

# Given Africa's Position in the International System, Can It Leverage Peace Between Russia and Ukraine?

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## ABSTRACT

Considering the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the international system that Africa is part and parcel of, it has expressed its readiness to become a mediator in the search for peace in Eastern Europe. Achieving this ambitious initiative, especially outside Africa, cannot be aloof from the position it occupies in the international system. Against the backdrop, this article employed a qualitative method with a main emphasis on content analysis to interrogate Africa's position in the international system. From the conceptualization of the international system, this paper established the following findings. First, Africa is not among the key state actors that through their soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy set, control, and direct the agenda of the international system. As such, it holds an underdog position and is still on the periphery of the international system. Second, the position taken by most African countries at the UN about Russia's invasion of Ukraine could compromise the neutrality and credibility of Africa to possibly mediate the conflict. Third, despite denial, the war is a US-NATO proxy war in which the search for peace lies in the hands of the US and NATO. Looking at their vested interests for standing behind Ukraine could make it difficult for Africa to break through the paradigm of mediation. Based on these findings, the paper remains skeptical of mediation. Finally, the paper concludes that achieving peace will be a big blow to NATO, the West, and other big powers for Africa positioned at the periphery of the international system to cajole big powers to get to solutions that would benefit all. Therefore, the possibility for the West and big powers to undermine Africa's efforts cannot be ruled out.

**Keywords:** Africa, International System, hard power diplomacy soft power diplomacy, Russia, Ukraine, Proxy war

## INTRODUCTION

Quite recently, Africa dominated international media outlets when a delegation of six Presidents or heads of state and Representatives from Comoros, South Africa, Zambia, Egypt, Uganda, the Republic of Congo, and Senegal embarked on an ambitious fact-finding peace mission to Eastern Europe. (Rahman, 2023).

Led by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the delegation traveled to Ukraine and Russia for two days, on June 16 and 17, and presented a 10-point draft framework document for ending the perceived US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine and establishing peace in Eastern Europe. In the words of President Ramaphosa, "Africa is ready to become a mediator in the search for peace" (Rahman, 2023).

The 10 points African peace proposal presented to both Zelensky and Putin to end the war include immediate resumption of talks, confidence building measures by both sides, recognition of Russian and Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty, and uninterrupted grain and fertilizer exports (Rahman, 2023). The proposal also includes de-escalation of fighting and for negotiations to commence with urgency, for the release of prisoners of war, and for greater humanitarian support, among other requests (Jones, 2023).

No doubt, the inclination behind what this paper described as an ambitious African peace initiative resonates with its strategic interest threatened by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war with global economic impact affecting the international system as well. Practically, the war has exacerbated the already food insecurity confronting the continent. According to the African Development Bank, the war in Ukraine has been responsible for a shortage of around 30 million tons of food grains on the continent and an approximately 300% hike in the prices of fertilizers which makes it increasingly difficult for the farmers on the continent to grow essential food grains at home (Adesina, 2022).

In clear explanation, it implies that the rationale behind the ambitious African peace initiative or fact-finding mission is to tackle food insecurity by persuading the belligerent parties to smoke from the peace pipe. To this end, can Africa achieve its ambitious peace initiative? Can it bring peace to this perceived US-NATO proxy war? To these salient questions, this article in a more academic but meticulous way explores the caption of this paper. It focuses on the possibility by considering Africa's position in the international system which is crucial to persuading the belligerent parties to lay down their weapons of war for the sake of peace that will benefit not only Africa, but other countries somehow affected by the ongoing war.

Structurally, the paper explores the caption from four segments. The first segment provides the conceptual underpinning of the paper. Particularly, it dissects the international system as a concept that Africa is part of. It looks at the dominant key players that influence or control the system. Also, the segment briefly explains why the paper claims that the war in Ukraine is perceived US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine. And finally, for this segment, the paper briefly looks at the Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on the international system with a main emphasis on Africa. It explains the motive behind the mediation. The second segment meticulously examines Africa's position in the international system. Precisely, it takes cognizant of Africa's ability through its soft power diplomacy to influence decision shaping international politics. Interestingly, it dives into the positions of the six countries taken at the UN regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is significant because to some extent the respective positions have implications for the prospect of the mediation. The third segment analyzes Africa's position which is also important to inform the conclusion consider the final segment of the paper.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The nature of the caption of this paper suggests a qualitative approach to the study. To be precise, it adopts a literature review as the methodology with an emphasis on content analysis. The purpose is not merely to repeat everything that the researcher has read, or all the things written on the subject but to critically evaluate the content of literature so as to advance logical inferences on the phenomenon under interrogation. The researcher reviews publications (such as journal articles, newsletters, documents, etc.) pertaining to the topic being explored. The materials were sourced from the internet through the Google Scholar Search Engine and Bielefeld Academic Search Engine.

### **Conceptual Underpinning**

To have a better understanding and appreciation of the issues in this discourse, a proper understanding of the underlying conceptual framework is necessary to guide the discussion or study. Therefore, the key conceptual framework is the international system that embodies international politics as one of the sub-fields of political science.

### **The Concept of International System**

From the perspective of International Politics, the concept international system has to a greater extent enjoyed academic attention among scholars considered proponents. To add value to this paper, it would be

wise to feature some of their discourse or contributions.

For his part, Stolberg (2012) who wrote extensively on the international system in the 21st century refers to the concept as a structure of relationships that exist at the international level. These include the roles and interaction of both state and non-state actors, along with international organizations (IOs), multinational corporations (MNCs), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Carefully note how this definition has already identified key actors that characterized the system.

