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'How does Russia's Foreign Policy affect Africa?'

With the kind cooperation of IFAS, the French Institute in Southern Africa, Professor Jacques Sapir, director of studies at EHESS in Paris, addressed a meeting at SAIIA on 22 May 2007 on Russia today, its foreign policy and how that affects Africa. The following is a resume of his comments with particular emphasis on Africa.

The rebound of Russia has been characterised by a deep sense of self-reliance and self-affirmation and a patriotic consensus since 2003. Putin's speech in Munich in February 2007 was not aggressive, according to Sapir, but restated the important principles of Russian diplomacy and reflected the idea of Russia as a sovereign state. In Russia Putin has a very high approval rating, including among the young educated class.

Russian policy under Putin has consequences for Africa, and southern Africa in particular.

Russia wants to develop its economy and that is seen to include control of the raw materials sector. It is therefore deeply interested in controlling the oil and mining industries. This has involved the taming of the oligarchs who emerged during the Yeltsin era. Russia is particularly interested in non-ferrous metals like titanium, chrome and vanadium. The despised role of the oligarchs has been replaced by state owned enterprises in a majority of cases.

The strategic agenda is to:

- Put the economy first, sustaining a high growth of 7 per cent per annum for the next 10 years. International cooperation is needed to achieve this and Canada, Australia and South Africa have been identified as critical because of their key role in controlling mining. However, Canada is perceived to be too close to the United States. Hence the emphasis will be on the latter two. Russia needs the industrial and technical expertise in the advanced processing of minerals that South Africa and Australia can provide.

- Go back to Africa, where Russia's presence and influence has waned since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

- Manage relations with the United States, which have been degenerating for the past five years, and a trend that will continue for the next ten years. There will be no return to cold war policies, but relations will not be at the same level as before

1999. (In Russian eyes, the US carries the blame for this, starting with NATO's perceived arrogance in Kosovo in 1999; the US indifference to Russia's offer of close cooperation after 9/11 and the US actions in Iraq, that have led to a perception by Russian officials that the US is 'unpredictable'.)

In Africa, Russia's policies consist of three main themes:

- Cleaning up the various illegal activities of Russian criminals. With this purpose in mind there has been co-operation with the SAPS for the past four years.

- Co-operation with Algeria to secure gas liquefaction technology from Sonatrach, thereby avoiding sourcing it from the west.

- Since 2004/2005 Russia has developed an Africa raw materials strategy. In executing this, its most important strategy for Africa, it will co-operate with China and emerging powers to balance the influence of the west.

Russia cannot play alone in Africa and it has identified three possible allies: China, South Africa and Algeria. Its new Africa policy gives South Africa a growing role.

In short, Russia and the Russians are back in Africa. Russia Inc. will be the instrument used.

In addition, Russia has identified Brazil, India and South Africa as important emerging regional powers that it seeks to work with. Venezuela is also seen as of increasing importance.

Africa is not the primary focus of Russia's geopolitical strategy. That is located in Eurasia and in three areas of the region which fall within the Russian definition of that term: Central Asia, Central Europe and the Middle East.

Of these, Central Asia is the most important. Its objectives are the control of the region's hydrocarbon resources and countering radical Islamist infiltration from Afghanistan. Russia cooperates with China in exercising power in

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Central Asia through their membership, together with the Central Asian states, of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation.

Central Europe has already shown signs of moving into alignment with Russia. The most notable development has been Hungary's decision to sign onto the Russian Burgas oil pipeline project that parallels the Blue Stream gas line across the Black Sea from Russia to

Turkey, in preference to the Nabucco pipeline scheme, envisaged to connect the gas fields of Azerbaijan and Iran with Europe, to the exclusion of Russia.

The Middle East is seen to present a power vacuum, because of the failure of the US in Iraq and the Israelis' failure to defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon. On the other hand Russia, which was ousted from the region in 1991, may have a

solution.

