

Russia–Ukraine War–Implications For West Africa’s Regional Security

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the implications of the Russian–Ukraine war for regional security in West Africa. The conflict, which began in 2022, has transcended its geographical boundaries to reshape global political and economic relations, revealing how interconnected and vulnerable regional systems have become in the twenty-first century. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilized data from scholarly publications, institutional reports, and verified media sources to trace the indirect but profound impact of the conflict on political stability, food security, foreign military influence, and regional cooperation in West Africa. Through this approach, the research offered a contextual understanding of how global power rivalries and supply chain disruptions translate into local insecurity, economic strain, and institutional fragility within the sub-region. The findings of the study indicate that the Russian–Ukraine war has had far-reaching effects on West Africa, primarily through economic, security, and geopolitical channels. It revealed that disruptions in global food and energy supply chains have intensified inflation, public discontent, and operational challenges for already underfunded security forces. The inability of several West African governments to cushion these shocks has heightened citizens’ frustrations, deepened inequality, and strained national cohesion. These pressures have allowed violent non-state actors to strengthen their foothold in rural and ungoverned areas, where weak state presence has created vacuums for parallel systems of governance. In these spaces, insurgent and extremist groups exploit socio-economic despair to consolidate control, thereby expanding the geography of insecurity across national borders. Furthermore, the study identified that the vacuum created by reduced Western engagement enabled Russia, through the Wagner Group, to expand its influence, often in exchange for political loyalty from transitional regimes. This shift in external alignment has marked a major reconfiguration of regional power relations, where regimes facing legitimacy crises increasingly turn to alternative global partners for survival. The study also found that cyber vulnerabilities and disinformation, influenced by Russian hybrid tactics, are increasingly shaping the information environment in West Africa. The study concluded that while the Russia–Ukraine war is not occurring on African soil, its consequences have destabilized already fragile states in West Africa, amplified governance weaknesses, and exposed the region’s structural dependency on global markets. It emphasized that these challenges, if left unchecked, could further undermine socio-political cohesion and regional stability. In response, the study recommends a regional strategy that prioritizes democratic accountability, economic diversification, and collective security frameworks. ECOWAS and the African Union must enhance their coordination, invest in cyber resilience, and develop community-centered counterterrorism policies that reflect local realities.

KEYWORDS: Security, Geo-politics, Regionalism, Globalization, State Fragility.

1. Introduction

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked a turning point in global affairs, reviving memories of Cold War-era tensions and provoking widespread geopolitical recalibration. Although the war is rooted in Eastern Europe, its effects are far-reaching, cutting across continents in ways that expose the interconnectedness of global politics. In

Africa, particularly West Africa, the fallout from the war is already shaping political decisions, economic policies, and security arrangements in subtle but increasingly observable ways (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The region of West Africa continues to face persistent challenges that have weakened national and regional security structures. Terrorist insurgencies in Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso, repeated unconstitutional

changes of government, and transnational criminal networks have placed the region under enormous strain. These long-standing threats are now being compounded by global developments beyond Africa's borders. Among these, the war in Ukraine stands out due to its effects on critical sectors such as food security, energy availability, international aid flows, and the foreign policy positions of global powers with vested interests in Africa (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

One of the most immediate consequences of the war for West Africa is the disruption of food and fuel imports. Countries in the region depend heavily on wheat, maize, and fertilizer from Ukraine and Russia. With trade routes interrupted and global prices surging, many West African states have experienced spikes in inflation and food insecurity. The inability of fragile governments to cushion these effects has led to protests in places like Sierra Leone and Ghana, demonstrating how external shocks can trigger internal disorder and stretch already burdened security agencies (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022).

