

Ukraine in Sub-Saharan Africa : From a Struggling Victim to a Reliable Partner?

أوكرانيا في إفريقيا جنوب الصحراء: "ضحية" مكافحة أم قوة منافسة؟

Pr. Belkacem IRATNI*

kiratni54@gmail.com

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Abstract

... Attempting to delve into a purported involvement of Ukraine in Africa's affairs recently may prove striking because of its lack of a deeply anchored presence on this continent. It is also striking that this country, heavily entangled in a violent, endless conflict, could venture militarily in Africa to offset, presumably, Russian stakes in Sudan and the Sahel-Sahara region, for instance.

Yet, Ukraine's presence in some parts of Africa is increasing, according to some media reports, although with a subtle manner and without fanfare. Perhaps, this feature consists of a distinctive asset, which Ukraine is using in comparison to the resounding uproar made by other foreign actors when dealing with Africa. Still, the main question that sprang to mind consists of evaluating the abilities of Ukraine to pursue an active policy in Africa and stand as a reliable partner to African countries. Thus, it may be useful to underline the objectives Ukraine intends to achieve in its dealings with Africa and to gauge the efficiency of the spearheads of its intrusion into the African continent. Are the instruments used, related to economic cooperation,

* Corresponding author

military actions, and the sale of arms, or to other soft measures pertaining to cultural influence, charity diplomacy, relief, and humanitarian missions? Concomitantly, other questions arise with regard to the capacities of Ukraine to shake off the geostrategic designs pursued in Africa by major world powers as well as by emergent players such as Turkey and some Gulf States.

The article raises pertinent questions concerning Ukraine's stakes in Africa, especially amid criticisms of the alleged support provided to terrorism in the Sahel region. It also consists of evaluating the benefits and opportunities this country could offer to Africa and questioning Kyiv's ability to meet the needs and expectations of its African partners.

Key words

Ukraine, Sub-Saharan Africa, economic cooperation, military involvement, competition with Russia.

Résumé

Tenter de scruter le 'prétendu' récent engagement de l'Ukraine dans les affaires africaines peut paraître paradoxal en raison de l'absence d'enracinement profond de ce pays dans le continent africain. Il demeure paradoxal aussi que l'Ukraine, embourbée dans un conflit violent et interminable, puisse s'aventurer militairement en Afrique pour contrarier, semble-t-il, les intérêts de la Russie au Soudan et dans la région du Sahel-Sahara, par exemple.

En effet, la présence de l'Ukraine dans certaines régions de l'Afrique se renforce selon certains médias, quoique d'une manière subtile et 'sans tambour ni trompette.' Cette démarche constitue, peut-être, un atout substantiel que l'Ukraine semble mettre à profit, comparativement au 'tapage' que font les autres puissances dans leur relations avec les pays africains. Il reste, toutefois, que la question principale qui traverse l'esprit consiste à évaluer les capacités de

l'Ukraine à poursuivre une politique active en Afrique et à s'affirmer comme un partenaire sur lequel les pays africains pourraient compter.

Il serait, ainsi, opportun d'appréhender les objectifs que l'Ukraine voudrait atteindre dans ses relations avec l'Afrique et jauger l'efficacité des principaux moyens sur lesquels s'appuie l'intrusion de ce pays en Afrique. Il s'agira de déterminer si les instruments employés sont liés à la coopération économique, les actions militaires et la vente des armes ou aux autres mesures dites 'soft' telles que l'influence culturelle, la diplomatie caritative et les missions relatives au secours humanitaire. En parallèle, d'autres questions restent posées concernant les capacités de l'Ukraine à contrecarrer les desseins géostratégiques poursuivis en Afrique aussi bien par les grandes puissances que par certains acteurs émergents, tels que la Turquie et quelques pays du Golfe. Il s'agira aussi d'évaluer les gains et les opportunités que l'Ukraine pourrait offrir à l'Afrique et de s'enquérir sur ses capacités à satisfaire les besoins et les attentes de ses partenaires africains.

Mots-clés

Ukraine, Afrique Subsaharienne, coopération économique, engagement militaire, concurrence avec la Russie.

Introduction

Having published numerous papers on the presence of foreign powers in Africa over the last few years, Ukraine's policy towards the African continent did not tilt my academic curiosity, despite the alleged implication of this country in the much-publicized attack carried out by Tuareg 'rebels' against the Malian security forces in July 2024. However, it was the severe diatribe proffered by the Malian Prime Minister against Ukraine's intervention in his country, which he made before the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly

in late September 2025, which incited me to investigate Ukraine's objective to have a footprint in Africa, especially through somewhat unusual means.

