

Africa-An Unintended Collateral Victim of Russia – Ukraine War

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Abstract

This paper examines security problems brought about by the Russian government in creating a war against Ukraine. The study emphasises Africa and other nations (which are either military aid donors or harbour companies and firms that produce and export military equipment) involved in the war for different reasons. Different scales at some point focus solely on Ukraine, with military aid could help donor countries involved in the war becoming limited, consequently leaving the Africa-a continent that relies heavily on aid faced with a serious security conundrum, especially in the wake of increasing terrorism-related activities not only in the continent but globally. The paper used secondary sources as the basis to conduct this research that as the war wages on, Africa becomes an unintended collateral victim of the Russia-Ukraine protracted war. The finding of the study is based on content analysis which shows that the war in Ukraine risks distracting or ‘taking away’ Russia and the West’s attention from Africa, resulting in the continent being vulnerable to combatting terrorism. Before divulging its main theme, which revolves around security challenges linked to the war. The paper used realism as its theoretical framework to discuss the protracted war between Russia and Ukraine, where issues such as why Russia is intransigently continuing with the war and why the West is interested in Ukraine. Realism is used as a basis for analysing the origin of the Russia-Ukraine war and not necessarily the impact of the war on Africa. It was established that realism is not used to justify Russia’s war in Ukraine but suggests that Russia’s behaviour is synonymous with the superpower.

Keywords: Realism, terrorism, Africa



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Introduction

The post-colonial Africa has struggled to consolidate inclusive development resulting in over-reliance on aid for basic needs (Human Rights Watch,2022). The advent of the Russia –Ukraine war once again has brought to the forefront the debate on food security in Africa. Russia and Ukraine produce nearly 30% of the world’s wheat, 12% of which is exported to Africa (Bourne Byjoel, 2022). Africa imports most of its wheat supplies from Ukraine and Russia (Behnassi,2019). North African countries such as Egypt and Tunisia import 85%-81% of wheat from Ukraine, respectively (Behnassi,2019). With the Russia-Ukraine war, the prospect of these countries failing to import adequate wheat to meet the demand of their citizens became an inevitable certainty. As the war rages on, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) predicts a scenario where other grain-producing countries in the world will start restricting exports to meet their domestic need (FAO, 2022). Egypt is the largest African importer of wheat, as it imports about 60 % from Russia and 25 % from Ukraine. The remaining 15% is produced locally (Dawoud,2022). In 2021, Egypt imported more than 6.1 million tonnes of wheat at a total cost of US\$ 2.4 billion from both Russia and Ukraine. Egypt spends around US\$ 3 billion per year on wheat imports only. Due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, however, wheat prices could rise to US\$ 5.7 billion before the end of 2022 (Dawoud, 2022). No country, therefore, in Africa is likely going to be hard hit by the war in terms of food insecurities than Egypt. The Egyptian case study clearly underlines Africa’s over-dependence on imports. Not only does Africa depend heavily on imports, but its economy is heavily aid-laden (Moyo, 2009). It is estimated that Africa has received more than one trillion US dollars in aid during the last 50 years (Moyo, 2009). Though endowed with natural resources, African countries have always relied on foreign aid to support development. Aid is used to finance development projects, technical assistance, and importation of critical commodities such as food and military equipment. This paper, through desktop research, looks at the impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on security in Africa in the wake of the proliferation of terrorism in the continent. Most researchers have dwelled on the impact of the war on food security in Africa. This paper, therefore, takes a different dimension and centres on the war’s implication on security in Africa. Taking a cue from other studies that have shown Africa’s overreliance on aid, the paper seeks to answer this research question: What is the implication of the Russian -Ukraine war on Africa’s security in the wake of the proliferation of terrorism? To answer this research question, therefore, this paper postulates that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine accelerates Africa’s departure from the West agenda in terms of military aid and exportation of military equipment, thereby leaving the continent in limbo and at crossroads, thus becoming more susceptible to terrorism.