Alongside economic pressures, the war has accelerated Russia's efforts to expand its political and military presence in parts of Africa. The deployment of Russian private military contractors, particularly the Wagner Group, to countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic has added a new layer to the region's security landscape. These groups operate in partnership with military regimes or transitional governments, often in exchange for access to natural resources or political allegiance. This evolving presence challenges traditional Western influence and raises concerns about the nature of Russia's strategic goals in the region (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The reallocation of Western military and development resources toward the Ukraine conflict has also affected West Africa. Countries like France and Germany, once heavily involved in African peacekeeping and counter-terrorism, are now redirecting budgets and attention to European defense. This has translated into a noticeable decline in support for operations such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which has struggled to contain jihadist violence across the Sahel. At the same time, ECOWAS faces increased pressure to act decisively, even as its internal unity is tested by divergent member-state interests (ECOWAS Commission, 2023).

New vulnerabilities are also emerging in areas that were once considered peripheral to regional security. The cyber dimension of the Russia-Ukraine war, involving coordinated cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and digital infrastructure sabotage, offers a blueprint for future conflict elsewhere. West African

countries with underdeveloped cybersecurity frameworks may become easy targets for such activities, particularly during elections or moments of political instability. The threat, while not yet widespread in the region, is beginning to receive attention from security experts and policymakers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022).

In addition, the war has reshaped Africa's external diplomatic relations. As Western states reduce their presence or recalibrate their strategies in the region, other powers such as China, Turkey, and India are stepping in to fill the void. These actors bring different interests, methods, and political expectations. West African states, already navigating the pressures of internal instability, are now confronted with an increasingly competitive and unpredictable environment in which aligning with one external power may carry economic or political costs (Reuters, 2023).

This study seeks to examine how a war thousands of kilometers away has begun to affect one of the world's most unstable yet geopolitically strategic regions. It begins by tracing the historical evolution of tensions between Russia and Ukraine, offering context to the present conflict. The study then explores the ongoing war, its causes, phases, and global dimensions. Finally, it considers the implications for West Africa, focusing on how economic shocks, military realignments, and shifting diplomatic partnerships are influencing regional security. In doing so, this study contributes to an emerging body of scholarly work that links global conflict with local insecurity in regions like West Africa.

Historical Issues Between Russia and Ukraine

The tensions between Russia and Ukraine are rooted in centuries of contested sovereignty, empire-building, and resistance. Though the 2022 invasion shocked the global community, it was only the latest development in a long trajectory of imperial dominance, political suppression, and geopolitical rivalry. These tensions date back to the Tsarist era when Russia sought to dominate Eastern Europe through conquest and cultural assimilation (Plokhy, 2017).

By the late 18th century, much of modern-day Ukraine had been absorbed into the Russian Empire following the decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the defeat of local Cossack forces. The eastern and central parts of Ukraine, including Kyiv, came under Russian rule, while the western regions were administered by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Subtelny, 2009). Under Russian governance, efforts were made to assimilate Ukrainians into Russian identity. These included restrictions on the Ukrainian language, church autonomy, and education. Ukrainians were often portrayed not as a separate people, but as a regional variation of Russians—a claim that has persisted into the

present (Wilson, 2009).

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Ukraine declared independence during the chaos of the Russian Civil War. However, the newly established Soviet government launched a military campaign to retake Ukrainian territory. By 1922, Ukraine was forcibly integrated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as one of its founding republics (Snyder, 2010). Though technically a federation, the USSR was centralized in Moscow, and policies toward Ukraine were marked by authoritarian control. One of the darkest chapters of this period was the Holodomor, a man-made famine from 1932 to 1933 caused by Stalin's forced collectivization policies. Scholars estimate that over three million Ukrainians died. The Ukrainian parliament and several international bodies have classified the Holodomor as an act of genocide (Applebaum, 2017).

During World War II, Ukraine became a major battleground. Nazi occupation forces were responsible for massive atrocities, including the murder of over one million Jews in Ukraine. However, Soviet forces reasserted control by the end of the war. In the postwar years, the Kremlin intensified Russification policies aimed at suppressing Ukrainian nationalism. Ukrainian-language schools were marginalized, and dissenters were jailed or executed. While the western part of the country retained a strong sense of Ukrainian identity and anti-Soviet sentiment, other regions remained economically and culturally intertwined with Russia (Magocsi, 2010).

