

Ukraine crisis is also an opportunity for Africa

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As the world watches in disbelief as the war in Ukraine evolves, the adage comes to mind: in every crisis there is an opportunity. As Africa prepares for the inevitable political and economic fallout, it may be an opportune time for some African countries to formulate new political and economic policies that may benefit from a shift in global markets.

Immediate concerns for Africa

While there may be longer-term benefits to target, there are more immediate concerns. African students studying in Ukraine found themselves stranded and desperate to escape. There have been reports of racism and discrimination regarding evacuation measures. Media reports and social media videos have highlighted [discriminatory practices](#) with claims of Ukrainian police and security personnel refusing to allow some Africans to board buses and trains heading towards the Ukraine-Poland border. Because of the lack of African embassies in Kyiv, diplomatic interventions were made from African embassies in [Warsaw](#). Calls were also made to the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya) on the UN Security Council to be stronger in their [criticism](#) of human right abuses African students experienced.

The invasion will have detrimental consequences for African households, the agricultural sector, and food security. The overdependence on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine is a concern as they constitute [almost 30 percent](#) of global wheat exports. About [36 percent](#) of Ukraine's total wheat is exported to Africa. There are fears [Russia's blockading](#) of Ukraine's Black Sea ports will prevent exporting the remainder of last season's wheat harvest. Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia are experiencing rising food prices. With elections later this year in Kenya, a recent coup in Sudan and the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia the elevated wheat prices may fuel anger, leading to insecurity. Rising oil prices will exacerbate the situation as transport cost increase, so too will food prices, creating a vicious cycle.

Natural resource opportunities

After Russia, South Africa is the world's second-biggest producer of palladium and is positioned to benefit from the sanctions as supply concerns grow. Palladium is an important component used in automobiles and electronics. The precious metal has surged to a [seven-month peak](#) due to sanctions imposed on Russia. With many turning to gold as a safe haven, this too may benefit South Africa as a major exporter of gold as the [rand has been strengthening](#) due to rising global prices for the precious metal.

With the prospect of Russia turning off the gas supply to Europe as a measure to counter sanctions, Europe has seen a spike in gas prices. One can only assume that contingency measures are being formulated to avoid a potential cut-off in gas supply to the EU. A viable option may be to look South, as Africa has some of the world's deepest gas reserves and can offset some of the [150-to-190-billion](#)

imperialism and capitalism. Both Angola and Mozambique's flags are heavily influenced by Soviet imagery with Mozambique having the image of an AK-47 rifle on its flag. The Soviet Union was influential in several liberation wars in the SADC region, namely, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. More recently, mercenaries from the Russian paramilitary group Wagner have been operating in several countries in Southern, Central and West Africa under the guise of fighting extremists.

The AU issued a [statement](#) condemning Russia's invasion and called for an immediate ceasefire. [Kenya's Ambassador](#) to the UN Security Council was quick to question the Russian invasion and called for respect of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Gabon and Ghana, the two other African members on the Security Council, followed suit and expressed disappointment over Russia's actions.

As the crisis developed several African leaders were placed in a difficult position of trying to remain neutral. The two economic giants on the continent, South Africa and Nigeria, delivered relatively subdued and varied early responses. Initially, South Africa did not issue a statement, but after the full-scale invasion the [government](#), called for Russia to withdraw its forces. However, this stern tone in language soon [changed](#) to "South Africa remains deeply concerned by the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine". The Nigerian government chose to note its [surprise](#) about the invasion but neither condemned it nor called for a cessation of hostilities. Nigeria did, however, vote to demand the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, whereas South Africa abstained.

How Africa voted at the UN General Assembly

A UN General Assembly emergency session adopted a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russia's forces. African diplomats were divided in their votes.

Out of 54 states

- 28 voted in favour
- 1 voted against
- 17 abstained
- 8 did not record a vote.

The way forward

The ensuing war in Ukraine has already affected Africa. We have seen fleeing students facing human rights abuses, fuel and transport price hikes, and growing concerns over wheat imports impacting food security across the continent. However, this may also provide some African countries with new opportunities to develop their infrastructure and gain access to new markets. African countries should act on this possibility to strengthen their policy formulation and implementation to benefit all.

Dr. Craig Moffat is at Good Governance Africa, a research and advocacy nonprofit organisation with centres around Africa

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