Indeed, when news broke out revealing the devastating ambush carried out by Tuareg militias against a Malian military convoy, reportedly killing 47 Malian soldiers and 84 Wagner fighters, very few political observers gave credit to the report, assuming the decisive implication of Ukrainian officers and sophisticated arms alongside the Tuareg insurgents in this military operation. Such astonishing news brought to light the unexpected and unusual military incursion of Ukraine in the African continent and the unpredictable extension of the Ukraine-Russian war to the African battlefield using proxy warring parties. Ukraine's surge in Africa became unusual, as it did not occur through projects launched in the framework of economic cooperation, financial assistance schemes, or active participation in rescue operations, as was the case with foreign powers operating in Africa.

Delving into Ukraine's African policy does not require the reference to a conceptual framework or to explanations put forward by theories linked to International relations or the study of foreign policy. Many studies have dealt with scrutinizing the objectives the world's major powers intended to pursue in Africa because this continent constitutes a scramble for the designs of these main actors. Other studies have also delved into analysing the competition between the world's major powers concerning Africa's resources and strategic designs, but seldom has the case of a competition between asymmetric actors been thoroughly conducted.

If the balance of power theory pertains mainly to explaining the competition between world's major power in the pure tradition of the realist approach to International Relations (Goddard, Kertze, 2025), asymmetric conflicts refers to Inequality in arms which indicates, indeed, a significant disparity between belligerents (Geiß, 2006). The asymmetric nature of the Ukraine-Russia conflict translates to the

African landscape in the form of an unbalanced war by proxy, which reflects the uniqueness and the originality of the competition between Ukraine and Russia in Africa. The conflict between Kyiv and Moscow is not over Africa's raw materials and geostrategic designs in the African continent, as is the case between China and the US, or between China and India, but over extending the effects of their war to Africa to gain allies for their respective cause; each of them claims it is just and legitimate.

This peculiar feature matches precisely the case of Ukraine and Russia, mainly because of Kyiv's prism and perception to extend its conflict with Moscow to Africa's security landscape. Such an extension matches the theoretical assumptions linked to concerns of geopolitics based on a combination between politics and geography in the sense defined by Pierre Marie Gallois. For this strategist, geopolitics pertains to "the study of the relations existing between the conduct of power politics sustained on the international scene and the geographic landscape in which this power politics is operating" (quoted by Boniface 2017).

As an international landscape where the conduct of power politics occurs, Sub-Sahara tends to become one of the theatres of the extension of Ukraine-Russia rivalry. It does not constitute, however, the place where the outcome or the future of the war between these two belligerents would be determined. Then, it seems that high-intensity geopolitics with regard this conflict would remain confined in the Atlantic-European power politics, in which African dynamics may not have a decisive role to play.

Delving at length into the geopolitical aspects of the Ukraine-Russian war may go beyond the scope of this study. Still, the search for allies and the quest to challenge, if not disturb Russian designs in Africa may remain an objective; Ukraine may seek to achieve through its recent 'intrusion' in the African continent. Such an analytical paradigm may help to explore Ukraine's recent involvement in Africa

through a pragmatic observation and scrutiny. The study relies on two main parts. The first attempts to explain Ukraine's motivation behind its involvement in Africa through the trade of cereals and foodstuffs, as well as military incursions in war-torn African countries. The second tries to underline the limits of the economic and military capabilities of Ukraine in its dealings with Africa, as well as the few opportunities this continent can offer to Ukraine in the proxy war it is conducting against Russian interests and strategic designs.

Explaining Ukraine's recent surge in Africa

In contrast to its arch-rival enemy, Russia, Ukraine has no deep-rooted ties with Africa. Russia is the heir of the Soviet Union, of which Ukraine was an integral part. The Soviet empire dominated the world, competing with the United States for many decades. In the long era of the Cold War, Africa was the theatre of conflicts and the scramble for raw materials by proxy between the two superpowers. After the crumbling of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia struggled to maintain its influence and interests in Africa (Iratni, Marouk 2023), while Ukraine was deeply absorbed with consolidating its status as a new independent country and increasingly torn between maintaining a close relationship with Russia because of the Soviet legacy and leaning towards European integration and Atlantic temptations.

