

Are We Seeing a Global Geopolitical Realignment?

Statements, UN Votes, and Diplomatic Interactions after the Invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has prompted claims that a new Cold War is evident in the emergence of global blocs. This brief examines the evidence as to whether the world is already divided into blocs; whether states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean remain ‘non-aligned’; and whether there is a global competition for influence. It studies the clues that can be gleaned from states’ public actions over the first 15 weeks after the invasion, looking at votes in the United Nations, statements from regional organizations, and reported diplomatic interactions. The analysis suggests that while there is no sign of a global pro-Russia or pro-authoritarian bloc, there is reluctance in parts of the ‘Global South’ to support the stance taken by the United States or its allies in Western Europe.

Brief Points

- The majority of states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean appear to prefer to be non-aligned and avoid taking sides.
- Although there is no sign of a global pro-Russia or pro-authoritarian bloc, there does appear to be diplomatic competition between Russia and the United States and/or European partners for political influence in the ‘Global South’, particularly in Asia.
- Conclusive evidence of the existence – or not – of a global geopolitical realignment will emerge in the years to come, as we learn more details about states’ security and economic policies.

Introduction

Early in 2022, Mali discontinued its historic security ties with France, the EU, and other member states as it began to engage with the Russian private security company Wagner Group. The Western European partners were reluctant to continue their activities in Mali due to the presence of the Russian mercenaries, making it difficult for Mali to maintain security relations with both. With an increase in anti-French sentiments as the backdrop, Mali's move to strengthen its relationship with Russia was an important factor in its decision to disrupt its European partnerships. Does the case of Mali moving from European partnership to Russian partnership signal a global trend, or is it an exception?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has prompted a debate which includes the perspectives that a new Cold War is evident in the creation of global blocs;¹ that, conversely, many states in the 'Global South' do not want to take sides in what they see as a European problem;² and that regions of the 'Global South' such as Africa have seen intense diplomatic competition to persuade governments to back one side or the other.³ This brief argues that although there is no sign of a global pro-Russia or pro-authoritarian bloc, there does appear to be a global competition for diplomatic influence, where most states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have had public diplomatic interactions with all the Great Powers. It appears that, in general,

these states are unwilling to choose sides, though in the future a consequence of the competition may mean that it is difficult to remain non-aligned. Through an analysis of votes in the United Nations (UN), statements from regional organizations, and public diplomatic interactions in the first 15 weeks following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the following sections reveal signals of a growing global competition for diplomatic influence.

UN Votes

UN votes related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine show those member states that are willing, or not, to publicly support criticism of Russia. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) held three votes on resolutions criticizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The states that abstained, did not vote, or voted against are summarized in Table 1. In addition to Russia, only four states (Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria) voted against two resolutions which condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine (ES-11/1) and called upon Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine (ES-11/2) and, respectively, 35 and 38 states abstained or did not vote. A further resolution called for the suspension of Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council (24 states voted against; 58 states abstained or did not vote).

The UNGA votes show that only four states have consistently voted with Russia and all of these already have close and longstanding relationships with Russia. If these four represent

a pro-Russia 'bloc', it is one that predates the February 2022 invasion. A further 79 states did not consistently condemn Russia. It is likely that any future political realignment may occur among those states that did not publicly express antipathy toward Russia in the three UN votes. All of the 79 states are located outside of Europe or North America, with the majority being African or Asian, and they are disproportionately non-democratic (49% of these are not democracies, compared to 39% non-democratic states worldwide).

Statements by Regional Organizations

Eleven regional organizations have issued statements responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. No regional organization has expressed support for Russia's invasion, though the responses have been different. Seven organizations explicitly named Russia as the aggressor (AU, ECOWAS, Caribbean Community, OAS, Council of Europe, EFTA, Pacific Island Forum), and a further four referred to the war without naming Russia as the aggressor, suggesting less overt antipathy toward Russia (IGAD, ASEAN, Gulf Cooperation Council, League of Arab States). There are also seven organizations from which no statement was identified (Arab Maghreb Union, CEMAC, ECCAS, SADC, SAARC, Central American Parliament, Southern Common Market). While it is difficult to draw conclusions from the lack of a statement, refraining from commenting suggests a reluctance to take sides.

