



Restoring trust beyond the world of 1945: UNGA 81, African exclusion, proxy wars, and the imperative of a shared multipolar future

Taling Tene Rodrigue

Deputy Director, Department of Countries and Areas Studies, Centre for Francophone African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66856/ijsp.2026.8.4.8099>

Abstract

The 81st UN General Assembly (UNGA 81), themed “Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: A United Nations That Delivers for All,” exposed a widening contradiction between the principle of universal sovereign equality and the reality of unequal authority. Africa’s 54 states—over a quarter of UN membership—remain locked out of permanent Security Council seats. The debate was unequivocally continental as leaders from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Eswatini, South Sudan, and beyond joined Kenya’s President Ruto in making reform a test of UN legitimacy.

This article treats five flashpoints—Africa’s Council exclusion, the Confederation of Sahel States’ anti-colonial challenge to *Françafrique*, the proxy warfare and selective legalism over Ukraine, the Israeli–Iranian confrontation and Palestine occupation, and finally, the contrasting US–China visions at UNGA 81—as facets of one structural shift. Together, they reveal an older US-led hierarchy losing its monopoly over international legitimacy. As China’s rise, Global South agency, and alternative regional institutions accelerate the emergence of a multipolar order. Yet the lesson is not binary. Multipolarity is already here—but it does not necessarily guarantee justice. Resistance to Western dominance cannot excuse aggression, authoritarianism, or humanitarian law violations, nor can a “rules-based order” mask selective enforcement.

In a word, a credible multipolar system must rest on Security Council reform, African agency, consistent legal standards, sovereign equality, and accountable partnerships. From an African and Global South perspective, UN Security Council reform is imperative for humanity’s shared future. It demands a practical, pluralistic international community grounded in the UN Charter—one that resists both obsolete unipolar privilege and rival spheres of impunity

Keywords: UNGA 81, UN Security Council Reform, African Exclusion, Alliance of Sahel States, proxy wars, shared future for humankind

Introduction

The eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly met under the theme “Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: A United Nations That Delivers for All.” At its close on 28 September 2026^[3], after 194 speakers—including 113 Heads of State and Government—General Assembly President Khalilur Rahman reported a common defence of the UN alongside demands for political, rather than merely administrative, reform. He identified Africa’s continued exclusion from permanent Security Council membership as an injustice and insisted that trust must be earned through consistency between words and deeds (UN News, 2026b)^[3]. I take that insistence as the starting point of this article.

The United Nations Charter declares that the organization is founded on “the sovereign equality of all its members.” It also requires states to settle international disputes peacefully and to refrain from conduct that endangers international peace, security, and justice (United Nations, 1945)^[28]. Yet, in practice, the institutional application of sovereign equality has always been constrained. All 193 member states possess a vote in the General Assembly, whereas the Security Council has only fifteen members, including five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—whose veto can block substantive decisions even when those decisions command broad international support (United Nations, 2026b)^[5].

This imbalance is rooted in the settlement reached by the victorious Allied powers after the Second World War. It no

longer reflects the membership, demographic composition, or political consciousness of the contemporary international community. Most African societies remained under colonial rule when the UN was established and therefore did not participate as sovereign equals in designing the architecture whose rules they are now expected to accept. Since then, Africa has become a major theatre of UN peacekeeping, sanctions, mediation, and humanitarian intervention, yet it has not gained permanent representation in the Council that authorizes such measures.

For me, this contradiction is not merely symbolic. Representation shapes which conflicts receive attention, how threats are defined, whose testimony is treated as authoritative, and which forms of intervention are considered legitimate. Africa’s absence from permanent membership therefore raises questions of both distributive justice and institutional effectiveness. As President William Ruto observed at UNGA 81, Africa is “frequently the subject” of Security Council decisions—“permanently discussed, yet permanently excluded” (Ruto, 2026)^[25]. His formulation captures the structural problem at the heart of my argument: those who bear the consequences of international decisions do not participate equally in making them.

This institutional contradiction became still more consequential because UNGA 81 unfolded amid interlocking wars and security crises. The Russia–Ukraine war continued to divide both the Security Council and the wider international community. NATO governments

characterised military support for Ukraine as assistance to a sovereign state resisting aggression, whereas Russian officials and many critics interpreted the war as a proxy confrontation through which NATO sought strategically to weaken Russia. In my view, these interpretations need not be treated as mutually exclusive at every level: one can acknowledge Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty while also scrutinizing the expanding military, intelligence, and logistical involvement of NATO states.

The Middle East presented an equally dangerous theatre and reinforced the same problem of competing legal and moral claims. Israeli military operations, Iranian regional influence, attacks on Arab territories, insecurity along maritime routes, the continuing Palestinian tragedy, and the risk of direct Israeli–Iranian confrontation generated rival appeals to self-defense, resistance, and collective security. At UNGA 81, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered a defiant account of Israel's actions, stating that Israel would “continue to win because we have no other choice” (Netanyahu, 2026) ^[3]. His speech prompted an extraordinary diplomatic protest: numerous delegations left or remained absent from the hall. Reports estimated that approximately seventy delegations participated in some form of boycott, although the exact number varied by source and not every vacant seat necessarily represented a coordinated walkout (Ahram Online, 2026; Anadolu Agency, 2026) ^[3, 6].

Against this background, the 2026 Trump–Xi state visits matter chiefly as the diplomatic setting for a sharper ideological contrast at UNGA 81. President Donald Trump presented American power, coercive capacity, and sovereign freedom from “global control” as the principal guarantors of order. China's statement, delivered by Vice-President Han Zheng rather than President Xi Jinping, defended multilateralism, common development, UN-centered governance, and a community with a shared future for humankind. Their bilateral engagement demonstrated continuing interdependence; their General Assembly statements, however, exposed competing conceptions of world order (Trump, 2026; Han, 2026) ^[4].

My central proposition is that these disputes are connected expressions of a transition beyond the world of 1945. Africa's exclusion from the Security Council, the Sahel Alliance's challenge to *Françafrique*, proxy-war dynamics in Europe and the Middle East, and the China–United States contest all reveal the distance between formal universalism and practical hierarchy. China's rise alongside a more assertive Global South, combined with the relative erosion of US predominance, signals not the disappearance of the West but the progressive obsolescence of an order in which Western preferences could claim automatic universality.

From my perspective, a responsible African critique must avoid two opposite errors. The first is to accept inherited Western dominance as natural, benevolent, or permanent; the second is to romanticize every anti-Western actor as emancipatory. Genuine decolonization requires more than replacing one external patron with another. It requires political agency, accountable institutions, economic self-determination, cultural confidence, and a consistent defense of human dignity. The objective should not be a world in which each major power enjoys a separate sphere of impunity, but one in which no power can place itself permanently above international law.

Approach and terminology

I employ a critical institutional and comparative geopolitical approach. I read the interventions made at UNGA 81 alongside the UN Charter, African Union positions, Security Council practice, peacekeeping evidence, and official records of the 2026 ^[34] China–United States exchanges. Throughout the analysis, I treat leaders' statements as political texts rather than neutral descriptions of reality: their speeches reveal how governments frame legitimacy, responsibility, and international order, but they do not, by themselves, establish the truth of disputed factual or legal claims.

The analysis is current to 30 September 2026 ^[3]. It incorporates the completed UNGA 81 general debate, held from 22 to 26 September and on 28 September, official UN closing coverage, available national statements, and the UN's recorded vote data. To maintain analytical discipline, I limit quotations to verifiable UN, governmental, or otherwise identifiable transcript sources and attribute contested state allegations rather than presenting them as established fact.

