

# Policy Insights

118

October 2021



## Walking with the Bear? Russia and the A3 in the UN Security Council

PRIYAL SINGH & GUSTAVO DE CARVALHO

African perspectives  
Global insights



# Executive summary

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has faced some of its most significant challenges in recent years. Deadlocks often lead to paralysis, which erodes the perceived legitimacy of the council in effectively responding to global crises. Russia is a key actor in these dynamics, as one of the five permanent members of the UNSC. As a 'loud dissenter' in most council discussions, Russia is often thought to have an outsized impact on council outcomes. African states are particularly affected by these dynamics, as most UNSC decisions relate to African conflicts. Therefore, it is vital to reflect on how the continent collectively engages with influential actors in the council, such as Russia. Accordingly, this policy insight reflects on the recent relationship between African member states and Russia in the UNSC. It assesses points of commonality and divergence through a statistical evaluation of voting patterns for 2014–2020. The policy insight argues that Russia's influence over the African grouping is often exaggerated or misplaced.

## Introduction

Multilateralism has been under increasing pressure over the past few years. The end of the Cold War gave way to a period of general optimism regarding the role of global multilateral institutions. This optimism resulted in growing support for these institutions, with member states vesting greater authority in them. In more recent years, however, emergent threats have placed growing stress on the capability of such institutions to play their intended roles, and to function effectively.<sup>1</sup>

Questions surrounding the capability and legitimacy of multilateral institutions to respond to international peace and security threats have become more prominent

Accordingly, questions surrounding the capability and legitimacy of multilateral institutions to respond to international peace and security threats have become more prominent, particularly over the last decade. These pressures and challenges are evident in the UNSC, as exemplified by its increasing paralysis to respond to situations in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Tanja A Börzel and Michael Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism", *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (2021): 283.

As one of the UNSC's five permanent members (P5), Russia has played a central role in these dynamics.<sup>2</sup> The country has been vocal on several council agenda items and has positioned itself at the centre of critical discussions that have led to the council's paralysis. For the past decade, Russia has played the 'loud dissenter'<sup>3</sup> role in the UNSC by adopting a particularly vociferous approach in almost every discussion. While the reasons for this are varied, Russia has been seen to adopt such approaches in its general opposition to the liberal worldview entrenched by the US, UK and France (the P3) on the UNSC in the post-Cold War period.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Russia is becoming increasingly influential in determining the nature of council debates, and in the language used in UNSC resolutions. Therefore, understanding the complex (and often contested) role that the country plays in the UNSC necessitates understanding its broader engagement with global politics. Examining its behaviour on the UNSC also provides an opportunity to reflect on how Russia perceives the function (and limitations) of the council, and how other state actors perceive Russia's roles and interests.

Against this backdrop, African states increasingly seek to coordinate their actions and use their voices on the UNSC to bolster the continent's collective agency on vital peace and security issues. Historically, the three elected African states on the UNSC (the A3) seldom tried to engage with one voice, and rarely championed joint positions. In more recent years, however, African member states have employed collective positions, and leveraged inter-institutional linkages between the UNSC and the AU.<sup>5</sup> This has culminated in a number of instances where the A3 could pressure other UNSC members to develop more coherent responses to African crises, and generate more sustainable and predictable support for African-led initiatives across the continent.

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Considering the vital role that both Russia and African states play on the council, assessing how these parties engage with one another is essential. One of the ways this can be done is by evaluating areas of convergence and divergence between the A3 and Russia, and assessing key positions and outcomes stemming from UNSC debates. Accordingly, this policy insight focuses on these issues for the 2014–2020 period. It uses a mixed-methods

2 China, France, Russia, the UK and the US.

3 Zheng Chen and Hang Yin, "China and Russia in R2P Debates at the UN Security Council", *International Affairs* 96, no. 3 (2020): 788.

4 Philip Remler, "Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty and Legitimacy" (Paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, January 2020).

5 Priyal Singh and Gustavo de Carvalho, *Looking Back, Looking Forward: South Africa in the UN Security Council*, Africa Report 22 (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2020). See also Daniel Forti and Priyal Singh, *Toward a More Effective UN-AU Partnership on Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management* (Pretoria: ISS and International Peace Institute, 2019).

approach that primarily interrogates voting pattern behaviour by Russia and the various elected African member states. In doing so, it makes recommendations aimed at a more balanced, evidence-based and nuanced understanding of interactions between Russia and African states within this critical multilateral peace and security institution.

