



Inside the Russia-Africa matryoshka: Summitry, Geopolitics and Resources

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Introduction

On 24 October Russia will host the first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi. This is some 26 years after Japan launched its TICAD process in 1993, 20 years since China's FOCAC and 11 years since the first India-Africa Forum Summit. The meeting will be the culmination of a series of outreach initiatives with Africa in 2019, and will also be symbolic in that a major summit recognises the growing significance for Russia of high-level ties with the African continent.

There is something to be said about summitry. The 21st century has seen a proliferation of them. From the annual summits of informal clubs such as the G7, the G20 and BRICS, and regional bodies around the world to the AU's bi-annual summits and then the big tri-annual (or so) pageants bringing together one country (usually) and a host of others from one continent. These latter events carry great political symbolism, they provide opportunities for business deals, but they also show to the rest of the world the influence and partnerships of the initiating country vis-à-vis its guests. After all, in the case of China, its FOCAC meetings, even though they alternate between an African host and itself often have close to a full house of African leaders attend them.

Russia has had a long association with the continent, especially during the Cold War when it was part of the Soviet Union, and an ardent supporter of many national-liberation struggles. As the Soviet Union, it also considered Africa as a stage for the rivalry between itself and the US. Each side 'needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies, and the elites of the newly independent states proved fertile ground for their competition'.¹ However, the end of the USSR saw Russia, its successor state and riven with problems at home, turn away from its erstwhile allies in the Africa in the 1990s and focus primarily on Europe and the West. This began changing slowly in the early years of the 21st century, but the significant break with the West came after Russia violated international law and annexed a part of Ukraine, Crimea, in 2014 and backed rebels in Ukraine's east, through sending of military personnel (albeit without insignia) and arms to fuel the conflict. Economic sanctions from the EU and the US followed soon after.²

By most indicators Russia has a much smaller footprint in Africa in terms of scale than most of the other major external actors on the continent. It has lacked the instruments and the resources of countries such as China, Japan, the EU and the US. The holding of the first summit is Russia's attempt to highlight to Africa the continent's political importance, and to provide a framework for its cooperation. The summit has been in the works for some time, and the initiative cannot be divorced from Russia's own diplomatic, commercial, and military attempts to assert its global role in the face of ongoing sanctions by the West and attempts to sideline it.

Three imperatives bear mentioning: Russia's desire to create a favourable environment externally for its economy to grow and to be more competitive; to consolidate Russia as a centre of global influence, which requires it to be present in all geographies and to be taken seriously; and to build up its economic relations so as to break out of the Western economic stranglehold of sanctions.³

This paper analyses Russia's re-engagement with the continent in the context of the evolution of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, arguing that its turn to Africa is part of a multi-

¹ Westad OA (2007). *The Global Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

² In many ways Russia's reengagement with Africa was similar to the PRC, which was very Western focused from 1980 onwards until the shock of the Western response to Tiananmen Square in 1989. It was on that basis that in the late 1990s China rediscovered Africa as a diplomatic bulwark which was not interested about imposing sanctions.

³ Gvosdev NK and C Marsh (2014). *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors and Sectors*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQPress.

vector approach that was articulated as early as 20 years ago. Russia has been a vocal advocate of a multipolar international system, as opposed to one dominated by the US. Its foreign policy pursuits have been characterised by the objective of establishing diverse partnerships aimed at bolstering its position vis-à-vis the West (BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Eurasian Economic Union); however, this approach received greater impetus after the imposition of Western sanctions in response to its annexation of Crimea. Thus greater attention to Africa (and specifically sub-Saharan Africa, as Russia has maintained strong ties with North Africa through most of the post-Cold War period), has been driven by both geopolitics and economics.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the drivers of recent Russian foreign policy, followed by a focus on the evolution of its Africa engagement and an analysis of the different sectors that have formed the basis of this re-engagement. The paper includes a brief overview of relations with South Africa, probably the most significant country in Russia's Africa engagement in sub-Saharan Africa, not so much because of commercial relations but because of South Africa's important regional and global role and its presence in many international forums. The last section focuses on what Africa could expect from Russia and how the continent as a whole should engage with Russia in the future.

THE RUSSIA-AFRICA SUMMIT AT SOCHI

In June 2019 Russia hosted the Russia-Africa Economic Summit, followed in early July by the Russia-Africa Inter-Parliamentary Forum. There were also two security-related conferences in June: the Ufa Security Conference hosted by the Russian Security Council and the International Military-Technical Forum Army-2019 organised by the Russian Defence Ministry, which played host to a number of African leaders.

The Russia-Africa Economic Forum is being held on 23-24 October. There will also be an exhibition of Russian—African partners, which will focus on economics, science, ecology, and culture. The exhibitors will present projects and technologies in the mining and chemical industries, engineering, energy, agriculture, transport, healthcare, and the military-industrial complex related to investment and export potential.

The discussions during the economic forum include potential collaboration between Russia and Africa, contribution of nuclear technologies in the Development of Africa, humanitarian cooperation, investing in Africa, energy for development and cooperation, doing business in Africa, oil and gas and agriculture.

What comes out of the forum will be significant to watch as most African countries are focusing on the potential economic benefits of this engagement, not just the political dimensions.

The summit will be co-chaired by President Putin and President Sisi of Egypt as chair of the African Union. The AU Commission has not been involved in the preparations for the summit, and much of the engagement with African states has occurred in Moscow with the African diplomatic community.

The programme for the Summit has not been released yet.

Russia is also preparing a report on Russia-Africa: A common vision for 2030, which will be presented at Sochi and form the basis of future discussions.

Some 35 heads of state are confirmed, including South Africa's president. The summit is intended to become a regular event, taking place every 3 to 5 years.

Among other initiatives, the Kremlin is also planning to sign a memorandum of cooperation between the African Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, which has been one of President Putin's key priorities in Eurasia.

Re-establishing influence: Russian foreign policy in 21st century

It was Yevgeny Primakov, first as foreign minister and later as prime minister, who initiated the shift away from the US in the late 1990s. This was accelerated under President Putin. It was also Primakov who called for Russia to adopt a multi-vector foreign policy considering Russia as a Eurasian power that would build a multipolar world rather than one where it was subservient to the US. Multipolarity remains a Russian foreign policy priority and its involvement and leadership in groupings such as the BRICS, SCO and EEU are part of this strategy, which has accelerated especially in the last few years.

It was perhaps President Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he rebuked the US for its unilateralism and regretted the fall of the Soviet Union, calling it the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, that was a turning point in Russia's multi-vector diplomacy.⁴ In the ensuing period, Russia flexed its muscles further, first in Georgia in 2008 where it intervened and occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia,⁵ cleaving them away from Georgia, and then more directly six years later when it annexed Crimea from Ukraine and fuelled the conflict in its eastern regions. The latter provided the next tipping point in its relations with the West. Russia was uninvited from the G8, and the US and Europe introduced sanctions against it.

Although post-Soviet foreign policy was shorn of its ideology and became more interest-driven, Russia's self-assessment of itself as a great power never disappeared – apart perhaps for a brief period during the Yeltsin years when the public narrative around this had diminished. Where Russia expected respect and recognition of equality with the US and Europe, the West was perceived to make inroads into its immediate zone of influence via promises of NATO or EU membership to former Warsaw Pact and Soviet states. Russia opposed the 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space, first experienced in Georgia in 2003, seeing them as part of the West's attempt to erode its own security. Wars in Georgia and Ukraine/Crimea were part of Russia's response to this encroachment, while it also resonated with the narrative of supporting and defending Russian-speaking communities that now fell outside of the Russian Federation.

In his first speech to the Federal Assembly in 2012, after he was re-elected president (for a third, albeit non-consecutive term), Putin emphasised 'geopolitical relevance', which included Russia's ability to generate 'demand among our neighbours and partners [...] This applies to our economy, culture,

⁴ Putin, V. Speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, Internet: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

⁵ This conflict harks back to the early 1990s soon after the end of the Soviet Union and the independence of Georgia and the other soviet republics that had made up the USSR. Russia has not formally annexed these territories but they are de facto under Russian control. The reason given for the 2008 invasion was to protect Russian citizens living in Georgia.

science and education, as well as to our diplomacy, particularly our ability to mobilise collective actions at the international level.⁶ In December of that year, foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated that 'Russia simply cannot exist as a subordinate country of a world leader'.⁷

The military were a key part of the concept of geopolitical relevance, which 'guarantees Russia's security and independence'. For Lukyanov, editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, this meant 'the ability to build different relations with different centres of power in a multipolar world, offering them what they need'.⁸ For the Russian elite, three elements that defined the country's pre-eminence were its relative 'co-equality' with the US in nuclear weapons; its energy predominance in the world; and its huge territory.⁹

While the Russia of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s was willing to acquiesce to US and Western dominance,¹⁰ Putin's Russia was not. As the US and NATO sought to expand into the former Soviet space in the early 2000s, so the seeds of the growing tensions began to manifest themselves. This was Russia's backyard and its growing assertiveness from the mid-2000s was also a response to this 'intrusion'.¹¹ Russia's strongly held belief is that of a great power that should be afforded the requisite acknowledgement and respect. Furthermore, while Russia is no longer in a G2 dance with the US as it was during the Cold War, it can take advantage of the opportunity presented by the growing rivalry between the US and China, to play the role of the 'balancer'.¹² The 'countervailing tactic' to this Western encroachment is to go 'beyond the "natural" area of Russian activism [...] Russia [...] refuses to accept the rank of a middle power with merely a regional role. It sees itself as a global actor, playing in the big leagues'.¹³

Over the last two decades Russia has sought to create or become a member of alternative groupings that address some of its key concerns, help to build alliances and project its power and prestige. These include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which was established in 2001 and was a Beijing initiative after 9/11. Members included China, Russia and other former Soviet states. The SCO became a site for military cooperation on terrorism and also to an extent competition economically over influence in the Central Asian states. Competition and cooperation are also part of the newer initiatives of China and Russia in that space, viz., China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union. The BRICS initiative also had its origins in Russia-China cooperation and the first summit in Yekaterinberg in 2009 actually followed on the previous warming of ties between the two. Of all the BRICS Russia sees the grouping as the key counterpoint to the West, while to varying

⁶ Putin V, Address to the Federal Assembly, 12 December 2012, Internet:

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>

⁷ Lavrov S, Russia in the 21st century World of Power, 27 December 2012, Internet:

<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russia-in-the-21st-Century-World-of-Power-15809>

⁸ Lukyanov F (2012), 'Putin outlines his moral vision for modern Russia', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 23 December 2012 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Putin-outlines-his-moral-vision-for-modern-Russia-15798> [accessed 16 April 2013]

⁹ Brzezinski Z, Putin's choice in Global powers in 21st century, 2008. Cambridge, MIT Press pp.194-95

¹⁰ The exception was the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1998.

¹¹ Trenin D (2012). Post-imperium: A Eurasian Story. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. p. 210. Kindle version

¹² Karaganov S (2013), The map of the world: Geopolitics stages a comeback. *Russia in Global Affairs* 19 May 2013 <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/The-Map-of-the-World-Geopolitics-Stages-a-Comeback-15974> [accessed 16 April 2013]

¹³ Trenin D (2012), Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story, p.210. (Kindle version)

degrees the other BRICS do not believe the grouping should adopt an explicit anti-Western position.¹⁴ It is for this reason that Russia has diversified its mechanisms to achieve its foreign policy objectives and to increase its influence. The Greater Eurasian Partnership, which Putin has pushed since after the Crimean annexation is one such mechanism.¹⁵

Russia in Africa – post-Soviet re-engagement

Gvosdev and Marsh analyse Russian foreign policy through the concept of vectors: the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Western/Atlantic, Europe, China and non-Western vectors. The importance of the non-Western vector arises from the lack of acceptance by the West of Russia as a full member, and thus its 'interests lie in helping to shape a coalition of rising non-Western powers in the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and Latin America to counterbalance both the Euro-Atlantic West and an emerging China'.¹⁶ This latter vector is made up of a number of sub-vectors. The southern vector comprises Africa and Latin America and in contrast to the other vectors is the least developed in Russia's foreign policy.¹⁷ This has begun to change in the last few years, as Russia deepened its engagement in Latin America, especially in Venezuela,¹⁸ and in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nevertheless, the rising importance of Africa cannot compete in priorities with other regions more proximate to Russia. Russia's most recent Foreign Policy Concept, published in 2016, mentions Africa for the first time in clause 99 of 108. Analysts and Africans could be excused for thinking that Africa was a minor blip on the horizon. Russia's immediate neighbourhood, near abroad, Europe, China, Central Asia and the Middle East, and of course the US are more important. However, in both Latin America and in Africa Russia has built up its influence and become a player without too much cost.

