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## The Russia–Ukraine War: Implications for Africa

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African perspectives  
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# Abstract

This paper analyses African perspectives on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its implications on human security, geo-economics, energy, and politics/security in Africa. The changing energy and security relations between African countries and Europe are also discussed. The study shows that the invasion is viewed as both a consequence and a driver of great-power competition, and African governments have divergent responses to the conflict. As major powers compete for influence in Africa, they need to understand the African context. On the other hand, African countries should develop foreign policies based on principles that enable them to work with competing powers for their national and regional interests, while also maximising their potential to prevent escalation of the great-power rivalry into a cold war or an all-out war.

# Introduction

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is arguably one of the most significant geopolitical events in the post-Cold War era. Although still ongoing, the impact is already shaping the future. It has accelerated great-power competition and caused major disruptions to international trade corridors, global investment, energy partnerships, and supply chains.

After months of being on the backfoot, Ukraine, with the backing of its Euro-Atlantic allies, mounted a military counter-offensive in late 2022 with considerable success. In January 2023, Germany and the US agreed to send main battle tanks to Ukraine. Countries around the world are bracing for a protracted war. Beneath all the ephemeral headlines, global trade, investment, and energy maps are being adapted to the geopolitical interests of powers with sufficient influence. As the saying goes, never let a crisis go to waste: the rationale is that tumultuous moments are also opportune moments to make gains.

Africa's 'divided' position on the invasion has been the subject of much debate, just as much as its exposure to the food and energy crises. But the implications for Africa are still crystallising and seem much broader than food and energy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is viewed as the first major flashpoint in a world rapidly descending into a cold war. This has not been lost on Africa. In his 2022 UN General Assembly (UNGA) address, African Union (AU) Chairperson President Macky Sall stressed, 'Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history; that it does not want to be the breeding ground of a new cold war, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis.'<sup>1</sup>

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This paper assesses the pre-invasion context and analyses African positions on the first UNGA resolution on the Russian invasion to provide insight into African perspectives. Its subsequent deeper dive into the implications of the invasion for Africa is divided into three sections: human security, politics and security, and energy and geo-economics. Finally, it makes the case for foreign policy fitting for the risks, limitations, and opportunities presented by great-power politics.

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<sup>1</sup> AU, *77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly address by H.E. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal, Current Chairman of the African Union*, September 20, 2022.

# How the context before Russia's invasion of Ukraine shaped African perspectives

The reluctance of many African countries to align with the West in the Ukraine war was predictable for a few reasons. The war is viewed through the lens of Great Power competition between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic axis, rather than a war between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, countries are more likely to fall back to non-alignment. However, there are two key events that are of note. Firstly, NATO's legacy in Africa inspired some antipathy towards the West's position in a war where some see NATO's expansion as one of the causes. Secondly, loss of confidence in western leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NATO's controversial intervention in Libya in 2011 shaped the view African leaders have of the alliance, and this has played out in African perspectives in the Ukraine context. Critics of the AU argue that the organization did not act decisively to protect the Libyans believed to be in danger from Gaddafi's regime. But that view ignores the various overt attempts by the AU to seek a political and non-military solution to the conflict in Libya.

In March 2011, the AU informed NATO that an ad-hoc committee comprising leaders of Congo, Mali, Mauritania, South Africa, and Uganda will fly from Nouakchott, Mauritania to Tripoli to engage with Gaddafi. The response from NATO was that the flight's safety could not be guaranteed owing to the imposition of the 'no-fly zone'. That a multi-nation delegation of African leaders seeking diplomatic solutions to an African conflict were not afforded the courtesy of delaying the start of the no-fly zone, was interpreted as a contempt for African agency over its affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Then AU chair President Teodoro Obiang Nguema later condemned the military interventions in Libya, stressing that Africa be allowed to manage its own affairs. Not long after, a high-level AU committee led by then-South African President Jacob Zuma were finally granted 'permission by NATO' to enter Libya to hold separate meetings with Gaddafi and rebel leaders and demand an immediate ceasefire.<sup>3</sup>

The West's marginalization of Africa and the AU in Libya wasn't just a feature of the pre-war context, but also evident in peace efforts, much to the frustration of African leaders. In February 2020, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni told the BBC that the AU point-man on Libya, Congo-Brazzaville's President Denis Sassou Nguesso, was invited at the 'last minute' to the Berlin summit held the previous month as 'tokenism to show that Africa was also involved'.<sup>4</sup>

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2 France24, "African leaders head to Libya to demand ceasefire", *France24*, April 9, 2011, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/20110409-african-union-leaders-libya-demand-cessfire-gaddafi-rebels-talks-zuma-tripoli-benghazi>.

3 France24, "African leaders head to Libya".

4 Farouk Chothia, "How Africa has been frozen out of Libya peace efforts", *BBC*, February 4, 2020, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51293355>.

NATO's legacy in Libya is not only emblematic of Euro-American disrespect for African initiatives in international security, but the chaos also left behind in Libya has shaped African attitudes towards NATO. And in the Ukraine war where NATO expansion is seen as a factor, it is hardly surprising that African views are unfavourable towards NATO's position.

In his address to the South African parliament in March 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa said: 'The war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its own leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region.'<sup>5</sup>

If the Libyan debacle raised a big question mark over Western leadership, the West's handling of the health crisis of 2020 – even within its own countries – shows up its inability to solve complex global problems. COVID-19 exposed local and international systemic deficiencies. For a long time, the low state capacity of African countries translated to high dependence on global partnerships to deal with shocks. Yet during the health crisis of 2020, countries, also in Africa, proactively took measures to protect their citizens. As African governments struggled with gaps in their own public health infrastructure, the international politicisation of the virus paralysed much-needed multilateral action.

Nothing better exemplifies the failure of Western leadership than the issuing of vaccines. When vaccines eventually became available, Western countries hoarded them

Nothing better exemplifies the failure of Western leadership than the issuing of vaccines. When vaccines eventually became available, Western countries hoarded them. In South Africa, one of Africa's few vaccine production facilities for instance exported vaccines to Europe, despite vaccination rates being miserably low in Africa,<sup>6</sup> smashing any sense of solidarity and laying bare the lop-sidedness of Africa's relationship with the West.

African countries received significant material support from the US, the EU, and several European countries during the pandemic. However, the West's support and appreciable expression of concern towards the conditions in Africa trailed China's more action-oriented intervention, in the form of the supply of public goods. Beijing has also thrown its diplomatic and economic weight behind African and Global South-oriented initiatives towards long-term solutions.

5 Al Jazeera, "S Africa's Ramaphosa: NATO to blame for Russia's war in Ukraine", *Al Jazeera* March 18, 2022, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/update-1-s-africas-ramaphosa-blames-nato-for-russias-war-in-ukraine>.

6 "Africa is Bringing Vaccine Manufacturing Home", *Nature*, February 9, 2022.



The West's admittedly noteworthy engagement with perennial African problems that attracted renewed attention during the pandemic – low manufacturing capacity, lack of public health infrastructure, government deficiencies, and systemic constraints, such as intellectual property rules – was lacking compared to that of the Global South. There are two significant pandemic examples to embellish how China and the Global South took the lead over the West in terms of support in Africa.

In 2020, India and South Africa proposed a temporary suspension of the World Trade Organization's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) on COVID-19 vaccines to address vaccine inequality by removing intellectual property protection barriers to manufacturing cheap vaccines in and for developing nations. Although China was not a co-sponsor, Beijing threw its weight behind the initiative. Support in the West was lacklustre, even though the Biden administration endorsed the waiver in 2021. The EU, however, consistently opposed the proposal.<sup>7</sup> When a TRIPS waiver on COVID-19 vaccines finally emerged in June 2022 it drew criticism from around the world, as being 'too little, too late', a betrayal by the EU of the Global South,<sup>8</sup> and 'no longer a TRIPS waiver' since 'South Africa and India proposed a more comprehensive' one in 2020.<sup>9</sup>

While the issue of the TRIPS waiver on COVID-19 vaccines enjoyed media attention, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa a project no less significant for the future of Africa's public health was ongoing amid disquiet in Western capitals. The construction of the new \$80 million Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention headquarters was once a US-China collaboration project. In January 2023, Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Qin Gang together with the AU Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat inaugurated the project in the Ethiopian capital.<sup>10</sup>

That Africa and China successfully completed the project without the US goes to show that Africa need not rely only on the West. Even though the maltreatment of Africans in Guangzhou was a stain on Africa-China relations, the COVID-19 crisis was China's global leadership moment, and Beijing excelled, at least in African eyes.<sup>11</sup>

While China delivered the physical infrastructure for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, it would be hasty to posit that the US is retreating from health cooperation with Africa, or that Africa is choosing cooperation with China over the US. The reality is that US-Africa partnership in health cooperation is long-standing and robust, covering contemporary issues ranging from COVID-19 vaccine production to more chronic health challenges, like HIV/AIDS and malaria.<sup>12</sup> As such, partnership with the US, China and the

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7 Human Rights Watch, "Seven Reasons the EU is Wrong to Oppose the TRIPS Waiver", June 3, 2021.

8 Corporate Europe Observatory, "TRIPS 'Waiver Failure': EU Betrayal of Global South on Vaccine Access Obscured by Lack of Transparency", July 8, 2022.

9 Corporate Europe Observatory, "TRIPS 'Waiver Failure'".

10 AU, "China Foreign Affairs Minister H.E Mr. Qin Gang Visits the AU and Takes Part in the Inauguration of the New Headquarters of the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)", January 12, .