Statement of the problem

There is a prospect that the amount of military aid and weapons Ukraine continues to receive from the West could eventually end up in the hands of criminal organisations in Europe and beyond. Thus, the high availability of weapons during this conflict might lead to the proliferation of illicit arms, which may end up in the hands of terrorism

(France 24, 2022, May 17). If this happens, it will increase criminality, banditry, and terrorism within Eastern Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to the global insecurity index. Third-world countries and nations with weak economies will feel the burden the most because, with each increase in food prices, millions of people are thrown into poverty and will have to commit criminal acts like kidnapping, robbery, internet fraud, and hijacking, and most importantly, join terrorists' organisations thereby heightening the existing global insecurity. Most studies on the impact of Russian –the Ukraine war have concluded that the impact of the war on Africa will be food insecurity; this argument is premised on the fact that most of Africa imports wheat grains from Russia and Ukraine, with the two countries at war, thus disrupting grain exportation to Africa leaving Africa facing dire consequences of hunger. Few research, if any, have studied the nexus between war and security in Africa. This paper, therefore, tries to fill that gap and departs from food insecurity as the impact of war and focuses on security challenges because of the war.

Purpose of the Study

Increasing security challenges brought about by terrorism in Africa purposively obliged the production of this paper to create an awareness among politicians, academics, economists, think–tanks, and policymakers that Africa needs to manoeuvre from being a continent dependent overly on aid to a continent that is self-sufficient to deal with security challenges without being dependent on aid. To achieve this purpose, the following specific objectives are considered:

- Examine the understanding of Realism in International Relations.
- explain military equipment and military aid;
- explore the West interest in the war; and
- Determine terrorism in Africa

Literature Review

Understanding of Realism Theory in International Relations

Theories in International Relations (IR) are products of the prevailing international situation at a particular time. Scholars study the international system to produce theories of IR, which enable them to predict and explain changes in the international system, and how different countries or actors influence it (Vyas, 2006). One such theory is Realism which is premised on four assumptions. That survival (self-interest) is the principal goal of every state in an anarchic system, states are rational actors- given the goal of survival, states are bound to pursue the national interest, all states possess some military capacity, and that power is central in ensuring a state's survival in an anarchic world (Donnelly, 2000). Schmidt (2005) also argues that states are the main actors in the international system and are guided by survival and self-help. States are the key ontological unit of analysis in realism. The desire to survive in an anarchical world, therefore, leads to states competing for survival. Realism has evolved over the years from classical realism

to modern realism and structural realism. Structural realism can be further divided into defensive and offensive realism. All branches of realism, however, are essentially about how inter-state relations are used to maximise each state's interests and desires. According to Morgenthau (1973), international relations are about the struggle for power and survival justified by the selfish promotion of a state's national interest. Realism, and its variations or branches, connote those states that are primarily concerned with promoting their national interest in their relations with other states. One way of promoting national interests is to maximise one's (state's) power at the international level.

National interests can be defined as those things that satisfy both the material and spiritual needs of a nation. It can also include economic, military, and cultural interests (Donnelly, 2000). The primary national interest of a state, therefore, is its survival and security. Wealth creation, economic development, military power, and prosperity are also important to the state's national interests (Jackson and Sorensen, 2003). Realism proposes that sovereign states act solely on self-interest to amass material power in an anarchical international system. This principle is premised on the belief that human beings are innately self-centred (egoistic) and competitive rather than cooperative and principled. In realism, the principal actor is the state, which is accountable to its people as opposed to an external supreme authority, which is absent, nevertheless (Jackson and Sorensen, 2003). Realism as an international relations theory can be best summarised by Mearsheimer's remarks: "States should maximise power, and their ultimate goal should be hegemony because that is the best way to guarantee survival" (Dunne et al., 2013).

Military equipment and Military aid

Africa relies heavily on the importation of military equipment from Russia, the United States of America (USA) and certain European nations, and China. The USA has always given military aid to Africa in different ways and at different intervals. USA's military aid to Africa is intended to fight terrorism, secure mineral and oil resources, and counter China's influence in the continent. From a realist perspective, countering the influence of its strategic rivals, especially China, reminiscent of the Cold War, has renewed US interest in Africa (Dorn and Ghodsee, 2012). USA's military aid to Africa includes subsidised sales of arms, military training and advice, the establishment of security commands, and intelligence. Since 2001, the USA has provided over \$9 billion to Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries and about \$25 billion to the five North African states in military aid. Similarly, the European Union (EU), through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), spends an average of over €100 million per year in military-related aid in Africa. These efforts are aimed at partly stymieing the growth of insurgency and terrorism throughout Africa (Security Assistance, Monitor, 2019).