Ukraine's independence in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, marked a turning point. In a national referendum held in December of that year, over 90% of Ukrainians voted in favor of sovereignty, including a majority in eastern and southern regions where Russian speakers were concentrated. This result signaled a broad national consensus in favor of self-determination (Åslund, 2009). Yet, the break from Moscow was not absolute. Ukraine remained dependent on Russia for energy, inherited Soviet-era infrastructure, and maintained a shared cultural and linguistic space. The post-independence period was thus characterized by both separation and continued entanglement (Kuzio, 2015).

One of the first challenges in the post-Soviet era was nuclear disarmament. At the time of independence, Ukraine inherited nearly 1,900 nuclear warheads, the third-largest arsenal globally. Under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine agreed to relinquish its nuclear weapons in exchange for security assurances from Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These assurances included respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial borders. However, Russia's

annexation of Crimea in 2014 was later condemned as a breach of this agreement (Pifer, 2014).

Energy disputes further strained relations. Russia supplied the bulk of Ukraine's natural gas and used this dependence as leverage. Disputes over pricing and transit fees led to several gas cutoffs, notably in 2006 and 2009. These crises affected not just Ukraine but also European nations that relied on Ukrainian pipelines to import Russian gas (Pirani, 2009). Moscow's use of energy as a political tool revealed the fragility of the bilateral relationship and Ukraine's vulnerability to Russian coercion.

As the 2000s progressed, political developments inside Ukraine began to deepen the divide. The 2004 Orange Revolution followed reports of widespread electoral fraud favoring pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich. Mass protests led to a repeat runoff vote and the eventual victory of Viktor Yushchenko, a pro-Western reformist. Russia viewed the revolution as a Western-backed conspiracy and interference in its traditional sphere of influence (D'Anieri, 2019). This period also marked a growing desire among Ukrainians, particularly in urban and western areas, to integrate with the European Union and NATO.

The rift widened again in 2013 when President Yanukovich reversed a planned association agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia. This triggered the Euromaidan protests, leading to his ousting in early 2014. Russia responded by annexing Crimea, a move it justified on the grounds of protecting ethnic Russians and securing its Black Sea Fleet based in Sevastopol (Charap & Colton, 2017). The annexation violated international law and was widely condemned by the international community. It also reignited fears of Russian expansionism and prompted Ukraine to accelerate efforts to align with the West.

In addition to Crimea, Russia began backing armed separatist movements in the Donbas region, comprising Donetsk and Luhansk. The resulting conflict escalated into a protracted war that claimed over 14,000 lives as of early 2022 (BBC News, 2014). Despite multiple ceasefire attempts under the Minsk agreements, hostilities persisted. The Kremlin denied direct involvement, but satellite images, captured fighters, and open-source investigations consistently exposed Russian military support. The hybrid warfare tactics used—involving disinformation, local proxies, and unmarked troops—further destabilized the region and made accountability difficult (Bellingcat, 2014).

Leading up to the 2022 full-scale invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin increasingly questioned Ukraine's legitimacy as a state. In a controversial 2021 essay, Putin argued that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people" and blamed the West for turning Ukraine

against Russia. He framed NATO's eastward expansion as a direct threat to Russian security, despite the alliance's stated defensive posture (Putin, 2021). These narratives laid the ideological and strategic groundwork for war, portraying Ukraine's sovereignty as both artificial and dangerous to Russia's national interests.

From Ukraine's standpoint, the country had long endured a pattern of broken agreements, coercion, and interference. Public opinion increasingly turned in favor of NATO membership and EU integration, especially after 2014. The Ukrainian military underwent reform, and civil society played a more assertive role in shaping policy and resisting authoritarianism. While divisions remained between eastern and western regions, national identity grew stronger as a result of continued external threats (Gessen, 2022).