Prof. Morton Kaplan intellectualized the international system as “an analytical entity for explaining the behavior of international actors and the regulative, integrative, and disintegrative consequences of their policies.” Implied in Kaplan’s conceptualization that also characterizes the system is the impact of states’ foreign policies on the system. For example, motivated by the basic tenets of liberal democracy as a foreign policy imperative, the US since the end of World War II has assumed global leadership in identifying international issues, taking actions to address those issues, setting an example for other countries to follow, organizing, and implementing multilateral efforts to address international issues, and enforcing international rules and norms (Congressional Research Service, 2021). This ambitious inclination to globalize democracy has changed the dynamics of US foreign policy to become aggressive toward rival countries. To prove this claim, reflect on the below italicized assertions from current Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, “*Authoritarianism and nationalism are on the rise around the world. Governments are becoming less transparent and have lost the trust of the people. Elections are increasingly flashpoints for violence. Corruption is growing. And the pandemic has accelerated many of these trends.*”

*“Shoring up our democracy is a foreign policy imperative. Otherwise, we play right into the hands of adversaries and competitors like Russia and China, who seize every opportunity to sow doubts about the strength of our democracy. We shouldn’t be making their jobs easier”* (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Arguably, one of the consequences of the US foreign policy imperative can be seen in the instability of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen. Moreover, the same foreign policy has managed to increase the risk of war by pushing Iran to gradually resume its nuclear program and make Russia and China look like fonts of wisdom and order (Walt, 2020).

Another remarkable contribution came from Kenneth N. Waltz. He defines the international system as composed of a structure and of interacting units, and

a structure by the arrangement of its parts (Walt, 1979). He contends that the units are sovereign states in international politics. And it is a structure that defines the arrangement, or the ordering, of the parts of a system. Describing the nature of the structure, Walt argues that the international system is decentralized and anarchic, and stresses that states are to seek to ensure their survivability. Of course, no doubt about Walt’s opinion. The survivability of states explains the existence of the international system. Strategic to its national interest that is translated into their foreign policies, states form an alliance, enter multilateral, or bilateral corporations to protect and ensure their political survivability. For example, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a security alliance of 30 countries from North America and Europe. Its fundamental goal is to safeguard the Allies’ freedom and security by political and military means. North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an example of a multilateral trade agreement that seeks to eliminate most tariffs and other trade barriers on products and services passing between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a political and economic union of 10 member states in Southeast Asia, which promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration between its members and countries in the Asia-Pacific. It is the most prominent regional cooperation group in East Asia.

Interestingly, Walt also described the international system as anarchical. Does it imply lawlessness characterizing the system? Of course not. The system is governed by international norms or laws that recognize the sovereignty of each state. However, the tendency to disrespect the norms because of the state's national interests is an empirical fact. The case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine without regard for the norms that regulate the international system is a contemporary example that may validate Walt's description of the system as anarchical. The US Navy SEALs raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan that led to the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 is another example that could also be cited to validate the anarchical nature of the international system.

According to your article library online source, the international system "is the set of interrelated and interdependent interactions among international actors-national and supra-national actors". From this definition, it is safe to equate it to international relations which could be another aspect of the international system. The definition also embodies key actors of the system with a reciprocal relationship.

An analysis of all the definitions of the international system points to the indisputable fact that the activities or interactions of nations are directed toward the preservation of their national interests. It explains national interest as the main driving force of the international system. The definitions also suggest that in the absence of interaction with the system, it would be difficult for nations to succeed in the preservation of their national interests.

### **Key Actors of the International System**

From the definitions of the international system, it is easy to pinpoint two types of actors. They are National Actors and International Actors.

#### **National Actors**

National actors are sovereign states that interact on the basis of their national interests. These states form an alliance, regional bloc, and bilateral corporation. For example, ECOWAS, AU, EU, ASEAN, NAFTA, NATO, G20, G7, BRICS, etc.

#### **Non-State Actors**

In the context of the international system, (Brown, 1995; Miller, 1994) divided non-state actors into two categories: international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and transnational or international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The first group consists of the non-state actors that are created by nation-states. Examples include but are not limited to ECOWAS, NATO, EU, BRICS, G20, G7, etc.

The second group of non-state international actors is established not by nation-states, but by certain groups of individuals, businessmen, and other societal forces. This group has no legal bonds with nation-states; therefore, they are truly transnational non-state actors. Examples include but are not limited to multinational corporations, Greenpeace, Red Cross/Red Crescent, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Worldwide Fund for Nature, etc.

#### **Interactional Actors**

They are typically universal actors such as the United Nations, World Bank & other international agencies.

### **The patterns of Interaction that characterize the International System**

In the international system, Enang (2021) explains three patterns of interactions that represent the behavior of the actors. They are Cooperation interaction, Competitive interaction, and Conflict interaction.

## Cooperation Interaction

In the theater of the international system, cooperation between actors (nations) has become necessary due to their common national interests. This is also the main goal of international and regional actors. Cooperation is achieved through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Most times, cooperation focuses on the maintenance of peace and security and economic interest. For example, the G20 or Group of Twenty is a strategic multilateral cooperation connecting the world's major developed and emerging economies. These countries work together to address major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development (IPS News, 2015).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS; also known as CEDEAO in French) is a regional political and economic union of fifteen countries working together to promote economic integration and maintain peace and security across West Africa.