Russia is also emerging as one of the largest suppliers of arms to Africa, with its arms exports accounting for nearly half of the continent's imports, more than twice as much as European countries, China, and the USA combined. Data from the Stockholm

International Peace Research Institute shows that between 2015 and 2019, Africa imported 49% of its military equipment from Russia, with the other 14 % and 13% from USA and China, respectively (Defence World, 2020). Countries like Angola do not only import weapons from Russia, but Russian firms also use them for the distribution of Russian weapons to other parts of Africa (Defence World, 2019). Angola also seeks to become a country that manufactures and assembles Russian weapons within its borders, as revealed by Angolan President Joao Lourenço during a state visit to Moscow in 2018 (Klomegah, 2019). During Sochi Summit in 2019, Nigeria and Russia signed an agreement whereby Russia would supply 12 MI-35 helicopters to Nigeria specifically to help Nigeria fight against the Boko Haram terror group. Cameroon also sought to obtain the Russian Pantsir-s1 air defence system for use by its armed forces against the infiltration of Boko Haram along its border with Nigeria. The system includes combat vehicles, surface-to-air missiles, 30-mm bullets, and two combat vehicles (<https://www.armyrecognition.com/>). In March 2018, Russia and Burkina Faso signed an agreement for the supply of two Mi-171Sh helicopters to help combat terrorism in the West African country, which is prone to terror attacks (<https://issuu.com/janesintel/docs/aad>). An extrapolation can be made, therefore, that Russia's inability to achieve its military objectives in Ukraine as quickly as Kremlin anticipated (as opined by many European political commentators) will likely lead to Russia and its firms not fulfilling their contractual obligation of weapons supplies to most African countries, it is inevitable therefore that a protracted war means Russia will concentrate all its military equipment on its current objective-the war in Ukraine (Fontenrose,2022). Observers also expect Russia's defence industry to lose access to key components used in the manufacturing of military equipment due to sanctions (alongside significant equipment losses in battle), making it less likely that Russian defence firms will meet production targets or fulfil arms contracts to buyers in Africa (Fontenrose,2022).

USA, EU, China, and Russia are increasingly contesting the international space by providing military aid with the aim of increasing their sphere of influence across Africa. Such competition occurs within a globalised economy, with a high premium on acquiring access to new consumer markets and extracting precious minerals and natural resources. The USA, EU countries, China and Russia, offer military aid and assistance missions for “real hard-nosed politics in pursuit of their own selfish strategic interests” (Matissek,2020). But their strategies and focus will likely shift towards Ukraine for different reasons, thus leaving Africa as an ‘orphan’.

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The West interests in the war

Realism as an IR theory, which had allegedly characterised the grand strategies of the superpowers during the Cold War, appeared to have outlived itself and left space for ‘new emerging theories’ like liberalism and other theories to take over. Peace returned to post-cold War Europe, with Europe embarking on its expedition of stability and prosperity, with democratic and liberal values at its forefront. However, Russia’s recent invasion of Ukraine and, most importantly, the position it adopted forecast a possible resurgence of the realists’ approach (Walker, 2022). The choice of semantics by President Putin underlines the realist-specific themes such as “security”, “survival”, and “an existential threat” (Agence France-Presse,2022). President Putin refers to Ukraine’s dallying with the USA and its prospects of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as an existential threat.” The war also illustrates a further realist concept: the idea of a security dilemma; this, according to Walt (2022), to which Putin appeared to respond by threatening the use of sanctions and military action as well as nuclear weapons if need be (Noak and Westfall,2022).

