Conflict Studies Quarterly

Issue 52, July 2025

Contents

Congo:
Protracted Social Conflict and the M23 Rebellion. Analyzing the Ongoing Struggle Between the DRC Military and Rebels

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Abstract: The Democratic Republic of the Congo is experiencing one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, with escalating conflict fueling widespread violence, displacement, and human suffering. The M23 rebel group, backed by Rwanda, has launched an offensive, capturing key towns and expanding its grip on the mineral-rich Kivu provinces. The United Nations has reported thousands of civilian casualties, along with an increase in war crimes, child recruitment, and sexual abuse. The conflict has forced nearly 7 million people to flee their homes, with many seeking refuge in Burundi, putting a strain on local resources. Epidemics, food shortages, and a collapsing healthcare system further contribute to the catastrophe. Using the Protracted Social Conflict Theory, this paper investigates the root causes of the violence and its devastating consequences for the region.

Keywords: Protracted social conflict theory, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Conflict, DRC Military, March 23 Movement (M23), rebels, Eastern Congo.

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is experiencing a deepening humanitarian crisis, with persistent conflict fueling violence, food insecurity, and mass displacement (International Rescue Committee, 2025). The escalation of hostilities—particularly with the resurgence of the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group—has destabilized the eastern provinces. Despite

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diplomatic efforts by the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), M23 continues to expand its territorial control, exacerbating the region's instability (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025).

The M23 has extended its reach further south, capturing Kamanyola and advancing toward Uvira, the third-largest city in the Kivus, with a population of 650,000. This follows their earlier takeovers of Goma—home to 2 million people—and Bukavu, which has a population of 1.3 million. Simultaneously, another prong has moved north of Goma, heading toward Butembo, a city of 280,000 residents. If the M23 were to gain control of the entire mineral-rich Kivus region, spanning 124,000 km², it would effectively dominate an area nearly five times the size of Rwanda.

The M23's assault on Goma led to the deaths of nearly 3,000 people—mostly civilians—according to UN reports, highlighting the extreme brutality of the violence (Jaime, Elsamra, & Stambaugh, 2025). Many believe the actual death toll is significantly higher. In a region where government forces, militias, and rebel groups frequently target civilians, the risk of mass atrocities remains alarmingly high. The UN has also raised concerns over the increasing rates of child recruitment, abductions, killings, and sexual violence. As the conflict intensifies, these human costs—along with broader regional instability—are expected to escalate further. Estimates suggest that the DRC lost approximately $11 billion—equivalent to 29% of its GDP at the time—and experienced 5.4 million deaths as a result of the First and Second Congo Wars alone (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2025).

Moreover, as people flee violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the ongoing conflict has led to a significant increase in the number of refugees entering Burundi. Within just the first two weeks, 42,000 individuals applied for asylum, according to Brigitte Mukanya-Eno, a UNHCR liaison in Burundi. Over a three-month period, the organization launched a contingency plan to assist up to 58,000 refugees. Most of these individuals originate from South Kivu, a region bordering Burundi, where the M23 rebel group continues to expand its control (Antediteste, 2025).

Reports of sexual violence, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and human rights violations are on the rise. As the conflict escalates, millions face severe shortages of food, clean water, and medical supplies. Hospitals are overwhelmed and struggling to cope, while the risk of disease outbreaks—particularly cholera—continues to grow. In North Kivu province, the epicenter of recent violence, 2.8 million people have been displaced, contributing to a total of nearly 7 million displaced individuals across the DRC (UN News, 2024). Between November 2024 and January 2025 alone, approximately 780,000 individuals lost their homes (International Rescue Committee, 2025). Against this backdrop, this article employs the Protracted Social Conflict Theory to examine the root causes of the protracted conflict between the M23 rebel group and the DRC military.

Methodology and Research Design

This study is a literature review employing an integrative or narrative review approach—a qualitative research method suited for critically evaluating a broad body of literature on a specific topic (Snyder, 2019). An integrative literature review (ILR) is a specialized technique that provides a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by systematically analyzing existing knowledge (Broome, 1993). This approach goes beyond merely synthesizing primary research findings; it introduces new perspectives and consolidates insights. ILR allows for the inclusion of diverse sources—such as opinion pieces, discussion papers, policy documents, and other relevant materials—alongside primary research (Snyder, 2019). Accordingly, this study adopts an integrative or narrative review to gain a broader understanding of the subject matter (Torraco, 2016).

The researcher conducted a critical analysis of relevant literature and evidence, including academic publications, reports, policy briefs, and media coverage, focusing on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As this approach enables a thorough examination of various types of evidence, it offers a more inclusive perspective on the phenomenon and facilitates the extraction of key insights (Soares *et al.*, 2014). Articles and books were purposively selected through website search engines using keywords such as *Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conflict, actors in the DRC conflict, and regional and international power in the DRC conflict (Bowen, 2009). The selection process involved an initial screening of abstracts, followed by full-text analysis to finalize sources for inclusion. To ensure quality and reliability, the researcher carefully monitored data abstraction throughout the review process.*

Conceptual Framework: Protracted Social Conflict Theory

Edward Azar introduced the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) Theory to explain conflicts arising from prolonged, often violent struggles by ethnic groups seeking to fulfill fundamental needs such as security, recognition, acceptance, political representation, and economic freedom (Azar, 1990). Azar (1990) argued that ethnic groups pursue these needs by forming identity groups composed of individuals who share similar interests. In protracted social conflicts, such groups often harbor deep-rooted animosities based on race, religion, tribe, or culture. These identity-driven conflicts are frequently intensified by an underlying fear of extinction, particularly among vulnerable groups facing threats of suppression or persecution.

Typically, these divisions and threats emerge when state institutions are dominated by a single ethnic group or a coalition of elites that denies broader segments of the population access to opportunities and the means to satisfy their basic human needs (Azar, 1990). According to the theory, four primary conditions drive violent conflict: the denial of human needs, the role of the state, international linkages, and communal identity factors. In the context of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all four of these conditions are present and continue to sustain the protracted nature of the violence.

One of the key conditions—the deprivation of human needs—has served as a rallying point for the M23 rebel group. From this perspective, the conflict between the M23 rebels and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) in Eastern Congo is fundamentally rooted in the systemic denial of basic human needs, which has fueled longstanding grievances, instability, and violence. This deprivation spans economic, security, political, and social dimensions, creating an environment that is highly susceptible to exploitation by armed groups such as M23.

For instance, Eastern Congo's instability has been shaped by decades of weak governance, ethnic tensions, and the plundering of natural resources. The region's conflicts intensified after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which spilled over into the DRC and exacerbated tensions between Hutu and Tutsi communities (Stearns, 2011). Marginalized groups —particularly ethnic Tutsis—were excluded from political and economic systems, fostering a sense of alienation that groups like M23 would later exploit (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). The Congolese state's failure to provide basic services, justice, and security further entrenched cycles of poverty and violence (Autesserre, 2010).

Furthermore, Eastern Congo's vast mineral wealth—including resources such as coltan and cobalt—has paradoxically perpetuated poverty. Local communities rarely benefit from resource extraction, which is dominated by armed groups and corrupt elites. High unemployment and the lack of livelihood opportunities often drive young men to join M23 as a means of economic survival. Competition over mines and trade routes further escalates clashes between M23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), as control over these resources finances military operations (Raeymaekers, 2014).

The Congolese state's inability to protect civilians has left many communities vulnerable to violence. M23 exploits this security vacuum, positioning itself as a protector of Tutsi communities against rival militias and government forces (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Persistent insecurity leads to population displacement, disrupts agricultural production, and restricts access to food—factors that, in turn, drive recruitment by armed groups offering basic sustenance (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022).

The FARDC's aggressive counterinsurgency strategies—which often involve human rights violations—have further alienated civilians, prompting some to align with M23. Ethnic Tutsi communities in Eastern DRC have consistently accused the government of implementing exclusionary policies. M23 leaders justify their rebellion as a response to this marginalization, claiming that the government in Kinshasa has failed to uphold peace agreements or to integrate Tutsi militias into the national army (Stearns, 2012). Political neglect and widespread corruption have deepened mistrust in state institutions, leading some communities to turn to armed groups as alternative sources of governance (Tull, 2003). Decades of conflict have also caused significant social fragmentation, eroding collective identity and making reconciliation increasingly difficult (Autesserre, 2010).

Although not directly tied to human needs, external interference—such as Rwanda's alleged support for M23—exploits local vulnerabilities. Rwanda justifies its involvement

by citing the need to protect Tutsi communities, underscoring how cross-border ethnic connections are intertwined with local grievances (UNSC Report, 2023). This external involvement further complicates efforts to resolve the conflict, as regional geopolitical interests often take precedence over addressing local concerns (Prunier, 2009).

The second precondition examined is the role of the government. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government has significantly influenced the conflict dynamics between the Congolese Army (FARDC) and the M23 rebel group in Eastern Congo. The government's failure to establish effective governance in Eastern Congo has created a power vacuum, allowing armed groups like M23 to flourish, as previously noted. Years of state neglect, underfunded public services, and widespread corruption have weakened trust in state institutions. Eastern regions, such as North Kivu, remain underdeveloped, with inadequate infrastructure, healthcare, and education (Autesserre, 2010). The central government's prioritization of Kinshasa and resource-rich areas has exacerbated regional disparities, leaving Eastern communities feeling neglected (Tull, 2003). This institutional weakness diminishes the state's credibility, making armed groups seem like viable alternatives for security and livelihoods (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004).

In addition, the government's failure to address longstanding ethnic tensions—particularly those affecting Congolese Tutsi communities—has been a key factor fueling the M23 insurgency. Many M23 members are ethnic Tutsis who claim systemic exclusion and cite the government's failure to honor the 2009 peace agreement, which promised their integration into the national army and political institutions (Stearns, 2012). Kinshasa's refusal to fully recognize the citizenship rights of Congolese Tutsis—often stigmatized as "Rwandophones" or foreign agents—has further intensified grievances (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Politicians have exploited this exclusion for electoral gain, portraying Tutsis as outsiders to mobilize nationalist sentiment. Such rhetoric reinforces M23's narrative of fighting for Tutsi rights and protection.

Furthermore, the state's involvement in the illegal exploitation of Eastern Congo's mineral wealth has directly funded the conflict. Government officials and FARDC officers have collaborated with armed groups, including M23, to control mines and smuggling routes (UN, 2023). For instance, a 2022 UN report revealed that FARDC commanders profited from illegal taxation at checkpoints, diverting state resources that could have been used for public services. This corruption undermines the army's effectiveness, as soldiers prioritize personal gain over combating rebels. Consequently, local communities perceive the state as exploitative rather than protective, increasing support for M23's anti-government stance (Raeymaekers, 2014).

The persistent shortcomings of the FARDC—such as insufficient training, low morale, and inadequate resources—have contributed to the prolonged conflict. Soldiers frequently desert or defect due to unpaid wages, compelling the government to rely on poorly integrated former rebels, which deepens internal divisions (Bøås & Dunn, 2017). Additionally, the FARDC has been repeatedly implicated in human rights abuses,

including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence against civilians accused of aiding rebel groups. These actions have alienated local communities, who perceive both the army and M23 as threats, perpetuating a cycle of violence and retaliation (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The government's reliance on foreign military support—such as UN peacekeepers and East African Community forces—further underscores its inability to stabilize the region independently (UNSC Report, 2023).

The DRC government's inconsistent adherence to peace agreements has undermined trust. The March 23, 2009, agreement, from which the M23 derives its name, promised the integration of Tutsi-led rebel factions into the army and political reforms. However, the government failed to honor these commitments, leading to the group's resurgence in 2012 and 2021 (Stearns, 2012). Similarly, the 2013 Nairobi Declarations and subsequent negotiations collapsed due to Kinshasa's refusal to address critical issues such as amnesty and power-sharing. This pattern of broken promises has reinforced the perception of the state as an unreliable negotiating partner, prompting groups like M23 to return to violence as the only means to secure concessions.

The government has frequently portrayed the conflict as a foreign invasion orchestrated by Rwanda, thereby diverting attention from its own governance failures. While Rwanda's alleged backing of M23 is well-documented (UN, 2023), Kinshasa's emphasis on external actors obscures its own role in perpetuating the crisis through governance deficits. President Tshisekedi's administration has leveraged anti-Rwandan rhetoric to stoke nationalist sentiment, accusing Rwanda of "economic terrorism" while ignoring the need for reforms to address the marginalization of Eastern Congo (Reuters, 2023a). This scapegoating tactic allows the government to evade accountability for fundamental drivers of the conflict, including corruption, ethnic exclusion, and militarized governance.

The government's preference for military solutions over dialogue has further entrenched instability. Operations such as Sokola 1 (2013) and Ukimwi (2022) aimed to dismantle M23 but often resulted in civilian displacement and increased human suffering without achieving sustainable peace (IDMC, 2023). These military campaigns are frequently timed to coincide with electoral cycles, suggesting politically motivated actions rather than strategic objectives. Concurrently, Kinshasa has marginalized civil society and local leaders in peace efforts, disregarding grassroots demands for land reform, justice, and reconciliation (Autesserre, 2010). This top-down approach alienates local communities and fosters support for insurgent groups.

The third prerequisite involves international connections. The conflict between the M23 rebel group and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Army in Eastern Congo has been heavily influenced by international ties, including regional state actors, global economic interests, and multilateral organizations. For example, Rwanda's alleged support for M23 has been frequently cited: Rwanda is accused of providing military, logistical, and political assistance to M23, a rebel group primarily composed of ethnic Tutsis. Reports from the UN Group of Experts (2023) have detailed cross-border arms transfers, Rwandan

troop deployments aiding M23, and the use of Rwandan territory for recruitment and training. Rwanda's involvement is motivated by concerns over Hutu extremist groups such as the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), which operate in Eastern Congo and oppose Rwanda's government (Prunier, 2009). Additionally, Rwanda seeks to maintain influence over Eastern Congo's mineral resources—such as coltan and tin—through proxy militias and to support Congolese Tutsis, who face marginalization and violence in the DRC (Stearns, 2012). Despite Rwanda's denials, its role has been corroborated by leaked UN reports and eyewitness testimonies. This backing has enabled M23 to continue its offensives against the FARDC (DRC Army) and destabilize the region.

Furthermore, Uganda's role remains ambiguous. While Uganda officially participates in regional peace efforts, it has been accused of covertly supporting M23. At the same time, Uganda is a member of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), deployed in 2022 to address the conflict. This dual role reflects Uganda's attempt to balance its economic interests—such as oil exploration near Lake Albert—with maintaining its diplomatic standing in the region (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004).

Eastern Congo's extensive mineral wealth has attracted foreign corporations and illicit networks, fueling the conflict. Key dynamics include armed groups like M23 controlling mines and smuggling routes, selling minerals to international buyers. The UN Panel of Experts (2023) has linked M23 to illegal gold and coltan exports through Rwanda and Uganda, which finance their operations. Additionally, multinational corporations—especially in the technology and manufacturing sectors—have historically sourced "conflict minerals" from Eastern Congo, indirectly funding armed militias (Raeymaekers, 2014). Although initiatives like the Dodd-Frank Act (2010) were introduced to restrict this trade, weak enforcement and persistent smuggling networks have undermined these efforts. Furthermore, Congolese political elites and foreign businessmen have collaborated to launder minerals through hubs such as Dubai, perpetuating corruption (UN, 2023).

The influx of weapons into Eastern Congo from regional and global actors has exacerbated the conflict. Rwanda and Uganda have been accused of supplying M23 with advanced weaponry, including drones and artillery (UN Report, 2023). Meanwhile, the DRC government has turned to mercenaries, such as the Russian Wagner Group, and allied militias, like Burundian forces, to combat M23, further internationalizing the conflict. Additionally, the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission, active since 1999, has faced challenges in disarming armed groups due to restrictive mandates and insufficient funding (Autesserre, 2010). Its perceived ineffectiveness has diminished local confidence in the mission.

International organizations have played inconsistent roles. For example, targeted sanctions on M23 leaders and Rwandan officials have had minimal impact due to poor enforcement and underground financial networks. Similarly, the AU's Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (2013) failed to address the root causes of the conflict, as signatories like Rwanda and Uganda prioritized their national interests over regional stability. Moreover,

while Western donors fund humanitarian aid and state-building programs, they often overlook local governance needs, reinforcing dependency (Trefon, 2016).

The conflict has also become a proxy battleground for broader geopolitical rivalries. For instance, Rwanda frames its involvement as "self-defense" against FDLR threats, while the DRC accuses Rwanda of pursuing territorial expansion (Al Jazeera, 2023). Lastly, great power competition further complicates the situation. The U.S. and EU's tacit support for Rwanda, a key ally in Central Africa, contrasts with China's significant investments in DRC mining, hindering cohesive international responses.

One of the most critical elements of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is its communal dimension. The ongoing struggle between the M23 rebel group and the DRC Army in Eastern Congo is deeply rooted in communal dynamics, including ethnic divisions, historical grievances, land disputes, and social fragmentation. These communal factors have driven recruitment, justified violence, and perpetuated cycles of retaliation, making conflict resolution highly challenging. For example, the ethnic diversity of Eastern Congo has been exploited by both M23 and state actors. The region is home to more than 100 ethnic groups, with longstanding tensions between indigenous communities such as the Hunde and Nande, and groups perceived as "foreign," like the Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsis). The Banyamulenge, descendants of Rwandan migrants, have faced systemic exclusion and violence, often labeled as "outsiders" despite their Congolese citizenship (Stearns, 2012). M23, predominantly composed of ethnic Tutsis, positions itself as a protector of this marginalized group, leveraging grievances related to land rights and political representation (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Conversely, the DRC Army has allied with local militias such as the Mai-Mai, who advocate for indigenous communities' rights and frame the conflict as resistance against "Rwandan aggression" (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). This ethnic polarization has deepened communal mistrust and legitimized violence under the guise of self-defense.

Additionally, communal conflicts over land and natural resources play a central role in the violence. Eastern Congo's fertile lands and mineral wealth have long been sources of contention, exacerbated by colonial-era land policies that favored certain groups. After independence, indigenous communities sought to reclaim territories from Banyamulenge pastoralists, leading to violent confrontations. M23 has exploited these disputes by promising displaced Tutsi communities the return of lands taken by rival groups (UN, 2022). Meanwhile, the DRC Army has armed local Mai-Mai militias to counter M23, framing their efforts as a defense of communal lands. This competition over resources, combined with weak land governance, has transformed communal tensions into militarized conflict.

Moreover, decades of war have severely eroded social cohesion, leaving communities distrustful of both the state and each other. Massacres, sexual violence, and forced displacement have caused intergenerational trauma, with survivors often perceiving rival ethnic groups as existential threats (Autesserre, 2010). M23 has exploited this by

recruiting youth who have lost family members to state-backed militias, framing revenge as a communal duty. Similarly, the DRC Army's alliance with Mai-Mai groups—known for brutal reprisals against Tutsi civilians—has further deepened communal divisions. Social institutions such as churches and traditional elders, once mediators in conflicts, have lost credibility due to perceived associations with armed groups (Titeca & Fahey, 2016). The breakdown of state authority in Eastern Congo has shifted power to traditional leaders and armed factions, dividing community loyalties. Chiefs (mwami) and local councils often collaborate with militias to maintain influence, creating parallel governance systems (Raeymaekers, 2014). For example, some Hunde chiefs support Mai-Mai groups to resist M23, while Tutsi leaders depict M23 as a "community defense force." The DRC Army's failure to provide security forces communities to rely on these non-state actors, blurring the lines between "protector" and "predator." This decentralization strengthens local autonomy but weakens national unity (Vircoulon, 2015).

Both M23 and the DRC Army use historical narratives to gain support. M23 leaders invoke the 1996–2003 Congo Wars, during which Tutsi communities were targeted by Hutu militias (FDLR) and state forces (Stearns, 2011). They frame their rebellion as a continuation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) "liberation" movement, appealing to a shared Tutsi identity across borders (Prunier, 2009). Conversely, the DRC government uses anti-colonial rhetoric, portraying M23 as a Rwandan proxy seeking to annex Eastern Congo (Reuters, 2023a). These narratives resonate with communities' experiences of marginalization, making compromise appear as betrayal. Violence in Eastern Congo follows a cyclical pattern of communal retaliation. For instance, an M23 attack on a Hunde village often prompts Mai-Mai reprisals against Tutsi civilians, which then justifies further offensives by M23 (UN Report, 2023). The DRC Army's indiscriminate tactics—such as destroying homes suspected of harboring rebels—further alienate civilians, driving some to seek protection from M23 (IDMC, 2022). Increasingly, communities view violence as the only means of survival, perpetuating a "war economy" that benefits armed groups (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002).

Background on the Evolution of Conflict in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

The conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has resulted in the deaths of approximately six million people since 1996. The violence originated in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, during which Hutu extremists killed around one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Parens, 2022). This horrific event forced nearly two million Hutus to flee to neighboring DRC (then Zaire), with most settling in the North and South Kivu provinces (Zapata, 2011). Among these refugees were some perpetrators of the genocide, who later formed armed groups within the DRC. The situation escalated as Tutsi militias emerged to counter these Hutu armed groups, involving various international actors (Minorities at Risk Project, 2025). Following the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF)

defeat of the genocidaires in Rwanda, the new Tutsi-led government under Paul Kagame launched military operations in Zaire (French, 2009). Rwanda, in collaboration with local Tutsi militias, invaded Zaire with the stated aim of dismantling Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship and protecting Tutsis from Hutu extremists who had found refuge under Mobutu's regime.

During the First Congo War, Rwanda led a coalition of African countries—including Uganda, Angola, and Burundi—in an invasion of Zaire. These nations were united partly by shared concerns over Mobutu Sese Seko's support for various rebel groups across Africa (Reyntjens, 2009). The coalition worked closely with Laurent Kabila, who was leading the rebellion against Mobutu at the time (McGreal, 2008). The war resulted in thousands of deaths, affecting not only Hutu militants and combatants but also numerous innocent Congolese civilians and refugees in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. Rwandan forces and Tutsi militias became notorious for their brutal tactics. The conflict concluded in 1997 when Mobutu fled Kinshasa, securing victory for the Kabila-Kagame alliance. Following this, Kabila assumed the presidency and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Second Congo War erupted in 1998 amid escalating tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Reyntjens, 1999). Laurent Kabila, seeking to assert his independence from Rwanda, began minimizing Kigali's role in his rise to power and distanced himself politically and militarily. He removed ethnic Tutsis from government positions and pushed to reduce Rwanda's military presence in eastern DRC (Duke, 1998). Meanwhile, the international community became increasingly aware of war crimes committed by Kagame's forces against Hutu populations during the First Congo War, damaging Kabila's legitimacy. In a strategic shift, Kabila expelled foreign troops from the country and permitted Hutu armed groups to regroup near the border (Zapata, 2011). In response, Rwanda launched an invasion in 1998, justifying it as a necessary measure to establish a buffer zone along the DRC-Rwanda border to counter Hutu threats.

The conflict expanded into a regional war, with Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe supporting Congolese forces against Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and their allied rebel groups (Reyntjens, 1999). A turning point occurred in 2001 when Laurent Kabila was assassinated during a failed coup. His son, Joseph Kabila, succeeded him and officially ended the Second Congo War in 2002. By 2004, the war had claimed over three million lives (OHCHR, 2002). Between 2002 and 2003, peace agreements among Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC led to a transitional government headed by Joseph Kabila. Despite initiatives like truth and reconciliation commissions and increased UN peacekeeping, eastern DRC remained unstable. Joseph Kabila was democratically elected in 2006 (DFID, 2006).

In August 2018, Kabila announced he would not seek a third term, and Félix Tshisekedi won the December 2018 election, marking the DRC's first peaceful transfer of power (Bearak, 2019). However, the election's legitimacy was contested, with some polls indicating Martin Fayulu as the actual winner (Financial Times, 2019). Tshisekedi faced

immediate challenges, including Ebola outbreaks and ongoing violence in eastern Congo (Belluz, 2019). The region's instability risks reigniting a broader conflict, a grave concern given the Second Congo War remains the deadliest conflict since World War II.