Before proceeding, I make one essential terminological distinction. The organ responsible for international peace and security within the United Nations is the United Nations Security Council. The phrase Peace and Security Council properly refers to the African Union's peace and security organ. Although the two institutions cooperate, they are not interchangeable; the African criticism examined here concerns exclusion from permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

I use “Global North” and “Global South” as political rather than strictly geographical categories. The Global North broadly refers to industrialised states that possess disproportionate influence over international finance, technology, military alliances, and post-1945 institutions. The Global South includes societies in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific whose experiences have been shaped by colonialism, dependency, and unequal incorporation into the world economy. These categories remain imperfect: wealthy states exist in the geographical South, economically marginal populations live within the North, and important differences divide Global South governments.

The description of the Russia–Ukraine war as a “proxy war” also requires care. In academic and strategic usage, a proxy war involves external states supplying resources, training, intelligence, or weapons to a local belligerent in pursuit of wider strategic objectives while seeking to avoid direct war. NATO governments reject the claim that NATO is a party to the conflict. NATO nevertheless acknowledges that its members coordinate training and weapons deliveries, provide intelligence, and supply crucial air-defence equipment to Ukraine (NATO, 2026a). I therefore use the more precise formulation “proxy-war dynamics”: it recognises external strategic involvement without obscuring Ukrainian agency or Russia's decision to use large-scale force.

Finally, I use “*Françafrique*” to denote the political, economic, military, and elite networks through which France retained exceptional influence in former colonies after formal independence. I use “Alliance of Sahel States” or “Sahel Alliance” to refer to the “Confederation of Sahel States (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger)”; official and external sources commonly use “AES,” derived from the

French “Alliance des États du Sahel”. Françafrique is a historically grounded structure, but I do not treat it as a total explanation: domestic elites, regional organisations, and newer external partners also exercise agency and bear responsibility.

UNGA 81 and institutional trust

The official ambition to restore trust presupposes that trust has been lost. In my view, trust cannot be generated through public-relations language alone; it depends on whether institutions are representative, consistent, and capable of fulfilling their mandates. UNGA 81 therefore confronted a credibility crisis at three interconnected levels: representation, enforcement, and performance.

First, the representational crisis arises from the structure of the Security Council. The General Assembly is universal, but most of its resolutions are recommendatory. The Security Council possesses binding authority in matters of international peace and security, yet permanent authority remains concentrated in five states. Substantive resolutions ordinarily require at least nine affirmative votes and can be blocked by the negative vote of any permanent member (United Nations, 2026d) ^[5]. Thus, the sovereign equality proclaimed in Article 2 coexists with legally institutionalized privilege.

Second, the enforcement crisis concerns inconsistency. International law is strongest when states accept that comparable rules apply to allies and adversaries alike. Conversely, it becomes politically fragile when military intervention, occupation, sanctions, recognition, and accountability appear to depend on the identity of the violator. The Security Council veto has repeatedly protected permanent members or their strategic partners. UN veto records show paralysis over Ukraine, Palestine, nuclear proliferation, and other conflicts, with different permanent members blocking action according to their geopolitical alignments (United Nations, 2025) ^[30].

Third, the performance crisis concerns the gap between mandates and results. UN peace operations are often deployed where no stable peace agreement, unified host-state consent, or realistic political settlement exists. Missions are then blamed for failing to achieve objectives that member states have neither adequately funded nor politically supported. The UN’s internal review of MINUSMA recognised that the mission had been stretched beyond its capacity and criticised it because it could not satisfy expectations in a context requiring peace enforcement rather than conventional peacekeeping (UN Security Council, 2023) ^[26].

These crises are not separate. Under-representation undermines legitimacy; selective enforcement weakens moral authority; and disappointing performance encourages rejection of international intervention. When African populations see powerful states designing mandates, protecting allies, and expecting African soldiers and civilians to carry the risks, dissatisfaction with a particular mission can become mistrust of the entire UN system.

Nevertheless, my critique is not an argument for dismissing the United Nations as irrelevant. The UN remains an indispensable arena in which small and medium-sized states can articulate claims, coordinate humanitarian action, establish legal norms, and publicly challenge major powers. The General Assembly’s universal composition gives it deliberative legitimacy even where it lacks coercive

authority. The real question, therefore, is not whether the UN should be abandoned, but whether it can be democratized before its legitimacy deteriorates beyond repair.

The completed UNGA 81 debate reinforced this conclusion: restoring trust requires simultaneous changes in representation, enforcement, and performance. Its 194 interventions repeatedly defended multilateralism while demanding deeper reform, and the closing synthesis specifically identified Africa’s exclusion from permanent Council membership as an injustice (UN News, 2026b) ^[3]. Institutional reform is therefore not an appendix to conflict prevention. When universal bodies preserve inherited hierarchy, excluded regions increasingly seek alternative institutions, partnerships, and alignments.

Africa and the Security Council

1. African Leaders Voiced it out at UNGA 81

President Ruto’s address offered the debate’s most concise indictment of inherited hierarchy: “The equality proclaimed in this Assembly ends at the doors of the Security Council.” (Ruto, 2026) ^[25]. I read this not as an isolated national appeal but as a clear expression of the broader African position repeated throughout UNGA 81.

Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama called Africa’s lack of a permanent seat “fundamentally unacceptable” and demanded representation with full rights and responsibilities. Nigerian Vice-President Kashim Shettima, speaking for President Bola Tinubu, invoked the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration in demanding at least two permanent seats with the veto for as long as it exists, plus five non-permanent seats. Liberian President Joseph Boakai argued that correcting the imbalance was not a favour to Africa but necessary to restore UN trust, credibility, and legitimacy (Mahama, 2026; Shettima, 2026; Boakai, 2026). Significantly, the same claim crossed subregional and political differences. Eswatini’s King Mswati III lamented that, two decades after the Ezulwini Consensus, Africa still had no permanent seat; South Africa’s Ronald Lamola linked reform directly to rebuilding multilateral trust; and South Sudan’s Cecilia Adeng reaffirmed the Common African Position on the debate’s final day. The dominant African message was therefore clear: the UN remains indispensable, but its authority cannot be fully legitimate while Africa is central to the Council’s agenda and marginal to its permanent membership (Mswati III, 2026; Lamola, 2026; Adeng, 2026) ^[32].

In my assessment, the case for reform is demographic, historical, and functional. Africa comprises 54 of 193 UN members and roughly 1.5 billion people, while most African societies were still colonized when the post-war architecture was negotiated. Moreover, African conflicts, sanctions, and peace operations occupy a substantial part of the Council’s work. UNGA 81 therefore framed reform not as symbolic recognition but as a condition of representative authority, effective implementation, and a genuinely shared multilateral future.

This argument is already institutionalized in the Common African Position, expressed through the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration. It demands at least two permanent African seats with all the rights and privileges of existing permanent members—including the veto for as long as the veto remains—as well as five non-permanent seats. The African Union reserves the right to select the states that

would represent the continent (African Union, 2024a) ^[1]. I recognize the tension within this position: many African states oppose the veto as undemocratic, yet they reasonably reject a reform that would create African permanent members without powers equal to those of the existing five. Critics sometimes respond that Africa has not resolved which states should occupy permanent seats. Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, and other states advance different claims based on population, diplomatic capacity, economic influence, regional representation, or peacekeeping experience. These disagreements are real, but in my view, they cannot justify indefinite exclusion. The existing permanent members were not selected through a neutral contemporary assessment of merit; their status emerged from wartime power and political bargaining. Requiring perfect African consensus before structural reform imposes a standard that was never applied to the current permanent members.

