



The Global South's Revolt Against Biden's Russia Policy

Ted Galen Carpenter

October 5, 2022

President Biden's boast shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine that the world stood united against Moscow's aggression is increasingly detached from reality. Indeed, it has reached the point of deserving mockery. Walter Russell Mead, a scholar at the Hudson Institute, provided a devastating, early assessment of how Washington's effort to isolate Russia was failing. "The West has never been more closely aligned. It has also rarely been more alone. Allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization plus Australia and Japan are united in revulsion against Vladimir Putin's war and are cooperating with the most sweeping sanctions since World War II. The rest of the world, not so much."

In other words, only Washington's network of security dependents signed on to its policy. Even a cursory look at a global map confirms that Mead's observation remains valid. Outside of NATO and traditional U.S. partners in East Asia, virtually no governments have imposed economic sanctions on Russia, despite enormous pressure from the Biden administration. That void is graphic with respect to Central and South Asia, Latin America, and Africa – the developing countries in the so-called Global South.

African countries especially fail to see any advantage for themselves in supporting the West's policy. Although Washington insists that repelling Russia's aggression against Ukraine is essential to preserve the "rules based, liberal international order," governments and populations in Africa see matters differently. To them, the war looks more like a mundane power struggle between Russia and a Western client state. As one African scholar put it: "many in Africa and the rest of the Global South do not regard – and never have regarded – the liberal international order as particularly liberal or international."

More tangible economic interests reinforce Africa's inclination toward neutrality. A June 3 *New York Times* analysis concluded succinctly: "A meeting on Friday between the head of the African

Union and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia highlighted the acute needs each one hopes the other can fill: Africa needs food, and the Kremlin needs allies." An Africa heavily dependent on food and energy imports that Russia controls is not about to antagonize Moscow.

There also is trouble for Washington elsewhere in the Global South. Despite being in Washington's sphere of influence since the early years of the Monroe Doctrine, even major portions of Latin America balk at waging economic war against Russia. Both Brazil and Mexico – the region's two most important political and economic players – continue to dissent. Brazil's resistance to the administration's anti-Russia policy has become evident again when the UN Security Council voted on a resolution condemning Moscow's annexation of four territories in Ukraine following sham referendums there.

Since it was obvious that Russia would veto that resolution, it would have been easy for Brazil and all other members of the Council to vote in favor of the measure. That stance would have signaled discontent, if not outrage, at the Kremlin's land grab, which had significantly escalated the Ukraine crisis. Instead, Brazil joined with India and China to cast an abstention, emphasizing the government's continuing neutrality with respect to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Washington's inability to enlist India and China in a common front to actively oppose Moscow's actions in Ukraine, highlights the bankruptcy of US policy. Mildly negative comments from Indian and Chinese officials in September about Vladimir Putin's policy following Ukraine's surprisingly successful military counteroffensive generated speculation that Beijing and Delhi were growing impatient with Putin and the disruption of the global economy that his war helped ignite. The UN Security Council vote confirmed that such speculation was decidedly premature and excessive. China and India (along with the rest of the Global South) still seem firmly committed to a stance of neutrality. And without the participation of the Global South (especially the two demographic and economic giants), there is little chance that Washington's strategy of forcing Moscow to capitulate because of mounting economic pain can succeed.

Indeed, the Biden administration needs to worry that the Global South's neutralist sentiment about the Russia-Ukraine war may spread to the Western bloc. There are multiple signs of fissures developing within NATO. Turkey openly advocates heightened diplomacy to end the war, rather than trying to defeat and humiliate Russia. Hungary has warned the European Union countries have "shot themselves in the lungs" by imposing sanctions on Russia, especially on energy supplies. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has pledged to "poll" Hungarian voters with respect to both proposed and current sanctions. Europeans fear a complete cut-off of Russian natural gas, leading to a winter of cold, hunger, and economic recession. That concern has grown following the mysterious sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines in late September. Even before that incident, at least 10 EU members expressed opposition to price caps on Russian energy shipments, mandated by the U.S.-dominated G-7. Thus far, the EU has not implemented those caps.

Washington's goal was to isolate Russia, making the country a pariah in the international system. That strategy clearly has failed, and absent Moscow's use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, the refusal of the Global South to embrace the Biden administration's strategy likely will persist.

Indeed, such neutralist sentiment now seems to be penetrating the Western bloc. Ironically, the administration's approach may end up isolating the United States more than Russia.

Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow in defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, is the author of 13 books and more than 1,100 articles on international affairs. His latest book is Unreliable Watchdog: The News Media and U.S. Foreign Policy (forthcoming, November 2022).