The Geopolitics of the Russian-Ukrainian War: Implications for Africa in International Relations

Joseph Kwabena Manboah-Rockson, Robert Yakubu Adjuik, and Tanko Daniel Dawda

ABSTRACT

On March 2, 2022, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly took a vote to oppose the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. In the end, the African vote was split right down the middle. Of the supposedly strong 54-member African Union (AU) bloc, 28 countries voted for the resolution, 26 others abstained or absented themselves, while Eritrea stood solidly with Russia. The vote outcome defeats the African Union's continental pledge towards the fulfillment of Agenda 2063, which entreats African countries ‘to speak with one voice’ in international relations. Is the African ‘neutrality’ stance an illustration of Russia’s increasing power on the African continent or a reflection of its expanding military and economic power that seeks to chart an independent path to peace and security in international politics?

To explain these phenomena, this paper adopts multiple underlying liberal theories of anarchy and rationality. We argue that the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war is ‘politics of crises. Crises compel leaders to make high-stakes decisions under conditions of threat, uncertainty, and time pressure. Indeed, crises are important because of their human consequences and their political repercussions. As such, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis provides an impetus to unify the literature from various perspectives and to explain to the layman how the war started, who prompted the war, its consequences, as well as implications and ramifications for the African continent and as a central research agenda in international relations.

Keywords: Combined theories, geopolitics, liberal theories, Russian-Ukraine war.

1. Introduction

With trepidation, shock, and horror, the entire world has been following the developments of the war in Ukraine. The foundations of our system of international peace and security have been rocked by Russian shelling and deliberate strikes on civilian targets, as well as by the outflow of people, notably African students studying in Russia and Ukraine, to neighboring nations. In addition, the war has exacerbated an already precarious global economic system that is recovering from the devastation and disruptions brought on by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. Geopolitical rivalries have gradually been reactivated and intensified in the past 20 years, affecting the global system (Levy, 1983). Any historian can confirm that the 21st century is a difficult period, with the phrase “turbulent era” being somewhat of an understatement. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022, marks a turning point and the start of the “new Cold War,” an unfolding drama of growing geopolitical significance (Fabricius, 2022). The war has replaced the upbeat outlook that flourished in the 1990s with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War with gloomy forecasts for the global political economy (Friedman & Martin, 2000). Although the conclusion of the war is still uncertain, it teaches African nations important lessons about emerging patterns and hard realities, which are essential for helping them anticipate what the coming decades may hold. Indeed, the effects of the conflict cannot be characterized as positive, as many countries cannot afford to ignore the pressures...
that it will have on their fragile economies in terms of social, economic, and financial inflation. Everything started on March 2, 2022, when the African Union’s 54 members voted in the UN General Assembly. The vote was crucial for determining Africa’s position on the conflict and the extent to which African delegates at the UN may use their “widow’s might” to persuade Russia and Ukraine to cease their war. But how could a historical legacy call back to a bygone era of solidarity between the Socialist bloc and the Third World countries (in this case, Africa) against an imperialist West, when “multilateralism lies on its death bed,” as echoed by the Kenyan Ambassador to the United Nations (Kimani, 2022)?

Diplomats and international relations experts frequently use international relations theories to guide the course that a government (country) may take regarding an international “political crisis” like the Russian-Ukrainian war. These theories range from liberal, equality-centric strategies to straightforward realist concepts (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 2000). Even though the African Union had earlier made clear that it opposed Russia’s incursion into another country’s “sphere of influence,” individual African nations disagree about who is to blame for the conflict. African nations had previously withheld their positions during major political crises, which was frequently seen as the cause of Africa’s absence on the international stage. However, given that both countries are strategic partners of the African continent in terms of their social and economic ties, the continent can barely stay indifferent to the Russian invasion of its neighbor this time. But in a multipolar world where the rule of law is disregarded and “might” (super-power) alone makes right, the issue that requires an answer is: What would an alliance with Russia or a non-alignment offer to African countries? In this essay, we characterize crises in terms of threat, uncertainty, and time constraint; comprehending them necessitates a comprehensive analysis of how these factors impact political and economic results. Again, what will Africa gain from remaining neutral and merely urging the warring parties to hold talks while the conflict continues and the global economy suffers irreparable harm, based on disparate literature on the causes of war, the responses from the international community, and transformations into the future? And why are so many nations concerned about this particular crisis or war or vulnerable to it? How do local and global institutions change in the wake of such profound shocks brought on by the war? Political scientists are the specialists who should be consulted on these issues because they can ascertain how crises like the Russian-Ukrainian War push leaders to make crucial decisions under threat, uncertainty, and time constraints (Morrow, 1989). In light of the implications of economic globalization and, more recently, the effects of climate change around the world, managing crises like the one that is currently arising is crucial. So, to begin this essay, the next section establishes a framework for theorizing crises in international relations after the introduction. Then, we examine how the politics of crisis came to be overlooked in the field and how the international political economy (IPE) has increasingly focused on explaining routine, ongoing economic relationships while international security places an excessive amount of emphasis on militarized crises at the expense of other types of crises. After that, we review the pertinent literature by contrasting crisis politics with open economy politics, which is the predominant style of theorizing in IPE. This leads us to interaction and decision-making processes that are different from those found in conventional liberal ideas. The ongoing battle is then examined in light of the three main components of crises: threat and uncertainty. This paper comes to a close with a summary of the war’s effects on Africa and its relationships with other continents, followed by a conclusion.