A credible reform process should therefore separate the principle of permanent African representation from the subsequent method of selection or rotation. The African Union could designate long-term representatives subject to periodic review, establish geographically balanced rotation among subregions, or select states according to agreed criteria. What should no longer be acceptable is using the difficulty of selection to preserve an inequitable status quo.

2. Legitimacy and credibility of the UN from Africa's standpoint

To clarify why representation matters, I distinguish between the legal and sociological dimensions of Security Council legitimacy. Legally, Council authority derives from the Charter; sociologically, it depends on whether states and populations regard Council decisions as fair and representative. An institution may remain legally competent while losing political credibility. When that happens, implementation becomes more difficult, resistance grows, and alternative coalitions become more attractive.

Africa's exclusion creates the impression that the Council acts on Africa rather than with Africa. This is especially damaging when the Council authorizes sanctions, peace operations, or political transitions in African states while permanent members pursue competing interests. Even technically justified decisions may then be interpreted through the historical memory of colonial administration, in which external powers claimed superior knowledge and decision-making authority over African societies.

Ruto connected representation directly to institutional trust: "Institutions that do not reflect the people whose cooperation they require will eventually struggle to command their trust" (Ruto, 2026) ^[25]. I regard this observation as central. International security institutions cannot operate through legal commands alone; they require cooperation from host governments, local communities, regional organizations, troop contributors, and neighboring states.

Accordingly, the Council's composition also affects the credibility of its universalist language. A body dominated by powers that possess nuclear weapons, maintain global military networks, and exercise vetoes over scrutiny of themselves or their allies cannot easily persuade excluded states that hierarchy is merely administrative. Reform should therefore be understood not as a concession granted to Africa, but as an investment in the Council's future effectiveness.

3. Peacekeeping and mistrust of the UN in Africa

The relationship between Security Council exclusion and mistrust of peacekeeping is neither automatic nor uniform. Research on local perceptions cautions against generalizing across missions: confidence varies by country, region, gender, local experience, and the extent of direct interaction with peacekeepers. Even so, available data identified particularly low confidence in UN missions in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, both of which experienced anti-UN protests and legitimacy crises (International Peace Institute, 2023) ^[20]. This evidence connects institutional design to lived experience without suggesting a single African response.

MINUSMA illustrates the dilemma. The mission was deployed in 2013 and grew to more than 15,000 personnel, but it operated amid jihadist violence, political upheaval, territorial contestation, and deteriorating relations with Malian authorities. The UN's own assessment acknowledged that the mission could not meet popular expectations and had become the subject of persistent criticism (UN Security Council, 2023) ^[26]. Mali eventually withdrew its consent, and the Security Council terminated the mission in June 2023 ^[16], completing the withdrawal at the end of that year (UN News, 2023) ^[26].

For many Malians, the central question was straightforward: if thousands of international personnel had been deployed for a decade, why had insecurity continued? Peacekeeping doctrine offered explanations involving mandate limitations, host-state obstruction, and the absence of a peace to keep. These explanations were operationally relevant, but they did not erase the lived perception of failure. Survey-based research found declining confidence in MINUSMA and stronger trust in national military and police institutions, though the Malian case should not be generalized to all peacekeeping contexts (Davydov and Degterev, 2024) ^[15].

The end of MINUSMA also involved costs. The mission documented abuses, supported humanitarian access, and provided civilian-protection functions. Human Rights Watch warned that its departure created serious gaps in independent human-rights monitoring and accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2023) ^[16]. Opposition to a mission can therefore coexist with the loss of valuable protections after its withdrawal.

The lesson I draw is not that UN peacekeeping is inherently neo-colonial or useless. Rather, missions cannot sustain legitimacy when local populations experience a widening gap between mandate language and daily insecurity. Peacekeeping must therefore be accompanied by realistic political strategies, transparent accountability, regional ownership, adequate resources, and meaningful local participation. Permanent African representation on the Security Council would not solve every operational problem, but it could reduce the perception that distant powers define African insecurity without equal African authority.

The Sahel Alliance and Postcolonial Sovereignty

I interpret the Alliance of Sahel States—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—as a regional response to the same legitimacy crisis that drives African demands for Security Council reform. Formed first as a mutual-defense alliance and later as a confederation, it presents strategic autonomy, control over natural resources, and coordinated security as a practical break with external tutelage. Its emergence,

therefore, links African exclusion at the global level to resistance against Françafrique at the regional level. This anti-colonial language resonates because formal independence did not dismantle every colonial-era structure. French bases, defense agreements, monetary influence, commercial privilege, and elite networks sustained Françafrique: formal sovereignty coexisted with exceptional French leverage. At UNGA 81, Niger's Prime Minister Lamine Zeine Ali Mahaman described the Sahel Alliance as the outcome of a struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism and insisted that Sahelian resources and decisions must belong to Sahelian peoples (Zeine, 2026).

The completed debate gave this claim a collective form. Mali endorsed the confederal statement, while Burkina Faso spoke for the three Sahel Alliance members on 28 September, defending their right to choose political, security, and economic partnerships without external conditionality and reiterating demands for stronger African representation in international institutions (Diop, 2026; Traoré, 2026) ^[19]. In this way, the Sahel Alliance connected postcolonial justice, regional security, and UN reform within a single sovereignty-centered discourse. That discourse directly challenges the Western account of Sahel policy. France and its European partners generally describe their involvement in terms of counterterrorism, migration management, constitutional governance, and regional stability; Sahel Alliance governments interpret prolonged intervention, sanctions, and political conditionality as mechanisms that preserve an unequal order. The dispute therefore extends beyond France. At stake is who has the authority to define legitimate sovereignty, security priorities, and development choices in a multipolar system.

Mali provides the clearest connection between Sahel Alliance politics and the crisis of UN peacekeeping. Malian authorities argued that MINUSMA had failed to reverse insecurity and described the mission as part of the problem. The UN acknowledged severe limitations in the mission's capacity, whereas critics of Mali's decision warned that withdrawal would weaken civilian protection and human-rights monitoring (UN Security Council, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023) ^[16, 26]. I believe both assessments can be valid: a mission may fail to deliver strategic security while still performing indispensable protective functions. More broadly, the Sahel Alliance critique challenges the claim that external security intervention is politically neutral. As insurgent violence spread despite years of French and UN engagement, the departure of French and UN forces became a symbol of rupture with the old order, not merely an operational choice. That symbolism helps explain the political appeal of alternative partners even where security outcomes remain uncertain.

The decisions of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to coordinate defense, diplomacy, and development consequently matter beyond the three member states. They express impatience with ceremonial independence that lacks strategic autonomy, and they show how African actors construct alternative institutions when established regional and global structures appear to preserve inherited hierarchies.

At the same time, I do not reduce anti-French sentiment to manipulation by external propaganda. Disinformation may influence public debate, but the underlying grievances have deep historical and material roots. Military interventions, unequal contracts, monetary arrangements, and the

perceived intimacy between France and selected elites created conditions in which anti-colonial narratives could gain credibility. External information campaigns are most effective where authentic frustrations already exist.

Russia and China occupy different positions in this realignment. Russia has become the Sahel Alliance's principal security backer and, in July 2026 ^[23], pledged further military and military-technical assistance, including support for the Unified Force; China contributes arms, infrastructure, mining, energy, and commercial relationships within a broader development-centred presence (Reuters, 2026; ISS Africa, 2026). These partnerships help Sahel Alliance governments reduce dependence on France and widen their bargaining options.

The Sahel Alliance is therefore neither simple isolationism nor evidence that the UN has become irrelevant. I read it as a demand for plural partnerships and authentic multilateralism in which France, Russia, China, the United States, and African governments are subject to comparable standards. Its legitimacy will ultimately depend on civilian protection, accountable government, transparent resource governance, and demonstrable improvements in security.