11 Paul Tembe, "China's Leadership During the Covid-19 Crisis has Been Exemplary", *Independent Online*, June 19, 2020.

12 US Embassy to Angola and Sao Tome and Principe "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Africa Partnership in Health Cooperation", December 14, 2022.

EU will be crucial for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention to make a maximum impact on Africa's public health. This is yet another reason it is not in the interest of African countries to align only with one side, but to adopt foreign policies that allows them to maximise cooperation with all side for their development and security needs.

It would be hasty to posit that the US is retreating from health cooperation with Africa, or that Africa is choosing cooperation with China over the US

## Africa's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine

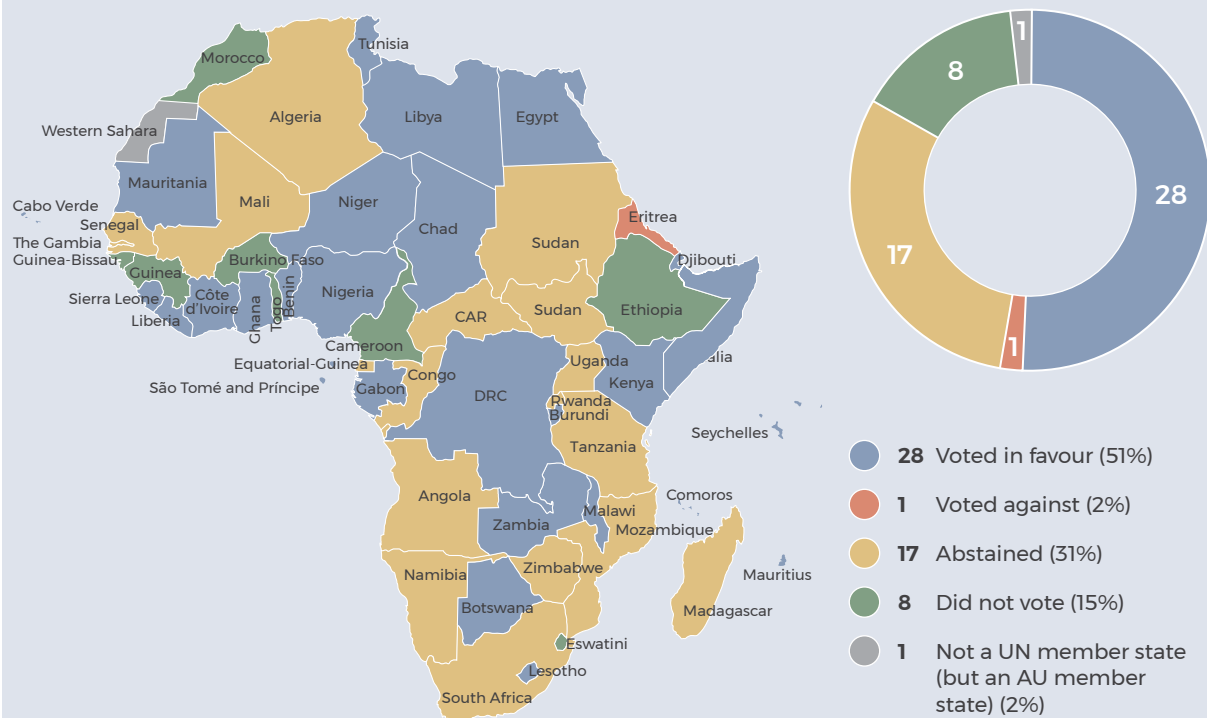
With the largest number of UNGA seats, at nearly 28% of the UN's overall membership (54 out of 193 members), Africa is in the spotlight whenever there is a contentious global concern, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> There have been six UNGA resolutions so far, five in 2022, and one on February 23, 2023, and how countries voted on the UNGA resolutions on the invasion of Ukraine illustrates what they think about this crisis. The notion that countries that voted against or abstained from the resolutions condemning Russia are supportive of Russia, while those that voted in favour of the resolutions are seen as supporting Ukraine and the West's position, is simplistic. African countries in particular have had a nuanced response.

The first UNGA resolution adopted on 2 March 2022 'Aggression against Ukraine' (Figure 1) was intended to condemn Russia and invoke the moral authority of the international community and diplomatically pressure the Russian government following its decision to invade Ukraine on February 24, 2022.<sup>14</sup> A total of 141 UN member states voted in supported of the resolution. African governments were split, with 28 countries voting in favour, 17 countries abstaining from the process for various reasons, and eight countries were completely absent from the voting chamber. Eritrea was the only African country that voted against the resolution.

13 Gustavo de Carvalho and Daniel Forti, "How Can African States Become More Influential in the UN Security Council?", IPI Global Observatory, March 12, 2020.

14 UNGA, "Aggression Against Ukraine", Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1.

**Figure 1** How African countries voted on UNGA resolution ‘Aggression Against Ukraine’ (2022)



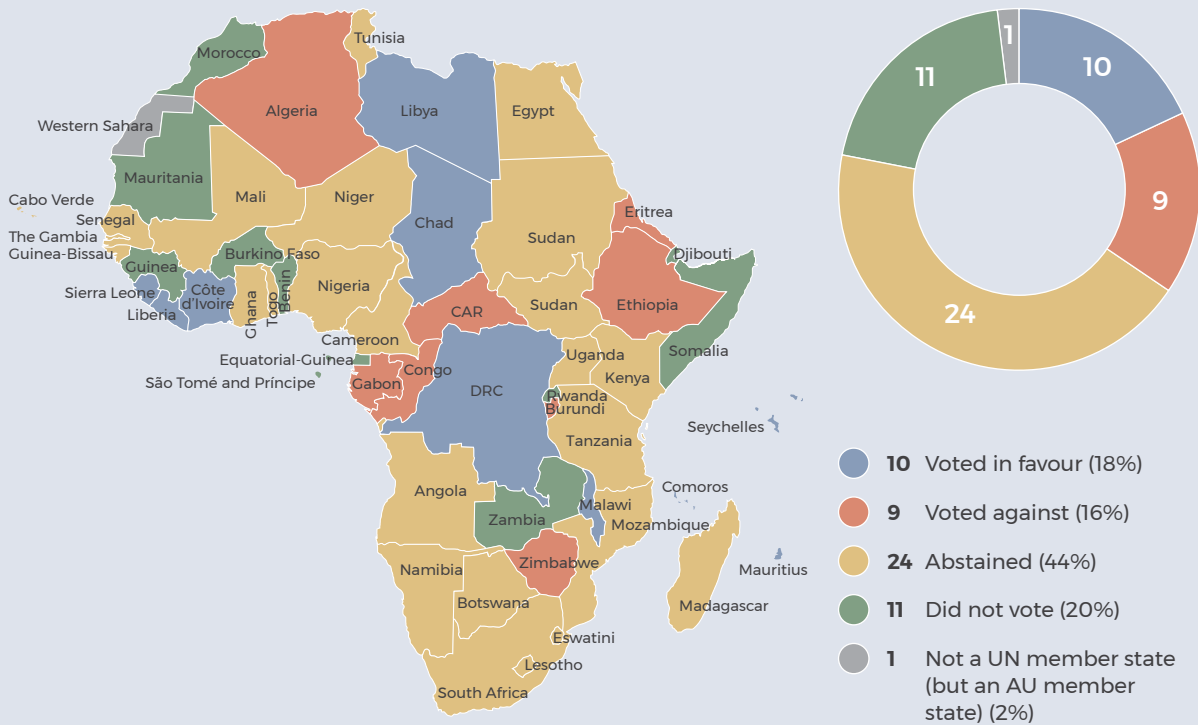
Source: UNGA, Resolution “Aggression against Ukraine” March 2, 2022

The second vote on March 24, on a resolution blaming Russia for Ukraine’s humanitarian crisis, was endorsed by 28 countries, with 19 abstentions and 1 vote against.

On April 7, 2022, the UNGA voted again on a resolution entitled “Suspension of the rights of participation of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council” (Figure 2). This resolution received the least support from African countries of all five resolutions in 2022. Just 10 African countries voted in favour, 24 abstained and 11 were absent.



