

The African Question in Global Politics and the Diplomatic Trajectories of the Russian-Ukrainian War: Neutrality or Graveyard Diplomacy?

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Although African nations voted overwhelmingly against the Russian invasion of Ukraine during the February 28, 2022 United Nations General Assembly, the euphoria having evaporated, African nations appear to have reclined to a state of diplomatic despair. This is evident from the striking silence of the Continent on the plethora of sanctions slammed against the Russian Federation by the European nations and their American-led allies—Canada, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. There is no doubt that the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises a number of teething questions within the perimeter of Africa's strategic importance in Global politics. First, from what strategic perimeter can one then view the present paradoxical innocuous position of the Continent on the Russian-Ukrainian war? Second, could the Continent be playing a strategy of safe-neutrality or a political stratagem of retributive silence better described as grave-yard silence? The present paper will apply all extant and past historical evidence to address the above budding questions.

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INTRODUCTION

To historians of Slavic history the name “Vladimir”—Ukrainian’s “Volodymyr” strikes a mythical political obsession which seems to make anybody who bears the name appear to be driven by the obsession of obstinate fame. This might not be unconnected with the etymology of the name which revolves round pristine Slavic power and authority. It is proudly connected with the first King of the Kievan Rus (the present Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus) known as Vladimir the Great who enforce massive conversion to Christianity among his subjects. Vladimir the Great known among native-speaking Ukrainians as Volodymyr, was based in Kiev and reigned between 980-1015 AD.¹ The name thus appears to have dominated the arena of dramatic political change among the Slavic nations— from Vladimir the Great to Vladimir Lenin, Vladimir Putin, and now Volodymyr (Vladimir) Zelensky.

Viewed esoterically, the current Russia-Ukraine conflict could be viewed from the angle of a conflict between two great princes driven by a sense of mythical history constructed on self-destructive ego. And as a popular saying goes, when two elephants fight, the grasses suffer. Indeed the grasses, whether defined in terms of the besieged Ukrainian populace living and

¹ Adam Augustyn, “Vladimir I grand prince of Kyiv” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-I>

dead, or Russian soldiers sacrificing their lives on the battlefield, including the global poor who are gradually paying the price of the paradoxical Western sanctions against Russia, remain the victims. Thus for Africa, whether directly or indirectly involved, the wind of the cumulative effect of the conflict will always blow over her. It was the case of the Arab oil boycott of the 1970s that followed the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In that war, even though African nations took the side of the Arabs against Israel, there was no preference in the economic hardship that followed the Arab oil boycott. Africa even suffered more than those nations the punitive measures were directed against. As Richard Bissell put it:

The escalation of oil prices by OPEC also created an entirely new relationship between the Africans and the Arabs. It placed tremendous financial pressure on the Black African States, it discredited the Israeli development model and it gave the OPEC states the power that comes with money. The Black African States saw their balance of payments position destroyed overnight. Those with surpluses were reduced to marginal cases and the majority already in trouble, were faced with imminent bankruptcy. When, in the wake of the oil price rise, the United Nations created a new category of nations euphemistically called “most-affected countries,” African States comprised nearly 70 per cent of the list. The limited sovereignty possessed by the African states was reduced even further as their credit ratings dropped out of sight. The ability of the African states to reduce petroleum consumption was far more limited than the ability of Western nations; most petroleum consumed in Africa was already being used for essential purposes (Bissell, 1976).

This is the dilemma the nations of Africa appear to be placed in the ongoing state of war between Russia and Ukraine.

The United Nations and Africa's Position

On the 24th day of February, 2022, in what looked like a big surprise to the whole world, but not least a surprise to Europe, Russian tanks rolled into the Republic of Ukraine in what President Vladimir Putin described as a “Special Military Operation.” Following the 11th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly which was summoned February 28, 2022 to address Russia's invasion of Ukraine and which subsequently took place on 2nd March,

2022, the 193-member United Nations General Assembly voted in a resolution titled “Aggression Against Ukraine” to condemn Russia's action in a most overwhelming manner. 141 of the 193 member-states had voted in support of the resolution condemning Russia, 35 abstained, while 5 voted against.²

Africa as usual in her usual euphoria of Global solidarity with her erstwhile colonial masters—the United States of America-led anti-Russian coalition, overwhelmingly joined the bandwagon, with only Eritrea taking the bull by the horn by standing on the side of Russia, with three other nations—Belarus, Syria and North Korea. Against Eritrea's position, 28 African nations voted in favor of the resolution, while 17 abstained. Among the African nations that voted in support of the resolution were Cabo or Cape Verde, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon, Chad, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Congo DRC, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Comoros, and Seychelles. Those that abstained, included Algeria, Mali, Senegal, Sudan, South Sudan, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Madagascar, and Mozambique. Among the absentees were Morocco, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso, Togo, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Eswatini.

