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ON THE AFRICAN FRONT OF THE RUSSIAN WAR OF AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

Abstract:

This article examines Africa's significance in Putin's war on Ukraine and evaluates the options for Kyiv to secure greater support by assessing the continent's political, diplomatic, and economic stakes. By exploring Russia's strategies in Africa, both through hard and soft power, it highlights opportunities for Ukraine to fill gaps left by Moscow, particularly in development, while addressing the challenges Ukraine faces in traditional areas of diplomatic influence and agricultural trade. Although Kyiv remains aligned with its Western allies, it must also navigate independently the growing African discontent with Western positions. Ultimately, the article concludes that while Ukraine's prospects in Africa appear limited in some areas, it retains strong arguments to win support for its cause.

Key words:

Africa, soft power, hard power, interests, Ukraine, Russia

INTRODUCTION

The vote by only 28 of the 54 African countries represented at the United Nations for the resolution condemning the Russian general invasion of Ukraine from February 24, 2022, came as a shock for certain Western countries, and first and foremost Ukraine. Alexander Khara, an international relations specialist at the Centre for Defence Strategies, a Kyiv-based think tank, describes the situation this way "We thought that the invasion of sovereign territory and the extremely serious violations of international law committed

by the Russian army would automatically put countries on our side. We underestimated how strong Russian influence was on the African continent”. He concludes by saying that “To win the war, Ukraine must influence the new centres of influence and growth in Africa”.

This division in Africa’s response to Russia’s actions underscores the growing geopolitical influence of the continent, which, despite ongoing challenges, is becoming a critical arena for global power struggles and a key factor in shaping Ukraine’s diplomatic strategy.

Although many African countries continue to grapple with challenges such as poverty, insecurity, and corruption, the African Union’s recent admission to the G20, following the group’s 2023 summit in India, highlights its close ties with the world’s most populous country. It is also a candidate for the United Nations Security Council. The various African countries are particularly divided on the issue of condemning the Russian actions. While Martin Kimani, Kenya’s ambassador to the U.N., strongly condemned Russia, several countries whose leaders came to power through coups against Western-backed regimes, such as Mali and Niger, benefit from partnerships with Moscow.

These countries generally receive diplomatic backing, mercenary support, resources, and economic deals from Russia. Moscow, despite a decade long retreat from Africa in the 90s, benefits from its stance against former Western colonial powers, particularly on the issues of democracy and human rights. Russia also leverages historical ties, built during the Soviet era through economic and ideological alliances and a tradition of elite training, especially in nations where Moscow once supported “socialist” organizations.¹

In comparison, Ukraine, with its 10 embassies across the African continent before February 24, 2022, appears far more vulnerable there. Its position is further weakened by the difficulties in maintaining exports of agricultural products and grains, which are vital connections to Africa. But how exactly is Ukraine countering Russia’s influence on the continent?

Russia’s actions in Africa and its confrontation with the West and NATO on the continent have been well studied. What

¹ Example of USSR support for the independence movement in Mozambique.

has been overlooked is Ukraine's action as an independent player, different from its western partners'.

This paper will first provide a detailed overview of the various forms of Russian influence in Africa, including its military and diplomatic agreements, the role of the Wagner Group, and the Kremlin's economic strategy. It will then focus on Kyiv's comprehensive efforts to increase its presence and influence in Africa, examining Ukraine's strategies and prospects.

RUSSIAN PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN AFRICA: MILITARY & DIPLOMATIC AGREEMENTS

Legacy of the USSR's support for independence and anti-capitalist movements has had a lasting impact in Africa. After a period of disengagement during the political and economic turmoil of the 1990s, Russia began its return to the continent in 2006, starting with Putin's first trip to South Africa. Russia then ramped up its efforts following its 2014 invasion of Crimea, as international sanctions pushed the Kremlin to seek new "partners" and economic openings.²

Employing a range of asymmetric and often extralegal tactics, Moscow has significantly deepened its ties with many military and political elites in countries often considered, at the very least, "unstable." Today, Russia is the leading arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 40% of the continent's major weapons imports from 2018-2022, with arms sales growing from approximately \$500 million to over \$2 billion annually in recent years³.