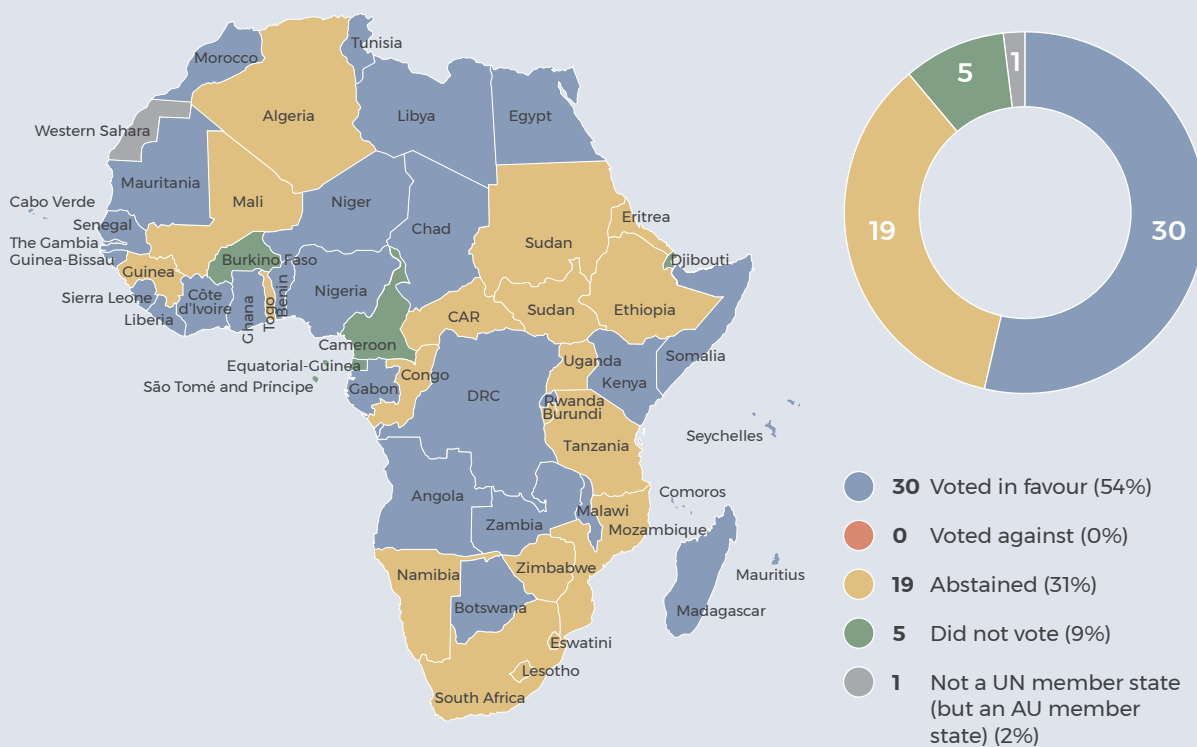
**Figure 2** How Africa voted on UNGA resolution ‘Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council’



Source: UNGA, resolution, ‘Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council’, April 7, 2022

On October 12, 2022, the UNGA adopted the third resolution entitled ‘Territorial Integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations’ (Figure 3). The vote condemned Russia’s ‘attempted illegal annexation’ of the four oblasts in Ukraine and reaffirmed the sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders. This resolution received a more support from African member states than all the previous resolutions. Notably, 28 countries African countries voted in support of the resolution, and no African country voted against the resolution.

**Figure 3** How Africa voted on UNGA resolution ‘Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations’

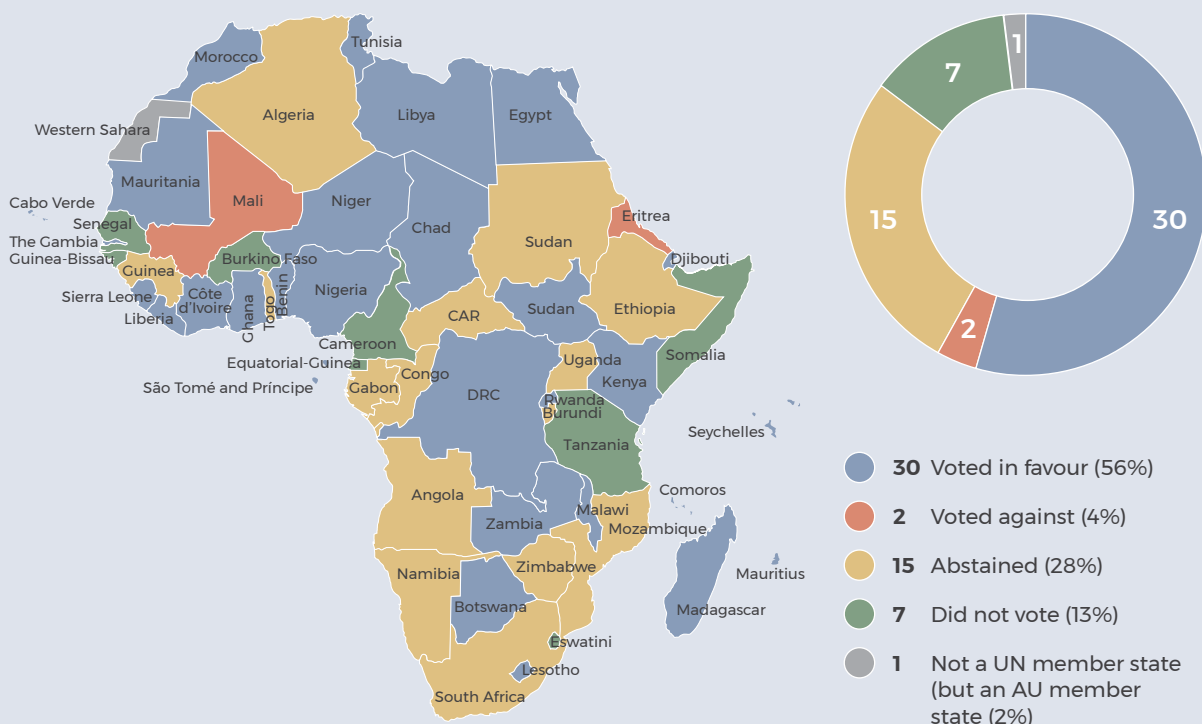


Source: UNGA, resolution, ‘Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the UN’, October 12, 2022

The fifth vote on the Ukraine war took place on November 14, 2022, the resolution called for Russia to pay reparations for the destruction caused by its invasion of Ukraine. As with the third resolution, this did not get much approval from Africa. Only 15 African countries endorsed it, 27 abstained, and five voted against it.

The most recent resolution adopted on February 23, 2023, was titled ‘Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine’ (Figure 4). It underscored respect for the sovereignty and territorial independence of Ukraine, and strongly emphasised the need for just and lasting peace. It received the most support from Africa of all UNGA resolutions to date: 30 endorsed it, 15 abstained, but Eritrea and Mali voted against it.

**Figure 4** How Africa voted on UNGA resolution ‘Principles of the UN Charter underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine’



Source: UNGA, ‘Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine’, February 23, 2023

So far, African countries have taken varied positions regarding the war. However, one year on, patterns have emerged. How they have voted in all six resolutions provides valuable insight into African perspectives of the Ukraine war. Firstly, they are more willing to condemn Russia based on principles of the UN Charter. This is evident in their support for the first, second, fourth, and sixth resolutions. However, resolutions with punitive measures against Russia like the third and fifth resolutions then get little support from Africa. But the African perspective is far more nuanced.

According to analysts at Development Reimagined, African perspectives can be grouped into four broad categories.<sup>15</sup> The first include countries who voted against the resolution in solidarity with Russia’s security concerns, Eritrea being the best example. Eritrea’s vote rationale was also influenced by it being under western sanctions as well. The notion that the invasion of Ukraine is exclusively Russian revanchism has been contested by leading

15 Hannah Ryder and Etsehiwot Kebret, “Why African Countries Had Different Views on the UNGA Ukraine Resolution, and Why This Matters”, CSIS, March 15, 2022, accessed March 11, 2023.

international security experts in the West. Hal Brands, Henry Kissinger Distinguished Professor at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, authored an article for the *Washington Post* entitled 'Russia Is Right: The US Is Waging a Proxy War in Ukraine'.<sup>16</sup> As the title suggests, Brands argues that the invasion is not just a conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, but that NATO is also using Ukraine as a proxy against Russia.

In the second group are countries like Algeria, Sudan and Uganda with close relations to Russia that have consistently abstained rather than vote against the resolution because they acknowledge Russia's invasion violates the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) basic principles, notably self-determination. Like Brands, the leaders of these countries see the war as politics by other means and in the context of great-power competition between nuclear armed Russia and the Euro-Atlantic axis with several nuclear power. The concern for escalation into an all-out war is reflected in the statement the AU issued and has been echoed in subsequent statements made by leaders and ambassadors of several African countries.<sup>17</sup> Given this context, for this group, abstention is used to signal neutrality.

The third category of African countries that have abstained stress that the drafts have not emphasised the need for dialogue and peace negotiation. South Africa fits into this camp. The sixth resolution adopted on February 23, 2023 drew the same criticism; South Africa's UN Ambassador Mathu Joyini is quoted as saying the resolution 'brings us no closer to laying the foundations for a durable peace and bringing an end to the devastation and destruction,' arguing that 'what we need is a firm, unequivocal commitment to peace from all parties.'<sup>18</sup>

Some countries that are NAM members have voted in favour of most or all resolutions condemning Russia, most notably Kenya and Ghana. Ghana, for instance, cited Article 2 of the UN Charter as the rationale for their support for the resolution adopted on March 2, 2022.<sup>19</sup> Article 2 opposes the breaching of a member state's sovereignty. Harold Adlai Agyeman, the Ghanaian ambassador to the UN, condemned the military action as a violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity. His Kenyan counterpart, Martin Kimani, reiterated the importance of the principle of self-determination, highlighting the historical injustices committed against Africans.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, following the vote of February 23, 2023, Dr Korir Sing'oei, Kenya's Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs said the country had given a 'sustained, clear, unambiguous and principled position' on the war in Ukraine.<sup>21</sup>

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16 Hal Brands, "Russia Is Right: The U.S. Is Waging a Proxy War in Ukraine", *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2022.

17 AU, "Statement from Chair of the African Union, H.E President Macky Sall and Chairperson of the AU Commission H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, on the Situation in Ukraine", February 24, 2022.

18 DW, "Ukraine: UN members endorse resolution to end war," *DW*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-un-members-endorse-resolution-to-end-war/a-64799465>.

19 UN, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto", February 25, 2022.

20 Martin Kimani, "Amb. Martin Kimani's Full Speech on Russia-Ukraine Tension", *The Standard*, February 21, 2022.

21 Aggrey Mutambo, "Kenya, Uganda uphold opposite voting stances on Russia war", *The East African*, February 24, 2023, accessed March 11, 2023, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ukraine-war-kenya-uganda-uphold-opposite-stances-4136846>.