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

War is defined by academics from a variety of fields as widespread, organized violence between political organizations (Malinowski, 1941; Vasquez, 2009). The contention made by von Clausewitz (1976) that war is ultimately political and a “continuation of politics by other methods” is widely accepted today, nonetheless. However, security studies offer a fascinating contrast to International political economy (IPE). Security studies focus on war, or more broadly, armed conflicts, in contrast to IPE, which is predominated by the study of ordinary, ongoing economic interactions. The criteria of a crisis are plainly met by war, which is marked by a serious material threat, a deadline, and uncertainty. Similar to other crises, significant wars like the one between Russia and Ukraine cause political ties to become unstable and frequently result in fundamental changes to both internal and international politics (Levy, 1983). The regular conduct of international relations, such as through diplomacy, alliance, or deterrence, is frequently studied by security academics in the context of gaining or avoiding benefits in military confrontations. The terms “crisis” and “militarized crisis” are frequently used interchangeably by security studies experts despite proposals for a more expansive understanding of security that goes beyond the traditional area (Bauerle Danzman et al., 2017). International security is, in fact, the study of war, extraordinary occurrences like the Russian-Ukrainian War, which has caused a significant economic upheaval, as well as ongoing global food, energy, fertilizer, and
environmental crises, as well as diplomatic squabbles in international politics (Waltz, 1959). Even more
so, open economy politics holds that home institutions and preferences determine national aims at the
international level and that international outcomes are endogenous to domestic processes, despite the
fact that many crises start in other nations and are spread either directly or indirectly by foreign players
(Levy, 1983). International macro processes and foreign players’ decisions are frequently significant
crisis initiators, and crises can significantly alter home institutions and preferences (Bauerle Danzman
et al., 2017). Under these circumstances, it can be very difficult to theorize from the ground up, from
preferences to institutions to international contacts, as crisis bargaining involves the decision-making
of leaders under times of threat, urgency, and ambiguity. In terms of home politics, the question of
whether Africa’s delegation to the UN extended a favorable outcome to stop the war in Ukraine
has always been the center of attention. Or did their “neutrality” posture harm Africa’s honor and
reputation? Did African leaders openly adopt a stance that they later changed their minds about? In
fact, similar concerns are raised when a crisis like the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has large economic
ramifications: can the crisis be resolved? In comparison to past crises like the Russian-American Cuban
missile crisis, was the African response to the situation skillfully handled? In the context of Agenda
2063, “the Africa we desire,” were the African leaders’ public pronouncements always consistent with
the African Union’s call for continental unity?

2.1. What Caused the Russian-Ukrainian War?

When examining a contemporary geopolitical issue like the ongoing war, there is a wealth of
historical material regarding the Cold War, which ended in 1989. Mikhail Gorbachev, the late former
Soviet leader who passed away in August of 2022, made it clear that the Cold War was a struggle
between two philosophies (Communist and Capitalist) that were vying for control in the world.
However, the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 made it easier to establish new independent governments
that were now independent of their former colonial masters and of American (capitalist) or Soviet
(communist) philosophies (Averre & Wolczuk, 2016). Recently, however, “renewed” geopolitical
conflicts have emerged as a result of the Cold War’s legacy in the modern world. This is especially
clear when examining the present conflict between Russia and Ukraine, where historical and cultural
links, as well as disagreements over natural resources that date back to the Cold War, have an impact
on the geopolitics of the two countries. Prior to this expanded battle, this is what ultimately caused
the annexation of Crimea, a region that was previously under Ukrainian control. Furthermore, since
the commencement of this war, pundits have been attempting to make sense of the world, and the end
of the Cold War in 1991 has prompted discussion in this regard. Fukuyama (1992) made definitive
claims that the conclusion of the Cold War in 1989 and the years that followed would mark the “end
of history” by drawing on the writings of Karl Marx. According to Fukuyama (1992), the collapse
of communism and the Soviet Union at that time may have meant that there was no longer any
opposition to capitalism and liberal democracy, ushering in the end of history. On the other hand,
we have also seen new meanings being attached to things like geography, power, and the global order
(Barber, 1996). Consequently, this sparked a transition in geopolitics from the imagined geopolitics
of territorial presence and spatial bloc to geoconomics, where countries were now contending spatially
and politically for economic dominance and resources (Vihma, 2018). Therefore, while examining
the Ukrainian situation where Russia has illegally (based on international law) invaded Ukraine, the
struggle for economic dominance and resources is particularly clear. The main motivation behind
Russia’s attack on Ukraine is its rising animosity over Ukraine’s economic and military ties to NATO,
which encroach on its (the former Soviet Union’s) “sphere of influence.” Leaders in Russia claim that
NATO and the United States are deliberately breaking commitments they made in the early 1990s
not to broaden their alliances to include nations that were once part of the Soviet Union, such as
Ukraine. The inclusion of former frontline states bordering Russia in NATO’s recent enlargement
is seen by Russia as a humiliating imposition over which it has no control but must only observe.
Most significantly, NATO and its allies think that Russia is concerned that Ukraine’s desire to adopt
“Western-style democracy” may ultimately undermine Russia’s autocratic government and maybe put
an end to Ukraine’s prospects of ever falling into Russia’s sphere of influence (Vihma, 2018).