Algeria	Brazil	El Salvador	Indonesia	Malaysia	North Korea	South Sudan	UAE
Angola	Brunei	Equatorial Guinea	Iran	Maldives	Oman	Sri Lanka	Uganda
Armenia	Burundi	Eritrea	Iraq	Mali	Pakistan	Sudan	Uzbekistan
Bahrain	Cabo Verde	Eswatini	Jordan	Mexico	Qatar	Suriname	Vanuatu
Bangladesh	Cambodia	Ethiopia	Kazakhstan	Mongolia	Russia	Syria	Vietnam
Barbados	Cameroon	Gabon	Kenya	Mozambique	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Tajikistan	Yemen
Belarus	CAR	Gambia	Kuwait	Namibia	Saint Vincent and the Grandines	Tanzania	Zimbabwe
Belize	China	Ghana	Kyrgyzstan	Nepal	Saudi Arabia	Thailand	
Bhutan	Congo	Guinea-Bissau	Laos	Nicaragua	Senegal	Togo	
Bolivia	Cuba	Guyana	Lesotho	Niger	Singapore	Trinidad and Tobago	
Botswana	Egypt	India	Madagascar	Nigeria	South Africa	Tunisia	

Table 1: States that voted 'no', abstained or did not vote on resolutions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Orange shades denote votes against all three resolutions; blue shades denote only voting against resolution ES-11/3.

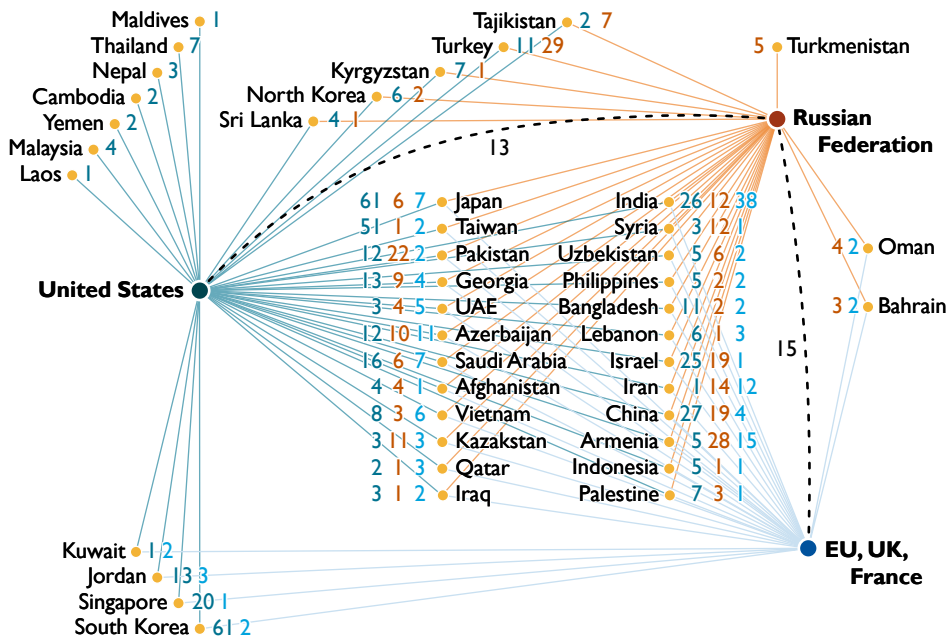


Figure 1: US, Russian and European diplomatic interactions with Asian states

It is notable that no Asian organization has named Russia as the aggressor, whereas there have been mixed signals from African and American organizations, indicating that several regional organizations are hesitant to align themselves explicitly with either side.