It should also be recalled that the three African members of the United Nations Security Council—Ghana, Gabon, and Kenya had voted in favor before being overtaken by Russia's Veto. Equally striking was the condemnation of Russia by African Union (AU). In fact, the speech by Kenya's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Martin Kimani during the Security Council deliberation of the conflict penultimate the General Assembly session was remarkable of the mood of most African nations at the time. In his words: “This action and announcement breach the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We do not deny that there may be serious security concerns in these regions but they cannot justify today's recognition of these regions as independent states (Isilow, 2022).” However, the euphoria that greeted Martin Kimani's speech and the subsequent pro-Ukraine vote soon gave way to a state of despair. This was remarkably noted in the subsequent 7 April, 2022 Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly that voted to suspend the Russian Federation from the United Nations Human Rights Council following allegation of the Bucha massacre. Even though the resolution succeeded with a two-third majority vote, the trajectory of its voting pattern showed the

²*Al Jazeera*, UN resolution against Ukraine invasion, March 3 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/3/unga-resolution-against-ukraine-invasion-full-text>

gradual withdrawal of African nations from anti-Russia euphoria.

Of the 193 member-states of the United Nations, 175 were present at 7 April, 2022 Emergency Special Session, while eighteen were absent. Of the 175 that voted, ninety-three voted in support of the resolution, twenty-four voted against, while fifty-eight abstained. Among those that voted in affirmative were ten African nations, against twenty-eight that voted in the previous resolution; nine voted against the resolution against one—Eritrea that voted in the previous resolution; twenty-four abstained against seventeen in the previous resolution; and eleven were absent against the previous eight.³

Among the countries that voted in support of the resolution were Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Congo Democratic Republic, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, and Seychelles. Algeria, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Mali, and Zimbabwe voted against the resolution. Those that abstained were Angola, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Egypt, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, and Tanzania. The absentees were Benin, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Mauritania, Morocco, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia, and Zambia.

The first resolution in which an overwhelming majority of the 93-member United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn the Russian Federation for her invasion of Ukraine was no doubt a clear victory for Ukraine and her Western allies, but not so with the second that dramatically stripped Russia of the organization's Human Rights Council membership. Technically Ukraine and her Western allies might appear to have won in the second resolution, but in strategic diplomatic terms it wasn't the case. Most striking was the recoil of the three African members of UN Security Council—Gabon, Ghana, and Kenya who jointly voted in favor of the first resolution, in which Gabon voted against and both Ghana and Kenya abstained. We are therefore left with one fundamental question: why the dramatic shift of position among most African nations, including the Asian countries even with the increased tempo of Western diplomatic assault on Russia?

Thus by both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the second voting, it is clear that in spite of passage of the resolution, majority of African nations appear to be on the side of Russia; thus in one way portraying their opposition to

the position of their erstwhile colonial masters on the conflict. This dramatic change of voting pattern by the African States appears to have dictated the gradual shifting of the battle ground away from the United Nations arena to sub-global levels. This is because the attempt to use the African nations as a stump to isolate Russia could not be effected. This was equally aided by the pro-Russian stances of such non-European powers as China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and Indonesia.

Against this background, John J Stremmlau has opined that the credibility of Pan-African commitment to the principles guiding the African Union (AU) was damaged following the unwillingness of African governments to forge a unified position on the Russia-Ukraine war. According to him:

They could not agree on the merits of two non-binding resolutions. Half of the AU's members abstained from the vote demanding that Russia abide by this principle, in the first resolution. And on the second resolution three weeks later demanding an end to the humanitarian crisis, the show of African disunity was the same. Most recently, the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. By my count, of the 24 "No" votes, nine were African. South Africa was among the 23 African abstentions, with another 11 not voting, despite human rights being a key objective of the AU and South Africa.⁴

However, the question should not revolve round the issue of Africa losing its credibility because of their lack of unison in Russia-Ukraine war, because as independent nations African countries are not bound by any external whim and caprice that do not fall within their individual and collective interests. Rather the question should be what was or were the fundamental factors that propelled Africa's volte-face against Ukraine and the Western nations?