From 1991 to 2014, the USA provided Ukraine with \$4 billion in military assistance, even though Ukraine is not a member of NATO. Over \$2.7 billion has been added since then, plus over \$1 billion provided by the NATO Trust Fund, which is only a part of the total military investments in Ukraine. With this, the USA seeks to move Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit and integrate it into the West (Mearsheimer,2014). All this is aimed at pulling Ukraine away from Russia’s undemocratic influence. In expanding the NATO alliance and offering countries like Georgia and Ukraine a theoretical chance of joining NATO, realists will claim that the USA triggered a security dilemma with Russia that led to its invasions of Georgia in 2008 and subsequently Ukraine in 2014 as well as Russia's attack of Ukraine in February of 2022. Russia, therefore, was bound to act.

The case of the Russia-Ukraine war is exactly what realism would predict. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine was meant to be his crowning achievement, a demonstration of how far Russia has come since the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991. The annexation of Ukraine is supposed to be the first step in reconstructing the Russian empire. President Putin wished to expose the USA as a ‘paper tiger’ outside Europe and to demonstrate that Russia is positioning itself for a leadership role in an envisaged multipolar world (Fix and Kimmage,2022). Russia came to believe that Ukraine was drifting out of its sphere of influence and integrating fully into the Western orbit and against Russia’s national interests, for President Putin sees former Soviet countries as a technical part of Russia. When no viable diplomatic solution to the problem could be found, Russia then launched an invasion intended to keep the West, in the form of NATO and the European Union, from further encroaching close to its borders. When Ukraine successfully resisted Russia’s opening offensive, and Russia’s invasion was delayed by Ukraine’s resilience, the USA and its European allies provided

just enough military assistance to deny Russia a victory and to, as USA Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin puts it, “see Russia weakened.” The continuous help rendered by the USA and its allies, as well as Russia’s continuous offensive, shows the great intent of the two sides wanting Ukraine to their side (Latham,2022).

For Mearsheimer (2014), the root cause of Russia’s decision in 2014 to annex Crimea and destabilise the Donbas region was the expansion eastwards of NATO and, to a lesser extent, the European Union (EU) along with its democracy promotion-which threatened Russia’s core strategic interests, a point President Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Both Russia and the USA want Ukraine for themselves to neutralise the influence of the other. Russia doesn’t want NATO close to its borders (Jibladze, 2007). Gotz (2016: pp302) reasons that Russia’s actions are “simply an attempt by a local great power to maintain a sphere of influence around its borders in the face of increasing external pressure” and that such an action is not an exceptionally Russian response but, rather, a typical response that any great power in such circumstances would pursue. Should Russia or China get closer to Mexico (USA’s neighbour) in a comparable manner, the USA is bound to act in a similar routine to Russia. For President Putin and in line with realism keeping Ukraine safe from the USA/EU and Western ideologies is to Russia a core national interest. The current invasion bore the same hallmarks and justification as the 2014 invasion and only differs in scale.

Even prior to the 2022 war and as a way of endearing Ukraine to its side and away from Russia in 2017, the EU granted Ukrainian citizens visa-free entry to the EU’s Schengen area of free movement, which allows individuals to travel without passport checks between most European countries (Barber,2019). The EU has imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine and supported Ukraine against Russia’s maritime aggression. Furthermore, from 2014 to 2019, the EU provided foreign aid to Ukraine, amounting to more than €13 billion (about \$14.2 billion) in loans and €2 billion (about \$2.2 billion) in grants. In 2020, the EU announced it would provide more than €190 million (\$205 million) in emergency support to Ukraine to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU subsequently provided another €1.2 billion (about \$1.3 billion) in loans to help “limit the economic fallout” of the pandemic (European Commission,2020).

On the 23rd of December 2022, during his first visit to the USA, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky was promised \$1.85 billion in military aid by the administration of US President Joe Biden ([http:// www.aljazeera.com/news](http://www.aljazeera.com/news)). This was in addition to aid announced in August 2022 by USA President Joe Biden, who pledged nearly \$3bn in new military assistance to Ukraine, which included anti-aircraft missiles, artillery, counter-drone defences, and radar equipment. It is the biggest contingent of USA’s military aid to date, bringing to over \$13bn in total what the USA has supplied or pledged to Ukraine under the Biden administration (<https://www.theguardian.com>). This shift means that military aid to Africa is likely going to be reduced as the USA concentrates its military aid to Ukraine. Africa, however, has and will always be in dire

need of military aid. To buttress this, on the 11th of November 2014, the then-Nigerian ambassador to the USA attributed the Nigerian army's failures to deal decisively with Boko Haram to the USA's refusal to sell military weapons and equipment like drones to the Nigerian army because of its questionable human rights (<https://www.bbc.com>). Without the importation of equipment or military aid, African countries will always struggle to take care of their security.

