

The Untamed Impact of a Faraway Shock: Africa and the War in Ukraine

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Abstract

The combinations of multiple disruptors in the world economy have now been reinforced by the return — through the front door — of the warmongering behaviour of the great powers. This is arguably to defend geostrategic interests. The consequences for Africa are brutal. After a decade and a half of considerable progress in its macroeconomic management and social indicators, halted first by the 2008–2009 global financial crisis and now by the impact of the pandemic, the continent was at the limit of its capacity when, in February, Russian troops entered Ukraine. A finer analysis allows us to discern that Africa is simultaneously experiencing a moment of great convergence and one of divergence. The convergence is verifiable at the level of opinions and the construction of defensive positions in relation to global actors, while the divergences are related to the end of a certain notion of globalisation that is likely to deeply affect the continent. Africans' choices in the international arena have become more limited, although that may eventually create the opportunity for a more courageous attitude.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Africa, Geopolitical, War, Economy, Crises.



1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine, the sanctions imposed on Russia, and the effect of climate-related stimulus packages from richer countries to pump up their economies are having a devastating impact on a continent dependent on global dynamics, including food imports. Africa, already struggling to overcome the economic and social effects of the pandemic, now has more on its plate. Once again, it finds itself contingent on conflicts and sanctions imposed on others.

The war is already fuelling global inflation. We know that the pandemic has severely compromised global supply chains and led to skyrocketing transportation costs. This will hit African countries harder due to their relatively marginal role in global trade routes. Inflation will be felt particularly in food-related imports, such as wheat and fertilisers.

One must also count on the potential fallout of the sanctions against Russia on the financial markets. For the smaller economies, the more recent past does not necessarily offer a good road map in this regard. While the 2008/09 crisis affected advanced economies from a systemic point of view, this one does not necessarily have the same types of repercussions. We are in the presence of the antithesis of “too big to fail”, with the richer Western economies ready for another war, an economic war. We may well witness a “too small fail” spectrum.

Development financing gaps have widened significantly since the outbreak of the pandemic. The annual financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals keeps growing steadily. Responding to costs related to climate vulnerabilities, African countries have already been spending 3–5% of their gross domestic product (GDP). If they are to be included in the climate transition, it would require more than the current unfulfilled promises of climate financing. As they endeavour to move away from a system that relegates them to the role of primary exporters of raw materials with little transformation, as has been the case since colonial times, the headwinds are threatening rather than reassuring.

The current war is, somehow, a consequence of tectonic shifts shaping the future’s economy, with all the attendant implications in terms of how to handle fossil fuels, by those who control the stakes. Financing controlling tools play a critical role in such shaping, either by stimulating or curtailing different sets of actors.

By the end of 2021, African sovereign borrowers had raised \$20 billion in capital markets, bringing African sovereign issuance to over \$175 billion over the past

decade (UNCDF 2021). It must be understood that African economies are thirsty for financing, and the margins for investment in such countries will be deeply affected by the war. They have no option but to tap into available commercial debt issuances, given the limited access to concessional finance, which is expensive and contributes to a debt servicing dilemma. This war cannot be an excuse for a reduction in capital flows. Unfortunately, this may well be the tangible outcome.

To understand the reasons behind such turmoil, a brief historical overview may be necessary. It will allow for a better reading of the reasons for the clash between Russia and the West, the repositioning of the latter's relations with Africa in such an environment, and the reasons behind two paradoxical emerging trends of convergence and divergence in the way Africa places itself in global affairs.

2. Consequences Always Have Causes

It is easy for the non-Western eye to perceive flaws, or even contradictions, in the political arguments that the mainstream and influential media present about the causes of this war. The flat interpretation of an unprecedented invasion of a sovereign democratic country by an irascible and powerful authoritarian neighbour as a manifestation of some lunatic behaviour is over-simplistic. Such an invasion, by all means, is unfortunately not a precedent, and it is almost mandatory to classify an enemy's behaviour as incomprehensible.

The overwhelming news about the human woes of the war, some real, some invented or amplified by the necessity of propaganda, does serve a purpose: to focus public attention on the effects of war, diverting their attention from the causes that gave rise to the conflict. All wars, without exception, are a source of human suffering. What distinguishes them is rather found in their origins, the political reasons that explain them and the complex justifications offered by the protagonists.