Mahama Tawat has pointed out that:

Historically... voting patterns have been shaped by the big issues of the day. In the 1950s, colonialism pitted European countries against Asian and African countries. From

³United Nations, "The UN General Assembly votes to suspend Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council" *UN News* April 7, 2022, https://twitter.com/UN_News_Centre/status/1512095779535609862

⁴John J Stremmlau, "African Countries Showed Disunity in UN Votes on Russia: South Africa's Role was Pivotal" *The Conversation* April 8, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/african-countries-showed-disunity-in-un-votes-on-russia-south-africas-role-was-pivotal-180799>

the 1960s to the 1980s, it was the Cold War and the division between Eastern or Western Blocs. More recently, voting patterns have been structured by developing countries' desire to obtain or secure aid from developed countries and increasingly the liberal-illiberal divide between democratic and authoritarian regimes (Tawat, 2022).

It is against this background that Africa's voting pattern at the United Nations should be judged and not by the assumption of a non-existent blanket unity in a Continent wrought with diverse colonial backgrounds, neocolonial alliances, ideological preferences, and differing economic and political challenges.

Thus one fact which should not be overlooked is that most of the voting patterns adopted by African States at the United Nations were often dictated primarily by individual national interests, and secondly by collective regional interests within a given geo-political space and time. And even when these collective interests appear to run contrary to individual national interests, as in the cases of African Union and Arab League positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict, the latter often takes precedence. For instance, looking at the ten African nations that voted along the Western nations and their allies to suspend Russia from Human Rights Council, it will be discovered that it was the same individual national interest, which is majorly anchored on Western paternalism that propelled their stances.

It is also remarkable to point out that neither Russia nor Ukraine belongs to such international organizations as the Non-Allied Movement, League of Arab States, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), form cross-cutting alliance blocs at the United Nations. Thus African nations were not under obligation of any kind to take sides in the conflict. It is therefore against this background that one can understand the underlying factors that dictated the current position of the African States on Russia-Ukraine war.

Africa's Aversion to Western Paternalism

The First and Second World Wars saw Africa as a marginal participant in her capacity as a Continent under European colonial domination. In other words Africa's participation in the two wars was at the behest of her colonial masters. Both wars were indeed European wars turned into world wars by the reason of American and Japanese involvements and subsequent extension of the battle theatres to colonial possessions.

To African nations therefore the Russia-Ukraine war like the First and Second World Wars is an entirely European conflict created by the West and dictated by the collective

interest of the West. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa pointed this fact out when he stated that: "The war could have been avoided if NATO had heeded the warnings from amongst its leaders and officials over the years that its eastward expansion would lead to greater, not less, instability in the region (Isilow, 2022)."

Fundamentally, any African involvement in the conflict will readily translate, to state in Nigerian parlance, to the case of the sheep joining the goat in a fight of horns. The cases of the two World Wars where Africa was used as guinea pigs can no longer be tenable under the present world order. Africa as a Continent of independent nations cannot this time be dragged into a war that does not concern them—a war that is aimed at serving the selfish hegemonic ends of America and United Kingdom at the expense of Russian Federation. To state the obvious, the Russian-Ukraine war is a veritable avenue for the Continent to prove the mettle of her independence and non-allied position in global politics. Every party to the conflict—from America through Great Britain and Poland to the European Union as a body has its peculiar interest which is not in tandem with the collective or individual interests of Africa.

The United States of America's stake in Russia-Ukraine war need no further explanation other than her global contest for superiority and spheres of influence with Russia; the same position her paternal ally Great Britain adopts. Poland on the other hand has had complicated long history of rivalry and resistance against Russian dominance that dates back to imperial Russia, which is strongly anchored on the Orthodox Russia versus Roman Catholic Poland. Beyond this also underscores the fact that Poland sees Western Ukraine—Lviv as being historically, culturally and religiously part of her nation.

It is not therefore enough to construct the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the bare platform of sentiment—of naked Russian aggression. There is nothing happening in Ukraine today that has not happened in parts of Africa—Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Congo DRC, and Libya and as I am speaking these mass killings are still taking place in Nigeria, Mali and Cameroon under the watch of Western powers; Asia—Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Vietnam, Yemen; and Europe—Yugoslavia which lasted from 24 March 1999 to 10 June 1999; yet America and Western Europe want to invent "Third World War" because it directly involves their individual and collective interests. No international conflict will ever be permanently resolved by the instigation of sentimental hatred over facts. This is indeed the fundamental factor inhibiting the resolution of Israel-Palestine conflicts—a case of placing naked sentiments over and above facts of history.