The Kremlin has also capitalized on the void left by the partial withdrawal of American counterterrorism efforts under Trump. Currently, more than half of African countries have bilateral defence agreements with Russia, which include

² Droin Mathieu and Dolbaia Tina, Centre for Strategic and International Studies. (n.d.). *Russia: Still Progressing in Africa. What's the Limit?* Retrieved from:

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-still-progressing-africa-whats-limit>

³ Ibid.

seminars, official visits, training missions, weapons deliveries, and maintenance support.⁴

There are also plans for intelligence-sharing agreements between Defence Ministries, and according to Ivan U. Klyszcz, a researcher at the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) in Tallinn, countries like the Central African Republic (CAR) and Madagascar—formerly more aligned with France—have now become “platforms for Russian intelligence in Africa”.⁵

But what explains this dependency of African countries on Russian equipment? Modern Russian systems are cheaper than those from the West and are generally compatible with older Soviet-era stockpiles. They’re also supplied without conditions tied to human rights or adherence to international laws. For example, Russia provides equipment to Marshal Haftar’s forces in Libya, which oppose the UN-recognized government⁶. Another crucial point is that the Kremlin promotes these deals as “partnerships,” unlike the “aid” offered by most Western countries. For instance, Russia has supplied the Malian military with helicopters and ammunition that France, due to concerns over rising insurgencies and the risk of high-tech arms falling into enemy hands—a phenomenon some experts retrospectively call the “Afghan syndrome”—was reluctant to provide.⁷

Moscow’s security approach is complemented by diplomatic efforts such as debt relief⁸, a critical factor in countries often subjected to austerity measures in exchange for international loans from organizations like the World Bank. At the upper echelons of state, Russia has actively promoted alternatives to democracy as a regional norm, backing coups to destabilize governments and install pro-Russian leaders. Russia has also invested millions to spread anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian sentiment through its network of embassies and information agencies like Rossotroudnitchestvo.

⁴ Le Rubicon. (n.d.). *Quel rôle pour les services de renseignement russes en Afrique?*

Retrieved from <https://lerubicon.org/quel-role-pour-les-services-de-renseignement-russes-en-afrique/>

⁵ Le Rubicon. Ibid.

⁶ Droin, M., Dolbaia, T. op. cit.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

In July 2023, despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, 17 African heads of state attended the second Russia-Africa Summit hosted by Putin, where multiple deals were signed, spanning several military-related fields and reinforcing Russian military diplomacy beyond arms transfers.⁹ However, while Russia has participated in some peacekeeping missions, it deploys few official military personnel on the ground, relying primarily on the Wagner Group – a private military company with strong ties to Putin’s inner circle.

WAGNER GROUP

The Wagner Group first emerged in 2014, when the Kremlin sought deniability for its involvement in the fighting in eastern Ukraine¹⁰. Likely founded by veterans of Russian military intelligence, the group was, until a failed rebellion in June 2023, officially controlled by Evgeniy Prigozhin, who had once been one of Putin’s most trusted associates. Prigozhin rose from his role as “Putin’s chef” to control many assets linked to the Kremlin’s oligarchy.

Known for their particularly brutal tactics, ¹¹Wagner operatives were initially used to train and fight alongside so-called local “independence militias,” minimizing the impact on Russian and international public opinion of Russia’s unprovoked attack on a neighbouring country, while allowing the Kremlin to avoid officially acknowledging casualties.

The war in Syria saw the expansion of Wagner’s activities. Prigozhin also developed a significant “troll factory,” later accused of interfering in U.S. political affairs and

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Open Society Justice Initiative (2023, November 8). *Accountability for Crimes of Personnel of the Wagner Group in Ukraine*. Retrieved from: <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/a8de622f-bfbf-4cf5-99ba-f5b98b34f4ad/accountability-for-crimes-of-personnel-of-the-wagner-group-in-ukraine-en-20231108.pdf>

¹¹ Deutsche Welle (n.d.). *Ukrainian POWs say Wagner Group violated war laws*. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/ukrainian-pows-say-wagner-group-violated-war-laws/a-67223859>; Open Society Justice Initiative, op. cit.; U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). *The Wagner Group's Atrocities in Africa: Lies and Truth*. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/the-wagner-groups-atrocities-in-africa-lies-and-truth/>

attempting to influence U.S. presidential elections¹². This operation is also believed to be a key component of Russia's online propaganda efforts in Africa. With growing combat experience, Wagner began to partially fund itself by taking shares or outright control of natural resource operations in various countries, particularly following an alleged rift between Prigozhin and Russia's official military high command.