On 24 March 2021, Ukrainian President Zelensky issued a presidential decree announcing a campaign to recapture Crimea from Russia (Ukrinform 2021). He then began to move the Ukrainian army to the south and southeast, towards the disputed territory of the Donbas. Thus, about a year ago, a large concentration of Ukrainian troops was on the southern border of Ukraine, ready to challenge Russia. In fact, President Zelensky always maintained that he did not believe the Russians would not attack the rest of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Defence Minister also confirmed this repeatedly just before the invasion. Likewise, the head of the Ukrainian Security

Council declared in December 2021 and January 2022 that there were no signs of a Russian attack on Ukraine despite strong warnings from Washington, DC, and NATO (National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine 2022; *NBC News* 2022).

So, what happened?

If one doesn't understand how war happens, then a solution cannot be found. We are in exactly this situation. Despite the United Nations peacekeeping doctrine, used and repeated many times over by its Security Council, this time around, there is no appetite for any mediation or active negotiation to end this war through third parties intermediation. It is as if winning the war was the only acceptable outcome for each of the contending sides, probably because there are more than two sides to the visual mess.

Some of the supporters of Ukraine's military effort are there, not with soldiers but with heavy weaponry supplies, military intelligence, and political support. At the same time, this terrible conflict is influencing relations in many fields: trade, normal multilateral cooperation for common public goods, energy, and the military balance in the world, especially in Europe. In that wider reading, China's interests loom large.

Before the war, relations between Russia and NATO were cold but stable. Even the discussions about NATO enlargement were not tense to the point of non-return, as is now often stated. Talks about Ukraine's inclusion in Western military alliances were present but not yet so concrete as to constitute a real threat to its powerful neighbour. The fall of Russian-aligned President Victor Yanukovich, who fled Kyiv and later Ukraine in February 2014 — prompting the Rada (Ukraine's parliament) to appoint acting leaders pending early elections — started changing the stalemate. What was to be known as the Maidan revolution set alarm bells ringing in Russia. The election of President Zelensky, an ally of former President Poroshenko, a Russian foe, in April 2019 complicated Russia-Ukraine relations immensely.

Russia's instincts towards Western Europe are usually marked by mistrust. Throughout history, the relationship has been conspicuously apprehensive, with Russia insistently trying to be accepted and reacting strongly when it realised it was not. The Cold War was an intensive demonstration of this pattern.

Without elaborating on the intricacies of the security arguments presented to justify the war, political promises were made to post-USSR Russia that NATO would not threaten its geopolitical interests, rather giving the impression to Russia that it would be fully integrated into the global economy (Wintour 2022). A multitude of multilateral agreements, processes and moves made such promises effective for a while. The US "War on Terror" has contributed to the expansion of NATO while reversing

the perception of the new, fragile balance of power. This made Russia aware of the limitations of its integration into the global economy. The aggressive expansion of NATO and EU membership across Central Europe confirmed the real aspirations of the United States and its European allies. Russia reacted with more strident warnings about its security concerns and eventually considered — as in the past with Napoleon and Hitler — the plains of Ukraine as a geographical security red line.

That is why the moves by President Zelensky in early 2022 caused the largest mobilisation of Russian troops since World War II (*The Economist* 2022). There was ample time to detect, engage and avoid it. But the rest is history, as the saying goes.

3. Russia's Forceful Move

The war changed everything. Since it started, NATO experts have had a golden opportunity to assess all the advantages and disadvantages of the Russian army in real time. Everything was revealed — how some mistakes were made, how military actions were planned and then cancelled, the purpose of the destruction of various targets, how the propaganda works internally, how the Western media is consuming the news, and how the international scene is unfolding. This is obviously not working in favour of a quick outcome for Russia.

What began as aid from NATO members to Ukraine with the aim of slowing down the Russian advance turned into an irresistible temptation to go much further: to convince the Ukrainians that, well-armed by NATO, they could defeat the Russians and, in any case, render the West the inestimable service of deeply wearing down the Russian military apparatus.

It is well known that NATO has had a problem with some countries being unwilling to increase their military budgets and strengthen their armies as part of the Atlantic Alliance forces — a point strongly advocated by US President Donald Trump (*France24* 2019). They simply saw no reason to do so, and it was decided that the money would be better used for other purposes more visible to voters, as any other government would prefer. The war has changed such priorities to the extent that what was unthinkable just a couple of months ago — dramatically reducing fossil fuel dependency from Russia, giving away the costly infrastructure that had been built (particularly by Germany) to receive Russian gas, curtailing the profitable capital flows from Russia to the European financial centres, or further sidelining the multilateral system with unilateral decisions — has become a must.