Some factual spots indicated that Ukraine had quite ancient links with Africa, but these examples occurred on an individual basis, and neither engaged Ukraine as a country, nor on an official status. For instance, Yevhen Bachynskyi, a Ukrainian political figure, served as a diplomatic representative to Ethiopia in 1925 and as a member of the Ukrainian government in exile, when the country came under Soviet rule. He assisted Ukrainian refugees who immigrated to Ethiopia after World War I (Ukraine.ua). Another case was that of Mykhailo Chmykhov, a military officer who helped Mozambique to constitute its Air Force in 1979. (Ukraine.ua).

In this process of international affirmation, both Moscow and Kyiv looked for alternative alliances to protect their national security and boost their path of development. However, as the clash between the two nationalisms increased, the quest for gaining support for their opposed causes also grew in intensity, particularly after the war that started in 2022. Then, the two belligerent parties spurred their projections in the African continent to gain allies and markets, especially for agricultural products and foodstuffs, which constitute a great portion of their main global exports. Russia increased its efforts to gain support for its cause through leveraging its substantial political, economic, and military footprint across Africa. It intended to bypass and overcome Western sanctions and securing its economic interests even through a disinformation campaign across Africa against Ukraine and its western allies, notably by opening an 'Africa Hub' in Addis Ababa operated by state-media Sputnik (Tisserand, 2025).

It may not be far-fetched to note that Ukraine inscribes its policy towards Africa in a geostrategic and economic design within a prism designed to resist and fight what it regards as "Russia's aggression." Oleh Kobzystyi, chargé d'affaires at Ukraine's Embassy to Senegal and Guinea, stated that "our objective aims at developing bilateral relations with African countries and transmit this truth: Ukraine is an aggrieved country and Russia the aggressor"(Marotte, 2025). It seems hard to conceive Ukraine's relations with the African continent outside Kyiv's overall external behaviour directed at offsetting Russia's international posture in the framework of their long-standing tensions and ongoing war.

From the outset, Ukrainian leaders claimed that their country shares a common colonial legacy with Africa and that it has suffered the same oppression to counter Russian "propaganda" related to the support provided by the Soviet Union to the decolonization process in Africa. President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed African journalists in 2022 by saying: "We are not different from you. We have the same values,"

urging them to "convey to every family on the African continent that we are peace-loving people" (Matthers, 2025).

During an online meeting with the heads of some Ukrainian diplomatic missions in Africa and representatives from some Ukrainian Ministries held in 2025, the Deputy Head of the Office of the President, Ihor Brusylo, declared, "Ukraine sees Africa not just as an export market but as a strategic partner in shaping global food security. Our goal is not only to restore but also to expand economic ties with African partners, leveraging all our competitive advantages in agribusiness, education, and science." In this meeting, he emphasized the importance of "Ukraine's cooperation with African countries and their support for Ukrainians in the fight against Russian aggression" (President. Gov. 2025).

If Ukraine frames its African policy solidly within its anti-Russia global strategy, it remains that this external stance contrasts heavily with Moscow's involvement on the continent in terms of objectives and instruments used for their implementation. If Russia "relies on the continent's illicit gold trade to circumvent western sanctions and sustain its war economy," Ukraine has a long-term strategy to reap substantial benefits by winning over African partners with regard to the prospect of "a vast and new agricultural market to boost its post-war recovery"(Matthers, 2025). A political scientist argued that Russia's strategy has allowed the Kremlin "to evade Western sanctions and help fund its war in Ukraine," citing the Washington-based [Blood Gold Report](#), which revealed, "that Russia has earned more than \$2.5 billion from gold trade in Africa since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine"(Banjo, 2025).

To pave the way to economic cooperation and military incursions in Africa, Ukraine started to strengthen its diplomatic network on the continent, although having half the number of Embassies compared to Russia.

In January 2022, for the first time ever, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine adopted a Strategy for the 'Development of Relations between Ukraine and African States' aimed at strengthening interaction between Ukraine and African countries (MOFA-Ukraine, 2024). Since the start of the war with Russia, Kyiv has opened eight embassies in Africa. It boasts no cultural centres accredited in Africa compared to Russia's 15 cultural institutions, which contribute to spreading the Russian language and providing grants for thousands of Africans to study in Russian universities. Therefore, Kyiv appointed a special envoy for Africa and the Middle East, launched a targeted communication strategy, and conducted a series of official visits to Africa. During 2022-2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as part of the New Horizons strategy, undertook four extensive diplomatic tours of Africa, visiting 12 countries across the continent. Most significant was the state visit paid by President Zelensky to South Africa in April 2025, to make out of the partnership with Pretoria, the axis for his country's policy towards Africa.