Indeed, all the major external actors in Russia-Ukraine conflict are guided more by the fundamental principles of their strategic interests than the notion of Ukrainian freedom

from Russian invasion. The pragmatic positions adopted by Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, and Hungary are all predicated on what they define as their exclusive national interests. The same applies to the United States, United Kingdom, and Poland—the three nations which form the bulwark of Ukraine's resistance to Russia. Beyond these three nations, every other European nation involved in the conflict is majorly doing so on account of regional solidarity founded on her membership of either the European Union or NATO, and to some noticeable extent out of naked American intimidation plaited in weird anti-Russian propaganda.

Looking at the diplomatic trajectory of the conflict it is obvious that these three nations are in fact the faces behind the mask in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and they are the reasons why Ukraine is emboldened to continue the war with Russia in the face of unimaginable human and infrastructural losses. Indeed it is wrong to refer to the on-going Russia-Ukrainian war simply as Putin's war or Russian-Ukrainian war, it is best to describe it as Joe Biden and Boris Johnson war against Putin with Poland as the slave-servant and Ukraine as the sacrificial lamb. Perhaps we can take a brief look at these vociferous external actors—the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Poland.

President Joe Biden sees the Russian-Ukrainian war as an avenue to distract the attention of the American public from his sickly unpopularity and weakness at his home-front under the guise of containing the expansionist tendencies of a historic enemy called Russia. Similarly, for Boris Johnson of United Kingdom, it presents an avenue to recreate the dying effigy of the British Imperial hegemony against the background historic rivalries of the leading European nations. This was the same reason that created Brexit, just because Britain felt that with her towering historical imperial ego, she cannot be part of a union where Germany assumes the status of the largest economy in Europe and by the same token the leading European nation.

In the same vein, Britain appears to bear historic enmity against Russia for no conceivable reason other than the intimidating size of Russia. Take for instance the Crimean war of 1853-1856. Why did Britain join the Crimean war on the side of the Ottoman Empire—an Islamic State against Russia—a Christian nation, if not for the reason of maintaining her Global hegemony and fear of Czar Nicholas I? Otherwise how can one explain the moral basis of Britain and America spear-heading the supply of arms to Ukraine to continue fighting Russia, without for once addressing Russia's grievances or encouraging the course of diplomatic settlement between the two warring nations? Today, Vladimir Putin has become Czar Nicholas I of our modern times for Great Britain and for that reason should be subdued, this time with a coalition of European Union and her NATO allies.

Russia fought the Crimea War with Ottoman Turks because of her moral and religious obligations to protect her

Orthodox Church whose rights in the Holy Land were being undermined by the Ottoman leadership under the instigations of France; which then had never forgotten the humiliating defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in the hands of Czarist Russia. This was the only war Britain had fought against Russia with France and the Ottoman Empire that made Boris Johnson taunt Russia of a previous defeat in war. Like the case of the Crimean war, Russia invaded Ukraine because of the urgent need to protect her Russian kinsmen against oppressions by those Putin rightly described as ultra-nationalists and neo-Nazis.

Working in tandem with Poland's strategic regional domineering objectives are those of the United States of America and United Kingdom. For the United States of America and Britain, the unexpected rise of Russia from the ashes of Soviet Union to world power was not part of victory they bargained. Added to this anti-Russian obsession is the fact that in spite of the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation remains the largest country in Euro-Asia. Indeed both countries appear to have the same misgiving, albeit covert, against the eventual rise of Germany as the largest European economy following her unification, but because of the unifying instrumentalities of NATO and European Union, it was difficult to vent such position overtly. Indeed, these are the basic factors propelling the obvious vengeful support for Ukraine against Russia by these three nations, and the fundamental reason why they jointly discourage Ukraine from proactively engaging on diplomatic resolution of the conflict at the cost of Ukraine's massive losses in human and infrastructural resources.

Those countries which were quick to comprehend the sinister motives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Poland, in the Russia-Ukraine conflict like Hungary, Tukiye and Israel were quick to adopt the policy of neutrality based on their respective strategic national interests. The cautious diplomatic approach adopted by Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Spain are equally geared towards alienating themselves from the obvious imperial whims and caprices of America and Britain. These positions adopted by these countries, particularly Israel, in spite of their close relationship with both NATO and European Union, one believes, should serve as a model to African nations.

The Poland Factor

If one may ask, what is Poland's strategic interest in the conflict? Perhaps we can take this briefly from three angles—the angle of sense of historical paternalism; the angle of strategic conflict with Russia; and the angle of sub-regional supremacy contest. Presenting the depth of Poland's resentment to anything Russia, Maxim Samorukov wrote:

In any discussion between Russia and the West, the positions of certain countries are known well in advance. Regardless of the issue at stake, Italy and Cyprus, for example, will almost certainly support any cooperation with Russia, while Poland and the Baltic states will be opposed. One recent example was the June 2021 proposal by France and Germany to invite Russian President Vladimir Putin to a summit with EU leaders. Despite the clout of Paris and Berlin, the proposal failed—largely due to the refusal of Poland and the Baltic states to participate in such a meeting (Samorukov, 2021).