NATO member states now seem to be concerned about whether they are sufficiently protected, asking the Alliance to develop its capabilities and expand permanent bases to deter future threats. For that, countries must spend more money. If Sweden and Finland joined, it would seal one of the few geographical holes between Russia and Europe. Paradoxically, that would increase the need for Ukraine to be secured strategically by Russia.

The economic situation in Europe, due to the strong sanctions against Russia, will have to go through difficulties, mainly in the energy sector. In the short run, the advantage is for fossil fuel sellers, but in the long term, that will flip consistently as the great energy transition away from fossil fuels kicks in. Sanctions are slow and don't threaten anyone immediately, but in the long run, they can be devastating and produce not only economic difficulties but political problems as well. We are in the presence of new forms of sanctions, too — such as wide cultural and sports boycotts — that produce a level of resentment that will be enduring, provoking both sides to weaponise any multilateral effort.

4. Russian Interests in Africa

Russia's relationship with Africa is marked by the Cold War period, during which the USSR and its allies took a stand in favour of independence movements and the struggle to end apartheid. The colonial heritage of some European countries, followed by a long period of Western European foreign policy hostility towards African nationalist movements, left marks that politically favour Russia. During the post-Cold War period of rapprochement between Russia and the West, Russia revealed a total lack of interest in its former friends on the continent, to the point of causing discomfort and disappointment.

In the last three decades, Russia's presence has been deeply influenced by its desire to integrate into the global economy. It constructed a relationship with Africa based on the expansion of economic interests in its areas of comparative advantage: companies specialised in extraction activities, from mines to fisheries; arms, weaponry, and cereal exports; and strategic coordination on oil prices with African OPEC member states.

As the regime of President Vladimir Putin became more isolated in the international arena, Russia showed a renewed interest in African countries. It tried to approach them first at the political-diplomatic level and then with interventions of various kinds in the military and security domains. Only in the period immediately prior to the war in

Ukraine did Russia try to add the investment dimensions and call for deeper economic cooperation.

Russia is now trying to position itself with Africa as a “world power”, knowing its credentials in many domains of global governance remain questionable. It is currently ranked as the 11th largest economy, with a GDP of \$1.43 trillion, dwarfed by the US and China and surpassed by all the G7 members as well as India and South Korea. “Despite a few pockets of excellence and an educated workforce, Russia is also outmatched in the technological field; it spends just 1 per cent of its GDP on research and development; its corporations conduct little or no research and the country as a whole trails China, the U.S., Japan, Korea, Germany and India in patent applications. Its technological strength is in near-space exploration, rocket engines and military hardware; however, research suggests that there have been hardly any spillovers from such sectors into the civil sphere,” says Yusuf Bangura (*Premium Times* 2022).

Russia’s ambitions in Africa may surpass its muscle. African leaders know this and see Russia from the perspective of what it can offer. However, they play the game because they benefit from rivalries between Russia and the West and the constant questioning of the latter’s hegemony. African leaders feel less pressurised by Russia in their bilateral engagements as they are highly transactional. They do not go through complex negotiating platforms. Deals are made using political connections. This makes the decision process less transparent, which coincides with the shared desire for discretion or secrecy, not to mention rent-seeking behaviour at both ends.

Russia accounts for less than 1% of total foreign direct investment stock in Africa (Irwin-Hunt 2020). When President Putin received 45 Heads of State of the continent in Sochi for a Russia-Africa Summit in October 2019, there were promises of over \$12 billion in additional investments (Foy 2019). It is hard to imagine that happening in the immediate future. Most of the investments were supposed to be in extractives, including fossil fuels. Russia is not competitive even in those areas, despite being rich in natural resources reserves and exports. More recently, several African countries signed deals with Russia to produce nuclear energy. Yet those agreements require significant capital investments that neither a beleaguered Russia nor debt-stressed African countries can implement. It seems, therefore, that the two most promising business opportunities for Russia remain the export of its commodities and military hardware and security-related services.

Of late, a great deal of attention has been given to the food security and food-fuelled inflation resulting from the War in Ukraine. Emphasis has been put on wheat

dependency.

