

# The Geopolitical and Geo-Economic Implications of the Ukraine War on Africa: Policy Dilemmas?

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To use a caveat first, when we talk about Africa, it's not about a country. Africa is a coming together of fifty-five countries with seventeen percent of the world population: more than one billion people. Although this large population constitutes only three percent of the global economy, its population growth and the sheer size of the youthful population in Africa presents many opportunities, and it attracts significant interest. Still, in terms of its place in the current global power (economy, military, technology, demography and diplomacy), it remains very limited.

As it did elsewhere, the war in Ukraine affects Africa. The impact of the war has revealed a complex and mutually reinforcing four-way interplay between supply and transportation chains, food security, water security, and energy security on the African continent. The war has also delayed the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance programs in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, exacerbating the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the drought and wars that have destroyed communities' assets and family livelihoods, and the ongoing armed conflicts that deployed starvation as weapons of war causing severe humanitarian crises. The geopolitics of the war and climate change reinforce all these insecurities.

In Africa, the war's direct impact is felt in food security (increased costs and disruption of the grain and fertilizer supply chain) and energy security (increase in price and market opportunities for gas and fuel). Given that more than one-third of the total global production of grain comes from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, the war and ensuing sanctions have severely impacted the provision of humanitarian aid to regions affected by conflicts or disasters.

My presentation will focus mainly on the impact of the Ukraine War--or, the Russian invasion of Ukraine--on the economy, especially as it relates to food security, geopolitics and multilateralism, and war and conflicts in Africa.

Africa has a significant population dependent on rainfed farming, affected by droughts, flooding, and food shortage (that often escalates to famine, particularly in war situations) in general. Food security also relates to a large extent to water security (rain and irrigation), which is connected to climate change. According to Statista, wheat, fertilizer, and oil supplies have been disrupted, and prices have increased by

more than 60%, 230%, and 29%, respectively. The 127.6% gas price increase in Europe, and Europe's plan to diversify its gas sources, may offer new opportunities for African gas producers. On the other hand, there are fears that countries with bread subsidies, such as Sudan and Egypt, may face "bread riots," increasing chances of instability. The devastating genocidal war on Tigray and volatility in Ethiopia have destroyed the capacity of the Ethiopian state to respond to climate change disasters such as drought. Furthermore, the global increase in grain, fertilizer, and oil prices puts the livelihoods of Africans in many countries under additional strain.

Climate change in the form of unpredictable weather conditions and frequent droughts or heavy floods is fueling water insecurity, food insecurity and, in some cases, energy insecurity. As a result, water disputes among riparian states are rising, as witnessed in the dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Competition over natural resources, particularly water and land, exacerbates violence that extends to pastoralist communities and farmers.

The confluence of these man-made and natural crises aggravates the long-standing fragility of African states. Geopolitical competition places an immense strain on local and international responses to conflicts and disasters. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has deflected and shifted the international community's resources, leadership, and attention away from equally (if not more) devastating crises in Africa. The war in Ukraine has resulted in horrendous consequences; yet, Africa's conflicts, specifically in Tigray and Sudan, seem to be overshadowed by the Ukraine war when comparing the human toll and the differential attention and resources they have received. The death toll in Tigray is staggering, with estimates varying widely, from 600,000 to 1 million. Data from Uppsala University in 2021 indicates more than 100,000 deaths, with total fatality estimates suggesting a range between 50,000 and 500,000. The conflicts in Tigray and Ukraine have rendered 2022 the deadliest year since the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Over 5 million people have been besieged and deliberately subjected to starvation as a weapon of war. Tens of thousands have been sexually assaulted, and the number of displaced persons exceeds 2 million.

Africa has been a battleground where global powers and strategic interests are at play, primarily competition of great powers, but also middle powers from the Middle East expanding their influence and business, affecting Africa. The competition between great powers, with the US and its Western allies on the one hand and Russia and China on the other, extends to various parts of the African continent. The Ukraine war is also increasingly affecting the geopolitical importance of Africa in the global game of great powers and regional players, particularly in the Sahel region, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. Russia has increased its military, diplomatic, and other engagements with a number of African governments, including Eritrea, Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic. At the same time, the US and its allies in the West are fortifying their relations with many other governments, including authoritarian

regimes accused of ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes as well as genocide such as those taking place in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia in Ethiopia.

The Ukraine war also has an impact on wars and conflicts in Africa, including the world's deadliest: Ethiopia's war on Tigray, the conflict in DRC, and coups and misgoverned transitions in the Sahel, Central African Republic, and the Horn of Africa . Russia has deployed its formal diplomatic and military capability and, informally, the Wagner Group (now Expeditionary Corps) to act on its behalf in these countries. The Western world is also trying to play, so it, too, proxies in Africa. The impact of all of this on multilateral organizations and multilateralism in general is illustrated by the lack of decisive intervention legally permitted and required under the UN Charter and other instruments. Paralysis in multilateralism is obvious also in the UN Security Council. Russia and China defended autocratic governments, such as those in Ethiopia, by threatening the use of a veto if the African group in the Security Council issued statements on the war in Ethiopia. Africa's voting behavior in the UN General Assembly on the issue of the Ukraine war also demonstrates the ambivalence or deliberate repositioning of African countries in the midst of these geopolitical dynamics.