At the same time, it is evident that relations with North Africa have always had a much deeper political significance for Russia and remain so to this day. While Africans want external actors to engage the continent holistically, it is nevertheless true that different imperatives drive engagement in North Africa to those of sub-Saharan Africa. The fact is that North Africa, bordering as it does on the Mediterranean, is considered by Russia as part of its broader Eurasian neighbourhood.¹⁹

The retreat from Africa began under Mikhail Gorbachev, who had described the USSR's engagement there as an 'unacceptable drain on Soviet resources'.²⁰ After the end of the Cold War, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia largely withdrew from Africa. President Yeltsin ended Soviet

¹⁴ See Salzman RS (2019). *Russia, BRICS and the Disruption of Global Order*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

¹⁵ Salzman. See also Köstem S, *Russia's Search for a Greater Eurasia: Origins, Promises, and Prospects*, Kennan Cable no. 40, 26 February 2019. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-40-russias-search-for-greater-eurasia-origins-promises-and-prospects> [Accessed 20 October 2019]

¹⁶ Gvosdev NK and C Marsh (2014), *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors*, loc 1471 Kindle

¹⁷ Gvosdev & Marsh, loc. 9976.

¹⁸ For example, Rosneft has a joint venture with Venezuela's PDVSA, and set up a joint oil service enterprise in 2016. <https://tass.com/economy/883378> Since 2014 Rosneft has provided some \$7bn in the form of prepayments for crude deliveries, while the government has supported a credit line and a \$3bn sovereign loan that it agreed to restructure in 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/d0645804-b7a3-11e9-96bd-8e884d3ea203>

¹⁹ Trenin D (2018). *What is Russia up to in the Middle East?* Cambridge: Polity. p.144.

²⁰ Andrew and Mitrokhin, 471 cited in Gvosdev & Marsh

foreign aid programmes to Africa and African states were asked to repay outstanding loans to a Russia struggling to emerge from the Soviet economic system. Embassies were also closed down.²¹

Russia began to return to Africa with Putin's first visit to the continent in 2006. It coincided with Russia's settling of its IMF debt after the financial crisis of the late 1990s, and regaining of 'financial sovereignty'. By 2007 Russia had forgiven some \$20bn debt that African states had incurred during the Cold War.²² In 2006, Putin appointed the head of the Institute for African Studies, Alexei Vasiliev as his special envoy for liaison with African leaders.²³ Vasiliev was succeeded in March 2011 by Mikhail Margelov who became special presidential representative for cooperation with African countries. (He had previously been Special Representative of the President on Sudan – from December 2008 to March 2011.) In November 2014 Putin appointed Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov as special presidential representative for the Middle East and Africa.²⁴

For most of this time re-engagement with the continent has largely been driven by ministries other than foreign affairs, in particular the ministry of natural resources, which chaired the bilateral commissions between Russia and a number of African countries, including South Africa. This reflected Russia's interests in commercial ties especially in the area of extractives, where both its private and state-owned companies have become active. However, this has changed more recently, as Africa became more important in Russia's broader geopolitical interests, especially after 2014. Foreign minister Lavrov has undertaken a number of trips to Africa, the most recent being in 2018. On that trip Lavrov visited Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, promoting three pillars:²⁵

- Revival or increase in military and security cooperation;
- Opening of these countries to Russian investment; and
- Relaunching cultural and university exchanges.

The Kremlin has also assumed a strong role, with the organisation of the summit residing with President Putin's adviser, Anton Kobayakov, out of whose office all the invitations to the summit were issued.

²¹ Gvosdev & Marsh, loc. 10045

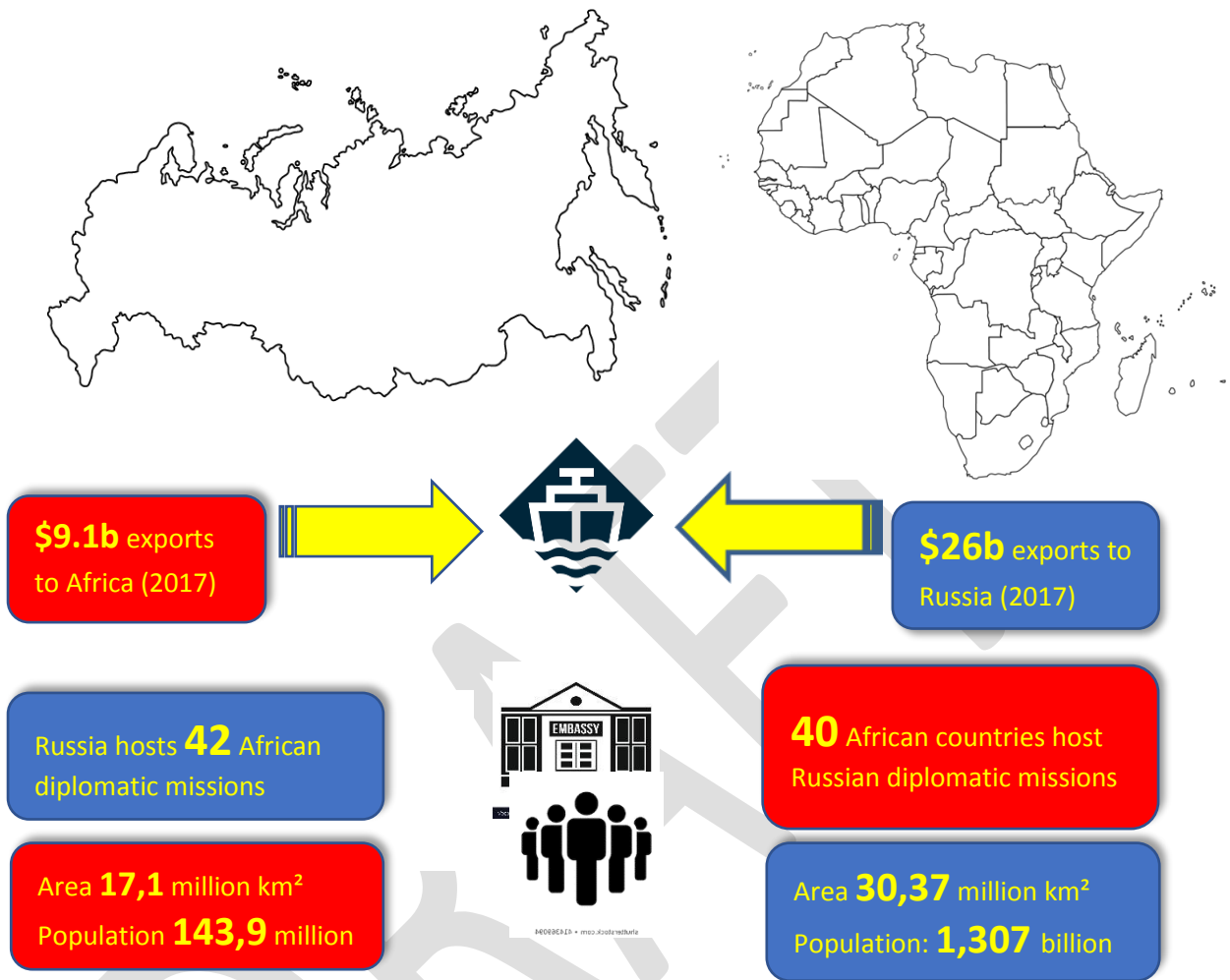
²² Gvosdev & Marsh, loc. 10090.

²³ Fedotov and Sidorova, Africa and Russia: Prospects for Cooperation, International Affairs 4, 2010, p.71.

²⁴ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46911>

²⁵ Kalika A (2019), Russia's "Great Return" to Africa?, Russi.Nei.Visions 114, IFRI, p.10.

FIGURE 1: A SNAPSHOT OF RUSSIA-AFRICA RELATIONS TODAY



Its actions in Africa since 2006 have seen a slow incremental growth in engagement, building on its arms trade from the Cold War, and the relations it had cultivated with African elites, many of whom had studied in Moscow or elsewhere in the countries of the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War. Russia's interests in Africa have also been driven by its policy of Russian 'national champions'²⁶ and the search for new natural resources and markets. In comparison to other (re)emerging powers Russia however remained a small economic and political actor overall. Moreover, unlike China, the Russian narrative on its engagement with Africa has not emphasised the development dimension, which has been a core component of the Chinese narrative.

When China began ramping up its interactions with Africa it was partly driven by the fact that the continent was still unsaturated commercially, which allowed China's companies to expand outside China while learning to compete. The concept of Africa as the next frontier of growth was further strengthened by the 'Africa Rising' narrative of the mid-2000s. For Russia, more than a decade later

²⁶ This policy was designed to make Russian companies competitive in international markets, including securing leverage for Russia economically and politically. See Peeter Vahtra, *Expansion or Exodus? – The new leaders among the Russian TNCs*, Electronic Publications of Pan-European Institute 13/2007.

Africa still provides such opportunities to diversify its economic partners, to access rich natural resources through its state-owned companies, and to insert itself as a player in volatile theatres.

Russia's desire to play a more influential role in Africa has not gone unnoticed in the US where former National Security Advisor John Bolton's speech in December 2018, outlining the Trump administration's Africa strategy, singled out China and Russia as the continent's puppeteers. Bolton's words have raised the spectre of a more intense fight for power and influence in Africa among the major powers, reminiscent of the 19th century scramble. They also illustrate the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the US, and Russia and China, where Africa becomes yet another arena for their global contestation.

At the same time, the relations between China and Russia have deepened, albeit it remains 'a partnership of convenience driven by concrete priorities and interests'²⁷ and an asymmetrical one where China is the more dominant partner. How that may evolve in the African arena has yet to become clear. In an article in Russian by Olga Kulkova posted by the Valdai Club in August this year, the author provides an indication of how Russia sees its relations with China in Africa:²⁸

Russia's politics in Africa can be called unique. Without a doubt, it strongly differs from Chinese or American politics. Russia strives towards genuinely friendly relations with African countries, bases its offers on the needs of its partners and shares their values, such as defence of governmental sovereignty and principle of non-interference. Russia was never one of Africa's colonisers and the USSR always advocated for decolonisation. This humanistic approach towards cooperation with Africans, based on mutual benefit, is also conducted by our country today. [...]

Russia does not have the same financial and economic opportunities to realise its politics on the continent as China. Russia is not attempting to establish military bases in Africa, which are analogous to ones possessed by the USA. Our country does not put forward political demands to partners, which would be a precondition for support and cooperation (unlike Western countries, which often accompany their help to African countries with demands on promoting democracy, liberal and market values, without taking into account the specifics of country-partners.

If Russia's re-engagement with Africa is part of its self-identification as a global power that needs to ensure that its presence and influence are felt on all continents, Africa represents fertile ground for achieving this aim. Its history, as varied as support for liberation movements to economic and military assistance to struggling independent states still resonates in parts of the continent.

In the section below, we examine a number of spheres where the Russia-Africa relationship plays out. These are commercial relations; the arms trade and military cooperation; engagement in African conflicts; and public diplomacy.

²⁷ Lo B (2017). *A Wary Embrace: What the China-Russia relationship means for the world*. Penguin Books. p.xiv.

²⁸ Kulkova O, *Russia-Africa Summit – demonstration of serious intentions and goodwill*, 7 August 2019 <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/sammit-rossiya-afrika-v-sochi/> (article in Russian)

Commercial relations

Russia cannot compete with the US, EU or China in terms of the sheer size and diversity of their respective economies, but Moscow has focused rather on lucrative niche markets, especially in nuclear power, energy and weaponry in Africa. For Russian companies and the state Africa presented a business proposition, and its gradual engagement in the post-Soviet period was driven by economic pragmatism, rather than ideology or purely political motives.²⁹ This narrower focus has advantages for Moscow, allowing for a concentration of limited resources on specific goals unlike other great powers whose superior capacities often brings with them broader exposure to risks.

Doing the deals

Much of Russia's investment into Africa has historically been resource-seeking, which enabled Russian companies to extend their resource base by acquiring exploration and production licenses in oil-rich countries and in countries like South Africa targeting producers of strategic minerals.³⁰ For example, President Medvedev's visit to Africa in 2009 when he visited Egypt, Nigeria, Angola and Namibia, included a delegation of some 400 Russian business people and the signing of a number of cooperation agreements in the field of energy. Many of Russia's big companies (both state and private) established a presence in Africa – from Alrosa and Renova to Rusal, Rosneft and Gazprom.

Investments have not been limited to extractives and many Russian companies sought to increase their downstream presence in the energy sector and value-added production activities in the metals sector.³¹

These investment or joint ventures include both state and private actors, some of which have political links to the Kremlin.