Cereal prices have increased considerably since the beginning of the war, according to the International Trade Centre: as an example, “while a ton of French corn cost \$297 on 23 February, its price rose to \$401 on 23 May [2022]” (International Trade Centre 2022). From the beginning of 2022 until 27 May, wheat prices jumped an additional 74% (Trading Economics n.d.). Several African countries depend on Russia and Ukraine for wheat imports, some having as much as 100% dependence, like Benin or Somalia (Armstrong 2022). The countries that are the most exposed in terms of absolute value are Egypt, Sudan, and Tunisia. Egypt and Somalia are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Africa is also the largest regional destination of Ukraine’s wheat exports. Wheat represents half of Africa’s caloric intake of cereals, and almost all of it comes from the two countries in conflict.

The effects of the war are already apparent in terms of supply. Further declines in exports caused by a prolongation of the situation will have devastating effects. Shortages are likely to last at least until 2023, given the planting cycles and the scarcity of fertilisers and other inputs.

It seems unlikely that African countries will be able to replace wheat imports through domestic or sub-regional production. Wheat consumption has grown well above domestic production for over a decade. No African country has an available surplus. Other major exporters such as the United States, Argentina, Australia, and Canada are solicited from everywhere, making it difficult for African countries to jump the queues. It is unlikely that alternative staples can compensate for the shortage of wheat in the short run, and as the share of expenditure devoted to food increases, the impact is much greater in Africa than elsewhere.

Rising costs of urea and phosphates are also cascading into higher fertiliser costs. After an 80% increase in 2021, the war added 30% by the beginning of May 2022 (Baffes and Koh 2022). Gas shortages in Europe are also resulting in cutbacks in ammonia, an important constituent of nitrogen-based fertilisers (Baffes and Koh 2022). Continued price increases for these products will be extremely difficult to absorb within the limited fiscal space of African countries.

Inflated prices for some other food and agriculture-related imports are already felt in most African countries at the household and production levels. Some of the fuel subsidy cuts prized by IMF programmes may be abandoned in the short term, as is the case in Nigeria (Burns 2022). It may not be enough to reduce the pressure. According to African Development Bank, the combined effects of the war could push an additional

1.8 million Africans to extreme poverty in 2022, swelling an additional 2.1 million in 2023 (African Development Bank Group n.d.). Furthermore, we are witnessing the worst run from emerging markets stocks and bonds in decades, deeply affecting Africa's largest economies (Wheatley 2022).

The impacts above have overshadowed other important dimensions of the Russia-Africa relationship. Pressure to impose sanctions on Russian fossil fuel exports creates opportunities for African oil and gas exporters, such as Nigeria, Algeria, and Egypt, and benefits other exporters through oil price hikes. New entrants to the gas market, such as Senegal, Mauritania, Mozambique, and Tanzania, are counting on accelerating the implementation of already identified exploration projects. The positions of these countries regarding the Ukraine war in the United Nations and other international settings show they are bargaining their position to protect investment prospects.

The most recently discussed dimensions of the Russian presence in Africa were, nevertheless, geopolitical, almost like a prelude to the larger geopolitical shifts taking place nowadays.

The first images of the invasion reminded Africans of the Cold War spheres of influence theory and how it conceived the distribution of power. It was a period marked by Africans suffering from further marginalisation in global affairs. The recent demonstrations of agency on the part of Africans, particularly during the pandemic, could be shattered by a return of such an atmosphere, obliging countries to pick sides.

The hesitant stance of the African group to position itself clearly in support of Western or Russian positions was on full display in the several voting rounds of the War in Ukraine UN resolutions (*Africa Confidential* 2022). The number of African countries abstaining or absent from the vote increased from the first to the third round, much to the astonishment of some African watchers (Adeoye 2022). Chris Ogunmodede's words ring true: "Put another way, many in Africa and the rest of the Global South do not regard — and never have regarded — the liberal international order as particularly liberal or international" (Ogunmodede 2022). The hegemonic behaviour of deciding on sanctions outside the legal UN shield and wanting others to follow is a reminder of the asymmetric nature of international decisions.

The condemnations of Russia for its hidden support to the Kremlin-connected private military contractor Wagner Group's presence in various African conflicts, such as Libya, Sudan, or Mozambique, and more visibly in the Central African Republic and Mali, has influenced some countries' posture on the war. The African Union and its 2022 rotating Chair, Senegal, have maintained strict neutrality; so did countries like

South Africa, which shares the views of other BRICS countries.