Seen in this light, the Sahel Alliance is a warning to the post-1945 ^[27] order. Suppressing alternative African alignments through sanctions or diplomatic isolation may strengthen their anti-colonial legitimacy, while treating them as mere extensions of Moscow or Beijing erases African agency. A shared future for humankind instead requires engagement based on sovereign equality, coupled with standards of legality, transparency, and public benefit for every partner—old and new.

Ukraine and proxy-war dynamics

The Russia-Ukraine war provides a further and especially severe test of the Charter and of the post-1945 ^[28] Security Council. The latest pre-UNGA 81 recorded vote, on 24 February 2026 ^[34], adopted "Support for lasting peace in Ukraine" by 107 votes to 12, with 51 abstentions and 23 non-voters. The resolution called for an immediate, full, and unconditional ceasefire while reaffirming Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity (United Nations General Assembly, 2026) ^[5].

1. NATO vs. Russia Proxy War

My analysis begins with a clear legal point: geopolitical rivalry does not extinguish Ukrainian sovereignty. Concerns about NATO enlargement, Western policy, minority rights, or regional security may form part of the conflict's historical context, but they do not give Russia an unlimited right to invade, annex territory, or determine Ukraine's foreign policy through force. At the same time, NATO countries' conduct warrants close examination. NATO acknowledges that its members provide extensive military assistance, training, intelligence, and weapons to Ukraine. It coordinates deliveries through institutional structures and has expanded mechanisms for learning military lessons from the war, while continuing to insist that it "is not party to the conflict" (NATO, 2026a). At its 2026 Ankara summit, the alliance reaffirmed support for Ukraine and pledged substantial military equipment, assistance, and training (NATO, 2026b). Whether this constitutes a proxy war depends on the definition adopted. If a proxy war requires the complete absence of local agency, the term is inappropriate: Ukrainians are fighting for their territory,

statehood, and political future. If, however, it refers to a local conflict embedded in a wider strategic confrontation through external arms, intelligence, sanctions, and security objectives, then the war plainly contains proxy dimensions. This distinction matters. Unqualified proxy-war language can erase Ukrainian suffering and suggest that Ukraine is merely a Western instrument. Yet rejecting the concept entirely can obscure how NATO governments use the conflict to reshape European security, degrade Russian military capacity, expand defense production, and strengthen alliance cohesion. My position is that both Ukrainian agency and wider strategic competition must be recognized.

The war also demonstrates how the Security Council’s design protects permanent members from effective coercive action. Russia can veto binding Council measures directed against itself, just as other permanent members can block scrutiny of their own conduct or that of their allies. When a permanent member is directly involved, the veto can transform the Council from an enforcer into little more than a witness, even though it remains an important site of debate and documentation.

2. Double Standards Accusations

Global South accusations of double standards arise from the contrast between the speed and scale of Western mobilization for Ukraine and Western responses to conflicts in Africa, Palestine, and elsewhere. Ukraine received extensive military, diplomatic, financial, and media support, whereas African wars have often attracted limited attention until migration, terrorism, or resource supply becomes a

major concern for Western capitals. This contrast does not invalidate support for Ukraine; it exposes the uneven distribution of international concern.

My point is not that the world should show less solidarity with Ukraine. It is that the same seriousness should extend to non-European victims. International law should protect Ukrainians, Palestinians, Congolese, Sudanese, Syrians, Yemenis, and all other populations without racial or geopolitical ranking. The double standard lies not in assisting Ukraine, but in withholding comparable concern elsewhere.

A related inconsistency appears when NATO states invoke the Charter’s prohibition on territorial conquest while politically or militarily protecting allies accused of occupation, unlawful settlement, or disproportionate force. This inconsistency does not make Russia’s actions lawful. It does, however, weaken the persuasiveness of Western legal rhetoric and enables Moscow to present its actions as resistance to Western hegemony.

African responses have been diverse rather than indifferent, and the voting record helps clarify that evolution. On the foundational resolution of 2 March 2022 condemning Russia’s aggression, 28 African states voted in favour, one voted against, 17 abstained, and eight did not vote. On the peace resolution of 24 February 2026, the 54 African votes were divided into 15 in favour, six against, 20 abstentions, and 13 non-voters. Thus, 39 African states—72.2 per cent—either abstained, opposed, or did not vote in 2026, while affirmative support fell to 27.8 per cent (CSIS, 2022; United Nations General Assembly, 2026) ^[5].

Table 1: African voting on selected UN General Assembly Ukraine resolutions

African vote	In favour	Against	Abstained	No vote
2 March 2022: ES-11/1	28 (51.9%)	1 (1.9%)	17 (31.5%)	8 (14.8%)
24 February 2026: ES-11/10	15 (27.8%)	6 (11.1%)	20 (37.0%)	13 (24.1%)

Source: CSIS (2022); United Nations General Assembly (2026) ^[5]. Percentages are calculated over 54 African UN member states.

3. Toward a diplomatic framework

These figures also show why “Africa” cannot be treated as a unified pro-Russian bloc. Fifteen governments endorsed a text affirming Ukrainian sovereignty; the largest single category—20 states—abstained; and only six voted against. Earlier research across six major emergency-session resolutions found 140 African votes in favour, 18 against, and 166 abstentions or absences, confirming that non-alignment and non-participation, rather than consistent alignment with Moscow, have been the dominant aggregate pattern (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2023) ^[20]. At UNGA 81, the dominant African discourse was accordingly sovereignty-centred but negotiation-oriented: defend territorial integrity; reject external pressure to choose a bloc; oppose sanctions or texts considered obstacles to negotiation; and address the food, fertiliser, and energy consequences borne by developing countries. Historical ties to Soviet support for liberation movements, present military and commodity relationships, distrust of Western selectivity, and the desire for strategic autonomy all shape voting. I therefore interpret abstention as politically heterogeneous: it may signal mediation, non-alignment, objection to a text, or reluctance to endorse Western leadership—not necessarily approval of aggression. In my view, a sustainable settlement must reconcile principles that are often presented as incompatible:

Ukrainian sovereignty, civilian protection, the prevention of territorial conquest, Russian security concerns, European security, and avoidance of direct NATO–Russia war. Diplomacy that ignores Ukrainian agency would be neo-imperial; diplomacy that treats Russia’s security concerns as wholly illegitimate may be strategically unsustainable; and diplomacy that rewards aggression without safeguards risks encouraging future conquest.

Within that difficult balance, the UN should support sustained mediation, humanitarian access, protection of nuclear facilities, prisoner exchanges, food and energy security, and a sequenced political process. Permanent Security Council divisions make enforcement difficult, but the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, and neutral states can preserve channels when belligerents cannot negotiate publicly.

African states have a legitimate role in such a process. Their histories of colonial partition and externally imposed borders give them a strong interest in defending territorial integrity, while their experiences of non-alignment and negotiated transition can contribute to mediation. I contend that African diplomacy should not be reduced to choosing between Moscow and NATO; it should articulate an autonomous peace position grounded in the Charter and in human survival.

Israel, Iran, and the Arab region

The escalating antagonism between Israel and Iran presents an even more complex regional security dilemma. It encompasses direct state confrontation, proxy forces, maritime insecurity, nuclear anxieties, destruction in Gaza, occupation and settlement in the Palestinian territories, attacks affecting Lebanon and Syria, and the vulnerability of Gulf states. Because each component intensifies the others, none can be analysed in isolation.

1. Israeli Isolation at UNGA 81

Israeli officials frame their actions as necessary self-defense against Iran and aligned armed organizations. Netanyahu's UNGA 81 address presented Israel's recent history as a multi-front war for national survival. On that darkest of days, our enemies expected us to collapse," he stated, adding that Israeli forces had fought "day in and day out in a seven-front war" (Netanyahu, 2026) ^[3]. His central message—"We will continue to win because we have no other choice" (Netanyahu, 2026) ^[3]—encapsulated this existential framing.