Terrorism in Africa

Terrorism, particularly in Africa, is constantly gaining ground. Today, many countries devote a good part of their resources and energies to fight and protect themselves against this phenomenon, depriving vital sectors such as health and education of the resources they need. In the 21st century, acts of terrorism in Africa have gone up exponentially (Cronin, 2002). This is attributable to a few events. One of these has to do with the post-USA famed 9/11 War on Terror and its allies' military offensive in Afghanistan and Iraq, which diffused terrorists to other parts of the world. Terrorists sought to strike soft targets of the USA and its Western allies (Cronin, 2002). With Africa playing host to the colossal commercial interests of the USA and several EU countries, terrorist organisations strike on African soil as a way of getting back to the USA (Crenshaw, 2011). West Africa is home to two well-known terrorist organisations, among others. Boko Haram, whose official name is Jama'atu Ahl as-Sunnah li-Da'awati wal-Jihad, operates mainly in Northern Nigeria and Cameroon, while Ansar Dine operates in Northern Mali. The former was formed in Maiduguri (Borno state) in 2002, and Boko Haram is a Hausa moniker accorded to the group mainly based on its prohibition of Western education. Boko Haram sees Western education as an abomination (Onuoha, 2010). In the Horn of Africa, there is the Al-Shabaab which continues to cause havoc in the East. Al-Shabaab also has links with Al-Qaeda (Onuoha, 2010). In 2013 Al-Shabaab carried out terror attacks at Westgate shopping mall, and in 2015 carried out the Garissa University massacre in Kenya. In North Africa, there is Ansar Al-Shariya in Tunisia which in 2015 carried out the Bardo National Museum and Sousse attacks. The Ansar Dine in Mali is responsible for the 2015 Sinai Russian plane crash and Radisson Blu Hotel attacks in Egypt and Mali, respectively). Boko Haram, on the 14th –15th of April 2014, kidnapped 276 mostly Christian female students aged between 16 and 18 from a government girls' secondary school in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria (Efobi & Asongu, 2016). A recent report on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2014) has shown that compared to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), which was responsible for 6, 073 deaths, Boko Haram in Nigeria accounted for about 6,644 deaths (Efobi & Asongu, 2016).

Till recently, the Southern African region has always been regarded as relatively less volatile in comparison to other regions of the continent. However, a terrorist insurgency group rose in Mozambique, which can be traced to 5 October 2017, when 20 armed members of the Ansar al-Sunna attacked three police stations in Mocímboa da Praia, a coastal district in Cabo Delgado Province. The attackers spoke Portuguese, Kiswahili, and Kimwani (a language widely spoken along the coast of Cabo Delgado Province).

During the raid, two police officers were brutally killed (Adrian,2017). Since then, the group has left and is still leaving trails of destruction of monumental proportions wherever it goes in Mozambique. This prompted the regional block- The Southern African Development Community (SADC), to intervene by sending a peacekeeping military contingent in July 2021.

Methodology

This study applied the qualitative approach. In the qualitative research applied, information was obtained from published articles having internalised them. This study did not include statistical analyses or the use of empirical data or survey analysis. It is based on secondary sources, like journal articles, newspapers, books, and publications from Chinese and Western think tanks, as well as research institutes. In addition, the research also relies on data and reports from the defence world and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it explains political phenomena through several factors (Hopkin, 2002). Qualitative research is important because it relates to the research about people's lives, lived experiences, behaviour, emotions, and feelings, as well as organisational functions, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). To answer the main research question underpinning this paper, a qualitative research approach was used to obtain information. This approach was undertaken to ensure that data can be collected from an international, regional, and local perspective. Ever since the Russia and Ukraine conflict began, there have been different narratives and debates which should explain the reasons behind the conflict and the implications for Africa regarding security in general. Therefore, a literature review approach was necessary to capture these arguments, debates, and narratives. For collecting the data needed for this paper, there were inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sources of information, such as selecting effective search terms and types of sources and evaluating sources for relevance. These essential search criteria were used to select the most relevant sources: Terms such as Russia/Ukraine conflict, Terrorism in Africa, Africa and the war in Ukraine, and implication for Africa concerning Russia and Ukraine conflict were used to gather the literature data. A preliminary list of research was compiled; then, its applicability was determined; and finally, data extraction and analysis were conducted. Vital sources such as the United Nations Publications, Journal Articles, Online Credible Websites, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar.