By 2022, decades of historical grievances, unresolved territorial disputes, energy manipulation, and incompatible political goals had reached a boiling point. Russia's refusal to accept Ukraine's independence as final and Ukraine's determination to escape Moscow's shadow proved irreconcilable. These clashing visions of sovereignty, reinforced by historical experiences and strategic anxieties, pushed the two countries toward open war (Galeotti, 2019).

The War

The Russia-Ukraine war that began on February 24, 2022, represents the largest conventional military conflict in Europe since World War II. Although tensions had been escalating for years, the full-scale invasion shocked the international community due to its scale, speed, and explicit aim of dismantling Ukrainian sovereignty. Within days, Russian forces crossed the borders from multiple directions—Crimea in the south, Belarus in the north, and Russia in the east—targeting Kyiv, Kharkiv, and other major cities (BBC News, 2022). The swift initial offensive was met with unexpected Ukrainian resistance, frustrating Russian objectives of a quick regime change (The New York Times, 2022).

Moscow's stated goals at the outset were demilitarization and "denazification" of Ukraine—vague terms used to justify military action. However, these claims lacked credible evidence and were widely rejected by international observers. The narrative echoed prior Russian rhetoric, portraying the Ukrainian government as illegitimate and hostile to ethnic Russians, especially in eastern regions (The Guardian, 2022). Ukraine, led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, rejected these accusations, framing the invasion as an unprovoked act of aggression aimed at erasing Ukrainian independence (Al Jazeera, 2022).

The early phases of the war saw intense fighting across multiple fronts. Russian forces attempted to seize Kyiv but faced logistical failures, poor coordination, and low morale among troops. Ukrainian defenders, using Western-supplied anti-tank weapons and drones, inflicted heavy losses. In March 2022, Russia began retreating from northern Ukraine, shifting its focus to the Donbas region, where it already supported separatist groups (Institute for the Study of War, 2022). This strategic recalibration signaled a prolonged conflict rather than the swift victory envisioned by Russian planners.

International reaction to the invasion was immediate and widespread. Western countries imposed severe sanctions targeting Russian banks, state enterprises, oligarchs, and the Central Bank of Russia. These sanctions aimed to isolate Russia economically and weaken its war-making capacity. In addition, the United States and European Union provided billions of dollars in military, humanitarian, and financial aid to Ukraine (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Countries previously hesitant to provide lethal assistance, such as Germany and Sweden, reversed long-standing policies to support Ukraine militarily (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

NATO, while avoiding direct military engagement, significantly reinforced its eastern flank. Troop deployments were increased in Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania, while joint exercises were expanded. Finland and Sweden, in response to the changed security environment, applied for and later gained membership in NATO, ending decades of neutrality. These shifts represented a dramatic realignment of European defense policy, one driven largely by the actions of Russia itself (NATO, 2023).

On the battlefield, Russia's revised objective was to consolidate control over eastern and southern Ukraine. Cities like Mariupol became focal points of brutal urban warfare. After weeks of siege and bombardment, Russian forces captured Mariupol in May 2022, leaving behind extensive civilian casualties and infrastructural devastation (CNN, 2022). Similar tactics were employed in Severodonetsk, Bakhmut, and other Donbas cities. These operations relied heavily on artillery, airstrikes, and scorched-earth tactics, often at the expense of civilian life and property (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

War crimes and violations of international humanitarian law became a defining feature of the conflict. International bodies, including the UN and Amnesty International, documented mass civilian killings in towns like Bucha, indiscriminate bombing of residential areas, use of cluster munitions, and forced deportations. Ukrainian officials and international prosecutors began collecting evidence for future war crimes trials, emphasizing accountability for violations

committed by Russian forces (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2022). The Kremlin denied these allegations, labeling them as Western propaganda, despite mounting evidence from satellite imagery and eyewitness accounts (Amnesty International, 2022).

