

Evening Standard

Which five countries voted against the UN's resolution to condemn Russia and who abstained?

Emma Loffhagen

March 3, 2022

The United Nations has voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution condemning Russian aggression, with 141 countries voting in favour, 35 abstaining, and only five voting against.

The resolution calls for the immediate withdrawal of its forces in a formal global expression of outrage that highlighted Russia's increasing isolation, and received a standing ovation in the chamber.

The result came after a huge outpouring of international support for Ukraine seen around the world over the past week. Pro-Ukraine demonstrations took place in London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Seoul and several other cities.

The no votes on the resolution came from five authoritarian nations: North Korea, Eritrea, Syria, Russia and Russia's close ally Belarus.

Among the nations that abstained were Iraq, Iran, India, Pakistan, and China.

What does the UN resolution mean?

The four-page resolution said the UN "deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine". It demanded that "the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine" and "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces".

The resolution is not legally binding, but is an expression of the views of the UN membership. The aim is to increase pressure on Moscow and Belarus.

"The Russian government stands increasingly alone," EU representative, Olof Skoog, said. "The European Union and the world stand with the Ukrainian people."

Which countries voted against the UN resolution and why?

North Korea, Eritrea, Syria, Belarus and, unsurprisingly, Russia, voted against the resolution.

All five countries have authoritarian regimes. The Cato Institute's 2020 Human Freedom Index ranks Russia as the 115th freest country on earth out of 194. Belarus comes in 99th, and Syria is ranked the 10th least free country in the world.

North Korea and Eritrea, both one-party dictatorships, are not ranked at all.

Belarus

Belarus and Russia share a border and also have important economic and political ties, with Russia accounting for 48 per cent of Belarus's external trade.

Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus's authoritarian leader has been accused of human rights violations for his crackdown on the press, and has allowed his military to take part in joint drills with Russian troops in Belarus.

Belarus's role in the invasion so far has already resulted in sanctions from Britain and the EU.

Syria

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has praised Putin for his invasion of Ukraine and denounced Western "hysteria" over Russia's actions.

He said events in Ukraine are "a correction of history and restoration of balance which was lost in the world after the breakup of the Soviet Union".

Syria has been a staunch ally of Moscow since Russia launched a military campaign in Syria in 2015 that helped to turn the tide in a civil war in favour of al-Assad, with massive aerial bombardment of opposition-held areas.

North Korea

North Korea broke its silence on Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Monday, blaming the "hegemonic policy" and "high-handedness" of the United States and the West.

In its first official statement on Russia's attack, the North Korean Foreign Ministry said that the West was guilty of "abuse of power".

"The root cause of the Ukraine crisis totally lies in the hegemonic policy of the US and the West, which enforce themselves in high-handedness and abuse of power against other countries," the country's official KCNA news agency said, citing an unnamed foreign ministry spokesperson.

Eritrea

Eritrea is a one-party state ruled by Isias Afwerki. He has never held an election since gaining power in 1993.

The East African country's human rights record regularly ranks among the lowest in the world with virtually no freedom of the press and 10,000 political prisoners locked up and subjected to torture.

Eritrea has been the target of international sanctions but Russia has frequently opposed the measures.

Russia has also been considering building a military base in the Horn of Africa country to gain more of a foothold on the continent.

Which countries abstained and why?

Thirty-five countries abstained, including Russia's key ally China, as well as Iraq, Iran, India, Pakistan, Armenia and 16 African countries.

Some countries, including China, South Africa and Iran, complained that the resolution was submitted without full consultation and input from all member countries, and it therefore risked inflaming rather than de-escalating the crisis.

India and China both previously abstained on a separate motion at the UN Security Council motion, with India reliant on Russia for military equipment, while China's Xi Jinping has been reluctant to break off ties to Mr Putin as he seeks to rival Western influence.

Iraq's ambassador, Bahr Aluloom, said that his country, which was invaded by the US in 2003, had abstained "because of our sufferings resulting from the continuing wars against our people."

In speeches to the UN General Assembly in the past few days, African diplomats said their citizens were being discriminated against in Ukraine while trying to flee.

Africans living in Ukraine have reported being stuck for days at borders with EU countries, held up by Ukrainian authorities who pushed them to the ends of long lines and even beat them, while letting Ukrainians through.

Representatives from developing countries also claimed that the international community had rallied far more quickly over the invasion of a European nation than over conflicts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

However, in a reflection of the worldwide outrage at the Russian attack on Ukraine, six of Moscow's allies who backed Russia in 2014, in a similar vote after the annexation of Crimea, abstained on this occasion: Armenia, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Another supporter from 2014, Venezuela, did not vote, as its voting rights had been suspended as a result of unpaid UN membership dues.