Arguably, through cooperation, the potential for conflict among or between nations is lessened. However, due to the clash of national interests, cooperation cannot be guaranteed.

## Competitive interaction

Doubtlessly, the international system is a competitive environment. Enang (2021) argued that competition is a regular pattern of interaction between states. States may compete because of the scarcity of resources or because of incompatible foreign policy objectives. The Cold War is a historical example of the incompatible foreign policy objectives between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc.

Following the demise of the Cold War, the inclination or quest for global hegemony has become so competitive in the theater of the international system. China has become the U.S. main competitor, including Russia. For example, China's economy has become the second largest in the world, and

its companies compete with U.S. counterparts for markets and resources. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has become the "pacing threat" to U.S. military operations in Asia, and China's diplomatic influence rivals that of the United States in many parts of the world (Heath, 2021). Arguably, competitive interactions depending on the actors may or not necessarily lead to conflict which is the third pattern of interaction.

## Conflict Interaction

According to Forest L. Griebes, "Conflict is a regular feature of interaction at all levels of human society including the international system". In this regard, the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1972) notes inter-alia that

*A conflict emerges whenever two or more persons or groups seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes.*

Actors with different political ideologies, opposing national interests, or foreign policy are likely to engage in conflicting behavior that impacts the international system.

The current Russia-Ukraine war is one of the contemporary examples. Economically, it has affected Africa. This is the reason why Africa wants to mediate the conflict. Similarly, Wayne H. Ferris (1973:23) noted that "states come into conflict over interests or desired goals that they deem important, or necessary to their welfare and security. If two states desire the same interest,

and if the interest cannot be enjoyed equally and fully by both parties, a conflict situation exists". So, here 'opposing national interests' constitutes one of the causes of conflict in the politics among nations. History is so replete with numerous examples of this type of behavior in the international system. The long-standing conflict between Israel and Palestine under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organization is a classic example of opposing national interests or incompatible foreign policy objectives. Israel's reliance on the realist theory (the Power Politics and Security Paradigm) and her covert and overt backing from her Western allies, particularly the U.S., who have enormous economic-geo-strategic interests in the Middle East, have continued to prolong the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab debacle despite the United Nations resolutions (Resolution 242 of 1967 requiring Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab lands) (Eze, 2015).

Similarly, the tensions between Iran and the U.S. escalated in May 2019, with the U.S. deploying more military assets to the Persian Gulf region after receiving intelligence reports of an alleged "campaign" by Iran and its "proxies" to threaten U.S. forces and Strait of Hormuz oil shipping (The New York Times, 2019) clearly speaks volume of opposing national security interests or incompatible foreign policy objectives. Following the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani due to the U.S. Strike in Iraq (Pollack, 2020) the tension has reached its peak with the U.S. expectation of retaliation from Iran.

### **Dominant Key State Actors in the International System**

States are the principal actors in world politics. So, cataloging the key state actors that dominate the international system is a huge academic debate. Nevertheless, there are prominent state actors that influence the system through soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy coined and articulated by Joseph S. Nye Jr., former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 1990. Inarguably, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council through soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy dominate the international system by shaping global or international politics affecting the global economy. Of course, you know them. China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each of these countries has veto power that influences the international system. All of them are endowed with soft power and hard power that speaks to their political values, culture, and foreign policies (soft power) and military might, GDP per capita (hard power). Through their soft power and hard power, these countries are projecting their influence shaping the trajectory of international politics. Moreover, these countries are equipped with cyber capabilities to pursue their national objectives (espionage and surveillance) (CSIS, 2021). Before citing examples, it is important for the benefit of the doubt to briefly review the definition of soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy.

Soft power diplomacy is defined as an actor or country's ability to influence others' behavior and preferences through non-coercive means, such as ideology and cultural values (Wilson, 2008).

In summary, Nye (1990) postulated that soft power diplomacy consists of three resources a country must have to win the hearts and minds of other countries that resultingly influence the international system by shaping international politics. These resources are political values, culture, and foreign policies which are synonymous or equated to ideology and cultural values intimated by Wilson (2008). Unlike soft power diplomacy, which is based on persuasion that yields voluntary compliance, hard power diplomacy is based on military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions and largely relies on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means.

It is the capacity to coerce another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise. A military invasion is hard power. Economic sanctions are hard to power. According to Joseph Nye, hard power involves "the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will" (Nye, 1990).

As a matter of notorious fact, the United States is recorded to have employed hard power diplomacy in

many situations. One is the George Bush Administration which decapitated the regime of Saddam Hussein and handled subsequent crises in Iraq through aggressive military operations. The Afghanistan War and its continued war on the Taliban is another classic example. For economic sanctions, there are many sanctions against Iran passed by the UN Security Council, and numerous nations such as the United States and the European Union also imposed bilateral sanctions against Iran. The United State current numerous sanctions imposed on Russia to end its military aggression against Ukraine is another contemporary example of hard power diplomacy. Still, on the US, its soft power was instrumental in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent establishment of the US as the world's sole superpower. In contemporary international politics, the US has used soft power to get other countries to adopt policies like sanctions and diplomatic isolation against rogue states (Matteucci, 2023). China uses soft power to influence other countries and promote its interests by appealing to their interests, values, and priorities. It does this through various activities, such as providing international development aid, sponsoring cultural events and sports competitions, and investing in media outlets to promote its views (Matteucci, 2023). According to the 2019 Asia Power Index, China takes the lead in diplomatic influence and ranks 2nd out of 25 countries in cultural influence after the US (Lowy Institute Asia Power Index, 2019).