3. Review of Relevant Literature

As with any big crisis, the “devil is in the details” when it comes to the conflict between Russia and
Ukraine. There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks where decades take place, as
Lenin once stated in his explanation of the world (Lenin, 1939). To say that “nothing happened” in the
decades that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall, even if it signaled the end of the Cold War, until
the start of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 may be an exaggeration. However, it seems
like ages have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which magnifies decades
of history into a(an) “inflection point” (credit went to US President Joe Biden on March 25, 2022), when he visited US troops in Poland. When reading the literature on conflicts and “crises” in this area, the Second World War immediately comes to mind as a historical point of comparison and support for Ukraine, rejecting Russia’s demands that the West reassess earlier agreements and oppose NATO’s eastward expansion. By claiming that “dictators who invade their neighbors cannot be trusted and must be vigorously opposed for the protection of the whole globe,” the West sought sympathy to advance their geopolitical interests. But has America forgotten the similarly justified “forceful” invasions of Grenada (1983), Vietnam (1965–1968), Cuba (in the “Bay of Pigs”), Panama (1989–1990), and Iraq (2003)? Therefore, NATO’s seeming unity and prompt action in supporting Ukraine with significant grants, donations, and shipments of armaments in the face of the most extreme sanctions ever imposed on a foe (Russia) in history is hypocritical (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 2000).

The Cold War, when the Soviet Union supported the liberation war against (western) imperial powers, serves as the historical reference point for Africa’s participation. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Africa resembles the Cold War more than World War II since it pits Russia against “the West” (the United States and its NATO allies) (Democrats vs. Dictators). Africa may have contributed very little, if anything at all, to the conflict in Ukraine, but the continent is nonetheless experiencing its devastating political and economic effects, much like the effects of “climate change,” which is wreaking havoc around the world through torrential rains and devastation. In fact, the ongoing conflict has led to spikes in food prices, shortages of fuel, cooking oil, and fertilizers, and significant inflationary pressures on African economies. More specifically, because Africa is a net importer of practically everything utilized in the developing world, rising global inflationary pressures have an impact there as well. For instance, Somalia, one of the most impoverished nations in Africa, imports all of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine since it has no other options at this time. Likewise, nations in the Middle East, South America, Asia, and South East Asia that depend on supplies of wheat, oil, and fertilizers from Ukraine and Russia may start to experience supply disruptions and security risks.

3.1. Reviewing the Basic Puzzle of War

Why governments allow war to occur is the first and most fundamental conundrum of crises. Crises have tremendous costs and minimal advantages for political leaders. Governments typically fail to put into place cost-effective preventative measures that may have avoided or lessened a disaster, according to retrospective reports (Averre, 2009). The inefficiency of the war dilemma, which asks why leaders go to war when diplomacy may accomplish the same goal without the expense of fighting, has generated a significant amount of research in the field of international security (Averre, 2009). The second deals with the “crisis inefficiency” conundrum: why do governments allow expensive crises to occur rather than taking suitable preventive action? Here, the exogenous and endogenous geopolitical elements that contributed to the Russia-Ukrainian conflict can be roughly distinguished. In essence, President Putin wants the “West” to understand that he will not tolerate any intrusions into his “sphere of influence” in light of his July 2021 publication of an article outlining his nation’s relationship with Ukraine to the globe. He claimed in that piece that the two nations “shared the same historical and spiritual space,” making them inseparable, similar to how conjoined twins are described (Fabricius, 2022). And when the “West” believed President Putin was “joking” them, he gathered thousands of soldiers at his border with Belarus and later with Ukraine under the pretense of conducting military drills. Then, on February 22, after all attempts at persuasion failed due to Ukraine’s adamant refusal to change its decision to join NATO at any time or location, Russia started a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Although Russia’s main goal was to annex Kyiv, it had made advances in the south (Crimea), the east (Russia), and the north (Belarus) with the intention of annexing important Ukrainian cities. Putin claims he wants to “de-Nazify” and “de-militarize” Ukraine in order to stop it from allying with the “West” or joining NATO.