Russia realises that the bipolar world is of the past, but it does not accept the concept of a unipolar world. Its objective is to create and strengthen a new multipolar world. Countries like South Africa have a role in achieving that objective.

Tom Wheeler, Research Fellow at SALLA and editor of the Foreign Policy Monitor

A Vote for Kosovo's Independence is a Vote for Peace

South Africa will have the opportunity to allay criticism of its UN Security Council voting record if the Security Council should vote on the future status of Kosovo. South Africa has recently been subject to a torrent of criticism, after it voted against a resolution condemning Human Rights abuses in Myanmar, intervened in support of Iran's nuclear programme and sought to prevent a Security Council discussion of the situation in Zimbabwe. Many in the international community feel bewildered as South Africa has always been vocal in declaring its foreign policy to be human rights driven. However, South Africa has argued that the UN Security Council was not the correct body to deal with these issues that do not relate directly to international peace and security.

The vote on the status of Kosovo is intricately intertwined with the peace, security and stability of the entire Balkan region. This ought to be of central concern to the members of the Security Council and explains the urgency with which the US and the EU, who would largely be tasked with the implementation of the resolution, regard the matter.

Kosovo was an autonomous province in the former Yugoslavia. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia tried to retain control of Kosovo, which Serbs consider the cradle of Serbian identity. Serbia launched an offensive against Albanian separatists which resulted in large-scale atrocities and a large number of displaced people. NATO air strikes resulted in the withdrawal of the Serbian army from Kosovo and since 1999 Kosovo has been administered by the UN as a result of UNSC resolution 1244. The proposed Security Council vote on the status of Kosovo would seek to end the limbo under which it has existed since then.

The key debate surrounding the status of Kosovo is whether or not to accept the recommendations of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. Ahtisaari mediated talks for more than a year between Kosovo and Serbia and concluded that a negotiated settlement is unlikely. As a result, he recommended that

"Kosovo's final status should be independence, supervised by the international community." The Ahtisaari plan also provides to the small Serbian minority in Kosovo extensive rights and privileges including privileged ties to Serbia. It is widely felt that the Ahtisaari Plan offers the best possible solution and that to delay adopting and implementing it, is to risk fermenting trouble in the region. Up until now, Kosovo Albanians who make up 90% of Kosovo's population have accepted the restrictions that have been placed on them by the Ahtisaari Plan and have demonstrated a degree of confidence in the United Nations. Delays in adopting the plan might convince Kosovo that its faith in the international community was misplaced and might lead to them opting for a unilateral declaration of independence. A delay also threatens the position of many moderate politicians in Kosovo who have vocally supported the UN process and would leave the field open for more radical politicians.

South Africa has a good opportunity to prove its commitment to peace, security and human rights by voting in favour of a resolution that enables the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan. However, there is some concern in the international community over the fact that South Africa has appeared reluctant to support such a vote. This is despite a fact-finding mission to Kosovo and Serbia in late April that seemed to convince the majority of Security Council members of the need for a decisive and quick decision on the future status of Kosovo. South Africa has voiced concern that a negotiated settlement is what is needed if Serbia is going to be expected to give up territory. However, Ahtisaari had concluded that the Serbians and Albanians had too disparate negotiating positions.

The only other members of the UNSC that are at present reluctant to endorse a UN resolution on Kosovo's status are Russia and Indonesia. Russia's position is essentially one of realpolitik. It was present and involved at every stage of the negotiations and has only

raised objections now, according to Ylber Hysa, a member of Kosovo's Negotiating Team for Final Status Talks as well as a member of the Lobbying Group for Kosovo in the UN in New York. Kosovo allows the Russians to flex their muscles in terms of a European issue where they are in a better position to influence the outcome than the US. Their potential objection to the Security Council resolution must be seen through the prism of their larger foreign policy objectives. However, the increasing deterioration in relations between Russia and the West, as was evident at the recent G8 summit, has made Kosovo into a significant contest of wills and has increased the likelihood that Russia would exercise its veto in the Security Council.