Inarguably, Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom are still regarded as great powers today with permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). These include the United Kingdom continuing to hold global soft and hard power and Russia holding the largest nuclear weapons arsenal in the world. In fact, according to the Global Soft Power Index 2022, all five permanent members of the UNSC are among the World's top 10 soft power nations. The US in the first position with a score of 70.7, the United Kingdom in the second position with a score of 64.9, China in the fourth position with a score of 64.2, France in the sixth position with a score of 60.6, and Russia in the ninth position with a score of 54.1 (Global Soft Power Index, 2022). Russia's decline is attributed to its current invasion of Ukraine.

Research confirmed that there are some countries that are not non-permanent members of the UNSC. However, they possess both soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy that can also influence the international system. These countries are among the World's top 10 soft power nations for 2022. For example, Germany is another country that is conspicuous for using soft power diplomacy. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany has made an enormous effort to build international relations and external cooperation (Holguin, 2013). Here are the countries. Germany in the third position with a score of 64.6, Japan in the fifth position with a score of 63.5, Canada in the seventh position with a score of 59.5, Switzerland in the eighth position with a score of 56.6, and Italy in the tenth position with a score of 54.7 (Global Soft Power Index, 2022). Below is a snapshot of the index.



Premised on the fact that hard power diplomacy is influenced by military might, it makes no fundamental flaw to cite the top 10 powerful countries in the world by military. Interestingly, more than three sources cataloged all five permanent members of the UNSC. Here are the sources. (Nye, 2022), Chrysopoulos (2022), Mishra (2023), Fair Team (2023).

The United States ranked first, Russia ranked second, China ranked third, the United Kingdom ranked fifth, and France ranked sixth. Other countries that can also influence the international system through hard power diplomacy include India ranked fourth position, South Korea ranked seventh position, Germany ranked eighth position, Japan ranked ninth position, and Tukey ranked tenth position (Nye, 2022).

Let it be clear that countries that are not captured in the soft power and hard power catalog do not mean they lack soft power and hard power. There is no country without soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy. But the issue is their soft power and hard power are not strong enough to dictate the trajectory of the international system. Despite being part and parcel of the system, they exercise no hegemonic position in the international system. Possibly, they can have bilateral cooperation or relations with other countries yet lack influence on the system. These are countries that are often directly or indirectly affected by the decision of the dominant state actors in the system. In contemporary international politics, these countries are described as “Weak and vulnerable states (Kassab, 2015).

Finally, key dominant actors also control the international system through foreign aid mainly to weak countries and their contribution to the UN as the biggest non-state actors. In the words of Williams (2023), foreign aid is simply defined as the international transfer of capital, goods, or services from a country or international organization for the benefit of the recipient country or its population. Aid can be economic, military, or emergency humanitarian (e.g., aid given following natural disasters). It can take the form of grants, and loans usually for developmental purposes. Despite its obvious merits and demerits, foreign aid is significantly used as a tool by key actors to project their influence on the system. Undeniably, the five members of the UNSC used foreign aid as a tool to project their influence on the system. For example, by signing a Presidential Memorandum directing all U.S. government departments and agencies engaged abroad to ensure that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons around the world, (US State Department, 2021), the Biden’s administration has rekindled the Obama’s administration memo to deter countries from criminalizing homosexuality (The Two-Way, 2011).

Through the same foreign aid, China is projecting its influence in global politics with Africa as a reference case. For example, according to the Chinese Loans to Africa Database, Chinese financiers signed 1,188 loan commitments worth \$160 billion with African governments and their state-owned enterprises between 2000 and 2020, predominately in transportation, power generation, mining, and telecommunications. The top loan recipient countries over the last 20 years included Angola, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Cameroon, and most recently the largest recipients included Ghana, South Africa, and Cote D’Ivoire.

China committed to providing 1.2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Africa, where developing countries have received only 1% of the global COVID-19 vaccine supply.

While slowed due to COVID-19, available data indicates that China’s top leadership (the president, premier, and foreign minister) has made a total of 79 visits to 43 different African countries from 2008-2018. China also has an estimated 53 embassies in Africa, more than does the U.S., and 52 African countries have signed onto an agreement or understanding with the One Belt One Road initiative (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022).

Though arguably minimal, Russia is using its foreign aid as a tool to also influence the trajectory of the



international system. Its interest in Africa stems from the fact that Africa notably constitutes the largest voting bloc in the United Nations. This is evidenced by the U.N. General Assembly vote that followed on 2 March 2022 on a resolution to condemn the Russian invasion in which nearly half (48 percent) of the 54 African states decided not to take a stand against Russia. Precisely, 17 countries abstained from the vote (Delegation from The Union of Comoros, n.d.) Arguably, Africa's position significantly undermined the resolution in terms of meeting the threshold to condemn Russia.

Now, their contribution to the UN considers the biggest non-state actor in the system. While it is true that every member state is legally obligated to pay their respective share toward peacekeeping which is in accordance with the provisions of Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations, there are some member states that contribute unprecedentedly. All five permanent members of the UNSC are among the top 10 contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations for 2020-2021. See below.

United States (27.89%)

China (15.21%)

Japan (8.56%)

Germany (6.09%)

United Kingdom (5.79%)

France (5.61%)

Italy (3.30%)

Russian Federation (3.04%)

Canada (2.73%)

Republic of Korea (2.26%)

Source: (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.)