However, from a geopolitical perspective, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine poses a threat to international security and, in particular, Africa’s social, economic, and political stability because both nations are vital to the continent. Due to the war, food costs have increased tenfold and are at an all-time high amid a food shortage, particularly in nations that depend on supplies from Russia and Ukraine. The African Union has been quick to express severe concern about the very terrible and hazardous situation caused by the war on the pan-African front through the voice of its current chairperson, Macky Sall, the President of Senegal. Through the African Union, African nations have urged Russia to uphold the national sovereignty of Ukraine, its territorial integrity, and international law. There have been many calls from various angles, the first being the African nations, who formally support a truss and are on the side of peace. The South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, even penned a letter to express his anger at the crisis in which he called for its swift settlement through negotiation and urged the warring sides to put down their weapons and return to the negotiating table in order for peace to triumph. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Gutiérrez, warned of the consequences of Russia’s war in Ukraine and how it might lead to a cyclone of famine in many nations...
on Monday, March 14, 2022. He specifically mentioned Africa and the rest of the world. Most nations around the Mediterranean and the rest of the continent are getting ready for a significant shock to their economies since they are so dependent on imports of wheat and other critical goods. In fact, the future seems gloomy for African nations in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine. The majority of Africa will be severely impacted by the halt of exports of grains, particularly wheat and other agricultural inputs, because the continent already faces a structural food crisis as a result of climate disruptions and ongoing wars in various forms. Additionally, there is no doubt that the conflict in Ukraine has had a catastrophic impact on the African economy, as rising prices for commodities like gas and oil are starting to “arrest” the region’s frail economies. In an era of globalization, any war can have serious effects beyond the battlefield in today’s linked world; hence, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will have an impact on Africa’s economies and politics. Therefore, the question is: Will the world disregard the concepts of self-determination and non-interference during the current crisis? If so, given Russia’s current presence in Africa, does Africa run the risk of once again serving as a battlefield for “great power rivalry”? Or will history repeat itself, and the world reverts to the Cold War era?

3.2. Towards an Analysis

International political economy (IPE) and security are two recent divisions of the study of international relations (IR), and crises that affect economic activity fall under the purview of IPE. IPE has largely shifted in recent years to routine, ongoing economic relationships in areas like trade, investment, and foreign aid. This shift is largely attributable to the fact that IPE was developed in response to the global turmoil of the 1970s when considerable attention was paid to the causes and effects of economic and energy shocks (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). Security studies, as opposed to IPE, concentrate on “war” or, more broadly, “militarized conflict.” The present Russian-Ukrainian war, which is marked by a large material danger, time constraints, and uncertainty, so fits the description of a military “crisis.” Similar to earlier crises, this one threatens a precarious political alliance between two nations, which fundamentally alters both internal and global politics (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020). In fact, security academics gain or present advantages in military conflicts in order to examine the normal conduct of IR, such as diplomacy, alliances, or deterrence (Morrow, 1989). The underlying premise is that during times of “crisis,” leaders around the world—and particularly in Africa—must make crucial decisions affecting core national interests. This assumption is known as the “crisis decision-making model.”

3.3. Combining Theories to Explain the Russian-Ukrainian War

The three most well-known theories of international relations are realism, liberalism, and constructivism, but they are by no means the only or the most complete. Theories provide extra information about why events are unfolding the way they are, similar to the security studies of crises discussed above. For instance, realism frequently treats states as lone, logical actors—as if the state were a ‘single creature,’ consistently acting in its own best interest. Constructivism can be a little mushy, but certain straightforward interpretations of it are quite intriguing and helpful in understanding why governments act the way they do. The assumption that international relations (IR) must be practiced as if one were always under assault isn’t always indicative of reality. Liberalism indicates that states can coexist peacefully and even that states aren’t always on the verge of conflict. But Graham Allison was able to explain to the world why states act in the ways they do by combining the various theories to analyze “The Cuban Missile Crisis, Essence of Decision, 1971,” with reference to the 1963 Cuban missile crisis, in which the US and the Soviet Union almost fought over the Soviet efforts to place nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. Allison was able to describe how the two sides came to a compromise and toned down their rhetoric about who would invade whom at the end of the narrative. As Allison determined at the end of the study, the Soviet Union withdrew its missiles from Cuba, while the United States withdrew its missiles from Turkey, which for the United States was akin to Cuba in that it was on the Soviets’ doorstep and pledged not to invade Cuba. Therefore, a realist approach suggests that states should and do look out first for their own interests. Since Russia cannot report Ukraine to the police to be arrested, secure a court order from an international or world court, or stop them from taking steps to join the NATO Alliance, Russia did the needful by invading Ukraine to further its own interest. This analysis of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war follows this logic. The question, therefore, is: can the United Nations learn from their lack of action or the necessary teeth-to-bite and probably change the order at the Security Council? A constructivist perspective, on the other hand, can also explain why things (events-from the beginning through the conflict) transpired the way they did. Constructivism focuses on the theory of the social construction of reality in part because it explains more of the reasons behind why events take place the way they do. Less is said about what we should do about it, though. Last but not least, liberal institutionalism has some faith in the power of international institutions to persuade Russia and Ukraine to cooperate rather than wage war. However, utilizing the United Nations, NATO, the African Union (AU), or other interstate bodies as means of informing the globe that a war was
imminent would not be lucrative for any one bloc of countries, given the severe repercussions it would have on all of the world’s nations. It may perhaps result in an international stalemate or a pile of countries’ support ‘for’ and ‘against’ the war effort. So, what do specialists have to say about the awful events that happened in Ukraine?