Russia has secured a number of concessions in oil and gas fields in Algeria via Gazprom and Lukoil, and in west Africa where the plan is to build a pipeline from Nigeria to Algeria to southern European markets. Not much progress has been made in this regard.³² It has also acquired stakes in different minerals such as bauxite, chrome, cobalt, titanium, and uranium among others. In fact, there are more than 30 Russian companies in the uranium sector in Africa and a uranium mine in Sudan.³³ There are also investments in hydropower plants in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, and Zambia. Deals in the extractives are often linked to security agreements. In August 2019 Mozambique signed an energy and security agreement with Russia, which includes cooperation between the two countries on

²⁹ See Tepavcevic S, The motives of Russian state-owned companies for outward foreign direct investment, *Transnational Corporations*, vol.23. no.1.

³⁰ See Peeter Vahtra, *Expansion or Exodus? – The new leaders among the Russian TNCs*, Electronic Publications of Pan-European Institute 13/2007, p. 13.

Kalotay Kalman and Sulstanova Astrit (undated), 'Modelling Russian outward FDI', UNCTAD, p.13.

http://www.researchgate.net/publication/222396251_Modelling_Russian_outward_FDI/file/5046351a86cca4d510.pdf

³¹ Vahtra, p. 14.

³² 'A Tran Saharan gas pipeline running from Nigeria to Algeria is under consideration. The objective is to make Nigerian piped gas available to Europe.'. Source: <https://www.nnpcgroup.com/Investor-Relations/Pages/Nigeria-Gas.aspx>

³³ Besenyo J, 'The Africa Policy of Russia', in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31:1 (2019), 132-153, p. 137.

information protection and a deal with Rosneft. In 2017 Mozambique had signed a debt swap agreement with Moscow and in 2018, Russia military advisers were sent to the country.³⁴

As important, and something which has more often been associated with China, Russia is also interested in investing in infrastructure. In November 2018 an MoU was signed between the Russian Export Centre and Russian Railways and Afreximbank to explore investment opportunities.³⁵ Other areas of cooperation between the Bank and the Russia Export Centre are the provision of fertiliser to Zambia and Zimbabwe, the implementation of mining projects with value-added processing capacity in Sierra Leone, participation in Africa's rail infrastructure and the establishment of petrochemical plants in Angola and Nigeria.³⁶

Russia hosted the annual meeting of the Afreximbank in St Petersburg in June 2019, only the second time this meeting was held outside Africa, with the previous one being held in Beijing in 2012. At the opening, Prime Minister Medvedev highlighted that Russia was 'promoting humanitarian ties, both as part of international assistance to Africa's comprehensive development and on a bilateral basis.'³⁷ This is important, as Russia traditionally has not emphasised development, something which China made the centrepiece of its engagement with the continent.

This framing of Russian political, commercial and developmental orientation is manifested in a number of ways. For instance, in late 2018 the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Russia signed a five-year MoU to create a unified regional platform to share with potential Russian businesses information on investment opportunities in SADC.³⁸ The MoU envisages strengthening ties in a broad range of fields, because, as Lavrov said, 'Russia is not only committed to long-term cooperation but also ready for large-scale investments in the African markets.... Equally important is African businesspeople who are looking to work on the Russian market.'³⁹

The commercial dimensions of its new approach to the continent are also evident in its promotion of state champions in Africa. It is especially the case in the field of nuclear energy that Russia has recognised its competitive advantage. Rosatom is the world's leading supplier of nuclear reactors.⁴⁰ In total Russia has been in negotiations with some 16 African countries on nuclear projects. In 2014 South Africa and Rosatom signed an Intergovernmental Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation in Nuclear Energy and Industry.⁴¹ Rosatom established an Africa office in South Africa in

³⁴ <https://www.fin24.com/Economy/mozambique-russia-sign-energy-security-deals-20190822>

³⁵ See <https://afreximbank.com/afreximbank-targets-railway-development-in-mou-with-russian-railways-and-russian-export-center/>

³⁶ <https://www.afreximbank.com/russia-and-africa-should-harness-resources-for-greater-economic-growth-medvedev-tells-afreximbank-shareholders/>

³⁷ <https://www.afreximbank.com/russia-and-africa-should-harness-resources-for-greater-economic-growth-medvedev-tells-afreximbank-shareholders/>

³⁸ Southern African Development Community. 'SADC, Russia sign MoU on Basic Principles of Relations and Cooperation'. 24 October 2018. Internet: <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/sadc-russia-sign-mou-basic-principles-relations-and-cooperation/>

³⁹ <https://southerntimesafrica.com/site/news/sadc-russia-to-sign-mou-at-investment-forum>

⁴⁰ Schepers N, Russia's nuclear energy exports: Status, prospects and implications. Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers, no.61, February 2019.

⁴¹ South African Department of Energy. Media release: Russia and South Africa sign Agreement on Strategic Partnership in Nuclear Energy. 22 September 2014. Internet: <http://www.energy.gov.za/files/media/pr/2014/MediaRelease-Russia-and-SA-sign-agreement-on-Strategic-Partnership-in-Nuclear-Energy-22September-2014.pdf>

2012. Its objective was to identify partners and suppliers capable of providing quality services and products to Rosatom projects across the continent.⁴²

In October 2017 an agreement was signed with Nigeria, in December with Sudan and with Congo-Brazzaville in 2018. Kenya and Russia have an MoU for cooperation in the field of peaceful use of nuclear energy.⁴³ With Rwanda the agreement with Rosatom included a focus on applied research including medicine, agriculture.⁴⁴ In the case of Egypt, Rosatom has signed a full contract undertaking also 85% of the financing of its four reactors. An advantage of the arrangement is that Russia also takes back spent nuclear fuel.⁴⁵ Part of Russia's nuclear energy strategy in Africa is to establish centres of nuclear science and technology. Such agreements were signed with Nigeria and Zambia in 2016.⁴⁶ South Africa's decision not to pursue a nuclear project was a huge disappointment to the Russians, as they were looking to this project to be their flagship in Africa.⁴⁷

Finally, there is also a geo-economic dimension to some of Russia's engagement with Africa (specifically North Africa). Apart from its own Eurasian Economic Union, which it has sought to integrate with China's own Belt and Road (see the EEU-BRICS meeting in Ufa in 2015), Russia also established an industrial zone in the Suez Canal Economic Zone in Egypt to serve as a gateway for Russian exports to Africa.⁴⁸ This agreement came into force earlier in 2019.⁴⁹

Trading

Russia's trade with Africa over the last decade has mushroomed (admittedly off a low base). According to UN Comtrade data, trade between Russia and Africa grew by 185% over the last eight years.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Russia's trade in 2018 was significantly behind the EU, China, India and the US (in that order) as the table below shows:

⁴² Engineering News. 'Russian Nuclear Group Opens Office in South Africa'. 18 July 2012. Internet:

<https://m.engineeringnews.co.za/article/russian-nuclear-group-opens-office-in-south-africa-2012-07-18>

⁴³ International Institute for Strategic Studies. 'Russian Incentives for Nuclear Hopefuls in Africa'. 30 April 2018.

Internet: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/04/russia-nuclear-africa>

⁴⁴ Engineering News. 'Russian Nuclear Group Further Develops Cooperation with Africa', 18 July 2018. Internet:

<http://m.engineeringnews.co.za/article/nuclear-group-rosatom-further-develops-cooperation-with-africa-2018-07-06>

⁴⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies *ibid*

⁴⁶ <http://www.nuclearafrica.co.za/presentations/conference2017/Viktor%20Polikarpov%20-%20Rosatom.pdf>

⁴⁷ Confidential interview, Pretoria, South Africa, October 2019.

⁴⁸ Trenin D, What is Russia up to in the Middle East? P. 131.

⁴⁹ The project will be undertaken in three phases. The area of the industrial zone is about 5.25 million square meters. The first phase involves 1 million square meters and will be carried out by a Russian developer. This phase will create 7,300 jobs in construction. The second phase will develop 1.6 million square meters and will be finished by 2022, creating 10,000 jobs, while the third phase will develop 2.65 million square meters and generate 17,000 jobs. The three phases are expected to be finished by 2031, when Russian companies will start operations, according to a statement put out by the Suez Canal Economic Zone.

<https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/64142/Establishing-Russian-Industrial-Zone-in-Egypt-comes-into-force>

⁵⁰ <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>

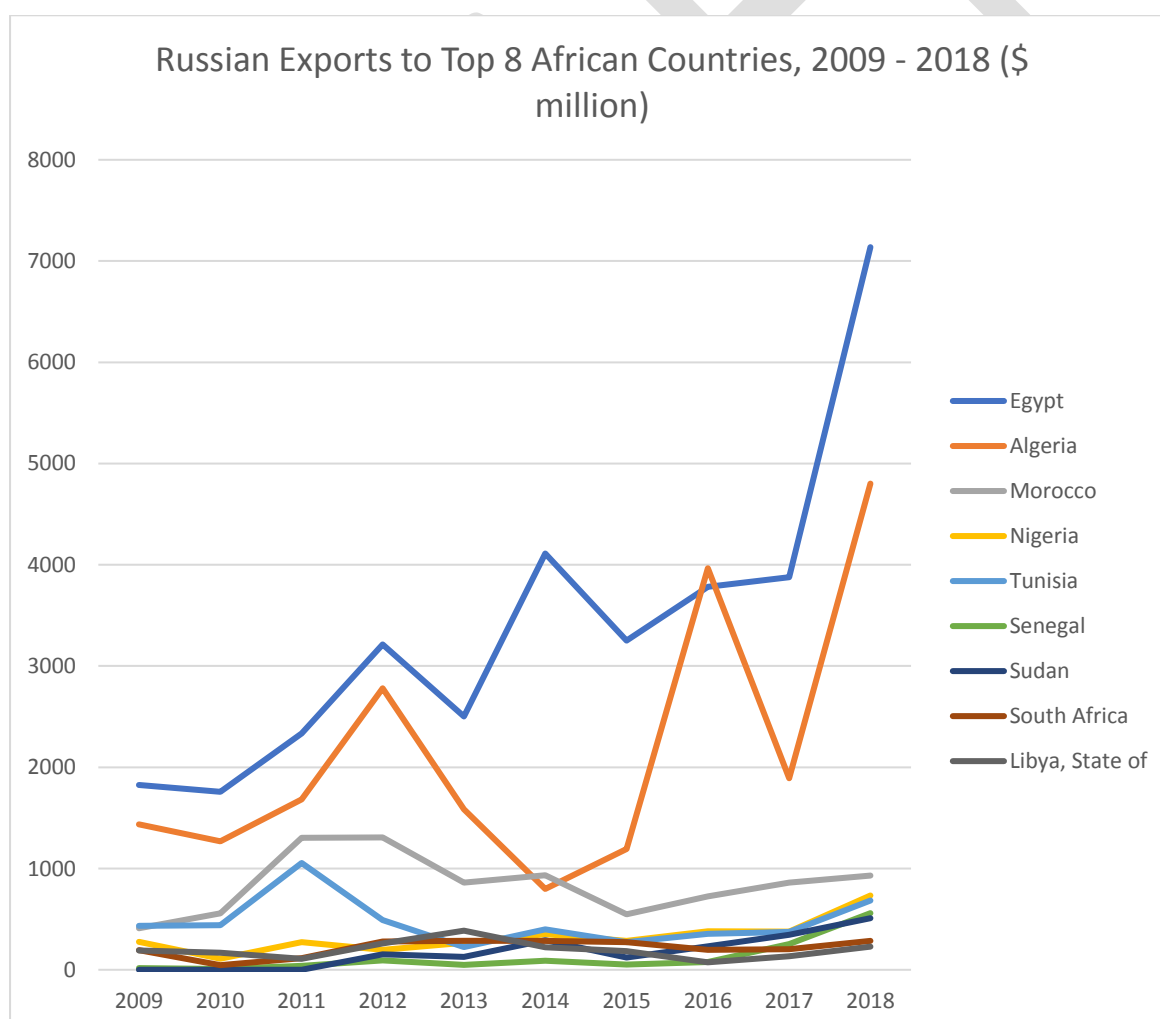
TABLE 1: TOTAL IMPORTS FROM AND EXPORTS TO AFRICA BY THE BRIC COUNTRIES, THE US, JAPAN AND THE EU (2018, \$BN)

Country	Imports	Exports	Total Trade
Brazil	6,61	8,16	14,76
Russian Federation	2,94	17,48	20,41
India	41,51	26,95	68,46
China	99,03	104,96	203,99
United States of America	36,87	26,04	62,91
Japan	8,96	8,11	17,07
EU28	180,11	176,96	357,07

Source: www.trademap.org, accessed 27 September 2019.