With the above in mind, it is easy to understand why for instance, Algeria, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda have consistently abstained. While Côte d'Ivoire, Seychelles, Liberia, Malawi and Niger have endorsed all six resolutions, Eritrea has voted against five of the six, abstaining just once. Conversely, Zambia and Kenya have endorsed five of the six resolutions; Kenya abstained just once, and Zambia was absent on one occasion.

Despite the patterns and consistencies exhibited by several countries, the last vote on February 23, 2023, came with some noteworthy shifts. Madagascar voted in favour of the resolution, even though the country had abstained in four out of the five previous votes. This time around, the spokeswoman for the Malagasy government told RFI that their vote was mainly motivated by the need to uphold 'the principle of the territorial integrity of sovereign States.'<sup>22</sup> Madagascar had earlier defended its abstentions as based on neutrality and non-alignment, but there is a shift from neutrality and abstention to adopting a principled stance like Kenya.<sup>23</sup>

For the vote on February 23, Mali shifted from past abstention or absence, to voting against the last resolution. This shift towards closer alignment with Russia can be understood from the perspective of its security partnership with Moscow. In early February, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Mali, during which he pledged more military support to Mali for its war against jihadists.<sup>24</sup>

While the six UNGA resolutions have one way or another been about ending the war, the February 2023 resolution emphasised the common denominator that African leaders and many of their counterparts elsewhere agree on, which is the need for dialogue and negotiation for a 'just and enduring' peace.

A country's vote does not reflect its moral opinion but what its vote is seen to mean for its own interests – it is a geo-political calculation, not a moral test

African governments have varied opinions on the invasion and have avoided a recency bias. At the same time, their decisions can perhaps be explained in part by foreign policy and awareness of geopolitical undercurrents. A country's vote does not reflect its moral opinion but what its vote is seen to mean for its own interests – it is a geo-political calculation, not a moral test.

22 Teller Report, "War in Ukraine: How four African countries changed their vote at the UN", *Teller Report*, February 24, 2023.

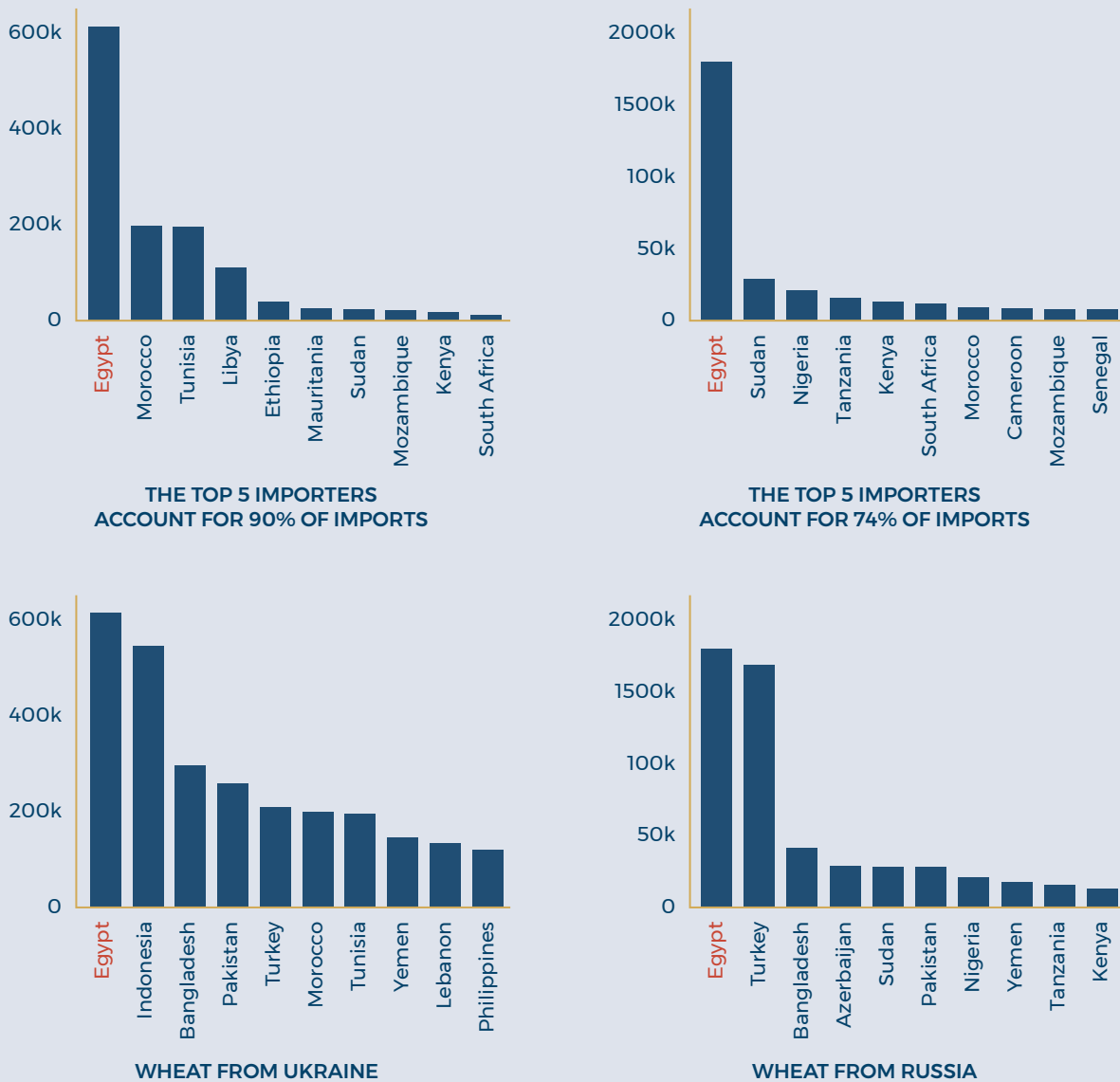
23 Reuters, "Madagascar minister fired for voting against Russia's Ukraine annexation", *Reuters*, October 19, 2022.

24 Al Jazeera, "Russia's Lavrov vows aid for W Africa fight against armed groups", *Al Jazeera*, February 8, 2023.

## Human security impact

Sall and Mahamat were among the first leaders to visit Russian President Vladimir Putin following the invasion, to consult on the global wheat and fertiliser shortage; Russia and Ukraine are major global suppliers. Sall and Mahamat's visits were in line with the continent's push for a much bigger role in global affairs, which the Ethiopian prime minister stressed at the AU extraordinary summit in February 2022.<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 5 Major wheat importers from Ukraine and Russia – top importers Africa, (\$)**



Source: Development Reimagined, "The Russia-Ukraine War: A New Economic Crisis in Africa?", May 20, 2022.

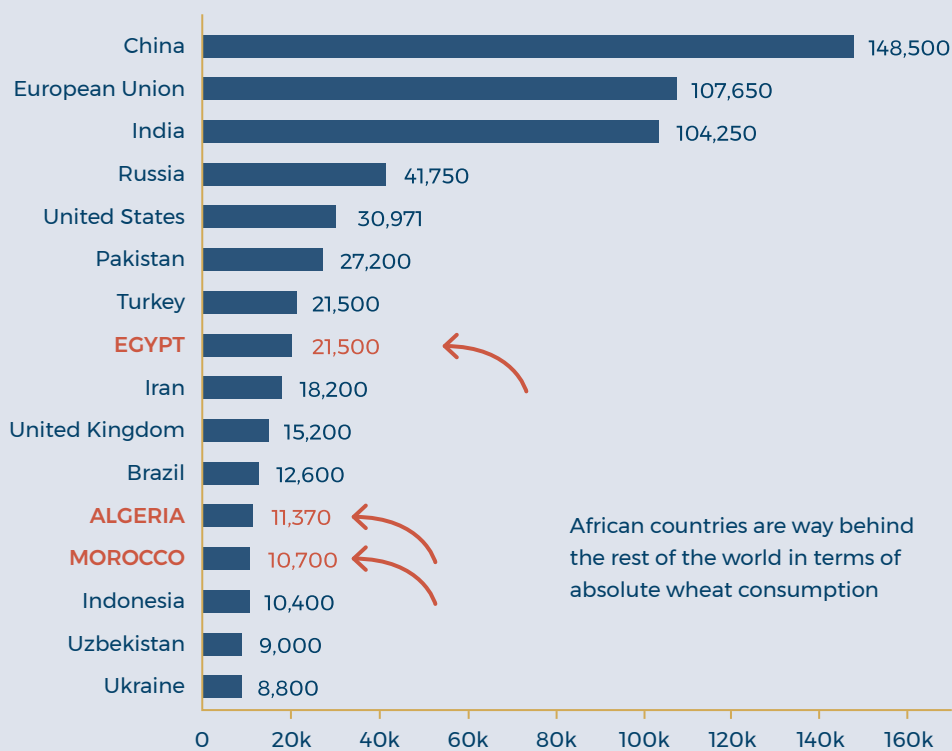
25 Lenin Ndebele, "AU calls for permanent seats on UN Security Council", News24, February 5, 2022, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/au-calls-for-permanent-seats-on-un-security-council-20220205>.



Africa's insistence on being increasingly proactive in global affairs also results from changing foreign policy attitudes. This is key to understanding Africa's evolving perspectives, which include the revival of realpolitik in foreign policy decisions, the erosion of trust in Western leadership and multilateral institutions, and a preference for the emerging multipolar world order.