Another possible reason for Russian reluctance could be the concern that this Resolution would create a precedent in international law in terms of the right to self-determination and secession of an ethnic minority. Russia would want to avoid this given its problems in Chechnya, and with Georgia and Moldova. The same argument could be said to apply to Indonesia's reluctance to support the resolution with its separatist movements in Aceh and West Papua. South Africa has voiced the same concern, citing the African context. However, other African states have supported the resolution. It has been emphasised by the EU and the USA that Kosovo is sui generis, arising out of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and as such does not create a meaningful precedent in International Law. They have made sure that the resolution is explicit in describing Kosovo as a unique case.

Previous indications were that Russia would accept a resolution that does not explicitly mention Kosovo's independence, paid greater attention to the position of ethnic minorities and a moratorium for a specified amount of time before Kosovo can apply for UN membership. However, developments at the G8 meeting have led to Russia adopting a tougher stance, calling for a negotiated settlement between Serbia and Kosovo. It looks unlikely that Russia

would even support a compromise agreement proposed by France. This agreement would compel Kosovo and Serbia to negotiate for a further six months. A failure to reach agreement at the end of this period would result in the automatic implementation of the Ahtisaari plan. However, Kosovo has indicated that further delays would not be welcomed and has called for a Security Council vote, despite the threat of a Russian veto. Kosovar leaders have also threatened to declare independence unilaterally if Russia does use its veto. However, this would put it in a precarious situation internationally: although there are indications that the US would recognise it, the EU, which strives for consensus between its members, is likely to be

immobilised.

The latest indications coming from the Department of Foreign Affairs is that they will at the very least abstain. However, South Africa would prefer a resolution that would water down the assumption that the endorsement of the Ahtisaari plan would lead directly to independence. It is possible therefore that South Africa will support France's proposal.

South Africa needs to look very carefully at the message its decisions at the Security Council send out. While the building of credibility among the developing world is important for many of South Africa's initiatives, to repeatedly vote against resolutions championed by the West is to risk losing their support for permanent

membership on the Security Council. It is also to risk a valuable tool of South African foreign policy – South Africa's reputation as a defender of the oppressed and champion of human rights that arose from the peaceful transition from apartheid to multiparty democracy. South Africa must vote in favour of a UNSC resolution on Kosovo's independence if it is to maintain credibility as a potential permanent Security Council member that advocates and protects Human Rights.

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South Africa's Space Interests: universalism redefined?

From Russia, With Love

In March 2006, land-locked (and former Soviet Republic) Kazakhstan had extended Russia's lease of its Baikonur launch site until 2050. About 80 000 people, most of whom are Russians, are employed at Baikonur, the world's largest and oldest commercial and scientific launch site. Baikonur is Russia's only facility for launching manned space flights. In terms of the agreement, Kazakhstan receives an annual rental, Russia will launch Kazakh satellites, a Russian oil company has invested in two Kazakh oil fields near the Caspian Sea, and both countries have made significant progress on the contested demarcation of their 7000km border. Almost simultaneously, the Russian government approved its US\$10.50 billion space programme for the next decade, which included the development of a military launch site at Plesetsk in the Archangel region of Northern Russia.

These developments illustrate the increased importance of the international political economy of space affairs. Moreover, it reminds us of the importance of geo-politics for Russia, CIS states' continued dependence on Russia and the enormous economic spin-offs of space activities for developing countries.

Almost a year after the Russian-Kazakh agreement, the South African government announced that a Russian navy submarine in the Barents Sea would launch its first satellite. Prior to this, in July 2005, Russia indicated its interest in using South Africa as a launch base for its international commercial payloads. In 2006, South Africa and Russia's space cooperation was further consolidated during President Putin's visit to South Africa.