## Overview of recent Russian engagements on the UNSC

In the early 2010s Russia's 'loud dissenter' stance positioned it as a central actor in the UN's responses (or lack thereof) to many critical international crises, such as those in Libya, Syria and Ukraine. Global responses to internal political developments in these three countries have broadly defined Russia's role in the UNSC, given the fallout over significant differences between the country and other P5 members.

In the early 2010s Russia's 'loud dissenter' stance positioned it as a central actor in the UN's responses (or lack thereof) to many critical international crises, such as those in Libya, Syria and Ukraine

For instance, during Libya's 2011 civil war, the UNSC was divided on approving a no-fly zone to protect civilians. Russia (and China) eventually did not veto the resolution to enable the NATO-led intervention. Richard Gowan argued that Russia wanted to avoid another 'diplomatic humiliation' following its previous vetoes of military action in Kosovo and Iraq in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>6</sup> Russia also expected to gain some leverage in the proposed NATO response, which eventually did not take place. Thus, the Libyan case is still relevant. The NATO response was vital in Muammar Gaddafi's fall, bolstering Russia's opposition to the West's motivations and perceived desire for regime change globally.<sup>7</sup>

Russia grounds its positions and approaches in the UNSC on strong state-centric principles relating to security and the importance of state institutions to safeguard stability. Russia has also opposed and criticised what it views as the West's monopolisation of the 'truth' and what constitutes human rights.<sup>8</sup>

6 Richard Gowan, "Bursting the UN Bubble: How to Counter Russia in the Security Council" (Policy Brief 137, European Council on Foreign Relations, Paris, 2015), 11.

7 Chen and Yin, "China and Russia in R2P."

8 Aglaya Snetkov and Marc Lanteigne, "'The Loud Dissenter and Its Cautious Partner': Russia, China, Global Governance and Humanitarian Intervention", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 15, no. 1 (2014): 113-46; "How the Media Became One of Vladimir Putin's Most Powerful Weapons", *The Atlantic*, April 2015.

## Russia has also opposed and criticised what it views as the West's monopolisation of the 'truth' and what constitutes human rights

Russia often pursues its positions in the council in conjunction with China. This 'axis of convenience' dates back to the Cold War, when China saw the Soviet Union as 'an imperial power, patronising mentor, but indispensable backer'.<sup>9</sup> While the rise of China as a global power gives the country far more strategic leeway than Russia, cooperating with Russia in the UNSC still pays dividends.<sup>10</sup> When China disagrees with Russian approaches in the UNSC, it does so in a 'surprisingly passive' manner.<sup>11</sup>

In this 'pseudo-alliance' between the two countries, 'Russia gives priority attention to the confrontation on its Western theatre and China focuses on security matters in East Asia and its trade relations with the United States'.<sup>12</sup> The pseudo-alliance is often at the core of how Russia navigates council dynamics, especially concerning other P5 members.

Richard Gowan noted in 2015 that the P3 often get their way, but primarily on issues that are less important to Russia and China.<sup>13</sup> In 2014 Russia annexed the Ukrainian region of Crimea, which led to new heights of tension in its relations with the US and some European countries. It largely shrugged off any proposed action by the UN and, unsurprisingly, opposed all attempts to bring the unfolding crisis onto the agenda of the UNSC. In spite of this, informal Arria-formula meetings have been used by various elected council members and the P3 to discuss certain aspects of the peace and security situation in the Crimea. Since May 2020 Russia has also used this informal format to present its views on the matter.<sup>14</sup> However, no African country has ever voted in line with Russia's various pursued (and vetoed) draft resolutions.

Another critical fault line in the UNSC recently was the impact of the Trump administration in the US and, to some extent, internal dynamics in the UK, especially around Brexit – Britain's decision to leave the EU. The US Republican administration widened the already-visible divides between Russia and the US, which also reflected in a more fractured engagement with other P3 members. This divide was particularly noticeable, for instance,

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9 Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 2.

10 Lo, *Axis of Convenience*, 45.

11 Gowan, "Bursting the UN Bubble".

12 Pavel K Baev, "Three Turns in the Evolution of China-Russia Presidential Pseudo-Alliance", *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 4.

13 Gowan, "Bursting the UN Bubble", 3.

14 "What's in Blue: Arria-Formula Meeting on the Ukraine via VTC", *Security Council Report*, June 1, 2021. These informal meetings are named for former Venezuelan ambassador Diego Arria, who held such a meeting in 1992.

in council debates on unfolding political and humanitarian crises in Venezuela,<sup>15</sup> Yemen<sup>16</sup> and Syria.<sup>17</sup> As a result, since 2017 more frequent use of the veto power by P5 members has led to a far greater degree of council paralysis (see Figure 3).