The DRC is currently locked in a tense standoff with Rwanda (Kasongo, 2024). After five years of dormancy, the M23 rebels reemerged in 2022 and by July 2023 had captured significant territory in North Kivu province (Agence France-Presse, 2023). Kinshasa, supported by several international governments, has repeatedly accused Rwanda of backing M23's resurgence, while Rwanda counters by accusing the DRC of supporting Hutu extremist groups, notably the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) (Butty, 2023). Rwanda maintains a strong military presence along the shared border and within eastern DRC. Both Rwanda and Uganda, along with allied militias, have vested economic interests in Congolese mining, often pursued through illicit activities (Muhumuza, 2024).

In October 2023, UN Special Envoy Xia Huang warned of the risk of direct military conflict between the two countries, highlighting military buildups, a lack of high-level dialogue, and ongoing hate speech. Although a U.S.-brokered agreement in November 2023 aimed to reduce border militarization, curb hate speech, and respect sovereignty, deadly violence in eastern Congo has persisted into 2024, despite a planned 72-hour ceasefire ahead of the DRC's national elections.

International security forces in the DRC have faced considerable challenges. Between 2022 and 2023, MONUSCO peacekeepers were met with violent local protests, as both civilians and officials questioned their effectiveness and opposed their presence (VOA Africa, 2023). Despite these obstacles, international and regional interventions have continued. In May 2023, SADC forces joined UN stabilization efforts ahead of the DRC's December elections (Kavanagh, 2023; Lorgerie, 2022). Although President Tshisekedi initially called for MONUSCO's withdrawal before 2024, the UN Security Council overruled this, fearing a security vacuum and disruption to humanitarian aid. Instead, MONUSCO's mandate was extended through 2024 with a phased withdrawal process initiated (UN News, 2023).

Who are M23 and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)?

The Congolese Revolutionary Army (Armée révolutionnaire du Congo, ARC), better known as the March 23 Movement (M23) or Mouvement du 23 Mars in French, primarily operates in the North Kivu province of the DRC. The conflict is further complicated by alleged support for M23 from the Rwandan government. After the Congo Wars, the integration of Rwandophone militants was problematic, leading to divisions within the group—some wished to remain in the DRC, while others preferred to return to Rwanda. Those who stayed formed the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), led by Laurent Nkunda, a former member of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which

transitioned from a rebel group to Rwanda's ruling party after the 1994 genocide. Backed by Rwanda, the CNDP aimed to protect Congolese Tutsis (Redae, 2023).

The name "M23" originates from the failed March 23, 2009, negotiation process between the CNDP and the DRC government. The group formed and became active after the collapse of the 2012 merger between the FARDC (DRC Army) and former CNDP militants (Africanews, 2023). Almost immediately, M23 seized control of parts of North Kivu, including Goma, the provincial capital near the Rwandan border. After international mediation, the rebels briefly took Goma in late 2012, with political violence intensifying in November before M23 withdrew in December (Blanshe, 2022). Violence persisted in surrounding areas such as Rutshuru and Nyiragongo. From 2012 to 2013, M23 was the most active non-state armed group in the DRC, responsible for over 20% of political violence incidents (Africanews, 2023). In November 2013, a major offensive by FARDC and UN forces inflicted heavy losses on M23 and led to a decline in Rwandan military support (Vogel, 2013). Hundreds of fighters, including leader Sultani Makenga, surrendered after being pushed into Uganda. However, according to ACLED, M23 reemerged as the most active non-state armed group in North Kivu by late 2021, with its activity nearly thirty times higher in 2022 than in 2021 (Serwat, 2023).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's national military, the FARDC, was established in 2003 following the end of the Second Congo War. Its creation involved merging various armed factions—both former government forces and insurgent groups—into a single command structure as part of peace agreements aimed at ending the conflict. Despite these efforts, the integration process has faced major challenges, including issues with military discipline, unit cohesion, and divided loyalties among soldiers. The FARDC is tasked with protecting the country's borders, maintaining internal security, and combating armed militias, particularly in the volatile eastern regions.

The FARDC faces significant criticism for operational shortcomings, inadequate training, and limited resources. Human Rights Watch (2023) has documented serious abuses by the army, including unlawful killings, sexual violence, and alleged collaboration with some militant groups. The military remains engaged in protracted battles against insurgents such as the M23 rebels and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), alongside other armed factions in eastern Congo. These conflicts are further complicated by regional dynamics, with neighboring countries like Rwanda and Uganda accused of supporting certain rebel groups, according to 2023 UN reports. Efforts to reform and strengthen the FARDC continue with support from international partners, notably the UN's MONUSCO mission. However, progress has been slow, and the Congolese military still faces major challenges in stabilizing the country and protecting civilians.

Who are the key players in the recent surge of violence?

The conflict primarily affects the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Over 120 armed groups operate in the region, broadly divided into two main factions: pro-Rwandan, anti-government rebels, and the Congolese government forces along with their allies. The Congolese military is supported by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia of ethnic Hutu extremists, including some refugees involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Although the FDLR's goal is to overthrow the Rwandan government, analysts generally agree that the group is now significantly weakened (Reid & Ferragamo, 2025). Numerous local militias, known as Mai-Mai groups, also operate in the area, each with distinct identities and missions. The primary rebel force, mostly composed of ethnic Tutsis, is the M23, which launched its first uprising in 2012. Rwanda provides material support to M23, and Rwandan troops have fought alongside them. Another notable rebel group is the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), founded in Uganda and linked to the Islamic State (ISIS).

Next are the 11,000 United Nations peacekeeping forces. While they do have some cooperation with the Congolese government forces, protecting civilians is their top priority. There have occasionally been public demonstrations against the peacekeeping effort, and they are not always well-liked. The United Nations and the Congolese government reached an agreement to pull out peacekeepers, although the process has faced delays (Reid & Ferragamo, 2025).

Which other countries, besides Rwanda and Uganda,
have vested interests in the DRC, and for what reasons?

The United States has engaged in the M23 rebellion and the broader conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) primarily through diplomatic and economic measures, avoiding direct military involvement. The U.S. has imposed sanctions on Rwandan officials and M23 leaders to hold them accountable for their roles in the conflict and associated human rights abuses. Notably, James Kabarebe, Rwanda's Minister of State for Regional Integration, was sanctioned due to allegations of his significant involvement in Rwanda's support for M23 (Muia, 2025; Mpuga, 2025). Furthermore, the U.S. has proposed peacebuilding initiatives, such as infrastructure projects including the expansion of the Lobito Corridor railway, aimed at fostering regional stability. However, these proposals have been rejected by Rwanda (Schwikowski, 2025a).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has shown interest in establishing a minerals-for-security agreement with the United States, modeled on a similar framework proposed for Ukraine. Under this arrangement, the U.S. would provide military support in exchange for access to strategic minerals such as cobalt and coltan (Lawal, 2025; Zane, 2025). Additionally, the U.S. is actively promoting increased private sector investment in

the DRC's mining industry, emphasizing responsible and transparent business practices (Zane, 2025).

While discussions about U.S. military assistance to the DRC are ongoing, direct deployment of American troops remains unlikely. Analysts anticipate that U.S. involvement will focus mainly on supplying military resources, training, and capacity-building support for Congolese forces rather than ground troop engagement (Lawal, 2025; Zane, 2025). The United States has also called on Rwanda to cease its alleged support for the M23 rebel group, highlighting concerns over human rights abuses and regional instability (Hixon, 2025). Washington underscores the importance of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, stressing the humanitarian crisis and the need to uphold human rights (Hixon, 2025; Schwikowski, 2025a). Overall, the U.S. approach to the M23 and DRC conflict combines diplomatic pressure, economic interests, and limited military engagement, with a primary focus on promoting regional stability, encouraging conflict resolution, and advocating for human rights protections.

The European Union has adopted a dual-track strategy of diplomatic and economic measures in response to the M23 insurgency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through targeted sanctions, the EU has penalized Rwandan military officials, M23 leaders—including president Bertrand Bisimwa—and commercial entities such as the Gasabo Gold Refinery, which has been implicated in illegal resource extraction from conflict zones (Bagala, 2025; Al Yahyai, 2025). These sanctions aim to pressure Rwanda to end its alleged support for M23 and to disrupt the illicit mineral trade that sustains regional instability. While the EU supports peace negotiations mediated by Angola, its sanctions regime has paradoxically contributed to M23's withdrawal from dialogue efforts (Al Yahyai, 2025; Reuters, 2025b).

The European Union, alongside international partners, continues to allege Rwandan involvement with the M23 rebel group, despite consistent denials from Kigali (Reuters, 2025a; Walther, 2025). This coordinated pressure forms part of a broader multilateral strategy aimed at addressing the regional dimensions of the conflict. Due to concerns over Rwanda's role in the DRC crisis, the EU is considering reassessing its agreements with Rwanda, including a memorandum of understanding on strategic minerals (Reuters, 2025a). The conflict has precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing millions of people. Through sanctions and diplomatic efforts, the EU seeks to reduce violence and alleviate the humanitarian situation (Walther, 2025; Reuters, 2025b). In response to the EU's sanctions, Rwanda severed diplomatic ties with Belgium, a key proponent of these measures, accusing Belgium of bias and efforts to destabilize the region (Walther, 2025; Peltier, 2025). Overall, the EU's approach to the M23-DRC conflict centers on economic and diplomatic pressure to reduce violence, promote stability, and combat the illicit exploitation of natural resources that fuels the conflict.

Russia's involvement in the M23 and DRC conflict primarily focuses on calls for de-escalation, dialogue, and condemnation of violence. Moscow has strongly denounced the

actions of the M23 armed group, demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of militants from occupied territories (TASS, 2025). Russia advocates for inclusive dialogue among all parties to resolve the crisis and cautions against any escalation that could trigger a wider interstate conflict. Additionally, Moscow supports the resumption of negotiations within existing regional peacekeeping frameworks, notably the Angola-mediated talks between Rwanda and the DRC (TASS, 2025).

During UN Security Council meetings, Russia has reaffirmed its commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of the DRC. It has urged external actors to cease their support for the M23 rebel group and withdraw any military assistance (TASS, 2025). Russia also acknowledges the escalating humanitarian crisis in North Kivu and emphasizes the urgent need to prevent further conflict escalation to enable a diplomatic resolution (TASS, 2025). Although there have been claims that Russia is providing military assistance to the DRC against M23, such reports are frequently dismissed as disinformation (African Digital Democracy Observatory [ADDO], 2024). Russia's expanding engagement in Africa is viewed by some as an opportunity for countries like the DRC to deepen ties amid growing anti-Western sentiment (Titeca, 2023).

China has emerged as a key partner in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), playing a pivotal role in both economic development and diplomatic relations. Its engagement follows a cooperation model centered on mutual benefit, exemplified by the 2008 Sicomines agreement based on a "resources-for-infrastructure" approach. This initiative has driven substantial investments in critical infrastructure projects such as roads, schools, and hospitals, fostering long-term economic growth. Beyond infrastructure improvement, these projects have created employment opportunities and stimulated local economic activity, helping to address some root causes of instability. Additionally, China supports peacekeeping efforts in the region, with Chinese troops contributing significantly to MONUSCO's engineering, medical, and logistical operations, underscoring China's commitment to regional stability and international conflict resolution (Ndegwa, 2025).

China has consistently engaged in multilateral efforts to resolve the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) through frameworks such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and Southern African Development Community (SADC). Emphasizing a policy of non-interference and respect for sovereignty, China has built strong diplomatic ties with successive Congolese governments, enabling it to exert influence in peace initiatives. This diplomatic approach offers a valuable opportunity to support long-term stability in the DRC. Through a partnership-based and mutually beneficial strategy, China has positioned itself as a credible mediator in conflict resolution. Furthermore, sustained and expanded economic investments by China could address root causes of violence by generating employment, improving infrastructure, and stimulating economic growth—thereby reducing poverty and inequality, key factors driving instability. China's support for governance reforms and capacity-building efforts also holds promise for strengthening institutional capacity and fostering durable stability in the DRC (Ndegwa, 2025).

While Chinese investment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) offers clear benefits, it has also raised concerns. Critics warn that the DRC's growing dependence on Chinese funding may weaken its negotiating leverage and raise the risk of debt-trap diplomacy (Khanna, 2025; Gregory & Milas, 2024). Additionally, revenues from mining and arms sales could inadvertently finance militant groups. Although infrastructure development is positive, it may sometimes exacerbate local tensions (Khanna, 2025; Rapanyane, 2021). Moreover, the deployment of Chinese drones and undisclosed military cooperation with the Congolese government risks heightening regional tensions, especially with Rwanda, which has been accused of supporting the M23 rebel group (Khanna, 2025; Center for Preventive Action, 2025).

France has been actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to resolve the M23-DRC conflict, condemning M23's offensive and demanding the group's immediate withdrawal from occupied territories. It has called on Rwandan forces to leave the DRC, underscoring the inviolability of Congolese sovereignty and territorial integrity. France supports peace negotiations led by Angola and Kenya aimed at fostering dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda. As a leading voice on the crisis within the UN Security Council, France has pursued a strategic but discreet approach following M23's advance into Goma (Kasongo & Irish, 2025). It proposed a draft resolution urging an end to hostilities, reaffirming support for the DRC's sovereignty, endorsing MONUSCO's peacekeeping mandate, and creating conditions conducive to dialogue.

France has reiterated its full backing of MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC), condemning attacks on the mission and any attempts to obstruct its operations. It emphasizes that MONUSCO must be allowed to operate unhindered to fulfill its peacekeeping role. Highlighting the worsening humanitarian crisis, France noted the displacement of over one million people and condemned reports of attacks on civilians, including sexual violence and violence against children. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has confirmed instances of summary executions of children by M23 in Bukavu, underscoring the urgent need for international intervention (Radio France International, 2025). France has supported DRC appeals for UN Security Council sanctions against Rwanda and continues to advocate for a ceasefire, renewed dialogue, and respect for Congolese sovereignty. Amid escalating clashes, France, alongside the US and UK, has advised its nationals to evacuate Goma for safety reasons.

Belgium has played a pivotal role in advocating for diplomatic and economic actions against Rwanda within the European Union (EU). It has been a leading proponent of EU sanctions targeting Rwanda, citing allegations of Rwandan military involvement in the DRC and support for the M23 rebels. These sanctions focus specifically on Rwandan military and government officials (Walther, 2025; Oelofse, 2025). Belgium has accused Rwanda of violating the DRC's territorial integrity and exacerbating instability in eastern Congo through its backing of the M23 (Paternoster & Jones, 2025; Oelofse, 2025). In response to Belgium's position, Rwanda severed diplomatic relations and expelled Belgian diplomats. Kigali accused Belgium of bias in the conflict and of attempting to destabilize

Rwanda and the wider region through "lies and manipulation" (Walther, 2025; Oelofse, 2025; Chibelush, 2025).

Belgium described Rwanda's decision to sever diplomatic ties as "disproportionate" and retaliated by expelling Rwandan diplomats, declaring them persona non grata (Chibelush, 2025; Oelofse, 2025). Critics are divided: some view Belgium's stance as influenced by its colonial history in the DRC, while others argue it stems from Rwanda's violations of international law (Walther, 2025). Belgium has also voiced concern over the worsening humanitarian crisis in eastern DRC and emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution. In response to Belgian pressure, Rwanda suspended its 2024–2029 bilateral aid program with Brussels, accusing Belgium of obstructing its access to development funding (Paternoster & Jones, 2025).

Meanwhile, Qatar has emerged as a mediator in the eastern DRC conflict, leveraging its diplomatic and economic influence to facilitate dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda. The conflict, fueled by clashes between Rwanda-backed M23 rebels and the Congolese army, has caused widespread violence, displacement, and regional instability. On March 18, 2025, Qatar hosted a trilateral summit in Doha with Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi, Rwandan President Paul Kagame, and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani— marking the first direct meeting between Tshisekedi and Kagame since the escalation of M23 attacks earlier that year (Schwikowski, 2025b; Mills & Ross, 2025; Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

The summit produced a joint declaration calling for an "immediate and unconditional" ceasefire, though enforcement remains uncertain amid ongoing hostilities (Schwikowski, 2025b; Mills & Ross, 2025). Qatar's diplomatic efforts complement existing peace processes, such as the Luanda Process (backed by SADC) and the Nairobi Process (supported by the EAC), both aimed at fostering peace between the DRC, Rwanda, and armed groups (Karr *et al.*, 2025; Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Qatar's mediation experience in conflicts like Chad and Afghanistan underscores its broader strategy to enhance regional stability while bolstering its international standing (Schwikowski, 2025b).

Qatar holds significant investments in Rwanda, including stakes in RwandAir and Bugesera International Airport, which likely influence its interest in maintaining a neutral mediation role acceptable to both parties (Schwikowski, 2025b; Mutambo, Vieira, Anami & Ilunga, 2025). Despite these diplomatic efforts, the situation on the ground remains volatile, with M23 rebels continuing to control key territories, complicating ceasefire implementation (Mills & Ross, 2025; Mutambo et al., 2025; Karr *et al.*, 2025).

Some analysts question whether Qatar's close economic ties with Rwanda might compromise its neutrality as a mediator. Given that previous regional mediation efforts, such as those led by Angola, have failed, doubts persist regarding Qatar's ability to secure lasting peace. Nonetheless, Qatar's involvement marks a significant diplomatic initiative in one of Africa's most protracted conflicts. While it has succeeded in bringing key stakeholders to the negotiating table, achieving sustainable peace will require ongoing dialogue, robust

ceasefire monitoring mechanisms, and addressing fundamental issues such as competition over natural resources and historical grievances.

**Impact of the Conflict Between M23 Rebels
and the DRC Military in Eastern Congo**

Allison D. Bosch (2019) highlights the devastating impact of conflict-related sexual violence on the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This violence often involves brutal acts such as gang rape, genital mutilation, torture, and the intentional transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. The UN Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence underscores that these atrocities are used as weapons of war, instruments of torture, and tools of retaliation amid the DRC's escalating political and security crises (UNSC, 2023).

Since 2020, sexual violence has been widespread in eastern DRC, particularly in Tanganyika, Ituri, South Kivu, and North Kivu provinces. In 2022, MONUSCO documented 701 incidents affecting 503 women, 187 girls, and 11 men (Redae, 2023). Most cases were attributed to non-state armed groups, while others involved state actors from the DRC and neighboring countries supporting the government. The UN Secretary-General's October 2022 report on Children and Armed Conflict notes that sexual violence remains the most frequently reported violation involving government forces, with FARDC elements identified as primary perpetrators.

Victims suffer long-term trauma, physical and psychological harm, and increased HIV infection risks (Redae, 2023). Reports also include female genital mutilation and the use of foreign objects such as weapons and sticks for penetration. Despite growing pressure to hold offenders accountable, low conviction rates persist. In December 2022, 22 FARDC members, 11 Congolese National Police officers, and 18 civilians were convicted for conflict-related sexual violence, but the limited justice progress continues to discourage survivors from seeking redress.

The eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has long suffered from armed violence that has devastated healthcare infrastructure and disrupted essential services, severely weakening disease surveillance efforts. The destruction of hospitals, clinics, and medical supply chains has deprived communities of critical healthcare resources, increasing their vulnerability to zoonotic disease outbreaks. The capacity to detect, diagnose, and treat emerging infectious diseases, especially zoonoses, has been significantly impaired by the deteriorated healthcare facilities.

Beyond physical damage, ongoing conflict has disrupted healthcare system functionality. The displacement or loss of healthcare workers has created a shortage of skilled personnel needed to manage outbreaks and deliver vital medical care (Kavulikirwa, 2024). Persistent violence and insecurity further obstruct the transport of medical supplies and staff to affected areas, limiting healthcare delivery.

Since 2009, the DRC has pursued Universal Health Coverage (UHC), but ongoing instability in the east presents formidable obstacles. Armed conflicts threaten healthcare workers, degrade working conditions, damage facilities, and displace communities, collectively weakening the health system. Consequently, insecurity impedes progress toward UHC by restricting the availability, affordability, and accessibility of healthcare services (Kavulikirwa, 2024).

Insecurity-driven psychosocial pressures have significantly altered how affected populations in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) seek healthcare. Cultural barriers, fear of violence, and mistrust of medical professionals contribute to these changes. Due to ongoing instability and psychological stress, many people avoid healthcare facilities (HCF) out of fear of attacks or doubts about the safety and reliability of these services. Additionally, cultural customs and beliefs may further hinder healthcare utilization, complicating efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the region. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that respects cultural contexts, enhances security, and builds trust in healthcare institutions to improve service use and health outcomes.

Beyond the direct impact on medical facilities, armed conflict has severely weakened disease surveillance systems. Effective outbreak detection and reporting depend on robust healthcare systems, reliable communication networks, and trained personnel—elements that are often disrupted in conflict zones. This breakdown leads to underreporting and delayed responses to emerging health threats. Compromised surveillance increases the risk that zoonotic disease outbreaks go unnoticed until they become critical, heightening the chance of spillover from animals to humans. In environments where humans, animals, and pathogens interact closely, the disruption of surveillance systems significantly raises the likelihood of zoonotic transmission (Kavulikirwa, 2024).

The ongoing conflict in North Kivu is severely disrupting agricultural activities and limiting farmers' access to their fields (FAO, 2024). This disruption threatens to worsen the already critical food insecurity in the province by reducing agricultural productivity and increasing hunger. The M23 group's control over certain areas has isolated Goma from surrounding regions, further hampering food production and distribution (UNSC, 2024).

As of January 2024, approximately 2.63 million people in North Kivu faced acute food insecurity, including around 48,000 children under five suffering from severe acute malnutrition (OCHA, 2024a). Limited market access and livelihood opportunities are expected to deepen the food crisis. According to IPC estimates from September 2023, over 2.7 million people (31% of the province's population) were projected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels of food insecurity between January and June 2024. This includes nearly 170,000 people in Goma, representing 20% of its population (IPC, 2023).

Food prices in DRC markets remain unusually high and continue to rise. By April 2024, staple foods like beans were 5% more expensive than the previous year and 31% above the five-year average. Mixed bean prices rose 16.9% compared to 2023 and were 46.21% above

the five-year average, while cassava prices increased 18.04% from 2023 levels and stood 69% above the five-year average (FEWS NET, 2024).

Persistent armed conflict, coupled with soaring food prices and ongoing epidemics, continues to severely impact the DRC population. Approximately 25.6 million people are currently experiencing acute food insecurity at Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels. From July to December 2024, around 3.1 million people (3% of the population) are expected to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) conditions, marked by severe food shortages and alarming rates of acute malnutrition. An additional 22.4 million people (19%) are projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), reflecting widespread food insecurity.

While the crisis affects the entire country, the most vulnerable include displaced persons and returnees—especially in North Kivu, Ituri, South Kivu, Tanganyika, and Maindombe provinces—as well as those affected by natural disasters and unemployment. Forecasts for January to June 2025 indicate minimal improvement, with an estimated 25.5 million people (22% of the population) likely to remain in IPC Phase 3 or worse, including approximately 3.3 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and 22.2 million in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2023).

Millions of children across Africa are being deprived of education due to the ongoing effects of armed conflict and insecurity. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, over 14,300 schools had closed across 24 African countries by June 2024 (Yusuf, 2024). The highest numbers of closures were reported in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, and Niger.

In eastern DRC, the continuing conflicts have severely disrupted education, particularly in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. Between January 2022 and March 2023, approximately 750,000 students were unable to continue their education, with over 2,100 schools closing due to security concerns. The situation is especially dire for about 240,000 displaced children living in overcrowded camps near Goma, forced to flee their homes due to violence by armed groups.

UNICEF Representative Grant Leaity highlighted that the escalating conflict is forcing children to sacrifice their education, with many now living in harsh conditions in camps instead of learning in classrooms. Most displaced children lack access to education, as only a small number can attend UNICEF's Child Friendly Spaces or Temporary Learning Centers. The shortage of educational facilities also limits the ability of displaced students to take their June final exams and earn their qualifications.

Data from UNICEF's education coordination team, working with government authorities and NGOs in North Kivu and Ituri, show that armed groups have attacked or occupied 119 schools. Additionally, around 1,700 schools have suspended operations due to ongoing security threats, as many are located in territories controlled by armed groups. About 300 schools have been repurposed as emergency shelters for displaced people, rendering them unable to function as educational institutions. Recent UN statistics report that the conflict

in eastern DRC has displaced over 5.3 million people, including more than 800,000 from North Kivu since the M23 crisis began in March 2022 (UNICEF, 2023).