Lest we forget: the first (South) African in space, Mark Shuttleworth, joined a team of cosmonauts in the Russian Soyuz capsule on a journey to the International Space Station in April 2002.

President Mbeki: From Renaissance Man to Space Comrade

During Thabo Mbeki's presidency, some of the most important aspects of South Africa's emerging space interests and affairs evolved:

- South Africa's science and technology budget increased by 26%;
- The South African Space Council was established;
- Cabinet approved the establishment of the first South African Space Agency (SASA), which is expected to be inaugurated in 2007 to consolidate government's space related institutions and their research;
- South Africa was the inaugural convener of the African Ministers' Council on Science and Technology; and
- The largest single optical telescope in the southern hemisphere, SALT, a multi-national space project, was inaugurated in Sutherland.

Stars in our eyes

South Africa's space interests are developing at a fast rate. South Africa has been shortlisted with Australia for the multi-billion dollar Square Kilometer Array (SKA) and is awaiting the outcome of the bidding process in 2008.

Secondly, the South African government's first satellite SumbandilaSAT, which was to have been launched in June 2007, is most likely to be launched later this year.

Thirdly, in June 2007, South Africa

participated in the 50th session of the permanent UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in Vienna.

Fourth, South Africans are members of the multi-national HESS (High-Energy Stereoscopic System) research group, which received the EU's prestigious Descartes Prize for Science in March 2007. Three of the four patents, which have so far resulted from the HESS research, belong to North West University.

Fifthly, in May 2007, the Astronomy Geographic Advantage Bill was published in the Government Gazette. The purpose is to provide for the preservation and protection of areas in South Africa that are uniquely suited for optical and radio astronomy. This could be in preparation of hosting the SKA.

These developments and events signify South Africa's ambitions and capabilities in space science and technology. Moreover, it reinforces South Africa's already active and activist role in international space initiatives.

Universalism redefined

South Africa adhered to universalism as one of the defining concepts of its post 1994 foreign policy. The South African government has clearly stated its space ambitions, and is consolidating its space affairs, bureaucracy to achieve this. The significance of these developments lies on various levels.

President Mbeki endorses South Africa's space ambitions. In April 2007, Egypt joined Nigeria and Algeria as African countries that have launched satellites.

Secondly, despite the huge cost of developing a space industry, the government no longer regards its space project as a vanity project, but rather one of necessity.

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Thirdly, on several occasions, South Africa has indicated its 'space for Africa' approach, namely that South Africa's space science and technology will be shared with the continent.

Fourth, a space industry will attract much

needed foreign direct investment.

Fifthly, it can give impetus for South Africa's self-imposed role as norm entrepreneur. It can, for example, contribute to the development of International Law in the fields of reducing the proliferation of orbital debris, and, more

importantly, work towards keeping space weapons-free and limit space activities to those for peaceful purposes only.

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Weighing Solutions to Global Challenges

Should countries have "per capita rights" to behave in ways that are economically and environmentally destructive? - Weighing solutions to global challenges...

The world today faces challenges ranging from poverty to environmental threats like global warming. In January 2007 the world community witnessed two very different annual gatherings that look at international economic and development issues from opposite sides of the ideological divide. Davos in Switzerland played host to the World Economic Forum (WEF) where global business leaders, leading politicians and United Nations bigwigs came together with media celebrities and selected intellectuals and trade unionists to debate issues around the theme "Shaping The Global Agenda: The Shifting Power Equation", seeking alternatives for more balanced power distribution in a global political economy.

By contrast, the World Social Forum (WSF) is an anti-capitalist meeting held primarily in opposition to the WEF. This year's meeting, held in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, was attended by social movements, networks, non-government organizations, and civil society groups and individuals. The theme for the Nairobi talks was "People's Struggles, People's Alternatives - Another World Is Possible". Delegates gathered to find solutions that are not influenced by capitalist ideals. The debates focused on social problems like HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, migration issues, and conflict and peace-building. The WSF agenda intersects with that of the WEF on issues such as privatisation, global trade agreements, environmental concerns and the commodification of labour.