Economic spearheads and presumed military incursions

Ukraine privileged two instruments to fulfil its objectives in Africa, similar to those used by Russia, however, with less acuity: agri-products, which constitute Ukraine's most important exports, and timid but disturbing military involvement, notably in Mali and Sudan. Both Ukraine's cereals and military engagement aimed also to counter Russia's presence in Africa as an extension of their ongoing war and rivalry.

-The subtle tool of food supplies

The sectors of cooperation with Africa regarded as a priority for Kyiv consisted of a constructive collaboration in agriculture and humanitarian relief, education, and science, with special emphasis on digital technologies and transformation.

The exports of cereals and foodstuffs constitute Ukraine's fundamental pillars of the economic partnership it intends to set up with Africa. A most significant parameter consisted of the launching in August 2022 of the UN-Türkiye brokered humanitarian initiative "Grain from Ukraine," which has provided food to over 10 million people across 12 African countries, signalling the focus on exporting cereals much needed by famine-stricken African countries. Such an emphasis became even more vital in the context of the war with Russia, the spiral of the food prices, which has badly hit the economies of many African countries, and the difficulties in channeling these products through the disrupted maritime routes of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Basin. Reports indicated that Russia actively worked to disrupt Ukrainian grain exports to Africa by imposing naval blockades, withdrawing from the Black Sea grain deal in 2023, and regularly attacking Ukrainian grain port facilities (Tisserand, 2025). Nevertheless, the "Grain from Ukraine Initiative" succeeded in establishing grain corridors from three Black Sea deep-water ports (Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Pivdennyi) and allowed Ukraine to increase the volumes of its seaborne exports. However, these volumes were still much lower when compared to the pre-war level (Martyshev et al., 2024).

Still, Ukraine's importance as a major world food supplier is neither overemphasized nor questionable. It accounts for almost half of the world's sunflower oil exports, 13% of corn exports, and 8% of wheat exports in the 2020-2021 period, and for 16% of Africa's imports of wheat and for 23% of this continent's purchases of sunflower oil (Martyshev et al., 2024).

Cereals and vegetable oils accounted for more than 80% of Ukraine's agricultural exports to Africa, and in 2021, Ukraine exported agri-food products valued at \$4.6 billion to 52 African countries (around 4% of the total agri-food supplied to Africa). Eighty per cent (80%) of Ukraine's agri-products, especially cereals, went to North African countries (Egypt, Algeria, and Libya).

Ukraine's exports to the region decreased in 2022 because of slowed seaborne trade, which recovered partially in 2023, while export volumes for January-October 2024 exceeded the indicators for the same period of the previous year by approximately 10 million tons (Martyshev et al., 2024).

Apart from cereal exports to Africa, Ukraine's trade exchange with this continent proved very limited, reflecting the weakness of the economic capabilities of this country.

In the domain of cooperation, *the agri-food sector seems the most promising field Ukraine can easily invest in because of its great experience in agriculture exploitation and supply of significant volumes of wheat, corn, sunflower oil, and other essential staples, as well as Africa's impressive demographic boom suggests a rapidly growing demand for food and Ukraine's* (Bogonos, Martyshev 2025). For example, Ukraine is engaged in promoting agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in South Africa.

Ukraine has engaged in initiating some projects in Africa, such as the construction of the largest electricity supply station in Equatorial Guinea with a capacity of 200 megawatts, which will also supply neighbouring countries (Ukraine.ua).

Another field of cooperation concerns education, academic exchanges, and space research. Kyiv launched many cultural and scientific programs with an emphasis on the needs of African countries pertaining to training qualified specialists in Ukraine. Academic institutions in Ukraine are engaged in cooperation with a number of technical universities in Algeria, and bilateral exchanges at the level of

sports federations and symphony orchestras are taking place on a regular basis. With Egypt, scientific and space cooperation is increasing, and Ukraine is participating in international cultural events organized in Cairo (book fairs, film festivals, youth forums, etc.).

