



Fighting for Africans' Hearts and Minds in the Context of the 2022 War in Ukraine¹

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Abstract:

The war in Ukraine is a theatre of struggle not only for the parties militarily engaged in the conflict, but for wider spheres. Despite its regional character, the war also has a multidimensional impact on a number of other states in the world, polarising the attitudes of their societies into three main groups: those supporting Ukraine, those expressing understanding of Moscow's actions, and a set of so-called 'non-aligned' states. This article describes how strategic communications by different actors have, through historical, political, economic, technological, social and cultural levers the potential to win the support of governments and societies in Africa.

The Russian--Ukrainian conflict, unlike many other armed confrontations in Africa had, from an information security perspective, become a global conflict long before open kinetic action began. The multilateral involvement of the leaders of both the United States and the European Union, first through attempts to resolve the dispute amicably and then in military, economic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, is unprecedented. This in itself can be perceived as a bitter pill to swallow for African countries beset by political, religious and climatic turmoil, which, despite their longer history of hardships, have not received equivalent, or even due attention.

Keywords:

strategic communication, framing, Russian—Ukraine war, spheres of influence.

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceas.2022.2.4.182>

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The war began by the Russian Federation with its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has quickly become an arena of confrontation between East and West. The level of involvement of 'third countries' not directly related to the substance of the conflict is unprecedented. Its uniqueness, however, does not lie in the mere provision of military or intelligence assistance to one of the parties. There is an abundance of examples in the history of the involvement of 'silent actors' who provided arms, data or logistical support to their allies. The specific nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war is related to the manifestly open form in which 'third countries' provide this assistance. The consequences of adopting such a stance can be considered on a number of levels, but regardless of the perspective adopted, its predominantly escalatory nature must be pointed out. The war in Ukraine has become the canvas of an internal political struggle in EU countries and a narrative aimed, among other things, at 'covering up' the economic problems of the Old Continent in the post-pandemic period. It is also an opportunity to consolidate and clarify a set of 'common European values', so badly damaged by Brexit and the rise of 'anti-EU' populism. At this level, the aid provided to Ukraine is thus justified by the need to fight for a 'democratic and non-imperial' world order, in which every country has the right to self-determination and any violation of the integrity of another state is a violation of international principles of coexistence. However, this politically embedded Eurocentrism, which is accepted in Western societies, also has global repercussions. In Asia, the Middle East and Africa alike, the introduction of 'democracy' is viewed very differently. Two decades of American presence in Afghanistan, missions in the Middle East, colonialism and the subsequent Arab Spring in Africa have left a lasting and deep aversion to an 'imposed and foreign world order'. It seems that the collective West, utilising the war in Ukraine in its domestic politics, not only failed to recognise the processes taking place outside Europe, but then, when they became obvious - was late in reacting. Antony Blinken's and Emanuel Macron's visits to African countries in July and August 2022 did not yield the expected results (and in the case of the French leader, were even counter-productive). This is because they took place in a space that had been intensely influenced by Russian information campaigns much earlier. Vladimir Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine motivated by a desire to achieve regional territorial gains, to emphasize the Russian Federation's sphere of influence and by a personal need to be an important part of world's history. The reaction of the West meant that the axis of the dispute expanded from an armed confrontation between the former imperial country and its neighbour - to a global conflict on not only a physical but also an ideological level. This situation fits into the scenario desired by President Putin, who, at least since 2000, has been trying to get the Russian Federation to return as a leader in the group of the most influential architects of the world order.

The deep polarisation of positions and narratives among the direct and indirect actors of the events, is also reflected in the official and unofficial actions taken (which sometimes contradict each other). Aspects such as the perception of the causes of the war, the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed, the legitimacy of military support, the need (or not) to continue to cooperate with the Russian Federation not only 'divide' but also 'unite' partners



who, until the outbreak of war, remained in a kind of status-quo of bilateral relations and did not have to take sides.

This article attempts to provide an overview of the communication strategies adopted by the actors involved in the war, to place them in a broader socio-political context and to illustrate how African societies reacted to the emerging actions of the main countries (Russia, Ukraine, the USA and the European Union) involved in this information war. The core hypothesis may be as follows:

„In the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, Russian communication strategies are more widely supported in African countries than Western strategies, due to their multipolar (and not unipolar) perspective on the international order.”

To verify this the following research questions were formulated:

- what is the multi-sectoral historical context of Russia's presence on the African continent;
- what is the multi-sectoral historical context of Ukraine's presence on the African continent;
- what communication strategies targeting African countries has the Russian Federation adopted in relation to the war it has started in Ukraine;
- what communication strategies targeting African countries have Ukraine and its Western allies adopted;
- how the Russian Federation responds to the communication strategies aired by the bloc Ukraine and its allied states;
- how Western countries respond to the communication strategies of the Russian Federation;
- what international events have particularly influenced African perceptions in the the Russian-Ukrainian conflict;
- what information (that is overlooked or seldom mentioned in the information space) influences the African perception of the ongoing conflict
- how African states are responding to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war in their information space.

The aim of this discussion will therefore be to answer these research questions, to profile the communication strategies of both sides, and to discuss their effectiveness.

To achieve the above objectives, more than 140 multilingual publications published up to 15 October 2022 were analysed. Methodologically, a short street survey was conducted in the city of Cairo, in-depth, non-structured interviews with representatives of the upper-middle class in Egypt were carried out, and in-depth interviews with Sudanese (economic) migrants in Egypt as well as non-structured interviews with UN representatives serving in Sudan were undertaken.

Limitations and initial assumptions

The following list presents the assumptions and limitations of this analysis. It refers both to the research methods adopted, the characteristics of the sources and the timeframe in which it was carried out.

- 1) The range of the analysis carried out covers the entire African continent, without a detailed discussion of each of the 54 countries. This generalisation blurs regional differences but allows for syncretic representations of the issues examined.
- 2) In some documents (especially those produced by international institutions), North African countries are included in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) rather than in Africa itself. In the course of the analysis, the necessary distinctions were made, but these should be seen more as an approximation of trends than a precise description.
- 3) The research findings and conclusions are presented based on 'open sources' (OSINT) accessed from both Europe and Africa. Due to the blocking of some online resources by parties to the conflict - some of the linked documents may not be accessible using IPs located in Western countries.
- 4) There is a profound asymmetry in the intensity of Russian Federation and Ukrainian influence on the African infosphere. In the case of Ukraine - its communication strategies are presented in combination with auxiliary/substitute strategies authored by European countries or the US (which refer exclusively to Ukrainian actions or narratives).
- 5) The analysis presented below is limited only to the strategies used by the parties targeting the African states. It should be noted that the outreach efforts of both Russia and Ukraine in other regions of the world are characterised by different objectives and ways of achieving them.
- 6) The Russian-Ukrainian war is a dynamic process, each day bringing new packages of information. This publication is based on data collected up to 15.10.2022.

Russian presence in Africa: historical context

Russian interest in Africa is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1869, Tsarist Russia provided military support to Ethiopia, which was at that time fighting the British for control of the Suez Canal (Besenyo 2019). The following years brought uncoordinated diplomatic and commercial efforts to establish closer relations and it was only at the end of the Second World War that a period of coherent, expansive and multifaceted foreign policy aimed at 'inviting' African states into its sphere of influence began. Already at the Potsdam Conference, Joseph Stalin sought to take under his control, the formerly Italian Tripolitania -western Libya (Kelly 2000) and although the UN blocked this plan, the Russian presence in this country, (through years of cooperation with Muamar Qaddafi (Bruce 1982, p. 136), and more recently General Haftar (Harchaoui 2021) still remains at a very high level. The strength of the historical relationship can also be demonstrated by the example of Egypt - the Russian-backed nationalist and anti-colonial rule of President Nasser (Holbik, Drachman 1971, p. 137-165) created long-lasting ties



that have survived, albeit in a less intense form under successive presidents Morsi and Mubarak and have made Egypt one of Russia's main partners in Africa (Kondratenko 2020).