It can be argued that from an African perspective, there is very little difference between COVID-19 and the invasion of Ukraine. As was the case during the pandemic, global concerns about the humanitarian impact of food and energy shortages following the Russian invasion were mainly directed at Africa. Yet African countries, though reliant on wheat imports from Eastern Europe, are not completely lost without these imports, contrary to the 'food insecurity' narrative expressed across various media. For instance, research shows that while wheat accounts for a large percentage of Africa's agricultural imports, it mainly goes to only five countries on the continent.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 6 African countries: Absolute wheat consumption**



Source: Development Reimagined, "The Russia-Ukraine War: A New Economic Crisis in Africa?", May 20, 2022.

26 Development Reimagined, "The Russia-Ukraine War: A New Economic Crisis in Africa?", May 20, 2022.

The UN-Turkey grain deal announced in July 2022 was a significant breakthrough for global food security<sup>27</sup>, with wheat prices steadily declining ever since then. In October 2022, prices were about 10% above pre-invasion levels and had declined about 30% from their May 2022 peak.<sup>28</sup>

As DW News reported,<sup>29</sup> the first grain-loaded ship left for Africa on August 16, 2022. Up until that point, 16 commercial ships loaded with grain had left Ukraine for other parts of the world. Although there was no expectation of priority, the delayed delivery of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia sparked criticism, as the UN and country leaders argued that the grain deal was desperately needed to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Africa.<sup>30</sup> The delay could be read as indicative of Africa merely being used as a political bargaining tool, as was the case during COVID-19. By the time the deal was renewed in November 2022, most Ukrainian grain exports had gone to Europe and Asia, and it appeared that Africa's dependence on Ukraine's grain exports was exaggerated. Despite the diplomatic rhetoric from Moscow, Washington, and European capitals, it is a combination of Western sanctions and Russia's aggressive action that is responsible for the global food and energy shortages.<sup>31</sup>

## Africa, geo-economics and Europe's changing energy map

With Europe phasing out Russian oil and gas, Brussels has its eye on Africa, to the excitement of gas-rich countries such as Algeria, Nigeria, Mozambique, and of course countries such as Morocco and Niger, which are expected to collect transit fees on Europe-bound gas pipelines. Security issues, the ongoing energy transition, and changing natural-resource governance laws in Africa are some of the present complications but can also be seen as opportunities to strengthen cooperation in the security-energy nexus of Europe-Africa relations.

Some African oil and gas producers are already ramping up production. Mozambique's state-owned oil company is planning to refinance a stake in an offshore natural-gas project led by Italian multinational petroleum refinery Eni.<sup>32</sup> Liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from Rovuma Basin in the country's Cabo Delgado Province have started, a move intended to take advantage of record gas prices.<sup>33</sup> Mozambique is geared to be one of the prime exporters of LNG, with a significant amount aimed at meeting Europe's energy needs.<sup>34</sup>

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27 Laurence Girard, "Wheat prices fall after Black Sea grain export deal", *Le Monde*, July 24, 2022, accessed March 11, 2023.

28 Laurence Girard, "Commodities: 'Wheat prices are falling and returning to levels from before the war in Ukraine'", *Le Monde*, January 23, 2023, accessed March 11, 2023, Trading Economics.

29 DW News, "Ukraine: First humanitarian grain ship leaves port," August 16, 2022.

30 DW News, "Ukraine: First humanitarian grain ship".

31 Jon Ross, "US Sanctions on Russia will Lead to Global Food Disaster", *Asia Times*, May 26, 2022.

32 Carol Burkhardt and Jordan Yadoo, "Mozambique Hires SocGen to Help Refinance Stake in Eni Gas Plant", *Bloomberg*, April 22, 2022.

33 Albert Nangara, "Mozambique Makes First Export of Liquefied Natural Gas", *The Exchange*, November 19, 2022.

34 AFP, "Mozambique Begins Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)", *Gulf News*, November 13, 2022.

To the north, Africa's gas giant, Algeria, has agreed to boost gas deliveries to Italy.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Nigeria and Morocco are accelerating efforts to implement the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, which comprises a 7 000km trajectory across 11 West African countries.<sup>36</sup>

Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria held discussions in 2022 to revive a long-defunct plan to pipe gas across the Sahara. The idea for this trans-Saharan gas pipeline, commonly referred to as NIGAL, was first put forward in the 1970s. Given recent developments in the Russo-Ukrainian War, the prospect of supplying the European market is encouraging.<sup>37</sup>

Both NIGAL and the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline face similar challenges. Financing is uncertain, despite feasibility studies the Moroccan and Nigerian governments conducted confirming the viability of the projects. Subsequently, the timeline for completion does not fit with Europe's transition schedule. The second challenge is security and its risks and costs. The 11 nations along the Morocco-Nigeria pipeline have seen heightened terrorist activity, creating security challenges. The Algeria-Nigeria pipeline passes through the Sahel, the epicentre of terrorism in Africa.

Despite reports of European countries falling back on coal and other fossil fuels to avoid an energy crisis, the momentum is behind green energy. On this front, there are also opportunities for African countries. In March 2023, the EU will unveil its Critical Raw Materials Act, which is part of Brussels' efforts to secure the bloc's supply of critical raw materials such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, and graphite needed for electric vehicles. Russia has for a long time been Europe's major supplier of aluminium, nickel, copper, cobalt, and palladium.<sup>38</sup>

## Momentum is behind green energy ... there are opportunities for African countries

In late January 2023, the European Commissioner Thierry Breton encouraged European financiers to provide more funding for minerals needed for the energy transition.<sup>39</sup> With African countries boasting major reserves of these minerals, exploration and mining investments in Africa are expected to increase.

35 ["Italy Signs Deal with Algeria to Increase Gas Imports"](#), *Al Jazeera*, April 11, 2022.

36 Harrison Edeh, ["Nigeria, Morocco Sign MoU, Kickstart 7000km Gas Pipeline Project"](#), International Centre for Investigative Reporting, September 15, 2022.

37 ["Europe Turns to Nigeria to Fill the Gap in Gas Supply"](#), *Africa News*, April 12, 2022.

38 Clara Denina and Pratima Desai, ["EU Urges European Banks to Step up Funding for Critical Minerals"](#), *Reuters*, January 25, 2023, accessed January 29, 2023.

39 Denina and Desai, ["EU Urges European Banks"](#).

It is important to underline that these investments will come at a time when African countries shift from extraction-only investments to localised refining. The Zimbabwean government recently banned lithium exports to encourage the development of local processing capacity. Similarly, back in 2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) passed a mining law designating cobalt, coltan, germanium, and lithium as 'strategic minerals' and raised royalties from 2% to 10%. With around 44.6 million tonnes of confirmed lithium reserves, the DRC is positioned to become a major supplier. An energy framework that is not low on ambition would merge the energy security needs of both sides and drive Africa's development. Europe's investment into gas projects for its short-term energy needs would then include financing gas-powered plants to generate electricity.

The LNG project in Mozambique is a prime example of insecurity having a direct impact on Europe's energy interests. Since the emergence of terrorism in Cabo Delgado halted the operations of TotalEnergies, the EU has ramped up financial and technical assistance for security in Mozambique. Under the European Peace Facility (EUPF), the EU has provided €89 million for the Mozambican Armed Forces and €15 million for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique. In December 2022, Rwanda received €20 million to support the continued deployment of troops fighting terrorism in Cabo Delgado.<sup>40</sup>

The EUPF was created in 2021 after the EU overhauled its strategy for funding its security efforts initiative abroad. It changed how the EU supports peace and security initiatives in Africa. In the past, the EU channelled most of the finances through AU funding structures, but the new tools allow the EU to bypass the AU and pay for the national and sub-regional military initiatives directly.

The EUPF was established in good faith, but it could weaken the AU's peacekeeping role. Furthermore, as the funding structure was fundamentally altered to make the EU the decider of who gets funding, potential beneficiaries (African governments) will increasingly compete over limited financial resources for training programmes and military support initiatives. This might unfortunately pit already politically fragile governments against each other while they should actually be collaborating against transnational threats.

While the EUPF works in Mozambique, the EU might face constraints in the West African context, where it also has energy interests and Europe's security concerns are much broader. The EU countries have been major security actors in West Africa, working with countries and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the fight against terrorism, piracy, illegal migration, and other transnational crimes. However, the military takeovers in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso have strained their political relations with Europe. Furthermore, the juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso have been leaning toward Russia as a security partner. Fighters from the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group are known

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40 Théophile Niyitegeka, "EU Approves €20 Million to Support Rwanda's Deployment in Mozambique", *Igihe Network*, December 1, 2022.

to be active in Mali and are now also active in Burkina Faso, according to the Ghanaian president.<sup>41</sup>

Russia's security influence in West Africa has been cited as a reason for the collapse of European bilateral and multilateral security partnerships such as Operation Barkhane, the French-led G5 Sahel Force, and the EU-led special operations Takuba Task Force all being expelled from Mali and Burkina Faso. Therefore, the kind of bilateral and multilateral EUPF support for Mozambique and SADC is not feasible in West Africa, where Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso will be key to create a conducive environment for the development of NIGAL and the Morocco–Nigeria pipelines, and where there are shared security interests such as human and drug trafficking, as well as illegal migration. West Africa shows why African leaders must, more than assert their sovereignty and freedom to deal with Russia, ensure that their decisions are not counterproductive or do not limit their national and regional economic and security interests.