Many UN members rejected that account as incomplete because it excluded Palestinian dispossession, occupation, civilian suffering, and the legal responsibilities of an occupying power. The diplomatic protest during Netanyahu's speech was therefore highly significant. Reports indicated that delegations from Arab, African, Asian, Latin American, and some European countries left the chamber or remained absent, leaving large sections visibly empty (Ahram Online, 2026; Anadolu Agency, 2026) ^[3, 6]. Netanyahu responded by denouncing departing representatives as "moral cowards" and "phony human rights protesters" (Netanyahu, 2026) ^[3]. In my assessment, this response deepened rather than resolved the legitimacy dispute. Supporters of Israel interpreted the walkout as an unwillingness to confront Hamas, Iran, and antisemitic violence; critics saw the empty seats as evidence of Israel's growing diplomatic isolation and frustration with the UN's inability to enforce international law.

Analytical precision is important here. The protest should not be described as an official vote by a "UN majority": a walkout does not carry the procedural meaning of a General Assembly resolution, and accounts differed over the number of participants. Nevertheless, it represented a broad and geographically diverse act of political condemnation. Its symbolic force lay in the visible withdrawal of diplomatic recognition at the moment Netanyahu asserted moral legitimacy.

2. International law and accountability

The legal background intensified the controversy. In its July 2024 ^[15] advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice concluded that Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was unlawful, that it should end as rapidly as possible, and that new settlement activities should cease. The Court also stated that other states should not recognise or assist the unlawful situation (International Court of Justice, 2024) ^[17].

In November 2024 ^[18], the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant, finding reasonable grounds to believe that they bore criminal responsibility for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. A warrant is not a conviction, and the accused retains the right to challenge

jurisdiction, admissibility, and evidence (International Criminal Court, 2024) ^[17].

Taken together, these proceedings complicate claims that criticism of Israel is merely political hostility. At the same time, legal scrutiny must extend to all actors, including Hamas and other armed groups accused of attacking civilians, taking hostages, and using indiscriminate violence. For me, consistent accountability requires rejecting the proposition that one side's crimes can justify those of another.

This brings the analysis back to the wider problem of selective enforcement. Many Global South governments perceive that Israel receives protection unavailable to weaker states. US vetoes of Gaza-related Security Council resolutions, together with strong Western military support for Israel, have reinforced the belief that international law is subordinate to alliance politics. UN veto records document repeated US negative votes on Palestinian questions, just as Russia has used its veto on matters concerning Ukraine (United Nations, 2025) ^[30]. The parallel suggests that selective protection is not unique to one bloc; it is embedded in the permanent-member system.

3. Arab perspectives at UNGA 81

Arab interventions at UNGA 81 further demonstrate that the region cannot be reduced to a single position. Gulf states faced both Iranian threats and anger over Israeli conduct. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud stated that Saudi Arabia and other regional countries had experienced "flagrant Iranian attacks targeting their security resources and civilian and economic facilities." He reaffirmed regional states' right to defend their sovereignty and called on the international community to confront threats to international peace (Al Saud, 2026) ^[5].

At the same time, Saudi Arabia defended Palestinian statehood. At the UNGA 81 ministerial meeting on the two-state solution, Faisal bin Farhan declared: "The Palestinian cause is a just cause. At the end of the day, the solution has to be a just solution" (Al Saud, 2026) ^[5]. He argued that Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, formed a single geographic and political unit and insisted that lasting security could not be achieved by undermining Palestinian statehood.

Qatar, by contrast, adopted a more mediation-centered position. Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani described the Gulf as passing through "one of the most dangerous phases" in its history and attributed the crisis to postponed diplomacy and temporary crisis management. He called for a regional system of collective security founded on sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference, and the peaceful settlement of disputes (Al Thani, 2026) ^[6]. We remain convinced that the crisis in the Gulf can be resolved through diplomatic means, through reopening the Strait of Hormuz to maritime navigation and returning to negotiations, in order to avert war" (Al Thani, 2026) ^[6]. This argument challenges security arrangements based solely on deterrence and exclusion. A regional order that permanently excludes Iran or treats Iranian insecurity as irrelevant is unlikely to endure. Equally, an arrangement that ignores Arab fears of Iranian missiles, proxies, or interference cannot build trust. In my view, collective security must reassure all states rather than guarantee the dominance of one. Qatar's position was also strongly critical of Israel. The emir described the destruction in Gaza as "genocide, in

every sense the word carries” and called the situation a stain on humanity’s conscience (Al Thani, 2026) ^[6]. This was a political and legal accusation of the highest seriousness. Although the final judicial determination of genocide belongs to competent courts, the statement expressed widespread outrage over civilian destruction and perceived international inaction.

These Arab positions show why it is misleading to reduce the region to a simple Israel–Iran binary. Governments may fear Iranian power while condemning Israeli conduct; seek American protection while expanding relations with China; support Palestinian statehood while opposing Hamas; and pursue normalization while demanding limits on occupation. Any viable regional diplomacy must accommodate these overlapping and sometimes contradictory interests.

4. Consequences for Europe

The regional conflict also has direct consequences for Europe through energy prices, maritime routes, migration, domestic political polarization, terrorism risks, and relations with Muslim communities. Disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Red Sea, or the Gulf of Aden can affect global supply chains and energy security. Saudi Arabia accordingly emphasized that freedom of navigation and resilient energy infrastructure are shared international responsibilities (Al Saud, 2026) ^[5].

More fundamentally, European governments face a credibility dilemma. They frequently present the European Union as a normative power committed to human rights and international law. Yet, from a Global South perspective, the unequal treatment of Ukraine and Palestine has damaged that image: European support for Ukrainian self-determination appears principled, while hesitation over Palestinian self-determination appears strategic. Unless comparable legal standards are applied, Europe’s influence will increasingly rest on material power rather than normative legitimacy.

The conflict also intensifies tensions within European societies. Governments must protect Jewish communities from antisemitism and Muslim and Arab communities from Islamophobia while preserving democratic space for legitimate political criticism. Criticism of Israeli government policy should not be conflated with antisemitism; equally, Palestinian suffering must never be used to legitimize hatred of Jews. A rights-based public sphere must reject both prejudices.

The greatest danger is that repeated escalation becomes self-sustaining. Israel may interpret military superiority as proof that force works; Iran and allied actors may interpret survival as proof that resistance works; Arab states may increase armaments because neither side offers reassurance; and external powers may supply weapons while urging restraint. Under these conditions, a single miscalculation could trigger a wider war involving American forces, Gulf infrastructure, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and international shipping.

The alternative, in my view, is a regional security framework combined with a credible Palestinian political settlement, firm limits on attacks against civilians, restored nuclear diplomacy, maritime guarantees, and mechanisms for crisis communication. Such an architecture cannot be built by Israel, Iran, the United States, or Arab governments acting alone. It requires all of them, supported by China, Europe, the UN, and other mediators.

China–United States Visions at UNGA 81

I place the China–United States relationship at the center of this article because it makes the transition from a US-dominated order to contested multipolarity especially visible. Reciprocal state visits in 2026 showed that neither power can manage trade, artificial intelligence, climate, nuclear risk, or regional wars through confrontation alone. Ceremony matters as evidence of mutual recognition, but the more consequential evidence lies in the rival visions presented at UNGA 81.