Many of the similar bilateral friendships were formed on the verge of African states regaining their independence from colonial sovereignty. While in the 1950s these efforts seemed aimed more at weakening rivals notably France and Britain³ (Wezeman et al. 2021) rather than promoting Marxist ideologies, the 1960s saw opportunities to 'export communism' to young and seeking 'their own way' African states. The Soviet Union was the first to recognise the independence of Algeria - a step that permanently tied the two countries together⁴ (Stronsky&Sokolsky 2017). It also supported many national liberation movements e.g. in Mozambique FRELIMO in years 1964-1977 (Sukhankin 2020), Angola's MPLA 1975-2002 (Hedenskog 2019, p. 34-37) or movements in Ethiopia in years 1974-1991 (Felgenhauer 2020). During the Cold War, the Soviet Union established cooperation with 40 African states and Marxism-Leninism presented as a remedy for European imperialism became permanently embedded in the ideological space especially in Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola and Egypt (Besenyo 2019a).

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought a temporary freeze in relations with Africa. Nine embassies and three consulates in were closed, and the level of political, military and economic cooperation decreased significantly (Kimberly 2019a, p. 155-170). Boris Yeltsin's government in the 1990s focused on internal processes in Russia. A return to interest in Africa did not occur until after 2000, with Vladimir Putin becoming President of the Russian Federation. A new doctrine based on the political thought of Prof. Rogov was adopted which formulated a shift from 'ideological-romantic' relations to a focus on the three pillars of bilateral relations: "economism, universalism and intelligent pragmatism" (Solodovnikov 2000). Back to Africa was designed on the premise of using two „vehicles“: The African Union and South Africa (President of Russia 2015), which at the beginning of the second millennium resulted in numerous meetings with representatives of these entities. The relations established at that time have not been reduced to the present day. Importantly, thanks to Russia's support, in 2010 South Africa was accepted to the bloc of developing countries – BRIC (Soule-Kohndou 2013).

Since 2014, when sanctions were imposed on the Russian Federation over the illegal annexation of Crimea, Africa has been on Vladimir Putin's list of priorities for economic, political and military reasons (Hedenskog, Persson 2019, p. 90). A number of initiatives were undertaken, which in particular included military and energy cooperation along with deepening trade in the natural resources.

³ This objective was initially shared by Russia with the United States, which was to become its main rival in Africa just a few years later.

⁴ Algeria is the largest African partner and the third global partner in arms trade with Russia; intensely developmentally supported by the Russian Federation, which, despite sanctions and economic hardship after 2014 - forgave its US\$4.7 billion debt.

Military cooperation: Russian federation - African states

Russia is the largest arms supplier to Africa, responsible for about one third of all its exports to the continent (Grunstein 2018). It has signed cooperation agreements with at least 30 African partners (Hendenskog 2019). It actively participates with other countries in joint military manoeuvres, the most notable of which in recent years have been:

- Defenders of Friendship anti-terrorist exercise involving tactical groups and airborne troops from Russia, Egypt and Belarus (MoD Russia 2019)
- Exercise Mosi - the first trilateral exercise off the coast of Cape Town involving the militaries of Russia, South Africa and China (Fabricius 2019)
- Naval exercise „Bridge of Friendship 2020” (KubNews 2020)

Russia has also been training African military personnel since the Cold War - both within the Federation and in African states. It was not uncommon for the beneficiaries of these services to later become important political figures in their countries (such as Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma in post-apartheid South Africa (Stronski 2019). Available information puts the number of countries with which such cooperation has been established at least 16.

What is important to note is the agreement signed between Cameroon's Minister of Defence, Beti Assomo, and the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, Sergei Shoigu. On 22 May 2022, a five-year agreement on military cooperation which overtly expresses the African state's opposition to the international sanctions imposed on Russia was initialled in Moscow (AfricaNews 2022). It is one of many examples of agreements signed in the military domain between Russia and African states.

Russian military cooperation agreements in Africa (since 2015).

Country	Date	Content
Botswana	August 2018	Joint peacekeeping operations and joint military training.
Burkina Faso	August 2018	Counterterrorism cooperation and exchange of peacekeeping experience.
Burundi	August 2018	Counterterrorism and joint training of troops.
Cabo Verde	June 2018	Simplified procedure for port calls.
Cameroon	April 2015	Military-technical cooperation.
Central African Republic	August 2018	Joint training of armed forces.
Chad	August 2017	Anti-terrorism cooperation and joint training exercises.
Democratic Republic of the Congo	July 2018	Military-technical cooperation. Revitalization of a previous military-technical cooperation agreement from 1999.
	May 2019	Military-technical cooperation. Technical specialists.
Republic of the Congo	May 2019	Military-technical cooperation, weapons supply, and technical training.

Equatorial Guinea	April 2016	Military cooperation. An agreement on Russian access to ports in Equatorial Guinea was signed in July 2015.
Egypt	November 2017	Military-technical cooperation and counterterrorism operations.
	October 2019	Strategic cooperation.
Eswatini	February 2017	Supply of weapons, maintenance and other military assistance.
Ethiopia	April 2018	Training and cooperation on peacekeeping, counterterrorism and anti-piracy operations.
The Gambia	September 2016	Training of armed forces, deliveries of military equipment.
Ghana	June 2016	Military-technical cooperation, including weapons supply and joint training.
Guinea	April 2018	Cooperation in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, search and rescue at sea.
Guinea-Bissau	June 2019	Training of military personnel.
Madagascar	September 2018	Information-sharing, training, military engineering, military education, military medicine, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, anti-piracy operations and cooperation in UN peacekeeping missions.
South Africa	July 2018	Joint declaration on strategic partnership and call for greater cooperation on counterterrorism and counter-proliferation of weapons-of-mass-destruction.
Sudan	February 2018	Joint information exchange, training, counterterrorism, anti-piracy operations, and UN peacekeeping missions.
Tanzania	January 2018	Arms shipments, joint training, and military research and development.
Zambia	April 2017	Supply of weapons and delivery of spare parts.
Zimbabwe	October 2015	Supply of weapons and joint military production.

Table 1: Partners and scope of military agreements signed between the Russian Federation and African countries since 2015. Source: Hedenskog, 2019; Institute for the Study of War, 2021; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018; RIA Novosti, 2016; Krasnaia vesna, 2019; Interfax, 2019; Defenceweb, 2019.

Because of the long history of Russian supplies of arms to the African continent, its simplicity, relative reliability in harsh weather conditions, and affordable price, Russian weaponry is immensely appreciated in many African countries.⁵

⁵ A symbol of this can be found, for example, in Mozambique, which has an AK47 rifle (the popular 'Kalashnikov') on its flag.