Ukraine's resilience throughout 2022 was enhanced by growing foreign assistance and effective domestic mobilization. The Ukrainian government enacted martial law, expanded military recruitment, and intensified diplomatic outreach. Civil society groups coordinated humanitarian aid, while technology firms developed digital tools to track missing persons, coordinate evacuations, and counter disinformation (Atlantic Council, 2022). Zelenskyy emerged as a symbol of resistance, delivering speeches to parliaments worldwide and galvanizing global public support for Ukraine's cause.

By mid-2022, Ukrainian forces began conducting counteroffensives, particularly in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. In September, Ukrainian troops liberated large parts of Kharkiv Oblast, forcing Russian forces into a rapid retreat. In November, Ukraine reclaimed Kherson city—the only regional capital captured by Russia since the start of the war. These victories boosted morale and demonstrated Ukraine's growing operational capacity (Reuters, 2022). They also exposed flaws in Russian logistics and command, prompting Moscow to announce partial mobilization in September—a decision that triggered domestic protests and mass emigration of military-age men (BBC News, 2022, September).

The war's economic dimensions have been equally profound. Russia faced not only sanctions but also an exodus of foreign investment and a cutoff from Western technology markets. Despite efforts to adapt through trade with China, India, and Turkey, the Russian economy struggled with inflation, currency instability, and rising war expenditures. Meanwhile, global energy prices surged, driven by Europe's attempts to reduce reliance on Russian gas and oil. The resulting supply disruptions contributed to inflation and food insecurity in many countries, especially in the Global South (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023).

Grain exports from Ukraine—one of the world's top wheat producers—were blocked by a Russian naval blockade in the Black Sea, worsening global food shortages. The UN and Turkey brokered a deal in July 2022, known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, to allow some exports. However, Russia periodically suspended its participation, citing sabotage and lack of Western concessions (UN News, 2022). These interruptions affected markets in Africa and the Middle East, where dependency on Ukrainian grain is especially high.

On the Russian side, internal dissent began to

surface, though harsh repression kept opposition movements in check. Independent media were shut down, protestors were jailed, and laws were passed criminalizing criticism of the war. High-profile military bloggers criticized tactical blunders, and the Wagner Group—a private military contractor with ties to the Kremlin—engaged in a dramatic, though short-lived, mutiny in June 2023, further revealing fractures within the Russian war effort (The Washington Post, 2023).

The war also became a testing ground for modern warfare technologies. Drones, satellite imagery, cyber operations, and information warfare played crucial roles. Ukraine made use of Starlink internet services provided by SpaceX, allowing troops and civilians to maintain communications even when infrastructure was destroyed. Cyberattacks, launched by both state and non-state actors, targeted everything from energy grids to banking systems (The Washington Post, 2023). The digital aspect of the war, including disinformation campaigns, extended its influence far beyond the physical battlefield.

Diplomatically, efforts to broker peace made limited progress. Talks held in Belarus and Turkey in early 2022 stalled, while Western nations insisted on Ukrainian territorial integrity as a precondition for negotiation. Russia, in turn, demanded recognition of Crimea as Russian territory and autonomy for the Donbas republics. With positions entrenched, negotiations gave way to a war of attrition by 2023, characterized by slow-moving frontlines and intensive artillery exchanges (The Guardian, 2023).

As of early 2024, the conflict remains unresolved, with no ceasefire in place and both sides preparing for prolonged engagement. Ukraine continues to seek further integration into the European Union and NATO, while Russia appears determined to prevent this at all costs. The war has not only altered the military and political balance in Eastern Europe but has also reshaped global alliances, energy markets, and defense doctrines. It has become a defining conflict of the early 21st century, the consequences of which are still unfolding.