4. An Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War in IR

At the broadest level, all realism theories imagine a world in which there is no institution or agency that can shield states from one another and where states constantly worry about potential threats from hazardous aggressors. States, especially large powers like the United States, Russia, China, and others, worry a lot about their security and constantly vie for dominance as a result of the lack of this concept of a “global police.” With such anxieties, even a small danger or provocation can cause such huge forces to act horribly improperly. For realists, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine serves as a reminder that powerful nations can behave badly when they perceive their fundamental security interests are at risk. The second point is that states are, and will always be, an embodiment of domestic and transnational society, which provide incentives for economic, social, and cultural interaction across borders. This is something that liberal international relations theory, which is the set of substantive social purposes that drives foreign policy, reminds us of. State preferences, however, offer governments a deeper interest in the global problems they face. State preferences vary widely over “space and time,” just as the domestic and international social framework in which states are embedded does. States wouldn’t have any good reason to participate in international politics without such social issues that cut across national boundaries; instead, they would invest their resources in an autarkic existence. However, governments must have sufficiently strong state preferences in order to drive conflict, collaboration, or any other expensive foreign policy action. The ensuing Ukrainian crisis brought on by globalization is the root cause of state action in international politics. The fundamental idea of the liberal theory of international relations is presented here in a variety of colloquial expressions: What is Russia trying to accomplish by hitting its neighbor so hard? Thus, according to liberal theories of international relations, Vladimir Putin’s actions can be divided into two or more categories: with the attack on Ukraine, Putin may be trying to renegotiate the end of the Cold War by expanding and reestablishing Russia’s sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, while the ‘West’ continue to question or guess the actions of President Putin and the probability of his next moves in the war. According to a second argument, Putin’s aggression was motivated by a desire to distract attention from internal problems and strengthen domestic support for his rule. But regardless of our inclinations, we base our evaluation of the war’s root causes purely on the effects it might have on African nations that are caught in the crossfire.

4.1. What is the Material Threat of the War to Africa?

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022, will have far-reaching effects on the African continent and is provoking conflicting opinions among IR specialists. While the majority of African nations have chosen to abstain from taking sides in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, experts claim that because of the continent’s divided vote in the General Assembly to punish Russia, blocs have formed on the continent, with many nations secretly siding with the opposing sides. In total, 141 votes were cast in favor of the resolution, five against it, and 35 were absent. However, what necessitates this paper is the alarmingly high and disproportionately large number of African nations that did not endorse the decision. The nostalgia South Africa and several other Southern African states displayed was an earlier appreciation of the Soviet Union’s support of their liberation struggles during the apartheid era in Southern Africa and during the Cold War, according to an immediate reaction and comments by international relations experts. Such remarks, however, are merely incidental and do not address the message of “unity of purpose” that their vote conveys to the outside world. According to other experts, African States were hesitant to become involved in an economy and politics that seemed to prioritize distributive conflict and short time horizons as a barrier to crisis resolution. The correct question, however, is how swiftly and successfully these global powers will put an end to the ongoing conflict. This is possibly the clearest distinction between crises and important issues in the global political economy, like trade, investment, and aid, where there is a normative argument and an assumption of the desirableness of the economic connection. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis is a dreadful situation, to put it simply. However, a crisis can only be good once it has ended amicably. What, however, hinders governments from swiftly resolving crises once they arise?