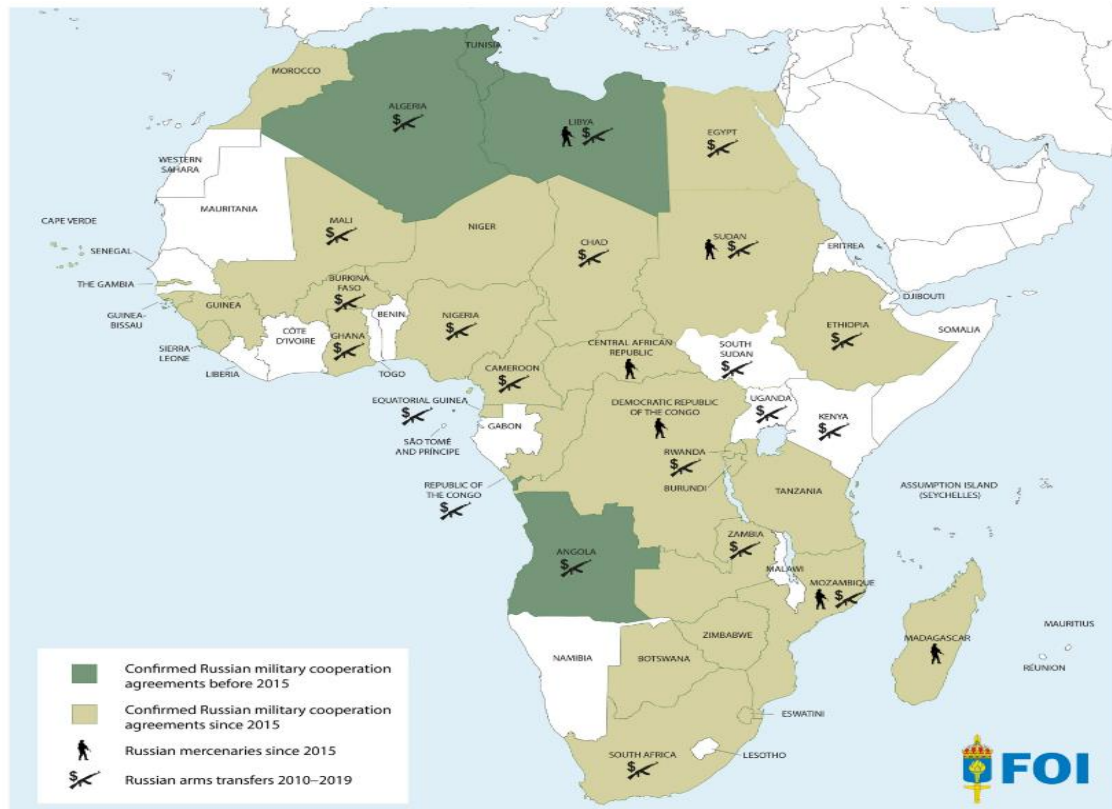


Figure 1: Russian military presence in Africa. Source: FOI.

Another aspect of Russia's military involvement in Africa is the internationally widely discussed activity of private-state armed mercenary organisations, particularly the Wagner Group (Marten 2019). Its activities in various African countries merit a separate publication, but it should be noted that it is the primary implementing actor of Kremlin policy not only in the political and military areas (Reynolds 2019). The mercenaries protect Russian investments, improve logistical routes and negotiate terms of cooperation with tribes and local governments. They are the Russian Federation's most outward-looking 'ears, eyes and hands' in the field (Lister & Shukla 2019). They provide services not only to African dictators (Searcey 2019) but also to businesses, including those with foreign capital - especially Chinese.⁶ They also provide a 'mentoring' function for both local security companies and agencies of friendly countries that, because of their significant involvement on the continent, need professional and experienced protection. The Wagner Group is an umbrella brand promoted in the media for image purposes mainly. In practice, it operates through a network of subsidiary entities with hardly identifiable origins. An illustrative example of this is the 'Association for Free Research and International Cooperation' (AFRIC). Presenting itself as a genuinely African initiative, this organisation actually pursues Kremlin political objectives (Thomas 2019). In 2018-2019, relying on the Wagner Group's information and equipment facilities, it sought to

⁶ In Ethiopia, for example, the Russians are protecting strategic Chinese investments related to the Renaissance Dam – the infrastructure object on the Nile of existential importance for almost all of East African countries (Majed, 2022).



influence elections in five African countries: Zimbabwe, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and Mozambique (Fabricius 2022a).

The unclear links and the lack of verifiable data means that the services of Russian mercenary companies are often used (unwittingly) by international organisations that principally express strong opposition to the Wagner Group's aims and modus operandi.

Energy and economic cooperation between the Russian federation and African states

„Solution to Africa's Energy problem would pave the way for the continent's development” (Vladimir Putin, G-8 Summit, 2007).

After security, the energy sector is the most important area of Russian expansion in Africa. On a continent where an estimated 620 million people suffer from electricity shortages (Kende-Robb 2016), energy issues find a permanent place in any election campaign and, along with a security issues, are part of fundamental and basic needs of African societies. Russia, understanding the relevance of this area, is broadening its influence using its unique position. As one of the very few countries fighting for African „hearts and minds” that has energy surplus it can therefore develop exports to this region (Maslov 2006). All other actors struggle with energy shortages within their countries or choose not to compete with Russia in this domain. The consequence of this situation is the widely communicated slogan Atom for Africa followed by at least 18 signed nuclear agreements.⁷ The entity that represents the interests of the Russian Federation in this sector is Rosatom, the state-owned energy corporation, which boasts in recent years (among other projects), the construction of the first nuclear power plant in Egypt (World Nuclear News 2021), the development of the Geregu Nuclear Plant in Nigeria (Proctor 2018), agreements with Ethiopia (Rosatom 2019a) and the expansion of cooperation with the DRC and Rwanda. Russia is also exploring the energy domain by influencing young people - it organises competitions (Rosatom 2019b) and a scholarship programme that allows Africans to go to Russia to study nuclear technology (Sokutu 2019). Many students from Nigeria (ESI Africa 2019a) and Egypt have taken advantage of this opportunity.

Other Russian business activities on the African continent are concentrated in the natural resources, raw material or gemstone sectors, for example:

- diamonds and platinum; cooperation with Zimbabwe (Nijin 2019), Angola (Samaita 2019)
- gold – particularly in West Africa (Sandel-Hay 2022)
- gas - cooperation with Algerian entities, despite the ongoing war in Ukraine (Interfax 2022)

⁷ South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia, Morocco, Egypt or the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others.

- oil (cooperation with Algeria, Angola, DRC (Zarubezhneft 2019), Sudan (SudanTribune 2022) and Madagascar (Arbunies 2019)

Russia's largest trading partners are located (with the exception of South Africa) in North Africa.

Russia's top five trading partners in Africa in 2018 (million USD).

Trading partner	Russian export	Russian imports	Total trade
Egypt	7 146	518	7 663
Algeria	4 801	10	4 811
Morocco	927	546	1 473
South Africa	286	780	1 066
Tunisia	681	137	818

Table 2: Russia's key business partners in Africa. Source: IMF DOTS (2020).

The Russian Federation is also developing two coastal industrial zones in Egypt (RioEgypt 2018).

Russia's business activities are most often implemented in a bundled model – i.e. a company entering into cooperation with an African partner is supported (and at the same time controlled) by entities linked to the Russian security and financial sector.

Media, cultural and sports cooperation between the Russian federation and African countries

Russia in Africa implements its communication strategies mainly through Russia Today and Sputnik, already present for years on the continent. These companies directly or through subsidiaries establish partnerships with local media entities (Clifford & Gruzd 2022) such as Eritrean Eri-TV (Eritrean Information Ministry 2019), Congolese National Radio TV (RIA 2019) or the South African Government News Agency (SAnews 2017).