Security considerations explain some of the hesitancy as well. “...African countries desire to broaden their economic, diplomatic and security relations beyond traditional Western powers and bristle at the notion that they must sacrifice their interests on the altar of geopolitical competition. It remains to be seen how effectively African countries can continue to strike this balance and for how long, but for most of them, the old adage rings true: When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers,” says Ogunmodede (2022).

Russia is responsible for almost half of Africa’s imports of military equipment (49%) (SIPRI n.d.). Even though the African market is small — 7.3% — it is precious for Russian arms dealers. A Rand study for the US Air Force points to the use of military cooperation as a way of ensuring influence useful in the confrontation between Russia and the West (Grissom et al. 2022). According to this study, 19 African countries are targeted by Russia to intensify their presence. Security insecure regimes in Africa are very tempted to protect their countries with such offerings from Russia. It is likely that more will investigate the use of private military contractors from Russia and other security-related options. These deals appear to the Africans as purely transactional, with the same characteristics they eventually envisage or negotiate with other suppliers, particularly Israel. The ultimate selling point for the providers will be the military efficacy of these arrangements.

5. The Unfolding of a New Geopolitical Reality

Despite several pundits’ statements about the emergence of a multipolar world since the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed a reaffirmation of the United States’ hegemony in many spheres of international life. Globalisation has demonstrated the great resilience of the distribution of power inherited from World War II. The biggest change has been China’s great rise, significantly supported by technology and capital investments from the United States and other Western countries, as well as from Japan.

If China reached the top of the world economy, it was partly due to its acceptance of the world economy’s governance rules, largely shaped by longstanding Western domination. China has integrated global value chains that concentrate the greatest value on intellectual property, despite long being at a clear disadvantage in this domain. Its adherence to trade rules established by the WTO has certainly been the subject of some misgivings, but it never escalated to confrontation, at least until quite recently. It did not contest the global financial system structures, favouring a centrality of the US

dollar and a regulatory system dominated by the United States. Until recently, China had the same decision-making weight within the IMF as Belgium; recent changes are still a long way from giving it prominence corresponding to the size of its economy. China tacitly agreed also to massively subsidise American consumption by buying up gigantic amounts of US treasury bonds as it accumulated capital from its own economic growth.

China has maintained a policy of looking away during major international decision-making moments in matters as wide-ranging as peace and security, development, human rights and the rule of law. Until President Xi Jinping came to power, the country insisted on its status as a developing country with a Third World economy, a country with significant unresolved poverty challenges. Its respect for a rules-based system and apparent faith in globalisation have undoubtedly contributed to its spectacular rise. The plethora of post-Cold War global compacts had China's support. The country benefited convincingly from them.

This period of enhanced multilateralism is changing, and with this change comes a sharp polarisation between the West and its immediate competitors, led by China. Deep down, BRICS represents a competitive ambition, and so far, its members have managed to maintain a semblance of coordination and unity in the most difficult moments of international relations. They defend the same interests in trade matters and the G20. They almost always vote in the same direction in various international bodies. Slowly, though, the collective leadership of the BRICS bloc is succumbing to another reality where China feels increasingly prepared to assume sole headship of an alternative hegemonic pole.

The war in Ukraine is the visible demonstration of a new geopolitical reality. Russia feels threatened in its role as a superpower, which it is no longer able to invoke convincingly for several reasons. The ageing and shrinking of its population are a warning of a demographic decline. This is even more serious with the almost continental territorial extension it has. Its economy is now dependent on natural resources, removing its industrial prominence in several domains and relegating it to a commodities exporter. Its soft power is waning even in its areas of linguistic influence.

But there is a domain left for Russia to assert itself. It is the country with the most nuclear warheads and continues to do cutting-edge research on unconventional weapons, despite its apparent incompetence in conventional military engagements. This, therefore, seems to be the only way for it to assert and elevate itself as a fundamental actor in the growing polarisation between the United States and China. Russia is pushing a new doctrine for conflict management and promoting itself as an

experienced pacemaker, challenging the quasi-monopoly the Western countries had in the domain (Lewis 2022).