### **Perceived US-NATO Proxy War in Ukraine**

From the genesis of the war, Russia, and some of its allies like China have accused the US and NATO of waging a “proxy” war against Russia by supporting Ukraine defending itself from Kremlin invasion (The Guardia, 2022), (Aljazeera, 2022, Aljazeera, 2022), (BBC News, 2022). To establish whether there is a kernel of truth to the perceived accusation of a US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine, it is imperative to review the conceptualization of proxy war. This will lay down the premise to establish the veracity or viability of proceeding argument. Conceptualizing proxy war since its inception till now in contemporary international politics has enjoyed copious attention in academia which also attracts the attention of this article.

In 1964, the political scientist Karl Deutsch conceptualized proxy wars as ‘an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country; disguised as a conflict over an internal issue of that country; and using some of that country’s manpower, resources, and territory as a means for achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies (Deutsch, 1964).

In the opinion of Byman (2018), a proxy war ensues when a major power instigates or plays a major role in supporting and directing a party to a conflict but does only a small portion of the actual fighting itself.

For his contribution, Osma?czyk (2002), a proxy war is defined as an armed conflict between two states or non-state actors, one or both of which act at the instigation or on behalf of other parties that are not directly involved in the hostilities. Finally, Hughes (2014) conceptualized proxy war based on relationships between external actors and the belligerent parties. He argues that for a conflict to be defined as a proxy war, there must be a direct, long-term relationship between external actors and the belligerents involved. The relationship is usually manifested by providing funding, military training, arms, or other forms of material assistance which assist a belligerent party in sustaining its war effort (Hughes, 2014).

From analysis, the first two similar definitions are purely state-centric as it ignores the role of non-state actors captured in the conceptualization of Osma?czyk. A proxy war being state-centric does not in any way or form invalidate or question the definition. In fact, most scholars have considered proxy war as a way of warfare exclusively employed by states, in particular, global powers and regional actors. Even though state actors often deny that they are supporting proxies. However, a state-actors proxy war is strategic either to its economic or geopolitical interests. Motivated by these interests, state actors prefer not to be viewed as waging a proxy war but as providing support on humanitarian grounds coupled with the concept of solidarity. For example, the decapitation of the Muammar al-Qaddafi regime is an example of both a state-actor and non-state-actor proxy war. The US-NATO proxy war in Libya was covered and justified by humanitarian intervention to save innocent Libyans from the nefarious inclination of Qaddafi. Securing their interests was the bottom line behind the so-called US-NATO intervention in Libya (Mezran, & Miller, 2017).

As it relates to non-state actors, Andrew Mumford was the first author who argued that proxy war is not a form of warfare carried out solely by state actors. According to him, non-state actors can use a state or another non-state group as a proxy force (Mumford, 2013). For example, al-Qaeda's support for Lashkar-e-Taiba represents proxy warfare conducted by a non-state actor (Kambere, et al., n.d.).

From the above premise lay down, it makes no fundamental flaw to say that there is a kernel of truth to the perceived accusation of a US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine. In the first place, the US is doubtlessly a major power with a vested interest. Likewise, NATO is an example of an intergovernmental organization which is one of the types of non-state actors. As you may be aware, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance comprised of 31 member states – 29 European and two North American. Established in the aftermath of World War II, the organization implemented the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington, D.C., on 4 April 1949 (NATO Homepage, 2023) NATO is a collective security system: its independent member states agree to defend each other against attacks by third parties (NATO Homepage, 2023).

Secondly, to be a proxy war, the definitions also established that the third parties must not be directly involved in the hostility. Of course, US and NATO are not directly involved in the ongoing war this is evidenced by the conspicuous absent of their soldiers or troops. However, this is not enough to agree with Russia's claims. Though the US and NATO are not directly involved in the war. However, to be defined as a proxy war, the third party must conspicuously provide military support to the country of its interest. In this case, it is clear from all indications without prejudice to the fact that the US and NATO military support to Ukraine is obvious. For example, as of June 15, 2023, the United States has committed more than \$42 billion in security assistance "to help Ukraine preserve its territorial integrity, secure its borders, and improve interoperability with NATO." Of this amount, the Biden Administration has committed more than \$40 billion in security assistance since the start of the 2022 war (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

This amount includes \$25.93 billion to replenish Department of Defense (DOD) equipment stocks sent to Ukraine via presidential drawdown authority; \$18 billion for DOD's Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative

(USAI; P.L. 114-92, §1250); and \$4.73 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF; 22 U.S.C. §2763) for Ukraine and “countries impacted by the situation in Ukraine.” (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

The US relations with Ukraine which accounts for its military aid date far back to 1991, following its independence from the Soviet Union. The United States attaches great importance to the success of Ukraine as a free and democratic state with a flourishing market economy. U.S. policy is centered on supporting Ukraine in the face of continued Russian aggression as it advances reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, fight corruption, and promote conditions for economic growth and competition (US Department of State, 2021).

NATO is also on record of providing unprecedented levels of support, helping Ukraine uphold its fundamental right to self-defense. Since March 2022, NATO allies have provided training for tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers. NATO has also delivered more than 150 billion euros in support including 65 billion euros in military aid that procured more jets, tanks, armored vehicles, medical supplies, mobile satellite systems, and pontoon bridges (Garamone, 2023).