Russia's eight biggest export destinations in Africa in 2018 were, in descending order, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Sudan and South Africa, although exports to all 54 African countries accounted for just 3.89% of Russia's global exports in 2018.⁵¹

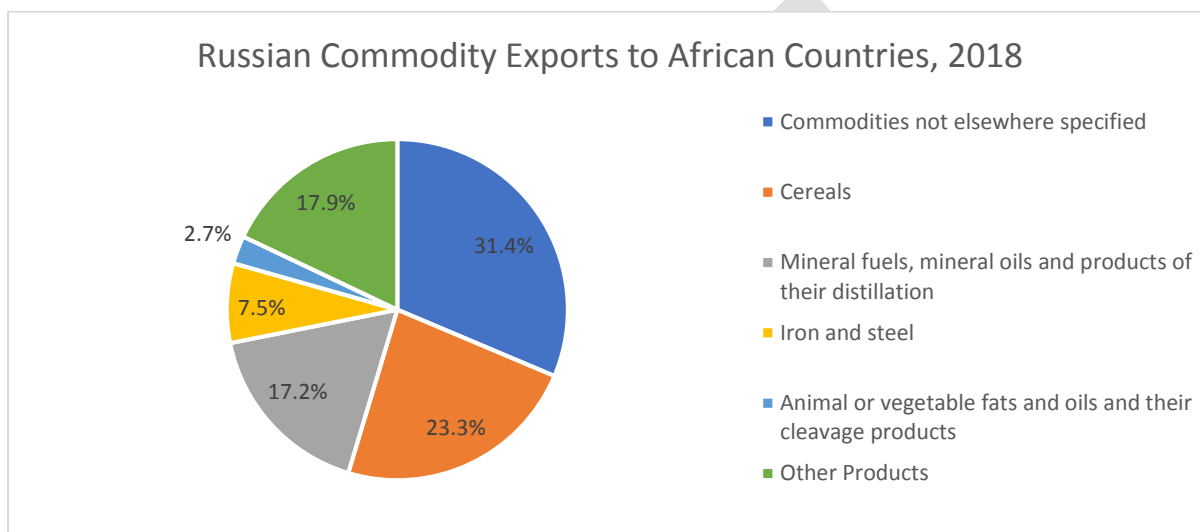
CHART 1: RUSSIAN EXPORTS TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES, 2009-18



⁵¹ www.trademap.org

Russia’s exports to African countries are dominated by a handful of commodities. Moscow’s top five exports to African markets account for nearly 80% of its total exports. Its biggest export category, commodities not elsewhere specified, typically denote trade in goods such as arms, ammunition and gold, and accounts for 31.4% of total exports to African countries. The other four top exports include cereals (23.3%), mineral fuels (17.2%), iron and steel (7.5%), and to a lesser extent animal and vegetable products (2.7%). The balance of Russian exports to African markets (17.9%) are made up of all other commodities.

CHART 2: RUSSIAN COMMODITIES TO AFRICA

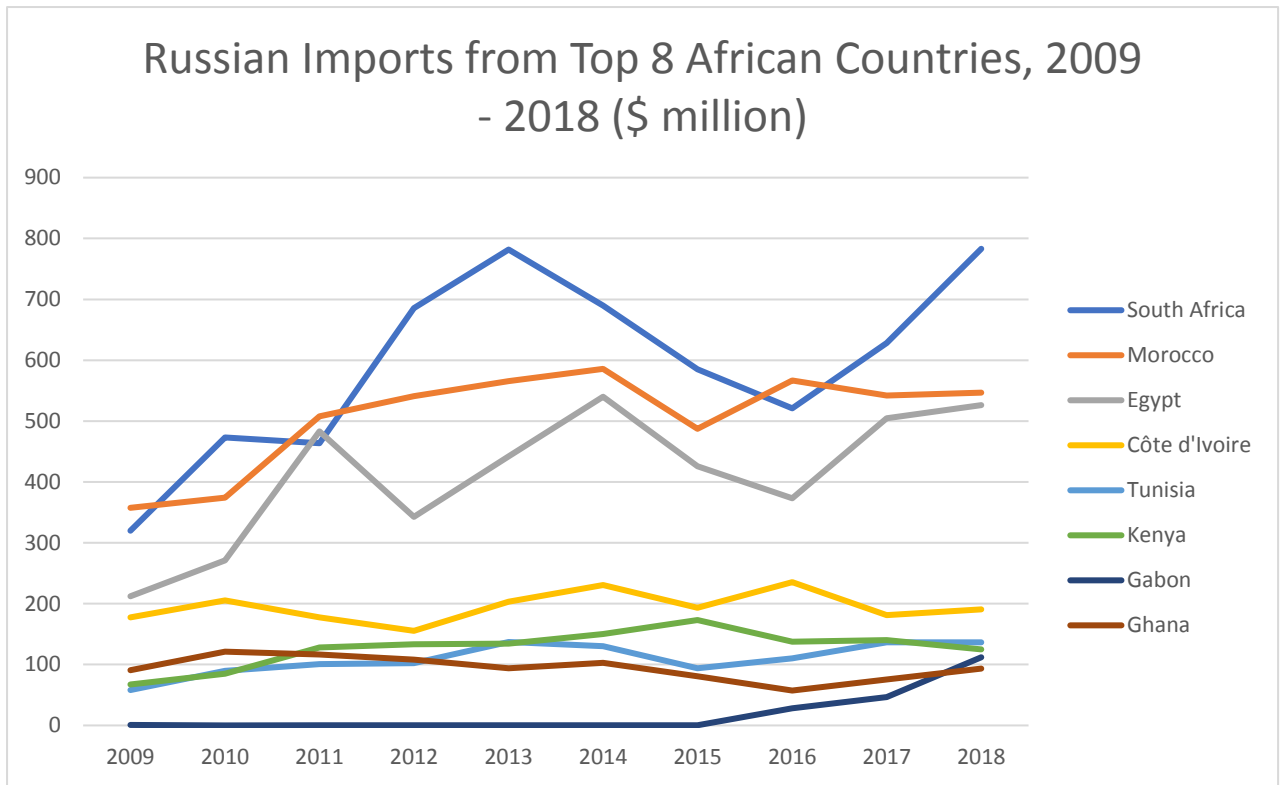


In terms of imports in 2018, the top eight source countries for Russia were, in descending order, South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Côte d’Ivoire, Tunisia, Kenya, Gabon and Ghana, just 1.23% of Moscow’s global imports.⁵²

South Africa has been the largest source of Russian imports for most of the last ten years, shipping primarily agricultural goods (fruit and nuts, vegetables and wine). This period has also seen a significant rise in these imports from South Africa, more so than from other African countries, most of which have remained at similar levels. It is impossible to attribute this increase in trade to Russia and South Africa’s participation in the BRICS, but it is equally difficult to argue that increased economic cooperation within the BRICS is the result of policy alignment, increased business-to-business meetings.

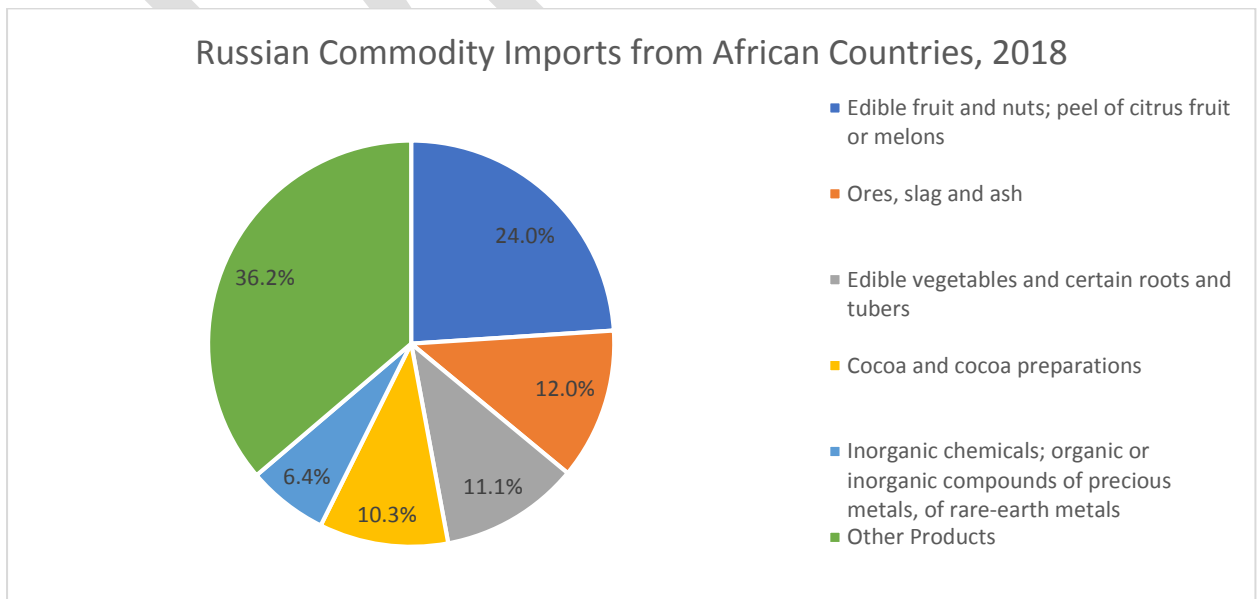
⁵² www.trademap.org

CHART 3: RUSSIAN IMPORTS FROM AFRICA



Russia's imports from African countries are dominated by agricultural goods and natural resources. Agricultural goods are dominated by imports of fruits and nuts (24% of imports), vegetables (11.1%) and cocoa (10.3%). Among its top five imports natural resources such as ores, slag and ash (12%) and chemicals (6.4%) dominates. The balance of Russia's imports 36,2%) accounts for all other commodities, including tobacco, clothing, coffee and tea, vehicles and electrical machinery, among others.

CHART 4: AFRICAN COMMODITIES TO RUSSIA

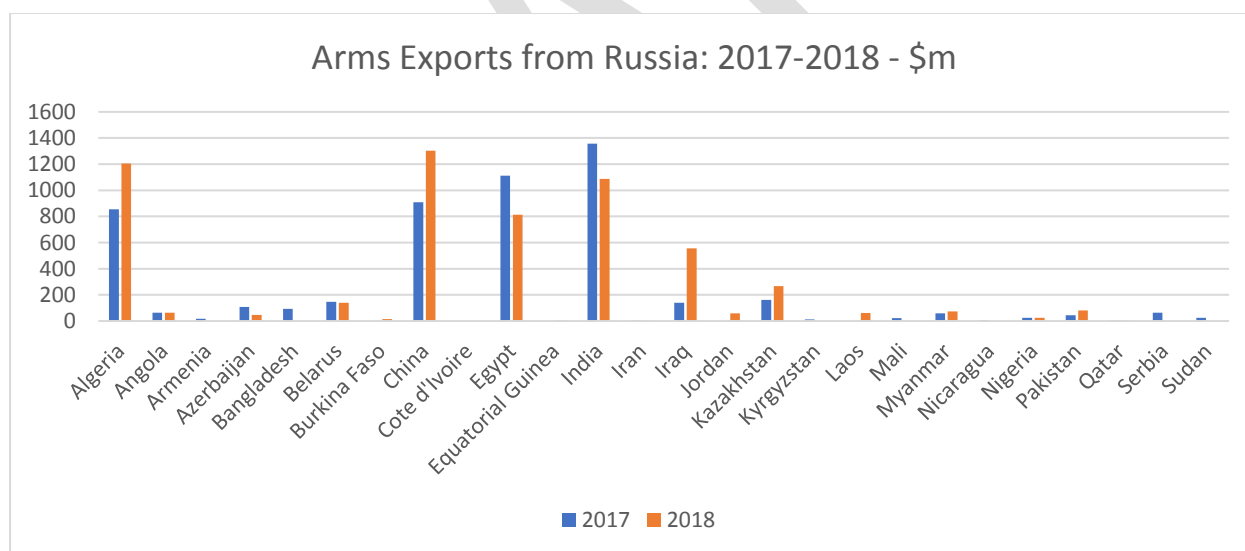


Arms and military ties

During the Soviet era the arms trade was an important aspect of its relations with African states. Decline followed in the 1990s; yet Russia remained the largest exporter to sub-Saharan Africa during that period (24% of all deliveries).⁵³ In fact, between 2000 and 2009 deliveries increased considerably compared to the previous decade.