Poland like Russia has always seen Ukraine as part of her paternal zone of influence based on the historical rights of conquest and colonization of most of what today constitute western and northern Ukraine between 1349 and 1430 AD. This was followed by the 1596 Poland's adoption of Greek Catholic Church which transferred its allegiance from the Patriarch of Constantinople to the Pope in Rome, with the subsequent conversion of what is today Western Ukraine while majority of Ukrainians remain Orthodox with Russia.⁵

Based on this historical connection, Poland has always presented herself as the protector of Ukrainian Roman Catholic minority against the oppressive Orthodox majority, yet under Polish rule Ukrainians as an ethnic group were discriminated against and suppressed by their Polish rulers. For instance in 1924 the Ukrainian language was banned from State institutions Ukrainian Galicia of Poland. This was followed by forceful conversion of Orthodox Christians to Roman Catholicism and seizure of Orthodox Churches by Polish rulers.⁶

Russo-Polish strategic conflict steamed from events following the 18th century three partitions of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Russia, Prussia and Hapsburg-Austria, through the First World War and subsequent Bolsheviks revolution, to the Second World War. In most of these circumstances Ukraine has often been at the receiving end with people variously partitioned by Russia, Hapsburg-Austria, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Nazi Germany, and eventually Soviet Union. But the main crux of Polish bitterness against the Soviet Union which the present Russian Federation eventually inherited was the 23 August, 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and

Soviet Union which led to their joint invasion and partition of Poland, an action that subsequently led to the Second World War.⁷

Looking Polish-Soviet conflict from the angle of sub-regional supremacy contest, one readily comes to mind is the positioning of Poland by European Union and NATO as their major bulwark against the domineering influence of post-Soviet Union Russian Federation on Eastern Europe. Indeed Poland has been the launching pad for the gradual expansion of NATO and European Union into the former Warsaw Pact nations, and this explains why she is at the forefront of the opposition against Russian invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, it is obvious from Poland's vengeful stances against Russia that she was specifically given the task of extricating Ukraine from the grip of Russian influence, which appears to have been obstructed by Russia's unexpected invasion.

The Moral Grounds of African Neutrality

In his address penultimate to February 24 invasion of Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin stated as one of his reasons for the "Special Military Operation" the threat posed by the activities of Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups. In his words:

The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime. To this end, we will seek to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation.⁸

In the moral judgment or justification of any conflict, two factors are always at conflict with each other. These are objectivity and sentiment. The pendulum of judgment is often determined by the strength of one against the other. One fact which both Ukraine and her Western allies have consistently failed to address is the crux of Russia's justification for her invasion of Ukraine. Russia has raised the issue of the security threat posed by the activities of Ukrainian Government sponsored neo-Nazi Azov organization which

⁵BBC, "Ukraine profile – Timeline", 5 March, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18010123>

⁶Britannica, "The Nazi occupation of Soviet Ukraine" <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Nazi-occupation-of-Soviet-Ukraine>

⁷*Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-soviet-pact>

⁸“Transcript: Vladimir Putin’s Televised Address on Ukraine” *Bloomberg News*. February 24, 2022, 2:07 PM GMT+2, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>

the West cannot deny of having the knowledge.

In 2014, the United States-based *Newsweek* quoting *Amnesty International* sources reported what it described as ISIS-style war crimes being committed by members of this pro-Nazi Azov regiments against the people of the contested Donbas Region.

Groups of right-wing Ukrainian nationalists are committing war crimes in the rebel-held territories of Eastern Ukraine, according to a report from Amnesty International, as evidence emerged in local media of the volunteer militias beheading their victims. Armed volunteers who refer to themselves as the Aidar battalion "have been involved in widespread abuses, including abductions, unlawful detention, ill-treatment, theft, extortion, and possible executions", Amnesty said. The organisation has also published a report detailing similar alleged atrocities committed by pro-Russian militants, highlighting the brutality of the conflict which has claimed over 3,000 lives. Amnesty's statement came before images of what appeared to be the severed heads of two civilians' started circulating on social media today, identified by Russian news channel NTV as the heads of rebel hostages (Sharkov, 2022).