Thirdly, for war to be defined as a proxy war, the definition offered by Hughes (2014) emphasized the “relationship” between the external actors and the belligerent involved. In this case, it is clear from all indications that the US and NATO are the external actors accused of waging the proxy war in Ukraine. But this is also not enough. The relationship matters. So, what is the relationship between the US, NATO, and Ukraine? The relationship behind the support speaks to the vested interests of the US and NATO. Undeniably, the US notable indirect involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war by siding with Ukraine evidenced by its military assistance and unprecedented economic sanctions on Russia speaks to its national security interest and democratic values. Meaning, a Ukraine defeat would create a more dangerous and unstable world that threatens the US democratic values of liberal democracy. Precisely, it could motivate Russian aggression against other neighboring democracies, threaten European allies, and perhaps further inspire China to invade Taiwan. In his State of the Union address, President Joe Biden made clear that supporting Ukraine matters “because it keeps the peace and prevents open season for would-be aggressors to threaten our security and prosperity.” (Hassel, Donald, & Kilbury, 2023). Moreover, President Joe Biden himself advanced a version of this argument, “If Russia does not pay a heavy price for its actions, it will send a message to other would-be aggressors that they too can seize territory and subjugate other countries”; elsewhere, he asserts that “Throughout our history, we’ve learned that when dictators do not pay the price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and engage in more aggression” (Shiffrinson, 2023). By Biden’s assertion, it could be inferred that Putin’s regime poses a risk or threat to the US national security interests that extend beyond its borders.

The relationship can also be explained by Ukraine’s intention to join NATO which the US is essentially part of.

As for NATO, the is similar to that of the US. Through its Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated, “Beijing is watching closely and learning lessons that may influence its future decisions. So, what happens in Europe today could happen in Asia tomorrow” (Hassel, Donald, & Kilbury, 2023). NATO’s Interest in backing Ukraine emanates from its relationship far dated to the early 1990s and has since developed into one of the most substantial of NATO’s partnerships. Since 2014, in the wake of Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, cooperation has been intensified in critical areas (NATO Homepage, 2023).

Fourth, the definitions established that for a war to be considered a proxy war, it must be fought outside the territory of the sponsors or external forces. Of course, the territory of Ukraine is the battleground bearing the humanitarian catastrophe inflicted by Russia. To repel Russia’s continuous attacks, the US and NATO have provided military aid and security training to Ukraine. It is interesting to know that one of the inconspicuous reasons behind the US-NATO proxy war is to test the efficacy of the weapons they are manufacturing.

Testing weapons by means of simulation is practically conventional but does not provide real-life feedback regarding the efficacy of the weapons. This is exactly what Ukraine has become. It is now the biggest theater for testing the weapons of the sponsors of proxies.

### **The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on the International System**

The impact of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine which is now a notorious fact has alarmed the global system from a negative dimension. It has devastated the global economy considers one of the essential brackets or parameters of the international system. Evidenced by the fact that the Russia-Ukraine conflict came just after the COVID-19 pandemic affected the global economy, it is safe to assert that the war exacerbated the already fragile or struggling global economy.

Undeniably, the war caused a massive shock to the global economy, especially to energy and food markets, squeezing supply and pushing up prices to unprecedented levels. Africa is one of the most affected regions. It has exacerbated the already food insecurity facing the continent. According to the African Development Bank, the war in Ukraine has been responsible for a shortage of around 30 million tons of food grains on the continent and an approximately 300% hike in the prices of fertilizers which makes it increasingly difficult for the farmers on the continent to grow essential food grains at home (Adesina, 2022). Given this fact, it is easy to make a logical inference that because Africa is part of the international system in which its interest is affected by the conflict, it explains the motive behind the inclination of African leaders to help find peace between Russia and Ukraine through mediation.

### **Africa's Position in The International System**

From the conceptual clarification, it is no doubt about Africa is part and parcel of the system. It is among or part of the state actors that account for the composition of the system. But the question that interests this paper is Africa's position in the system. Meaning, it is part of the key state actors that can leverage its soft power diplomacy to influence the system. To what extent do African voices influence or shape international politics in terms of decision-making? Is Africa among the key actors that set, control, and direct the agenda of the international system? Or do they have a say in decisions that also affect them?

To answer these questions, this article drills you through a few structures that fall under the bracket of the international system. Let's begin with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) that play a major hegemonic role in the system through their veto power coupled with their soft power and hard power diplomacy to control the agenda and direction of the system. For example, all the permanent members of the UNSC have a jurist sitting on the panel of the fifteen judges that adjudicate cases before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Of course, the ICJ cannot be isolated from the international system. A classic case of the big powers reluctance to adhere to the rules of the international order or system is the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Since the establishment of ICJ to date, no permanent member of the UNSC has been subject to any compulsory jurisdiction (Oloo, 2016). The most obvious historic example can be seen from the US reaction to the decisions that were reached by the Court. The United States refused to participate in the proceedings on the merits of the case brought by Nicaragua in 1984, withdrew from the Court's compulsory jurisdiction in 1986, and recently terminated its acceptance of the Court's jurisdiction over disputes arising under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (Murphy, 2008). In this part of the system, where is Africa? The absence of Africa is so conspicuous. However, the place which is a matter of notorious fact is the 10 non-permanent members of the UNSC. Represented by Algeria, and Sierra Leone, Africa does not have veto power and can only serve non-concurrent two-year terms. By this, it means Africa lacks the veto power to influence the system. In other words, its voices are completely absent from the UNSC which predominantly sets, controls, and directs the agenda of the international system.