The invasion of Ukraine has created a scenario where energy cooperation could strengthen relations between Africa and Europe to the benefit of both regions

In summary, the invasion of Ukraine has created a scenario where energy cooperation could strengthen relations between Africa and Europe to the benefit of both regions. For that to become a reality, a new energy partnership model is needed that speaks to the short and long-term needs of both sides.

Brussels' priority to secure its supply chain of critical minerals can also drive industrialisation in Africa through investment in countries locally refining battery minerals. And lastly, Europe and Africa would need to review the framework for security partnership to address security concerns in regions like Mozambique, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Sahel. Anything short of this will see a repeat of the extraction-only model that has been the norm since colonial times and expose EU–Africa relations to criticism from detractors, who decry them as unimaginative.

## Political and security implications

Since the invasion of Ukraine, top US, Chinese, Russian, and French officials have been touring Africa more frequently as part of what can be seen as a global charm offensive.<sup>42</sup>

41 John Irish, "Burkina Faso Aware of the Dangers of Wagner Force -France", *Reuters*, December 16, 2022.

42 Elliot Smith, "Top U.S., Chinese and Russian Officials Tour Africa as Global Charm Offensive Gathers Pace", *VOA*, February 1, 2023.

The flurry of diplomatic engagements is indicative of the geopolitical magnitude of the invasion and ongoing rivalry for influence in Africa amid the broader great-power competition. Along with diplomatic efforts, Washington and Moscow are already taking measures and countermeasures with implications for African security, thus necessitating the need for African leaders to be more prudent in foreign-policy-related decisions.

In July 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, and the Republic of the Congo to shore up support for Russia and push the Kremlin's narrative of the invasion. Lavrov painted Russia as a victim of Western aggression while absolving the country of the blame for the energy and food crisis.<sup>43</sup> Six months later, in January 2023, he was back on the continent, with visits to South Africa, Eritrea, Angola, and Eswatini. Evidently, Africa is a priority for Moscow. More than just promoting Russia's perspective, the visits also came in preparation for the second Russia-Africa Summit in Saint Petersburg held later in 2022. Moscow sees Africa as an important vector of its global strategy, and even more so following the invasion of Ukraine.

Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko's high-level visit to Zimbabwe at the end of January 2023 came as a shock to many. Lukashenko has not travelled much since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, except sometimes to Moscow. Bilateral ties between Zimbabwe and Belarus alone hardly explain this trip. Despite reports of agricultural cooperation agreements, this event is better seen within the context of Moscow's diplomatic efforts in Africa. Lukashenko's travel to Zimbabwe can be interpreted as a move agreed upon with Moscow as part of Russia's strategic objective to strengthen ties with Africa. President Putin is, of course, occupied at home but may have been looking for another high-ranking individual to send to Africa after Lavrov. Lukashenko and Putin closely cooperate on much more than Ukraine. As a head of state, Lukashenko further strengthens relations between the Belarus-Russia axis and Africa.

Speeches by both Lavrov and Lukashenko were laden with references to anti-colonialism, sovereignty, and anti-imperialism, and it is not hard to see why. Foreign direct investment (FDI) from Russia comprises less than 1% of total FDI inflow to Africa. In fact, just four countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa) account for 70% of Russia's total trade with Africa.<sup>44</sup> With its limited economic footprint on the continent, it is not surprising that Russia resorts to sentimentalism in its communications with and about Africa.

Rekindling anti-colonial and Cold War sentiments in Africa distracts from Moscow's culpability in the food and energy crisis that followed its invasion in Ukraine. Also, Lavrov – intentionally or not – reinforces the notion some African leaders hold that the invasion is part of Russia's struggle against Western imperialism.

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43 Vivian Yee, Anton Troianovski and Abdi Latif Dahir, "[Russia Tells Famine-Fearing Africa It's Not to Blame for Food Shortage](#)", *NYT*, July 24, 2022.

44 Constantin Duhamel, "[A 2023 Russia-African Trade Summary](#)", *Russia Briefing*, February 2, 2022.



Moreover, Moscow benefits from presenting its invasion as a continuation or a return of the Cold War because it would encourage African countries to (re)adopt a non-aligned and neutral stance and subsequently abstain from Western-sponsored UNGA resolutions targeting the Kremlin.

If its appeal to Africa is successful, Russia can avoid isolation and argue that the West's framing of the invasion is unpopular outside its own backyard. This is perhaps why Lavrov has lauded countries taking a neutral stance, while in Angola, he slammed the West and said Moscow 'appreciates Angola's balanced position at the United Nations'.<sup>45</sup> Russia does not need Africa to win the shooting side of the invasion, but it certainly needs Africa to not lose on the political and diplomatic fronts.

The US has also been active on the continent, with high-level visits in 2022 and in January 2023. Washington's diplomats seem aware of the factors that make Africa receptive to Moscow's communication strategy.

But mixed signals leave African leaders confused. In 2022, high-level US diplomats in Africa on a 'listening tour' suggested African leaders avoid certain economic activities with Russia. During the tour, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, for instance warned African governments about the various 'red lines' that must not be crossed vis-à-vis relations with Russia. The ambassador said African governments could purchase agricultural products such as fertiliser and wheat but cautioned against engaging Russia in sanctioned contexts because actions could be 'taken against them'.<sup>46</sup> President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda responded by saying that, if the US government really wants to help Africa, it 'should consider separating us from the sanctions in a war where we are not participating'.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had a more diplomatic tone when he visited South Africa, the DRC, and Rwanda in August 2022.<sup>47</sup> Leading up to his visit, Blinken was quoted as saying,<sup>48</sup>

African nations have been treated as instruments of other nations' progress, rather than the authors of their own ... Time and again, they have been told to pick a side in great power contests that feel far removed from daily struggles of their people.

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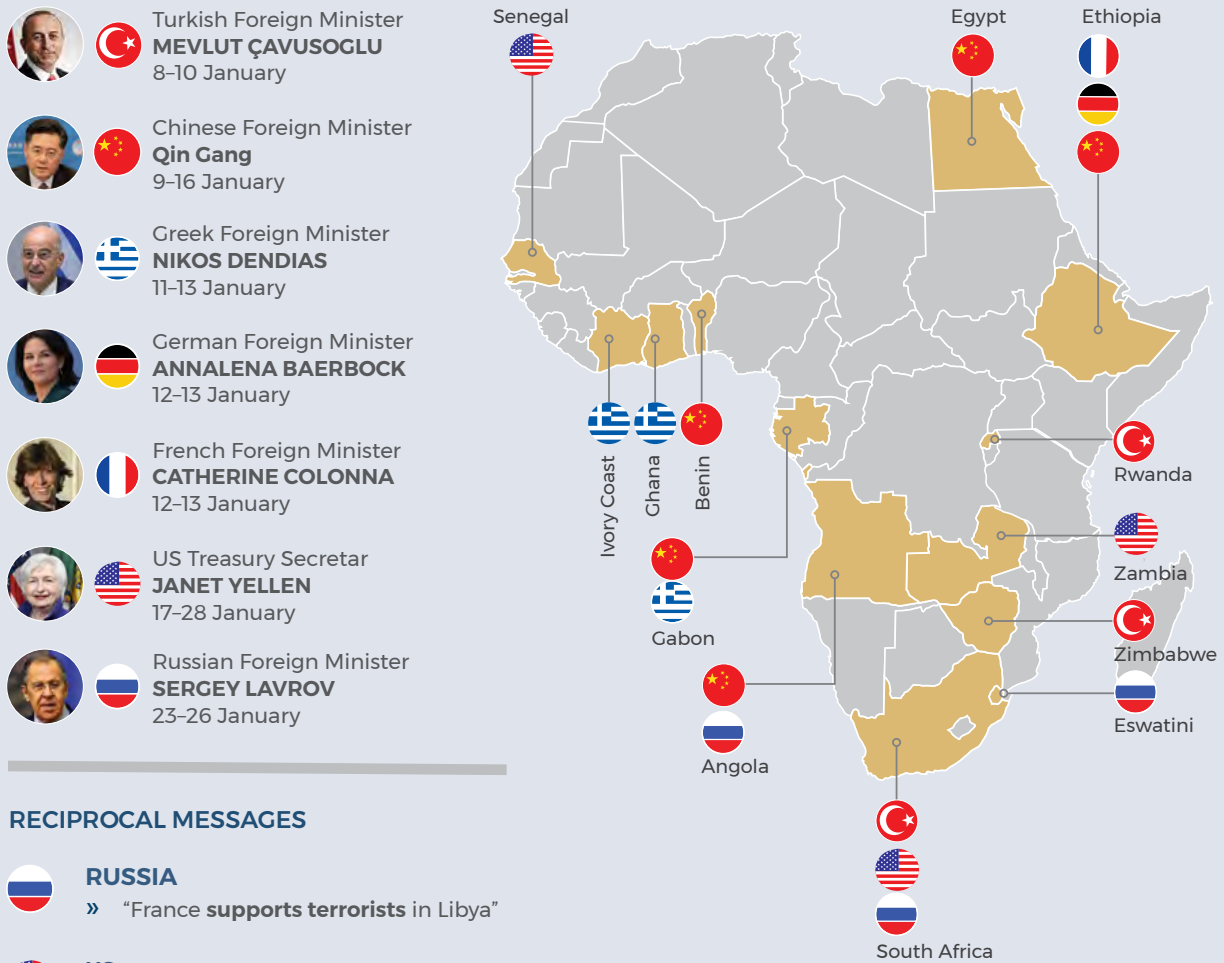
45 AFP, "Russia's Lavrov Blasts West in New Africa Tour", *The Citizen*, January 26, 2023.