Indeed, Tanya Cooper, a Ukraine-based *Human Rights Watch* researcher clearly stated:

Ukraine would be violating its international obligations under human rights law if authorities either tolerate abusive militia who undermine [the] population's liberty, security, freedoms or provide an abusive militia with the color of law but [do] not impose on them exacting standards on use of force (Miller, 2018).

It should equally be instructive that the Russian Federation still remains one of the major Jewish sanctuaries in Eastern Europe since the holocaust. The 2019 estimate of Jewish population in Russian Federation was put at 165,000; while that of Ukraine was estimated at 43,000.⁹ Indeed with the ongoing conflict, most of the Jewish population in Ukraine has migrated to Israel. Bearing the large population of Jews

⁹*World Population Review*, 2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/jewish-population-by-country>

in Russia it becomes a matter of caution in diplomacy that Israel should remain neutral.

It is also remarkable to note that more than Russia; Ukraine has remained a bastion of acts of anti-Semitism with gory instances of violence against the Jews. As Shaked Karabelnicoff succinctly observed:

Ukraine has also been the site of extreme antisemitism. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Jewish community faced pogroms (an organized massacre or riot against Jewish people), policies which tightened restrictions on where Jews could live and restrictions on the occupations that Jews could attain. During the Holocaust, more than one million Jews were killed by the Nazis and local Ukrainian supporters. In fact, the country is home to the most horrific violence ever committed against the Jewish people during the Holocaust.¹⁰

Indeed Nokhem Shtif and Maurice Wolfthal further observed that the horrifying 1918 to 1921 Jewish pogrom in Ukrainian resulted to the death of an estimated 100,000 people with a record of 105 Jewish settlements destroyed (Shtif and Wolfthal, 2019). It is important to note that up to the Volodymyr Zelensky's election as Ukrainian President, there had been cases of anti-Semitism. For instance the Chief Rabbi of Kiev Jonathan Markovitch was reported to have transferred his daughter's wedding to Israel in 2014 for fear of being attacked. In fact there had several cases of desecration of the Holocaust Memorial Menorah in Babi Yar in 2015.¹¹ Based on the foregoing Jewish-Ukrainian experience and the paradoxical sit-on-the-fence policy of Israel towards the Russia-Ukraine war, we can look at the justification of Russia's invasion of Ukraine from Russia's stand-point.

Indeed what could be more Nazist than the Ukrainian language law of 2019 where non-native Ukrainians were stripped of their rights to their official indigenous languages in daily and business communications, instruction in schools and literary publications with imposition of penalties? The French news media France24 had reported the discriminatory trajectory of the 2019 Ukraine's Language law in the following words:

¹⁰Shaked Karabelnicoff, "Who are the Jews of Ukraine?" Jewish Unpacked, <https://jewishunpacked.com/who-are-the-jews-of-ukraine/> Mar 24 2022 08:01PM EDT

¹¹"Wikipedia, History of Jews in Ukraine" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Kyiv

Lawmakers in 2019 passed legislation to cement Ukrainian as the country's primary language, ordering middle schools that taught in Russian and other minority languages to make the switch and mandating Ukrainian versions of online stores. An article of the laws that entered into force in January goes further, obliging shops, restaurants and the service industry to engage customers in Ukrainian unless clients specifically ask to switch. Anyone caught violating the new legislation twice within one year could be fined 200 euros (\$235), almost half of the average salary in the country. No one has been penalised so far.¹²

Indeed nowhere in the law was Russian mentioned as an important language of the nation, in spite of the fact that more than sixty percent of the nation's population speak Russian as their first language, and more than thirty percent are native Russian speakers. The only minority language mentioned in law was Crimean Tatar. Article 12 (1) on the "Working language in the operation of government authorities, authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local self-government authorities, State- and community-owned enterprises, institutions and organizations" states: "The working language in the operation of government authorities, authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local self-government authorities, State- and community-owned enterprises, institutions and organisations, including the language of conferences, events, meetings and the day-to-day communication language, shall be the State language."¹³

Article 7(1) on "The obligation to be proficient in the State language for acquisition of Ukrainian citizenship" also makes obligatory for anyone who intends to acquire Ukrainian citizenship shall be required to attest an appropriate proficiency in the State language." Similarly Article 2(1) on "The scope of the Law" states: "This Law governs the functioning and use of the Ukrainian language as the State language throughout Ukraine in the spheres of public life referred to in this Law."