President Trump’s address of 22 September placed national power above institutional constraint. He celebrated expanding American military and technological superiority, threatened the “annihilation” of Iran if diplomacy failed, urged states to leave the International Criminal Court, rejected global taxes and supranational AI control, and portrayed reduced UN budgets and mandates as reform (Trump, 2026) ^[4]. I read this not as classical liberal multilateralism but as a sovereigntist and coercive conception of order in which American power defines security and international institutions remain acceptable when they serve US priorities.

China’s position, delivered on 26 September by Vice-President Han Zheng rather than President Xi Jinping, offered a contrasting vision. Han connected the Global Development, Security, Civilization, and Governance Initiatives to a community with a shared future for humanity; defended common security, openness, development for all, and UN-centred multilateralism; and argued that UN reform should improve performance rather than merely reduce budgets and mandates (Han, 2026). China thus represented itself as a defender of post-war multilateral institutions while demanding their adaptation to a world in which developing countries possess greater agency.

I do not reduce this contrast to a virtuous China confronting a declining America. The United States retains unmatched alliance, financial, technological, and military assets, while China’s partnerships require scrutiny for debt sustainability, local employment, environmental responsibility, and transparency. Nevertheless, the speeches indicate a redistribution of normative initiative: Washington increasingly speaks the language of unilateral strength and exemption, whereas Beijing claims the language of multilateralism, development, and Global South inclusion.

Accordingly, I use “US decline” to mean a relative erosion of predominance, not collapse. China’s rise is amplified by BRICS+, South–South cooperation, Sahel Alliance strategic diversification, and widespread dissatisfaction with selective Western enforcement of rules. The emerging order is increasingly multipolar in its distribution of agency, but its justice remains undecided. African strategy should therefore be issue-based and non-subordinate, using competition to expand infrastructure, technology, and diplomatic space while refusing exclusive dependency on either pole.

Global North and Global South

1. US-led Global North vs. China-led Global South

The UNGA 81 statements crystallized two rival tendencies. The US-led Global North increasingly defends an inherited architecture through alliances, sanctions, military reach, and a selectively invoked rules-based order, while China presents a Global South-oriented vision of sovereignty, development, civilizational plurality, and reform of

Western-dominated institutions. These are tendencies rather than homogeneous camps, but they clarify why African exclusion, Sahel Alliance sovereignty claims, and competing interpretations of proxy wars converge within the same debate over world order.

Even so, neither camp is homogeneous. The Global North contains disagreements between the United States and Europe, as well as differences within NATO. The Global South encompasses democratic and authoritarian governments, exporters and importers, large powers and small island states, rivals and partners. BRICS+ is not a military alliance comparable to NATO; it is a heterogeneous political-economic grouping whose members do not share identical security interests.

Within this heterogeneous landscape, China increasingly presents itself as an advocate of Global South representation and development. Infrastructure, trade, support for institutional reform, and the UNGA 81 language of common security give that claim practical content. Russia's appeal in the Sahel Alliance is more security-centered; China's is more economic and institutional. Together, they widen the alternatives to French and wider Western predominance, although neither should receive immunity from African scrutiny. For precisely that reason, African scholarship should assess Chinese engagement with the same critical independence applied to the West. Mutual benefit must be demonstrated through local employment, technology transfer, sustainable debt, environmental responsibility, transparent contracts, and African participation in decision-making. In my judgment, respectful language is not enough; a partnership must also be evaluated by its outcomes.

The United States, meanwhile, remains the central power within NATO and the broader Western alliance system. NATO's reinforcement, increased defense spending, and continuing support for Ukraine show that it is not in immediate decline (NATO, 2026b). Yet the order it supports faces a legitimacy problem whenever Western security concerns are treated as universal and non-Western concerns as merely regional or secondary.

I therefore identify two dangers that must be avoided. The first is a return to unipolar interventionism, in which one bloc claims the authority to define rules for everyone else. The second is an unregulated multipolarity in which every major power asserts an exclusive sphere of influence. The latter would not liberate small states; it could subject them to intensified pressure from several competing centers. A just multipolar order must consequently be constitutional rather than merely arithmetical. By this, I mean multiple centers of contribution operating within common rules—not several empires dividing the world. Multipolarity should expand political voice without weakening prohibitions against aggression, occupation, genocide, racial domination, and attacks on civilians.

2. The Danger of Wider War

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are geographically distinct, yet they interact through alliance politics, weapons supply, energy markets, sanctions, information warfare, and great-power rivalry. NATO supports Ukraine; Russia maintains relations with Iran and other anti-Western actors; the United States supports Israel; China seeks ties across opposing regional camps; and European states face simultaneous pressure on defense, energy, and social cohesion. These connections make regional crises part of a wider systemic danger.

A direct NATO–Russia confrontation could escalate towards nuclear war. A regional Israel–Iran war could draw in US forces, Gulf states, and armed groups across several countries. A military crisis involving China and the United States, particularly over Taiwan, would add an Indo-Pacific front to an already fragmented security environment. No government may intend a world war; history nevertheless shows that wider wars can emerge from interacting commitments, misperceptions, and escalatory sequences.

In my view, moral absolutism magnifies this danger. When every belligerent presents its struggle as existential, compromise begins to look like treason. Netanyahu's statement that Israel has "no other choice," Russian claims of encirclement, Ukrainian fears of national destruction, Iranian resistance narratives, and Western declarations of civilizational defense all narrow the political space for negotiated settlements. This observation does not imply that the aggressor and victim are always morally equivalent. Rather, it means that diplomacy must function even when the parties reject equivalence. Negotiation is not approval; it is an instrument for preventing further death. States that maintain communication across rival blocs are therefore especially important.

China and the United States carry a particular responsibility in this regard. Their management of bilateral relations can either intensify bloc confrontation or create space for mediation. The ceremonial respect displayed during reciprocal visits will matter only if it produces crisis communication, arms-risk reduction, support for negotiated settlements, and restraint in third regions.

African states also possess diplomatic agency. Their traditions of non-alignment, experience of liberation struggles, and participation in both Western and non-Western institutions enable them to challenge zero-sum thinking. I reject the treatment of Africa as a passive arena in which other powers compete. The continent can become an intellectual and diplomatic center for reimagining multilateralism.

The Ideal of "A Community with a Shared Future"

The concept of a "community with a shared future for humankind" offers, in my view, a normative bridge among the cases examined in this article. It responds to the interdependence exposed by proxy wars, the demand for authority voiced by excluded African states, and the need to prevent multipolarity from hardening into rival spheres of domination. At its strongest, the concept holds that security must be mutual, development inclusive, and civilizational difference compatible with common rules.

This idea also resonates with African philosophical traditions of relational personhood and mutual obligation, including the broad principle associated with Ubuntu: human flourishing is realized through relationships rather than isolation. Such a perspective challenges the zero-sum assumption that one nation's development must require another's decline and provides an ethical foundation for cooperation across cultural differences. However, I do not understand a shared future to mean uniformity or compulsory acceptance of any one country's political model. It must be pluralistic. African societies, Western democracies, Asian civilizations, Arab nations, Latin American traditions, and Indigenous communities must all contribute to its meaning. Otherwise, the language of shared

destiny could become yet another universalism defined by a powerful state.