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## Africa's attempt to move from subject to agent in the UNSC<sup>18</sup>

African states comprise 28% of the UN's overall membership, providing significant regional political backing to the A3, which constitutes 30% of the UNSC's non-permanent members. Niger, Kenya and Tunisia are the A3 members in 2021, while Gabon and Ghana will be joining Kenya in 2022.

Numerically, African issues dominate UNSC discussions by a large margin. For instance, in 2020, 47% of UNSC meetings, 64% of its outcome documents, and 76% of its resolutions with a Chapter VII<sup>19</sup> mandate concerned African peace and security issues.<sup>20</sup> In 2020 the UNSC approved eight Chapter VII resolutions on South Sudan and Sudan and three Chapter VII resolutions each on the Central African Republic and Somalia.<sup>21</sup> This disproportionate focus on Africa is further reflected by the fact that most UN-mandated peacekeeping operations and special political missions are based in Africa, and these accordingly require a greater share of the council's time and resources in terms of oversight and direction.

15 The Venezuelan issue was brought to the UN Security Council as a result of a constitutional crisis after Nicolás Maduro was sworn in as president in January 2019. This led to the escalation of protests in the country, resulting in a violent reaction and an increasing number of alleged human rights violations.

16 The civil war in Yemen started in 2014 and has become one of the most violent and complex conflicts in the world. Most P5 members, as well as regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, are heavily involved in the conflict.

17 The Syrian crisis is possibly the most divisive agenda item on the UNSC's agenda. The conflict has been ongoing since 2011, like the Yemeni conflict, with heavy involvement by P5 members (Russia and the US, in particular) and other regional powers such as Turkey and Iran. The UNSC struggles to reach consensus on decisions regarding the conflict, and thus in approving resolutions that would enable humanitarian access to the country.

18 Parts of this section are based on updated arguments presented in Gustavo de Carvalho and Daniel Forti, "[Africa Can Become More Influential in the UN Security Council](#)", *ISS Today*, March 12, 2020.

19 UN Charter Chapter VII resolutions are those decisions taken by the UNSC that have "the authority to make decisions that are binding on member states, and to employ or authorise the use of coercive measures, including the use of force, to ensure compliance with its decisions". See Patrik Johansson, "[The Humdrum Use of Ultimate Authority: Defining and Analysing Chapter VII Resolutions](#)", *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 78 (2009): 309.

20 UN, "[Highlights of Security Council Practice 2020](#)".

21 UN, "[Highlights of Security Council](#)".

Despite this, many UNSC members have treated Africa as being less strategic than Syria, North Korea or the Middle East peace process.<sup>22</sup> In recent years, council discussions on Syria – possibly the most divisive issue in the organ – often resulted in paralysis. In 2020 P5 members vetoed three draft resolutions introduced on humanitarian access, accounting for 13% of all vetoes cast between 2011 and 2020.<sup>23</sup> In 2020 all African-related resolutions were approved (none was vetoed or received insufficient votes). At the same time, two thematic resolutions of direct relevance to the continent, namely foreign terrorist fighters and the women, peace and security agenda (WPS), were not adopted.

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Historically, African matters have not been contentious in the council. However, in recent years intense negotiations on Western Sahara or the Central African Republic, for instance, have been increasingly divisive.<sup>24</sup> The P5 has been mired in impasses and conflicting strategic interests, suggesting that clashes in other parts of the world now affect the UNSC's engagements with Africa. As a result, negotiations on one file rarely occur in isolation. A3 members are continuously identifying and negotiating their interests; other council members can take advantage of this by either aligning with these positions or trying to split the A3 bloc.

Historically, A3 members have concentrated on African issues as their key priority, with rare exceptions.<sup>25</sup> From a practical point of view, A3 members generally restrain themselves from being too active in non-African UNSC files that P5 members prioritise, to avoid a spillover effect on their positions relating to the continent. This is a realistic concern: in 2017

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22 Gustavo de Carvalho, *Rejoining the High Table: South Africa and the UN Security Council*, Southern Africa Report 15 (Pretoria: ISS, 2018), 1–20.

23 UN, "Highlights of Security Council".

24 Richard Gowan, "Three Troubling Trends at the UN Security Council", International Crisis Group, November 6, 2019.

25 South Africa's vocal position on Venezuela and the Israel/Palestine issue during its 2019–2020 term is somewhat unusual. However, this can still be explained to an extent by the country's own history and political dynamics. For instance, in the case of Venezuela there are historical linkages with South Africa's ruling party. In the case of Israel/Palestine, South Africa sees a resemblance with that situation and its own apartheid regime. In addition, considering its role as a middle power, its larger size and influence, there is a stronger possibility of dissent than with other smaller countries.

the US said it could punish countries that did not support its positions at the UN.<sup>26</sup> Like other council members, the A3 generally votes in favour of UNSC resolutions (see Figures 1 and 2). However, the A3 also has a considerably higher abstention rate than other council members and a much lower rate of voting against resolutions.