In April 2023, 1.34 million people returned to North Kivu, while 2.75 million remained displaced, according to the Population Movement Commissions (CMP). As of May 28, the ongoing conflict between the M23 rebel group and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) has caused the displacement of 1.77 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 682,000 returnees (International Organization for Migration, 2024; OCHA, 2024b). Among those displaced, 44% live in camps and shelters, while 56% reside within host communities. All face urgent needs for food, water, and medical care, enduring unstable and precarious living conditions (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2024; International Organization for Migration, 2024).

Years of violent clashes in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu have forced multiple forced relocations (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024). After a month of fighting that drove many to seek refuge in nearby towns, some people have begun returning to villages in Masisi Territory and the city of Sake in southern Masisi. However, the growing presence of rebels in Sake and nearby Bweremana has caused concern among returnees. The ongoing insecurity, damage to village infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, and limited humanitarian assistance continue to fuel urgent humanitarian needs (Radio Okapi, 2024).

In early 2024, a resurgence of violence caused significant loss of life and displaced more than 738,000 people from January to March. The security situation deteriorated sharply, with North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces hardest hit. Intense fighting among armed groups forced thousands to flee, often to or from areas with limited humanitarian access. Non-state armed groups also targeted IDP sites, creating serious protection challenges. In Ituri, intercommunal clashes resulted in numerous deaths and widespread human rights abuses. By mid-2024, over 940,000 people had been displaced, many of them multiple times. The already critical humanitarian crisis worsened, as IDPs and refugees across the DRC faced dire conditions, including inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, and limited means to support themselves (Redae, 2023).

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict between the M23 rebel group and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) military reflects deep-rooted political, economic, and ethnic tensions that have troubled the region for decades. Using Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict Theory, this analysis shows how unmet human needs, weak governance, international interference, and communal divisions have driven one of the deadliest and most prolonged conflicts in modern history. The humanitarian crisis in eastern DRC—characterized by mass displacement, widespread violence, and systemic instability—highlights the urgent need for comprehensive, sustainable solutions.

Addressing this crisis requires a multidimensional approach. The Congolese government must undertake inclusive governance reforms to ensure equal political representation and economic opportunities for marginalized groups, especially Congolese Tutsis, whose grievances are often exploited by armed groups like M23. Regional actors, including Rwanda and Uganda, must be held accountable for their roles in sustaining instability, with international oversight mechanisms enforcing compliance with peace agreements. Furthermore, the exploitation of the DRC's abundant natural resources must be curtailed through stricter regulations and international cooperation to prevent illicit trade from funding armed groups.

The international community—including the United Nations, African Union, and regional organizations—must move beyond reactive military interventions toward proactive conflict resolution strategies. Diplomatic efforts should focus on fostering dialogue, investing economically in local communities, and demilitarizing armed groups through effective disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. Additionally, humanitarian aid needs to be significantly increased to meet the urgent needs of displaced populations, ensuring their access to food, healthcare, and protection services.

If left unaddressed, the crisis in eastern DRC risks further destabilizing the Great Lakes region, heightening tensions among neighboring countries, and perpetuating cycles of violence that have already claimed millions of lives. Breaking this cycle requires strong political will, regional cooperation, and sustained international engagement. Without decisive action, the DRC will remain a battleground for competing interests, leaving millions of innocent civilians trapped in a relentless humanitarian disaster. The time for meaningful intervention is now—before the conflict spirals further out of control.

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Palestine:
Expediency and Principle.
Gulf-Israel Relations and the Palestine Question

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolving diplomatic strategies of Gulf States in relation to the Palestinian question, with a focus on the normalization of relations with Israel. Once staunch supporters of Palestinian rights, several Gulf governments have recently shifted toward formal engagement with Israel, raising critical questions about the implications for Palestinian aspirations and regional stability. This policy realignment reflects a complex interplay of strategic, economic, and geopolitical considerations, including countering Iranian influence, leveraging Israeli technological expertise, and aligning with U.S. regional interests. While normalization may enhance cooperation across key sectors, it also risks undermining the Palestinian cause and entrenching existing conflict dynamics. The paper argues that Gulf governments must balance pragmatic diplomacy with enduring commitments to justice and self-determination, navigating both external pressures and internal public sentiment. This transformation signals a broader reconfiguration of power and priorities in the contemporary Middle East.

Keywords: Gulf Perspectives, Geopolitical relations, Palestine, Israel, Gulf dynamics, Self-determination.

1. Introduction

The Middle East has always been a region characterized by complex and multilayered politics. With a myriad of nations, cultures, and religions, it hosts one of the world's longest-standing and most contested political disputes: the Arab-Israeli conflict (Smith, 2013). Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the policies of Arab states toward the nascent state have been shaped by both the consensus of the Arab League and the diverse interests of individual countries. The League's position has been one of strict and unwavering non-recognition of Israel, with no formal communication until a fair and just resolution to the Palestinian question is achieved. This support for the Palestinian people has been a cornerstone of Arab foreign policy and remained consistent for many decades (Smith, 2017).

In recent years, a shift in Middle Eastern politics has begun to take shape. As evidenced by economic modernization efforts and the original Arab Spring protests, the traditional policies long adhered to by Gulf states have become increasingly untenable. Additionally, the rise and consolidation of the Iranian regime as a dominant regional power, coupled with deepening polarization in Middle Eastern politics, have further complicated the landscape of alliances and foreign partnerships. The urgent need to diversify their economies and modernize in terms of technology and infrastructure has created a unique set of pressures, prompting Gulf countries to reassess their overall security posture (Schulze, 2013).

One of the major outcomes of these circumstances was the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. These agreements marked the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were the first to sign, followed by Sudan and Morocco, while Saudi Arabia is reportedly considering the possibility. This development represents a significant and unexpected shift in the region's traditional balance of power (Kostiner, 2013).

The traditional approach of Arab states toward Israel was characterized by decades of steadfast opposition, rooted in both political and ideological grounds. This stance began in 1948, with the establishment of the State of Israel and the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians from their homes—a traumatic event known in Arabic as the *Nakba* ("catastrophe") (Pappé, 2011). The creation of Israel, grounded in the ideology of secular Zionism, was widely perceived as a profound challenge and affront to the Arab world. Since then, the conflict has encompassed multiple wars and a persistent cycle of hostilities.

Founded in 1945, the Arab League became the primary platform for coordinating the Arab world's policies toward Israel. Major military confrontations—beginning with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, followed by the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War— further intensified Arab opposition. In the 1967 war, Israel captured territories of immense economic, strategic, and symbolic importance: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, including the Suez Canal crossing (Mara'i & Halabi, 1992). The occupation of East Jerusalem, home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and deeply significant in Islamic tradition, became a central grievance that fueled the Arab world's sense of injustice.

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the Arab League adopted the Khartoum Resolution, which expressed the "Three No's": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2003). This resolution laid the foundation for a unified Arab policy aimed at the international isolation of Israel. It was predicated on the belief that diplomatic and economic relations with Israel would only be possible if the Palestinian issue were resolved and all territories occupied in 1967 were returned (Sykes, 2022).

The traditional Arab approach to Israel encompassed a wide range of political and economic measures. As some of the world's largest producers of oil and gas, Arab countries leveraged energy supplies as a strategic policy tool. In 1973, Arab states declared an oil embargo against countries supporting Israel, a move that had significant global economic consequences. Although often mentioned in proximity, the embargo was not directly connected to the terrorist attack on Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympics, which was carried out by a Palestinian militant group.

On the international stage, Arab states consistently sought to prevent Israel from advancing controversial decisions. For example, as Laila Juma Ibrahim, Legal Counsel at Al-Haq, notes, during the First Intifada, Arab states collectively opposed Israel in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea debates, voting in favor of referring the matter to the International Court of Justice (Singer, 2021). Their coordinated stance was pivotal; had any abstained, the number of votes in favor would have fallen to nine—barely meeting the threshold required for judicial consideration.

Simultaneously, various Arab countries provided financial and military support to Palestinian factions, including some armed groups, in pursuit of Palestinian independence. A landmark development in this policy trajectory was the Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by Saudi Arabia in 2002. The initiative called for the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations in exchange for a comprehensive peace settlement, including the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders and a just solution for Palestinian refugees. Nonetheless, the broader policy of non-recognition and diplomatic isolation of Israel remained a consistent condition in the Arab world. This historical backdrop has profoundly influenced contemporary Middle Eastern politics (Nasasra, 2021).

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, marked a significant turning point in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and reshaped how certain Arab countries engaged with Israel. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain became the first Gulf states to break the longstanding Arab consensus by formally normalizing relations with Israel, followed later by Sudan and Morocco (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020).

The motivations behind these decisions were multifaceted, including regional security concerns, national economic and developmental aspirations, and evolving political dynamics. The Accords reflected a pragmatic shift in priorities, wherein strategic and economic interests began to outweigh historical animosities and ideological commitments.

This diplomatic breakthrough was largely facilitated by the active involvement of the United States, which played a central mediating role. Under the Trump administration, normalization between Gulf states and Israel was viewed as a key pillar of U.S. strategy in the region (Singer, 2021).

The Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between Gulf Arab states and Israel were largely driven by shared concerns regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions, missile development, and support for proxy groups across the Middle East. One of the primary goals was to establish a united front against perceived Iranian aggression and to enhance regional stability. Additionally, normalization provided Gulf states with access to Israeli defense technologies and intelligence capabilities, thereby strengthening their national security.

The motivations behind the Arab states' actions were varied, yet they all reflected a shift toward a pragmatic, forward-looking foreign policy. This shift indicated a willingness to move beyond entrenched stereotypes in pursuit of strategic and economic benefits (AlMaashi, 2021). In particular, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—key petroleum producers—have sought to diversify their economies. Israel was viewed as a valuable partner, especially in terms of scientific innovation and educational collaboration.

Overall, the signing of the Abraham Accords marked a significant reconfiguration of the Middle East's geopolitical landscape and laid the foundation for a new approach to regional alignments and foreign policy strategies (Singer, 2021).

This paper aims to analyze the evolving nature of Gulf-Israel relations within the broader context of the Palestinian question. First, it examines the historical foundations of Arab—and specifically Gulf—states' approaches to Israel. Second, it explores the motivations behind the recent normalization agreements and their implications for the Palestinian issue. Third, it assesses the broader regional consequences of these diplomatic shifts, particularly for Palestinian aspirations and regional dynamics. Ultimately, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between strategic pragmatism and ideological principles, and how this relationship is being reshaped within a changing global order.

2. Historical Context

2.1 The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Gulf States

The Arab-Israeli conflict, which began in the early twentieth century and intensified with the creation of Israel in 1948, has been a defining and persistent feature of Middle Eastern politics. The mass displacement of Palestinians during this period—referred to as the Nakba or "catastrophe"—left a profound and lasting impact on the Arab collective consciousness, shaping regional dynamics for decades (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021). The wider Middle East's relationship with Israel has been marked by conflict, beginning with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Although the Gulf states were not directly involved in frontline

combat, they supported the broader Arab cause through political solidarity, financial aid, and, in some cases, military assistance. Israel's military victory and territorial consolidation significantly influenced the region, particularly among the Gulf monarchies, which aligned themselves with the pan-Arab consensus against Israel.

The 1967 Six-Day War served as a pivotal turning point. Israel's capture of key territories —including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights—prompted a rare moment of pan-Arab unity, culminating in the Khartoum Resolution, which articulated the "Three No's": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel (Rabi & Mueller, 2017). This resolution formalized the Arab world's collective stance and remained the cornerstone of regional policy for decades. Even before this point, some Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, had already adopted positions of non-recognition and non-normalization, beginning in 1962.

Throughout the decades that followed, Gulf states continued to champion the Palestinian cause, offering financial support, political advocacy, and vocal condemnation of Israeli actions in international forums (Ramazani, 1978). A notable example of Gulf influence was the 1973 oil embargo led by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), in response to Western support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The only significant shift toward conditional engagement was the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, which proposed normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for a comprehensive peace agreement that included a return to the 1967 borders and a just solution for Palestinian refugees.

Despite this proposal, Gulf states largely maintained their longstanding policy of non-recognition and disengagement from Israel, portraying it as a hostile state. This deeply entrenched position laid the foundation for understanding the significance of more recent developments—particularly the Abraham Accords—which represent a substantial departure from traditional Gulf foreign policy.

2.2 Role of Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, in supporting the Palestinian cause

The Gulf states have historically wielded considerable economic and geopolitical influence and, both individually and collectively, have actively sought to counter Israeli actions while supporting the Palestinian cause politically and financially. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which unites Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has played a pivotal role in coordinating this support, leveraging the region's economic resources and geopolitical weight to advance Palestinian interests. This support has manifested in various forms, including direct financial aid, development projects in Palestine, diplomatic engagement, and political advocacy within international institutions such as the United Nations (Rabi, 2005). Among the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia has arguably been the most prominent critic of Israeli policies and the most significant

provider of financial and political assistance to the Palestinian people. This prominence is attributable to Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves and its substantial political influence in the region, positioning it to lead and fund efforts opposing Israel. Saudi Arabia has consistently supported the Palestinian Authority and other groups by facilitating the survival and development of infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while also working to counter Israeli interests across the Arab world and beyond.

Beyond financial contributions, Saudi Arabia has been actively engaged in dialogue and negotiation efforts aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A notable example is the Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the Arab League in 2002 (Gause, 2014). This initiative also aligns with the dynamics surrounding the emerging Saudi-Israeli alliance, which has been viewed by some as a form of strategic realignment affecting both parties involved in the conflict (Cooley, 1979). Additionally, Qatar's support is significant due to its cooperation with Hamas, the political and militant group controlling the Gaza Strip, which Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia classify as a terrorist organization. Qatar's engagement with Hamas reflects a pragmatic approach to influence within Gaza. The UAE has funded numerous infrastructure projects in the West Bank and Gaza, including schools, hospitals, and housing. In contrast, Kuwait has publicly rejected cooperation with Saudi Arabia while continuing to provide financial aid to various Palestinian groups and offering diplomatic support for Palestinian issues in the United Nations and other international forums (Khader, 2020).

Despite this, the support of the Gulf states is neither straightforward nor without complications. Recent political developments in the Arab world have led to new partnerships between Israel and several Persian Gulf states, culminating in the Abraham Accords. While this agreement may provide a foundation for peace and regional cooperation, many scholars view it as a breach of the longstanding Arab consensus regarding Palestine (Rabi & Mueller, 2017). The changes brought about by the Abraham Accords have prompted many experts to question the future of Arab collective support for Palestine and its impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Alon & Sher, 2013).

2.3 Overview of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002

The Arab Peace Initiative was proposed by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002 at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, Lebanon. This initiative "offered Israel diplomatic recognition from the Arab world in return for a full withdrawal from all occupied territories" and was subsequently adopted as a consensus by all Arab League member states (Ben-Meir, 2010). The initiative extended beyond the Middle East, envisioning the entire region—including not only Arab states but also Iran and Turkey—as a zone of peace, stability, and economic development. It promised full security for all states in the region, including Israel. This paper presents the key components of the Arab Peace Initiative, major criticisms associated with it, and its prospects for the future (Khatib, 2008).

The main principles of the initiative, which establish the framework for a stable peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, are as follows. First, Israel must withdraw completely from all territories occupied after the Six-Day War in 1967, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Second, permanent borders must be determined with Syria in accordance with UN resolutions, including the return of the Golan Heights to Syria. Third, the initiative calls for "the achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem," to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194, affirming "the attainment by the Palestinian people of their rights".

2.4 Diplomatic significance

The initiative is unique for several reasons. For the first time in history, the entire Arab League, as a collective political body, offered to normalize relations with Israel. Until 2002, Arab countries had maintained a united front of non-recognition and even confrontation toward their Middle Eastern neighbor (Podeh, 2022). This collective offer of peaceful relations with Israel may be seen as a significant "political threshold." Although not all Arab states were initially prepared to fully embrace these changes, they expressed a willingness to recognize Israel's legitimacy as a state and partner once the Palestinian issues were resolved (Sher & Duckett, 2020).

The offer to Israel was particularly attractive due to its broad and comprehensive framework. Compared to previous agreements, such as those reached at the Madrid Conference and Oslo Accords, it addressed all core issues of the conflict, including borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem. The initiative aimed to tackle the root causes of the conflict holistically rather than addressing its symptoms in isolation. Its approach adhered strictly to international law and United Nations resolutions, providing the peace plan with a solid legal and moral foundation.

2.5 Reactions and impact

The initiative received a variety of responses. The United States and the European Union welcomed it, viewing the peace plan as a constructive step and a promising starting point for negotiations. The Quartet for the Middle East, comprising the UN, the US, the EU, and Russia, also supported the initiative. Israelis responded cautiously to the Arab Peace Initiative. There were no immediate direct negotiations between the Arab states and Israel. The initiative, and its subsequent endorsements in 2010 and 2017, were interpreted in two ways (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021). Some Israeli leaders saw the Arab Peace Initiative as an "initial basis" for negotiations, while others regarded it as "cloaked in conditionalities". Specifically, the initiative demanded that Israel withdraw completely to the pre-June 5, 1967 borders and accept the right of return for Palestinian refugees. This was perceived by many Israelis as an imposition that posed a potential existential threat to the country's

security and demographic character. Meanwhile, the Palestinian people regarded the Arab Peace Initiative as a sign of continued Arab solidarity and support for their cause. It was also seen as establishing the "minimum requirements" for negotiating a two-state peace agreement (Podeh, 2022).

3. Factors Prompting Reevaluation of Gulf States' Policies Towards Israel

3.1 Rise of Iran as a Regional Power

One of the most critical reasons for the Gulf states' reassessment of their approach toward Israel is the rise of Iran as a significant regional power. Over the past few decades, Iran has expanded its influence across the Middle East through military, political, and ideological means (Naqvi, 2024). Its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, substantial support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, alliances with Shia militias in Iraq, and backing of the Houthi rebels in Yemen have given Iran considerable leverage in several regional conflicts. Moreover, the ongoing development of Tehran's nuclear program has alarmed the Gulf states, as a nuclear-armed Iran poses a direct threat to regional security and stability (Quamar, 2020). Particularly, Iran's intervention in the Yemeni Civil War is seen as especially critical because it represents Iranian expansion right on Saudi Arabia's doorstep. The strategic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has never been more intense, as demonstrated by their escalating hostility in multiple regional conflicts. Against this backdrop, Gulf states—most notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain—are increasingly viewing Israel as a potential strategic partner against Iran (Quamar, 2020). Israel's advanced military capabilities, unmatched intelligence networks, and shared security concerns present a compelling case for these Gulf states to adopt a more pragmatic approach toward normalizing relations.

3.2 Economic diversification needs

One of the main drivers behind the changing behavior of Gulf states toward Israel is the urgent need for economic diversification. The economies of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have traditionally been highly dependent on oil. However, fluctuations in global oil prices, shifting prospects in the global energy market, and growing environmental concerns—especially the transition to renewable energy sources—have exposed the vulnerabilities of oil-dependent economies. In response, Gulf states have launched ambitious economic reform programs aimed at reducing reliance on oil and promoting sustainable development. Initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030, the UAE's Centennial 2071, and Kuwait's Vision 2035 focus on developing diversified, knowledge-based economies (Quamar, 2020). Engaging with Israel, a global leader in technology and innovation, offers Gulf states valuable opportunities to accelerate their economic diversification. Cooperation with Israel in areas such as technology, cybersecurity, agriculture, water management, and healthcare can foster economic growth and create new

jobs. Thus, the strategic importance of economic diversification makes normalization with Israel a wise choice for the Gulf states (Rahman, 2021).

Another key factor contributing to the shift in Gulf states' policies toward Israel is technological and security cooperation. Israel is recognized as a global technological hub with advanced capabilities in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and renewable energy. The Gulf states see great potential in leveraging Israeli expertise and technology to advance their own projects and enhance their technological capabilities (Guzansky, 2021). Collaborative efforts including information exchange, strategic discussions, joint military exercises, and defense technology development are expected to counterbalance Iran's influence and help maintain regional stability. The recent peace agreements, particularly the Abraham Accords, have formalized this cooperation, enabling all parties to benefit from enhanced security and sustainable arrangements. Overall, the Gulf states' policies are pragmatic and reflect their readiness to prioritize national security and technological advancement over traditional political stances (Niu & Wu, 2021).

The changing political dynamics within the Gulf states themselves have also been crucial to this reassessment of their policies toward Israel. A notable recent development is the emergence of more pragmatic and future-oriented leadership in several Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the UAE's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed are prominent examples, having led ambitious economic and social reforms to modernize their countries and reduce oil dependency (Hitman & Zwilling, 2022). These younger leaders have demonstrated greater willingness to depart from traditional policies and adopt more flexible regional postures. Importantly, this generational leadership shift has allowed for a reconsideration of long-held positions, including those on Israel, as national interest, economic development, and regional stability have taken precedence (Rehman, 2020). Through normalization with Israel, these leaders aim to achieve broader strategic objectives.

4. The Abraham Accords

The year 2020 marked a fundamental shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. It was the year when the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to normalize relations with Israel, followed shortly by Sudan and Morocco taking similar steps. This transformation was driven by a complex mix of strategic, economic, and political factors, highlighting the practical and politically motivated nature of these decisions. A key influence behind the move was security concerns, particularly the desire to counterbalance Iran's potential regional expansion (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020). This pragmatic collaboration manifested in various forms, including joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing programs (Singer, 2021).

4.1 Significance of the Abraham Accords

In 2020, the normalization of relations between the UAE and Bahrain on one side, and Israel on the other, under the Abraham Accords marked an unprecedented moment in Middle Eastern diplomacy. The UAE's decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was driven by a complex mix of strategic, economic, and technological factors (Bayrak, 2021). Led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the UAE's leadership recognized that cooperation with Israel could enhance the country's security, particularly in countering Iran. Moreover, the agreement presented an opportunity for the UAE to align itself with a more modern state on the global stage and to stimulate national economic growth through diversification, modernization, and integration into global economies via advanced technologies and investments (Çinkara & Coşkun, 2023).

Bahrain's move toward normalization was also motivated by security and economic considerations. Although Bahrain is oil-rich and enjoys a relatively high level of human development, it remains a small island state with limited natural resources (Feierstein & Guzansky, 2023). Thus, securing its survival through strategic alliances—including military partnerships—was crucial. Relations between Bahrain and Iran have been tense, with the predominantly Shiite Islamic Republic making recurrent claims against Bahrain's Sunni monarchy. Additionally, Bahrain sought to strengthen ties with its Gulf Cooperation Council partners, especially Saudi Arabia, whose perspectives heavily influence Bahrain's security and economic policies. Following the UAE and Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco also began normalizing relations with Israel, each motivated by unique factors. Sudan's decision, for instance, was primarily driven by its desire to be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism (Mazzucco & Alexander, 2022).

5. Balancing Expediency and Principle

5.1 Overview of Iran's Regional Influence and Military Capabilities

Iran's regional influence has grown significantly over the past few decades, largely through the strategic use of proxy forces and the development of asymmetric warfare capabilities. Its external support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Shia militias in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen has extended Iran's reach across the Middle East, forming what is often called the "Shia crescent" stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean. Among Iran's military capabilities, its expanding arsenal of ballistic missiles and drones, along with its nuclear program, are especially concerning. Overall, Iran possesses substantial strategic depth, enabling it to project power far beyond its borders (Jalal, 2023).

A key factor driving the improved relations between Israel and several Gulf states is their shared perception of Iran as a common enemy. Both see Iran's regional influence and military capabilities as direct threats to their security. For the Gulf states, the main concern

lies in Iran's support for proxy groups and the potential for exporting its revolutionary ideology to destabilize regimes. Israel's worries center on Iran's nuclear ambitions and its backing of organizations intent on the destruction of the Jewish state (Gul, Abbasi, & Haider, 2021). This convergence of security interests has led to closer cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states in recent years. Specific examples of this security cooperation include intelligence sharing, which has been a critical component of their partnership. Both sides have benefited from exchanging vital information regarding Iranian activities and capabilities (Khlebnikov & Smagin, 2021).