¹²France24, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210401-new-law-stokes-ukraine-language-tensions>

¹³European Commission For Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) *Ukraine law On Supporting The Functioning Of The Ukrainian Language As The State Language*, Strasbourg, 18 November 2019, Opinion No. 960 / 2019, CDL-REF(2019)036, Or. Engl, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2019\)036-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2019)036-e)

No nation in Africa can impose such devious Nazi language policy against her people, not even in Nigeria where Hausa language is the most spoken indigenous language after English and expect those whose languages are being undermined to keep quiet. The people will definitely fight back like Russians are doing. No European nation would tolerate that act of naked fascism; not even in Switzerland where German, French, Italian, and Romansh are official languages; or Great Britain where in the midst of the globalization of English, Scots, Welsh, Gaelic, Irish, Angloromani, Cornish, Manx, and Shelta are still regarded as official languages in their respective ethno-linguistic zones.

Yet the West did not see any moral reason to condemn Ukraine over this obnoxious legislation; may be because the same law gave exemptions to English and other official European Union languages, while making Russian, Byelorussian and the Jewish language of Yiddish lingua non grata. Ironically the now living-canonized war-time Hero-President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky who claims to be Jewish and speaks more Russian than Ukrainian does not see any reason to reverse the obnoxious law. Does this not underscore as well as reinforce the unrepentant rabid sense of Western double standard in Global politics?

There is therefore no gainsaying the fact that the 2019 Ukrainian law on *Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language* which forms one of the bases of Russian invasion was Nazi in both form and character, and against the provisions of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of Indigenous languages.

Indeed the Minsk Agreement under the auspices of the Trilateral Contact Group, which America and the European Union convinced Ukraine to jettison, specifically emphasized the issue of the autonomy of the Donbas Regions.¹⁴ Interestingly, Paragraph 8 of the United Nations 2nd March, 2022 Resolution on the Russian-Ukrainian war made mention of the Minsk Agreement by calling for its implementation. Yet Ukraine and those nations that co-sponsored the resolution failed to state those responsible for its non-implementation since 2015.¹⁵

President Vladimir Putin in his December 23, 2021 Annual Press Conference had stated ipso facto: "What is

¹⁴*Protocol on the outcome of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group on joint steps aimed at the implementation of the Peace Plan of the President of Ukraine, P. Poroshenko, and the initiatives of the President of the Russian Federation, V. Putin S/2015/135*, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA_140905_MinskCeasfire_en.pdf

¹⁵*Al Jazeera*, UN resolution against Ukraine invasion, March 3 2022 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/3/unga-resolution-against-ukraine-invasion-full-text>

unclear here? Are we putting missiles next to the United States' borders? No, it is the United States that has come to us with their missiles; they are already on our doorstep."¹⁶

He went further to ask in most succinct but pungent manner: "The U.S. is placing rockets at our doorstep.... How would the U.S. react if we delivered rockets near their borders with Canada or Mexico?" (McGee and Chernova, 2021). This is a fundamental question that underscores the diplomatic hypocrisy of the West, when considered in the light of the 1962 Cuban Crisis that brought the World to the brink of nuclear war. The West has also not denied Putin's accusation that the unscrupulous eastward NATO expansion at the expense of Russia's national security interests was a breach of a 1990 agreement with the Soviet Union; neither has the West denied the fact of Russia's willingness to cooperate with her in matters of mutual security interests.

And if one may ask, of what relevance is the existence of NATO to Global Security today in the light of the disintegration of both the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact? NATO fundamentally came into existence to contain Communist expansion to the West. Today, Soviet Union is no more and the succeeding State of Russian Federation is no longer communist and socialist in orientation. Indeed the depth of capitalist orientation in the Russian Federation turned out to become another axis of economic nightmare to the West to the extent that the World is now abuzz with another ridiculous stigmatization of successful Russian capitalists as Oligarchs. For how long will the World be captive to the West's incendiary psycho-political imperialism?

Part of the Preamble to the resolution states: "Recognizing that the military operations of the Russian Federation inside the sovereign territory of Ukraine are on a scale that the international community has not seen in Europe in decades and that urgent action is needed to save this generation from the scourge of war." Yes! Truly the Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred in a scale never witnessed in Europe, yet it has occurred severally in non-Western nations with the West as the main actors as well as instigators. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has not yet reached the scale of American invasions of Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, and the shameful 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia code-named "Operation Allied Force" in which over 1000 members of security forces, and about 600 civilians were slaughtered.

The world stood aghast in 1994 when for over 100 days the Hutus of Rwanda slaughtered their over 800,000 Tutsi kinsmen. Where were America and Western Europe—the so-called scions of modern democracy? Indeed the Russian-

Ukrainian war clearly reveals the depth of Africa's diplomatic orphanage in Global politics, the predicament of not being part of the blue-eye racial complex of the world.