In recent years, and especially since 2019, new dynamics within the A3 itself have been forming. Increasingly, A3 members present a unified position on African topics – especially when informed by AU Peace and Security Council decisions. By doing this they also hope to strengthen their collective credibility and leverage their engagements with other council members, and so better influence outcomes. In 2019, for instance, the A3 delivered 16 joint statements in the UNSC during country-specific and thematic debates. Interestingly, the Caribbean nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), based on shared interests and fraternal relations with the African grouping, has often voted with the A3 since joining the council in 2020. Between January and July 2021 the A3 and SVG<sup>27</sup> issued 11 joint statements<sup>28</sup> and three joint media statements.<sup>29</sup>

The benefits of collective A3 engagement are clear, but political and institutional dynamics still threaten to disrupt bloc dynamics. Broader geopolitical conflicts frequently test agreement, and the interests of influential council members can deepen divisions among non-permanent members. In particular, they can strain alliances between the A3. These are related to historical connections between A3 countries and their former colonisers, pressure regarding investments and aid, and attempts at providing neutral positions amid significant power dynamics. While the Non-Aligned Movement peaked during the Cold War, many African members still use its approach to explain their voting patterns and avoid being seen as siding with one bloc or another.

An example was South Africa's decision in 2019–2020 not to vote against any resolution that could provide humanitarian access to Syria (whether it was presented by the P3 or by Russia/China). South Africa also voted in favour of two controversial WPS resolutions, one in opposition to Russia's position, and the other in favour. The first of these WPS resolutions was led by Germany in April 2020, and was opposed by Russia, China and the US. Russia led the other in October 2020, which did not reach enough votes to be adopted, as 10 members abstained. Prior to this, in October 2019 during its UNSC presidency, South Africa

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26 De Carvalho, *Rejoining the High Table*.

27 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, despite being a Caribbean country, joined the A3 in 2020 as part of the African diaspora, defined by the AU as its sixth region. For more on the role of the diaspora, see Rita Kiki Edozie, "The Sixth Zone: The African Diaspora and the African Union's Global Era of Pan Africanism", *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 2 (July 7, 2012): 268–99.

28 The 11 joint A3 +1 statements provided between January and July 2021 related to the following issues: "The Situation in Darfur" (July 27); "Colombia Peace Process – UN Verification Mission" (July 13); "Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – MONUSCO" (July 7); "The Situation in the Central African Republic" (June 23); "Situation in Mali" (June 14); "The Question of the Joint Force of G5-Sahel" (May 19); "Briefing on the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei – UNISFA" (April 26); "Situation in Darfur" (March 10); "The Situation in the Central African Republic" (February 24); "The Situation in Mali" (January 13); "Briefing on the UN Office in West Africa and Sahel – UNOWAS" (January 12). For further information see Niger Permanent Mission to the UN, "Déclarations".

29 The A3 media stakeouts were related to the following issues: "A3+1 Press Stakeout Following Themes: Peace and Security in Africa – The situation in Tigray", July 2, 2021; "Media Stakeout on MINUSCA", June 23, 2021; "Press Remarks on the Humanitarian Situation in Ethiopia". For more info, see AU, "A3 Media Stakeouts".

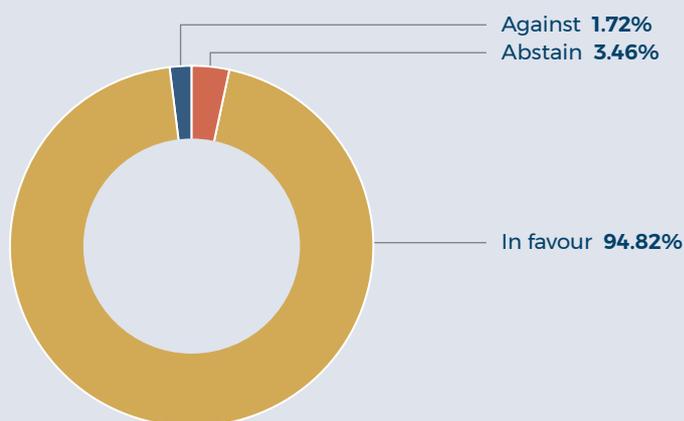
negotiated a consensus where the P3, Russia and China voted in favour of a new WPS resolution, which was approved unanimously.