Deployed in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan at the end of 2017, the group transformed into a security provider for Moscow's allies in the region, offering protection in exchange for economic advantages.

Although details are scarce, a pattern of Wagner's activities in Africa can be discerned. First, it engages in disinformation campaigns targeting Western powers and supporting pro-government narratives through tactics like fake polls and counterdemonstrations. Second, Wagner secures payment in extractive industries, such as bauxite in Guinea and gold in CAR. Third, Wagner collaborates with national militaries, facilitating direct ties with Russian military forces by offering training, advising, personal security services, and anti-insurgency operations. This involvement also opens opportunities for Russian state-controlled companies, such as Gazprom and various diamond extraction firms.¹³

Wagner's main strategic value for Moscow seems to lie in its "low-cost" model—an inexpensive way to extend influence in the region. After Prigozhin's death in August 2023, the Kremlin consolidated its control over the mercenary group, now rebranded as "Africa Corps."

While Wagner has achieved some "military successes," most notably assisting the Malian armed forces in retaking the rebel stronghold of Kidal, a recent event may threaten the group's standing as Moscow's key tool in the region.

¹² Columbia University - School of International and Public Affairs. (n.d.). *Study Confirms Influence of Russian Internet Trolls in 2016 Election*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/news/study-confirms-influence-russian-internet-trolls-2016-election>

¹³ ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) (2022, August 30). *Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African Republic and Mali*. Retrieved from: <https://acleddata.com/2022/08/30/wagner-group-operations-in-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-in-the-central-african-republic-and-mali/>

In late July 2024, Wagner members accompanied Malian soldiers on a “stabilization mission” in the northeastern border city of Tinzaouaten, when fighting broke out with Tuareg rebels. As the joint force retreated, they were ambushed by militants from the al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Reports indicate that up to 80 soldiers, including more than 40 Malians, were killed.¹⁴ A defeat of this scale, coupled with Wagner’s brief, unsuccessful 2019 counterterrorism mission in Mozambique, may prompt some African leaders to reconsider Wagner as their primary security provider.

RUSSIA’S ECONOMIC STRATEGY IN AFRICA

Trade revenue between Russia and African countries has nearly doubled, rising from \$9.9 billion in 2013 to \$17.7 billion by 2021. Grain plays a particularly strategic role, as many African countries rely on grain imports to feed their populations, with Russia supplying 30% of Africa’s grain needs.

The stakes are especially evident in Russia’s use of Ukrainian grain as a bargaining chip. The Kremlin’s refusal to renew the Ukrainian grain deal has endangered millions who depend on these imports. To further increase African dependency, Russia promised free grain to its closest allies most impacted by the deal's end and inevitable price surges. This move further tightened Moscow's control over countries whose leaders were already indebted to Russia for their ascension to power.

Another critical aspect of the Kremlin’s African economic strategy involves natural resources. Through Wagner, Russia has gained favourable or direct control over the natural resources of several African nations, which are exploited by state-owned or partially state-owned companies like Rosneft and Rosatom, including nuclear plant developments in Egypt and diamond extraction projects led by Alsora in countries like Zimbabwe and Congo.

Despite these gains, Russia remains an economic “dwarf” in Africa, especially when compared to what other powers

¹⁴ For context, in almost 10 years in Mali, the French armed forces only lost 59 soldiers.

invest in traditional statecraft through civil and infrastructure investments. However, Russia's main advantage seems to be its ability to offer affordable military services, a wide range of weapons, and security support without attaching conditions related to human rights. This approach, unlike the "patronizing" concerns typical of Western powers, allows Russia to strengthen alliances without criticism.

In contrast to China's large-scale investments, some argue that Russia's approach may lack long-term strategic benefit. Yet, because Russia's alliances are largely elite-based and overlook long-term development needs, they may appear more sustainable in the short term. With endemic corruption, insecurity, and unequal distribution of state wealth diminishing the impact of large-scale infrastructure investments in many African countries, China's reduced lending in recent years reflects the limitations of its strategy in a region where returns are uncertain, and risks are high.