5.2 Defense and Military Alliances

The establishment of both formal and informal military alliances has played a crucial role in strengthening security cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states. Formal alliances typically involve signed agreements and treaties that define the terms of military collaboration, defense aid, and strategic partnerships. In contrast, informal alliances encompass less publicized but equally vital cooperation, such as intelligence sharing, joint training exercises, and other collaborative efforts. Together, these alliances enhance the military capabilities of the parties involved and ensure they are well-prepared to confront shared threats, particularly from Iran (Horowitz, 2021).

5.3 Role of the U.S. in Facilitating Gulf-Israel Security Cooperation

It is important to recognize that the United States has been central to the security cooperation between the Gulf states and Israel. Serving as a key ally to both parties, the U.S. provides military aid, advanced technologies, and supports their respective regional strategies (Barak, Sheniak, & Shapira, 2023). Heilbrunn highlights that Washington's push for the Abraham Accords was driven by the objective to unite key allies against Iran and other regional threats. Additionally, the U.S. has played a pivotal role in organizing joint military exercises and defense agreements, fostering an environment of increased cooperation and trust between the Gulf states and Israel. Overall, the U.S. seeks to strengthen regional security and deter aggression from Iran by backing this trilateral collaboration (Cristiano, 2021).

5.4 Analysis of Joint Military Exercises and Defense Agreements

Regional security cooperation primarily centers on joint military exercises and defense agreements. Joint military exercises, organized and conducted by participating states, often include combat simulations, missile defense, naval operations, antisubmarine warfare, and counterterrorism efforts. Their main goal is to strengthen the operational readiness of the forces to effectively protect both the Gulf states and Israel. Defense agreements encompass mutual defense commitments, arms procurement, and intelligence sharing, all of which

serve to reinforce the region's collective defense capabilities and prepare for potential threats. Together, these joint exercises and defense agreements significantly enhance security cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states (Cristiano, 2021; Dana, 2023).

Recognizing the finite nature of their oil reserves and the vulnerabilities of the global oil market, many Gulf states—such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—have launched ambitious economic diversification initiatives. These efforts are reflected in national development frameworks like Saudi Vision 2030, the UAE Centennial 2071, and Qatar National Vision 2030. Although these plans vary in scope and timeline, they share a common goal: building a diversified, post-oil economy (Yaman & Yiğittepe, 2023).

5.5 Technology and Innovation in Economic Plans

Technology and innovation are central to the Gulf states' economic strategies. Many of these countries have committed substantial resources to developing advanced technological infrastructures and fostering innovation ecosystems. To attract foreign investment and support local startups and tech firms, the UAE has established multiple free zones, such as Dubai Internet City and Masdar City, Abu Dhabi's clean technology hub. Saudi Arabia's flagship initiative is NEOM, a cutting-edge, post-fossil fuel megacity powered entirely by renewable energy (Triantama, 2023). Consequently, the Gulf states' economic development plans, alongside the normalization of relations with Israel, encompass a broad range of initiatives including diversification, technological collaboration, trade and investment, tourism, and cultural exchange (Kéchichian, 2023).

5.6 Cultural and Religious Ties

The Palestinian cause holds profound cultural and religious significance across the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf states. Jerusalem, with the Al-Aqsa Mosque as one of Islam's holiest sites, adds a deeply personal and spiritual dimension to the Palestinian struggle for Muslims globally. In the Gulf, this cause is woven into the cultural fabric and remains a passionate issue for both the public and regional governments. Beyond its political dimension, the Palestinian cause symbolizes Arab and Islamic unity, heritage, and shared identity.

Historically, the Gulf states have been key supporters of Palestinian rights. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, these nations have strongly backed the Palestinian cause, providing substantial financial aid. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have consistently contributed billions of dollars to support Palestinian refugees, fund salaries, and sustain essential public services (Saltzman, n.d.).

5.7 Israel attack on Palestine and the future of Gulf-Israel relations

The future of Gulf-Israel relations will likely be shaped by a mix of regional and global developments. The ongoing conflict in Palestine, marked by escalating violence and humanitarian crises, exemplifies the challenges that could impact these relations. Public opinion in the Gulf and the broader international community, alongside Gulf countries' commitment to solidarity with Palestine, may pressure Gulf states to balance their ties with Israel against potential risks to their international reputation and internal stability. Additionally, global factors—such as U.S. foreign policy shifts under different administrations, the roles of China and Russia, and fluctuations in the energy market—will also influence the region's trajectory and Gulf-Israel relations (Oxford Analytica, 2024). These dynamics may strengthen pragmatic alliances while requiring Gulf states to adopt more cautious policies to preserve both regional and domestic stability (Abbas, 2024a).

5.8 Shifts in Alliances and Their Effects

The regional changes discussed above suggest potential shifts in alliances. Iran's rising influence and the ongoing regional conflicts may prompt more Gulf states to strengthen their security ties with Israel. Conversely, the current war in Palestine could trigger a different realignment, with some divided Arab states renewing their commitment to the Palestinian cause as part of their collective identity and as a means to bolster regime legitimacy within the Arab world. These dynamics may lead to clearer positions among involved countries and a more polarized regional landscape. The consequences of these shifts are significant, affecting regional stability, the balance of power, and opportunities for cooperation on issues such as terrorism, economic development, and climate change (Oxford Analytica, 2024).

Gulf states occupy a unique position within the Israel-Palestine conflict and the wider Middle Eastern geopolitics, placing them in a pivotal role to facilitate peace negotiations and promote long-term regional stability. Should the Gulf states successfully contribute to resolving the conflict, a comprehensive peace agreement would markedly enhance regional stability. However, such an agreement is unlikely to produce major effects beyond the Middle East. Past negotiation attempts and the persistence of the status quo have demonstrated that the conflict's impact remains largely local, affecting primarily neighboring countries and the broader Middle East. In other words, none of the scenarios considered suggest broader geopolitical implications outside the region (Oxford Analytica, 2024).

5.9 The prospects for enduring peace and cooperation in the Middle East

Several factors determine the prospects for enduring peace and cooperation in the Middle East. Firstly, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue—through the implementation

of a two-state solution or another mutually agreed arrangement—remains a critical prerequisite for peace in the region. The Gulf states play a crucial role in this process due to their substantial economic resources and political influence, which can be used to encourage both sides to reach a peaceful solution. Secondly, equitable economic growth and social development across the region will help address some of the social and economic grievances that fuel the conflict. Thirdly, educational and cultural programs can be used to nurture mutual understanding and respect for other cultures. Fourthly, the regional security system should include all key stakeholders, such as Israel, Palestine, Iran, and the Gulf states (Abbas, 2024b).

6. Conclusion

The relations between the Gulf states and Israel have undergone a substantial transformation, shifting from non-recognition and hostile approaches to normalization agreements within the Abraham Accords. This agreement marked the transition from several decades of informal and defensive relations to a policy characterized by pragmatism. This approach reflects a relatively similar set of security interests shared by the Gulf states and Israel, particularly regarding concerns about Iran. Moreover, the economic benefits of normalization have contributed to the implementation of various technological and economic projects, as well as the development of trade and investment networks that benefit both regions strategically and economically.

The pragmatic shift toward normalization is a testament to the realist outlook that the Gulf states adopt in response to the ever-evolving regional and international landscape. By partnering with Israel, the Gulf states seek to enhance their security architecture and refine their financial portfolios while promoting their status as pivotal players in the regional dynamic. The normalization of relations between the Gulf states and Israel may have significant impacts and shape future dynamics surrounding the issue in various ways. On the one hand, the fact that the Gulf states have normalized relations with Israel signifies a waning influence of the Arab world's two main countries—Egypt and Saudi Arabia—in the region's power architecture, resulting in a weakened position for the Palestinians. Moreover, the significant conflict in key regions, pitting the two sides against each other while causing a high death toll and humanitarian emergencies, intensifies this challenge. On the other hand, the Gulf states could leverage their new partnership to influence Israeli dynamics and promote an inclusive approach that incorporates the Palestinians into the regional integration project. The economic benefits of such a regional initiative could be advantageous for the entire region.

Looking to the future, the Gulf states are poised to use their new relationship with Israel to create a more stable regional geopolitical climate, at least by mediating potential conflicts. Additionally, these nations could feasibly pressure Israel through diplomatic means to adhere to the widespread demand for a two-state solution. Hopefully, in light of the

significant loss of life in the recent military conflict, the resolution this time underscores the necessity of addressing the root causes rather than the symptoms of this recurring malaise. Given the historical events that have perpetuated the conflict, either a two-state solution or some other compromise entailing full Palestinian recognition are the only pragmatic long-term solutions. The newly developing Israel-Gulf relationship is a realistic development amid the shifting alliances of the Middle Eastern world, combining the needs of the Gulf nations with the urgent interests of the parties involved, even if it is not entirely consistent with certain principles. Although it may present challenges for the Palestinian cause, the Gulf states are set to benefit from—and subsequently influence productively—the ongoing changes through balancing competing interests. In this way, the emerging political configuration could enable the region to address contemporary challenges while leaving historic grievances behind.

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The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965:
An Alliance Power Transition Theory Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the interplay between global and regional rivalries by illustrating how alliances during the Cold War period affected the conflict between India and Pakistan in South Asia, with a focus on the US-Pakistan alliance and its consequences for the region. It applies Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) to the case of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, set within the geopolitical context of the Cold War. The study argues that, due to their implications for power redistribution and perceptions of parity, the US-Pakistan alliance pushed India-Pakistan relations onto a conflict trajectory. Pakistan's alliance with the US was driven more by rivalry with India than by any shared strategic interests, temporarily leveling the power gap between the two states. Pakistan's dissatisfaction with the South Asian regional status quo and its perceived power parity in terms of military strength contributed to the outbreak of war, as exemplified by the 1965 conflict. This paper critiques the Balance of Power theory and instead emphasizes the role of alliance-driven power transition in the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Methodologically, the research employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates historical analysis with theoretical perspectives. This study contributes a replicable framework concerning alliances, perceptions of power, and geopolitical contexts, which may offer new insights into regional rivalry and alliance dynamics.

Keywords: Alliance, Cold War, 1965 Indo-Pak War, Parity, US-Pakistan Alliance.

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Introduction

A state can choose to enter an alliance (external balancing) or develop its own military capabilities (internal balancing) to ensure its national security. The state determines the most cost-effective option by weighing the relative costs and benefits of each approach. These factors are integral to an alliance relationship, which serves as a strategic concept or goal that defines the shared responsibilities of alliance partners and outlines a common defense strategy. This includes specifying roles, missions, and the required force levels to implement agreements on command structures, base arrangements, and burden sharing (Pollack & Cha, 1995). Alliances have existed historically, in the recent past, and continue to exist today. During the Cold War, several key alliances emerged, most notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, representing the US and the USSR, respectively. These alliances solidified and intensified the divisions between democratic and socialist states, raising the possibility of a wider conflict involving multiple regions, including the risk of nuclear war if hostilities broke out between opposing powers. In the early years of the Cold War, the US engaged in so many alliances, treaties, and agreements that American commentators referred to the era as one of "Pactomania" (Walt, 2023).

The alliances of both the US and the USSR expanded across many regions. Beyond Europe, South Asia also witnessed intense alliance competition, particularly between India and Pakistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan became part of the US alliance network in South Asia (Gul, Shad, & Imran, 2024). The primary motivation for Pakistan's alliance with the US was its rivalry with India, especially over the Kashmir dispute and related issues (Gul, Munir, Shafiq & Imran, 2022). Despite differing interests and the absence of a common external threat, this rivalry led to the US-Pakistan alliance in 1954.

America's policy towards the subcontinent during the Cold War aimed to unite the region against communist states, with the alliance with Pakistan forming part of its broader containment strategy. However, Pakistani leaders were more focused on securing military and economic support to strengthen their defenses against India than on containing communism. Meanwhile, American leaders never intended the alliance to serve as an anti-India pact or to involve the US directly in the India-Pakistan dispute.

Since its inception in 1954, the US-Pakistan alliance has experienced various ups and downs, with criticisms that the US has been a "fair-weather friend" and accusations that Pakistan has engaged in "double plays" (Komireddi, 2011; Merkey, 2011). Despite divergent interests in many key areas, the US and Pakistan have maintained a long-standing alliance.

Although Pakistan and the US were both active members of their alliance, in 1965, Pakistan—a US ally—went to war with India. This conflict strained the US-Pakistan alliance. Unwilling to take sides, the US imposed a military embargo on both countries and significantly reduced its involvement in South Asian politics. Meanwhile, the Soviets led a renewed effort to resolve the dispute, sought to strengthen ties with Pakistan, and continued

supplying weapons to India. Following the war, India's dominance over Pakistan increased, and Pakistan's growing dissatisfaction with the US prompted a shift in its security policy toward other nations (Walt, 1988).

Several studies have approached this topic from different perspectives. The most effective way to examine the balance-of-power argument is to analyze the reasons behind alliance formations. A central idea shared by all versions of this theory is that weaker states tend to band together to counterbalance great powers. This tendency results in "the recurrent formation of balances of power," as articulated by Kenneth Waltz, whose *Theory of International Politics* offers the most rigorous explanation of this concept (Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau & Thompson, 1985; Kaplan, 1957; Wagner, 1986). The balance-of-power theory continues to provide valuable insights into international politics. However, its limitations highlight the need to explore specific issues, such as the competition between the US and USSR in South Asia from 1954 to 1965 and how the power dynamics between India and Pakistan led to the 1965 war. Examining alliance formation is a logical starting point, as alliances lie at the core of the theory's predictions and hold particular significance in international politics (Booth, 2021).

Drawing on both contemporary alliance commitments in the Middle East (Walt, 1985) and traditional diplomatic history, several recent studies have examined competing theories of alliance formation. These findings suggest that states often form alliances not purely for balance-of-power reasons but as a form of *bandwagoning* to counterbalance perceived threats. Contrary to the structural balance-of-power hypothesis, this body of research reveals that states balance not only against raw power but also against a range of perceived threats.

The hypothesis of this article is grounded in Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), a recent development in power transition theory advanced by scholars such as Woosung Kim. This study is significant because it revisits alliance behavior not through the traditional balance-of-power lens—which holds that states form alliances primarily to deter threats and resist foreign aggression—but rather by exploring how enduring rivalries, such as the one between India and Pakistan, have influenced alliance dynamics.

Since their independence from Britain in 1947, India has maintained military and economic superiority in South Asia, emerging as the dominant regional power. In contrast, Pakistan has sought to challenge this hegemony by aligning itself with Cold War powers. Once Pakistan achieved relative military parity through its alliance with the United States, combined with Cold War geopolitical strategies pursued by both the US and USSR and its own dissatisfaction with India's dominance, the result was the regional war of 1965 between Pakistan and India.

The assumption of parity during alliance transitions suggests that conflicts are more likely to erupt when a challenger reaches relative equality with a dominant power. While Organski and Kugler (Organski, 1968a) argue that war arises when a challenger attains parity in terms of internal economic development, this paper builds on the concept of

parity and dissatisfaction in alliance transitions as explored by Woosung Kim in his studies on alliance dynamics.

To illustrate this, the paper examines alliance formations in South Asia since World War II, focusing in particular on the alliance commitments between the United States and Pakistan. These cases are crucial, as they allow for a rigorous evaluation of several key theoretical propositions. The study employs a framework using independent, dependent, and control variables. The independent variable is the perception of Pakistan's military capability, alliances, and political support prior to the 1965 war. The dependent variable is the outbreak of the 1965 war between Pakistan and India. The control variables include the overarching Cold War context—specifically the roles of the United States and China as external powers—as well as the political and military responses of both India and Pakistan.

Alliance transition theory

Alliance Transition Theory posits that the parity of alliance power between opposing coalitions is a critical factor in determining the likelihood of a power-transition conflict. As DiCicco and Levy (1999) highlight, Woosung Kim's research into Alliance Transition Theory demonstrates that forming alliances can significantly enhance a state's capabilities—comparable to the internal advancements achieved through industrialization and political modernization, as originally emphasized by A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler.

The central determinant of war between the alliance of a declining dominant power and that of a rising challenger is the combination of power parity between these alliances and the challenger's dissatisfaction with the prevailing status quo. The theory underscores that it is not merely the shift in national power between individual states that triggers conflict, but the balance of power between rival alliances during a transition phase that plays a decisive role.

Moreover, Kim's empirical findings suggest that the likelihood of a power-transition conflict is not primarily influenced by the point at which a rising challenger surpasses a dominant power in terms of internal economic development. Instead, the interplay between alliance-based power parity and political dissatisfaction is what most strongly correlates with the outbreak of major conflict.

In his development of Alliance Transition Theory, Kim (1989, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2002) argues that the international system tends to remain stable when the dominant power's alliance maintains a substantial advantage over the alliance of a dissatisfied challenger. In such scenarios, when the leading state and its allies possess overwhelming military and strategic superiority, the likelihood of a successful challenge is minimal, thereby reducing the risk of a power-transition conflict (Organski, 1968b). Conversely, the probability of conflict increases when the rising challenger and its coalition approach parity with the declining hegemon and its alliance. The alliance transition framework thus emphasizes that

both the level of dissatisfaction among challengers and the relative parity of alliance power are key factors influencing the likelihood of major war.

This article builds upon the previously discussed Alliance Transition Theory by applying it to the U.S.–Pakistan alliance and analyzing its implications in the context of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. Proponents of balance-of-power theory argue that alliance formation is a common and effective strategy for augmenting state power and plays a crucial role in the emergence of major power conflicts (Claude, 1962; Gulick, 1955; Kaplan, 1957; Morgenthau, 1973). In contrast, Alliance Transition Theory suggests that dominant powers within the international hierarchy are more likely to form alliances, and, as Kim notes, when one coalition achieves significant strength, it may trigger a power transition conflict. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union actively cultivated alliances in South Asia to establish parity within their respective spheres of influence. Pakistan's alignment with the U.S., alongside India's strategic relationship with the USSR, exemplifies this dynamic. According to Kim, alliances are essential for enhancing a state's external power, and Pakistan's military and economic vulnerabilities prompted it to seek greater security through strategic alliances. The U.S.–Pakistan alliance, therefore, emerged not from shared values or objectives, but rather from Cold War-driven competition between superpowers.

Literature Review

As the Cold War expanded beyond Europe into the emerging "Third World," newly independent nations faced immediate and significant risks. Although Pakistan was not a primary battleground of the Cold War, the possibility of an East–West confrontation along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border remained a concern for U.S. policymakers, mirroring earlier challenges encountered by British colonial authorities. With mounting tensions in Europe, the Soviet Union's successful detonation of its first atomic bomb in August 1949, and Stalin's attempts to assert control over Italy's former North African colonies, establish military bases on the Black Sea, and gain access to Iran's oilfields, U.S. officials began implementing a broader Cold War strategy between late 1949 and early 1950. As anti-colonial movements gained momentum across Southeast and East Asia, officials from the Central Intelligence Agency expressed concern, stating: "Political and social tensions have intensified along the Asian coastline as Western European powers have lost their grip. The USSR and various local Communist groups are capitalizing on these tensions." The decolonization process in Asia further alarmed U.S. leaders, who feared that newly independent states might align themselves with Communist ideologies (Central Intelligence Agency, 1948).

The United States expanded its alliance network to South Asia in the 1950s as a result of the considerations outlined above. From the administration of President Truman through that of President Eisenhower, strong military ties with Pakistan were actively promoted by key

officials such as Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chief of the U.S. Naval Operations; Henry A. Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs; and Major General George Olmsted, Deputy to the Mutual Security Administrator. Dean Rusk, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in 1951, also played a significant role in shaping the U.S. alliance structure in Asia. On the Pakistani side, one of the earliest proponents of a military alliance with the United States was General Muhammad Ayub Khan, then Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani Army, who began seriously considering such an alliance in August 1951 (Khan, 1963).

In his later memoirs, General Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, openly discusses the rationale behind the "close friendship and alliance" between Pakistan and the United States. "The relationship was well established by the time I took office as President," Ayub noted. While acknowledging that political elites shaped the alliance's core components, he emphasized his direct involvement in matters that specifically affected the defense services. "I believed it was only natural for the United States to have a keen interest in the safety and well-being of smaller powers in Asia." He argued that the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and even India—despite their significant internal challenges— sought to expand their respective spheres of influence and were unlikely to agree on clear boundaries. However, a compelling factor united them: none would permit the United States, as an offshore power, to establish a permanent presence in Asia. Situated between these three major powers are several smaller nations, including Nepal, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Korea, as well as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Given their geographic location between key landmasses, these nations' foremost concern was their security. It was therefore reasonable, Ayub contended, that such states would seek external alliances for protection. In this context, the United States appeared to be a natural ally, particularly as it also sought to expand its influence in Asia (Khan, 1967).

On May 19, 1954, Pakistan and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in Karachi, reflecting a genuine give-and-take approach. However, some experts argue that this agreement led to Pakistan's unpopularity among Afro-Asian nations, who were concerned about India's potential regional ambitions. Evidence suggests that the Pakistani government undertook preparatory steps during Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' visit to Karachi in May 1953. The first Soviet thermonuclear explosion likely accelerated the urgency of forming a wartime alliance. During the meeting of the Colombo Powers in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) from April 28 to May 2, 1954, Pakistan's Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra emphasized that South and Southeast Asia were under threat from international communism. To further reassure the United States of Pakistan's commitment to a Southeast Asian defense organization, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan visited Washington in June 1954 (Sayeed, 1965).

Indeed, Pakistan became the only Asian nation to join both major military alliances when it entered the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later known as the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO) in February 1955. As Leicester Webb observed, Pakistan "made it embarrassingly clear that she was

primarily doing so to enhance her position against India," despite SEATO's provisions for military and economic assistance. At the time, Pakistan received approximately $15 per capita in aid, compared to just $9 per capita for India—despite Pakistan's frequent complaints about what it perceived as a U.S. economic bias favoring neutralist India over itself, a committed American ally. Richard Weekes noted that U.S. military aid often arrived in Karachi faster than Pakistani personnel could be trained to use it. Advanced tanks and supersonic jets were delivered to American-trained forces, providing a level of capability that their original commanders could scarcely have imagined. By 1963, U.S. expenditures on military equipment and personnel training for Pakistan had surpassed $1 billion. To further assist Pakistan in revitalizing its struggling economy, economic aid also flowed into Karachi and Dacca in the form of cash grants, loans, surplus food, industrial machinery, and thousands of technical experts (Weekes, 1964).

Table 1: Share of the US in Economic Assistance Contracted by Pakistan (1951–1965)

Years	US Economic to Pakistan ($Millions) Total	Annual average	Total economic assistance contracted by Pakistan ($Millions) Total	Annual average	Percentage of total economic Assistance from US
1951-52 to 1954-55	244.2	61.1	335.9	84.7	72.1
1955-56 to 1959-60	752.2	150.4	1032.3	26.5	72.9
1960-61 to 1964-65	1662.8	332.6	2979.2	595.8	55.8
1965-66 to 1969-70	1280.5	256.1	2897.3	579.5	44.2

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Table 2: Loans and Credit contracted by Pakistan with the US (1951–1965)

Years	Loans and Credits Contracted with US ($Millions) Total	Annual average	Total Loans and Credits Contracted ($Millions) Total	Annual average	US percentage of Total Loans and Credits
1951-52 to 1954-55	63.1	15.3	121.3	30.1	51.9
1955-56 to 1959-60	279.3	55.9	456.1	90.9	61.5
1960-61 to 1964-65	900.0	180.0	1961.4	392.9	45.9
1965-66 to 1969-70	895.3	179.1	2270.6	454.1	39.4

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

At least 100 Pakistani officers received public administration training in the United States through programs sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, USAID supported and funded approximately 300 Pakistanis for training in public health, agriculture, and other specialized sectors (Sayeed, 1965). Between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan received between $1.2 and $1.5 billion in essential military equipment.

However, even more substantial economic assistance was provided in the form of various loans, grants for economic development, technical assistance programs, and agricultural commodity support under Public Law 480 and other U.S. initiatives. From 1947 through June 30, 1965, Pakistan received a total of $3 billion in economic aid. Notably, during the Second Five-Year Plan, the United States provided $1.7 billion in loans, grants, and other forms of support—constituting nearly 30% of the total $5.5 billion development expenditure (Sayeed, 1965). Consequently, Pakistan remained heavily dependent on American aid for roughly a decade. Since 1960, the primary channel for this support had been the World Bank's Aid-to-Pakistan Consortium, which included the United States, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Japan, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. According to Pakistani journalist Qudratullah Aziz, between 1960 and 1965, "the consortium's aid pledge to Pakistan totaled $2.103 billion, nearly half of which was from the United States" (Aziz, 1966). The tables below provide a detailed breakdown of U.S. economic aid during the 1960s.