## Africa's and Russia's voting patterns: 2014–2020

This study used various statistical methods and tests to identify and unpack overarching trends within the voting outcomes of UNSC member states for the period 2014–2020. Trends relating to the convergence and divergence of voting behaviour among UNSC member states, mainly the A3 and Russia, were evaluated. First, data from all UNSC draft resolutions between 2014 and 2020 were compiled based on meeting transcripts.<sup>30</sup> The authors sorted voting outcomes into three categories ('abstained', 'in favour', and 'against') and developed frequency-count tables by assigning the total annual votes in each category to corresponding member states for each year between 2014 and 2020.

Between 2014 and 2020, 462 resolutions were put into voting, meaning that among the 15 members of the UNSC, individual countries voted 6 930 times during the seven years. Of the 6 930 votes, the vast majority were 'in favour' (94.82%), with abstentions accounting for 3.46% and 'votes against' for 1.72% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Percentage of individual votes by UNSC members, 2014–2020

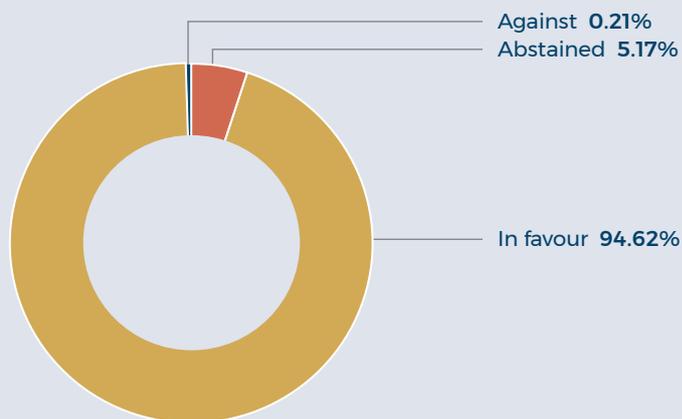


Source: UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "UN Documentation: Security Council", compiled by authors

30 UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "UN Documentation: Security Council".

During the same period, A3 members<sup>31</sup> voted 1 450 times, with a similar proportion of votes in favour comparable to that of other council members. However, A3 members accounted for more abstentions and a much lower number of votes against tabled resolutions (see Figure 2).

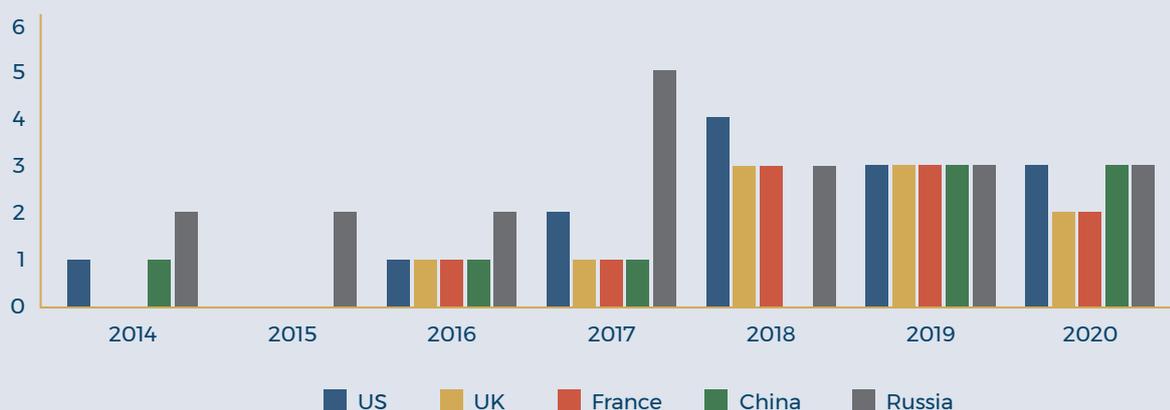
**Figure 2** Percentage of individual votes by A3 members, 2014–2020



Source: UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "UN Documentation: Security Council", compiled by authors

Permanent members voted against resolutions 0.9% of the time. Still, Figure 3 shows that since 2017 an increasing number of P5 members have vetoed resolutions.

**Figure 3** Number of P5 vetoes, 2014–2020



Source: UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "UN Documentation: Security Council", compiled by authors

<sup>31</sup> St Vincent and the Grenadines is included in this vote, as it has aligned itself with the A3.

The study also analysed the coincidence of votes ‘in favour’ between and among A3 and P5 members during this period. Figure 4 illustrates these coincidences (by percentage of total votes cast) during this period when the A3 and individual P5 members voted ‘in favour’ of tabled resolutions.