4.2. A Focus on the ‘Politics of Crisis’

Major conflicts, like other “crises,” disturb the status quo of political relations and frequently result in significant change. More specifically, crises like energy and environmental shocks, starvation,
financial panics, increases in the price of oil and gas, and food crises have substantial economic and financial repercussions for nations all over the world. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is such a striking example that it puts current “crisis politics” at the forefront of the study of international relations. The links between African nations and the warring eastern European states will have a wide range of effects on the continent. Although all three of these factors are closely related, these can be divided into three primary groups: economic, citizen vulnerability, and country prestige. Indeed, imports, which pose a danger to the economies of countries in Africa, are a major factor in the economic effects of the war on that continent. Africans and students caught up in the conflict who had to flee either Russian or Ukrainian colleges are already feeling the immediate effects when it comes to weaker citizens. Because Ukraine and Russia are both significant exporters of oil, wheat, and corn to Africa, this will have a longer-lasting effect on those living there, who will see an increase in food insecurity. More specifically, if the conflict is not settled right away, South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt—which are economies that are the most developed on the continent—might be the most impacted by the prolonged crisis. Even if Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa have declared their positions to be “neutral,” this represents a setback for Russia, which views South Africa in particular as a crucial friend in Africa. Due to their shared membership in the BRICS organization, which unites the world's emerging nations, Russia and South Africa enjoy close economic connections. But when the world observes in shock as the Ukraine war develops, the proverb “with every crisis there is an opportunity” comes to mind. It may be a good idea for South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria (if not all the countries) to develop new political and economic policies that could help them take advantage of the change in global trade by producing their own food within their borders as Africa gets ready for the inevitable political and economic fallout.

4.3. The War’s Impact on Africa

Russia’s military engagement in the ongoing conflict has sparked alarm amid concerns that the conflict’s escalation could seriously threaten the stability of the world’s food supply. We wholeheartedly concur with this specific worry about the effects of a rise in the price of grains and oilseeds around the world. The increase in food costs worldwide from COVID-19 and throughout 2020 is being driven by a number of factors. In fact, the geopolitical spotlight is now on fertilizers, sunflower oil, wheat, and other crops as a result of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. African leaders need to pay notice and speak out instead of maintaining their neutral attitude because both nations are significant players in the world’s agricultural industry. Significant agricultural trade exists between the continent, Russia, and Ukraine. Egypt, Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Kenya, and South Africa imported agricultural goods from Russia worth $4 billion in 2020. Additionally, several areas of the African continent are experiencing drought difficulties. However, the good diplomatic effort of Turkey and its role as a superintendent to restart supplies of crucial commodities from the troubled port of Crimea to Africa and the rest of the world will indeed reduce the widespread worry about rising food costs and inflation. In fact, Ukraine and Russia are significant players in the global commodities market. While Russia provides roughly 10% of the world’s wheat, Ukraine contributes 4%, with exports topping $2.9 billion in 2020. In fact, the invasion had a negative impact on African households, the agricultural industry, and food security because of Africa’s excessive reliance on Russian and Ukrainian wheat imports, which account for about 30% of the world’s wheat exports. Even though Turkey’s recent action has made it possible for food and other exports from Ukraine to the rest of the globe via Turkey to resume. However, in a situation like this, no one can predict when more clashes will be able to stop such shipments of urgently required logistics in Africa and elsewhere.

4.4. The War’s Global Impact on African Countries

In the face of a potentially catastrophic catastrophe, people may be more concerned about their own lives than with the distribution of economic benefits. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine is unequivocal proof that it is aiming to undermine the security order in Europe and safeguard its borders because it has come to the realization that Ukraine is committed to redrawing Europe’s map once more by moving Ukraine from the “east” to the “west.” And even though the post-Cold War era has ended, business with Russia won’t resume as usual for a very long time, and as a result, Europe finds itself between geopolitical epochs. Russia is determined to undermine democratic societies through the invasion. Second, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia heralds the start of an unstable and disruptive period for Africa’s relations with the rest of the world. The Soviet succession is still undetermined since history did not finish with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 or the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, and because the African continent as a whole continues to be turbulent, dynamic, and politically, economically, and socially unstable. Thirdly, the Global Goal 2 of the United Nations, which aims to end world hunger, is directly impacted by the war’s effects on Africa. The inability to obtain grains, along with rising food and gasoline prices, have the potential to
make life even more difficult for Africans. Not to mention that food costs worldwide have already risen to their highest levels since 2011 (African Union Commission, 2021). We are currently waiting to see how the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Union Development Agency-NPAD (AU-D-NPAD) will cooperate with African nations to develop a shared African position prior to the food systems Summit in accordance with the African Union’s Agenda 2063—“the Africa we want” and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A synthesis and united perspective on how to reform Africa’s food systems over the coming ten years may be found in the African common position. The main focus of this promise is resilience in the face of rising vulnerability and shocks, like the present war in Ukraine. Africa’s socioeconomic development will be aided by rapid increases in agricultural and food productivity and production. It has been emphasized! Africa must also see the current geopolitical crisis as a chance to lessen its dependency on food imports from outside the continent, even though the socioeconomic repercussions are already significant and the situation is still quite unpredictable. More specifically, African nations must make the most of their 60% global share of arable land in order to produce more food for both domestic consumption and sale to other countries. As a result, fewer individuals would experience food and nutrition insecurity as a result of outside shocks like the conflict in Ukraine. Another issue facing Africa is that the conflict in Ukraine has diverted political focus away from its ‘critical issues’ and made it more difficult for the UN to lead global efforts to bring about peace on behalf of the “world’s vulnerable,” who are primarily African nations. As a result, the African Union must start making diplomatic efforts to break the deadlock between Russia and, specifically, NATO countries led by the United States of America. Since the Russian Wagner Group is “neck-deep” in maintaining peace for a number of African inter-rivalries of various proportions, the lack of international attention puts more African countries at risk of fighting it out themselves in intra-state conflicts from the horn of Africa through the DRC Congo.