In another arena of the international system, Africa seems to be under-represented. For example, in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, in which major policy decisions are taken by the

executive boards of the IMF, evidence shows developing countries are under-represented in terms of membership. For instance, 46 African countries are currently represented by only 2 of a total of 24 Executive Directors on the Executive Board tasked with running the operations of the IMF and the World Bank. Despite the 2008 appointment of additional Alternative Directors for the large constituencies, it did not necessarily improve the representation of African countries on the Board knowing fully well that the voting power is determined by quotas. Evidently, the large constituencies make it difficult to ensure that the diverse interests of African countries are adequately represented in informal processes that influence final decisions (African Sovereign Debt Justice Network, 2022).

Now Africa's position in international trade. Is Africa among the key drivers of international trade? Or how many countries from Africa are among the leading players? Let's examine the empirical evidence from both old and fresh data well researched.

From 2012-2017, the five top leading players were China, the United States,

Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands for the sum of exports and imports of merchandise trade. The top five traders account for more than one-third of world trade, recording 38.2 percent of world exports and imports (World Trade Statistics, 2018). In a related development that seems to validate the data FROM World Trade Statistics, Verter (2017) bluntly established the veracity of how Africa has been struggling to gain relevance in the world market.

In 2022, Ousmane Diagana, World Bank Vice President for Western and Central Africa validated Africa's under-representation when he said *While African exports of goods and services have seen their fastest growth in the past decade, the volumes remain low at just 3 percent of global trade. The time is ripe for policymakers to expand their thinking beyond traditional approaches and traditional markets if they want to play an active role in international trade in the 21st century,*" (World Bank, 2022).

Another research paper published in 2022 also repeated Africa's under-representation as it relates to trade performance indicators. According to the paper, for Africa as a whole, the exports' share to the world total trade ranges from 2.5% to 1.64%, in the period 2005-2019 (Moudatsou & Garcia, 2022).

Interestingly, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Finance Minister of Nigeria appointed as the first woman and the first African Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) also validated Africa's under-representation. In response to CNN reporter Nell Lewis, she maintained that Africa's share of global trade at 3% is too little (Lewis, 2023). In summation, Africa's position in international trade suggests that Africa remains the supplier of raw materials to industrialized and stronger economies. The lack of diversification and value addition coupled with the low exportation of finished products made Africa to be marginalized in international trade.

Finally, is foreign aid. Premise on the argument established by this paper that state actors used foreign aid as a tool to project their power on the global stage, it is important to pinpoint foreign aid from Africa and its impact on the global stage or international system. Without prejudice to the fact, outside the continent, Africa is not on record as foreign aid donor but rather on record as a major recipient. Melesse (2021) confirms this claim when he said that many African countries still rely heavily on foreign aid despite their failure to deliver sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Research reveals that North African countries have for many decades been major recipients of foreign aid. According to the OECD, in 2017, Morocco and Egypt were among the top 10 aid recipients in Africa (New African, 2021). Moreover, U.S. assistance for Africa totaled \$7.65 billion in FY2021 allocations, including supplemental global health security funds provided in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA, P.L. 117-2) but excluding emergency assistance appropriated for Sudan under Title IX of P.L. 116-260 as well as humanitarian assistance (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

Interestingly, Africa is not among the top 10 contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping operations budget.

From the above analysis so far, it can be inferred that despite the recent increase in the quota and voice of Africa in international politics the general observation is that African effective representation still looms large, and they are yet to acquire a voice as such in the international arena. In other words, Africa is still positioned at the periphery of the international system. This simply means Africa exists on the outer edges of the myriad of organizations that fall under the parameter of the international system mentioned in this article. They include the five permanent members of the UNSC, IMF, World Bank, International Trade or WTO, etc. The analysis also suggests that Africa's soft power diplomacy and hard power diplomacy are not strong enough to project their influence on the international system. Maybe its soft power and hard power may work on the continent. However, evidence shows that Africa is still struggling to resolve prolonged armed conflict. Take the case of the DRC, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia. Moreover, A fragile peace hangs on by a thread in Mali, Sudan, and Somalia, and communal violence has increased in many areas of Africa, as has the proliferation of armed groups (Pinto, 2022). If the AU is still struggling to resolve armed conflict and communal violence within Africa, how can it possibly project its influence to mediate the Russia-Ukraine war that affects the international system through the global economy or global trade?

Another argument that substantiates the claims of Africa's underdog position stems from the dependency on foreign aid articulated in this article.

### **The Position of the Six African Countries Involved in the Peace Mission**

Besides Africa's position in the international system expressed by this paper, the position of the six African countries regarding the Russia-Ukraine war is equally important to the mediation for Africa this paper cannot ignore.

#### **South Africa Position**

Since the genesis of Russia's arguably unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, South Africa has retained its impartial posture in the conflict. It says it is neutral. Meaning, it has taken no side. This is evidenced by abstaining from two consecutive votes at the United Nations. The first was the United Nations resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calling for Moscow to withdraw its forces immediately in March (Mohamed, 2023). And the second was the United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022 (Aljazeera News, 2022). Ironically, South Africa participated in a joint military drill with Russia, and China on its east coast from Feb. 17-27, 2023, while Russia continues attacks on Ukraine (Carrien du Plessis, 2023). Responding to the US criticism, South Africa through its Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor remarked "All countries conduct military exercises with friends worldwide. It's the natural course of relations," More importantly, South Africa's close ties with Moscow date far back as a friend of the governing African National Congress when it was a liberation movement opposing white minority rule (Carrien du Plessis, 2023). Another Irony that is yet to be proven stemmed from the US allegation of South Africa covertly shipped weapons and ammunition to Russia loaded onto a Russian freighter that docked at a Cape Town naval base between 6 to 8 December 2022 (Financial Times, 2023).