**Figure 4** Average coincidence of ‘in favour’ votes between A3 and P5 members (percentage, 2014–2020)



Source: UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, “UN Documentation: Security Council”, compiled by authors

Following this visual inspection of UNSC voting patterns for the 2014–2020 period, the study used two statistical tests<sup>32</sup> to evaluate association between A3 and Russian voting patterns. These tests were applied to three different sets of frequency count data, which were based on:

- all UNSC member state voting data during this period;
- voting data relating only to the A3 and Russia; and
- data relating to the coincidence of votes between the A3 and Russia.

<sup>32</sup> In order to prove some measure of association between the voting outcomes of Russia and the A3 during this period, a chi-square test and Fisher’s exact test were applied to contingency table data for each of the years under consideration. These tests were chosen given their usefulness and appropriateness in determining an association between categorical variables. The findings of this policy insight are based in part on readings of the compiled p-values for the chi-square and Fisher’s exact tests applied to the three different sets of data. Mosaic plots were also generated in order to visually inspect any higher- or lower-than-expected voting outcome observations for individual member states during this period.

These tests sought to answer whether a significant association could be determined between member states, on the one hand, and their voting outcomes in terms of the categories ‘in favour’, ‘against’ and ‘abstained’.

Finally, the qualitative assessment of several select resolutions enabled this policy insight to better understand some of the underlying political dynamics at play between the A3 and Russia. These resolutions were selected based on the confluence of powerful convergent or divergent A3 and Russian interests. Appendix I presents an overview of these resolutions.

## Findings

Statistically, the tests conducted show little evidence to support any notion of greater alignment or coordination between Russia and the A3 during 2014–2020. Significant results pointed to an association between all UNSC members and their voting patterns regarding the three identified categories (specifically from 2016–2020). However, further analysis did not attribute these findings to any meaningful or growing alignment between Russia and the A3. Despite this, this policy insight did identify some broad trends.

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Firstly, it is clear that most UNSC resolutions are still approved through unanimous consensus, with most votes for any resolution being in favour. The high percentage of resolutions approved by unanimous consensus shows the importance of looking at how council members conduct negotiations. P5 members often compelled the inclusion or exclusion of language and agenda items using the veto ‘threat’. For instance, the simple threat by one of the P5 members to potentially veto a resolution may well change the course, content and language of drafts circulated. In 2019 the US threatened to veto a resolution on sexual violence in conflict due to language included by Germany on issues related to sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch, “How a UN Bid to Prevent Sexual Violence Turned Into a Spat Over Abortion”, *Foreign Policy*, April 23, 2019.

Secondly, during this period Russia had higher-than-expected abstentions and votes against tabled resolutions (casting 45 abstentions and 20 vetoes – more than any other UNSC member). This voting behaviour helped to explain some of the statistical associations found by the tests. However, when explicitly analysed in association with A3 voting outcomes, no significant findings could be observed. Interestingly, A3 members seldomly voted against any tabled draft resolutions during this period, preferring to abstain from contentious council files. From 2014–2020 only three votes ‘against’ were cast by A3 members, namely Senegal in 2016 (Russia voted in favour), Côte d’Ivoire in 2018 (Russia voted in favour), and South Africa in 2019 (Russia also voted against).

Thirdly, Russia and the A3 often vote in favour of the same tabled draft resolutions. However, there has been a visible year-on-year decline in the percentage of such coincidences (with 2018–2019 being the only exception). Figure 4 shows that the A3 members most often vote together in favour of resolutions on which the P3 also vote in favour. Figure 4 also shows a visibly lower coincidence of votes ‘in favour’ between the A3 and Russia (or China). In 2014 the A3 votes ‘in favour’ coincided with that of Russia 91% of the time. This dropped to a low of 72% in 2020. By comparison, the coincidence of A3 votes ‘in favour’ with those of specific P3 members ranged from 91–93% in 2020.

Fourthly, there are extremely low coincidences of cases where the A3 collectively abstained or voted against particular draft resolutions from which Russia also abstained or vetoed. In fact, during this entire period, there was only a single instance of an A3 member voting against a draft resolution that Russia also voted against, namely South Africa in 2019 (relating to the situation in Venezuela). Moreover, there were only six occasions on which the A3 collectively abstained on a resolution that Russia either abstained from or vetoed. Accordingly, based on this observation alone, it could be argued that interactions between Russia and the A3 do not point to any significant degree of increasing strategic coordination or alignment. These interactions are becoming more divergent over time.