Table 3: Pakistan's Share of US Official Development Assistance (1951–1965)

Years	Total US Assistance (& Million)	Pakistan's Receipts ($ Millions)	Pakistan's Percentages
1960	2702	141.5	5.2
1965	4023	243.7	6.1

Source: World Bank, World Development Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and unpublished data obtained from the Economic Affairs Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.

Table 4: Grants Contracted by Pakistan (1951–1965)

	From US ($Millions) Total	Annual average	Frol and Countries ($Millions) Total	Annual average	Percentage share of US
1951-52 to 1954-55	181.2	45.3	217.6	54.4	89.3
1955-56 to 1959-60	472.9	94.6	578.2	115.6	81.8
1960-61 to 1964-65	762.8	152.6	1017.8	203.6	74.5
1965-66 to 1969-70	385.2	77.0	626.7	125.3	61.5

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

In contrast to Pakistan's alliance strategies, India consistently championed the moral principle of non-alignment and critiqued American concerns regarding "Communist expansionism." This stance led some members of the Truman Administration to question the feasibility of implementing an effective containment strategy in South Asia if "the greatest Asian democracy" steadfastly chose to remain outside the defense framework of the so-called free world. India's foreign policy was firmly grounded in non-alignment. Its considerable size and regional influence enabled it to avoid formal alliances, while the legacy of colonialism fostered deep mistrust toward Western security initiatives. Nonetheless,

despite its public commitment to non-alignment, India gradually shifted away from strict adherence to this policy in response to significant security threats. Given the nature of these threats and India's geopolitical context, this shift often manifested in closer ties with the Soviet Union (Wint, 1962).

India's primary adversary has historically been Pakistan. The Indo-Pakistani conflict originates from the deep-rooted animosity between Muslims and Hindus in the subcontinent, a tension intensified by specific disputes that emerged following the partition and independence of the region (Brecher, 1952). It is hardly surprising that this conflict has dominated the security concerns of both countries ever since, given that communal violence in the aftermath of independence resulted in nearly 500,000 deaths and the displacement of approximately 10 million people (Barnds, 1972).

In contrast, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru actively sought to improve relations with India's significant northern neighbor, China, despite potential security threats. Nehru played a mediating role between China and the West during the Korean War and supported China's admission to the United Nations. When China's takeover of Tibet in 1950 posed a threat to India's border, Nehru responded with relatively modest protest and pursued a conciliatory approach. This policy saw temporary success when, in 1954, Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai announced that Sino-Indian relations would be governed by the principles of "panchsheel" or peaceful coexistence (Nehru, 1961).

Several factors motivated India's accommodation of China. Nehru highly valued "Asian solidarity," which both India and China regarded as a powerful counterbalance to imperialist domination. He believed that Sino-Indian tensions could be resolved amicably. Furthermore, Nehru saw cooperation between the two nations as a means to safeguard themselves from interference by global superpowers. Lastly, given India's ongoing conflict with Pakistan and pressing internal challenges, Nehru considered a confrontation with China as a burden India could ill afford (Halpern, 1965).

India adopted a more cautious stance toward both China and the broader Cold War powers. Unlike Turkey and Iran, India did not support the American strategy of "containing" communism, which contributed to Nehru's initially disappointing relations with the United States (Brecher, 1952).

Nehru did not perceive the Soviet Union as a significant threat and was somewhat sympathetic to socialist ideas, despite occasionally imprisoning Communists within India. India's standing in the United States was further weakened by its refusal to condemn China's involvement in the Korean War and its decision not to sign the Japanese peace treaty (Barnds, 1972). Meanwhile, Stalin viewed the former colonies largely as pawns of imperialist powers, which limited the depth of Soviet-Indian relations (Donaldson, 1974). Under these circumstances, India faced no urgent need for strong alliances as long as its relations with China remained positive and Pakistan did not become overly powerful (Marwah, 1967).

A key moment indicating India's potential shift toward Soviet support occurred when Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact in 1955. In response, Nehru invited Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin to India that same year, anticipating a more moderate stance from Stalin's successors. During this period, India received a $112 million loan from the Soviet Union, which also backed India's position on Kashmir (Barnds, 1972b). Later in 1955, Nehru undertook a highly publicized visit to the Soviet Union, demonstrating India's diplomatic capabilities despite remaining a member of the British Commonwealth and continuing to receive economic aid from Western countries.

Methodology

The research methodology is grounded in a hypothesis derived from Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), examining the relationship between the US-Pakistan alliance and its influence on the 1965 India-Pakistan War. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines historical analysis with theoretical application to explore the interaction between alliance dynamics—specifically, the parity of power within the alliance and levels of dissatisfaction. This qualitative study adopts a historical case study design, focusing on the Cold War alliance between the United States and Pakistan and its eventual impact on the 1965 conflict. Theoretical interpretation is framed through ATT, which stems from Power Transition Theory. The study identifies an independent variable encompassing Pakistan's perceived military capability, alliance commitments, and political backing prior to the war. The dependent variable is the outbreak of the India-Pakistan War in 1965. Control variables include the broader Cold War context shaped by the involvement of powers such as the US, USSR, and China, as well as the military and political responses of both India and Pakistan during the conflict.

The data sources for this research include archival records, treaties, and policy documents related to the US-Pakistan alliance, supplemented by books, journal articles, and prior studies on Cold War alliances, balance of power, and the 1965 India-Pakistan War. The study approaches the historical military and diplomatic developments in South Asia during the Cold War period. Its analytical framework integrates Alliance Transition Theory with historical analysis to understand the dynamics of power parity and alliance-driven conflict escalation. Using a comparative methodology, the research examines the alliances between the US and Pakistan and between the USSR and India within South Asia. It further investigates internal and external factors that influenced the effectiveness and outcomes of these alliances and conflicts. The methodology includes historical contextualization to analyze Cold War-era alliance structures, focusing particularly on the US-Pakistan and USSR-India partnerships. The application of theory involves testing Alliance Transition Theory's core assumption that power parity between opposing alliances increases the likelihood of war. The case study centers on the events leading up to the 1965 India-Pakistan War, highlighting how Pakistan's military buildup was supported and enabled by

its alliance with the US. The research concludes by analyzing how variations in independent and control variables influenced the outbreak of war as the dependent variable. This study aims to extend Alliance Transition Theory from explaining international wars to addressing regional conflicts in South Asia. It challenges the Balance of Power Theory by emphasizing the primacy of alliance parity and dissatisfaction as triggers for war. The findings offer new insights into how the nature of alliances shaped under ATT contributes to conflict escalation. Overall, this methodology facilitates a rigorous analysis of the causal relationship between alliance dynamics and the India-Pakistan War of 1965 within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics.

Analysis/Findings

ATT and the 1965 Indo-Pak War

Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) posits that weaker states can enhance their power through strategic alliances, a concept reflected in Pakistan's partnership with the United States during the Cold War. Recognizing India's considerable military, economic, and demographic advantages, Pakistan sought to offset its relative weaknesses by aligning with the US. Between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan joined US-led alliances such as SEATO and CENTO, receiving over $1 billion in military and economic aid. This support bolstered Pakistan's defense capabilities and contributed to a growing military parity with India. ATT further argues that the likelihood of war increases during power transitions when competing alliances approach parity—a dynamic evident between Pakistan and India. In this context, Pakistan's alliance with the US, strengthened indirectly by Chinese support after 1962, enabled it to challenge India's dominance, especially following India's military defeat in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Pakistan's incorporation of Western military training, doctrines, and acquisition of advanced US weaponry further reinforced this sense of parity (Fair, 2014; Gupta & Lüthi, 2016).

Facing vulnerabilities on the subcontinent from China in the north and Pakistan on both eastern and western fronts, India's regional dominance was increasingly challenged as Pakistan modernized and gained confidence in its military capabilities. Between 1954 and 1963, the US supplied Pakistan's army, navy, and air force with extensive weaponry under SEATO and CENTO agreements. The army received 200 M113 Armored Personnel Carriers, 650 Patton tanks, M36B2 Tank Destroyers, Chaffee and Walker Bulldog tanks, along with 105mm and 155mm artillery, anti-tank recoilless rifles, and Cobra anti-tank missiles. The air force was equipped with B-57 bombers, F-104 supersonic jets, nine squadrons of F-86 Sabre jets, a C-130 transport squadron, six additional aircraft squadrons, thirty helicopters, Falcon Sidewinder missiles, and a variety of bombs and rockets. Pakistan's navy was modernized with a cruiser, five destroyers, eight minesweepers, a water tanker, a submarine, and three tugboats. Alongside this hardware, Pakistani forces received training to operate these advanced systems effectively. The military formed three

combined regiments, including a squadron of M36B2 Tank Destroyers and eight Patton tank regiments; notably, Patton tank cannons were also mounted on Sherman MKII tanks, sharing armament with the M36B2. All equipment reflected frontline NATO standards, and Pakistani troops were trained to ensure interoperability with Western forces (Yeager & Janos, 1985).

Beyond Pakistan's military and economic aid from the US, India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War emboldened Pakistani leaders such as Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and General Muhammad Musa. They believed Indian soldiers lacked fighting spirit—Ayub Khan famously claimed that one Pakistani soldier was equal to three Indian soldiers in combat. Confident that the advanced military equipment supplied through SEATO and CENTO had strengthened their forces, they aimed to retake Jammu and Kashmir from India. Moreover, they thought that capturing a major city like Amritsar would pressure India into conceding Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan (Cloughley, 2016).

As previously noted, between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan received over $1 billion in various forms, including cash, loans, credits, and US military assistance. This aid significantly enhanced Pakistan's defensive capabilities through the establishment of new military bases, the expansion and modernization of existing ones, the introduction of advanced weaponry and equipment, and the creation of two new Corps commands. Shahid M. Amin, a former Pakistani diplomat, observed that these agreements secured critical US military and economic support during Pakistan's formative years, strengthening its position against India—an advantage particularly evident during the 1965 war. The United States was granted permission to establish bases on Pakistani soil to monitor the Soviet Union, while Pakistani personnel received training from American and British advisors. Many future Pakistani presidents and generals graduated from US and British military academies during this period, resulting in the Pakistani army adopting Western, especially British, military frameworks (Amin, 2000).

The Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) highlights that dissatisfaction with the existing regional status quo can drive conflict. In South Asia, Pakistan's dissatisfaction stemmed from India's control over Jammu and Kashmir, a region Pakistan claimed as rightfully its own. This grievance intensified after India's military restructuring following the 1962 Sino-Indian War, which Pakistan viewed as a direct challenge to its Kashmir claims. Perceiving India's military as overstretched due to commitments along the Chinese border and believing Indian troop morale was low, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam in 1965. These operations aimed to exploit India's perceived vulnerabilities and alter the territorial status quo in Pakistan's favor (Ganguly, 1994).

Pakistan gained a qualitative military advantage over India, heightening tensions that ultimately led to the full-scale war of 1965. In April 1965, a minor border clash in the Rann of Kutch surprised the Indian Army and ended with a decisive victory for Pakistan, which was widely celebrated domestically. This success emboldened Pakistan to launch Operation Gibraltar later that year, an infiltration campaign into Kashmir aimed at provoking a local

uprising against Indian control. As a US ally, Pakistan benefited from advanced American military technology, positioning itself as a credible rival to India. The situation escalated into a full-scale war along the international border, with extensive aerial combat between both countries' air forces (Yeager & Janos, 1985). During the conflict, both armies occupied portions of each other's territory. While Pakistan claims the war ended in a stalemate, it also achieved the capture of significant Indian territory.

India demonstrated considerable numerical superiority; however, this advantage was somewhat diminished due to the extensive deployment of its forces along the Indo-China border. In contrast, the Pakistan Army possessed a notable edge in anti-tank capabilities. They effectively utilized infantry-level anti-tank weapons such as the M40 recoilless rifle and the M20 Super Bazooka, while the Indian Army primarily relied on the M40 106mm recoilless rifle mounted on Jeeps—a weapon also employed by Pakistan—for anti-tank operations. Pakistan's larger inventory of anti-tank weaponry, largely the result of substantial US military aid in preceding years, proved crucial for ambush tactics, especially when concealed in dense foliage, enabling close-range strikes against enemy tanks. Quartermaster Abdul Hamid of the Indian Army was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for destroying six Pakistani tanks with his M40 gun (Mishra, 2025).

The Pakistan Army also held a significant advantage in armored strength. Equipped with US-supplied M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), Pakistan possessed mechanized infantry capabilities that India lacked at the time. This disparity provided Pakistan with greater mobility and battlefield flexibility, allowing troops to dismount alongside tanks and engage enemy positions effectively. Pakistan operated over 756 battle tanks and tank destroyers, including Patton tanks, Sherman tanks, Chaffee light tanks, and M36 Jackson tank destroyers. Additionally, the Pakistan artillery employed American tactics such as pre-time fuses, which enabled projectiles fired at different trajectories to converge on the same target. This tactic, combined with the deployment of Weapon Locating Equipment, inflicted significant damage on advancing Indian forces during the conflict (Singh, 1991).

The 1962 Indo-China border conflict was a significant factor influencing regional dynamics. In response, Pakistan sought to strengthen its ties with China following the war. A boundary agreement between Pakistan and China was reached in 1963. In July 1964, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited Pakistan to discuss US-China relations. During his visit to China in March 1965, President Ayub Khan secured Chinese support for Pakistan's claims over Jammu and Kashmir. Although India's defense budget rose from Rs 300 crore to Rs 800 crore following the 1962 war, much of the increase was allocated to establishing mountain divisions aimed at fortifying the country's borders (Afridi & Khan, 2016).

In terms of armored capabilities, Pakistan's Patton tanks outperformed India's primary battle tank, the Centurion Mk VII, which dated back to World War II, in firepower, range, and mobility. Prior to the conflict, General Ayub conveyed to General Musa his belief that Indian troop morale was fragile and vulnerable to well-timed, concentrated assaults. He expressed confidence that the Indian army could not withstand a determined Pakistani

offensive, famously asserting that one Pakistani soldier was equivalent to three Indian soldiers (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, 2015).

The roles of the US and USSR illustrate the core principles of the Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), which suggests that alliances formed during periods of power transition critically impact the likelihood of conflict. The United States provided material and strategic support to its ally Pakistan, while India depended on the Soviet Union for military and diplomatic backing. This dynamic fostered a subtle rivalry between the two superpowers in South Asia. The Soviet Union steadily enhanced India's military capabilities, whereas a US arms embargo forced Pakistan to seek military aid from other countries, including China, North Korea, Germany, Italy, and France. Notably, China supplied Pakistan with over 900 tanks, MiG-19 fighter jets, and equipment for three infantry divisions. France contributed Mirage aircraft and submarines, while the Soviet Union initially provided about 100 T-55 tanks and Mi-8 helicopters; however, this support was abruptly withdrawn due to intense pressure from India. Despite these challenges, Pakistan managed to partially strengthen its military forces during this period (Central Intelligence Agency, 1986).

While Pakistan received political, military, and economic support from the United States, India increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. The USSR first entered the South Asian arms market in May 1962 by signing an agreement with India for the sale and licensed production of MiG-21 supersonic fighter jets for the Indian Air Force. Due to tensions stemming from the Sino-Indian conflict, the delivery of these aircraft was delayed, with the first batch of four arriving in February 1963 for assembly in India. The Indian government justified the purchase as a means to counterbalance the F-104 fighter jets promised to Pakistan by the US in 1961. In September 1964, the Indian Defence Minister visited Moscow and secured further agreements for the supply of light tanks, helicopters,
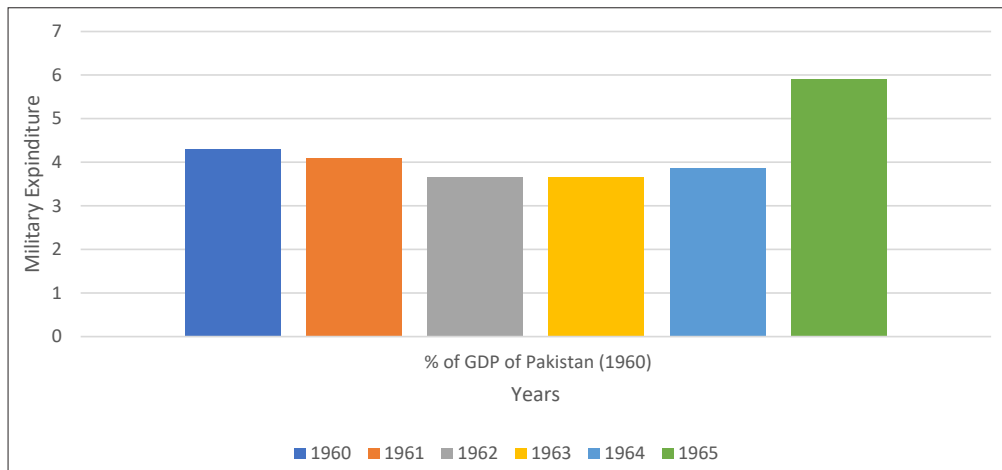

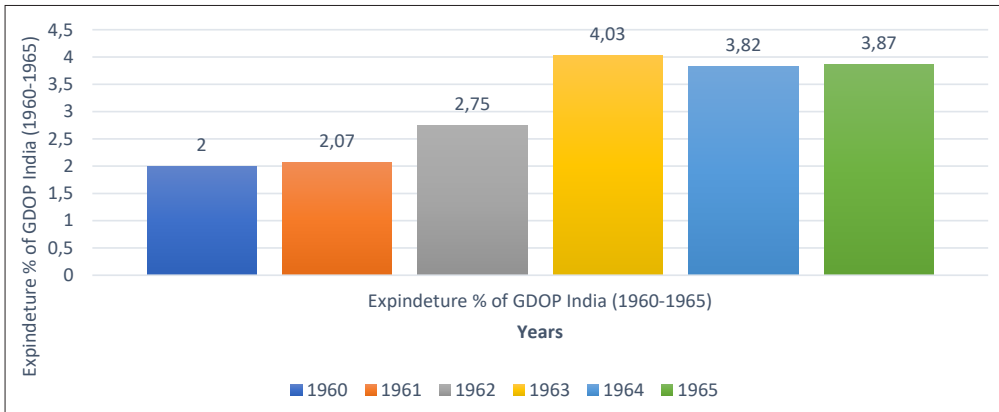**Figure 1.** Defense Expenditure of Pakistan % of GDP (1960-1965)

Source: https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/

Figure 2. Defense Expenditure of India % of GDP (1960-1965)

Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=IN
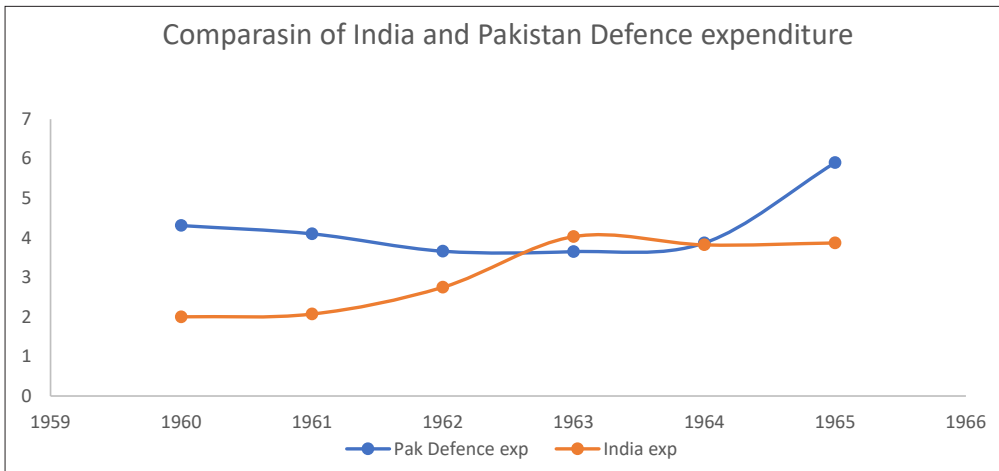

Figure 3. Comparison of India and Pakistan Defense Expenditure

Source: We, the authors, have compiled the data from the World Bank

missiles, naval vessels including submarines, and materials to support MiG manufacturing facilities in India. By 1965–66, the Soviet Union had become India's largest single arms supplier, providing over $300 million in military aid between 1961 and 1965 (Qureshi, 1967). Consequently, military expenditures rose significantly in both India and Pakistan, reflecting their growing reliance on foreign military assistance.

The transfer of Soviet military equipment to India raised serious concerns in Pakistan. Following the MiG agreement in May 1962, the Pakistani government lodged complaints with both the United States and the Soviet Union about the escalating competition among major powers to supply India with military resources. This dynamic threatened to upset

the regional military balance and risked increasing political instability (Hasan, 1968). Pakistan's opposition to substantial military aid flowing to India—regardless of its source— stems from fears of potential Indian aggression. India's delays in honoring agreements with Pakistan concerning the distribution of financial assets and military supplies after partition, its rigid position on the Kashmir conflict, and its ambitions to dominate South Asia and the Indian Ocean all reinforced Pakistan's perception of India as a significant security threat. Consequently, Pakistan's defense policy has prioritized maintaining military power parity, actively opposing the influx of large-scale arms into India's arsenal. This arms buildup in India has consistently triggered a reciprocal arms race in the region.

Pakistan began to feel the full impact of the Soviet arms aid program in 1965. In September of that year, the United States ceased its military assistance to Pakistan, which had been used to counter Soviet weapon shipments to India. Although the US also stopped military aid to India, the Soviet Union continued to supply New Delhi with arms. By November 1965, the Indian Air Force had received 30 MiG-21 fighters from the Soviets, who had also committed to delivering 65 medium tanks. In response to the American withdrawal, the Soviet Union intensified its military support to India. While Pakistan acquired a limited number of MiG-19 aircraft and T-53 tanks from China, concerns over Soviet arms deliveries to India were well-founded. This issue was formally raised at the governmental level during Foreign Minister Z. A. Bhutto's visit to Moscow in November 1965 (Hasan, 1968).

Following the outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan in September 1965, the US halted military and economic aid to both countries. Despite assurances, both Indian and Pakistani forces continued to use previously supplied American military equipment. Pakistan viewed this as a breach of US commitments under military agreements and expressed strong dissatisfaction over Washington's perceived lack of support. Although the US played a role in the United Nations Security Council's ceasefire resolution on September 20, its suspension of all aid was seen negatively, especially by Pakistan (Hasan, 1967). Militarily, Pakistan felt disadvantaged, as India had access to a broader array of military suppliers, while Pakistan's supplies were largely US-dependent.

The US became disillusioned with a conflict where both nations used American equipment intended for defense and anti-communism purposes. Pakistan argued that its military actions were necessary to counter India's attempts to fully annex Jammu and Kashmir, but these claims had little effect on the Johnson Administration. By July 1967, the US withdrew its military advisory group from Pakistan. In response, Pakistan declined to renew the lease on the Peshawar military base, which expired in 1969. Consequently, US-Pakistan relations deteriorated as the US became more involved in Vietnam, reducing its focus on South Asian security. During the war, the US imposed an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan, but Pakistan faced greater difficulties due to shortages of spare parts for its air force, tanks, and other military equipment, whereas India's numerical superiority helped offset such problems. The conflict concluded with a ceasefire (Kux, 2001).

Conclusion

This paper explores the dynamics of alliances and their role in shaping the likelihood of war through the lens of Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), using the 1965 Indo-Pak war as a case study. The example of Pakistan-US relations during the Cold War illustrates how alliances can influence regional power distributions and potentially trigger conflict, especially when rival states perceive parity. ATT builds on Power Transition Theory by emphasizing alliances' role in enhancing national capabilities and highlighting how alliance power parity and dissatisfaction with the status quo increase the chances of war.