According to the 2018 annual report of The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia became the world's second-largest arms producer, overtaking the UK, with \$37.7 billion, up 8.5% year-on-year (but still well behind the US at \$222.6 billion). Some 13% of all Russian arms are sold to Africa.⁵⁴ Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and Sudan are its most significant arms clients.⁵⁵ Between 2014 and 2018 Africa accounted for 17% of Russian arms exports. Key destinations in 2017-18 were Algeria, Egypt, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Sudan.

CHART 5: ARMS TRANSFERS TIVs⁵⁶



Source: <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods/>

⁵³ Holtom P, 'Russia', in Skons E and O Ismail (eds), Security Activities of External Actors in Africa, Solna & Oxford: SIPRI & OUP, p.71.

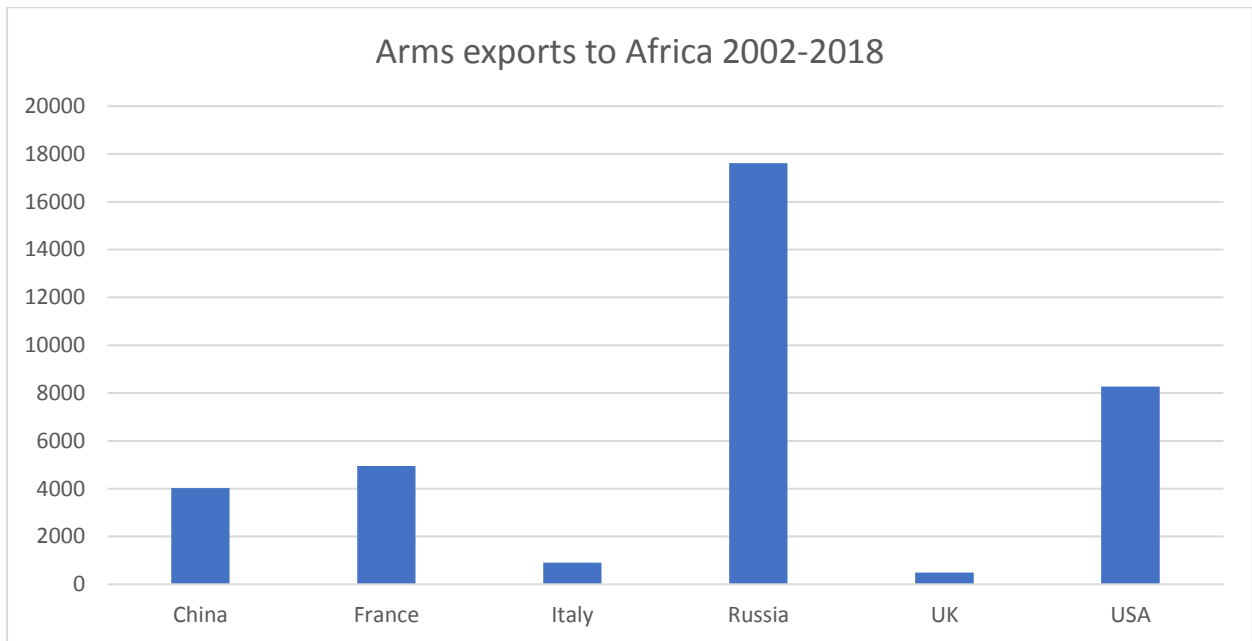
⁵⁴ <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2018/global-arms-industry-us-companies-dominate-top-100-russian-arms-industry-moves-second-place>

⁵⁵ www.sipri.org

⁵⁶ SIPRI statistical data on arms transfers relates to actual deliveries of major conventional weapons. To permit comparison between the data on such deliveries of different weapons and to identify general trends, SIPRI has developed a unique system to measure the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons using a common unit, the trend-indicator value (TIV). SIPRI TIV figures do not represent sales prices for arms transfers. They should therefore *not* be directly compared with gross domestic product (GDP), military expenditure, sales values or the financial value of export licences in an attempt to measure the economic burden of arms imports or the economic benefits of exports. They are best used as the raw data for calculating trends in international arms transfers over periods of time, global percentages for suppliers and recipients, and percentages for the volume of transfers to or from particular states.

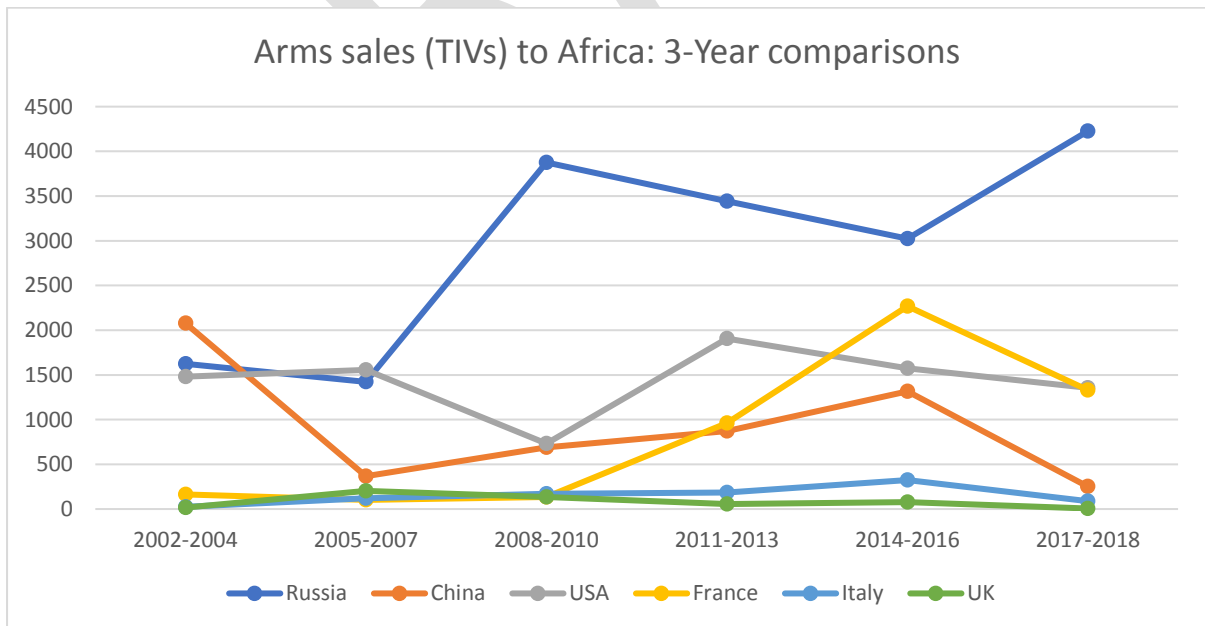
Note: Figures are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) expressed in millions

Russia is by far the largest exporter of arms to Africa using the TIV, compared with other major suppliers over the period 2002-2018.



Source: SIPRI database

Disaggregating the figures into three- year comparisons from 2002 to 2018, until the period 2005-07 Russia's exports to Africa were at a similar level to those of the US. However, after that period they grew significantly.



Source: SIPRI database

In the post-Cold War period, Russia's security-related activities has taken a number of forms. Arms transfers and military training are similar to those undertaken during USSR times. Russia has signed some 20 military cooperation agreements with African countries since the West imposed sanctions against it in 2014.⁵⁷ Contribution to UN peacekeeping and anti-piracy are new dimensions of its security engagement.⁵⁸

Apart from bilateral defence cooperation agreements Russia has also pursued such cooperation with intergovernmental institutions. For example, in July 2018 Russia's federal service for military and technical cooperation⁵⁹ signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Military and Technical Cooperation with SADC. It focuses on 'technology transfer and training' and the main aim is 'enabling SADC to effectively participate in, and contribute to, the maintenance of regional and international peace and security.'⁶⁰ In the Sahel, Russia has indicated that it wants to be granted observer status in the G5 Sahel framework.⁶¹ Russia also has an interest in being an active and important actor in counter-terrorism, complementing its concerns domestically and in areas like Syria.

Russia is reportedly seeking to open a military base in the Horn of Africa, in either Eritrea⁶² or Somaliland (to house 1,500 troops and its nuclear submarines).⁶³ It would be a latecomer great power to the Horn, where Djibouti already hosts US, French, Chinese and Japanese bases in close proximity to each other. This interest is linked to Russia's maritime doctrine to 2030, which identifies the Indian Ocean as one of the areas of regional priority. Produced in 2015, the document emphasises the importance of developing close links with both China and India. With the growing interest in the Indian Ocean (and more broadly the concept of the Indo-Pacific) by other major powers, this has become even more important for Russia.⁶⁴

In understanding Russia's military power projection with relation to Africa it is also important to consider its interests and actions in the broader Mediterranean. In July 2017 Russia established a Mediterranean task force with its base at Tartus, Syria. A permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean is also part of the first line of defence against any NATO aggression that would enable it to protect its port on the Black Sea.⁶⁵ In March 2018 Putin announced that Russia would deploy a

⁵⁷ Moscow Times 3 July 2019

⁵⁸ SIPRI, p.68.

⁵⁹ It is responsible for regulation, coordination and control of Russian military and technological cooperation with foreign partners.

⁶⁰ <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/sadc-executive-secretary-and-director-general-russias-federal-agency-military-and-technical-cooperation-discuss-roadmap-military/> and <http://www.fsvts.gov.ru/materialsf/7B928B0207995853432582DD00429E12.html>

⁶¹ Kalika, p.11.

⁶² <https://qz.com/africa/1377434/russias-sergey-lavrov-confirms-plans-for-logistics-base-in-eritrea/>

⁶³ <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/UK--Russia-and-UAE-scramble-to-set-up--bases-in-Somaliland/1066-4926388-fo30xt/index.html>

⁶⁴ See Karaganov S & D Suslov (2018), 'A new world order: A view from Russia', October 2018. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/A-new-world-order-A-view-from-Russia--19782>

⁶⁵ Korzun, P. 20 May 2018. 'Russia's Navy Establishes Permanent Presence in the Mediterranean Sea'. *Strategic Culture Foundation*, <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2018/05/20/russia-navy-establishes-permanent-presence-in-mediterranean-sea/>. Accessed 17 April 2019.

naval force with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles permanently in the Mediterranean.⁶⁶ In September 2018, Russia undertook its largest naval exercise in the Mediterranean since the end of the Cold War.

Russia is actively cultivating a number of partnerships especially in the eastern Mediterranean. Of relevance to this paper is the relationship with Egypt where Russia has acquired the use of Egyptian facilities for its military aircraft.⁶⁷ The military relationship between Russia and Egypt has deepened in the last few years, which is reminiscent of the level during Soviet times. Since 2013 the two countries have held regular joint meetings of their defence and foreign ministers; in June 2015 they held the first Russo-Egyptian joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean; and in 2016 their special operations forces trained together.⁶⁸

Russia has had long-standing relations with Algeria, which is its largest buyer of arms in Africa.⁶⁹ Algeria is an important ally in North Africa, and the popular unrest in that country in early 2019 was viewed with concern by Russian officials who feared that a complete regime change might endanger their interests.⁷⁰

Since 2017 Russian energy companies Gazprom and Transneft have been working with Algeria's Sonatrach on pipeline construction projects.⁷¹ The two countries have also been collaborating on how to stabilise Libya, and Algeria has links to some of the tribal militia there as well as to Field Marshal Haftar, although Haftar also has close relations with Egypt, Algeria's traditional rival.⁷² Moscow has reached out to Morocco as well, as Rabat has sought to broaden its dependency away from Western interests.

Peacekeeping and African conflicts

After the end of the Soviet Union Russia did not play a direct role in many of the conflicts on the African continent, except through its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. In the 21st century Russian peacekeepers have been deployed in a number of UN missions around the world. As at November 2018, there were about 80 Russian peacekeepers deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, including in Africa – in the Middle East, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Abyei, Colombia, Cyprus, and the missions in Kosovo and the Western Sahara.⁷³ Apart from peacekeeping, Russia has also threatened and applied its veto on sensitive issues like Darfur in Sudan and sanctions against the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.

⁶⁶ Korzun.

⁶⁷ Bregolat, E. 2018. 'Russia in the Mediterranean and in Europe'. *IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook 2018*, 36-39

⁶⁸ Trenin D (20) What is Russia up to in the Middle East, p.116.

⁶⁹ Ramani 2019

⁷⁰ Ramani, S. 22 March 2019. 'Russia's Cautious Calculus in Algeria'. *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78667>. Accessed 20 April 2019

⁷¹ Ramani, S. 22 March 2019. 'Russia's Cautious Calculus in Algeria'. *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78667>. Accessed 20 April 2019.

⁷² *Africa Confidential*. 21 December 2018. 'The Forgotten Army', 59 (25), 9-10.