But are these meetings mere talkshops or do they serve a deeper purpose towards finding solutions to global problems, albeit from very different perspectives? The WEF aims to find solutions within the existing system while the WSF aspires to replace the existing order with a more globally equitable one. In Davos Angela Merkel, Germany's Federal Chancellor, said that globalisation must offer opportunities for all, and she spoke of equal treatment for each country as it enters the global economy. Aligned with this, delegates from the US, EU and emerging economies like India committed to resume the Doha round on trade

negotiations, which collapsed last year due to differences concerning subsidies and tariffs. In the WSF meetings, the WEF was challenged to alter policies that are inconsistent with global social equality. For example, the Doha round should ensure that farmers in developed countries do not get preferential treatment such as government subsidies that allow them an unfair advantage in global markets.

Although the WSF promotes the spread of alternative ideas, it too cannot guarantee social delivery, at least within the current world order. Before and after the WSF gathering, there were protests by members of poor communities such as the Kibera slum in Nairobi, who felt that while the forum benefited those NGOs who claimed to be the voice of the poor, few or no practical improvements were felt within the poor communities themselves. While big companies are generally blamed for environmental problems, delegates to the Nairobi forum were encouraged to be better stewards of their environments. Mohammed, a resident in the Kibera slum community, commented, "No one in the slums is assured of the land he lives on. For this reason, it is difficult to have people care for the environment." Mohammed articulates the idea that the impetus to protect the environment arises when there is a sense of inclusivity and ownership.

"Every country should have the same per capita rights to pollute". This provocative statement was made in Davos by Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chair of India's planning commission, as a direct challenge to the West's 'monopoly' on pollution of the environment. It raises interesting moral dilemmas on whether fast-growing economies such as India and China should be forced to slow down their development or to pay for expensive technology to reduce pollution. Though China is second only to the United States in carbon-dioxide emissions from energy sources, it is adamant that in per capita terms it is well below the world average. The average American guzzles over fifty barrels of oil for every barrel used by an Indian and fourteen barrels for each barrel consumed by the average Chinese citizen.

Given the huge populations in India and China, extending "per capita rights to pollute" would herald environmental disaster of epic proportions. By the same token, given the

discussions in both the WSF and the WEF, it would be interesting to extend the debate on "per capita rights" to issues such as child labour. At first glance the argument presented by Ahluwalia seems fair, but it would mean that for issues such as child labour every country must have the same "per capita right to exploit children!" Most of us would be outraged by this as a violation of human rights, but the same sentiments should surely apply to the suggestion that nations should have "per capita rights to pollute". Although there is a global consensus evident in both the WEF and the WSF that environmental challenges have the potential to unite the world precisely because nature knows no boundaries, it is not clear whether nations and companies are prepared to sacrifice their economic gains in order to preserve the earth.

In Davos, when the question arose whether nations and companies that release large amounts of carbon gases should be taxed, the motion was rejected by 64% of delegates. Although, that suggestion might have raised funds for technologies to counter global warming; it would ultimately be problematic. The cost would be passed on to the global public through high consumption prices.

Both the WSF and WEF can play important roles in influencing global policy development. While the WEF delegates wield sufficient economic clout to pass motions that impact on the global community, the WSF, through its grassroots constituency, can vigilantly challenge motions that adversely affect the marginalised and the poor. This was perhaps most eloquently illustrated in the WSF's first mobilisation, in 2001, against the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) suggestion that barriers protecting domestic industries should be arbitrarily removed. While many of the world's impoverished citizens may express skepticism about the impact of such gatherings on their daily lives, the debates at both ends of the spectrum provide platforms for airing different views. In an increasingly global village, such platforms become the crucibles that will shape our future.

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