Pakistan, with a relatively weaker military and economic base, sought to bolster its position against India by aligning with the US. This alignment was driven more by Pakistan's rivalry with India than by shared values or strategic interests with the US. According to ATT, perceived parity between rivals can create conditions prone to conflict, as evidenced by the 1965 war. The Cold War context was crucial, with the US-Pakistan alliance forming part of a broader US containment strategy, while the Soviet Union's growing support for India rebalanced regional alignments. These conflicting alliances not only sparked the war but also shaped its outcomes, including the eventual strain in US-Pakistan relations and Pakistan's realignment with China.

This research critiques traditional Balance of Power theories, which focus mainly on direct power imbalances between states, by showing that alliances and perceived parity within alliance networks are critical factors in conflict escalation. The 1965 Indo-Pak war exemplifies how regional rivalries, external alliances, and shifts in perceived power parity can destabilize a region and escalate tensions into war.

Methodologically, this study combines historical analysis with theoretical application, employing a mixed-methods approach that applies ATT as an analytical framework. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding than classic Balance of Power theory by accounting for how alliance dynamics and perceptions of parity increase conflict likelihood. Applying ATT to a regional conflict like the 1965 Indo-Pak war advances the field by demonstrating how global geopolitical alliances, especially during the Cold War, interact to destabilize regions and facilitate war.

Furthermore, the use of independent, dependent, and control variables strengthens the analysis of how alliance dynamics contribute to war outbreaks, providing fresh insights into how alliance perceptions and structures influence escalation. By situating the 1965 conflict within a broader theoretical and historical framework, this study challenges conventional theories and proposes a replicable methodological model for analyzing alliances, regional rivalries, and geopolitics in other conflict-prone areas.

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Romania:
The Crisis of Ukrainian Refugees.
Political and Humanitarian Perspectives

Valentin MACEC, Cătălin BABA

Abstract: The Ukrainian refugee crisis, triggered by Russia's military aggression in February 2022, has produced one of Europe's largest migratory flows in recent decades. As a border state of the EU and NATO, Romania has played a vital role in managing this influx, facilitating the transit and integration of millions of displaced persons. Between 2022 and 2023, over 15 million refugees crossed Ukraine's borders, with many arriving in Romania and receiving humanitarian aid, temporary protection, and integration support. This study analyzes Romania's response to the crisis, focusing on national and international measures. It examines the organization of border checkpoints, reception centers, socio-economic integration efforts, diplomatic initiatives, and cooperation with international partners, including the EU and NATO. The methodology draws on official documents, institutional reports, and data from Frontex (2024), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and humanitarian organizations. The study highlights both challenges and opportunities stemming from refugee integration into the labor market and local communities. Findings reveal Romania's enhanced responsiveness through rapid deployment of protection mechanisms, inter-institutional coordination, and administrative flexibility. Additionally, EU and NATO financial and logistical support played a crucial role in reinforcing reception infrastructure and regional security.

Lessons from this crisis emphasize the need for more efficient refugee management systems, improved international cooperation, and sustainable long-term integration policies.

Keywords: Ukrainian refugees, humanitarian crisis, temporary protection, Romania, European Union, NATO, forced migration

JEL Classification: F22, F52, H84, K37, R23

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1. Introduction

Refugees are individuals forced to flee their home countries due to imminent threats such as war, persecution, violence, or severe human rights abuses (Bali, 2023). Unable to safely return, they are entitled to international protection under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (McAdam & Wood, 2021).

A crisis is a severe situation marked by sudden, significant challenges that impact individuals, communities, or states, demanding urgent solutions and potentially causing long-term social, economic, and political instability (Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022). The refugee crisis stands as one of the most complex global challenges today, driven by armed conflicts, political persecution, human rights violations, climate change, and extreme poverty. These factors compel millions to seek safety and improved living conditions elsewhere (Brumat *et al.*, 2022).

Massive refugee flows strain host countries' infrastructure and resources, igniting intense political debates over management strategies (Bali, 2023). Border nations often serve as transit or destination points, struggling to meet refugees' needs (Kriesi *et al.*, 2021). Across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, states face challenges in social integration, employment, education, and healthcare access for displaced populations (Drescher *et al.*, 2021).

International organizations, including the UN, UNHCR, and numerous NGOs, provide humanitarian aid, shelter, and legal protection, though their resources often fall short amid growing demand (Harrell-Bond, 2022; Ozkul & Jarrous, 2021). Meanwhile, developed countries vary in their refugee policies, with some demonstrating openness and solidarity, and others enforcing restrictive and deterrent measures (Spiegel & Mhlanga, 2022).

The socio-economic impact of the refugee crisis varies across countries, presenting both challenges and opportunities. While refugees can boost local economies through labor and entrepreneurship, their presence sometimes sparks social tensions and conflicts over resources and jobs (Schmich & Mitra, 2023).

Long-term solutions to the refugee crisis include stabilizing conflict zones, establishing efficient international protection systems, and improving living conditions in countries of origin (Akilova *et al.*, 2022). Managing this complex issue requires a coordinated global effort grounded in solidarity and respect for fundamental human rights to ensure a safer and more equitable future for all affected populations (Garlick & Inder, 2021).

Romania has strengthened its international standing through active foreign policy and strategic partnerships (The Presidential Administration, 2020). Amid the security crisis triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Romanian diplomacy has adapted to evolving regional and global dynamics, focusing on three key pillars: enhancing influence within the European Union, reinforcing its role in NATO, and deepening its Strategic Partnership with the United States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b).

Refugee crises are intrinsically linked to armed conflicts and the international humanitarian response. Wars, persecution, and political instability displace millions, creating complex global challenges. Beyond loss of life and destruction, conflicts produce large-scale humanitarian emergencies where affected populations lack access to essential resources, safety, and fundamental rights.

Humanitarian efforts are critical in protecting refugees and providing immediate support. International organizations, states, and civil society collaborate to deliver aid in security, health, education, and socio-economic integration. However, managing refugee flows remains challenging for both transit and destination countries, which must balance solidarity, security, and economic sustainability.

Situated at the conflict's border, Romania has played a direct role in managing the refugee crisis through emergency responses and integration policies. At both national and international levels, including partnerships with the European Union and other organizations, Romanian authorities have implemented measures to support displaced individuals, highlighting the importance of coordinated and efficient action in such crises.

This study aims to analyze Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, focusing on measures implemented at both national and international levels. It reviews the organization of border checkpoints, reception centers, socio-economic integration efforts, and diplomatic support, alongside collaboration with key partners such as the European Union and NATO. The methodology includes analysis of official documents, institutional reports, and data from Frontex (2024), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and humanitarian agencies. Additionally, the study assesses the economic and social impacts of the crisis, highlighting both challenges and opportunities arising from refugee integration into the labor market and local communities.

1.1 Romania's Role in NATO and the Bucharest Summit

Between 29–30 November 2022, Romania hosted the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a strategically significant event (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b). This was the first high-level NATO meeting held in an Eastern Flank state since the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the first formal gathering of NATO foreign ministers following the Madrid Summit.

Key topics discussed in Bucharest included strengthening deterrence and defense postures on the Eastern Flank, implementing NATO's New Strategic Concept, and providing multidimensional support to Ukraine. Ministers also focused on accelerating the full integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO, emphasizing the need for greater cohesion amid emerging security challenges.

Another central theme was the Black Sea region, where Romania stressed the importance of concrete security measures. Given its geostrategic position, Romania has become a key

player in advancing NATO's strategy in the area, with the Bucharest discussions shaping the agenda for the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius.

1.2 Romania's Accession to the Schengen Area and OECD

Accession to the Schengen Area has been a key diplomatic goal for Romania in 2022. Although Romania has met the technical criteria since 2011, its entry has been blocked by opposition from some member states, notably Austria. Romanian diplomacy has involved intensive bilateral talks, further evaluations of Schengen acquis implementation, and political negotiations at the European level.

Romania gained support from previously reluctant countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland. However, Austria blocked the unanimous decision needed for full Schengen integration, citing concerns over illegal migration (Șancu, 2024). According to data from Frontex (2024), Romania is not on the primary illegal migration route from the Western Balkans, and Romanian authorities effectively manage the EU's external borders.

Alongside its Schengen ambitions, Romania has stepped up efforts to join the OECD. A significant diplomatic achievement came on 25 January 2022, when the OECD Council agreed to start accession negotiations with Romania. The process demands meeting stringent criteria in economic governance, rule of law, and administrative transparency. Romania advanced the process by submitting its Initial Memorandum to the OECD in December 2022, marking a key milestone.

1.3 Consular Reform and Support for the Diaspora

Modernizing consular services has remained a consistent priority for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The consular reform launched in 2020 focused on digitizing services, streamlining procedures, and expanding the network of consular offices.

In 2022, Romania opened new consulates-general in Chişinău, London, Madrid, Paris, and Rome, while accelerating plans to establish offices in Valencia and Salzburg (Fodor, 2022). Key improvements included an upgraded online scheduling system, the introduction of document submission via courier, and a reduction in the paperwork required for various consular services.

A central aspect of the reform was the deployment of mobile consulates, enabling access to consular services in locations without permanent representation. In 2022 alone, 151 such missions were conducted, processing over 33,000 applications.

1.4 Assistance Policy and International Cooperation

Romania has remained an active donor in development assistance, with a focus on supporting Ukraine and Moldova.

In 2022, Romania provided significant humanitarian aid to Ukraine, including financial contributions to UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as logistical support for managing refugee flows (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, Romania backed Ukraine's reconstruction efforts and initiatives to enhance resilience against external threats.

Moldova received over 10 million euros in non-reimbursable financial aid through the Moldova Support Platform, a joint initiative by Romania, France, and Germany, which helped secure essential resources for Moldova's economic and energy stability. Beyond Ukraine and Moldova, Romania continued its development assistance in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, supporting projects in education, healthcare, and emergency management.

1.5 Public Diplomacy and Cooperation with the Academic Sector

Romanian diplomacy prioritized strengthening ties with the academic community and international think tanks. In 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-organized the Munich Leaders' Meeting in Bucharest, a key event within the Munich Security Conference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

The Ministry also actively participated in major international forums, including the World Economic Forum, Munich Security Conference, and gatherings hosted by the Atlantic Council and New Strategy Center. These engagements helped promote a coherent strategic outlook in Romania's foreign policy.

2. Dynamics of the Ukrainian Refugee Flows

According to Frontex (2024), by early 2023, over 15 million people had crossed Ukraine's borders into neighboring countries. Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia were the primary destinations, serving as critical transit and reception points (see Figure 1).

The distribution of refugees by nationality demonstrates significant diversity among those affected by the conflict. Of the 15 million people who left Ukraine:

- 13.19 million were Ukrainian citizens
- 1.61 million were citizens of European Union countries who had been residing in Ukraine prior to the conflict
- 4.48 million were citizens of third countries, including students and foreign workers

In addition to the massive departures from Ukraine, a significant number of returns were recorded. By January 2023, approximately 10.37 million Ukrainians had returned to the country—either to reunite with families remaining in Ukraine or to contribute to defense and reconstruction efforts. (Chart 1).
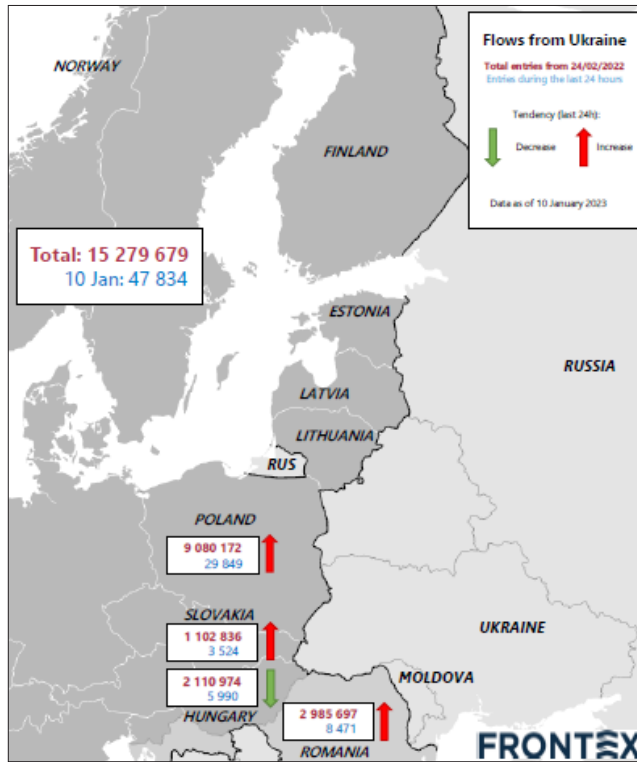
Figure 1. Dynamics of the Ukrainian Refugee Flows

Chart 1. Weekly flows of Ukrainian citizens

This bidirectional flow created significant pressure on transportation infrastructure and the administrative capacity of European states to manage migration.

2.1 Romania as a Strategic Transit and Reception Point

Due to its geographical location near southern Ukraine—particularly Odessa and Izmail—Romania has played a vital role in managing refugee flows. From the onset of the crisis, Romanian authorities swiftly implemented support measures, including establishing border crossing facilities, reception centers, and humanitarian corridors.

Key border checkpoints such as Siret (Suceava County), Sighetu Marmaţiei (Maramureş County), Isaccea (Tulcea County), and Halmeu (Satu Mare County) quickly became major entry points. These local efforts were bolstered by international organizations and support from the European Union (European Network on Statelessness, 2023).

Beyond immediate humanitarian aid, Romania also launched long-term integration initiatives, offering refugees temporary housing, medical care, education, and employment opportunities.

2.2 International Response and Euro-Atlantic Solidarity

The European Union, NATO, and international organizations mobilized substantial resources to assist countries affected by the refugee influx. At the EU level, the Temporary Protection Mechanism was promptly activated, granting Ukrainian citizens extended rights such as access to employment, education, and social services across member states (Carrera & Ineli-Ciger, 2023). Romania collaborated closely with its European and transatlantic partners to ensure effective management of the humanitarian crisis. In addition to providing direct support to refugees, Romania facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine via the Suceava Humanitarian Hub—a critical logistical center for distributing supplies and essential equipment to conflict-affected regions.

2.3 Return of Refugees and Long-Term Perspectives

Although millions of Ukrainians fled the country during the initial months of the conflict, data show that a significant number chose to return to Ukraine throughout 2022 and early 2023. Motivations for returning included the desire to reunite with family members still in Ukraine, perceptions of stabilization in certain areas, and the wish to participate in reconstruction efforts. However, the return of refugees does not signal the end of the humanitarian crisis. Extensive infrastructure damage, persistent insecurity, and economic difficulties continue to present major challenges to sustainable reintegration. Consequently, ongoing international support for Ukraine remains crucial, both in terms of humanitarian aid and post-conflict rebuilding.

3. Romania's Response to the Refugee Crisis

3.1 Management of Border Checkpoints and Evacuations

Romania was among the first countries to respond promptly to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, implementing emergency measures to support the massive refugee influx.

This early response granted Romania a significant role in facilitating the transit of foreign citizens and diplomatic personnel affected by the conflict (see Table 1).

Table 1. Romania's Strategic Position and Humanitarian Contribution

Aspect	Details
Humanitarian evacuations	Over 30,000 foreign citizens from more than 100 countries evacuated via Romania
International cooperation	Partnerships with OSCE, NATO, UN, UNICEF
Global recognition	Romania has become a logistical and humanitarian hub for international organizations

Through these efforts, Romania reaffirmed its commitment to protecting human rights and fulfilling its international obligations. The participation of nine international organizations and global bodies highlights Romania's status as a trusted partner in the crisis response. This collaboration demonstrates that Romania not only reacted swiftly but also became a crucial strategic hub in managing the humanitarian situation.

Border checkpoints, including key entry points such as Siret, Sighetu Marmației, and Isaccea, were transformed into vital transit and reception centers where administrative procedures were streamlined and logistical support facilitated rapid evacuations (Incăltărau & Mocernac, 2024).

Additionally, humanitarian corridors were established to transport refugees to major Romanian cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timişoara, or directly onward to other European countries where long-term assistance was available.

3.2 Involvement of the Government and Local Authorities

The Romanian government acted promptly to mobilize the necessary resources for managing the refugee influx. Coordinated by the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs along with the Department for Emergency Situations, a national intervention plan was established to ensure an effective humanitarian response.

Prefectures in border counties were tasked with providing administrative assistance to refugees, facilitating documentation processes and supporting their integration into local communities. Temporary accommodation networks were set up in sports halls,

guesthouses, and private homes offered by volunteers. Major cities also implemented rapid integration measures, ensuring access to education and social services.

A central component of the government's strategy was close cooperation with the European Union and international organizations. By activating the EU's Temporary Protection Mechanism, Romania secured essential funding and logistical support for refugees. Additionally, partnerships were forged with UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF to address the specific needs of refugee women and children.

3.3 Role of Civil Society and Volunteers

In addition to institutional efforts, non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, and local communities played an essential role in managing the crisis. NGOs such as the Romanian Red Cross, Save the Children, World Vision, and the National Council for Refugees mobilized resources to support thousands of refugees daily (UNHCR, 2025).

Volunteers provided translation services, guidance, and distributed food and basic necessities, while offering emotional support to those fleeing the conflict. In major cities, donation centers became key distribution points for humanitarian aid, and many churches, companies, and private individuals offered shelter and logistical assistance.

A notable example of solidarity was the initiative of online platforms that directly connected refugees with families or individuals willing to offer free accommodation. This support network greatly facilitated the rapid integration of refugees and demonstrated the extraordinary mobilization capacity of Romanian society in the face of an unprecedented crisis.

3.4 Long-Term Integration of Refugees

As the conflict continued, Romania implemented measures aimed at the long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees into society. A key focus was access to education, with special programs established in schools for Ukrainian children. Romanian language courses were offered in several cities, while universities expanded enrollment opportunities for refugee students.

Labor market integration was supported through legislative changes allowing Ukrainians to work without special permits. The Romanian government, together with employers and trade unions, developed professional training programs to help refugees find employment across various sectors, including IT, healthcare, construction, and agriculture.

Access to healthcare and psychological support also became a priority. The Romanian health system adapted to include refugees in national insurance schemes, providing access to free medical treatments and services. Additionally, initiatives addressing mental health were launched to support refugees coping with the trauma of displacement.

3.5 International Cooperation and EU Involvement

Romania did not manage the refugee crisis alone but worked closely with international partners to ensure a coordinated response. The European Union played a central role by funding humanitarian assistance programs and facilitating the relocation of refugees to other member states.

Within NATO, Romania supported regional security efforts and collaborated with allies to address the geopolitical implications of the crisis. Romanian diplomatic missions also secured additional financial and logistical support to strengthen reception infrastructure.

4. Reception Centers and Refugee Integration

In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, Romania swiftly established a comprehensive network of temporary reception centers to address refugees' urgent needs. Beyond border checkpoints where initial aid and referrals were provided, special centers were set up in major cities including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași, Brașov, and Constanța.

These centers operated in sports halls, community centers, mobile camps, and buildings managed by local authorities or NGOs. Many hotels and guesthouses generously offered free accommodation, while numerous Romanian families opened their homes to shelter refugees temporarily.

Each reception center was equipped with beds, mattresses, blankets, and personal hygiene products. Refugees received daily hot meals, water, essential medicines, and free medical services. In addition to logistical and material support, these centers provided refugees with information on medium- and long-term options, whether they planned to settle in Romania or continue to other European countries.

4.1 Integration of Refugees into Romanian Society

With the protraction of the Ukrainian conflict, many refugees decided to remain in Romania, prompting the authorities to implement long-term integration measures. Consequently, the Romanian government launched several initiatives to facilitate the adaptation of refugees to the new socio-economic context, supporting them in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and employment.

4.2 Access to the Healthcare System

The Romanian government guaranteed Ukrainian refugees free access to the national healthcare system by exempting them from social insurance contributions. Consequently,

those fleeing the conflict could receive emergency medical care, treatment for chronic illnesses, subsidized medications, and free vaccinations.

To address the specific needs of refugees—particularly children and the elderly—hospitals and clinics nationwide allocated additional resources, while reception centers were staffed with mobile medical teams. Additionally, specialized hotline services were established to provide medical advice in the Ukrainian language.

A vital part of the healthcare response involved psychological support to address the trauma caused by the war. NGOs and public institutions organized counseling sessions for both children and adults, offering access to psychologists and therapists trained in treating post-traumatic stress.

4.3 Access to Education for Refugee Children

Ensuring the continuity of education for refugee children was a critical component of their integration. The Ministry of Education issued special regulations allowing Ukrainian children to enroll in Romanian schools and kindergartens without requiring official documents verifying their previous educational level.

Schools were encouraged to provide Romanian language courses to refugee students, easing their adaptation to the new academic environment. Additionally, some institutions introduced bilingual programs, supported by volunteer teachers from established Ukrainian communities in Romania.

Beyond primary and secondary education, several Romanian universities offered special placements for Ukrainian students, enabling them to continue their studies tuition-free or with scholarship assistance.

4.4 Labor Market Integration

To facilitate the integration of adult refugees, Romania amended labor legislation to allow Ukrainian citizens to work without the need for a work permit. This measure simplified the hiring process and provided refugees with opportunities to secure a stable income.

Employment agencies in various counties organized job fairs specifically targeting Ukrainian refugees, and numerous companies from sectors such as IT, construction, and healthcare employed Ukrainians under flexible contract arrangements. Additionally, free vocational training and retraining courses were organized to help refugees more easily access jobs in high-demand areas in the Romanian market. For refugee women with children, day centers and specialized kindergartens were established to allow them to work without worrying about the safety of their children.

4.5 Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Integration Process

NGOs played a crucial role in supporting refugees and facilitating their integration into Romanian society. Key initiatives included:

- Language Courses: Numerous NGOs organized free Romanian and English language courses to help refugees improve their communication skills and enhance their employment prospects.

- Legal Assistance: Volunteer lawyers provided free consultations to explain refugees' rights in Romania and assist them in obtaining temporary protection status or other official documents.

- Psychological Support: Many organizations deployed teams of psychologists and therapists to help refugees cope with war-induced trauma and the challenges of relocation.

- Donation Centers: Several NGOs collected and distributed food, clothing, medications, and other essential products to ensure that refugees maintained a decent standard of living.

- Children's Programs: Recreational activities, camps, and non-formal education programs were organized to help refugee children integrate more smoothly.

5. Diplomatic and Consular Support

5.1 Consular Assistance for Ukrainian Refugees

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs played an essential role in managing the Ukrainian refugee crisis by providing extensive diplomatic and consular support. With the massive influx of people crossing Romania's borders due to the war, diplomatic missions and consular offices were mobilized to facilitate the processing of necessary documents, ensuring legal entry and assistance with relocation.

The Romanian government implemented special measures to streamline bureaucratic procedures, enabling Ukrainian citizens to quickly obtain identity documents, residence visas, and work permits. A key aspect of this effort was the removal of complex administrative requirements, allowing Ukrainians to enter Romania with just a biometric passport—or, in exceptional humanitarian cases, even without complete documentation.

Romanian embassies and consulates experienced a record number of requests for temporary document issuance, document legalization, and processing of temporary protection applications. Additionally, Romanian authorities worked closely with other European countries to facilitate the transfer of refugees, assisting them in obtaining long-term visas and work permits in their destination states.

5.2 Protection and Facilities for Ukrainians in Romania

A key measure adopted by Romania was the implementation of temporary protection status in line with EU directives. This status granted Ukrainian refugees access to healthcare, education, and the labor market without the need to apply for formal asylum.

To enhance the management of refugee flows, Romania established specialized counseling centers in major cities with significant Ukrainian populations—including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, and Timișoara. Operated in cooperation with local authorities and international organizations, these centers provided assistance with document registration, legal status acquisition, and access to essential services.

Additionally, the Romanian government launched emergency hotlines and online platforms to offer Ukrainian citizens information about required documentation, the relocation process, and their rights while residing in Romania.

5.3 Romania's Role in the Transit of International Humanitarian Aid

In addition to directly assisting refugees, Romania became a strategic transit point for international humanitarian aid destined for Ukraine. From the early days of the conflict, Romania opened its infrastructure to facilitate the rapid transport of food, medicines, medical equipment, and other essential goods to the affected regions in Ukraine.

Romanian border checkpoints were transformed into logistical hubs for quickly distributing aid to Ukraine. International organizations such as the UN, UNICEF, the Red Cross, and various European agencies used Romanian transit routes to dispatch critical supplies to conflict zones.