Fifthly, as mentioned earlier, A3 votes that corresponded with Russian voting outcomes did not indicate any meaningful association. However, several interesting observations can be made when comparing Russia’s higher- or lower-than-expected categorical voting outcomes with those of A3 members. In particular, the data indicates that in 2016 Russia’s rate of abstention was statistically higher than expected than if the data was random. The only other council member states that mirrored this voting pattern were two African states, namely Angola and Egypt. In each year since then, however, no other A3 members have stood out in this regard, whereas Russia has consistently featured as an anomaly.

**A3 votes that corresponded with Russian voting outcomes did not indicate any meaningful association**

# Conclusion

This policy insight shows that the relationship between Russia and the African grouping on the UNSC remains comparatively uncoordinated, when viewed, for example, in relation to that between the A3 and the P3. Voting patterns for the 2014–2020 period clearly highlight that voting by most elected African member states on the UNSC remains more aligned to that of the P3, and is largely independent of Russian vetoes and abstentions.

Voting by most elected African member states on the UNSC remains more aligned to that of the P3, and is largely independent of Russian vetoes and abstentions

This analysis does, however, only present part of the overall picture. The UNSC is ultimately a political institution. Its member states act on national and collective interests that can only be fully understood by assessing these particular interests on a case-by-case basis. Only by qualifying resolution-specific political dynamics (such as those contained in Appendix 1), can a definitive argument be made as to whether there has been growing coordination and collaboration between Russia and A3 members within this vital multilateral institution. While this study did not delve into the content and substance of resolution-specific negotiations, a macro-level case for weakening Russia–A3 coordination and collaboration could nonetheless be made based on the analysis of voting record data.

From this particular vantage point, the limitations of Russia–A3 relations are clear. Accordingly, arguments that try to paint certain A3 members as becoming more aligned with the interests and positions of Russia on the UNSC simply do not hold true for the African grouping as a collective. Whether this is reflective of broader political dynamics and relations between Russia and African states is difficult to tell. However, a case can be made for Russia’s limited capability in wielding influence within multilateral institutions, and seeking greater support at a normative level among African actors, based on the general findings here.

Arguments that try to paint certain A3 members as becoming more aligned with the interests and positions of Russia on the UNSC simply do not hold true for the African grouping as a collective

Moving forward, Russia's 'loud dissenter' role in the UNSC may well continue, based on its general ongoing opposition to the positions of the P3 on a number of council files in which it has a vested interest. Yet, if it is to secure greater support from other elected members, and the A3 in particular, it will need to make a much more concerted and directed effort in order to buck the trend of the last five years.

# Appendix I

## Similar voting occasions between African members and Russia

Table 1 examines the occasions on which A3 members abstained from or voted against (individually or collectively) resolutions that Russia also abstained from or voted against.

TABLE 1 SIMILAR VOTING OCCASIONS BETWEEN AFRICAN MEMBERS AND RUSSIA			
No	Draft Resolution	Theme	Description
1	S/RES/2220 (2015)	Illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons	All A3 members (Angola, Chad and Nigeria) abstained, as did Russia (along with China and Venezuela), whereas all other member states favoured the resolution. This was the only instance in 2015 that A3 members abstained from a resolution from which Russia also abstained.
2	Draft resolution S/2015/562	Letter submitted to the council chair from the Ukraine permanent representative	Russia vetoed this failed draft resolution. The A3 members did not vote against the resolution with Russia. Still, they were also not united in their positions, as Angola abstained. Chad and Nigeria voted in favour of the draft resolution.
3	Draft Resolution S/2015/508	Bosnia and Herzegovina	The A3 did not vote against the resolution with Russia. They were not united in their votes either, as Angola and Nigeria abstained. Chad voted in favour.
4	Draft Resolution S/2016/1026	Middle East (specifically on Syria)	The A3 members did not vote against the resolution with Russia. They were also not united in their votes, with Angola abstaining and Egypt and Senegal voting in favour.
5	Draft resolution S/2016/1085	Sudan and South Sudan	In this failed draft resolution, all A3 members (Angola, Egypt and Senegal) abstain along with Russia (as did China, Malaysia, Japan and Venezuela). The draft resolution failed to pass due to a lack of required votes in favour.
6	S/RES/2317 (2016)	Somalia	The A3 were not united in their vote on this resolution. Two of the A3 members – Angola and Egypt – abstained with Russia. Senegal voted in favour.
7	S/RES/2304 (2016)	Sudan and South Sudan	The A3 were not united in their vote. Egypt abstained with Russia, while Angola and Senegal voted in favour of the resolution.
8	S/RES/2285 (2016)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their vote on this resolution. Angola abstained with Russia, while Egypt and Senegal were in favour of the resolution.
9	S/RES/2269 (2016)	International tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia	This resolution saw all A3 members abstaining with Russia
10	Draft Resolution S/2016/846	Middle East (specifically on Syria)	The A3 did not vote against the resolution with Russia – Angola abstained and Egypt and Senegal voted in favour.