Cultural and scientific cooperation in Africa is mainly developed through the government agency Rossotrudnichestvo (Rossotrudnichestvo 2022) operating in three domains Russian Federal Agency for Independent States, the Government Commission for Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation. Established in 2008, the agency now operates in more than 80 countries. In Africa, it has opened science and culture centres in seven countries - Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Tunisia and Zambia, and has a representative at the Russian Embassy in South Africa. It is responsible for promoting Russian culture and language (RussiaToday 2019), as well as expanding inter-university cooperation, which has been continuously developing since the second half of the 20th century. The Soviet Union as early as in 1960 established the Patric Lumumba University in



Moscow (Mr. Lumumba was the first prime minister of the independent Congo, who was tortured and murdered by the Belgians), which was intended to serve as a forge for African elites and as a contact point for all scientific cooperation with Africa (Katsakioris 2019). A number of prominent African political figures, such as Hifikepunye Pohamba (former President of Namibia), Youssouf Saleh Abbas, (former Chadian Prime Minister) or Michele Djotodia (former President of the Central African Republic), were graduates of this university (which is now called the University of Friendship of Nations in Moscow). It is estimated that up to 100,000 African students were educated in Russia, more than half of whom were to benefit from scholarship programmes.

Russia holds regular meetings with African alumni of friendly universities and uses these networks to promote its image in Africa. Close relations bind Russia with, among others, the Pan-African University, universities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Botswana. The Egyptian-Russian University in Cairo, founded in 2006, also remains very active in promoting scientific cooperation.

Russia engages extensively in a number of 'cultural' events. The majority of them have a significant propaganda component. Particularly successful events in recent years include:

- the 2018 Miss Central African Republic elections (the award was presented by Miss Russia 2013), which created a new canon of beauty for women from the CAR (Bouessel 2018)
- celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of the 'reunification of Crimea to Russia', held in several different countries. Confirmed reports come from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bugayova&Regio 2019, Russian MoFA 2019a) and Botswana (Russian MoFA, 2019b). From today's perspective they can be perceived as 'preparing the mental ground' for the subsequent invasion of Ukraine
- the production of the latest feature-length thriller-war film, addressed exclusively to African audiences, *The Tourist* (Munshi 2022) (an earlier movie, *Shugayev*, relating the Libyan adventures of two 'social scientists' had a more regional focus). Produced in a country that lacks cinemas (the Central African Republic) and presented in a stadium in Bangui in the presence of 10000 prominent spectators, this production is a quintessentially soft – narrative of Russia aimed at African states. The film was (and still is) heavily promoted across the continent. Its plot is based on the story of the support that Russian 'consultants' give to the democratically elected president, defending him against the rebels. The “messages” spread in this movie are based on a series of subliminal semantic anchors, namely:
 - a) Russians invited to help are „tourists” and „useful guests” and not „invaders”.
 - b) The negative characters speak French and are affiliated with Christianity.
 - c) Their oft-repeated „battle cries” represent a predatory, discriminatory and proprietary attitude towards all African assets.

- d) Stationed UN forces stand idly by as they watch rebel atrocities.⁸
- e) Russians are well organized, brave, resilient and effective; they die for their non-Soviet country – saving Africans just as they themselves save their Russian friends.
- f) Russian arms deliveries radically change the course of the conflict.
- g) CAR is a beautiful, prosperous country where people, thanks to the Russians, can live without fear for their own safety.
- h) Spasiba Russia!!! (Thank you, Russia!)⁹

Shaping Russia's image in Africa

The Russian Federation currently has 40 embassies in African countries (Africana.ru 2020) through which it builds its image as:

- 1) an effective partner in the fight against terrorism (Hedenskog 2020), drug crimes (Estelle 2018) and 'rebels' seeking to overthrow the authorities,
- 2) an ally that does not impose values or how African societies should function,
- 3) sponsor of humanitarian, cultural and sporting projects, with respectful reference to African belief systems,
- 4) mediator of local conflicts (e.g. in Libya),
- 5) an opponent of neo-colonialism who wants to help African countries complete this "painful process" (Aregagegn 2022), highlighting their successes in the fight against 'Western colonialism',
- 6) an ally in making Africa a self-sufficient continent in terms of energy (ESI Africa 2019b), security, logistics, production and mining,
- 7) a partner supporting African countries in international organisations (BRICS, UN),
- 8) a country with a keen interest in multi-sectoral cooperation with Africa, (in addition to the organisation of the 2019 Africa-Russia Summit, which brought together representatives of many ministries, corporations and social organisations of African countries (Kortunov et al. 2020, p. 6), Russia organises regular events such as the UFA Security Forum, Yalta International Economic Forum, AtomExport, International Army Games to which African delegations are invited),
- 9) a creator of long-term cooperation with Africa - the next Africa-Russia summit has been planned (President of Russia 2022) and the Russia-Africa Shared Vision 2030 strategic project (Kagan, Bugayova, Cafarella 2019, p. 30),
- 10) an advocate of multiculturalism/multipolarity and self-determination as a basis for prosperity and development - African solutions for African problems (Ruptly 2018),
- 11) leader of the anti-Western bloc of states,
- 12) a partner that shares with Africa the threat of entrapment by neo-colonial states that are already trying to seize its territory referring to the Kaliningrad region or, Norwegian blockade of supplies to Russian miners (Kobylarz 2022),

⁸ The way they are portrayed is a direct reference to the Rwandan genocide

⁹ The final slogan for the advertising spot that concludes the film

- 13) an ally that understands Africa's needs and is taking concrete steps to meet them - agreeing to ship Ukrainian grain through the port of Odessa¹⁰ (Sihlobo 2022), or supplying Russian fertilisers to South Africa¹¹),
- 14) admirer of African resistance to the recognition of sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation,
- 15) an ally with whom relations can be developed not only at governmental but also at parliamentary, sectoral, regional and societal level (EgyptIndependent 2021).

Presidential visits				Foreign minister's visits			
President	Period	Number of		Foreign minister	Period	Number of	
		Individual countries	Trips			Individual countries	Trips
Vladimir Putin	2018–	1	1	Sergei Lavrov	2018–	5	2
	2012–18	2	3	Sergei Lavrov	2012–18	11	10
Dmitrii Medvedev	2008–12	4	1	Sergei Lavrov	2008–12	4	5
Vladimir Putin	2004–08	5	5	Sergei Lavrov	2004–08	4	3
	2000–04	0	0	Igor Ivanov	1998–04	2	5

Table 3: Russian high-level visits to Africa between 2000 and 2020. Source: President of Russia website; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

Russia's nurturing of multilateral relations with African states is expressed, inter alia, in ten visits by the Presidents of the Russian Federation to Africa and 26 visits by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs.¹²

Framing the image of Ukraine and its allies by the Russian federation in Africa

The Russian Federation is very active in AN creating the unfavourable image of its opponents, both at the level of propaganda media narratives, direct messages and concrete actions to give credence to its point of view. The war in Ukraine has become an opportunity to strike at the entire 'collective West' by linking subjectively interpreted events from the distant (colonial) as well as the nearer (Covid-19) past. The communication strategies pursued by Russia revolve around a series of parallel narratives.

¹⁰ Being in the Russian narrative the result of direct talks between the President of Senegal (and at the same time the African Union Macky Sall), and President Putin

¹¹ What was presented in both the Russian Federation and South Africa as the result of President Cyril Rampaphosa's talks with Moscow

¹² Taking into account the recent presence of Minister Sergey Lavrov in July 2022

- 1) „In relation to Africa, the collective West continues to use a master-slave logic, dictating to countries what, how and when to think.” (Tass 2022a)
- 2) „The West is using food as a weapon - it claims to support African countries, but in reality, it has been hoarding foodstuffs for itself during the covid pandemic and through recently imposed sanctions is condemning Africa to famine. It is an economic bandit responsible for climate change and sanctions- bringing African states to the brink of disaster.”