#### **The Union of Comoros Position**

The Union of Comoros position has been unequivocally cleared. It has taken one side that seems to favor Ukraine. Comoros is among the 10 African countries that voted to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council. Moreover, through its "Yes Vote" on 2 March 2022 in favor of Ukraine, the Union of Comoros demanded that Russia ceases its military action and withdraws all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine (Delegation from The Union of Comoros, n.d.).

### **Senegal's Position**

As evidenced by abstaining from two consecutive votes at the United Nations following Russia's invasion, Senegal's position has been very clear. The first was

United Nations General Assembly resolution of March 2, 2022, demanding Russia to halt its invasion and withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory.

The second was the United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022 (Aljazeera News, 2022).

Deeply rooted in its traditional diplomacy that fosters dialogue – neutrality, Senegal justified its position based on the “principles of non-alignment and the peaceful settlement of disputes” (Tawat, 2022). This position was taken by Senegal and other like-minded African Countries like South Africa conformed to the “Principle of neutrality”.

### **Egypt's Position**

By calling for an end to the Russia-Ukraine war through peaceful political means, Egypt seems to have taken a position based on the “principles of non-alignment through its impartial posture (Egypt Today, 2022). This is evidenced by abstaining from two consecutive votes at the United Nations following Russia's invasion. The first was the United Nations General Assembly resolution of March 2, 2022, demanding Russia halt its invasion and withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory. The second was the United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022 (Aljazeera News, 2022).

### **Zambia's Position**

Like South Africa, Zambia's position seems to be controversial. On one hand, it says it is neutral in the conflict by not voting to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council. On the other hand, it voted in favor of Ukraine for the UN General Assembly resolution along with other 140 nations demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine (Lukasatimes.com, 2022). Zambia justified the “Yes Vote” by its foreign policy first formally codified in 1969 in which Russia's action breached. Rhetorically, the government further argued that it did not vote against Russia but against the war.

### **Uganda's Position**

In cognizance of its foreign policy that speaks volumes to its close diplomatic ties with Russia, Uganda took a neutral position by abstaining from the two conservative votes at the United Nations following Russia's invasion. The first was on 2 March 2022 which condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and immediately halted its military operation and withdrew its troops from occupied Ukraine territory (Africanews, 2022). The second was the United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022 (Aljazeera News, 2022). Uganda's position stemmed from the former Soviet Union support rendered to Africa during the anti-colonial endeavors in the 1960s and for facilitating Uganda's nation-building processes through trade, agriculture, industry, and security support (The Independent, 2022).

### **The Republic of Congo's Position**

The Republic of Congo's position is unequivocally clear. Regarding the 2 March 2022 vote that condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, immediate halt to its military operation, and withdrawal of its forces from occupied Ukraine territory, Congo was among the 17 African countries that abstained from the resolution

(Delegation from The Union of Comoros, n.d.) It was also among the UN states that voted against the resolution to remove or suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council on 7 April 2022 (Aljazeera News, 2022). In clearer connotation, the Republic of Congo's position speaks to its foreign policy guiding its diplomatic relations or ties with Russia.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has advanced the argument pertaining to Africa's position in the international system that is so crucial to its ambitious peace initiative between Russia and Ukraine. The paper recognized that this ambitious move by Africa is motivated by its economic interest specially to tackle food insecurity exacerbated by the ongoing war. Regarding Africa's inclination to offer mediation, the article concludes on a key number of issues. First, the paper sees the initiative as welcoming and good for history making for Africa to extend its mediation outside its geographical borders. Secondly, the paper remains skeptical for the prospect of the mediation. This skepticism is prompted by Africa's underdog position in the international system coupled with its position on the UN General Assembly two conservative votes in which the 2 March 2022 resolution votes favored Russia. In the opinion of this paper, this position seems to compromise the neutrality and credibility of Africa mediation. Arguably, Africa is still on the periphery of the international system. As such, to leverage its soft power diplomacy to end the war between Russia and Ukraine in Eastern Europe seems to be impractical. Thirdly, this paper also questions the possibility for Africa successful mediation in Eastern Europe when it is still struggling to find lasting peace in ongoing prolonged conflict in Africa. In other words, if Africa cannot find durable solution to the conflict in the DRC Congo, Somalia, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, etc., how can it possibly find durable solution to the war between Russia and Ukraine?

Fourth, the paper also questions Africa's potential to end a proxy war in which it is argued that the solution lies in the hands of the proxies. Africa needs to remember that a proxy war is motivated by the latent interests of the sponsor(s). Ukraine is only used as the biggest theater for the war. This would suggest that Africa constructively engage the US and NATO as the major sponsors behind Ukraine counterattacks.

Finally, the paper concludes that for Africa to achieve peace will be a big blow to NATO, the West, and other big powers for small African countries positioned at the periphery of the international system to cajole big powers to get to solutions that would benefit all. Therefore, the possibility for the West and big powers to undermine Africa's efforts cannot be ruled out.

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