The pandemic was a turning point in a notorious trend toward a confrontation between the West and China that started with trade and regulation of new technologies. China has been preparing for such a scenario. Its behaviour towards Russia seems self-interested but also defining. An alliance between the two exacerbates the confrontation of them with the West. It is as if several proxies explain the moment of the war (Corradini 2022).

The gigantic post-pandemic stimulus of rich countries' central banks to quicken a return to growth used the imperatives of a climate transition urgency as an additional justification for implementing unorthodox macroeconomic policy — an opportunity not to be missed. This, in turn, rang alarm bells for all concerned with strategic shifts in the energy sector, heralding necessary geopolitical realignments.

The United States saw a possible fragility in NATO regarding the great energy transition. The fact that gas is considered the obvious bridge energy — from more pollutant fossil fuels to renewables — did not escape strategists. Europe's extensive gas use could throw it into Russia's lap.

The war began when the pipeline that would bring Russian gas to the largest European economy — Germany — was completed and this key recipient had already opted for the end of its use of nuclear power. The war occurred when the United States had become a net exporter of energy, including LNG (the fact that it is a more polluting gas than Russia's could be mitigated by it being safer). The war has conveniently followed the hype over market positioning between the West and China on new technologies, such as 5G or AI. Showing Russia the red lines through unprecedented sanctions regimes — particularly financial isolation and the possibility of far-reaching punishments — serves as a warning to China. The economic risks of doing it with Russia are lower than confronting China, so it is a good bet to use Russia as an example.

The pandemic seems to have created the perfect storm for a polarisation that announces a different stage of globalisation, one that is likely to be marked by decoupling and divergence. The war in Ukraine serves as a proxy for the confrontation between Russia and the West, and it allows Russia to check the solidity of its alliance with China. At the same time, Russia serves as a proxy between the West and China regarding shaping future global governance.

Most African countries read the above signs with extreme care and concern.

6. African Pragmatism and Renewed Agency

There has been finger-pointing over who is responsible for the unprecedented food crisis ahead. Russia blames the sanctions, while Western countries point to a Russian blockade of the Ukrainian ports and its use of limited food exports as a pressure strategy. This crisis, which Africans want to avoid at all costs, recalls what happened during the pandemic with masks, ventilators and vaccines: a blame game, also known as vaccine diplomacy — a world of promises that did not materialise and left African countries exposed to a lack of solidarity. With the food crisis, the same behaviours are taking place.

The discussion of pandemic-related debt relief also exposed the unwillingness of Western countries and China to substantially help African countries. The set of these experiences created great scepticism concerning any promises. For example, during the pandemic, the European Union has only reprogrammed its cooperation budgets to replace development programmes with drug purchases from its pharmaceutical companies at inflated prices. A few days before the war in Ukraine began, the Europe-Africa Summit on 17 and 18 February 2022 in Brussels served as the stage for the announcement of €150 billion for Africa by 2027 (European Commission 2021). This sum contrasts with the European Commission budget, which only foresees around €33 billion for Africa during the same period. Examples of this type of discrepancy abound. The UN talks about an alarming reduction, not an increase in development aid (Deen 2022).

We are just eight years away from the ambitious goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which include ending extreme poverty (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development n.d.). It seems that in Africa, few still believe in these kinds of aspirations. This realisation created a great convergence of positions and an impetus to count on its own forces. Manifestations of this commitment are the fast-tracking of the African Continental Free Trade Arrangement (AfCFTA) and the African Union's hard-nosed negotiating position on the manufacture of medicines and vaccines. This is harshly demanded by Africans. The overwhelming majority of African countries refuse the complicated platforms of temporary repositioning or restructuring of sovereign debts, which is another demonstration of the agency. They are considered by most to be inefficient and condescending. Ukraine has already received more aid from the West than the entire continent during the two years of the pandemic, illustrating the enormous impact the war will have on the continent.

African countries see the divergence in global affairs as an opportunity to keep their distance from more powerful players. They appear to be building their own defence in the form of a convergence of their usually fragmented positions. This movement is not consolidated yet and will surely be challenged by divisions and remain fragile for a while. But if this pragmatic approach is strengthened, we may witness the birth of a new African attitude. The war will have served as a trigger for Africa not to enter the great period of polarisation that is beginning with the same positions that divided the continent in the Cold War. The dilemma is for Africa to either build its own unified international stature or to transform itself by atomisation into a set of countries that can be used as second-rate proxies.

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