46 Ruth Maclean, "A U.S. Diplomat Warns African Countries Against Buying Anything From Russia Except Grain and Fertilizer", *NYT*, August 5, 2022.

47 AP, "US Top Diplomat Blinken in South Africa on Africa Tour", *VOA*, August 7, 2022.


48 Lebo Diseko and Cecilia Macaulay, "Blinken Africa Trip: The World Should not Dictate to the Continent", *BBC*, August 8, 2022.

**Figure 7 Diplomatic visits to Africa by major countries in January 2023**



**RECIPROCAL MESSAGES**

- 
**RUSSIA**
  - » “France **supports terrorists** in Libya”
- 
**US**
  - » “China puts African countries into dept **in return for investments**”
  - » “Russia pushed millions of Africans **into poverty**”
- 
**CHINA**
  - » “Africa should not be an arena for **major countries competition**”
  - » “US should cope with its own dept problem **before blaming other countries for its debt problem**”
- 
**GERMANY**
  - » “European Union’s partnership with **the African Union should be strengthened**”


**HEAD OF AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**  
**MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT**  
 “We are open to **cooperation and partnership** with everybody. but our principles, our priorities and our interests have to be respected”

After the start of the Russia–Ukraine war and food and energy crises, the world powers that have initiated close contact with African countries paid diplomatic visits to the continent in the past month

Source: ‘Diplomatic Visits to Africa, New Area of Global Power Rivalry’, Anadolu Agency, January 26, 2023.

During Blinken's speech in South Africa, he called out Moscow as a negative influence on various African countries. It was also alleged that Russia uses security and economic ties and disinformation to undermine African principles vis-à-vis African opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He warned that Russia's Wagner Group is 'not any other mercenary group'.<sup>49</sup>

While Blinken offered a rebuttal to Russia's characterisation of the US as coercing Africa, steps taken in Washington came in sharp contrast to Blinken's message in Africa. The US Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act directs the US Secretary of State to<sup>50</sup>

develop and submit to Congress a strategy and implementation plan outlining United States efforts to counter the malign influence and activities of the Russian Federation and its proxies in Africa, and for other purposes.

Passed in the US in 2022, the Bill was designed to foil Putin's efforts to steal, manipulate and exploit resources in parts of Africa in order to evade sanctions while undermining US interests and support Africa to 'protect innocent people victimised by Russian mercenary actions in Africa, especially the Central African Republic and Mali'.<sup>51</sup>

The lack of a clear definition of what constitutes 'malign activities' is a reason for push-back against the Bill in Africa. African institutions, analysts, and officials have suggested that the US is 'obviously unhappy with the way so many African countries voted in the General Assembly and their relatively non-aligned position'.<sup>52</sup> The Institute for Security Studies reports the US reaction to Russian military activities in Ukraine as a sort of new 'Cold War psychosis', which takes foremost concern above other issues, such as economic and bilateral cooperation with African counterparts.<sup>53</sup>

The AU and SADC roundly objected to the passing of the Act,<sup>54</sup> which is seen as providing a legislative framework for the US to use sanctions to dissuade African countries from dealing with Russia.

US antagonism to Russia's growing influence on the African continent is arguably politically motivated. Yet it would be negligent of African leaders to not take Washington's protests seriously. Some reasons backing the US decision to act against Russia include Moscow's alleged efforts to bribe candidates in Madagascar's elections,<sup>55</sup> and the activities of the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation in Africa. The BBC suggested in a 2019 report that Russian political strategists with possible ties to the Kremlin, who posed as tourists, approached at least six candidates in the Malagasy elections.<sup>56</sup>

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49 Jennifer Hansler, "Blinken Draws Distinctions Between US and Russia as he Seeks to Make Case for US Partnership in Africa", *CNN Politics*, August 8, 2022.

50 US Senate, *Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act*, H.R.7311.

51 "Meeks Statement on House Passage of the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act", *State Newswire*, April 29, 2022.

52 Peter Fabricius, "US Debates Bill to Counter 'Malign' Russian Activities in Africa", *Institute for Security Studies*, May 20, 2022.

53 Fabricius, "US Debates Bill".

54 Abayomi Azikiwe, "SADC Rejects Anti-Russian Bill In United States Congress", *Popular Resistance*, September 3, 2022.

55 Gaelle Borgia, "Did Russia Meddle in Madagascar's Election?", *BBC*, April 8, 2019.

56 Borgia, "Did Russia Meddle?".

Likewise, the UN has raised alarm over the action of Wagner Group in the Central African Republic (CAR). A recent study of Russia's security partnerships with Mali and CAR concluded that<sup>57</sup>

while Moscow's opportunistic use of private military diplomacy has allowed it to successfully gain a strategic foothold in partner countries, the lack of transparency in interactions, the limited scope of impact and the high financial and diplomatic costs expose the limitations of the partnership in addressing the peace and development challenges of African host countries.

The security situation in the Sahel and Central Africa is dire, requiring multilateral solutions, which usually take the form of an intervention. These are usually either an ad-hoc multinational joint taskforce comprising regional armies or a UNSC peacekeeping operation, or both, as in the Sahel where the G5 Sahel Joint Force operates alongside the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. African countries are typically reliant on Western partners for funding multinational joint taskforces. The military regime in Mali, bolstered by its Russian partners, is not only undermining UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission, but has also stopped cooperating with the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The foreign policy decisions of Mali and Burkina Faso is also problematic for African-led solutions such as the Accra Initiative.<sup>58</sup> Launched in 2017, the Accra Initiative was born out of the recognition that the security threats facing the Sahel and West Africa are transnational, and thus requiring a collaborative response that includes coastal West African countries. Since then, coups in Mali and Burkina Faso – both members of the Accra Initiative – as well as concerns over their use of Russian mercenaries have strained their relations with ECOWAS, and regional countries. The Accra Initiative Summit held in November 2022 concluded with the leaders of member states recommending that 'concrete actions, specifically fundraising-related, be taken to support the countries severely affected by terrorism, while commitments were reaffirmed to mobilise the necessary indigenous resources to operationalize within a month, the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative (MNJTF/AI)'.<sup>59</sup>

The initiative has elicited interest from the UK and the EU with \$550 million earmarked to make the MNJTF/AI operational.<sup>60</sup> However, with Mali, and Burkina Faso now expelling French and other European troops and pulling closer to Russia, the West will refuse financial support to any regional security mechanism that includes Mali and Burkina Faso. Russia is unlikely to step in to fill the financial gap. So, it comes as no surprise that months after November summit, little progress has been made. Meanwhile, the EU has recently allocated €25 million in humanitarian aid to Niger, a country that has emerged as Europe's reliable partner in the region.<sup>61</sup>

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57 Ovigwe Eguegu, "Russia's Private Military Diplomacy in Africa: High Risk, Low Reward, Limited Impact", *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 29 no. 4 (2022):445–462.

58 UNOWAS, "International Conference on the Accra Initiative", UNOWAS, November 23, 2022.

59 UNOWAS, "International Conference on the Accra Initiative", UNOWAS, November 23, 2022.

60 APANews, "Accra Initiative look to check Burkina insurgency", APANews, November 23, 2022.

61 EU, "Niger Fact Sheet", EU, March 14, 2023.

All things considered, geopolitical rivalry between the great powers is already undermining African peace and security. The foreign policy decisions of Mali and Burkina Faso do more than alienate European partners, they also complicate the process of establishing an

The foreign policy decisions of Mali and Burkina Faso do more than alienate European partners, they also complicate the process of establishing an effective regional security and crisis response mechanism

effective regional security and crisis response mechanism from financial, political, and operational standpoints. While Lavrov is urging African leaders to not factor ‘geopolitical events’ into bilateral relations with Russia,<sup>62</sup> African leaders need to remember that foreign policy is not formulated in a vacuum. They must cope with a set of hard global political realities and carefully decide between competing imperatives.

## Navigating the evolving context: Realpolitik, (non)-alignment, and principles

Realpolitik – a term coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – is making a comeback in responses to the invasion of Ukraine and the changing global order. The invasion has forced countries to take a stand and explain their position, and in doing so, their foreign-policy decisions have become more clearly exposed as driven by realpolitik. Russia’s invasion also increased the tempo of the great-power competition and pushed the world in the direction of a cold war and even all-out war. For Africa, this context is pregnant with risks and rich in complexity. Already, African countries seem inclined towards re-adopting non-alignment but a closer look at history, the situation of Africa, and the current geopolitical context suggests that African leaders should err on the side of caution.

Euro-American sanctions against Russia were designed and incrementally applied to minimise as much as possible the economic disruption to their economies. The EU struggled to reach a consensus on phasing out Russian energy imports from the bloc partly because of national interest-based concerns raised by countries such as Hungary. Importantly, in a break from the EU and NATO consensus, Hungary chose to engage Russia and pay for gas shipments in rouble. The EU’s ambitious timeline triggered anxiety in member countries over energy security. The scramble to secure alternative energy supplies

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62 AFP, “Russia’s Lavrov Blasts West in New Africa Tour”, *The Citizen*, January 26, 2023.

strained relations between Germany and France, prompting the French finance minister to call for a 'reset' in Franco-German relations.<sup>63</sup>

Dissent within the Euro-Atlantic axis reached new heights in November 2022, when top European officials accused the US of 'profiting from this war'.<sup>64</sup> A senior EU official told Politico that, 'if you look at it soberly, the country that is most profiting from this war is the US because they are selling more gas and at higher prices, and because they are selling more weapons'.<sup>65</sup>

Realpolitik is also evident in India's decision not to condemn or isolate Russia, with the subcontinent citing its own national security and strategic interests. India, a close partner of the US and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue member, is communicating with Russia about fast-tracking payment for exports in rouble and rupees, and with China about activating Beijing's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System to shift away from the SWIFT system, which has banned Russia. Concerned by these initiatives, the Euro-Atlantic bloc is keen to pull India closer.