The concept of the „golden billion” is also being increasingly promoted in Africa, assuming that there are only resources on earth for one billion of the most privileged citizens, while the rest will be discriminated, exploited and „relegated at best to the role of slave.” (Tass 2022b)

- 3) „The West, by controlling the major social networks and the supply of the Internet, makes African countries dependent and because of that is able to influence their societies.” It is a digital colonialism. (Dahmm&Moultrie 2022)
- 4) „All UN peacekeeping initiatives over the years have been a disaster, with numerous crimes committed by them against local communities.”

Disillusionment with Western missions sometimes took the form of physical attacks, e.g. on 25 July 2022 the MONUSCO mission in the Congo was attacked - just before Minister Lavrov's visit a few days later. (France24 2022)

- 5) „The West is trying to influence the internal affairs of African states by provoking coups and aiming to destabilise them both in the Sahel area and also in Central Africa.” (Stronski 2019)
- 6) „Ukrainians, along with the West, display extreme racism and contempt for African communities. They represent an attitude in which the convenience of Ukrainians crossing the border into Poland is more important than the suffering of those from Africa who remain there.”

These claims were disseminated intensively through social media (e.g. #AfricansInUkraine) and were also met with a formal protest from some African states (Guardian 2022). The alleged dehumanisation of Africans, according to the Russian narrative, is also expressed in the objectification of Africans – the much-discussed journalistic and scientific 'D weapon' (demographic weapon – uncontrolled influx of migrants from Africa). President Putin seems to use this process to destabilise Europe, and points out that Europe reduces the Africans to the role of a helpless tool. On this occasion, the Russian propaganda apparatus cites examples of the treatment of African slaves during periods of colonialism, making for a strong historical anchor.

- 7) „The West's accusations against Russia with regard to influencing the internal processes of African states are unfounded. It is the West that is responsible for the occupation of developing countries.”



- 8) The term whataboutism was intensively promoted to recall the failures of Western interventions mainly in the Middle East and Central Asia (Gorenburg 2021) and to send a message about the 'hypocrisy and duplicity' of the West.
- 9) „The Russophobia presented by the West and the removal of Russians from the world's scientific, sporting and cultural bodies is reminiscent of the discrimination experienced in the West by people from the Black Continent, who are denied prestigious and well-paid jobs simply because of the colour of their skin.” The process of 'visa apartheid', which currently affects Africans (Oduor Oduku 2022) as well as citizens of the Russian Federation, is also invoked.
- 10) „The West strives for a single global vision of the world (unipolar) in which it alone imposes its political, social and worldview order on other countries without respect for their historical, cultural and religious differences.” (Krzywiecki 2022)
- 11) „The 'colour revolutions' in North Africa are other forms of Western interventionism, not a manifestation of the real needs of African societies.” (Hendeskog&Persson, 2019b)

Russian propaganda cited them as an example of 'meddling in internal affairs' and subversions in other countries, supported by, among other things, confessions from senior US officials (AlJazeera 2022).

- 12) „Ukraine is more willing to destroy grain than to send it to Africa.”

In support of this thesis, photos of burning fields of grain posted with comments on Telegram by Ukrainians themselves were widely circulated (AndriushchenkoTime 2022).

- 13) „The West forcing African states to take 'either side' limits their available options for development - Russia does not expect this but encourages a focus on deepening mutual cooperation.”

The communication strategies implemented by the Russian Federation on the African continent can be characterised by consistency and coherence in implementation, (at least in the initial phases of their realisation). Russia appears to be concentrating its efforts on the cognitive and affective phases of social influence, aiming to effectively focus attention on its actions and arouse emotions in its target group. The next phase - behavioural implementation - requires more resources (which Russia may not have) and is fraught with the risk that the initial theses will be verified by the campaign's addressees. It is therefore more effective and safer to create attitudes and trigger emotions than to support or “consume” the fruits of one's narratives.

History and development of Ukraine's relations with African states

The independent Ukrainian state, in the first years of its self-determination, continued the relations developed with Africa while the Soviet Union was still in operation. In particular, cooperation was developed in the agri-food, metallurgy and irrigation sectors. Ukrainian consultants stayed in African countries on long-term contracts, and through their relations, trade cooperation was also developed (mainly in the area of cereals, fertilisers, sugar, edible oils and heavy industry). An important domain of bilateral relations was also education and possibility for African students to study in Ukraine.¹³ Broader accessibility (than in Western Europe), a high level of education and significantly lower costs meant that by 2021 an estimated 76 000 African students had graduated in Ukraine in predominantly medical and the engineering fields.¹⁴

However, in the more than 30 years since the declaration of independence, there has not been a single visit by a Ukrainian president or foreign minister to Africa. (Veselovski 2021) The first one took place early October 2022. (Peltier&Camara 2022) There has also been only one visit to Kiev by an African head of state - in 2000, South African President Jacob Zuma visited Ukraine at the invitation of President Leonid Kuchma. Ukraine currently has ten embassies in Africa, located in countries with access to the coastline (Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia), which pursue a regional rather than a strategic and coherent vision of cooperation with Africa. An example of the rare joint initiatives at the parliamentary level could be the Ukraine - Algerian parliamentary friendship, established in 2019. (AlgeriaPress 2019)

Positions adopted by president Zelensky and minister Kuleba addressed to the people of Africa

Two events have been recent milestones in Ukrainian-African relations. The first was President Volodymyr Zelensky's speech to the leaders of the African Union on 20 June 2022, where President Zelensky gave his assessment of the condition of the African states, the functioning of the UN and the function of the sanctions imposed on Russia. He also expressed his hope for a future deepening of cooperation. The second was the visit of Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba to Africa from 3-10 October 2022 and his statements at press conferences.

Referring to President Zelensky's speech, the key issues he addressed were:

- Africa as „hostage of Russia”
- Ukraine which has never taken part in colonisation¹⁵
- Rapid population growth in African societies
- Weakness of African economies after the Covid-19 pandemic
- Africa's own funding deficit to import expensive food

¹³ Their total number is estimated at 76,000 people

¹⁴ The largest number of students came from Morocco, Nigeria, Guinea, Mali, Uganda and Angola

¹⁵ How was it supposed to take when the free Ukraine was established in 1991 and the decolonisation process in Africa ended in the 1970s?



- The claim that 400 million citizens of the world are dependent on Ukrainian grain
- Defending the international sanctions imposed on Russia to prevent Ukraine from becoming a Russian colony
- Criticism of African UN missions while pointing out that 300 Ukrainian nationals also took part in them
- Announcement of the organisation of the Ukraine-Africa summit and future strategic partnership

Minister Kuleba, in turn, had planned to come to four African countries (Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire)¹⁶ however, due to the rocket fired on Ukraine on 10 and 11 October 2022, he returned to Kiev. During his stay, however, he managed to give several interviews that shed light on the Ukrainian perspective on cooperation with Africa.¹⁷

- States that refrain from condemning Russia at the UN refrain from condemning war crimes.
- African states have a misconception about Ukraine's independence.
- Broad Ukrainian-African cooperation will soon develop in the areas of cyber-security, agricultural technology, diplomacy and science.
- Ukraine will send “ships full of grain” to Africa – despite the Russian blockade, some had already reached the Horn of Africa.
- Ukraine's 11th embassy will be opened - in Ghana.
- A Ukraine-Africa summit will be held in 2023. (Fabricius 2022b)

The statements of both President Zelensky and Minister Kuleba should also be presented in the broader context of the narrative of Ukraine and its Western allies, who have appealed to African states in different ways when referring to the war.