4.5. The Geopolitical Time Pressure of the East-West Conundrum

The actions or inactions of today will determine whether or not Africa achieves the objective of eradicating hunger and food insecurity in the following forty years, as outlined in Agenda 2063. This is due to the fact that existential threats to the country heighten the stakes and emphasize the importance of leaders in crisis management. The Malabo Declaration was adopted by African Union member states in 2014, demonstrating that Africa was aware of the precise steps needed to address its food insecurity issues. However, the Russian-Ukrainian issue is yet another depressing African reality that goes beyond the continent’s struggle for food security because of the flagrant lack of leadership cohesion and boldness to put pressure on the UN and, specifically, NATO to terminate the war immediately. Only 4 of the 49 African nations are expected to meet the set goals by 2025, according to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program’s (CAADP) second biannual evaluation, which monitors the fulfillment of the Malabo Declaration’s promises (African Union Commission, 2021). The confrontation between Russia and Ukraine makes it much less likely that the aforementioned figures will be reached. Africa is forced to rely on “ad hoc” mechanisms like impromptu working groups and emergency directives because of the unpredictability and time restrictions associated with crises, which allow for quick decision-making and bypass limitations from established institutions. Therefore, the current crises should increase African leaders’ influence over policy results while decreasing the importance of established institutions. Forums that want to hasten the quest for food security need to do more than just come up with innovative or ambitious ideas; they need to implore leaders to prioritize investing in agriculture, even during hard times, and stress the importance of government leadership in expanding the sector. Most importantly, they need to adopt a justice lens to view Africa’s food system. The other major danger to Africa’s food security is climate change, which must be actively addressed in addition to direct investments in the food system.

4.6. Opportunities from the War in Ukraine

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the globe has seen a serious disorder in the global order, as in recent months. A “military and political partnership” has been put to the test during the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with the 54-country bloc made up of African nations having a considerable impact on the outcome of the vote. On February 27, 2022, the UN General Assembly brought up a non-binding resolution denouncing Russia’s intention to make its nuclear forces more ready at its first urgent session in forty years. The UN General Assembly vote revealed the African bloc’s ‘interest-driven’ motivation. Most of the 27 African nations that supported the resolution were “democracies affiliated with the West.” Benin, Botswana, Cabo (Cape Verde), Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Estwani (Lesotho), Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and Zambia were among them. Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Libya, Chad, Egypt, Mauritania, Rwanda, and Somalia are among the “hybrid and non-democratic countries”; they share one trait in common with one another: they
are all close allies of the West, sharing bases and participating in joint military operations against jihadists in Africa. In contrast, the majority of the 17 African nations who voted against the resolution or abstained, like Eritrea, are “authoritarian or hybrid regimes.” Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe were among them. Since the Cold War, some of these nations have maintained strong military and ideological relations with Russia. Algeria, Angola, the Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Mali, and the Central African Republic are on this list. Therefore, if African nations truly intend to respect sovereign rights and create a more equitable international order, they must engage rather than abstain. Indeed, they must be more upfront with Western nations about their costs; “sitting on the fence” as they are doing at the moment is perilous. African nations run the danger of appearing weak and unimportant in international issues by remaining “neutral.” A united, self-assured, assertive, and confident Africa would urge the belligerents to put a stop to their hostilities and bring peace to Europe.

Despite the fact that African nations may be regarded as less powerful, they are significant buyers of goods and services from the powerful powers, including armaments. In the decades that followed, Africa rose to prominence on the global stage from a less resourceful continent that was primarily under colonial administration in the 1940s. Africa continues to struggle through guerrilla wars, insurgencies, and intra-state conflicts, but it is making progress toward its short-term socioeconomic and political development goals every day. Africa has abundant natural and human resources, as well as tremendous unrealized economic and social potential. Africans have progressively pursued a transformational agenda under the leadership of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), with the goal of achieving shared prosperity, unity, and integration before 2063. First, the United African viewpoint on the post-2015 development agenda is reflected in the global 2030 agenda’s call for sustainable development and its sustainable development goals. This suggests setting up a comprehensive global agenda focusing on equitable growth, fundamental economic reform, and long-lasting peace and security. Agenda 2063, a broad continental framework that strives to realize the African Union’s vision of an “integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its own population and representing a dynamic force in the world arena,” has also been accepted by the AU (African Union Commission, 2021). In other words, the AU seeks to present the “Africa we want” to Africans. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict thus poses challenges and difficulties for the African Union and its members because the accomplishment of these two ambitious goals necessitates not only a new strategy for the continent’s own development and for peacekeeping and security operations but also a rethinking of its approach to international relations and partnership.