THE UKRAINIAN OFFENSIVE IN AFRICA: A LARGE DIPLOMATIC EFFORT

The preservation of Ukraine's independence remains the country's primary foreign policy goal, as outlined in the Law of Ukraine on the principles of domestic and foreign policy. In Africa, Ukraine's efforts to advance this objective encounter varying levels of support across different countries.

The African Union, through statements by its President Macky Sall and Chairperson of the African Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat, has expressed "extreme concern" and urged Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty. However, this stance is not uniformly shared among AU members.¹⁵

While 26 countries voted to support sanctions against Russia at the United Nations, a number that increased to 30 for the resolution condemning Russia's annexations in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, many countries, including some of Ukraine's traditional allies in

¹⁵ African Union (2022, February 24). *African Union Statement on the Situation in Ukraine*. Retrieved from: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220224/african-union-statement-situation-ukraine>

North Africa, have refrained from joining the sanctions movement. Some even abstained from the UN resolution demanding Russia's withdrawal¹⁶, instead blaming NATO and the West for "instigating" the war.

Ukraine's diplomatic efforts in Africa have been hindered by decades of minimal investment in the region, stretching from its independence in 1991 up to Russia's initial aggression in 2014. During this time, Kyiv's foreign policy was largely concentrated on Europe and former Soviet states.¹⁷

As a result, its limited number of embassies has translated into a low cultural and political presence on the African continent. A noticeable shift began after the 2014 Euromaidan protests, as the Ukrainian diaspora in Africa organized events to promote Ukrainian culture, raising awareness to the point that the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized this cultural diplomacy as a valuable tool. Notable events took place even in South Africa, a country traditionally more aligned with Russia (Kachur, Rozumna 2018).

Still, with only 10 embassies at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, some of them in charge of several countries, Ukraine was still far behind Russia. Since February 24, 2022, Kyiv has pursued four main diplomatic goals, according to George Erman, a BBC Ukraine journalist: "to secure support for territorial integrity; to gain backing for a special tribunal against Russia; to advocate for reparations; and to promote the Crimean Platform [an initiative to reaffirm Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea]."¹⁸

Gaining support from non-Western countries is crucial for these initiatives, which seek to address Russia's actions from a global, not solely Western, perspective. Despite the financial strain of the ongoing war, Ukraine has made significant diplomatic investments over the past two years, including the recent opening of an embassy in Ghana and

¹⁶ The Washington Post (2023, February 24). *U.N. Security Council members vote on resolution regarding Ukraine*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/24/un-ukraine-resolution-vote-countries/>

¹⁷ South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) (n.d.). *Beyond Bread: Ukraine's Africa Diplomacy*. Retrieved from <https://saiia.org.za/research/beyond-bread-ukraine-africa-diplomacy/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

plans for new embassies in Botswana and Mozambique. Discussions are underway with additional countries like Mauritania, Tanzania, the DRC, and Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁹

Ukraine's former Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has conducted multiple tours across Africa, the first of their kind by a Ukrainian official of his stature. "He understands that African countries seek tangible benefits," explains Erman. "Ukraine needs to support African interests in international organizations and provide practical assistance across various sectors."²⁰ However, collaboration in international institutions presents challenges, as Ukraine is dependent on Western allies for support, making it difficult to champion Africa's push for a more prominent role in the Western-dominated global order. Nonetheless, Ukraine could leverage key sectors of its economy to deepen its ties with African nations.

AN ECONOMIC WAR

Ukraine has a clear economic objective on the African continent, according to Maksym Subkh, Ukraine's special representative for the Middle East and Africa. "To gradually reduce the share of raw material exports to Africa, namely cereals and oil, by increasing that of processed goods, such as agricultural technologies. Military-technical cooperation is also promising, especially with the sale of various types of weapons."²¹

This policy builds on pre-existing partnerships from before the full-scale invasion, particularly in university education. Prior to February 24, 2022, Ukraine hosted a significant number of African exchange students in its universities.²²

¹⁹ Le Monde (2023, November 20). *L'Ukraine tente de défier la Russie en Afrique*. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/11/20/l-ukraine-tente-de-defier-la-russie-en-afrique_6201324_3212.html

²⁰ South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), op. cit.