Formulating relations of Ukraine and its allies with African states

- 1) The United States directly criticised Africa for its neutrality during votes on UN resolutions condemning the invasion of Ukraine (ChannelsTv 2022), and French President Emmanuel Macron even called some of African leaders „hypocrites”. (Peltier&Breedon 2022)
- 2) In connection with the difficult situation of African citizens on the Ukrainian-Polish border just after the outbreak of the war (the segregation into „white and black” evoked associations with apartheid), there were a number of discriminatory statements by Ukrainian diplomats - Mr Vladym Prystaiko, Ukrainian ambassador to the UK, stated that „black people should be less visible”. (White 2022)
- 3) Ukraine's war narratives focus on human stories, often depicting the individual tragedies of people in places under Russian attack. While this strategy captures the attention of Europeans, it pales in the face of the scale of the atrocities taking place in Africa, which are mentioned little (or not at all) by the media (particularly in the West). Such a

¹⁶ These countries generally take a critical stance towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

¹⁷ Aspects related to Minister Kuleba's assessment of Russia's actions can be found later in this analysis.

juxtaposition was made in relation to early June 2022, when there was much news coverage of a few Russian missile attack victims, while the massacre in Kulbus (West Darfur), where at least 125 people were killed between 6 and 11 June, was omitted or forgotten (OCHA 2022).

- 4) Ukraine acknowledges that European policies towards Africa were mainly created by the old European countries “modes” while it can bring a new quality to these relations (Chadwick 2022). The above can be read as an Ukrainian attempt to distance itself from the difficult history linking Western countries and Africa. Along with this claim, it is also emphasized again that Ukraine has never participated in colonisation.
- 5) Ukraine points to a commonality of interests with African states, particularly with regard to cooperation within the UN, where a greater number of voices of developing states can vote in favour.
- 6) The United States, in support of Ukraine's position, to counter Russian narratives (and with due regard for its own *raison d'être* in Africa), implemented a diplomatic tour by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. This mission (which followed earlier visits to African states by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov), despite a meticulously prepared communications layer responding to Africa's needs, was not significantly successful. The keynote slogan of the visit Africa has problems and USA has solutions (BBC 2022) however media-laden did not win 'the hearts and minds of Africans'. One possible reason for this is the disconnection between Secretary Blinken's words and the then ongoing debate in the US related to „punishing African countries for cooperating with Russia”.¹⁸

Ukraine's current policy towards African states is based on an attempt to quickly 'catch up' with multilateral relations which, under wartime conditions, is difficult to implement and full of disappointments¹⁹ (Reuters 2022). The impetus initiating this process appears to have been the need to create a counter-narrative to Russia's growing influence on the African continent. However, the realisation of this goal so far (even with the support of Western allies) probably does not satisfy Kiev's expectations. In relation to Africans, Ukraine often represents an attitude that is interpreted as a combination of demands and unjustified pretensions. The failure since 1991 to develop deeper relations with African states, understanding and feeling their cultural differences and the relatively frequent instances of racism (Ray 2022), have meant that although Ukraine claims to have never taken part in colonialism, the opinions it expresses and the actions it follows up with - for some African societies - bear such hallmarks.

¹⁸ Also addressed below: Reactions of African countries

¹⁹ Such as the omission of Kiev (despite promises) by African Union President Sall at the same time as the meeting that took place between him and President Putin



Creation of Russia's image by Ukraine and allied states

The communication strategies used by Ukraine are less profiled to the specifics of the African infosphere than those of the Russian Federation. With minor variations, they replicate the narratives addressed to Western countries by focusing on a few key issues:

- 1) „Imperial Russia wants to rebuild its influence in the former Soviet states by invading an independent Ukraine as early as 2014, when it had not yet declared its intention to join NATO.”
- 2) „Russia uses terrorist tactics by attacking civilian installations more often than military ones, commits war crimes and crimes against humanity.”
- 3) „It uses methods to destabilise global markets by blockading Ukrainian ports and fuelling an already difficult demographic situation in Africa.” (AfricaCentre 2022)
- 4) „It is having a devastating impact on democratization and development processes in the Black Continent using brutal and human rights violating mercenary groups.” (OHCHR 2021)
- 5) Through its actions, it started another Cold War and is responsible for the global polarisation of East versus West. (Everett 2022)

It should be noted that the narratives of Ukraine and its allies largely duplicate the accusations made against the Soviet Union by the United States before 1991. In part, they are also similar to those used against the Taliban in Afghanistan or Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The repeated slogans about autocratic governments violating democracy and human rights presenting a strictly Western pyramid of values.

Shadow messages and side-kicks

When considering the power of Russian and Ukrainian communication strategies to influence African states, it is important to highlight a number of modelling events that remain outside the mainstream information warfare, but are located in the African information space. They are rarely (or not at all) referred to in the public debate having, however, a significant impact on the perception of the messages broadcast by the parties in the conflict. Their syncretic and subjective following addresses the fundamental (and often forgotten) principles of communication strategy analysis, in which information omitted from the discourse may be similar in (or even of greater) importance than information revealed. (Dijk 1993)

- Russia (back in the days of the USSR) made surveys and produced geological maps of a number of African countries, which identified the extent and nature of the Black Continent's above- and below-ground resources. These maps were handed over to African rulers as part of an allied friendship, and are still cited to this day as evidence of both the recognition of Africa's mineral wealth and the transfer of all of it into the hands of Africans themselves. (Novosti 2008) Also highlighted is the action of colonial states

which, even if they pursued geological exploration - did not share it with the indigenous people, hoping to negotiate better prices for sovereignty over resource-rich land.

- Russia, along with African partners, claimed to have developed a vaccine for the Ebola virus, (Gamaleya 2022) considered incurable and widely feared. It has already declaratively completed the testing phase in Guinea (PharmaceuticalTechnology 2018) and has plans to mass supply the Democratic Republic of Congo. (TASS 2019) Not only was the vaccine against Covid-19 (Sputnik-5) supposed to be half the price of Western equivalents, but it had also become a 'bridge between the poor and the rich'. It was found to be available in 15 African countries. (Stronski 2021) Sputnik's promotion strategy itself was also the subject of an intensive communications campaign - replicated repeatedly by the African media. The Russian team proactively visited medical companies in various African countries encouraging them to produce the vaccine in-house based on the know-how provided free of charge (Maxmen 2021) and with the Russian technical support provided. The West, in contrast showed significant 'vaccine nationalism' during the pandemic, sending less than the declared number of vaccines to Africa, with a long time lag, mostly in only one of the two required doses and often with a borderline expiry date (Fandi 2021). It seems that Sputnik's lack of economic success (no production took place) was due to a preconceived strategy in which the social and image component dominated over the business component.²⁰
- The visit of Ms Nancy Pelosi (and the subsequent US Congressional delegation) to Taiwan, despite China's objections, in Africa was presented as an example and vindication of the West's interventionist, 'colonial' policies and provided significant support to the development of Russian narratives on the continent.
- The level of rapprochement between African states and Russia can be a factor in influencing the West, which is expected to invest more and make greater efforts to 'pull Africa to its side' (Nourddine 2020, Schenker 2021) – this is particularly true of Tanzania, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger or Algeria. It suggests that if Western countries do not react quickly and decisively - African countries will return to Russia's sphere of influence.²¹
- Moscow is willing to share influence with autocrats involved in intra-African power struggles, settling for a smaller (though often crucial) share of the 'cake'²². Western states seek full influence and subordination of the will of their rulers.
- Russia has worked hard in recent years to make Africa dependent on its grains - especially wheat (Medetsky 2018). Analysing the period 2018-2020, it can be concluded that Russia was responsible for the supply of 32% of wheat to the African continent while Ukraine accounted for 12%. At least 23 African countries are dependent on the Russian wheat while just four on Ukrainian supplies. (Statista 2022)

²⁰ It can be assumed that Russia never wanted to make the production of Sputnik V in Africa realised

²¹ For example, Egypt, which had been denied sales of F-35 aircraft by the US, purchased SU-35 aircraft from Russia, sending a clear message to the Americans.