⁷³ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, The 45th anniversary of Russia's participation in UN peacekeeping actions, 25 November 2018 <https://russiaun.ru/en/news/unpko251118> [Accessed 27 September 2019]

A more pronounced shift in terms of engagement on African peace and security issues more directly began to emerge after the Arab Spring and the overthrow of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi by NATO in 2011.

In the process of deepening its engagement in peace and security matters, Russia has also sought agreements with the AU and regional organisations, recognising their increased role in conflict resolution in Africa. In 2012 Russia announced a grant of \$2m in support of the AU's mandate on peace operations, including countering terrorism and transnational organised crime.⁷⁴ In September 2014 Russia and the AU Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which provided the framework for regular interactions between the two parties and an opportunity to discuss both economic and political matters. For example, in the second such engagement after the signing of the MoU, in 2016, the two discussed potential trade and investment projects linked to Africa's Agenda 2063, as well as some of the African conflicts (Burundi, CAR, Libya, Mali and South Sudan). Terrorism and extremism were also discussed.⁷⁵ During Lavrov's visit to the AU in 2018, these issues were expanded and deepened. Among others, Russia indicated that it would be ready to share with the relevant African Union institutions, notably the African Center on the Study and Research on Terrorism, its list of foreign terrorists to help in the fight against terrorism, while it also asked to be granted observer status with the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). Russia was also keen to establish formal cooperation between the AU and the Eurasian Economic Union.⁷⁶

Moscow has articulated its support for the concept of African solutions for African problems. In June 2019 Foreign Minister Lavrov said that 'Russia is making an input into efforts to solve crises and conflicts according to the principle formulated by the African Union: African solutions to African problems. He added that the international community needs to support agreements made by Africans and support these "morally, politically, and financially"'.⁷⁷ South Africa, when it was an elected member of the UN Security Council in 2011-12, had pushed for a greater collaboration between the UN and regional organisations on peace and security issues (UNSC resolution 2033),⁷⁸ and that has since led to regular meetings between the UNSC and the AU's PSC. Foreign Minister Lavrov has argued that,

[t]he African Union and sub-regional organizations on the continent have proven that they are ready to take the initiative and act as peacekeepers, and *they deserve all necessary support from the UN and the Security Council...* As far as future conflict management is concerned, in Somalia, the Central African Republic, Mali, the DRC, and the Great Lake Region as a whole,

⁷⁴ <https://peaceau.org/en/article/african-union>

⁷⁵ <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20160425-0>

⁷⁶ <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180309/joint-communique-meeting-between-moussa-faki-mahamat-chairperson-african>

⁷⁷ <https://iz.ru/890869/2019-06-20/af-podderzhit-strany-afriki-v-samostoiatelnom-uregulirovanii-konfliktov> (article in Russian)

⁷⁸ United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2033. Adopted on 12 January 2012. Internet: [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2033\(2012\)](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2033(2012))

Russia as a permanent member of the Security Council will continue to play an important part in peacekeeping on the African Continent.⁷⁹ (emphasis added)

At the same time Moscow sees the role of regional organisations as one that strictly operates within the 'geographical frameworks in which they are based'.⁸⁰ Furthermore, they should be either authorised by the UN, or be based on an intergovernmental agreement.⁸¹ This position is borne out by the difficulty in the relationship between the UNSC (and specifically the P5) and the AU's PSC. While the A3 in the UNSC (albeit not always in unison) advocate for the UNSC to follow the PSC's lead on African matters, this is rarely the case. In the case of Russia specifically, this was evident more recently on Sudan. The PSC had issued a strong statement on the need for Sudan to move to civilian rule and Russia (and China) blocked a UN statement to that effect arguing that the Council should not interfere in the internal affairs of a state.⁸²

The case studies below, however, demonstrate how it is not something Russia respects any more than other external actors when their direct interests are affected.

Russian involvement has also been driven by its desire to operate in arenas that were previously in the West's purview. The discussion below will focus briefly on three countries where Russia has been involved. Libya, the Central African Republic and Sudan illustrate key elements of Russia's motivations for being involved: regaining direct economic interests, creating opportunities for defence ties and military contracts, and showing the West that it is a player to be reckoned with even in places which the West traditionally dominated. Part of its focus on Africa is linked to its interests in the Middle East – Libya and Sudan form part of its significant power-broking role in the MENA region. Private military companies with links to Russian officials or institutions are also players.⁸³ There is also an overlap between mining interests and some of these contracts.

Libya

The precipitous decision by NATO to intervene in Libya and its consequences – the fall of Gaddafi and the loss of many Russian military and infrastructure deals (about \$7bn) as a result – triggered Russian

⁷⁹ Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova v hode sovmestnoi press-konferentsii po itogam peregovorov s Ministrom inostrannykh del mezhdunarodnykh sotrudnichestva Respubliki Yuzhnyi Sudan B. Barnaboi [Speech and Q&A with the Media with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov during the Course of a Joint Press Conference on the Results of Talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of South Sudan, Benjamin Barnaba]. Moscow, 26 May 2014. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Department of Information and Press, Information Bulletin, 23–26 May 2014, p. 14. Cited in Bratersky M, p.167 (author's translation).

<https://iorj.hse.ru/data/2018/05/23/1149410902/Russia%20and%20Peacekeeping%20Operations%20Conce..l%20Components%20of%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20Policy.pdf> (accessed 27 September 2019)

⁸⁰ Bratersky M, Russia and Peacekeeping Operations: Conceptual and Practical Components of Russia's Policy, P. 161.

<https://iorj.hse.ru/data/2018/05/23/1149410902/Russia%20and%20Peacekeeping%20Operations%20Conce..l%20Components%20of%20Russia%E2%80%99s%20Policy.pdf>

⁸¹ Bratersky M, p.161.

⁸² International Crisis Group, A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN cooperation, Africa report 279, 24 June 2019.

⁸³ Sukhankin S, Making War Profitable Again: PMCs as Russia's 'Key' to Africa, <https://icds.ee/making-war-profitable-again-pmcs-as-russias-key-to-africa/> [accessed 27 September 2019]

activism in North Africa and the Middle East.⁸⁴ Russia did not block resolution 1973 at the UNSC that imposed a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011, but subsequent NATO actions led Russia to conclude that the West could not be trusted and would not take into account Russia's material interests in Libya.⁸⁵ The competing interests of the P5 in Libya and the absence of a united effort by the international community continues to be a key obstacle to peace. Engaging both Haftar and al-Sarraj has positioned Russia as a power broker in Libya, one that the P3 cannot ignore. This power-broking role is manifest in Russia's establishment of the Contact Group for intra-Libyan settlement headed by Lev Dengov,⁸⁶ who also serves as an adviser of the head of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov.

In the ensuing period, as chaos descended on Libya, and it fragmented into warring factions, Russia's primary concern was to defeat the extremists operating from there and restore stability. With stability, Russia hopes that its arms and oil interests can be restored. Already in 2017 Rosneft signed an agreement with the Libyan National Oil Company to cooperate in oil extraction.⁸⁷

Libya unfortunately has now become the playground for the rivalries in the Gulf and the competing Muslim blocs – Turkey/Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabi/UAE on the other. Turkey and Qatar together with most of the international community recognise the Libyan government in Tripoli, the Government of National Accord. The rival Libyan government in the east led by Field Marshal Haftar is supported by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt has also backed the Soviet-educated Haftar and his preference for a military solution to the conflict in Libya, although it has advocated for an accommodation between the two sides and has built ties with the UN-backed al-Sarraj government too. This too is driven by economic interests, specifically linked to resuscitating the energy joint ventures of the Gaddafi era.⁸⁸ More recently, investigative journalists have found evidence of a Russian mercenary presence in Libya.⁸⁹ The independent Russian press has also reported that Russian special forces are present in Libya.⁹⁰

Central Africa

In **Central Africa**, Russia is more directly involved in resources and direct military support in collusion with local elites, though evidence is still partial and further research needs to be conducted.⁹¹ For instance, the Russian bank VTB was in discussions with the former Kabila regime in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** over US\$1 billion in investment. Before the 2018 elections, Russia sought to revive a 1999 agreement on military cooperation, while after the presidential elections and the

⁸⁴ Trenin, What is Russia up to in the middle East?, p.5.

⁸⁵ Trenin, p.45.

⁸⁶ According to the website of Roscongress, Dengov is also chairman of the board of the Russian-Libyan Trade House and his mandate on the Contact Group derives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Duma and the head of Chechnya.

⁸⁷ <https://jamestown.org/program/lev-dengov-ramzan-kadyrovs-middleman-in-libya/>

⁸⁸ Bershidsky L, In Libya, One of Putin's Many Bets is in Play, 8 April 2019.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/08/in-libya-one-of-putines-many-best-is-in-play-a65143>

⁸⁹ <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russias-wagner-mercenaries-have-moved-into-libya-good-luck-with-that>

⁹⁰ <https://jamestown.org/program/lev-dengov-ramzan-kadyrovs-middleman-in-libya/>

⁹¹ See Reuters 'Congo in talks with Russia's VTB for \$1bn investment', 4 July 2017

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-russia-economy-idUSKBN19P27S>; BBC 'Why is Russia Cosying up to CAR?' 30 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-44293080/russia-and-the-central-african-republic-a-curious-relationship>;

controversy that ensued over the results, it blocked (supported by China and South Africa) attempts by the US, the UK and France not to accept the outcome.

On the other side of the Congo River, in the Republic of Congo, the government there signed a military agreement with Russia in May 2019. Russia would send military specialists to Congo-Brazzaville and also provide maintenance of equipment (much of it Soviet).⁹²

However, it has been Russia's actions in the **Central African Republic (CAR)** that have garnered the most international attention. In 2018⁹³ the UN sanctions committee allowed Russia to sell weapons and provide military trainers to the CAR government, which had been under an UN arms embargo since 2013.⁹⁴ Earlier Russia had opposed weapons delivery by France to the CAR government. An agreement between Russia and the CAR that Russia would establish a Russian mining company there, be granted operation of an airfield, and provide training to the Central African National Guard and Army was also signed.⁹⁵ In mid-2018 a Russian company Lobaye Invest Sarlu was granted permits in the Yawa and Pama regions to search for gold and diamond deposits.⁹⁶ The CAR president also has a Russian security adviser, Valery Zakharov, since 2018, who is reputed to have links to the FSB. Two Russian private military companies are also present. The Wagner Group has achieved much media notoriety. The other group is Sewa Security Services. Estimates place Russian instructors in CAR at anything between 200 and 1,000.⁹⁷ The man behind them is Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has close links to the Kremlin.⁹⁸ (He was sanctioned by the US for funding the Internet Research Agency implicated in the interference in the 2016 US Presidential election.) Three Russian journalists who had gone to CAR to investigate Russian activity there, were killed in July 2018, fuelling further speculation about the extent of Russian activity there, especially around mercenary activities.⁹⁹

For Russia CAR serves a number of functions: there are clearly lucrative resource contracts to be had, which form part of the package that includes military contracts and defence cooperation. At the same time, Russia's significant inroads into exerting influence in CAR serve to strengthen its case that it can operate effectively in areas that have been the domain of the West (and France more specifically in this case). Its diplomatic endeavours to help broker peace in the CAR in 2018 and 2019 have made that point even more pointedly. Russia, together with Sudan, was able to broker a peace deal between the CAR government and 14 militia groups in February 2019. When Russia initiated negotiations together with Sudan in July and August 2018 in Khartoum to discuss an agreement between the

⁹² <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/24/russia-to-send-military-specialists-to-republic-of-congo-a65721>

⁹³ Reuters. 'Russia to send more military trainers, equipment to Central African Republic', 19 October 2018. Internet: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia/russia-to-send-more-military-trainers-equipment-to-central-african-republic-idUSKCN1MT28D>

⁹⁴ United Nations Security Council. Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. Internet: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/2127>

⁹⁵ The Africa Report, 23 August 2019.

⁹⁶ The Africa Report.... See also copies of the contracts - <https://letsunami.net/index.php/2018/09/01/affaire-lobaye-invest-sarlu-enfin-les-raisons-de-la-presence-des-russes-en-centrafrique-revelees-au-grand-jour/>

⁹⁷ African Report

⁹⁸ For more <https://www.thedailybeast.com/yevgeny-prigozhins-empire-at-the-center-of-the-car-murders-cold-case>

⁹⁹ See also <https://time.com/5637539/russia-central-african-republic-militia-anniversary/>

government and the rebel forces, this was in fact a parallel process to that being undertaken by the AU.¹⁰⁰

Sudan

Sudan is another example of an engagement with Russia where a number of interests on both sides intersect. The country's turmoil that began in late 2018 resulted in the overthrow of President al-Bashir in April 2019.