Implications of the Russia-Ukraine War on West Africa's Regional Security

The Russia-Ukraine war has produced far-reaching effects in West Africa, even though the region remains geographically removed from the battlefield. Among the earliest and most severe impacts were dramatic increases in food and fuel prices, which intensified already existing economic fragility. Bar-Yam and Lagi (2013) explain that food price spikes are frequently associated with civil unrest in vulnerable societies, and this pattern manifested across West Africa following the disruption of Ukrainian grain exports. Protests in Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal highlighted growing dissatisfaction with

governance, worsened by inflation, unemployment, and dwindling public trust.

In the Sahel, the food crisis took a more dangerous turn. Burkina Faso and Mali—two states already contending with terrorism and internal displacement—witnessed escalating malnutrition and humanitarian pressure. When state authorities fail to provide food and basic services, extremist groups exploit the vacuum. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* (2023), non-state armed actors like JNIM and ISWAP have increasingly provided resources in exchange for loyalty. This strategy not only helps militants recruit new members but also enables them to establish parallel governance structures.

Fuel cost increases have placed additional burdens on regional military operations. The African Security Review (2023) reports that higher petroleum prices have constrained counter-insurgency patrols and air surveillance in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania. These constraints have weakened the ability of national armies to secure peripheral areas, allowing terrorist groups to smuggle weapons, conduct raids, and expand their zones of control without resistance.

In parallel, Russia's strategic reach into West Africa has grown, partly enabled by the vacuum left by receding Western influence. The Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, has entrenched itself in Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic. Allegrozzi (2024) documented severe abuses, including executions and torture, committed by Wagner operatives alongside Malian forces during 2022 operations. A United Nations Working Group on Mercenaries (2023) investigation confirmed over 300 civilian deaths in Moura during a five-day military operation involving Russian mercenaries and local soldiers.

Additional atrocities have deepened public distrust in state-military collaborations with Russian elements. Christensen (2022) verified the killing of at least 50 civilians in Hombori market in August 2022 by Malian and Wagner forces. These incidents further erode public confidence in national institutions and intensify the perception that foreign-backed security solutions bring more harm than stability.

Beyond kinetic operations, Russia employs strategic messaging and disinformation. Isaacs and Kinnes (2023) show that the Wagner Group actively manipulates information environments in West Africa to promote authoritarian narratives, suppress dissent, and discredit Western influence. Through radio broadcasts, social media campaigns, and cultural outreach, Moscow positions itself as an ally of anti-colonial resistance—an appeal that resonates with segments of West African societies.

Amid this realignment, countries such as Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have begun diversifying their military partnerships. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2023), West African states are engaging with Turkey, the UAE, and China to obtain drones, naval surveillance systems, and light arms. However, this growing list of security providers has led to overlapping responsibilities and fragmented coordination, weakening regional frameworks like the ECOWAS Standby Force.

Chatham House (2023) analysts warn that the war in Ukraine has diverted European funding and political capital away from West Africa, undermining stabilization efforts. Programs once supported by Germany, France, and the UK—such as border security initiatives and police training—have seen cuts or delays. The decline in consistent support weakens ECOWAS and the African Union's ability to manage coups, mediate peace, or respond to transnational threats.

A growing area of concern involves cybersecurity. Inspired by the digital frontlines of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, some West African states are now exploring cyber defense strategies. However, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2022) highlights that weak digital infrastructure, low investment in IT, and unregulated data environments make the region highly susceptible to cyber threats. These vulnerabilities create opportunities for election interference, surveillance, and digital sabotage by hostile foreign actors.

Politically, the war has emboldened military juntas. In Guinea and Burkina Faso, leaders justified unconstitutional seizures of power by arguing that global attention is fixated on Europe. The International Crisis Group (2023) notes that this narrative is being used to weaken the resolve of regional bodies and international partners to push back against authoritarianism. The perceived retreat of Western powers has encouraged some regimes to consolidate control with minimal fear of external consequences.