Another promising sector of cooperation pertains to tourism activities since Ukraine, for instance, ranked first in terms of the number of tourists visiting Egypt (1,600,000). The number of Ukrainian tourists to Egypt has sharply declined because of the war with Russia and the bloody events occurring in the Middle East. However, African tourism assets, particularly the Egyptian resorts, will remain an appreciated destination for Ukrainian visitors in the future.

- Equivocal venturing in African cauldrons

Ukraine's military incursions in Africa came as a surprising move, especially as this country seemed heavily entangled in a war with Russia and preoccupied by garnering military assistance from its Western allies to make a successful breakthrough in this conflict. Ukraine's military ventures in Africa targeted the alleged pro-Russian Wagner groups operating in Mali and Sudan. Serhii Kuzan, Director of the Ukrainian Security and Cooperation Centre in Kyiv, explained why Ukraine might want to target Africa. He asserted that for Russia, "the African countries where Wagner contingent is present, are just a zone of interest that allows Moscow to get hold of resources-gold, diamonds, gas and oil-and the money goes to finance Russian aggression in Ukraine"(Walker, 2024).

Russia denied, officially, allegations of links with Wagner troops operating in Mali. Its Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared, "Military initiatives established by private Russian citizens in Mali were not Moscow's official business," in a meeting held with Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop in Moscow in November 2022 (AFP, 2021). Furthermore, the Kremlin asserted that Russia's military engagement in fighting terrorist groups in Mali occurred at the official

request of the Malian government. The allusion seems quite explicit in comparison to the objectives of Ukraine's military support to Tuareg insurgents, which the Malian authorities regard as "rebels" and a danger for the territorial integrity of their country. The dichotomy seems then clear, between the reference to international law and legality on the one hand, and the acquaintance with non-legitimate forces and 'unjust causes,' on the other.

As African nations split over voting resolutions related to the Ukraine-Russia war, these two countries also split over the destination of their military assistance in Africa, supporting rival factions engaged in wars and conflicts. Ukraine took the side with the Sudanese regular forces in their clash with Wagner-allied Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a rebel movement led by Gen. Hamdan Dogolo, a warlord and a former ally of the Sudanese President, General Burhan. A report released by the US Broadcast channel [CNN](#) hinted that Ukrainian special services were likely behind a series of drone strikes near Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, against the RSF (Banjo).

Ukraine also helped some Tuareg insurgents to launch a devastating ambush against the Malian security forces backed by these pro-Russian groups. The ambush carried out by the Tuareg militias with the military support of Ukrainian officers at Tinzaouten in July 2024, reportedly killing 84 Wagner fighters and 47 Malian soldiers, attests to Kyiv's determination to act as a troublemaker in the Sahel region to shove off Russia's strategic designs in this region. Andriy Yusov, spokesperson of Ukraine's military intelligence service (GUR), said Tuareg insurgents in Mali had "received necessary information, and not just information, which enabled a successful military operation against Russian war criminals"(Lawa Shola, 2024). According to [Ulf Laessing](#), Director of the Bamako-based Regional Sahel Program at the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Ukrainian leaders saw "a chance to strike at Russia in the disinformation war when they noticed that so many Russian mercenaries were killed." He added, "There might have been

some training or equipment provided to these Tuareg rebels, but I do not think Ukraine was directly involved. It just saw an opportunity to hit Russia and frame it as the aggressor, sending mercenaries to Mali" (Banjo, 2024).

Predictably, Ukraine's spat with Mali led to diplomatic rupture of relations with this country as well as with Niger and Burkina Faso, the founding members of the Alliance of the Sahel (Melly, 2024).

Ukraine's setback in the Sahel-Sahara region did not prevent this country from looking for other partners interested in military cooperation to pursue its ventures to upset Russian interests. Ukraine has offered to continue to train Mauritanian soldiers, amid the tensions between this country and Mali, where Moscow backs the central authorities against the Tuareg insurgents. According to Maksym Subkh, Ukraine's top envoy to Africa, Ukraine "is ready to continue training officers and representatives of the Mauritanian armed forces, to share the technologies and achievements that Ukraine has made on the battlefield against Russia"(Donati et al., 2025).

Limited prospects of the Ukraine-African relationship

Ukraine is a lower-middle-income country, lagging far behind the economic capabilities of world major powers involved in Africa, such as China (Iratni 2024), India or Japan (Iratni 2024), and remaining far away from matching the military might of Russia or France. Africa has also limited assets to offer Ukraine with regard to the capacity of this country to absorb and transform raw materials it may need from Africa. If economic relations between the two partners may prove limited, it remains that security issues may guide their partnership because of Africa's instability and Ukraine's search for support to offset Russian strategic designs.