Russia's involvement in Sudan includes significant arms purchasing agreements, mineral rights concessions and a military agreement, with the purported presence there too of Russian private military companies. There have also been allegations of Russian involvement in a disinformation campaign against the opposition and attempts to delegitimise it in the run-up and following the removal of President al-Bashir.

Sudan is the second largest purchaser of arms from Russia on the continent after Algeria. After all, Sudan has been under western sanctions for some 20 years. More recently Russia has been keen to establish a base on the Red Sea, having been rebuffed by Djibouti previously.

In May 2019, less than a month after the removal of Bashir, Russia signed a military agreement with the military government which covered the development of joint military training, engineering training, military education and military hydrography among others, as well as sharing of experiences in UN peacekeeping, search and rescue. The agreement also provided for the Russian navy to use Sudanese ports.¹⁰¹

At the same time Russian companies have been signing deals and receiving concessions from the Sudanese government for mining exploration in gold and uranium among others. Russian companies involved include M-Invest, Esimath Company and Miro Gold. These mining projects have not been without controversy, with protests from local communities having been reported in 2017.¹⁰² In December 2018 Russia signed an agreement to build a refinery in Port Sudan, which would have a capacity of about 220,000 barrels per day.¹⁰³

Russia has built up strong relations with the Sudanese military over the years. Provided the military remains a key player during the three-year transition agreed by Sudanese stakeholders, Russian interests will probably remain fairly secure. This is why Russia (and China) rejected a call by the A3 at the UNSC to support the PSC decision to call for a transition in Sudan.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ IISS, Armed Conflict Survey 2018, pp.287-288.

¹⁰¹ 'Russia signs military deal with Sudan', UAWire, 26 May 2019 <http://www.uawire.org/russia-signs-military-deal-with-sudan>

¹⁰² 'Blood and Gold: Now Sudan's land wars have spread to mining', <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/blood-and-gold-now-sudans-land-wars-have-spread-mining>

¹⁰³ Reuters, 'Sudan signs mining, oil refinery agreements with Russian companies – oil ministry', 20 December 2018.

¹⁰⁴ International Crisis Group. (2019) A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN cooperation. Africa report no 279. 24 June 2019

Development cooperation

Russia is not a significant player in providing development cooperation, although it has built up its activities in this area since the articulation of the Concept of Russia's State Policy in the Field of International Development Assistance in 2014. Russia officially became a donor in 2006 when it chaired its first G8 meeting. Russia's development assistance is a mix of bilateral and multilateral aid. The former takes the form of technical assistance projects, capacity building and scholarships, budget support and debt relief.¹⁰⁵ Russia reports its aid statistics to the OECD-DAC. Since 2004 Russia's development cooperation has grown from about \$100m to \$1.3bn in 2016, after which it declined marginally. Its bilateral aid in 2017 was about \$734m, compared with \$459m in multilateral contributions.¹⁰⁶

Most of its development cooperation goes to the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. A small proportion goes to 13 African countries. The largest recipients have been Guinea and Mozambique.

Russian bilateral aid to African countries: 2012-2017 in US\$m						
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Burundi	0.14	-	-	-	-	0.04
Congo	0.28	-	-	1.21	-	1.00
Egypt	0.07	-	-	0.78	-	0.03
Guinea	0.97	-	16.79	6.25	6.32	3.72
Kenya	2.88	2.19	-	2.00	-	1.00
Madagascar	0.06	-	-	-	9.89	8.89
Morocco	0.08	1.98	1.50	0.60	-	4.16
Mozambique	0.09	13.05	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00
Namibia	0.09	0.46	-	0.06	-	1.50
Somalia	2.04	1.00	1.00	-	1.00	1.00
Sudan	0.01	2.56	0.05	1.54	0.01	1.00
Tanzania	0.07	3.37	1.37	1.37	1.37	1.37
Tunisia	0.04	19.8	1.65	1.12	-	5.66

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/russia/russias-official-development-assistance.htm>

¹⁰⁶ Knobel, A., & Zaytsev, Y. (2018). Russia as international donor in 2017. *Economic Development of Russia*, 25(12), 8–12. (In Russian.)

Source: Based on data provided by the OECD-DAC and the MoF of Russia (Knobel and Zaytsev 2018)

Public diplomacy and social media

Russia's foreign policy concepts in 2013 and 2016 defined a comprehensive soft power strategy, including the expansion of public diplomacy programmes abroad.¹⁰⁷ 'Russia seeks to project itself as a positive force in international relations, and that it can contribute constructively to processes and events.'¹⁰⁸ In an effort to deliver its perspective to international audiences and improve its image abroad, Russia has been allocating millions of dollars to public diplomacy initiatives from as early as 2005.¹⁰⁹ One way to define public diplomacy is as a 'government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and cultures, as well as its national goals and current policies'.¹¹⁰ Russia utilises a wide range of tools for this purpose. These range from news agencies (Russia Today and Sputnik) to sporting events (Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 and FIFA World Cup in 2018) and are intended to project an image of a great global power. The media channels are also openly positioned to provide an 'alternative' point of view to one presented by Western TV, radio and print. Similarly, Russia Today has been conceived as a soft-power tool to improve Russia's image abroad and counter the anti-Russian bias, which the Kremlin perceived to be prevalent in the Western media. Broadcasting in over 100 countries and in three languages (English, Spanish and Arabic), it has become better known as an extension of Russia's foreign policy.¹¹¹ In Russia, however, its media outlets are seen as part of the strategic communications narrative.¹¹²

In assessing Russia's role in the region, there is mounting evidence of media manipulation of public debates through conventional sources and social media, and an application of 'sharp power' instruments that have been utilised in Europe and the US.⁷⁵ By compromising public tendering processes and working through corrupt senior officials in each of these countries, and at the same time hampering public debate, Russian actions undermine the longstanding efforts to support the development of accountable, rules-based democracies in post-liberation or post-conflict states of the region. The St Petersburg-based 'Internet Research Agency', popularly known as the 'troll factory', which has been identified as being behind many of the social media trolling, is owned by Prigozhin, head of the Wagner Group. ¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Terry, JL, 'Russian World:' Russia's Cultural Diplomacy Programs in Europe, MA Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁰⁸ Simmons, G, 'Russian Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Structure, Means and Message', in *Public Relations Review*, September 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Avgerinos, K, 'Russia's Public Diplomacy Effort: What the Kremlin is Doing and Why its Not Working'.

¹¹⁰ Tuch, Hans. (1990). *Communicating with the world: U.S. Public Diplomacy Overseas*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

¹¹¹ Ioffe, J, 'What is Russia Today? The Kremlin's propaganda outlet has an identity crisis', *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2010, Internet: https://archives.cjr.org/feature/what_is_russia_today.php.

¹¹² Velikaya, A, 'The Russian Approach to Public Diplomacy and Humanitarian Cooperation', in *Rising Powers Quarterly* Vol 3(3), 2018, pp 39-61, page 41

¹¹³ BBC. 'The tactics of a Russian troll farm', 16 February 2018, Internet: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-43093390>.

Russia-South Africa relations since 1992

With the exception of North African states, South Africa is strategically the most important country for Russia on the continent, although the decision by the new South African administration not to continue with the Russian nuclear energy deal has created some uncertainties in the relationship.

Although allies during the Second World War against the Axis powers, South Africa and the Soviet Union parted ways officially in 1956 when the Soviet Consulates in Pretoria and Cape Town were closed down at the request of the white National Party government.¹¹⁴

Throughout the duration of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the apartheid government were involved in a proxy war in the region which, under Gorbachev shifted towards a cooperative resolution in conflicts like Angola while Moscow's once-strong support for the ANC dwindled under Yeltsin.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation subsequently re-established formal diplomatic relations with the National Party government in February 1992, two years after President FW de Klerk's landmark announcement on the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP, and the release of Nelson Mandela.

The opening of the mission was not without its controversies; the Soviet Union had failed to consult its ally, the ANC, prior to the decision. To add insult to injury, it was President FW de Klerk who made it to the Kremlin first and not Nelson Mandela. Shubin, in his authoritative *ANC: A view from Moscow*, recounts this story against the background of the political shifts in Moscow at the time, which reached their denouement with the attempted putsch against Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December of that year.¹¹⁵

The internal shifts in the Soviet Union played themselves out also in the re-orientation of its foreign policy, which saw the start of its de-ideologisation.¹¹⁶ Indeed, while the Soviet Union's pre-1990 relations with the ANC and the apartheid regime might be characterised as driven by ideals and ideology, the period thereafter was characterised by a great degree of pragmatism.¹¹⁷ Russia's first ambassador to SA noted in an interview to *The Star* newspaper in 1992 that he was 'intent on exorcising the ghosts of the former Soviet Union's history in South Africa, even if it meant leaving some former Soviet allies disappointed'.¹¹⁸

Economic considerations played a role in Russia's decision to establish diplomatic relations with apartheid South Africa in 1992. Such considerations included the natural resource endowment that both countries shared, which from time to time has seen attempts to create cartels. Russia also considered South Africa as a source of capital investments at a time when Russia's economy was going

¹¹⁴ Shubin V (2008). *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*. University of KwaZulu Natal Press & Pluto Press, Scottsville and London, p.239; Filatova and Davidson, in their book, *The Hidden Thread*, document and analyse the evolution of the break in relations in great detail.

¹¹⁵ Shubin V (2008), *ANC: A view from Moscow*. Jacana Press: Auckland Park (second revised edition). pp.301 ff.

¹¹⁶ See Tikhonov V I (1991). *Contemporary politics in South Africa and the Soviet policy towards southern Africa in Moscow Papers*, p. 9 and 12

¹¹⁷ Ironically, even during apartheid certain economic interests trumped ideology, with De Beers and the Soviet government agreement on diamonds to manage prices.

¹¹⁸ Cited in *The Hidden Thread*, p. 455.

through a crisis. Russia also considered SA as a potential promoter of Russian defence equipment and maintenance contracts in Africa.¹¹⁹

However, the impact of the USSR/Russian Federation's political rapprochement with the De Klerk government left its scar on the bilateral relationship after the ANC came to power in 1994. It was several years before this 'slight' by the successor state to the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, was overcome. One can discern four phases in the evolution of relations between Russia and South Africa.

The **first stage** (lasting through the 1990s) may be characterised by the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the signing of a spate of agreements and protocols. These included in 1993 the agreement on trade and economic cooperation, 'which reciprocally introduced almost favoured nation bilateral treatment in trade and investment protection and provided free transit of goods',¹²⁰ and the Protocol on Political Consultations (1994). The Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) was also provided for in the treaty. In 1995 the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement.¹²¹ However, the relationship was neither deep nor substantive, still coloured by the way in which the Russian Federation had resumed links with apartheid South Africa after the ANC's unbanning.

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki's visit to Russia in November 1998, followed by President Mandela's in April 1999, began the thaw, initiating the **second stage** of the relationship. This stage also coincided with Russia's changing approach to the West and its adoption of a multi-vector policy. During Mbeki's visit, a number of agreements were signed, including the promotion of investment agreements which came into force in 2000. However, no agreement was reached on how to promote and maintain stable prices for minerals produced by both countries, although this was discussed.¹²² During President Mandela's visit to Moscow, a Declaration of Principles concerning Friendly Relations and Partnership was signed. Agreements were signed on cooperation in various fields, including military-technical, mining, sports and tourism. An agreement on double taxation avoidance came into force in 2000, and in 2002 South Africa recognised the market status of Russia's economy.

Since 1999 when the SA-Russia Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) met for the first time (and coincided with the state visit of President Mandela to Moscow), there have been regular ministerial meetings and official exchanges. However, the impact was inversely proportional to their frequency.¹²³ In this second phase of the relationship, the two countries also began to exchange views more widely on global political issues from the Middle East to terrorism and disarmament. The consensus after such meetings was that both countries held similar positions on

¹¹⁹ Pieterse HJ (1998), 'Russia and South Africa in the Nineties', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 2, winter 1998, p 139; and *The Hidden Thread*, p. 456.

¹²⁰ See <http://www.russianembassy.org.za/economic/Coop.html>, (accessed on 10 April 2013)

¹²¹ Filatova I and A Davidson (2013). *The Hidden Thread - Russia And South Africa In The Soviet Era*. p. 458.

¹²² Pienaar S, *Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. SA Yearbook 1999/2000. Johannesburg: SAIIA p 121

¹²³ Pieterse H J (1998). 'Russia and South Africa in the Nineties' in *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 2, Winter 1998, p. 139.

many of the global challenges. It was also in the early 2000s that the two countries began discussions to launch Russian satellites from South Africa.¹²⁴

In 2005, Viktor Vekselberg, chairman of Renova and reputed to be Russia's fourth richest man, became a member of President Mbeki's International Investment Forum (IIF), a highly significant appointment, because up to then, IIF membership had been drawn largely from US, European and Asian business leaders.