²¹ Le Monde, op. cit.

²² Le Monde (2022, April 7). *In Ukraine, African students scramble to flee the war*. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/04/07/in-ukraine-african-students-scramble-to-flee-the-war_5979916_124.html

President Zelensky himself, during his address to the American Congress in December 2022, highlighted the "colossal economic potential" of such relations with Africa, announcing the setting up of multiple trade representative offices.²³

These goals are primarily aimed at reducing economic dependence on agricultural and cereal exports and sidestepping Russian leverage. There is also a broader ambition to align Ukraine's economy more closely with the European Union, preparing the country for integration into the common market.

Ukraine brings significant strengths in the IT sector, which remains strong despite the war. For example, the government-run app Diia enables citizens to store documents and complete administrative tasks online—an innovation that could benefit African countries struggling with widespread corruption in public services.²⁴

Another potential area of cooperation lies in power grid management. Despite heavy targeted bombings, Ukraine has managed to maintain mostly consistent power access, except in areas of ongoing conflict. Roughly half of Africa lacks electricity, and even developed economies like Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa face challenges in managing their grids. Assisting with infrastructure development and maintenance could allow Kyiv to contribute meaningfully to African development.²⁵

However, Ukraine has not abandoned its traditional grain exports to Africa. The "Grain from Ukraine" (Зерно з України) program, launched by President Zelensky on November 26, 2022, on the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor,²⁶ aims to foster partnerships by providing grain to countries at high risk of famine. Through this initiative, Ukraine, alongside partner countries and private donors, will supply Ukrainian grain to nations in Africa and Asia facing food insecurity. The goal is for donors to purchase grain directly from Ukrainian producers

²³ Reuters (2022, December 23). *Ukraine eyeing a bigger diplomatic footprint in Africa - Zelenskiy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-eyeing-bigger-diplomatic-footprint-africa-zelenskiy-2022-12-23/>

²⁴ South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), op. cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Genocide through hunger of the Ukrainian people by Staline in 1932-1933, thought to have killed at least 3,9 millions Ukrainians.

and distribute it to countries in need. For some, like Comoros, which has remarked that Putin's "gifts" may be insufficient to stave off hunger, this program could be an effective tool to strengthen partnerships on the continent.²⁷

Under this program, 60 shipments are planned to Africa.²⁸ Yet, the prospects for Ukrainian agricultural exports to the continent remain uncertain, as they depend entirely on Kyiv's ability to keep the Black Sea ports open following Moscow's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The economic and diplomatic connections that might have developed through these exports have been largely severed by Putin's conflict. However, Ukraine's engagement with Africa isn't limited to soft power alone.

UKRAINIAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

Before the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian military engagement in Africa was minimal, limited to around 300 soldiers in the United Nations mission in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, before February 24, 2022.²⁹

Since then, Ukraine, beyond defending its territories, has launched efforts to strike at Russian interests abroad, aiming to weaken its economic assets and diplomatic credibility.

In Sudan, rumours circulated for months about the presence of Ukrainian military advisers, especially after the appearance of tactics specific to Ukraine³⁰ in the conflict between the rebel Rapid Support Forces (RSF)—primarily representing the Arabic Sudanese minority and led by a figure

²⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) (n.d.). *African Union Chairman: Ceasefire, Grain Deal Insufficient in Ukraine-Putin Talks*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rferl.org/a/african-union-chairman-ceasefire-grain-deal-insufficient-ukraine-putin/32524692.html>

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (n.d.). *Grain Ukraine*. Retrieved from: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/grain-ukraine>

²⁹ Reuters (2022, March 9). *Ukraine to pull troops, equipment from UN missions*. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-pull-troops-equipment-un-missions-2022-03-09/>

³⁰ Suicide drone attacks against vehicles with camera, previously were unseen on the Sudanese field.

linked to Russia through a gold-smuggling network³¹, supported by Wagner, and the military government of Khartoum.