²² It is working intensively with Egypt, for example, which wants to realise its influence in Libya, Sudan and Tunisia



- Africa accounts for only a negligible percentage of Russia's overall foreign turnover (some sources even say around 1%) - sanctions imposed by the West therefore hit Africa more than the Russian Federation itself.
- A forgotten fact is the wave of racism that took place in Russia in the 2000s. At the time, ambassadors of African countries intervened with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in connection with mass violence against Africans. 16 murders and 248 beatings were recorded against this background between 2004 and 2009 (Kozhenikova 2009).
- However, there was also a wave of violence (and killings) of Africans in Ukraine during this period, as was evoked during the Ukraine-Poland border crisis shortly after the war began. Ukraine only adopted an anti-racism law in 2012 (OHCHR 2016), however, in colloquial language people from Africa are still often referred to as 'black monkeys'.
- Russia's uranium resources are of low quality and their processing is very expensive (Deich 2007). When it comes to nuclear energy, it is not only Africa that expects Russian technology, but Russia also needs African raw materials.
- Many African countries were (and are) in debt to both Russia and Ukraine due to mutual trade. Economic crises, pandemics and droughts have left them unable to settle their debts. Russia had already announced the cancellation of Algeria's debts in 2006 amounting USD 4.7 billion (Mohammedi 2020) and in 2008 adopted a similar strategy for other countries at a total declared level of USD 20 billion. (MoFA Russia 2010) Ukraine has sought to collect its debts, which in recent years has led, for example, to a conflict with Tunisia whose multi-million dollar debt remains unpaid. (Cbonds 2022)
- China was making large grain purchases in 2021 and announced in early 2022 that it had a year-and-a-half's supply of grain, which may suggest communication occurring with Russia even before the outbreak of war.
- Russia's anti-Western narrative in Africa is supported by China, which in an unprecedented manner (following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan) is attacking US and NATO global policies towards both the Russian Federation and Ukraine (alleging, among other things, violations of international law, crimes against humanity, imprisonment without trial, torture, unauthorised sanctions on other countries, human rights violations and instrumental treatment of democracy as a mask for its abuses – Xinhua, 2022). Given that China is the largest lender in Africa on which at least 40 African states depend (Kumar&Pike 2022) - Russia's communication strategies have gained extremely strong leverage.
- A significant item in the budgets of many African countries are foreign remittances from compatriots abroad (Egypt's receipts from this, for example, are 30% - more than from tourism and the Suez Canal). With high population growth being the source of many of the problems for African economies, 'pushing' their surplus beyond national borders is therefore beneficial in two ways - they reduce the budget burden, whilst also increasing foreign remittance receipts. The Russian Federation is attempting to stimulate and

geographically target this centrifugal process by creating what Europeans call a demographic weapon.

- Russia is making intensive efforts to bind the Christian Church in African countries more closely with the Great Russian Orthodox Church and to expand its influence through this institution among the 31 countries of Africa and approximately 680 million Christians (Saleh 2022). These activities intensified in many regions of the Black Continent after the Orthodox synod held in 2021 (Rozanskij 2022). It resulted in the establishment of two 'centres for the propagation of faith and dialogue' at two opposite ends of Africa: in Cairo and Johannesburg (Hanafi 2022).

Each of the above-mentioned processes could individually (or cumulatively) be a potential factor in modelling the perception of African public opinion.

Reactions of African countries and societies

The reactions of senior officials and the publics in African states varied considerably depending on whether their messages were directed at the internal African market or at the international community. In the first case, most opinions negated the position taken by the 'collective West' regarding the war and rationalised offensive Russian actions²³ (AlMayadeen 2022). In the second, the attitude of African states was balanced (mostly 'abstaining') with rare expressions of criticism of Russia's aggressive policy of which a widely circulated media example is, the statement of the Kenyan ambassador to the UN, Mr Martin Kimani and the allegations of Russia's colonialism (Chappell 2022). It should be noted that in the first weeks of the war, a concept that was rapidly gaining a following in Africa was the so-called Non-Aligned States Movement- represented mainly by Egypt, Ghana, India and Indonesia (Mltek 2022). This formula had its roots in the 1960s, when a number of states, in pursuit of their own economic and political interests, did not want to take sides in the Cold War conflict. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, a number of states in the 'global south' expressed their willingness to opt for a 'third way'. These attempts, however, have been confrontationally suppressed by the United States and Europe, which (viewed through the prism of African sensitivities) force a 'for or against' position. Such a situation has become a perceptual backdrop affecting perceptions of both the war and its main actors. Significant events, actions and statements presenting the positions of African states in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war can be summarized as follow:

- 1) Only four African heads of state in addition to Macky Sall of the African Union and Senegal were present during the online meeting and President Zelensky's address to the African Union: Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire), Mohammed el-Menfi (Libyan Council) and Denis Sassou Nguesso (Congo).

²³ Like the slogan "An attack on Russia is an attack on Africa"

- 2) Many African countries were outraged by the treatment of black students at the Ukrainian-Polish border. Nigeria, South Africa and Congo formally complained about the racist treatment of a group of at least 12,000, mainly Moroccans and Nigerians (Resnick 2022) people wanting to get out of Ukraine. Social media was flooded with a wave of videos and posts from the border, and a social movement #AfricansInUkraine was created
- 3) Africans see Ukraine as a separatist entity that took advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union to establish its own statehood (Al Jazeera 2022). They fail to see the history, role and culture of post-World War II Ukraine as a separate entity from the Soviet Union
- 4) The pressure exerted on African states with regard to taking „a side in the conflict” evokes colonial reminiscences for the people of the Black Continent, and the surprise (and often even indignation) of the West at the attitude other than what it would expect - only deepens this impression (Obadare 2022). Balancing the two superpowers under such conditions is a very difficult challenge for African states, not only because of international circumstances, but also because of domestic politics (Annor 2022).
- 5) African countries have shown themselves to be keen observers of the international scene learning from the experiences of other countries - particularly the Middle East and Afghanistan following US 'stabilisation' missions. The US blunders in Iraq and Afghanistan (Bowman, Thomphson, Brombst 2021) and Russia's ability to 'keep President Bashar al-Assad in office' in Syria (despite intense Western campaigns to overthrow him) are repeatedly cited - a particularly relevant perspective for African autocrats as well.
- 6) In the collective consciousness of African societies, President Trump's term shithole countries (formally referring only to Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania and Eritrea (Kanno-Youngs 2022) but extended in the media to most African countries) is deeply imprinted.
- 7) The withdrawal from the Paris climate agreements (Kotchen 2017) and the marginalisation of the Green Climate Fund significantly undermined the „green” policies of the West (which were also linked to significant investment) and reinforced the focus of African governments on nuclear energy
- 8) Many African governments see Russia as a „lifeline” for their famine-threatened populations, making personal negotiating efforts (with relative success) with President Putin to help avert a food crisis (Kalondo 2022). Russia thus goes from being the perpetrator to being the „saviour”.
- 9) The actions of the European Union are seen as escalating the conflict rather than being steps towards establishing peace. Europe has identified the risk of „losing African hearts and minds” , but through the lack of a coordinated policy, the countermeasures taken have so far been of low effectiveness.
- 10) Many African countries that depend on China are watching their reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian war extremely closely and are trying to express opinions similar to

Beijing. This, in turn, after Nancy Pelosi's visit, has sharpened to a great extent its rhetoric towards the collective West