Despite the concerning trends, there are emerging opportunities. The supply shocks prompted by the war have driven investment in local agriculture and intra-African trade. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS, 2023) advocates for integrating economic resilience strategies into security frameworks, urging West African governments to increase food production, reduce energy imports, and strengthen regional supply chains. These adaptive strategies may reduce long-term dependency on volatile global markets.

Still, the danger of worsening conflict remains. According to the Clingendael Institute (2024), the combination of economic hardship, state withdrawal, and increased foreign interference has intensified recruitment into violent groups across northern Nigeria

and central Mali. Communities once allied with national governments are now shifting loyalties toward whichever actors—state or non-state—offer them security and basic welfare. If this trend accelerates, it could transform localized insurgencies into cross-border regional conflicts.

It can then be deduced that the Russia–Ukraine war has produced economic, political, and security consequences for West Africa that go beyond immediate shocks. Rising food and fuel prices, diminished Western support, and the rise of Russian influence have disrupted governance and military cooperation. How regional and global actors respond to these emerging threats will determine whether West Africa can withstand or succumb to the ripple effects of a distant but deeply consequential conflict.

Conclusion

The Russia–Ukraine war has not only altered the geopolitical configuration of Eastern Europe but also produced far-reaching consequences for regions like West Africa. Although the immediate battlefield lies thousands of kilometers away, the conflict has intensified vulnerabilities within West African states, exposed weaknesses in existing security arrangements, and prompted a re-evaluation of traditional alliances and governance structures. Its economic aftershocks—especially in food and fuel markets—have inflamed social tensions, strained public service delivery, and disrupted fragile peacebuilding processes in countries already contending with insurgency and institutional fragility.

The most visible impact of the war has been economic. The steep rise in food prices, caused by supply chain disruptions and the blockade of Ukrainian ports, contributed to inflation and reduced household purchasing power. In many West African countries, these pressures led to protests, government crackdowns, and increased distrust in political leadership. Simultaneously, higher fuel prices inflated operational costs for militaries already under-resourced. The weakening of patrols and withdrawal from hard-to-reach areas provided new opportunities for violent non-state actors to reassert themselves, often offering basic services where governments failed to do so.

Another key outcome has been the geopolitical realignment of security actors. The retrenchment of Western military support—due in part to diverted attention and resources toward Eastern Europe—created vacuums that Russia, through the Wagner Group, quickly sought to fill. While some regimes welcomed Russian involvement as a means of consolidating power, the consequences have included widespread reports of civilian abuses and a shift away

from principles of democratic accountability. Moreover, the entry of Russian private military companies has led to a breakdown in regional consensus, with ECOWAS and the African Union finding it harder to speak with a unified voice or coordinate effective responses to evolving threats.

Beyond hard security, the Russia–Ukraine war has disrupted diplomatic norms and shifted narratives around governance. Coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea were partially justified by the claim that international partners were too distracted to intervene effectively. Such reasoning has eroded deterrents against unconstitutional political behaviour. The normalization of military rule, underpinned by new foreign alliances and disinformation campaigns, has contributed to democratic regression. At the same time, weak digital defenses leave West African states vulnerable to cyber threats modeled after the information warfare seen in the Ukrainian theater.

Yet, the crisis also presents an opportunity for strategic introspection. With traditional global powers increasingly preoccupied, West African states are being compelled to seek indigenous solutions, strengthen regional cooperation, and reduce dependency on distant actors. Investments in local agriculture, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure can serve both economic and security ends. Regional institutions like ECOWAS, despite their challenges, remain critical platforms for negotiating collective security and democratic norms.

In retrospect, the war in Ukraine has underscored the interconnectivity of global conflict and regional stability. For West Africa, the challenge is no longer avoiding external shocks, but building internal resilience capable of withstanding them. As external alliances shift and new powers emerge, the region's security and governance future depends on its ability to craft cohesive strategies, rooted in accountability, adaptability, and regional solidarity.

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