

Africa and the International Order at a Time of the Current Global Crisis

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Seminar Report

On 11 March 2022, the Embassy of Kenya in Addis Ababa and Amani Africa jointly convened a high-level panel on how the war on Ukraine affects the international system and Africa's role and interests in the system. Moderated by the Founding Director of Amani Africa, Dr Solomon Ayele Dersso, the panel was made up of key policy makers: H.E. Hanna Tetteh Special Representative of the Secretary General to the AU and Head of United Nations Office to the AU (UNOAU), H.E. Amb. Mafa Sejanamane Permanent Representative of Lesotho to the AU and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of March 2022, H.E. Amb. Jean Kamau Permanent Representative of Kenya to the AU and the immediate past Chairperson of the PSC, Ambassador William Awinador Kanyirige, Special Advisor to AU's Commissioner of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) and Bitania Tadesse, Director of Programs of Amani Africa.

The joint event was convened against the background of Russian military assault on Ukraine. As pointed out in the concept note for the high-level panel, this convening is premised on the recognition that Africa, as other parts of the world will not escape the consequences of the global crises that this war and the reactions to it set in motion and that Africa, on account of existing vulnerabilities, may bear the brunt of the crises.

The convening sought not only to appraise the nature and

import of this dramatic development as well the responses it triggered. As the interventions of the panelists of the event and the ensuing discussions revealed, although this is a war involving Russian troops fighting Ukraine in breach of fundamental UN principles, the war and the unprecedented nature of the responses it elicited particularly from Western governments are not without global consequences. The discussions centered on the implications of this crisis to multilateralism, the socio-economic and security impacts of this situation on Africa and on Africa's humanitarian, development and peace and security cooperation and how best African states position themselves.

At one level, there is a question about what this war means for Africa's interest in and reliance on multilateralism. While there was no agreement on the scale of the damage this war inflicted on multilateralism, there was consensus that multilateralism suffered a major blow. As the SRSG Hanna Tetteh observed multilateralism, although not on its death bed, is fragile. It was observed that the world has witnessed the failure of diplomacy. Panelists also highlighted how this war represents one of manifestation of the total disregard of fundamental rules of international law by the powerful, including violation of inviolability of borders witnessed in the post-Cold war era. In the words of Amb Sejanamane, what we are observing in Ukraine is 'the consequence of failed international system.' In underscoring the gravity of the crisis facing multilateralism, Amb Kanyirige underscored that 'if multilateralism is in retreat, humanity is also in retreat.' Without the necessary reform of the multilateral system, Amb Sejanamane warned that what comes next could be graver than the war on Ukraine.

From the perspective of Africa's role in multilateralism, the high-level panel identified at least four areas of concern. First, the damage this war and the accompanying polarization it triggered have inflicted on multilateralism threatens the

interest of the weak regions of the world, including most notably Africa, who heavily depend on multilateral cooperation and rules to fend off overt interference by the powerful in their affairs.

Second, the division in the UNSC that this war accentuated threatens to result in complete paralysis, depriving UNSC of the consensus that is key for it to address effectively peace and security issues in Africa. It was pointed out that 'we are in for difficult times', although it remains to be seen how this would also affect AU-UN partnership on peace and security.

Third, with the war in Ukraine attracting all the international attention, as Amb Kamau aptly observed, African issues risk being de-prioritized and multilateral cooperation on humanitarian support, development and peace and security in Africa will be weakened. As an immediate area of concern and illustrative case, Amb Kanyirige observed the emerging worry that this crisis may divert resources in the EU that might have been channeled to support the on-going process for the transition of the AU Mission in Somalia, although the EU Ambassador to the AU reaffirmed EU's commitment to support.