A source informed the French newspaper *Le Monde*³² that Ukrainian special forces within the HUR (military intelligence directorate) left a strong impression on General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the leader of Sudan's ruling military junta, by successfully organizing a complex land evacuation of foreign civilians to Egypt. This likely contributed to the Sudanese government, despite its frayed ties with the West due to halted political transition following Omar al-Bashir's ouster, entrusting Ukraine to assist in combatting the RSF—accused of atrocities in the West Darfur region.³³

An "unscheduled" meeting between president Zelensky and the chief of the Sudanese army at the Shannon airport in Ireland in September 2023, where were discussed "illegal armed groups financed by Russia"³⁴ seems to support the notion that Ukraine may be establishing Sudan as a "bridgehead" for counter-Russian operations across the region.

Both sides have leveraged this information war opportunity. Ukraine has showcased its special forces' reach, including successful drone strikes on Wagner troops, underscoring its ability to target Russia globally. Meanwhile, Russia has attempted to sway Arab audiences by highlighting Ukrainian support for al-Burhan, painting it as aligned against

³¹ Warsaw Institute (n.d.). *As Zelensky meets Sudan's Burhan, is Ukraine present in Sudan?* Retrieved from: <https://warsawinstitute.org/as-zelensky-meets-sudans-burhan-is-ukraine-present-in-sudan/>

³² *Le Monde* (2023, September 27). *Ukraine wants to thwart Moscow's plans all the way to Africa*. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/09/27/ukraine-wants-to-thwart-moscow-s-plans-all-the-way-to-africa_6140299_4.html

³³ Human Rights Watch (2023, November 26). *Sudan: New Mass Ethnic Killings, Pillage in Darfur*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/sudan-new-mass-ethnic-killings-pillage-darfur>; Harter, F. (2023, December 15). *Looting, massacre in Ardamata is the latest chapter in Darfur's horror story*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/dec/15/looting-massacre-in-ardamata-is-the-latest-chapter-in-darfurs-horror-story>

³⁴ *Le Monde*, op. cit.

the RSF's vision of Sudan's future, similarly to how it leverages Ukrainian support for Israel.³⁵

However, Ukraine's position in Sudan appears tenuous. The junta's forces are losing ground rapidly, and Ukraine lacks the extensive military resources, like aviation and advanced intelligence, that would enable Western powers such as France, the UK, or the US to alter the situation and secure a stable position.

Thus, Ukraine's direct military intervention against Russian influence in Africa does not appear promising on a broader scale, as limited firepower constrains its capabilities. This is further complicated by the stance of African countries, even the most unstable, which are generally reluctant, as former CIA operative and security expert Cameron Hudson noted, to "become a proxy battlefield for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict."³⁶

The Tuareg victory in Tinzaouaten in July 2024 and the subsequent statement from the HUR's spokesperson, who claimed the rebels "had received intelligence" aiding their success, triggered a diplomatic row between Ukraine and Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, leading to a severing of ties. While Ukraine has denied supplying the rebels with UAVs as speculated in certain reports, there remains insufficient information to fully assess Ukraine's position in this particular region.

CONCLUSIONS

In Putin's war against Ukraine, Africa has become an indirect front, heavily impacted by economic consequences like rising prices across multiple sectors. Political rifts with the Western world have emerged, as many of the continent's traditional Western allies have opted for neutrality, choosing

³⁵ Ukrinform (n.d.). *Russian propaganda invents death of eight Ukrainian soldiers in Sudan*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-factcheck/3775993-russian-propaganda-invents-death-of-eight-ukrainian-soldiers-in-sudan.html>

³⁶ Le Monde (2023, November 20). *L'Ukraine tente de défier la Russie en Afrique*. Retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/11/20/l-ukraine-tente-de-defier-la-russie-en-afrique_6201324_3212.html

not to take sides or pressing for peace talks. This article has outlined how Russia has long cultivated its influence in Africa, spreading its ideology and influence through various channels and proxies like the Wagner Group, positioning itself as a defender against former colonial powers, often perceived as meddling in African affairs.

It raises questions about the potential for Ukraine to establish its own influence on the continent and highlights the policies President Zelensky's administration has pursued. Though Ukraine faces an uphill battle, particularly on the diplomatic front, it possesses tools to offer viable alternatives to Russia. While Moscow has often amplified African grievances against the West, Kyiv may present solutions, at least in specific sectors.

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