During President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen's visit in late April 2022,<sup>66</sup> India and the EU recommenced negotiations for a free trade agreement that has been on hold since 2013. Their intention is to reach a deal by late 2023 or early 2024.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, US President Biden has invited Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a state visit in the US summer of 2023. President Biden is expected to be courting his Indian counterpart in the Modi holds the G20 presidency.<sup>68</sup>

The diplomatic attention and prospects that followed the initial criticism India received from the West has led some observers to praise – and even recommend – India's foreign policy, which is described as a combination of multi-alignment and neutrality.<sup>69</sup> Dr Sankaran Kalyanaraman of MP-IDSA, a leading Indian defence policy think tank, criticised the concept of multi-alignment as it<sup>70</sup>

would mean aligning with both or all parties (blocs) to a rivalry or conflict or struggle for influence. Such an idea, however clever it may sound, is not practicable as policy. When two or more parties are ranged against each other, how does one align with both or all? It would mean, for example, participating in coercive (military and non-military) measures against Country or Bloc A that are being coordinated by Country or Bloc B on one hand, while at the same time participating in coercive measures against B being coordinated by A on the other.

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63 Ania Nussbaum and William Horobin, "EU Energy Crisis Puts Spotlight on Franco-German Strains", *Bloomberg*, October 20, 2022.

64 Charles Harrison, "NATO Row as US Accused of 'Profiting From Ukraine War' While EU Flounders Over Gas Prices", *Express*, November 26, 2022.

65 Harrison, "NATO Row as US Accused".

66 India News, "EU Wakes Up, Moves on FTA with India", *Hindustan Times*, April 12, 2022.

67 Karunjit Singh, "India, EU to Hold Talks on FTA in June, set 2023-2024 Target", *The India Express*, April 30, 2022.

68 PTI, "Joe Biden Invites PM Modi for State Visit to US this Summer", *Oneindia*, February 2, 2023.

69 Bejoy Sebastian, "India's Multi-Alignment: The Origins, the Past, and the Present", *Modern Diplomacy*, June 9, 2021.

70 Abhijit Matele, "What is 'Multi-Alignment' and How it is Different From 'Non-Alignment'? Is India Moving Towards 'Multi-Alignment' in the Current Context?", MP-IDSA, December 2, 2015.



Regardless of the above critique, differences in geopolitical status, relationships with competing powers, and state capacity means African countries cannot simply adopt India's approach. Similarly, re-adopting non-alignment would not avoid the risk of becoming 'a breeding ground of a new cold war' and enable working with all partners, as stated by AU Chairperson Sall.

The Cold War era was riddled with conflict in many NAM countries, including those in Africa. Many countries in the NAM were also in practice not non-aligned, out of necessity or coercion. So, if the goal was to avoid choosing to evade conflict, it clearly did not work. South Africa choosing to host a joint naval drill with China and Russia to coincide with the first anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine raises a question mark over the practicality of non-alignment.<sup>71</sup>

The reliance of African countries on partnerships to meet basic economic, security, and development goals make them vulnerable to persuasion. If ideology was persuasive during the Cold War, the promise of billions of dollars of investment would do the same this time. Competing powers have singled out Africa in their flagship programmes: the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, the EU's Global Gateway, and China's Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative.

## National interests could explain the reluctance to condemn Russia, a strong security partner and primary arms supplier for several African countries

National interests could explain the reluctance to condemn Russia, a strong security partner and primary arms supplier for several African countries including but not limited to Algeria, Mali, and the CAR. While abstention is not alignment, the power of national interests cannot be underestimated. African countries continue to fall short of the threshold of self-sufficiency to resist coercion and persuasion from major powers.

It is unlikely that all 55 AU member states will adopt or consistently practise non-alignment. A likely scenario would be one where some countries are aligned, some are non-aligned, while some oscillate between both positions.

African countries need to achieve two broad imperatives. Firstly, they need to prevent covert or overt alignment from undermining global and regional stability. Secondly, they must be able to pursue parallel ties with all major powers to deepen multilateralism, enhance security, increase economic development, and address existential threats such as climate change.

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<sup>71</sup> Carien du Plessis, "South Africa Defends Planned Military Drills with Russia and China", *Reuters*, January 24, 2023.

Out of the Cold War comes another concept that would be valuable for African countries to incorporate into their foreign policies, in addition to non-alignment. The concept of indivisible security originated in Europe during the Cold War. The phrase ‘indivisibility of security in Europe’ was incorporated in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.<sup>72</sup>

The concept broadly asserts that the security of any state is inseparable from others in its region. The European Security Charter, signed in Istanbul in November 1999, and the Astana Declaration of December 2010 both reiterated the importance of this concept, with the stipulation that states will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of others. But both summits also repeated that no state or group of states can consider any part of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe area as ‘its sphere of influence’.<sup>73</sup>

These guidelines are exactly the common denominators that African countries can agree on to avoid becoming a battleground for great powers. For instance, while Mali and the CAR argue that employing the Wagner Group serves their national security interests, their decisions on regional multilateral security initiatives have a disruptive impact. Furthermore, both countries can also argue that their use of Wagner does not mean alignment with Russia, but it does put their respective regions (West and Central Africa) on the radar of Russia’s Euro-Atlantic rivals. A combination of non-alignment and indivisible security would empower African countries to reverse and manage disruptions. One of the Bandung principles that informed the NAM is abstention from the ‘use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers’.<sup>74</sup> As many African countries of the NAM are preparing for the summit in Uganda later in 2023, they need to be reminded of this commitment to not become proxies for competing great powers.

As many African countries of the NAM are preparing for the summit in Uganda later in 2023, they need to be reminded of this commitment to not become proxies for competing great powers

Without officially re-declaring ‘non-alignment’, the positions of most countries in the world reflects that sentiment. Even countries within the US alliance are willing to make joint declarations in the UN but are unwilling to take unilateral action against Russia.<sup>75</sup>

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72 Polina Ivanova and John Paul Rathbone, “What is ‘Indivisible Security’? The Principle at the Heart of Russia’s Ire Against NATO”, *Financial Times*, February 7, 2022.

73 Ivanova and Rathbone, “Indivisible Security”.

74 South Centre, “Non Aligned Movement and Bandung Principles as Relevant Today As Ever: South Centre” South Centre”, May 1, 2017.

75 Krisztina Than, Gergely Szakacs and Nina Chestney, “Breaking Ranks with EU, Hungary Says Ready to Pay for Russian Gas in Roubles”, *Reuters*, April 6, 2022.

For African countries, a combination of non-alignment and indivisible security is not just a rejection of the East versus West dilemma, it enables African leaders safeguard national and regional interests effectively and sustainably.

## Conclusion

The world is at an inflection point. When future historians look back on the decisions of African states in the period beyond the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the story will not just be about how they responded, but about the broader great-power competition within which it was embedded.

History did not start with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and some African responses shunned the recency bias that led some to assert it was unprovoked.

Conversely, African perspectives also reflect commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The general African position on the UNGA vote to condemn Russia's invasion is a stark reminder that many countries on the continent prioritise the non-aligned stance and seek to safeguard their interests as states routinely do.

The invasion has had a major impact on global food and energy security, but Africa's exposure needs to be nuanced. Wheat accounts for a large percentage of African agricultural imports, but 90% of imports goes to only five countries on the continent. All of Africa suffered from the global spike in wheat prices caused by reduced global wheat supplies. It was more an affordability than an availability issue for the continent but, regardless, the shock caused by the invasion has underscored the need for governments, including in Africa, to design effective, resilient, and contextually relevant food and energy systems. Productive bilateral and multilateral partnerships can enhance efforts in this regard and help the continent meet broader national and regional economic, security, and developmental goals.

With Africa once again at the centre of attention of major powers, the opportunity to improve on existing partnerships cannot be missed. As stated by Sall at UNGA 2022, Africa intends to work with all partners. This means African governments need to walk the diplomatic tightrope and balance principles with interests. Enshrining the principles of non-alignment and indivisible security into their strategies in engaging competing powers will empower African countries to successfully execute this balancing act.

Without understanding the foreign policy attitudes in African capitals, major powers will struggle to achieve their foreign policy objectives with their African partners. Similarly, African leaders should refashion their foreign policies to deal with the shrinking latitude for miscalculations in their geopolitical 'balancing act', as errors will be costly, for their countries and the region. The impact of decisions made today – whether in or targeting Africa – will be far-reaching in the future.

# Author

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SAIIA's occasional papers present topical, incisive analyses, offering a variety of perspectives on key policy issues in Africa and beyond.

## Cover image

A man poses with a bag of wheat flour at a shop in Kigali, Rwanda, on March 23, 2022. The price of wheat flour has risen significantly, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as Rwanda imports 64% of wheat from Russia, according to the Rwandan Prime Minister. The price of a 25-kilogram bag of wheat flour now costs 25,000 Rwandan Franc (about \$24) (Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP via Getty Images)

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