-Narrow fields of economic cooperation

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Ukraine was worth \$197 billion in 2024, representing only 0.18% of the world economy according to official data from the World Bank (Trading Economics, 2025). There is no comparison whatsoever between Ukraine's GDP and those of the countries heavily involved in economic and security issues in Africa, such as the United States (\$25.43 trillion), China (\$14.72 trillion), Japan (\$4.25 trillion), India (\$3.41 trillion), Russia, and France (\$2.63 trillion). Russia's global output (\$2.24 trillion) represents ten times Ukraine's GDP.

After falling by 28.8% in 2022, Ukraine's economy recovered by 5.5% in 2023, but GDP growth reached only 2.9% in 2024 (Samoiluk, 2025). In 2023, Ukraine ranked 45th out of 132 in the world 2023 in terms of trade value, 39th out of 96 in terms of technology, and 80th in terms of research OEC 2024).

Trade exchanges between Ukraine and Africa reached less than \$4.5 billion in 2024. In contrast, Russia recorded a turnover with Africa amounting to \$24.5 billion in the same year, according to the announcement made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, at the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum first Ministerial Conference held in Sochi in November 2024 (Abbasova, 2024).

In 2024, Ukraine's exports to Africa reached a level as low as \$4 billion out of its relatively limited \$41.3 billion global exports (Trading Economics, 2025b). A large portion of these exports consists of cereals and foodstuff products, while Russia exports to Africa grains, machinery, hydrocarbon fuels, which constitute the essential needs of many African economies, in addition to arms.

In 2023, Ukraine's top imports consisted of refined petroleum (\$7.85 billion), cars (\$4.22 billion), petroleum gas (\$2.21 billion), packaged medications (\$1.67 billion), and explosive ammunition (\$1.39 billion). From these figures (Samoiluk, 2025), it appears that these

main imports needed by Ukraine's economy are not abundantly available in Africa, and the top suppliers of these products (China, Poland, and Turkey) are outside of the African continent.

It remains that Africa ranks among the top clients of Ukraine's agri-products, though it is facing fierce competition from Russia. This challenge may greatly lessen Ukraine's importance as a food supplier to this continent.

Africa constitutes a huge source of raw materials, especially rare minerals badly needed by the world's major powers because of their highly developed manufacturing process and use of technological innovations, especially consumer electronics, medical devices, renewable energy, and defence systems. In all these sectors, Ukraine lags far behind the US, China, Japan, India, and France, the traditional and most important clients of Africa. In contrast to Ukraine, Russia has abundant natural resources, estimated at \$75 trillion, and ranks in the world's top three for the production of commodities, such as platinum, gold, and iron ore.

Equally, Ukraine does not represent a viable market for African oil and gas because of its limited capacity for absorption due to the low level of local industrialisation and the process of transformation. In addition, it is far too remote from African shores to import crude oil or natural gas, and African exporters of natural gas are very few and have long-standing shares in the South Mediterranean energy market, as is the case with Algeria. It is therefore more convenient and less costly for Ukraine to rely, in case of a continuous defection of Russian gas, on the supplies of natural gas coming from Central Asia as well as from the Balkan region (Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia), after the recent offshore discoveries in the Black Sea.

Security imbroglios and the difficult search for alliances

In the eyes of the Ukrainian leaders, it seemed quite easy to garner support from African countries against what they dubbed "Russian

aggressive expansionism," because the African continent has endured a long colonial oppression and domination (Mhaka, 2024). However, Africans seemed divided over the approach towards the Ukraine-Russia war because of the difficulty in reconciling their Western interests with their strategic ties to Russia (Raafat, 2023).

This divide was evident in the voting behaviour of African nations on the resolution to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the March 2022 UN General Assembly. 28 African nations lent their support to the proposed resolution, while 17 African countries abstained from voting, and eight African countries were absent during the voting session (Banjo). Only one African nation, Eritrea, opposed the resolution. Furthermore, 24 African countries abstained from voting on a resolution calling for the suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, and 27 African nations abstained from voting on a resolution demanding that Russia pay war reparations to Ukraine (Mhaka, 2024).

Concerning the military involvement in Africa, Ukraine's determination to compete with Russia may prove pretentious and quite risky. Thus, challenging Russia where it is strongest- propaganda and military capabilities- may prove difficult.