I propose six principles for turning this idea into a practical framework:

- **First, sovereign equality must become materially meaningful:** States differ in size and capacity, but no region should remain permanently excluded from authoritative institutions. Security Council reform is therefore a decisive test of whether shared destiny is more than rhetoric.
- **Second, security must be indivisible:** No state can sustainably guarantee its security by creating permanent insecurity for another. This principle applies to NATO–Russia relations, Israel–Palestine, Israel–Iran, the Gulf states, and the China–United States relationship. It does not require accepting every security claim; it requires negotiated arrangements that prevent one party’s protection from depending on another’s subjugation.
- **Third, development must be mutually beneficial:** Infrastructure, trade, natural-resource agreements, and technology partnerships should build local productive capacity. Africa must not remain a supplier of raw materials to either Western or Eastern industrial centers. Genuine partnership requires value addition, knowledge transfer, and African ownership.
- **Fourth, cultural respect must be reciprocal:** No civilization possesses a monopoly on modernity, rationality, or moral insight. At the same time, cultural differences must never be used to excuse torture, discrimination, or the denial of fundamental human dignity.
- **Fifth, international law must be applied consistently:** A shared future cannot survive if powerful states enjoy selective immunity. Russian, American, Israeli, Iranian, Chinese, European, African, and other actors must be judged by comparable legal standards. Without such consistency, the concept will be reduced to diplomatic branding.
- **Sixth, the framework must include people as well as governments:** Civil society, women, young people, scholars, artists, educators, and local communities should participate in defining international priorities. A purely state-centered community risks reproducing elite bargains while excluding those who bear the human cost of conflict.

Taken together, these principles could support a transition within the United Nations from hierarchical to participatory multilateralism. The UN would remain the universal institutional centre, but authority would be more fairly distributed: regional organisations would gain a stronger role; the Security Council would become more representative; the General Assembly would exercise greater oversight; and international financial governance would better reflect developing-country priorities.

I also understand the concept through an ethic of responsibility. States would remain entitled to defend their interests, but they would recognise that enduring interests cannot be secured by destroying the ecological, economic, or security conditions on which others depend. Such an

ethic does not abolish power; it disciplines power through reciprocity and an awareness of interdependence.

African participation is indispensable if the concept is to become genuinely universal. The continent’s philosophies of relationality, histories of anti-colonial solidarity, traditions of mediation, and experience of regional integration can add substance to an idea otherwise associated primarily with Chinese foreign-policy discourse. A shared future, in my view, must be co-authored rather than exported.

A Reform Agenda for the UN

The analysis above leads me to a practical conclusion: UNGA 81 should not end with another general endorsement of reform. Restoring trust requires an agenda that connects institutional representation to consistent law, accountable security, and shared development.

Security Council representation: First, member states should begin text-based negotiations to expand both permanent and non-permanent membership. Africa should receive no fewer than two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats in accordance with the Common African Position (African Union, 2024a) ^[1], and the African Union should determine its representatives through an agreed continental process. If immediate agreement on the veto proves impossible, an interim formula could grant new permanent members the same formal status while restricting veto use by all permanent members in situations involving mass atrocities. The essential principle, in my view, is that reform must not create a second class of permanent membership.

General Assembly authority: Second, the General Assembly should acquire stronger procedures for reviewing vetoes and monitoring compliance with international legal findings. The existing mechanism under which a permanent-member veto triggers General Assembly debate is a useful beginning, but debate should be linked to reporting requirements, political consequences, and follow-up measures (United Nations, 2024) ^[1].

Peacekeeping reform: Third, peace operations should rest on achievable mandates, credible local political strategies, and regular assessments of legitimacy. Host populations should participate in defining priorities and evaluating performance. Missions also need transparent complaint mechanisms, accountability for misconduct, and clearer communication about what they can and cannot accomplish. African countries should exercise greater authority over operations on their continent. Nevertheless, regional ownership must not become a pretext for shielding African governments from scrutiny; African-led missions should meet rigorous standards of civilian protection and human rights.

Postcolonial partnerships: Fourth, France and the European Union should replace paternalistic security relationships with transparent, negotiated partnerships. Military agreements, resource contracts, and monetary arrangements should be publicly accountable. African governments, for their part, should disclose the terms of agreements with Russia, China, and other external partners. Decolonization requires accountability to African citizens, not only independence from Western governments.

Ukraine diplomacy: Fifth, support for Ukrainian sovereignty should be combined with serious diplomacy on European security. Ukraine must participate as a principal party; negotiations cannot impose a great-power settlement on its population. A durable process should address ceasefire monitoring, territorial questions, civilian protection, sanctions, reconstruction, security guarantees, and mechanisms for preventing renewed conflict.

Middle Eastern collective security: Sixth, a regional security conference should bring together Arab states, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and relevant international actors. Its agenda should include maritime security, non-interference, missile-risk reduction, nuclear restraint, crisis communication, and the Palestinian question. Palestinian self-determination cannot remain indefinitely separated from regional normalization. International legal processes concerning all parties must also be respected. I do not regard accountability as an obstacle to peace, but as one of its foundations. Peace without justice often institutionalizes resentment; justice without a political strategy may remain unenforced. A durable settlement requires both.

Sino-American responsibility: Seventh, China–United States dialogue should be institutionalized beyond leader-level summits. Regular channels are needed on military incidents, artificial intelligence, nuclear doctrine, trade, climate, and regional wars. The objective is neither a restoration of US unipolarity nor a Washington–Beijing condominium, but responsible competition within reformed institutions in which Africa and the wider Global South participate as rule-makers.

African intellectual agency: Finally, African universities, research institutes, filmmakers, writers, and civil-society organizations should participate actively in debates over international order. Africa’s contribution cannot be limited to requesting seats in institutions conceptually designed elsewhere. The continent must also generate ideas about peace, development, intercultural dialogue, environmental responsibility, and the ethics of technology. This intellectual agency matters because international order is produced not only through military or economic power, but also through narratives. Societies that do not articulate their own interpretations of history risk being represented through the categories of others. As an African scholar, I regard the production of concepts, stories, and institutional alternatives as part of the struggle for sovereign participation.

Conclusion

The completed UNGA 81 debate revealed, in my view, not a temporary disturbance but a structural transition. Africa’s exclusion from permanent Security Council authority, the Sahel Alliance’s challenge to *Françafrique*, proxy-war dynamics in Ukraine and the Middle East, and the contrasting American and Chinese visions all arise from the same contradiction: institutions designed around the distribution of power in 1945 are governing a decolonized world with new centers of agency.

Ruto’s warning that equality ends at the Security Council’s doors gained continental force from Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, South Africa, Eswatini, South Sudan, and others. I therefore regard Security Council reform not as an African special interest, but as a test of whether multilateralism can

survive its legitimacy crisis. An institution that depends on excluded peoples cannot retain their trust indefinitely without sharing authority.

The UN remains indispensable, but indispensability does not guarantee legitimacy. Its peacekeeping missions, humanitarian agencies, and diplomatic forums provide essential services. Yet its authority will continue to erode if international law appears to change with the identity of the violator. The same principles must apply to Russia in Ukraine, Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Western interventions, Iranian regional conduct, and the actions of all major and minor powers.

From my African perspective, multipolarity is no longer merely an aspiration. It is visible in diversified partnerships, alternative regional institutions, and the declining ability of any single center to define legitimacy for all. Yet a shared multipolar future must not become a polite description of competing empires. Africa’s objective should be sovereign partnership: neither subordination to the old Western center nor unaccountable dependency on emerging powers.

UNGA 81 thus connected institutional reform directly to human security. Selective law, proxy wars, occupation, sanctions, external tutelage, and permanent exclusion reproduce mistrust across Kyiv, Gaza, the Sahel, Beijing, and Washington. In my view, a shared future for humankind becomes credible only when it is co-authored—when Africa gains authoritative representation, Sahel Alliance States exercise sovereignty with accountability, great powers accept common legal limits, and development partnerships generate tangible public benefits.

A “community with a shared future for humankind” can contribute to that project only if it becomes genuinely inclusive, practical, and accountable. It must not belong to China alone, just as multilateralism must not belong to the West. I understand it as a common undertaking to which African philosophies of community, Asian traditions of harmony, Arab experiences of mediation, Latin American ideas of solidarity, European legal traditions, and the insights of all other peoples can contribute.

The aim is not to erase difference, but to manage difference without domination. Shared destiny means recognising that the security of Kyiv, Gaza, Tel Aviv, Tehran, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey, Beijing, Washington, and every other community is interconnected. No nation can ultimately prosper in a world organised around permanent humiliation and fear.

I therefore regard UNGA 81 as a marker in the movement from selective to shared multilateralism. China’s rise alongside the Global South and the relative decline of US unipolar predominance make multipolarity increasingly undeniable. Whether that transition produces representative cooperation or competing spheres of impunity will depend on reforming the United Nations and applying common rules consistently. Restoring trust beyond the world of 1945 requires authority to be shared before fragmentation makes reform impossible.

References

1. African Union. Decision on the Report of the Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government on the Reform of the United Nations Security Council, Assembly/AU/Dec.876(XXXVII). Addis Ababa: African Union, 2024. Available at: <https://portal.african-union.org/DVD/Documents/DOC-AU->

- DEC/Assembly%20AU%20DEC%20876%20(XXXVII)%20_E.pdf (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
2. African Union. 'Consultation between the African Union and African civil-society organisations on the Common African Position on United Nations Security Council reform', 24 May, 2024. Available at: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240524/consultation-between-african-union-and-african-civil-society-organizations> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 3. Ahram Online. 'Dozens of UN envoys walk out on Netanyahu as he brands them "moral cowards"', 24 September, 2026. Available at: <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/58/577482/War-on-Gaza/Dozens-of-UN-envoys-walk-out-on-Netanyahu-as-he-br.aspx> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 4. Al Jazeera. 'Trump welcomes Xi to Washington as US and China agree to extend trade truce', 23 September, 2026. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/23/trump-meets-chinas-xi-jinping-at-us-airport-on-arrival-for-three-day-trip> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 5. Al Saud FBF. 'Statement to the eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly', 25 September. New York: United Nations, 2026. Available at: <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d363/d3635480> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 6. Al Thani TBH. 'Address to the eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly', 22 September. Doha: Qatar News Agency, 2026. Available at: <https://qna.org.qa/en/news/news-details?id=hh-the-amir-participates-in-opening-session-of-un-general-assembly&date=22/09/2026> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 7. Anadolu Agency. 'Delegations from nearly 70 countries protest Netanyahu's UN address', 24 September, 2026. Available at: <https://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/delegations-from-nearly-70-countries-protest-netanyahu-s-un-address/4069104> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 8. Associated Press. 'Trump lays out the pomp for Xi but says little about significant tensions in US-China relations', 23 September, 2026. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/trump-xi-china-state-visit-e21305f04e21bae2c083282a8bfc8321> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 9. Associated Press. 'Trump in China for Xi meeting to focus on Iran war, trade and Taiwan', 13 May, 2026. Available at: <https://apnews.com/live/trump-administration-updates-05-13-2026> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 10. Associated Press. 'Trump greets Xi in Washington with rare red-carpet airport welcome', 24 September, 2026. Available at: <https://www.1news.co.nz/2026/09/24/trump-greets-xi-in-washington-with-rare-red-carpet-airport-welcome/> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 11. Associated Press. 'Xi meets Trump after remaking China on the global stage since 2015', 23 September, 2026. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/trump-xi-summit-economy-military-4e78d518f0256ebf5fc8d044dfdbd67e> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 12. BBC News. 'Trump China trip: What to know as president meets Xi Jinping', 12 May, 2026. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cyv2n7l1z14o> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 13. BBC News. 'Trump-Xi summit: A decade on, the US president returns to Beijing', 11 May, 2026. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm2py6l78dxo> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 14. Congressional Research Service. Chinese President Xi's September 2015 State Visit. Washington, DC: US Congress, 2015. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PD/F/IF10291/IF10291.9.pdf (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 15. Davydov DA, Degterev DA. 'Perception of peacekeeping activities in Africa by the local population: The case of Mali'. RUDN Journal of Sociology, 2024, 24(4). Available at: <https://journals.rudn.ru/sociology/article/view/42240> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 16. Human Rights Watch. 'UN peacekeeping mission in Mali to end', 30 June, 2023. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/30/un-peacekeeping-mission-mali-end> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 17. International Court of Justice. Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem: Advisory Opinion. The Hague: ICJ, 2024. Available at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/summary-of-the-icj-order-icj-19jul24/> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 18. International Criminal Court. 'Situation in the State of Palestine: Pre-Trial Chamber I issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant', 21 November, 2024. Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 19. International Monetary Fund. People's Republic of China: Economic Indicators. Washington, DC: IMF, 2026. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/CHN> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 20. International Peace Institute. Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeeping: A Look at the Data. New York: International Peace Institute, 2023. Available at: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2309_Local-Perceptions.pdf (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 21. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 'President Xi Jinping holds talks with US President Donald J. Trump', 14 May, 2026. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202605/t20260514_11910330.html (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
 22. NATO. 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the launch of the 2025 Annual Report', 26 March, 2026. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/03/26/press-conference-for-launch-of-annual-report> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).

23. NATO. 'NATO summits: 2026 Ankara Summit', 8 July, 2026. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/nato-summits> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
24. Netanyahu B. 'Address to the eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly', 24 September. New York: United Nations, 2026. Available at: <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d363/d3633272> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
25. Ruto WS. 'Address to the general debate of the eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly', 23 September, 2026. Available at: <https://www.globalroles.com/unga/speaker/kenya> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
26. UN News. 'UN Security Council terminates Mali peacekeeping mission', 30 June, 2023. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138257> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
27. UN News. "'This is not 1945": General Assembly president gavels open eighty-first session', 8 September, 2026. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/09/1168293> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
28. United Nations. Charter of the United Nations. San Francisco: United Nations, 1945. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
29. United Nations. 'Explainer: The journey of a UN Security Council resolution', 7 October, 2024. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/delegate/explainer-journey-un-security-council-resolution> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
30. United Nations. 'Security Council veto list'. New York: Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 2025. Available at: https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scact_veto_table_en.htm (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
31. United Nations. 'Eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly', 2026. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/81/> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
32. United Nations. 'Membership of principal United Nations organs', 2026. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/membership-of-principal-un-organs> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
33. United Nations. 'General debate of the eighty-first session', 22–28 September, 2026. Available at: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1k/k1kfcwu5kc> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
34. United Nations. 'Security Council voting'. New York: Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 2026. Available at: <https://research.un.org/en/docs/unvoting/sc> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
35. United Nations General Assembly. Territorial Integrity of Ukraine: Defending the Principles of the Charter of the United Nations, A/RES/ES-11/4. New York: United Nations, 2022. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3990673?ln=en> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
36. United Nations Security Council. Internal Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, S/2023/36. New York: United Nations, 2023. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF-CF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2023_36.pdf (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
37. White House. 'Fact sheet: President Xi Jinping's state visit to the United States', 25 September, 2015. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/fact-sheet-president-xi-jinpings-state-visit-united-states> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
38. White House. 'Follow along: Official China state visit', 24 September, 2015. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/09/24/follow-along-official-china-state-visit> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
39. White House. 'Details of the official state visit of President Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan', 20 September, 2026. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/09/first-lady-melania-trump-releases-details-ahead-of-his-excellency-xi-jinping/> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).
40. Xi J. 'Toast at the White House state dinner', 24 September. Reported in New York Post, 'Xi meets with Trump during US visit', 2026. Available at: <https://nypost.com/2026/09/24/us-news/xi-meets-with-trump-during-us-visit-live-updates/> (Accessed: 27 September 2026).