The port of Constanța, in particular, emerged as a key asset in Ukraine's supply chain by enabling the export of Ukrainian cereals when Black Sea ports were disrupted by hostilities. In addition to cereal exports, essential medical equipment - including ventilators, medications, and surgical materials - was also transported through Romania to Ukrainian hospitals facing severe shortages.

5.4 Collaboration with International Organizations and External Partners

Romania worked closely with the European Union, NATO, and various international organizations to manage the refugee crisis and facilitate the transport of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The EU provided significant financial support to Romania to help manage the refugee influx, with European funds used to expand reception center capacities, purchase medical equipment, and organize the transportation of supplies to Ukraine.

NATO offered logistical support and coordination for the movement of military equipment and supplies to Ukrainian armed forces. In this regard, Romania was a strategic

partner in facilitating these operations by providing the necessary infrastructure for the rapid and secure movement of military convoys.

Additionally, through cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Romania developed programs to relocate refugees to other European states, ensuring they received adequate support and access to essential resources.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian Embassy in Bucharest and Ukrainian consulates in Romania worked closely with Romanian authorities to streamline the documentation process for refugees and to ensure that they were informed of their rights and available options.

6. Involvement of the European Union and NATO

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs undertook an extensive diplomatic effort to assist Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war. In collaboration with embassies and consulates, Romanian authorities facilitated the issuance of necessary documents for entry, residence, and transit through Romania and other EU member states.

A key aspect of this support was the simplification and acceleration of procedures for issuing long-term residence visas and permits. Ukrainians arriving in Romania benefited from special derogations from standard visa requirements, in accordance with exceptional measures adopted at the European level. Additionally, legal counseling centers were established where refugees received comprehensive information regarding their legal status and options for relocation or temporary protection.

To address the urgent needs of Ukrainian citizens, Romania expanded consular services in countries hosting large refugee populations. Romanian consulates in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, and other European states actively supported refugees by facilitating document issuance and ensuring access to international protection. Concurrently, Romanian authorities cooperated closely with the IOM and UNHCR to uphold refugee rights and implement effective measures for managing displaced populations.

International aid provided to Ukraine can be categorized into three main types: emergency humanitarian aid, crisis response measures, and recovery assistance. The total amounts allocated to each category are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of International Aid for Ukraine (2014–2023)

Category	Total Amount (EUR)
Total humanitarian aid	550.6 million
Crisis response measures (NDICI)	1.79 billion
Recovery assistance	1.47 billion
TOTAL (all categories)	16.52 billion
Under contracting/planning	118.1 million

According to Table 2, humanitarian aid was lower compared to the amounts dedicated to economic recovery and crisis response measures. The funds allocated for recovery are essential for rebuilding infrastructure and basic services, while the funds for crisis response are aimed at providing immediate support to the population and ensuring economic stability.

In Table 3, we can observe that aid for Ukraine comes from both European institutions and individual countries, reflecting a strong commitment to supporting the country affected by the conflict.

Table 3. Top 5 Donors by Allocated Amounts

Country/Organization	Total Amount (EUR)
European Union (EU)	12.5 billion
ECHO (EU Humanitarian Aid)	717.1 million
Germany	2.11 billion
Sweden	93.5 million
Netherlands	60 million

The European Union is the largest donor, providing over 12 billion EUR in grants and loans. Germany has provided the largest national support, followed by Sweden and the Netherlands. The EU humanitarian mechanism, ECHO, contributed nearly 720 million EUR for emergency interventions.

Regarding Table 4, we can see that international aid has been directed towards several key areas essential for Ukraine's stability, ranging from humanitarian support to economic recovery and infrastructure reconstruction.

Table 4. Distribution of Aid by Priority Areas

Field	Description
Emergency humanitarian aid	Food, water, medicines, medical equipment
Protection and refugees	Support for displaced persons
Health and hospitals	Medical supplies, equipment, medicines
Energy and infrastructure	Generators, rehabilitation of power networks
Demining	Clearing minefields and unexploded ordnance
Education and social support	Scholarships for Ukrainian students, educational materials

Humanitarian aid and support for refugees were priorities in the early stages of the conflict. After the attacks on electricity networks, the energy infrastructure and health became critical funding areas. Demining programs are essential for post-conflict safety, and support for education helps maintain access to schooling for young people affected by the war.

According to Table 5, several countries have provided significant support, either through direct funding or through deliveries of essential equipment and goods.

Table 5. Notable Contributions

Country	Amount (EUR)	Type of Aid
Belgium	19 million	Equipment for refugees, aid via the B-FAST mechanism
Croatia	4 million	UNDP project for demining
Denmark	178 million	Mobile hospitals, equipment for firefighters
Finland	43.4 million	Humanitarian and recovery aid
Hungary	67 million	Vaccines, scholarships for Ukrainian students
Italy	157 million	Medical equipment, direct budget contributions
Spain	37 million	Energy generators, medical equipment

Belgium and Denmark provided logistical support and essential equipment for refugees and infrastructure. Croatia focused on demining—a vital area for civilian safety. Hungary invested in education and health by offering scholarships for students and providing medical equipment.

International support for Ukraine increased significantly after 2022, reflecting the severity of the situation and the need for a coordinated intervention. The European Union and Germany are the main donors, playing an essential role in ensuring the economic and social stability of the country.

While humanitarian aid was critical in the early years of the conflict, as the war prolonged, support expanded to include infrastructure reconstruction and economic stabilization. Priority areas now include energy infrastructure, health, civil protection, and demining programs, all of which are essential for the safety of the population and the return to normalcy. This trend suggests that international support will continue, adapting to the evolving situation in Ukraine and to the new challenges the country will face.

6.1 Romania – Strategic Corridor for Humanitarian Aid

Beyond serving as a transit and reception country for refugees, Romania has become a crucial hub for the distribution of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Romanian government, in partnership with international actors, facilitated the transport of food, medicines, medical equipment, and other essential supplies through its national transport infrastructure.

The port of Constanța played a pivotal role, acting as a key outlet for Ukrainian cereal exports. Due to the blockade of Ukrainian ports caused by the conflict, Romania emerged as the primary route for exporting agricultural products, helping to mitigate the risk of a global food crisis.

Moreover, Romania supported the delivery of humanitarian aid via its rail and road networks. Designated trains and truck convoys carrying vital supplies transited through Romania en route to Ukraine, ensuring that international assistance reached the most affected areas.

The Romanian government also worked closely with organizations such as the Red Cross and the World Food Programme to guarantee the fair and efficient distribution of aid. Additionally, Romania actively participated in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, coordinating joint efforts among member states to support Ukraine.

6.2 The Temporary Protection Mechanism and EU Support

The European Union implemented the Temporary Protection Mechanism, an essential tool that enabled member states to provide Ukrainian refugees with a clear legal status and immediate access to essential services. This mechanism streamlined the bureaucratic process for granting international protection, bypassing individual asylum procedures, and granting Ukrainians the right to residence, work, education, and social services in all member states.

Through this legislative framework, Romania was able to rapidly integrate refugees into society, granting them access to healthcare, education, and the labor market without the need for a lengthy asylum process. In addition, Ukrainian refugees benefited from freedom of movement within the EU, allowing them to choose the country where they would settle either temporarily or permanently.

To support states that received a high number of refugees, including Romania, the EU mobilized additional funds through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and other financial mechanisms. These resources were allocated for:

- Improving reception infrastructure – building and modernizing refugee centers and expanding accommodation capacities.
- Supporting local communities – funding integration programs, social assistance, and education for refugees.
- Facilitating access to employment – organizing vocational training courses and supporting employers who hired Ukrainian citizens.

Through these measures, the EU demonstrated its solidarity and ability to manage the humanitarian crisis in a coordinated and effective manner, reaffirming its commitment to human rights and humanitarian assistance.

6.3 NATO Support and Romania's Security

In addition to humanitarian responses, the conflict in Ukraine prompted a reevaluation of security strategies within NATO. The Alliance supported Romania by reinforcing its military presence on the Eastern Flank, deploying additional troops and equipment to deter any attempts at regional destabilization.

A significant number of NATO forces, including American, French, German, and British troops, were stationed in Romania, participating in joint exercises and air surveillance missions. This military support served a dual purpose: ensuring the security of Romania and other regional states, and enabling Romania to continue its humanitarian commitments without compromising national security.

NATO also strengthened security in the Black Sea region given its strategic importance in the context of the conflict. Naval vessels and aircraft were deployed for surveillance, while the Alliance supported Romania in modernizing its defence infrastructure. Furthermore, Romania actively participated in logistical support for Ukraine, facilitating the transit of military aid through its territory and contributing to the overall resilience of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression.

6.4 The Impact of the Refugee Crisis on Romania

The refugee crisis has posed significant challenges for Romania, putting pressure on its infrastructure, public services, and financial resources. However, efficient management of the displaced population combined with the solidarity shown by Romanian society has not only mitigated negative impacts but also generated positive economic and social effects.

One of the major consequences has been the integration of refugees into Romania's labor market. In sectors experiencing labor shortages, many Ukrainians have found employment opportunities in industries such as hospitality, agriculture, transport, and IT. Romanian companies, previously facing recruitment challenges, have benefited from this additional workforce, while the state streamlined administrative processes and expedited the recognition of qualifications.

Moreover, the financial support from the European Union for states hosting large numbers of refugees has helped ease budgetary pressures. EU funds were directed toward improving social and educational infrastructure, facilitating the integration of Ukrainians into local communities. Numerous international organizations and NGOs also invested in refugee assistance programs, further bolstering the social sector.

Beyond economic effects, the crisis has significantly impacted social solidarity and cohesion in Romania. The Romanian population mobilized extensively to support refugees, offering shelter, food, transportation, and other essential resources. This response strengthened the ties among civil society, authorities, and international organizations, demonstrating Romania's capacity to manage a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

On the international stage, Romania has reinforced its image as a responsible and solidary actor in managing refugee flows. Its active involvement in supporting Ukrainians was highly appreciated by European and transatlantic partners, consolidating its status as a pillar of stability in the Black Sea region.

7. Challenges and Perspectives

7.1 Challenges in Managing the Refugee Crisis

The Ukrainian refugee crisis presented a multifaceted challenge for Romania, necessitating a rapid and coordinated response from national authorities, European institutions, and international organizations. Although the management of displaced persons was largely effective, several difficulties persisted throughout the process.

One of the greatest challenges was the limited capacity of reception and accommodation infrastructure. While transit centers were essential during the initial months of the crisis, they were not designed to handle such large numbers of refugees over the long term. Integrating these individuals into communities required significant expansion of available resources, including social housing, education systems, and healthcare services.

Another major obstacle was the integration of refugees into the labor market. Despite many Ukrainians finding employment in Romania, language barriers and the recognition of qualifications proved to be significant challenges. Romanian employers had to adapt their recruitment processes, and the state had to implement special programs to facilitate economic integration.

In addition to economic aspects, the crisis also placed pressure on the healthcare system. The sudden increase in demand for medical services tested the capacity of Romanian healthcare institutions, particularly in border regions. Moreover, managing the psychological trauma experienced by refugees required additional resources for counseling and mental health support.

Social cohesion was also tested. Although Romanian society demonstrated exemplary solidarity with refugees, over time tensions emerged due to competition for resources and employment. In some communities, the perception that refugees were receiving more support than disadvantaged Romanian citizens led to frustration and reluctance.

7.2 Perspectives for Managing the Refugee Situation

In the long term, Romania must adopt sustainable policies for the integration of Ukrainian refugees, especially considering that some may remain permanently. A strategic approach should include several key directions.

First, developing educational programs for refugee children is essential so that they can continue their studies without significant interruptions. Adapting school curricula, providing Romanian language courses, and supporting teachers in managing cultural diversity are vital measures.

Economic integration is another critical area. Facilitating access to jobs through the rapid recognition of qualifications, organizing vocational training, and supporting

entrepreneurship among refugees can help transform them into active contributors to the Romanian economy.

Regarding the healthcare system, reinforcing the capacity of hospitals and clinics, as well as developing specialized programs for psychological support, is essential. Romania may also benefit from EU support to improve healthcare services for displaced persons.

Maintaining international support and close cooperation with the European Union and NATO remains crucial. EU funds allocated for the refugee crisis should be used efficiently, and Romania must continue to play an active role in mechanisms for managing migratory flows.

Finally, Romania has the opportunity to use this crisis to improve its own migration management structures. Developing a flexible legislative framework, creating more efficient integration mechanisms, and strengthening diplomatic relations with neighboring states are necessary steps for the future.

The Ukrainian refugee crisis demonstrated Romania's capacity to manage complex humanitarian situations but also highlighted the need for reforms to better adapt to future challenges. Through a combination of effective public policies, international support, and social solidarity, Romania can transform this crisis into an opportunity for strengthening its national resilience.

8. Long-Term Impact and Lessons Learned

8.1 Long-Term Impact of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis on Romania

The Ukrainian refugee crisis has had a significant impact on Romania economically, socially, and geopolitically. In the long term, this crisis will shape Romania's policies regarding migration, security, and the integration of foreigners into Romanian society.

A major long-term effect is the demographic change. Although a large portion of Ukrainian refugees returned to their country, many decided to remain in Romania temporarily or permanently. This contributes to the diversification of Romanian society and necessitates effective integration policies. Particularly in major cities with large Ukrainian communities, authorities must ensure access to education, employment, and healthcare for these populations.

Economically, the presence of refugees has brought both challenges and opportunities. Their integration into the labor market can help alleviate labor shortages in sectors such as hospitality, construction, agriculture, and IT. However, if integration measures are not effective, there is a risk that some refugees may remain marginalized, potentially leading to social tensions.

Another important aspect is the impact on infrastructure and public services. Rapid population growth in certain regions has strained healthcare, education, and social

assistance systems. In the long term, Romania will need to invest in modernizing these services to be better prepared for future similar challenges.

Geopolitically, the crisis has reinforced Romania's role as a key actor in the Black Sea region and highlighted the importance of international cooperation. Romania's active participation in supporting Ukrainian refugees and facilitating the transport of humanitarian aid has influenced its strategies regarding regional security and diplomatic relations with its neighbours.

8.2 Lessons Learned from Managing the Refugee Crisis

The experience of managing such a large number of refugees has underscored both the strengths and vulnerabilities of Romania's crisis response system. Several important lessons can be drawn for the future.

An essential aspect is the importance of administrative flexibility. Romania was able to quickly eliminate bureaucratic barriers to allow refugees to enter the country and access support. This demonstrates that in crisis situations, administrative mechanisms must be agile enough to respond promptly.

Another key lesson is the need for well-developed reception infrastructure. Although transit centers were useful in the early months, Romania must enhance its capacity for long-term accommodation and support of migrants and refugees to efficiently respond to future large-scale movements.

Long-term integration is another area that requires improvement. Programs for learning the Romanian language and the rapid recognition of qualifications are vital to ensure that refugees can fully participate in economic life. Furthermore, supporting vocational training and entrepreneurship among refugees will help turn challenges into opportunities.

Finally, the crisis highlighted the necessity of international solidarity and coordinated responses. The collaborative efforts of national authorities, the EU, NATO, NGOs, and civil society were fundamental to managing the crisis effectively. These experiences should guide future strategies for migration management and humanitarian responses.

9. Conclusions

The Ukrainian refugee crisis has represented one of the most significant humanitarian challenges for Romania and Europe at large. The sudden, massive influx of people seeking safety demanded a swift and coordinated response from Romanian authorities, the European Union, and NATO. Romania demonstrated both solidarity and administrative capacity by mobilizing resources and streamlining procedures to support those affected by the war.

The efficient management of border checkpoints, the establishment of reception centers, and the integration of refugees into Romanian society were accomplished through the collaborative efforts of state institutions, international organizations, and civil society. These measures not only safeguarded the lives of refugees but also enhanced Romania's standing as a responsible actor in the Black Sea region.

Diplomatic and consular services were vital in facilitating refugees' access to rights and essential services, while support from the EU and NATO provided crucial logistical, financial, and security assistance necessary to manage the crisis effectively. Mechanisms such as Temporary Protection enabled Ukrainian refugees to quickly access healthcare, education, and employment in Romania, helping to alleviate the economic and social pressures caused by forced migration.

Although significant challenges persist, Romania's overall response underscores the resilience of its institutions and society. The lessons learned—especially in administrative adaptability, infrastructure development, and international cooperation—will inform improvements in future migration and security policies.

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Romania:
The Fear of Shame as a Deterrent for Deviant Behavior in the Kalderash Community

Ciprian SANDU

Abstract: Roma people, regardless of clan or desire for acceptance, may be perceived as exotic by the majority, eliciting varied responses. This study contributes to understanding conflict management in Kalderash Roma communities. Using legal anthropology principles, the researcher gathered qualitative data to elucidate how Kalderash Roma conceptualize and implement conflict management strategies. Findings indicate they adhere to a stringent moral code centered on shame. Through interviews and observation, it was determined that Kalderash Roma use shaming as an effective conflict management measure, believing deviant behavior engenders shame and misfortune for the transgressor. This study examines the unique conflict management practices within Kalderash Roma communities, emphasizing shame's pivotal role in their moral framework. The research investigates how shame functions as a deterrent against deviant behavior and a mechanism for maintaining social order and resolving disputes. The findings suggest that the Kalderash Roma's approach to conflict management is intertwined with their cultural beliefs and values, particularly the notion that wrongdoing incurs shame and misfortune upon the perpetrator. This interconnection between moral transgression and negative consequences provides a strong incentive for community members to adhere to social norms and resolve conflicts amicably.

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Introduction

Individuals have consistently sought efficacious methods for conflict resolution at various levels. This pursuit has generated numerous conflict management strategies and techniques, as well as actions considered

deviant in diverse contexts. In contemporary society, formal justice takes precedence, followed by negotiation, arbitration, and mediation techniques, which have been institutionalized alongside traditional justice administered by state institutions. However, the complexity of modern conflicts has rendered these methods insufficient, necessitating the exploration of alternative approaches, including hybrid practices such as private trial, ombudsman, med-arb procedure, or simulated court. Throughout this evolution, one element has remained constant—shame as the foundation for any conflict resolution mechanism. Irrespective of the chosen method, shame is inevitable—shame associated with court appearances, convictions, being perceived as deviant by family or community, making public apologies, being labeled, or becoming the subject of gossip.

In 2014, together with other researchers from the Conflict Studies Center (part of the Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania), we started working on an international project to revitalize interest in the traditional methods of conflict resolution. Our goal was to document them and show that they are often more effective than modern justice. In this way, we have documented traditional methods of conflict resolution used in the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Crete, Albania, Nigeria, Cameroon and Ethiopia (Chereji & Wratto, 2013; Chereji & Sandu, 2018, 2021; Ragandang, 2017, 2018; Ragandang & Ponce, 2019; Amaechi, 2017; Awoh & Nkwi, Sandu, 2018, 2020; Mengistu, 2019; Yimer, 2021). The common thing all this studies have in commin is that they concentrate on traditional communities with a strong moral code, a high group cohesion and a desire to preserve and use their traditional justice system instead of using the modern and formal justice system. Even if we talk about communities from three distinct continents, all of them define the effectiveness of their own traditional justice system in terms of quickness, preserving the group cohesion afther the punishment of the wrongdower, the reintegration of the wrongdower back to his community and, most importantly, the fact that the whole community is part of the justice act. At the end of the project, we realized that something was missing from this list and that we focused on communities on three continents while we had at home, in Romania, a community that uses its own methods of conflict resolution—the traditional Roma people, a community that can be met in North America, Asia and Europe. Based on our previous work (Chereji & Sandu, 2018; Sandu, 2018, 2020) we can see that the traditional justice system of the Kalderash Roma is almost symilar with the ones from other parts of the globe—it is based on a moral code, it uses the principles of reintegrative and dezintegrative shaming, it is done with the participation of the whole community and it is based on the notion of *making peace* rather than just to find who is right and who is wrong, all of this being analyzed in the following pages. Of course, there are also some differences due to the specific of the Kalderash Roma branch, their moral code and values, the biggest one being the fact that, due to their harsh history (being for centuries slaves) and the nomadic way of life, they don't have a lot of time to spend on resolving community conflicts. More exactly, if Adat (Kazachstan), Gacca courts (Nigeria), sasmos (Crete) are more inclined to facilitate a resolution, Kris (Roma court) is a proper med-arb procedure (very resemblent with the one institutionalized in the Western countries).

The results of our previous research showed that shame was the foundation for every moral code we have met and that the members of the community fear shaming more than a legal punishment for a deviant action. This conclusion can be also addopted for the three Kalderash Roma communities based on their moral code—Romanipen—whith its four pillars based around the notion of shame (each of this pillars will be presented and analysed in the following pages in order to explain the peculiarity of this groups but also the resemblance with other studies communities).

Methodology

Using active observation for a period of more than one year and semi-structured interviews with the members of the Kalderash branch of the Roma community, I was guided by the specific objectives of this branch of anthropology: identifying normative control systems, identifying how society and its members use the concept of justice to resolve conflicts and their interaction with other social control systems (Donovan, 2008).

For this study, three Kalderash Roma communities were selected: one from Valcea County (Boisoara) and two from Gorj county (Târgu Cărbunești and Scoarta). The Kalderash group was chosen based on the researcher's interest in their lifestyle and traditions, and their reputation for adhering to Roma traditions, including traditional conflict resolution methods (Partida Romilor, nd, Grigore & Sarau, 2006). These specific communities were selected due to the researcher's prior interactions and established connections with krisinitori (Roma judges) who facilitated the study logistics.

The research involved interviews with 31 Roma individuals (17 women and 14 men), all self-identifying as "real Roma" from the Kalderash group. Most interviews were conducted at participants' residences, with some in camps during fairs. Additionally, key individuals working with Roma communities were engaged to obtain otherwise inaccessible information and gain their perspectives. Six interviews were conducted with krisinitori (supreme Roma judges), law enforcement representatives, and local authorities.

Indigenous Community Justice

As a component of legal anthropology, the seminal study in indigenous community justice is Malinowski's (Crime and Custom in Savage Society, 1926). This work is considered the foundational text of the emerging legal anthropology discipline. The study examines crime and punishment among the Trobriand Islanders of the Western Pacific. Malinowski posits that primitive societies possess distinct justice systems predicated on their cultural norms and values. A significant finding, pertinent to this study, is that in primitive societies, the concept of crime is not based on a universal notion of right and wrong, but rather on the society's specific cultural values. Furthermore, punishment for crime is not necessarily intended to reform the offender, but to restore social harmony and equilibrium.

Malinowski's work was subsequently expanded upon by Schapera's study of the laws and customs of present-day Botswana. Within legal anthropology, Schapera's study is significant because it delineates both the traditional laws and customs of the indigenous tribes and the modern legislation of the English settlers, as well as their interaction (Donovan, 2008; Moore, 2005).

Another foundational study in legal anthropology is Conflict and Custom in Africa (Gluckman, 1955). A central theme is the concept of "customary law", which Gluckman defines as the informal system of social control and regulation in traditional African societies. He contends that customary law was an adaptive system, responsive to changing circumstances in African societies, and was not necessarily predicated on immutable traditions or cultural norms. In 1955, Claude Levi-Strauss, founder of structural anthropology, published a seminal work combining personal memoir, cultural critique, and scientific inquiry (Tristes Tropiques, 1955). Levi-Strauss reflects on his Amazonian rainforest and Brazilian Highlands experiences, examining indigenous people's cultural and social systems. He posits that all cultures share common structures in mythology, social organization, and material practices, regardless of technological advancement. Another relevant work is The Savage Mind (1962), where Levi-Strauss contends that shame and punishment significantly influence the Nambikwara people's social organization. He argues that Nambikwara society is based on "reciprocal obligations" enforced through shame and punishment threats. Levi-Strauss observes that the Nambikwara's developed sense of shame maintains social order and enforces behavioral norms. Shame and punishment deter deviant behavior like breaking obligations, theft, or violence. These sanctions are enforced through informal social mechanisms and public shame threats rather than formal institutions like the state or legal system.