Reported Diplomatic Interactions

This section focuses upon media reported diplomatic interactions of Russia the US and European partners with states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean from 20 February to 19 June 2022.⁴ The reported diplomatic interactions are activities that governments want to publicize, and they therefore provide an indication of the relationships that they prioritize. There are, of course, many more diplomatic interactions that occur in private, and for many states no applicable diplomatic interactions were publicly reported during the period being studied.

Asia and Africa

Of the 79 states that did not consistently condemn Russia through the UNGA votes, the majority are in Africa or Asia. The following analysis of reported diplomatic interactions with African and Asian states suggests that neither continent is dividing into significant pro-Russia or

pro-Western blocs (where the US and European partners here broadly represent 'the West').

The network analysis of reported diplomatic interactions with Asian states, as seen in Figure 1, demonstrates that 31 out of the 42 Asian states in the figure have had public diplomatic interactions with both Russia and the US and/

or European partners. This is out of 51 counted states and entities in Asia, meaning that nine Asian states have had no reported diplomatic interactions with Russia and 'the West'. Although the majority of Asian states thus signal an unwillingness to choose sides, there are some relationships that seem to be prioritized, at least publicly: e.g., Armenia had publicly reported interactions with the US five times, with Europe 15 times and Russia 28 times.

The analysis of reported diplomatic interactions with African states is presented in Figure 2 and demonstrates that 8 out of 23 states in the figure have met with both Russia and the US and/or European partners. It is noteworthy that only 23 out of the 54 African states were identified. The analysis therefore suggests that despite media attention to these diplomatic interactions, Africa may be prioritized to a lesser degree than Asia as a site for competition for influence between the great powers, at least in public.

Democratic and non-democratic interactions

Of the 79 states that did not consistently condemn Russia through the UNGA votes, almost half are non-democratic states.⁵ Most non-democratic states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean had public diplomatic interactions with Russia, China, the US and/or European partners.⁶ These clues suggest that most non-democratic states thus far remain

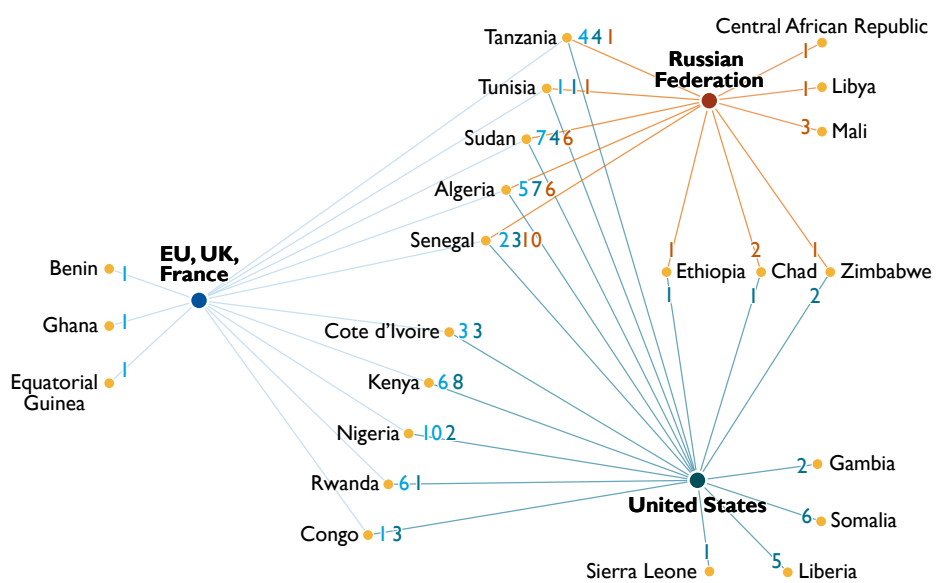


Figure 2: US, Russian and European diplomatic interactions with African states

non-aligned. Yet, the data on the quantity of reported diplomatic interactions could suggest that, in some cases, certain relationships have been prioritized. For instance, Afghanistan had reported diplomatic interactions with European partners once, four times with the US, four times with Russia and 13 times with China.