President Putin's visit to South Africa in September 2006, the first ever to sub-Saharan Africa by a Russian head of state, and some seven years after President Mandela's visit to Russia, indicated a political deepening of the relationship. During the state visit, the two presidents signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and a number of other agreements. The Treaty built on the Declaration that Russia and South Africa had signed in 1999. President Putin's visit was the catalyst for business deals as well as a deepening of the political exchanges on global issues. In any bilateral relationship the engagement on global issues is an important indicator of a multidimensional exchange. Soon thereafter SA assumed a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (in 2007) and this further provided opportunities and imperatives for such exchanges.

The **third phase** of the relationship started in 2010. From the South African side, the intensification of exchanges was linked to one of President Zuma's key objectives after coming to power in 2009, that of South Africa joining the BRICS. This was part of a strategy of diversifying its diplomatic and economic links away from the crisis-hit Europe and the US. Joining the BRICS helped to raise Russia's profile in South Africa where the focus heretofore had been largely on China, and slightly less on India and Brazil. The Zuma presidency was characterised by significant and frequent high-level political exchanges, and similar approaches to a number of global issues whether at the UN Security Council in New York or at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. However, these did not translate into substantial increases in economic relations. The alignment between South Africa and Russia or China in these forums dented the country's reputation as an upholder of democratic values among many of its supporters in the West.

During President Zuma's visit to Russia in August 2010, he and President Medvedev reaffirmed their strategic partnership and agreed to convene a presidential summit at least once every two years. President Putin paid a working visit to South Africa in advance of the BRICS summit in Durban in 2013, during which South Africa signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Russia. (South Africa signed a Comprehensive Partnership with China in 2010.) At the level of political symbolism, therefore, this was a very significant elevation from a South African perspective. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership makes provision for cooperation at the highest political level in all spheres, from political to economic and science and technology to defence and multilateral issues.

A further nine agreements were signed including on agriculture, arts and culture, defence, education, energy, fisheries, mining, science and technology and transport. An agreement was also signed between the South African National Space Agency (SANSA) and the Russian Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) on the RadioAstron space satellite, which paved the way for the two countries to work together on the development of science and space technologies. (In 2006 the South African and Russian governments had signed an agreement to cooperate on the exploration and use of outer

¹²⁴ Filatova and Davidson, p.465.

space for peaceful purposes.) Earlier in September 2009, the South African satellite SumbandilaSAT had been launched by the Russian launch vehicle Soyuz-2,¹²⁵ after a number of delays ascribed to administrative problems or rescheduling of programmed launches by Roskosmos.¹²⁶

By 2014 it was very clear though that the Zuma administration's core interactions with Russia was going to be around a mooted nuclear energy deal. In September 2014 news broke that an MoU had been signed with Russia to supply up to eight nuclear power plants.¹²⁷ Notably the cost of the programme would be R1.6 trillion, or the equivalent of the entire projected spend in the national budget for 2018-2019, and, though the procurement process was suspended by the Constitutional Court, Zuma himself continued to press the government to implement the agreement right up until his ousting by the ANC in early 2018.¹²⁸ The nuclear deal coloured the perceptions of many in South Africa about the relationship between the two countries.

The **fourth phase** of the relationship was heralded by the rise of Cyril Ramaphosa to the presidency of South Africa. Although it is still too early to assess fully, relations with Russia seem to have become less intense, with President Putin's original invitation by President Zuma to undertake a state visit to SA during the BRICS summit in 2018 being withdrawn to be replaced by one to President Xi. The nuclear build has also been put on hold by the new administration. As noted earlier, the Russians had hoped that the nuclear deal in SA would have become the flagship of their nuclear endeavours in Africa.

Party-to-party links have also developed. Historically, the ANC had close links to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The renamed Communist Party of the Russian Federation continues to operate as a political formation and has representatives in the State Duma. It has not ruled Russia since the end of the Soviet Union. But it is with the ruling United Russia party that the ANC has cultivated links. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the two in Moscow during a visit of an ANC Progressive Business Forum delegation in October 2013.¹²⁹ In the ANC's strident anti-imperialist and anti-American rhetoric there is a confluence of world views with Putin's United Russia party, and the desire for a more multipolar world.

There is a strong constituency among the left in South Africa that considers Russia a country that stands up to the US's hegemony, supports a global order based on international law and is an

¹²⁵ Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of South Africa, Press Release, 'The Eighth session of the Joint Inter-Governmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) between the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation', Cape Town, 26-27 October 2009.

¹²⁶ Part of the problem seemed to have been the decision by South Africa's defence minister at the time, Mosiuoa Lekota, to cancel the purchase of a military spy satellite from Russia (in late 2006 or early 2007). Bruemmer S and N Dawes, 'SA, Russia in R1bn cold war', Mail & Guardian, 15 September 2008. See also http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1710&catid=52:Human%20Security&Itemid=114 [Accessed on 20 June 2013]

¹²⁷ South Africa Department of Energy *ibid*

¹²⁸ More than 600 million Africans lack access to electricity, an attractive prospect for Russia's nuclear industry. It has sounded out states such as Egypt, Ethiopia, South Africa and Sudan, and is greatly interested in Namibia's uranium and Zimbabwe's platinum.

¹²⁹ ANC Media Office on behalf of the Office of the ANC Progressive Business Forum Co-Convenors, 'ANC Progressive Business Forum Delegation Returns From Russia', 9 October 2013. (email)

important actor in the emerging multipolar system. They also argue that like the Global South, Russia respects sovereignty and respects the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries.

South Africa, Russia and the BRICS

When South Africa joined the BRICS at the invitation of China in 2011 it considered this membership as an important step in its foreign policy objectives as they related to the continent and to its global governance reform agenda. In 2012 South Africa's international relations and cooperation minister highlighted that its membership had three objectives: to advance South Africa's national interests; to promote its regional integration programme and related continental infrastructure programme; and to partner with key players in the South on issues related to global governance and its reform.¹³⁰

This membership also acted as a catalyst for closer SA-Russia links. This was achieved at the political level under President Zuma, less so in tangible economic outcomes.

Since the first summit it chaired in 2013, South Africa has wanted the BRICS to engage as a grouping with Africa. However, to date, while the BRICS individually all have interactions with Africa (both the continental institutions as well as bilaterally), there has not been any serious attempt at building a BRICS Africa strategy, because a compelling reason/interest is absent.

In the run-up to the Russia-Africa summit, South Africa also believed that strategically Russia should have leveraged the BRICS platform in preparing for it, but the Summit was largely arranged by Russia and Egypt.

While Russia was still a member of the G8 it considered the BRICS as part of a dual strategy 'of raising Russia's profile and guaranteeing it a voice in all the significant clubs across multiple vectors'.¹³¹ Since 2014 the BRICS provided cover for Russia in a number of multilateral bodies.

What should Africa be asking of Russia?

The question from the outset of the announcement of the summit was what will Russia bring that is different from the other major summits between the continent and China, India or Japan. Russia post-2014 does not have the deep pockets of China. It is also largely a resource-based economy and in that sense is a competitor of many African states.

The Russian forays into Africa are also coming against the backdrop of rapidly evolving and uncertain geopolitics and a concerted reframing of Russia's role as a responsible member of the international family of nations. In order to live up to its image of a 'great power', Russia needs supporters. African states, which are disillusioned with the current world order and rules of the game, make useful partners. In turn, African states appreciate that Russian help, trade and infrastructure projects come without political conditionalities and ideological baggage often associated with the West. With a rift opening between the US and its traditional allies through its 'America First' approach, including wanting its allies to pay more for their own security, the emergent trade war between the US and China, and finally, a schism in the European project, Russia has been able to exploit these divisions. However, this role (as a counter-point to the West and often as a 'spoiler' on global debates related

¹³⁰ Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa, 2012. (DIE paper)

¹³¹ Cynthia Roberts et al, (2018) *The BRICS and collective financial statecraft*. New York: Oxford University Press p. 125.

to human rights and governance) is at odds with the efforts of many African states and civil society that are invested in democracy, good governance and accountability.

In the last two decades Africa and its states have developed increasing agency in their external relations. Both African institutions and many individual states have become more effective in developing, articulating and taking forward their specific interests. Some of this growing agency is attributed to the greater number of choices that African states now have, given the rise of many Southern powers, not least of which is China. The AU and its development arm, the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) have also played a role in mobilising collective action, especially in global multilateral forums.¹³² Nevertheless, Africa is still often seen as an arena for great powers to exert their influence, while local grievances within countries and across regions have also become linked with external transnational extremism. This intersect is also sometimes an enabler of external great power involvement.

Important lessons can be drawn from the major summit initiatives between great powers that have been a feature of the African landscape for nearly 30 years. These include:

- While Africa is made up of 55 states, with different interests and levels of development, which makes it difficult to develop a single African strategy for dealing with a single state, it is nevertheless important to have a set of principles and guidelines about the development of the relationship, and specific African interests that should be advanced (especially in the multilateral sphere). The growing role of the AUC in some of these processes is reflective of this intention, although African states do not always see the value of collective action, recognising that there are benefits to engaging bilaterally.
- External partners should respect African institutions and processes and support them, rather than creating parallel ones, especially in the area of peace and security. However, there is a corollary here that related to the importance of African institutions speaking and acting with one voice, especially in matters of peace and security.
- Engagement with African states needs to go beyond elites, to also consider the often dynamic, civil society (including opposition parties) that characterise African countries.
- This is particularly relevant in states with unaccountable elites. Fragile and tentative accountability systems are not sustainable or stable in the long term. Involvement to secure peace and stability needs to consider these factors.

As the relationship deepens, with the Summit as the launching pad, African states will increasingly require a nuanced understanding of the interests driving Russia as well as its broader geopolitical and world view. These interests include great power stature, rallying a 'coalition of the willing' in changing global orders and international institutions, ability to influence domestic and regional politics elsewhere, and diversification of trade partners.

The significant voting bloc that Africa presents in the UN is important for Russia's position in international affairs, especially against the background of an increasingly difficult relationship with the West. Both the BRICS and African states have provided political support to Russia on international issues. The Russian International Affairs Council makes the point succinctly: 'With potentially 54

¹³² See Sidiropoulos E (2019). 'Being in them but not of them: South Africa's engagement in global development forums', DIE Discussion paper.

additional votes to offer in slightly over a fourth of all UN members, Africa could provide a much-needed political boost for Russia, swaying decisions and helping the country to achieve more tangible results in its pursuit for new multipolar world order.¹³³

Indeed, both Africa and Russia favour a more multipolar world, based on a more level playing field and governed by global rules. Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, described Africa as 'an important and active participant in the emerging polycentric architecture of the world order and an ally in protecting international law against attempts to undermine it',¹³⁴ a clear reference to the often unilateral actions of the US in particular.

However, a more multipolar or polycentric world order does not necessarily imply a more equitable, fair and rules-based multilateral system, if its outcome is a shift from a single hegemon to an oligarchy of great powers, similar to the 'Concert of Europe' in the 19th century. The challenges facing multilateralism today are worrying for African states and the AU. It is essential for the continent, therefore, to develop a clear set of objectives in this unpredictable geopolitical environment that safeguard its voice and interests in a global governance terrain that is fast changing.

There is also a strong business dimension to the drivers of deeper Russia-Africa relations. Anton Kobayakov, the presidential adviser responsible for the organisation of the Summit, noted in August 2019 that Africa was not only a market for Russian goods, but also a strategic partner in science-technical cooperation, development of oil and gas project, agriculture and industrial zones.¹³⁵

Russia has expertise in science and technology, including in space. Its nuclear energy industry is one element that it wishes to promote in Africa, even providing financing for such projects. Russia certainly sees this as an advantage, with the Russian International Affairs Council arguing that 'Russian nuclear technology offers a possible solution for Africa's energy deficit'.¹³⁶ Yet, Africa states that are interested in developing a nuclear energy capacity, as well as to utilise the technology more broadly need to ensure that the requisite safety and compliance dimensions (including related to the Pelindaba Treaty) are operational and effective.

Russia's geopolitical dimension carries great advantages for many African states who see opportunities in the dilution of Western dominance politically and economically on the continent. Not unlike other external powers, Russia too has cosied up to African elites to advance its interests, linking economic and security interests and blurring the lines between state and oligarchs. In some of Africa's fragile or unstable regions Russian support is welcomed by those elites, but this may come at the cost of advancing democracy and good governance. