

United Nations General Assembly Marked by Sharp Debates on the World Situation

Issues such as the war in Ukraine, climate change, equal representation and the global economic crises illustrated vast differences of approach among global leaders

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Beginning on September 20, the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly held its annual gathering in New York City.

This multilateral institution has its origins in 1945 after the conclusion of the second world war where tens of millions of people were killed and displaced resulting in a restructured international balance of political and economic forces.

With the United States emerging in the postwar period as the leading capitalist and imperialist country in the world, it was not surprising that the headquarters was eventually established in New York after its initial assembly in San Francisco. At that time, the majority of peoples and nations in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean remained under the yoke of imperialism.

However, during the latter war years and with fury after its conclusion, the national liberation movements erupted demanding independence and freedom for the oppressed colonies and semi-colonies. Today in the third decade of the 21st century there are 193 countries recognized by the UN encompassing all of the continents and many island-nations.

Nonetheless, the media coverage of the UN General Assembly within the U.S. largely focused on the address delivered by President Joe Biden. His remarks were heavily centered on continuing the proxy war against the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

At no point during the Biden speech did he put forward any viable peace initiatives for Ukraine to end the fighting. Neither did Biden suggest a different tone towards the People's Republic of China which has been provoked by the trips to Taiwan by leading members of the U.S. Congress in recent months.

Biden began his remarks on September 21 by denigrating Moscow and its motivations. [He said in part:](#)

“Russia has shamelessly violated the core tenets of the United Nations Charter — no more important than the clear prohibition against countries taking the territory of their neighbor by force. Again, just today, President Putin has made overt nuclear threats against Europe and a reckless disregard for the responsibilities of the non-proliferation regime. Now Russia is calling — calling up more soldiers to join the fight. And the Kremlin is organizing a sham referenda to try to annex parts of Ukraine, an extremely significant violation of the U.N. Charter.”

Biden whose approval rating in the latest polls has him enjoying just 41% support among the electorate in the U.S. The majority of people in the country, some 84%, are concerned about the worsening economic crisis and have almost no faith in the capacity of the current administration to enact policies to stem inflation and provide adequate housing, education and other necessities of life in the near future.

The U.S. is Answered by Many Nations

Of course, Washington was the focus of the address by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the UNGA. Lavrov repudiated Biden’s accusations and pointed to a long list of atrocities which have resulted from U.S. foreign policy in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

[A summary of the official speech](#) before the UNGA notes:

“SERGEY V. LAVROV, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, said the United States, declaring victory in the cold war, has behaved as if it has the sacred right to act with impunity whenever and wherever it wants. Recalling the war of aggression — in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya — which claimed many hundreds of thousands of lives, he also asked: ‘What is the outcome of the adventurism of the United States in the Middle East? Has the human rights situation improved? Is the rule of law better? Has the socioeconomic situation stabilized?’... The incapacity of Western countries to negotiate and the continued war by the Kyiv regime against their own people left Moscow with no choice but to recognize the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk people’s republics and start a special military operation to protect the Russian and other people in Donbas, he stressed. He also underlined the intention to remove the threat against Russian security which NATO has been consistently creating in Ukraine. For the Anglo-Saxons, Ukraine is just an expandable material, as they are fighting against the Russian Federation.”

Several African representatives, following the consensus of the 55 member-states African Union (AU), continued to demand the expansion of the Security Council which only has five permanent members: the U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China. Although the African continent has 1.4 billion people, there is no permanent presence on the Security Council while states with far less population are represented.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Awatif El Tidjani Ahmed Koboro of Chad [said to the UNGA:](#)

“On the reform of the Security Council, the body responsible for peace and international security, Chad once again urges member states to move from rhetoric to action in order to achieve the said reform and correct the historic injustice towards the African

continent, which excludes it from full and equal participation in this body.”

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, Africa’s most populous state, had already gone on record demanding that two permanent seats be allocated on the UN Security Council to Africa. The general theme of many African, Caribbean, Latin American and Asian-Pacific states was that they had concerns other than those being promoted by the U.S. and other allied European governments.

Acting Prime Minister of Mali, Abdoulaye Maiga, blasted the former colonial power of France saying that the policies of Paris towards Africa were unacceptable. [Maiga said to the West:](#)

“Move on from the colonial past and hear the anger, the frustration, the rejection that is coming up from the African cities and countryside, and understand that this movement is inexorable. Your intimidations and subversive actions have only swelled the ranks of Africans concerned with preserving their dignity.”

In a speech from the leader of the Caribbean island-nation of Barbados, Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley, the stateswoman laid bare the inequalities related to international finance which served to perpetuate the underdevelopment of the Global South. [A summary of her address](#) said of the present conditions of the developing states:

“Mia Amor Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, urged world leaders to ‘use the power of the pen’ and impose natural disaster and pandemic clauses in developing countries’ debt, as well as remove the current barriers to accessing financial assistance from multilateral development banks.... During her speech, Ms. Mottley spoke extensively about the need to reform the ageing global financial architecture to better reflect today’s realities, for instance making it easier for climate-stricken countries to access capital. Indeed, the Bretton Woods Agreement that gave rise to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ‘no longer serve the purpose in the 21st century that they served in the 20th century,’ she said.”

Another Caribbean island-nation, the Republic of Cuba, was the subject of several leaders who called for the lifting of the U.S.-imposed blockade of the socialist state. This call was made by the South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor along with the President of the Republic of Namibia, Gage Geingob.

The Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez [spoke](#) on the vast inequalities prevailing in the existing world system dominated by the western industrialized states:

“Never has humankind had this wealth of scientific and technical potential that it has now, neither has it ever had the extraordinary capacity than it does now to create wealth and well-being. However, never has the world been so unequal in terms of just how much people suffer.”

Rodrigues cited statistics indicating that some 828 million people are going to bed hungry every night and that around 50 million children suffer from stunting while joblessness will impact 207 million persons in 2022. Despite the more than sixty years of the blockade by Washington, Cuba is able to conduct international solidarity in the areas of education, healthcare and humanitarian assistance to peoples throughout the globe.

The progressive African states also called for the liberation of Palestine and the Western Sahara, where the U.S. has sponsored the continued national oppression of these peoples so

deserving of self-determination and independence. In addition to the call for the recognition of the right to self determination for the oppressed, there was equal emphasis on the responsibility of the industrial states as it relates to climate change. The next UN Climate Conference (COP27) will be held in November in Egypt where African states are preparing to put forward unified positions on the current environmental crisis.

These and other features of the UNGA illustrated that the struggle for a just world in the current period remains the preoccupation of billions throughout the globe. Working and oppressed peoples within the western capitalist states must recognize the inextricable links between their own well being and that of the majority of humanity in the Global South.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Featured image: Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez addresses UNGA 77 in NYC 2022 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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