Findings

Specific themes such as security, survival, existential threats, and national interests are what define realism in international relations. Russia sees Ukraine's close camaraderie with the EU and USA as an existential threat to its security. President Putin's Russia has always viewed parts of Ukraine and Georgia as part of Russia's territory, and Russia's national interest will therefore be to keep both Ukraine and Georgia under its sphere of influence. On the other hand, the USA, the EU, and their allies also want to extend their influence on Ukraine as a way of neutralising Russia. To this end, Russia

sees USA and EU as ‘stealing’ Ukraine from under its wings. It is these stark opposing interests that make the opposing sides continue their involvement in Ukraine, albeit at different scales, with Russia launching a full military operation while the USA, EU, and their allies offer military aid to Ukraine. These concerted efforts in Ukraine by Russia as a loner and the collective of EU/USA and their allies’ effort has calamitous consequences for Africa. As Russia on the one hand and the USA/EU alliance on the other channel most of their resources towards Ukraine, Africa will be forgotten in terms of military aid, military equipment, and military training. This paper induces, therefore, that the focus on Ukraine will leave Africa in limbo about its security. Africa is a continent that relies heavily on military aid and the importation of military equipment from Russia, the EU, the USA, and other countries like China. With these countries channelling most of their resources towards Ukraine for different reasons and objectives, and capacities, Africa’s vulnerability to security challenges and its military failures to curb those challenges is bound to increase. Militaries in Africa are likely to find themselves in short supplies of military equipment to deal decisively with terrorism which is on the rise in the continent. It follows, therefore, that the Russia-Ukraine war, therefore, makes Africa an unintended collateral victim in the face of a serious security conundrum.

On a positive note, it is worth noting, however, that the shrinking military supplies and aid from Russia and the West may also affect terrorists fighting power because they too will be affected by limited access to weapons which they always get, albeit through unscrupulous means from the same countries that dispatch military aid and manufacture weapons. This might also help to silence guns in Africa, thus reducing terrorism significantly. The vacuum left by aiders should see the proliferation of Private Military Companies like the Wagner group, which further complicate security in Africa may. It is therefore becoming incumbent upon military industries in Africa to take advantage of this vacuum and capitalise, big economies like South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt investing heavily in those industries.

Conclusion

The study established the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its contemporary impact on Africa’s security in the wake of the rising conflict in the continent. To accomplish this goal, a research question was coined to have a better analysis of the impact of the war on the African continent. The paper, therefore, concludes that the Russia-Ukraine war inadvertently poses a security threat to Africa. As countries like Russia USA/EU alliance jostle for influence in Ukraine and are likely going to channel most of their resources towards attaining objectives, albeit different ones in Ukraine, Africa will likely receive less military aid disproportionate to its need as the Ukraine war takes centre stage. Moreover, some companies in Russia and the EU which manufacture military equipment may be forced to reduce their supplies to African countries because their supplies are needed for replenishment of the damaged equipment used by the Russian army or used as part of military aid to Ukraine by the USA/EU. The result of

this would be an African continent with limited resources to battle terrorism which is on the rise. This, therefore, presents an opportunity for African countries to revive their military industries and reduce dependence on aid for military equipment. To bring itself out of this over-reliance quagmire of foreign aid and importation of basic valuables such as military equipment, African leadership must strive for economic independence, build strong institutions, strong alliances among themselves, free intra- continental trade, invest in education and technology, and create a fertile ground for local industries to flourish.

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