Fourth, the confrontation between Russia and the West that the war brought to the open threatens to accentuate a Cold War type major power rivalry in Africa, with African States facing the specter of being forced to choose between rival camps. The serious impact of both the war and the responses it elicited on the global economy including the power realignment that seems to be in the making is sure to have particular reverberation on the continent. Amb Kamau thus observed 'depending on the power realignment that is going on we will be pulled into those realignments and almost forced, under the pretext of ongoing investment opportunities, to align ourselves with certain realignment'. One manifestation of this expectation and demand for Africa to align is the simplistic interpretation of the pattern of votes of African states on

the UN General Assembly resolution on Ukraine that those who voted for the resolution are on one side of the geo-political divide and those who abstained or did not vote are on the other side. Thus, Amb Kanyirige advised that the voting pattern needs to be considered not just from a legal but also from the pragmatic. He further said that it is not the African way 'that because country A, country B and C have voted in a particular way that is against the way friends may have voted therefore they are against'.

In terms of Africa's engagement in this crisis, panelists pointed out the necessity for Africa to assert its voice to shape the future global order and must continue its rightful place in the international arena. One way of doing this, as Amb Kamau observed, is, in the context of this crisis, for Africa to support and push for the ongoing effort of the reform of the UN. This echoes the view expressed by the current Chairperson of the Africa Group in New York that 'failure of the global security architecture to uphold UN Charter is currently in full display. Africa must turn this moment to galvanize the call for the requisite reform of the UNSC.' Indeed, all panelists agree that the structures of the UN are (over)due for reform. Africa can build on the Ezuliweni consensus on the reform of the UN Security Council. While pushing for reform, attention was drawn to the imperative of Africa standing up for the fundamental principles of the UN Charter when they are violated as AU member states rightly protest when those principles are not applied to Africa fairly. In the words of Amb Sejanamane, given that this is a product of the failed multilateral system of the post-Cold War period, the most important issue for Africa is 'the recreation of the multilateral system and institutions.' Given that global order refers to international system of rule-making, decision-making and compliance enforcement primarily but not restricted by the UN Security Council, Amb Kamau also rightly asked whether international order exists and why any member of the UN system should not respect international law. She

stressed the importance of legitimacy in maintaining international order.

The panel also highlighted the importance for Africa advocating for dialogue and diplomacy to be the basis for ending the ongoing crisis. The importance of this could not be underestimated given that diplomacy seems to be on a retreat or taking the backseat in the context of the current war in Ukraine, as observed during the question-and-answer session. But for Africa to play such role, there is a need for the AU to deliberate on and formulate a common Africa approach for ending the war and resolving the structural flaws of the multilateral system that was unable to prevent it. The importance of the 54 African states members of the UN harmonizing their positions instead of going it alone was also underscored. There is a minimum basis for African states to achieve such a harmonized position and this minimum basis is the fact that no African country would support the invasion of Ukraine. Underscoring the foundational importance of respect for inviolability of borders for international peace and security, Amb Sejanamane stated 'African states are weak. They know that if the situation of unilateral change of borders takes place, none of them can have peace.'

Two approaches have been identified. The first is the legal approach which is based on the principles of the UN Charter. Emphasizing the importance of this for Africa, SRSR Tetteh observed that it 'is important for us as Africans...to ensure that the principles that we expect to be respected with respect to the African continent should also be respected when they happen anywhere else.' The second is what Amb Kanyirige called the pragmatic approach. While the first approach confines the war on Ukraine to a question of law, the second approach treats it as not just a legal issue but also importantly as geo-political issue as well. Accordingly, Amb Sejanamane suggested that it is inaccurate to consider that the current global crisis started with the invasion of

Ukraine. The parameters of the analysis of the current global crisis properly defined suggest that this crisis started much earlier. Amb Kanyirige thus stressed that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) serves as a standard platform for Africans to put forward their common agendas. On the continued and contemporary importance of NAM for protecting the interest of 'third world' countries, reference was made to the fact that the structure of the international system that emerged from the ashes of WWII remain unchanged and the world is in a new form of Cold War. Similarly, speaking on the experience of African states Amb Sejanamane reiterated the importance of Africa pursuing its own interest without aligning with any global power.

Beyond the strategic ramifications of the combination of this war and the confrontation it brought to the open between Russia and the West, there are also issues of immediate concern for Africa. The first of these relate to the disruption the war causes on the supply of agricultural products such as wheat and the resultant food price hike and lack of access to edible oil. The other involves the oil and gas price hike that this war and the ensuing confrontation particularly between the West and Russia brought about and the impact of this on the finances of oil importing African countries. At a time when African economies are as yet to recover from the impacts of COVID19, the spike in cost of living that these developments are expected to accentuate existing economic woes of African countries, weaken further state-society relations and heighten risks of political instability.