The world again stood akimbo while the same American-led NATO bombed President Muammar Gaddafi of Libya out of existence. The same devastations were wrought in Syria, Yemen, and still ongoing in Nigeria with the connivance of America and her European allies. Why then should the Russian-Ukrainian situation become a subject of grave Global concern with self-inflicting obnoxious sanctions leveled against Russia and threat of Third World war? This is the fundamental moral question that underscores the Western vile propaganda and attempts to drag the unsuspecting nations into a conflict that is never their making. Thus short of taking sides, Africa's best bet is unfettered neutrality—a watch-watch scenario.

In addition to the hideous activities of these neo-Nazi militants which were exclusively directed against the largely Russian indigenes of Donbas Region, there had been reported cases of xenophobia and racism against non-Ukrainians, in addition to cases of anti-Semitism reported earlier. One case of such xenophobic attacks was the attack on Uzbeks at Vasylykivskya market of Kyiv.¹⁷

Indeed in his response to the disgusting racism against African refugees fleeing from Ukraine by Ukrainian security agencies, the Director General of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi stated: "We also bore witness to the ugly reality, that some Black and Brown people fleeing Ukraine – and other wars and conflicts around the world – have not received the same treatment as Ukrainian refugees. Ironically, neither the United States of America nor her European allies came out to exceptionally condemn this act of racism against African refugees in Ukraine, including their rejection by Poland.

How can the West give Africa tutorials on racial equality and fundamental human rights by presenting the Ukrainian situation as the worst scenario when even the same Ukrainians stopped African students in their country from boarding the train to escape the war and Poland even stopped them from crossing into their country, and those who managed to cross into Poland were clamped in detention.

The European Union in courting Ukraine's membership of the organization is fully aware that Ukraine does not satisfy the first clause of the 'Copenhagen Criteria' for membership qualification, which requires "stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities." But because of its desire to whittle down the powers of the Russian Federation, it does not make any sense that Ukrainian minorities are

¹⁶"Putin on NATO, Ukraine, Gas, COVID and the Russian Economy" *Reuters* December 23, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-president-vladimir-putins-annual-news-conference-2021-12-23/>

¹⁷<https://archive.ph/20140512205439/http://snaua.info/migrantiv-vikunuli-z-vasilkivskog/#selection-409.19-429.213>

being oppressed and denied their right of self-determination, their right of freedom of speech, and above all the right to their indigenous language. A popular legal maxim states that he who seeks equity must come with clean hands. In their bid to drag the non-Western world into an exclusive European conflict, have the America and her European allies considered their past invasions to sovereign nations and how the world reacted?

CONCLUSION

Among the Igbo of Nigeria an anecdote goes thus: A slave once stated in bitterness that what pained him most was not the fact of sleeping with his wife but what was said in the process—let us sleep with that wife of a slave. This is true of Western policies toward the members of the African Union (AU) in contrast to their approach to the present Russia-Ukraine war. This approach also puts into contentions the twin doctrines of Western democracy and open society—the two most lethal ethical weapons of global Western domination. How really democratic and open are the Western nations when viewed in the context of the present Russia-Ukraine conflict?

The Fundamental consequence of this conflict is that both Ukraine and her vociferous Western allies are gradually facing a backlash from members of the African Union in particular and stealthily from some European nations within and outside the European Union. And this could further be deciphered from the trajectories of the voting patterns in the last two United Nations General Assembly resolutions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The African States in confronting this NATO-orchestrated war of imperial expansion against Russia should not quickly forget the historic roles of the defunct Soviet Union of which the Russian Federation stands as the successor-nation in the liberation of Africa from the pangs of European colonialism. At a point where African nations were glued to the imperial servility of the Western powers the Soviet Union provided an alternative political vision that gave the West the bitter impetus to double down their imperial foot-holds in Africa. Russia also has become a factor in both Africa's security challenges and agricultural import needs. Staying neutral in the war therefore becomes imperative.

Most importantly is the counter-effects of anti-Russian sanctions on the European economy, which are also being felt in Africa. In this case it will be foolhardy for the African States to take sides in a war in which the major participants are facing strong backlash on their economy, a situation which individual African States might not be able to contend. Furthermore, taking sides while the major non-European economies such as China, India, Brazil, and Indonesia are neutral should have been suicidal on the part of the African nations. It is therefore important to conclude that Africa's

neutral stance has helped to diffuse the orchestrated assumption that the Russia-Ukraine war might lead to Third World War. It will not so long as Africa and other members of the United Nations outside Europe choose to remain neutral and thus make the war an entirely United States and European problem.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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