Pfohl (1981) and Raybeck (1988) consider that the subject of this type of community justice is much more complex than has been presented in previous studies. In this regard, Pfohl (1981) states that tribal or indigenous societies have adopted specific customs that have enabled these communities to prevent deviation from the rules, while ensuring a strong sense of belonging to the same cultural identity. Raybeck (1988) goes on to say that these habits and internal conflict resolution mechanisms allow the community to forgive the wrongdoer. Being small communities, the strength of the group lies in the quality of its members, but also in numbers. For this reason, in order not to lose important members for the survival of the group, these communities have developed mechanisms for reintegrating the culprit into the community to the detriment of more severe punishments that could result in the death of the culprit or ostracization.

Regarding the Roma, Caffery and Mundy (1997) state that "judgment is basically a meeting between group members in which a specific conflict related to inter-group relations, especially between families, is discussed and an agreement is reached certain solution of it" (p. 254). Moreover, according to the studies carried out by Acton *et al*. (1997), Weyrauch (2001), Wryrauch and Bell (2001), Marushiakova(1998), Marushiakova & Popov (2007), Lee (2001) or Sorescu-Marinković (2013), this form of justice involves the whole

community in determining the verdict, so that the responsibility for any sanction belongs to the whole group. Also, Acton (2003) and Marushiakova and Popov (2007) also discusses the fact that the judgment is the attribute of the oldest members of the community because the authority they have in front of others is given by life experience and status.

Shame

Shame is a significant concept in the sociology and anthropology of law. Consistently associated with social prestige, specifically its negative component (unfavorable reputation), this concept is prevalent in the theory of social stratification, the theory of elites, and, more recently, the restorative justice movement (Wegener, 1992; Braithwaite, 1989). An evaluation of social prestige inevitably leads to the concept of reputation. In positive instances, prestige is synonymous with the status an individual holds within their community. Conversely, in negative instances, prestige manifests as an unfavorable reputation among other community members, resulting in shame, particularly as this shame leads to stigmatization, understood as a deviation from socially accepted standards. As will be demonstrated in the presentation of data obtained through this research, this stigma can manifest as a label that isolates (temporarily or permanently) the offender from the rest of the community.

Braithwaite is one of the scholars who has devoted considerable attention to the study of this concept and its societal role. According to his research (1989, 2002), shame can be employed against any individual who fails to adhere to community norms. In support of this assertion, Braithwaite presents examples from diverse cultures and historical periods. He posits that in antiquity, the Roman Republic punished deviant behavior by setting fire to the offender's entrance door and having individuals dressed in mourning attire consistently follow the deviant. Both actions were intended to embarrass the culprit and demonstrate the community's disapproval of such behavior, thereby serving as a deterrent for potential future rule-breakers. In other cultures, Braithwaite discusses the use of political mockery in some Native American societies, while noting that in China and Cuba, shame functions to publicly denounce deviant behavior (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 58).

In his 1989 study, Braithwaite categorized shame into two types, based on its effect and application. First, he examines integrative shame. This form of shame is not prolonged and aims to rehabilitate the individual within the community. Furthermore, research indicates that offenders respond negatively to formal state-imposed punishments (manifesting in appeals, denial of guilt, or desire for retribution) and respond positively when sanctioned by members of their own community. Considering these two variables, duration and effect, Braithwaite identifies a second form of shame, termed disintegrative. In this instance, the shame persists over an extended period and results in the stigmatization and ostracism of the individual. Braithwaite posits that society should emphasize the utilization of integrative shame, as communities employing this approach demonstrate higher levels of social cohesion and fewer instances of deviant behavior. Thus, Braithwaite establishes a

connection between integrative shame and restorative justice, both of which focus on the impact of the transgression (effect) rather than on the perpetrator (the subject).

In the subsequent section, this study will examine this relationship and its relevance to the research.

Throughout their history, the Roma people have maintained a number of cultural characteristics that have contributed to the preservation of their ethnic identity and social cohesion. These characteristics are primarily manifested through Romanipen. This moral code (which translates in the Roma language to "the way to be a good Roma person") serves as the fundamental law of the Roma people and represents a system of intra-community norms, values, and concepts that define, morally and socially, every aspect of Roma life. Upon closer examination of the statements of Roma elders and a deeper analysis of the role and symbolism of this moral code, it becomes evident that Romanipen is constructed around the concepts of honor and community.

The Conflict Management Measures Used By The Kaderash Roma Community

Kris

Non-compliance with Roma customary values inevitably results in the emergence of conflicts. The Kris (Roma Court) serves to reconcile parties and resolve conflicts arising from non-adherence to Roma traditions, including: violation of pure-impure rules, abduction of a female, disrespect towards an elder, adultery, inappropriate gaze directed at a woman, and uncovering of a woman's head, among others. Within this system, the entire community participates in the decision-making and conflict resolution processes, as the responsibility for implementing any sanctions rests with the collective. In the absence of evidence, oaths may be requested, with a vow on a child's life considered the most compelling. To render a verdict, deliberations are necessary, with the jury withdrawing to a secluded location to ensure confidentiality. The objective is not to punish but to compensate for harm, with the ultimate aim being reconciliation and restoration of community harmony.

Fighting

Fighting is a significant sanction among Roma, used when an individual or group deviates from their community's moral codes (Acton *et al*., 1997). For Roma, the fighting system is as important as the penal system is to wider society and holds greater legitimacy. This is because defending one's honor and that of their kin is paramount, and failure to do so is considered shameful (similar to 18th and 19th-century duels with swords or pistols).

The fighting system also serves to gain respect and status within the community. Those who excel in fighting earn great respect. Although these fights are often intense and brutal,

understanding the rules and moral code prevents a perpetual cycle of violence. Adherence to rites and rituals is crucial as it is part of the moral code. Non-compliance renders an individual and their family impure, affecting all aspects of their lives. For example, community members observed that the younger generation's use of weapons (primarily bats and knives) is considered inappropriate and leads to partial isolation for transgressing traditional fighting rules.

Avoidance

Avoidance can manifest in various forms. The most prevalent of these is the relationship in which the parties refrain from communication with one another. In such instances, the parties continue to reside in the same community but do not engage in interaction. An advantage of this type of avoidance is that the group retains its members, who continue to contribute to the welfare of the entire community. Conversely, the disadvantage of this form of avoidance is the potential longevity of conflicts, which may persist for months, years, or even become permanent. In this manner, avoidance (and even gossip) differs from the aforementioned two mechanisms because, as observed, with regard to Kris and the conflicts, as long as the parties remain attentive, adhere to the established rules, and comprehend the outcome in accordance with them, the issue is considered resolved.

Gossip

Gossip is another strategy used by members of the three communities studied in Vâlcea and Gorj to informally manage deviant behavior. Being a small community with strong ties to its members, gossip is the equivalent of shame that leads to a loss of respect from the other members. Being started by women in the community, gossip has two functions. First, it acts as a local newsletter, informing the community of a problem in the community. In this case, the gossip practically triggers Kris' procedures because the information has to be proven, and Kris being the most appropriate procedure for such a thing. The second function, as we will see in the examples below, is to discourage deviance from community rules or conflicts, because members fear that they will become the subject of these rumors, which is considered shameful for them. Another woman interviewed also discusses the mechanism of gossip as a means of discouraging the violation of community rules.

Shame

This article presents the methods used by studied Kalderash Roma communities to resolve conflicts within their community. The article will examine the concept of shame to explain why their justice system can be categorized as restorative justice based on this concept. Although the Kalderash Roma utilize several mechanisms to manage conflicts or

deviations from community norms, these mechanisms serve the same function: to provide the opportunity for the offender to be reintegrated into the community. This concept will be explored, focusing on how shame empowers community members to resolve conflicts efficiently.

The Kalderash Roma employ reintegrative shame in the form of ceremonies or gestures of acceptance. However, given the expeditious nature and efficacy of restorative justice, certain transgressions are deemed so severe that the only swift and effective solution is to apply disintegrative shame, often manifesting as permanent ostracism from the group.

Shame is an integral component of the community justice processes developed by the studied Kalderash Roma and is utilized to compel members to adhere to its moral code. The manner in which shame influences the actions of the Roma was evident in both the observations and interviews conducted during this research. The Roma participants discussed the importance of ensuring that their actions do not bring shame upon themselves and their families, as can be inferred from the following comment:

> *... As I told you, my son-in-law is Romanian, and now I have problems with that because, although everyone knows him, I know his family, he knows our language a little, but I often talk to him or make my daughter draw his attention to the fact that he is a Romanian inside the gypsy community and he has to control his behavior and language, because the gypsies see him and shame falls on me and my daughter...* (interview, Kalderash judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).

This fragment highlights a strong boundary-maintenance mechanism, where even partial assimilation does not equate to full acceptance. His son-in-law presence in the community requires constant vigilance, as any deviation from the community's expected norms can result in collective disapproval and shame upon his Roma relatives.

Another interviewee mentions the repercussions that shame has on community members. According to her, shame influences the way the community interacts with the person in question, which is often avoided by others:

> *For us, respect is a big thing, maybe second to family and children, you lost it, you lost everything, who else would still want to marry to your children?* (interview, Kalderash woman, Boișoara, 20.07.2017).

The second interview reinforces the significance of shame as a disciplinary force within the Kalderash Roma. The woman's statement demonstrates that respect is not just a personal asset but a social currency that determines one's ability to form alliances, including marriage prospects. This suggests that shame functions as a regulatory system that ensures adherence to traditional values and behaviors. The fear of losing respect operates as a preventive measure, reinforcing conformity through the threat of exclusion.

Continuing the discussion regarding shame and its repercussions, this article will further elucidate its application. As previously established within this discourse, shame serves a dual function among the Roma population. Primarily, it fulfills a reintegrative role wherein an

individual found culpable of transgressing the community's moral code is subsequently pardoned and reaccepted. Conversely, shame can also be disintegrative, with certain actions deemed so egregious that the group no longer seeks to rehabilitate the offender. The following excerpts demonstrate the reintegrative function of shame:

> ... *maybe you had a fight with your brother, father-in-law or son-in-law, even with someone who is not familly and you beat him very badly, worse than you should ... even if at first it was his fault and you fought for honor but you exaggerated, you hit him when he was down or unconscious ... they won't talk to you for six months maybe even a year, that's a shame ... and that's if you're lucky and people don't start talking about you, then you really fucked up...*(interview, Kalderas man, Scoarța, 18.03.2017).

> ... *some years ago, my father left to live with another woman in another place and my mother was the one who felt the shame, people started to talk behind her back... she managed to convince my father to return and all the gypsies started to talk even more and to make fun of them because we don't do that, familly come first for us... at least now things got better because they called a krisinitor (judge) to judge the situation* (interview, Kalderash woman, Tg. Cărbunești, 20.09.2017).

The two interview excerpts elucidate the function of shame as a regulatory mechanism within the Kalderash Roma community, enforcing social norms and ensuring collective cohesion. Both instances depict shame as a means of disapproval, as well as a method for reintegration following a period of social exclusion. This dual function illuminates the manner in which the Kalderash community negotiates justice, personal conduct, and communal values. In the same time, both cases demonstrate that shame is not necessarily permanent. The concept of reintegrative shame, as proposed in the final interpretation, permits individuals who have engaged in deviant behavior to be gradually reaccepted into the community. In the second case, the involvement of a krisinitor (judge) signifies an official pathway to reintegration, wherein community mediation restores equilibrium and validates the return of the transgressor. This suggests that while shame functions as a form of social control, it is not solely punitive but also serves as a corrective mechanism that facilitates social restoration.

Nevertheless, as previously stated, shame is not invariably reintegrative. The presence of disintegrative shame among the interviewed Kalderash Roma is evidenced by the following excerpts, which elucidate the factors that elicit this form of shame. One transgression deemed sufficiently severe to warrant permanent exclusion from the community is incest. As established earlier, children hold significant importance within the community, and consequently, they are safeguarded by such measures.

> *In general, it's the same as in the past when it comes to children, we protect them, we put them first in a lot of things and if one do something bad to one of them, he will mess with the whole community* (interview, Kalderash judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).

Another woman emphasizes the seriousness of this action and its consequences:

> *To make fun of a child in any way, to beat him, to give him to someone (the researcher's note: to sell him) or to rape him, then a man would be excluded from society for life. It doesn't matter who he is, a great shame falls on the whole family, he is taken out of the community and the family, if it doesn't leave with him, it is avoided, we don't talk to them anymore, we don't sell them anything, we don't help them, as if it wouldn't exist* (interview, Kalderash woman, Boișoara, 20.05.2017).

In the same way, one of the Roma judges said:

> *Returning to the rules, it was never acceptable to rape a child. It is something that has remained unchanged. Even today, if someone does something wrong to a child, that person would no longer be allowed to stay in the community, no one would take their daughters as wives, no one would go to their weddings or funerals, and no one would ever talk to them, it would all be over for them* (interview, Kalderash judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).

As evidenced, these fragments explore disintegrative shame, a form of social sanction that results in permanent exclusion and profound shame for the transgressor and their family. The ramifications of child abuse—including rape, trafficking, or mistreatment—extend beyond individual punishment to encompass the offender's entire family, unless they opt to sever ties with the transgressor. This phenomenon suggests that shame is not merely personal but also familial, reinforcing the concept that honor and disgrace are shared social constructs. The severity of the punishment—wherein the individual becomes a social nonentity ("as if it wouldn't exist")—demonstrates the irreversible nature of disintegrative shame. In contrast to temporary shaming practices that allow for rehabilitation, this form of exclusion is definitive, effectively erasing the individual from the community's social fabric. This further underscores the collective nature of honor and disgrace among the Kalderash Roma, where individual transgressions can impact entire families, thereby reinforcing social cohesion through stringent moral enforcement.

Another manifestation of disintegrative shame occurs when a member of the community becomes an informant for the police. First of all, in the next passage we have an incident in which the child of such a person got married. As this excerpt shows, no matter how long it has been, the informant has not been received in the community and his actions influence the boy's future because he is viewed with suspicion and must prove that he is a "true gypsy" before he is accepted by future mothers-in-law:

> *... there was someone here who would have tweeted something to the police, it's been many years since then, we kicked him out of the village and he's not allowed to come back. His poor son had a wedding two years ago ... what he went through and still goes through... he is not very popular among us although he works, he is respectful, he helps us but no ... he is his son and he must work hard for us to be able to trust him* (interview, Kalderash man, Boișoara, 15.03.2017).

While the reintegration of an individual as a full member is possible, from what we have seen before, some actions are too serious to reintegrate an individual into the community, so community members must have the means to manage such actions which could threaten the stability of the group. In this case, the Kalderash Roma must show their disapproval of such actions by the punishment of ostracization.:

> *Well, if you don't follow the rule, you don't have principles and you don't have self-respect, you are no longer a gypsy between gypsies, you have to leave and you are no longer a gypsy. It was a shame for us to say, "You're not a gypsy anymore", another gypsy to tell you that you are no longer a gypsy was a shame, it means that you are no longer part of the community, take your house, sell your house and leave... when an anti-social act, with murder or a woman ... this is it* (interview, kalderash judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2018).

Another very important thing that emerges from the fragments above is that shame stigmatizes, this form of shame becoming the status of the aggressor. Due to his status as an outlaw, his connections with the rest of the community suffer, as we can see from those mentioned by one of the Roma judges who contributed a lot to my research:

> *The moment it is a family and makes four or five quarrels, it becomes a quarrelsome family, that is, it hurts the community and it leads to a crime, then the community decides, Yes, you only hurt us, you leave because the community gathers. There are isolated cases when it happens, for a moment, it is not premeditated, it happens to everyone, but when you have a lot of quarrels, you cut one, you cut another and so on, you become a person, a social danger to the community, a person in whom the community does not trust and many have been affected, then you say to him Get out of the gypsy! and he leaves alone, this is the only way to be expelled.*
>
> Question: *And he can be accepted by another community?*
>
> Answer: *No, well in that moment, who will give him her daughter to marry? He is already isolated, an isolated family has no respect, no value, no principles and is affected by the community. Because I'm having a party, when do you see yourself as a valuable man? Is it a family death, when you see your quality? When you see people attending a vigil, a funeral, and you see that you are a respected person, people are around you at good and bad* (interview, Roma judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).

The primary distinction between the two types of shame pertains to their outcomes, community acceptance or ostracism, and the methodologies employed. Reintegrative shame aims to express community disapproval of inappropriate behavior, with the goal of correction and resulting in forgiveness and reacceptance. Disintegrative shame shares the purpose of disapproval but does not consider forgiveness or behavior correction, opting for ostracism.

All small societies have incorporated mechanisms for inducing shame in their members. Braithwaite (1989) introduces readmission ceremonies, representing the culmination

of shame as a social control mechanism. He posits that individuals who have deviated from societal norms must participate in ceremonies to acknowledge their deviant act and rationalize appropriate reparation. Braithwaite asserts that societies successfully utilizing integrative shame exhibit significantly lower conflict rates. I obtained similar information from a respected peace judge in Gorj County, regarding shame in Kalderash communities:

> *I tell you, a gypsy does not return twice with the same problem ... they are afraid of their shame ... that is why they respect exactly the verdict of our judgment and that is why they agree to apologize and pay. Once the shame of the whole community knowing what kind of a person he is, the second time he and his family will be controlled ... that's why we have peace in our community ... they are ashamed of us* (interview, Kalderash judge, Tg. Jiu, 06.06.2017).

As we can see, one of the people in charge of resolving conflicts in the Roma communities articulates very clearly the importance of shame and its social control function that discourages community members from possible inappropriate behavior. Moreover, the person confirms what is already known about small communities, namely the fact that the rate of conflicts or inappropriate behavior is very low, the main reason being shame and its stigmatizing function.

As mentioned earlier, the Roma tribunal is an important mechanism for resolving conflicts arising from violations of Roma traditions and moral codes. In addition, Kris Romani is a part of the ceremony of accepting the person who made a mistake in the community, as illustrated in the following passage in which the guilty party is aware of his actions and participates in the trial knowing from the beginning the punishment he would receive:

> *If we have two people, yes, and one knows that he did something wrong, he will be summoned to court by the other and before the trial he will prepare with money because he knows that he has to pay to end the problem between them. He apologizes, gives a fine and receives a pardon ... this is usually the case* (interviu, krisinitor, Tg. Jiu, 06.06.2017).

According to this excerpt, the purpose of the trial is to provide the offender with an opportunity for rehabilitation in the presence of the community through apologies and the imposition of a fine (which can be considered a readmission ceremony). As the interviewee states, the offender participates in the trial with financial resources, acknowledging the necessity of restitution. However, what prevents the offender from providing this compensation to the victim prior to appearing before the Kris? The explanation lies in the traditions of the Kalderash Roma and in Romanipen, where the collective community is regarded as superior to its individual members. Consequently, any attempt to resolve a conflict must be mediated through the Kris, whose role, in addition to conflict resolution, is to publicly censure the guilty party (one of the primary reasons why the Kris is a public assembly) and simultaneously, through this process, to reintegrate:

> *... a judgement will happen even if he received a penal (formal) punishment. No matter what you do, even if it is a criminal act judged by a state court, there is no*

peace between gypsies until the Kris is reached. Regardless of whether the judiciary makes a decision, a gypsy trial is also reached. There were cases when they didn't listen to us, the court judged but there was no peace even if the court has made a decision... There are cases that have reached the court, murders, and you can't get involved in the murder, he goes to jail...when he comes from prison we're still judging him with the gypsy judgment. He paid for what he did, but there is no peace between the famillies until the gypsy judgment is made ... all of us must hear what he has to say, why he did what he and ask forgiveness from everyone ... we also set the conditions of the reconciliation, because we areempowered with the trust of the community (interview, Kalderash judge, Rm. Vâlcea, 12.12.2017).

In this manner, according to the krisinitor who provided this fragment, Kris Romani can be considered a mandatory readmission ceremony for the reintegration of the offender into the community. According to this source, reconciliation between the parties can only be achieved through Kris, as this assembly provides the community with the opportunity to hear the offender's position, listen to their explanations, and witness the resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, as previously observed, the community concurs with and monitors the process by which the verdict was reached, which significantly influences the acceptance and reintegration of the offender into the community. From this perspective, one can better comprehend the rationale behind organizing Kris even in cases where parties have already been adjudicated in the formal justice system, where the community may not always have access and the offender lacks the opportunity to express remorse for their actions..

The following excerpt confirms that the Kris use shame as a readmission way for the culprit to be received back into the community:

I'll give you something about our judgment that will surprise you, but with us it's normal. It was a dangerous combination, a lot of money, the woman had messed with the wrong person, and this one with the money given and the dishonest woman sued him and this one had to pay her money ... she took the money, she set them on fire in front of us and forgave him (interview, Roma judge, Rm. Vîlcea, 12.12.2017).

In this case, the victim set fire to the money received in front of the krisinitor and the entire audience. Asked what is so special about this gesture, the judge in question told us that the deed has a great significance because it shows the participants that money is not more important than the public apology from the culprit.

As previously discussed in this article, certain actions of the studied Kalderash Roma may be of such severity that the reintegration of the offender into the community becomes untenable. Gronfors (1986) noted that the Roma community cannot sustain the potential consequences of such actions on its social cohesion, necessitating the removal of the offender from the community. Ostracization exemplifies the application of disintegrative shame. Similar to reintegrative shame, this form of shame is predicated on specific ceremonies and customs. Degradation ceremonies function through avoidance and labeling, manifesting in their most extreme form as prohibition orders within the community. This is evidenced

in the following instance, wherein a community member was accused of sexual abuse and subsequently compelled to depart from the community.:

> *... the man was in jail but it didn't matter because he wasn't punished by us ... he was a bad person and nobody cared about him anymore. We gypsies don't do this often because there aren't many of us but that's why we forbade him ... he was asked to leave and he left knowing that he will never come back ... somehow it's sad, I don't want to know what this humiliation is, God forbid ... so the world gathers at your house, some curse you, others laugh at you, gossip, words, it's cruel what's there and I'm watching you and I do this while you take your things out of the house. The car is newer, who has the money, but most of them are still with the cart, if that's the case ... and what happens ... after everyone is sitting on your head and making you a disgrace, you leave and the world comes after you and it happens to you, so we say, to make sure you leave ... and they come after you 1-2 kilometers and they still shout at you and make you ashamed, woe to us...* (interview, Kalderash man, Boişoara, 09.03.2017).

According to our source, the individual was permanently excluded from the community due to the severity of the transgression. In this instance, the ostracism of the individual is accompanied by public humiliation. As the offender gathers their belongings and prepares to depart from the community, the spectators engage in a degradation ceremony wherein the culprit is denounced for their actions, subjected to derisive remarks, and stigmatized through gossip. The culmination of this ritual involves a procession to ensure the individual's departure from the premises. Given the public nature of this ceremony (which is also observed by non-Roma individuals who are present during the procession), this degradation ritual serves multiple functions: to humiliate the offender, to label them, to inform others of their transgression and subsequent punishment by the community, and to deter other members from engaging in deviant behaviors that contravene the community's norms and customs.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to contribute to the understanding of conflict management and resolution methods employed by the traditional Kalderash Roma in Romania. To provide a more comprehensive perspective on this subject, the research incorporates the existence of a moral code based on the concept of shame as the foundation of the conflict resolution system utilized by this community.

Given their small population, the Kalderash Roma cannot sustain long-term conflicts or exclude community members, as such actions could jeopardize their social cohesion. To mitigate this risk, they have developed a highly effective, visible (public) justice system centered around the notion of shame. As observed, shame manifests in two forms: stigmatizing and reintegrative. The latter is considered the most effective form, as it allows

individuals guilty of deviant acts to acknowledge their transgressions and be reintegrated into the community. However, in certain instances where the severity of actions is significant, the only viable option is the permanent removal of the offender from the community. In such cases, the Kalderash Roma in Romania employ disintegrative shame. This approach serves a dual purpose: it enables the Roma to unite against the wrongdoer, thereby maintaining social order, and acts as a deterrent for potential future offenses.

Addressing the research objective, this analysis contributes to the intersection of Roma studies and studies of justice and conflict management, which has been developed through the anthropology of law and qualitative ethnographic research methods. This approach facilitated on-site observation of how shame functions as a deterrent for deviant behavior. While the topic of shame as a conflict management tool within traditional communities is not novel, this research aims to enrich the existing knowledge about traditional Roma communities and provide an alternative perspective to prevailing assumptions about them.

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