

How will the war in Ukraine change the global Order?

Gerhard Erasmus

The war in Ukraine has been described as the world's biggest security crisis since the Second World War. It is also changing global relationships, policies and institutional affiliations in a manner not seen in decades. Some of the implications will only become clear over time but African governments will not escape the consequences of the shifts now underway. Africa lacks a joint strategy on how to respond to recent global developments and there are no signs that one is being developed. Neither is it clear which institution could take the lead in doing so, or whether there is consensus that a joint African response is required.

The West has responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine by adopting joint policies through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reminiscent of the worst days of the Cold War. In addition to direct financial and military support to Ukraine, huge increases in defence budgets have been approved, more troops will be deployed in Eastern European countries, and Sweden and Finland have decided to join NATO. For more than 70 years these two countries have steadfastly maintained a unique policy of neutrality. The European Union (EU) has decided to begin the process of admitting Ukraine as an EU member.

This crisis will have consequences beyond its military dimension. It will shape global, regional, and national policies for years to come. Energy supplies to several EU member states are threatened and may become a major crisis by the time the European winter sets in later this year. Germany has, for example, announced plans to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas. This will take time, will require many reforms and sacrifices, and will impact on commitments to combat climate change.

Alternative energy supplies are not readily available, that is why some Western countries are looking at Africa as a future source of energy. Will this take the form of bilateral relationships with specific African nations, or will there be a collective response by African

Governments? There are no signs of the latter happening yet. The energy crisis is no limited to Western nations. South Africa, Africa's largest industrialized economy, faces its own electricity crisis. This has been going on for years and load-shedding will continue until 4,000MW-6,000MW of extra capacity has been created.¹ Mozambique has been mentioned as a source of extra electricity for South Africa.

Food security is another looming crisis. African nations are already directly affected. International trade and supply chains are disrupted and the Covid pandemic has made matters much worse. There are other worrying developments that remind us of how dependent we are on effective international cooperation and joint efforts so address the dangers of climate change. There are unprecedented heatwaves, fires, and droughts across many continents, including in Africa.

How will Africa respond to these developments? How will the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) be affected? Non-alignment is no longer the obvious policy option it was during the 1960s and 1970s when the Cold War dominated international relations and China was a strong supporter of this idea. The world has changed, and communism imploded in the Soviet Union in 1989 when on November 9, 1989, thousands of jubilant Germans brought down the Berlin Wall. Now China is a leading global power, with a unique system of capitalism under communist rule. Some commentators see a China-Russia-Iran axis that will form the core of a future Eastern power bloc – all armed with nuclear weapons.²

The US is no longer the dominant global power that it was for most of the twentieth century, but it is still the world's major economy and military power. Its responses to Russia's aggression will be an important barometer of things to come. The Biden administration is developing new policies to deal with the many challenges the US now faces, including restoring relationships with allies scorned by his predecessor. It has to deal with growing power and political ambitions of China too. The G7 leaders have announced a plan to create a \$600bn *global infrastructure fund* to counter China's [Belt and Road Initiative](#) in developing countries. President Biden said America would aim to contribute \$200bn in private and public funds to the project; the EU will muster \$300bn. Mr Biden called it "*an investment*

¹ *Business Day*, 20 July 2022.

² *Ibid.*

that will deliver returns for everyone".³ American and British security services warned about China meddling in [foreign businesses and elections](#) and called it a long-term threat.⁴

African governments find themselves in a delicate position and will not want to get drawn into the tensions and battles unfolding on the global level. However, they face tough choices in working out a neutral stance. Global trade and foreign direct investment remain vitally important in order to advance economic development at home and to promote economic integration on the continent. There is often competition to attract FDI.

When the AfCFTA negotiations were launched in 2015 the world was a more peaceful place. The AfCFTA has not been designed to create one collective voice for Africa to respond to the global challenges it now faces. It is not even clear that African states want such a collective voice. This is perhaps one of the most important conclusions to be drawn for now – the AfCFTA is a member-driven arrangement. Its *"institutional framework for implementing the AfCFTA"*⁵ consists of political platforms where the State Parties take decisions on the basis of consensus. There is no consensus to be detected on how to respond to the latest global crises. The default position is that African governments will, at least for now, pursue national or regional preferences and choices. This may not be the best option.

³ *The Economist*, 27 June 2022.

⁴ *The Economist*, 7 July 2022.

⁵ See Part III of the AfCFTA Agreement.