- 11) Some high officials of African countries (such as in Uganda President Museveni's son Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba) directly support President Putin²⁴ by spreading fake news in line with the message of the Russian propaganda and intelligence apparatus (such as the extremely popular tweet with a photo of a young Vladimir Putin in 1970s Tanzania talking to the „African fathers of independence” (ClubofMozambique 2002). No media report concerning any diplomat / soldier from the West has ever gained such popularity
- 12) During protests in the Sahel countries, notably Mali (Ramani 2020) and Burkina Faso (Jones 2022) participants attacked French „colonialists” while flying flags of the Russian Federation, demonstrating their sympathies clearly by this action
- 13) The African media's resentment of the West while favouring Russia may stem from years of having to denounce Western media publications spreading information about more and more 'senseless African wars' (senseless wars). African journalists and reporters have unsuccessfully tried to point out the basis, significance and consequences of the ongoing conflicts, rather than simply publishing the shocking statistics and pictures associated with them. Another reason may be the sectoral animosities associated with the primacy of information from Western sources - compared to local ones. It was the Western one that became the reference point and epicentre of socio-political discussions. Painfully for African media - the level of relevance and substance of 'Western' information mattered much less than the location of the entity that published it.
- 14) African states were very critical about offensive legislation that was being considered in the US (Diseko&Macaulay 2022), and in the following weeks of the adoption by the US Congress of the 'Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act' (US Congress 2022). This document gives the US services legislative space to determine various consequences against African entities linked to Russian Federation activities. Many African governments and societies condemned the act as an attempt to dictate with whom they could or could not cooperate. The prospect of penalties being imposed on them for contacts with Russia was perceived as an assault on their independence (Pandor 2022). The meaning of this document also stood in stark contrast to the narrative of Antony Blinken, who was in Africa at the time, in effect sinking the effectiveness of his diplomatic efforts.
- 15) Following the American example, the European Union has unofficially started discussions on potentially making humanitarian aid to Africa conditional on the representation of 'common values and shared vision'. The reaction of African countries is not yet unified, but one can anticipate voices even more critical than in the case of the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act

²⁴ *The majority of the mankind (that are non-white) support Russia's stand in Ukraine. Putin is absolutely right!" (The majority of the mankind (that are non white) support Russia's stand in Ukraine. Puting is absolutely right!"*)

- 16) Africans feel they are politically and economically discriminated against and undervalued by so-called global public opinion. Ukraine (despite the fact that it is not a member of NATO) receives not only financial and diplomatic aid, but also state-of-the-art weapons - support that the West has never given (at least officially) to African states. The budgets for the 'granary of Europe' are unprecedented, while for Africa humanitarian budgets are being cut despite growing needs due to the Russian-Ukrainian war.
- 17) Russia is seen as a counterweight to Turkey's growing influence and Ankara's 'neo-Ottoman' ambitions - thus approaching the Gulf states in particular (mainly the UAE and Saudi Arabia), for whom weakening Turkey as a competitor in Africa and MENA is an important objective (Repetowicz 2020). However, limiting Turkey's growing influence is also important for some North African states (e.g. Egypt, which shares with Russia an interest in Libya and Tunisia).
- 18) In social media, there are claims (repeated in face-to-face interviews) that the US through Poland (Karlovskyi 2022) is planning to deploy nuclear weapons systems on Ukrainian territory, which directly triggered the need for a Russian response. One of the factual bases for such suspected claims were the disseminated messages about the deepening of energy cooperation between the US and Poland (WorldNuclearNews,2022a) and the covert extension of the already functioning nuclear agreements between the US and Ukraine (WorldNuclearAssociation 2022).

African acceptance of two distinctly different types of narratives created by actors representing such antagonistic values, goals and methods is far more favourable to the Russian Federation. Many of the reasons for this have been demonstrated above, but the fundamental basis is that Russia is familiar with the Africans' mental model of the world and is able to construct a narrative that coincides with it in a very attractive and pertinent manner.

Summary and reflections

The differences between Russian and Western communication strategies used in Africa are not limited to the '*content*' itself. They are also different approaches to methods of disseminating messages and ways of aggregating and transforming the information that reaches Africans from a broad political, economic and media context.

In conclusion to the above, a number of meta-assumptions that seem to remain unconsidered by analysts, journalists and politicians are presented, as follows.

- Voting 'against' (or 'for') at the UN to condemn certain military actions of the Russian Federation cannot be equated with condemning Russia as a partner for African states.
- The Russian narrative offering Africans the 'freedom of the path they want to take', however more attractive than the 'violent dictate of the West', is well-installed *fake*

news. Russia is offering a presuppositional choice - that is, from a selection of possible solutions which has prepared in advance.

- The sanctions imposed on Russia and the probable food crisis in Africa they will cause are a greater economic threat to the countries of the Black Continent than to Russia itself. In the long term, it may even be beneficial for Russia - famine causes civil unrest and therefore an increased need for protection for autocratic governments. They will turn for help not to the discredited states of the West but to Russia itself (as long as it can continue to support them militarily).
- Colonisation in Africa continues - only the actors (China, Russia, Turkey, Gulf States) and its forms (economic colonialism, digital colonialism, cultural colonialism etc.) have changed.
- The post-colonialists (among whom, according to Africans, Ukraine aspires to be one) constitute for many Black Continent governments the 'institutions of the eternal enemy' and, in this respect, are a very important component of the African political, social, identity and psychological system. They are also used as a point of reference in the less transparent matrix of ethnic, religious and tribal struggles for power over the 'hearts and minds' of Africans. Stepping into this multi-level structure without awareness, knowledge or trustworthy guides carries a high probability of being exploited by more experienced actors. On the African continent, Ukraine appears to have been effectively 'played' by the Russian Federation.

According to Theodore Murphy, director of the European Centre of Foreign Relations, the collective West made a 'strategic mistake' by forcing African states to take sides in the conflict (Murphy 2022). This gave space to Russian information operations and stirred up post-colonial traumas. Ukraine has become so close to the West that it has taken on all historical US-European 'sins' in African perceptions. The deepening inequality in the distribution of wealth in recent years has created a fertile information space for this as well (Repetowicz 2022). Russia is devoid of these burdens. It has also managed to combine hatred towards the colonisers with the automatically triggered belief that Russia is a better partner. Operating on this 'anchored' contrast should be considered a major communication success for the Russian Federation in Africa²⁵. Russia has achieved it by profiling its strategies in relation to local specificities, constantly taking 'many small steps' that are associated with equally frequent (though not always small) gratifications. This is in significant contrast to the 'systemic and strategic' solutions proposed by the West (Hume&Phillips-Barrasso 2022), ordered 'from afar' by Washington or European capitals. Newton's second law of motion states that „Force = mass x acceleration“. The collective West has more mass but is dispersed and often incoherent in its actions. Russia is lighter but tightly focused on areas that can give it - in various dimensions - the most favourable 'return on investment'.

²⁵ As exemplified by recent events in Burkina Faso



Africa is the continent experiencing the fastest population growth (UN 2022) with the greatest risk of experiencing the negative effects of climate change (UNFCCC 2020). The combination of these two factors in a post-pandemic reality means that it is Africa that could be a significant source of destabilisation for the global security system in the future. What for some actors in international competition is a threat for others, however, may be an opportunity. Developed countries, especially at a time of a return to deep East-West polarisation, are existentially forced to fight for Africa's unique resources. Acquiring them is essential for the functioning of their economies when the availability of raw materials from eastern Europe and Asia is reduced. In the near future, therefore, one can expect not only intensification, but brutalization of the struggle for the hearts and minds of Africans, once again, as in history disregarding their needs and dreams in the big game of great powers.

„[Africa] does not want to be a breeding ground for a new Cold War, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis.“

(Sall, 2022)

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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