Comparing democratic and non-democratic states, more democratic states than non-democratic states appear to have had reported diplomatic interactions only with the US and Europe, or only with China or Russia. However, when looking only at democratic states, the majority of these have publicly engaged in diverse diplomatic interactions with both Russia and ‘the West’, which suggests an ongoing competition for geopolitical influence that operates outside of ideological differences.

Bringing UN Votes, Regional Positions, and Diplomatic Interactions Together

Bringing together the UN votes, statements from regional organizations, and reported diplomatic interactions provides us with clues as to the potential existence – or not – of a global realignment.

Of the African UN member states that did not vote consistently with the West in the UNGA resolutions, six states had diplomatic interactions only with European partners and/or the US. Of these, Ghana and Nigeria are the only democratic states and are also some of the stronger voices within the regional organization ECOWAS, which named Russia as the aggressor in its statement. The Central African Republic and Mali (where the Central African Republic is democratic and Mali is not) had reported diplomatic interactions only with Russia. Seven African states did not vote consistently with the West in the UNGA resolutions and entertained public diplomatic relations with both Russia and the US and/or

European partners. Of these, Tunisia and Senegal are the only classified democracies. There thus appears to be no significant relationship between type of political rule in Africa and high diplomatic activity either with the West or with Russia.

Of the 37 Asian UN member states that did not vote consistently with the West on the UNGA resolutions in Table 1, only three did not have reported diplomatic events with Russia, the US or the European partners: namely, Bhutan, Brunei and Mongolia. Furthermore, no regional organization in Asia named Russia as the aggressor in their statements on Ukraine.

Conclusive evidence of a potential global realignment will emerge in years to come. The clues that this brief has gathered from states’ and regional organizations’ public actions indicate that pro-Russian or pro-authoritarian blocs have not (yet) been created. A majority of states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean appear to prefer to be non-aligned and to avoid taking sides. There does, however, appear to be diplomatic competition between Russia and ‘the West’ for political influence in the ‘Global South’, particularly in Asia. The case of Mali moving from European partnership to Russian partnership is, as things stand today, exceptional rather than representative of a trend. Time will tell whether the diplomatic competition taking place in 2022 has the consequence that more states have to make similar choices in the future.

Data

The reported diplomatic interactions were derived from the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System weekly event dataset,⁷ which stems from machine generated sources collected from news reports globally. This means that all diplomatic interactions used in this dataset have been public.

Of the initial 280,293 diplomatic interaction events between 20 February and 19 June, the dataset was coded and narrowed down to 2,533 diplomatic interactions. This was done through identifying the most important diplomatic players, removing duplicates, and removing references to meetings between people who can be regarded more as historically important figures than as current political actors. For the cluster of European partners, we chose EU bodies, the UK and France collectively for European diplomatic interactions. Had other European states’ public diplomatic interactions been included, the result would have presented a higher number of European interactions globally. ■

Notes

1. Hirsh, Michael (2022) We Are Now in a Global Cold War. *Foreign Policy*, 27 June.
2. Beech, Hannah; Abdi Latif Dahir & Oscar Lopez (2022) With Us or With Them? In a New Cold War, How About Neither. *New York Times*, 24 April.
3. Meldrum, Andrew & Mogomotsi Magome (2022) ‘New Cold War’: Russia and West vie for influence in Africa. *Washington Post*, 28 July.
4. Hence, starting the week that Russia invaded Ukraine. The diplomatic interactions were coded from the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System weekly event dataset.
5. Using the Polity scale of political rule from 2018, we recognize that some states may have changed position on this scale since then.
6. Due to the limitations of this brief’s format, the network analyses on democratic and non-democratic states are not included.
7. The dataset is available here: dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/QI2T9A.

THE AUTHOR

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THE PROJECT

The project ‘Consequences of the Invasion of Ukraine for the Global South’ was set up to provide rapid analysis of the wider effects of the invasion. It is led by PRIO Senior Researcher Nicholas Marsh. The project is funded by Norad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway.

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