No	Draft Resolution	Theme	Description
11	Draft Resolution S/2016/1026	The situation in the Middle East (with particular regard to Syria)	Russia vetoed this failed resolution. The A3 members did not vote against the resolution with Russia, but were also not united: Angola abstained, and Egypt and Senegal voted in favour. Similar voting outcomes on Syria would be seen again on several occasions in the following years.
12	S/RES/2385	Somalia	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. Egypt abstained with Russia, while Ethiopia and Senegal voted in favour of the resolution.
13	Draft Resolution S/2017/962	Middle East (specifically Syria)	Russia vetoed this resolution. Egypt abstained, and Ethiopia and Senegal voted in favour.
14	Draft Resolution S/2017/172	Middle East (specifically Syria)	Russia vetoed this resolution. Ethiopia and Egypt abstained, and Senegal voted in favour.
15	S/RES/2440 (2018)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their votes: Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea abstained with Russia, while Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
16	S/RES/2428 (2018)	Sudan and South Sudan	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea abstained with Russia, and Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
17	S/RES/2422 (2018)	Sudan and South Sudan	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea abstained with Russia, while Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
18	S/RES/2418 (2018)	Sudan and South Sudan	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea abstained with Russia, while Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
19	S/RES/2414 (2018)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. Ethiopia abstained with Russia, while Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea voted in favour.
20	Draft Resolution S/2018/520	Middle East (with particular regard to Palestine)	Russia vetoed this failed resolution. The A3 (Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea) did not vote against the resolution with Russia, but chose to abstain from the vote collectively.
21	S/RES/2498 (2019)	Somalia	The A3 (South Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire) were not united in this resolution. Equatorial Guinea abstained with Russia, while South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
22	S/RES/2494 (2019)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. South Africa abstained with Russia, but Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
23	S/RES/2471 (2019)	Sudan and South Sudan	This resolution saw all A3 members (South Africa, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire) abstain, along with Russia.
24	S/RES/2468 (2018)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. South Africa abstained with Russia, but Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.

No	Draft Resolution	Theme	Description
25	Draft Resolution S/2019/756	Middle East (specifically on Syria)	Russia vetoed this resolution. Equatorial Guinea abstained, and South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire voted in favour.
26	Draft Resolution S/2019/186	Venezuela	Russia vetoed this resolution. This was the only instance in 2014–2020 when an A3 member (South Africa) voted against a resolution. Equatorial Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire abstained.
27	Draft Resolution S/2019/756	Middle East (specifically on Syria)	Russia vetoed this failed resolution. The A3 were not united in their votes, with Equatorial Guinea abstaining and South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire voting in favour.
28	S/RES/2548 (2020)	Western Sahara	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. South Africa abstained with Russia, while Tunisia and Niger voted in favour.
29	S/RES/2521 (2020)	Sudan and South Sudan	The A3 were not united in their votes on this resolution. South Africa abstained with Russia, while Tunisia and Niger voted in favour.
30	Draft Resolution S/2020/797	Non-proliferation	Russia vetoed this failed resolution. The A3 abstained from voting.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on UNSC voting record data. See UNSC, "[Resolutions](#)"

# Authors

## Priyal Singh

is a Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies' (ISS) Peace Operations and Peacebuilding Programme in Pretoria, South Africa. He holds an MA with distinction in International Relations from the University of the Witwatersrand and is certified in statistics for research and design.

## Gustavo de Carvalho

is a Programme Manager and Senior Researcher at the ISS' Peace Operations and Peacebuilding Programme in Pretoria. He is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town, and holds an MA in African Studies from the University of Oxford.

# Acknowledgement

SAIIA gratefully acknowledges the support for this publication from a funder that wishes to remain anonymous.

# About SAIIA

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## Cover image

The United Nations Security Council meets about the ongoing Ukrain-Russia conflict on August 28, 2014, New York (Andrew Burton/Getty Images)

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Jan Smuts House, East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand  
PO Box 31596, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa  
Tel +27 (0)11 339-2021 · Fax +27 (0)11 339-2154  
[www.saiia.org.za](http://www.saiia.org.za) · [info@saiia.org.za](mailto:info@saiia.org.za)