

The GLOCEPS

Commentary Today

Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Pillar

Africa's vote on the Russia-Ukraine conflict: why the fragmentation?

Janet Kiguru



Photo Credit: Loey Felipe UN Photo

Results of the United Nations' vote on Russian aggression are projected in an emergency special session of the U.N. General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York City on March 2.

Africa's voting pattern on the US-led resolution to remove Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on 7th April 2022, following the Russia-Ukraine conflict reflects divisions in the continent. While the African Union charter aspires to have collective action on the global front, 11 states did not vote, 24 abstained, 10 voted to adopt the resolution, and nine voted to support Russia. Interestingly, Kenya, which was vocal and globally recognised for its 2nd March 2022 vote against the Russian invasion, abstained. The vote indicates that the Conceptual Europe's grip on the continent has weakened; the non-aligned movement is resurgent; and the Sino-Russo influence is actively dictating voting patterns at the UN. The voting pattern reflects competing national interests of states; the historical cold war relations with the Sino-Russo communist bloc and; negative reactions to the West's regime of sanctions and pushover tendencies.

National interests versus global 'morality.'

African states are pursuing strategic realism as the West seems to be losing a grip on the international community. Other than threats, sanctions and provision of weapons, the West is limited in its Ukraine engagement. Russia's Ruble has rebounded against the US dollar, which has strengthened Moscow's image internationally. The Kremlin has made it seem possible to circumvent and find alternatives to challenge the dominance of the US dollar. The Chinese Yuan has also started getting traction as a reserve currency, especially among states strongly interconnected with China's economy. This has created uncertainty about the implications of the war on the global financial system. States' abstention is a rational move as they assess great power balance, a decline of America's soft power, and the rise of multipolarity. Thus, the voting pattern reflect African states' pursuit of their strategic interests through partnerships with either Russia, the West or China—which is supporting Russia. States that abstained or are pro-Russia heavily trade with Moscow; others increasingly rely on the Russian defence industry; while some are members of Russian-linked politico-economic blocs. For instance, South Africa, a member of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa [BRICS] states abstained from three anti-Russia resolutions at the UN. More so, states receiving Russia's military and defence support, such as Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, CAR, Madagascar, and Sudan— have been against the US-led motions. This is informed by Moscow's disinterest in 'good governance' and democracy while reinforcing fragile governments in Africa with private militaries.



The blowback on the West's regime of sanctions

The extreme sanctions against Russia have made non-Western states reconsider their support for the brutal West. Sanctioned states such as Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe voted against or abstained from the March 2nd and April 7th motions. Libya—is an exception as the current Government of National Unity is an initiative of the UN and the West. The sanctions have created a cleavage between the West and Africa and validated Africa's voting pattern on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. President Kenyatta, as chairperson of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the East African Community (EAC) summit, has previously cautioned the European Union against unilateral sanctions on African states, arguing that the sanctions impede regional and global cooperation.

The resurgence of the non-aligned movement

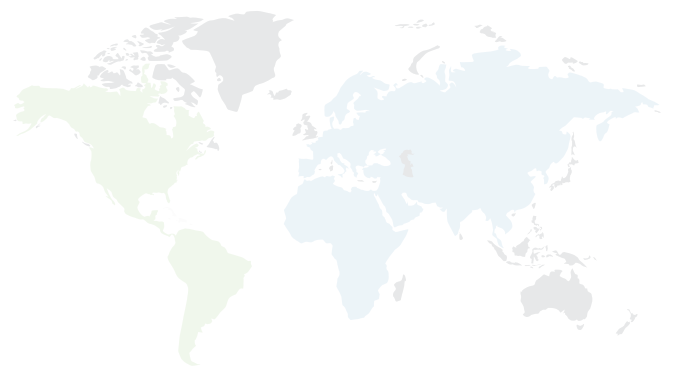
The re-emergence of the cold war rivalries has created a resurgence of the non-alignment movement. The dominance of the West is waning as African states that had aligned with the Eastern Communist bloc—Angola, Benin, Congo, Ethiopia and Mozambique have abstained or voted in favour of Russia. Similarly, states considered pro-West and often double up as regional powers—Kenya, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Egypt, and Ghana equally abstained. There is a growing realisation that the Ukraine-Russia war does not serve the interests of non-Western states, and this has informed their stance on the war. The support for the Sino-Russo-Africa alliance in the UN is fortified as China and Russia have consistently voted against undue interference in African states at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). For instance, Russia and China had reservations on the application of UN Resolution 1973, on authorisation of the use of force to protect civilians, by arguing that non-forceful interventions had not been exhausted before the West-led invasion on Libya. They have often objected prolonged sanctions on Eritrea and fostered relations with regimes under threat

from the West. Russia has made a comeback into Africa with trade relations, scholarships, and private military assistance, which is beginning to manifest in international engagements.



President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia hosted a summit meeting in October in Sochi for Moscow and African countries. Sergei Chirikov. Agence France-Presse.

In conclusion, the Ukraine crisis has amplified the Russo-Africa relations. The cordial politico-economic relations Africa enjoys with Russia has increased Kremlin's geopolitical footprints across the continent. The gains are balancing the West's influence with the possibility of creating divisions within the African Union's aspirations for unified engagement on the global front. It is a manifestation of the fact that non-alignment serves as the best option for African states to avoid being sucked into global conflicts that could derail their focus on domestic and regional challenges.



Janet Kiguru is GLOCEPS Research Fellow for Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Pillar.



THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY

(GLOCEPS)

Research | Knowledge | Influence

Off Kiambu Road, Nairobi Kenya
P.O. Box 27023-00100, Nairobi.
Telephone: 0112401131
Email: info@gloceps.org
Web: www.gloceps.org