In the Sudanese case, Ukraine was standing aside international law because the central authorities were fighting the Russian-backed rebel movement (RSF); however, it faced harsh criticisms for not respecting international legality when it supported the Tuareg rebellion waged against a sovereign state (Mali). After the decision taken by Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to break off diplomatic relations with Kyiv, the West-African regional grouping (ECOWAS) released a statement in July 2024 to express its "firm disapproval and condemnation of any outside interference in West Africa, which could threaten security and peace in this region and draw it into current geopolitical confrontations" (Mhaka, 2024). Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Yusov declared in a statement released in August 2024 that the

decision of Mali to break off diplomatic relations with Ukraine was "short-sighted and hasty" and was carried out without "a thorough study of the incident's facts and circumstances" (Acharq Al Awsat 2024).

Such a statement may have not only infuriated Mali, but also fuelled the accusations raised against Kyiv related to its support for terrorism in the Sahel-Sahara region. For Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson for Russia's foreign ministry, Ukraine, unable to defeat Russia on the battlefield, decided to "open a second front in Africa, indulging terrorist groups in Russia-friendly states on the continent" (Banjo). Ukraine's mounting feuds with some African countries, as well as the increasing propaganda controversies with Russia, may result in undermining Ukraine's efforts to build strong relations with African countries and garner their support against Russia. If Kyiv might have achieved a symbolic victory by helping the Malian Tuareg to kill pro-Russian Wagner groups in Mali, it remains unlikely that it can carry out a multiple front war with Moscow. Indeed, it cannot "win the support of the global community by convincing them of the righteousness of its struggle, while jeopardising the security and territorial integrity of other nations in the name of weakening Russia" (Mhaka).

Ukraine apprehension and perceptions with regard African security contexts relies on a military approach and does not involve pre-emptive strategies or soft measures pertaining to the use of effective economic means and cultural influence. It seems that Ukraine's African stance corresponds to the logic, which considers that for a "hammer, all the problems are nails." If it seems obvious that Ukraine's military capabilities are far from matching the Russian military might, it remains also evident, that Moscow's non-hard power and anchorage in African politics proves much efficient and much deeper than Kiyv's soft means and influence in the African continent. Such a parallel reveals the accuracy and potency of the asymmetric nature of the

conflict between the two countries and their unequal impact on African issues.

Conclusion

It may seem too precocious to evaluate Ukraine's involvement in Africa with accuracy and appreciate its cooperation with this continent in the economic and military fields with perspicacity and cumulative and appropriate findings.

It seems that Ukraine's desire to offset Russian economic stakes and strategic designs in Africa through the policy of cereals supplies or military incursions has not proved efficient, as Kyiv does not possess the required means to compete with Russia through extending its war against this country in the security landscape of this continent.

It may not be beneficial for Ukraine to confine its presence in Africa to the sole objective of upsetting Russia's economic and strategic designs on this continent because it may not be capable of presenting better options, more adequate, and more appropriate alternatives to African countries than Russia. It cannot replace Russian presence in Africa overnight because of the deep-rooted links Russia has forged with many African countries, the opportunities it may offer to these countries to diversify their economy, and lessen their dependence on Western outlets. It also cannot replace Russia as the main source of arms supplies for African countries facing civil wars or terrorism, and cannot constitute a strategic ally for many African regimes confronted with rebellions, separatist movements, or meddling in their internal affairs, generally fomented by Western powers.

Ukraine may bear fruit in pursuing a policy tending to alleviate the suffering of many countries by opting for a smooth food assistance, given its agricultural potential, and convey messages of solidarity with oppressed people based on its own experience with Russian territorial expansionism, as depicted by Ukrainian official rhetoric. Kyiv should, rather, express solidarity with countries facing foreign interference,

territorial expansionism, and exploitation, and not take sides with countries or support political or military forces just because they systematically oppose Russia's presence in Africa.

It is clear that Ukraine does not have the required economic and military capabilities to offset Russian designs in Africa, and it does not have the financial or diplomatic brokerage instruments of the Gulf States, for instance, to be able to shape the policies or the future of Sudan or the Sahel-Sahara region. Ukraine needs allies in Africa in its war against Russia and cannot afford to engage in a hypothetical struggle related to the balance of power on this continent.

Just as the war against Russia dictates a more pragmatic and realistic approach, as well as useful compromises to avoid a global deflagration, Ukraine would benefit more if it opted for a balanced stance in its dealings with African countries.

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