4.7. What is Africa’s Way Forward?

For Africa, the Cold War era, when the Soviet Union supported the liberation movement against (western) imperial powers, serves as the historical reference point for this particular dilemma. This conflict also serves as a reminder to Africans of the Cold War, a time of great international crisis during which Russia was ideologically opposed to the “West,” democracy was pitted against authoritarianism, and “non-alignment” served as a front for Africans and other emerging nations (Keohane, 2009). The consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are far-reaching and difficult for Africa to comprehend. In terms of international diplomacy, democracy, sovereignty, freedom, and equality are at a crossroads. Economic success and how a sovereign nation like Ukraine is portrayed in international politics due to “fault lines” between the “East and West” are other stark realities (Levy, 2008). Most international relations specialists believe that if NATO, led by the United States, had heeded the warnings that its threatened to attack Ukraine if Ukraine did not give up its drive to join NATO? The Russian-Ukrainian conflict does not have any external force that might credibly threaten to punish future violators of any agreement that may be breached to end the war, unlike civil wars, when peace agreements can occasionally be ensured by interested outsiders. Any agreement to terminate the war must satisfy the parties to the point where they are not secretly hoping to change it or quit it as soon as the situation is more favorable, barring an unconditional surrender. Unfortunately, a negotiated peace in this war seems a long way off as Russia is deliberately taking its time to exhaust Ukraine.

4.8. The ‘What Ifs’ of the Ongoing War

What are the strategic and geopolitical repercussions if Russia wins this ongoing conflict against Ukraine? However, I do not see a defeat with NATO’s involvement; rather, I see a “deflection” and a de-escalation of the fight. Since Russian forces have only deployed as far as Ukraine’s eastern border, which is several hundred miles from Poland and other NATO countries to Ukraine’s West, Russia
would have preferred that it had adopted the following strategic measures: wage new front lines of conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe. If Russia is successful in its targeted objectives, it will wish to post forces in bases in western Ukraine and Belarus, which will inadvertantly turn into Russian territory, including missile, air, and ground units. The military of Russia, however, cannot position itself along Poland’s whole 650-mile eastern border, as well as along the eastern borders of Slovakia and Hungary, as well as along the northern border of eastern Romania, thanks to new applications like Sweden and Finland. When Russian forces are able to establish a land bridge from Crimea to Moldova’s breakaway province of Transnistria, Moldova will get engaged because it won’t wait to be brought under Russian rule. As a foreign policy specialist foresees, Russia without Ukraine is, in the words of former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, “Upper Volta with missiles” (Fearon, 1995). In fact, going forward, Russia will be a different strategic beast without Ukraine. The geography of Europe has seen many changes throughout the years as a result of geopolitical battles and skirmishes like this one; so let’s be clear that this prediction won’t be the first or the last. Let’s not forget that the fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the conclusion of the Cold War at the end of 1989–1991 led to the Europe of today. The collapse most likely mirrored the growth of American power from that point on till the present (Lake, 2009). It may be Russia’s turn this time, which will likely result in a new configuration of Europe involving China in East Asia and the Western Pacific. This could then bring an end to the current order and usher in a new era of global disorder, the emergence of a new Cold War between the “East” and the “West,” and the “dire straits” of Africa (Vihma & Wigell, 2016).

5. Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022, will be remembered as a historical event. First and foremost, historians have largely refuted liberal views that claim that when the Cold War ended in 1989 and the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, war in Europe was no longer “thinkable.” Before the invasion, theories suggested that the “zone of peace” would continue to grow as NATO expanded eastward. However, many who bought into and promoted the “liberal tale” now want to hold President Putin accountable for Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, which broke international law. Realism may be the best guide to the serious crisis we are currently experiencing, but it rarely gives us everything we need to know. This is in contrast to our past attempts to theorize this topic utilizing a combination of ideas. Realists, to their credit, underplay the influence of norms as powerful restraints on the actions of great powers, yet norms are important in explaining how the world reacted to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Waltz, 1979). For instance, nothing prevents a nation from going against international standards, yet blatant infractions will always affect how other nations view that nation’s objectives. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine serves as an example of the realist concept of a “security dilemma.” This is due to the fact that measures taken by one state to increase its security frequently result in weaker security for other states, especially if those governments have been warned. States within Russia’s “sphere of influence” have been warned that Russia won’t be pleased if they apply for NATO membership or take any other steps to ally with the “West.” However, Ukraine broke this covenant, which sparked the war. Furthermore, realism is a direct method of approaching IR. All nations, including the African nations, are said to be working to expand their own influence. Therefore, those nations that are able to accumulate power in the most effective way will prosper since they are able to easily surpass the accomplishments of weaker countries. Russia’s invasion is primarily motivated by the need for self-preservation, and maintaining political, economic, and social dominance should always be a priority for any nation in international relations. We are concerned about how this unnecessary war will affect African nations and how far they will need to advance to prevent an economic collapse amid inflationary pressures on their economies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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