In terms of measures that African states should adopt to limit the adverse impacts of this crisis, Amb Sejanamane counseled that there is need for ensuring that the goods necessary for maintenance of life such as food and energy resources are made available. Similarly, SRSR Tetteh underscored the need for blocking revenue leakages and improvement of governance

structures and using the saved revenues to cushion citizens. Additionally, as COVID19, the disruptions that this crisis causes in trade of agricultural products and oil and gas once again affirms the need for building intra-African supply chains, a further validation of the critical importance of the AfCFTA for Africa in a time of global crisis. Given that it is unknown how long this crisis will last, SRSG Tetteh observed that this crisis may be used as an opportunity 'to move towards that energy transition' away from the unsustainable dependency in fossil fuel as source of energy. Further, Amb Kanyirige remarked that, strengthening the quality of governance, managing continental and regional crisis and seeking opportunity in crisis to build resilience in the global arena should be key priorities at the present time. The necessity of African states putting their house in order and coordinating meaningfully to multiply the weight of their collective voice. In addition, continental and regional integration is vital to sustain and influence at a time of global crisis.

From a peace and security perspective, the situation is set to have immediate impacts. First is the withdrawal of peacekeepers and peacekeeping assets by Ukraine and the resultant gap this would create on peace keeping operations in Africa. For example, Ukraine is withdrawing 250 peacekeepers from MONUSCO. In the words of SRSG Tetteh, 'abrupt departures of such peacekeepers are likely to negatively impact the balance of forces on the ground in such missions at the risk of reversing the gains made by those missions.' The second is the risk of disruption of support for AU peace and security work and the danger of this creating security vacuum, threatening to reverse gains that have been made in places such as Somalia. The third relates to the impact of big power confrontation on aggravating existing conflicts and impeding the search for and implementation of peace agreements. The Special Research Report whose main themes were presented by Tadesse, among others, highlight how, even before the eruption

of the Ukraine war, Cold War type rivalries on the continent negatively affect peace and security on the continent, which would only be aggravated in the context of the confrontation that the war on Ukraine brought to the open. The final is the disregard of African interests in the global arena and the diversion of attention away from African conflicts and humanitarian needs as well as development cooperation.

The panel concluded that the nature of the global crisis relating to the War on Ukraine has both direct and indirect impacts on Africa. It thus warrants further and wider reflections as well as consideration at the level of the continental policy structures. It became clear that the AU may need to convene Assembly meeting similar to that the OAU convened in 1991 in the context of the end of the Cold War. On the peace and security aspect of the crisis, participants as well as panelists indicated on the importance of the Peace and Security Council of the AU convening a session to consider the impact of this crisis on Africa in the manner it did with respect to the global COVID19 pandemic.

It also emerged from the interventions of the distinguished panelists and from the inputs from participants that no African country supports the war against Ukraine and the blatant breach of the principle of the inviolability of borders. Thus, given the danger that such acts pose to global order and peace and security, it is in the interest of Africa to defend the fundamental principles of the international system. From the perspective of the geo-strategic dimension of the crisis, while condemning the invasion of Ukraine, African states are advised to avoid aligning themselves with any block in the geo-strategic confrontation between global powers. In the short term, Africa has to work on addressing the immediate socio-economic impacts of the disruption in trade in agricultural products and oil and gas on Africa and the peace and security ramifications of the crisis in Africa, including by enhancing intra-African trade in these goods. With respect

to the war, Africa's contribution would be in avoiding the retreat of diplomacy to the backseat in the current effort to address the war and advocating for making diplomacy the main avenue in the effort for ending the war. In the medium term and at strategic levels, this crisis should give impetus for aggressively pushing for the reform of the global order. As the moderator of the panel pointed out, it is not clear what would catalyze the reform of the reform of the global order if not this current crisis. This current crisis aptly demonstrated that it is too dangerous to allow the status quo of the failed and deeply flawed current structure of the global order as that would mean condemning the world for further calamities.

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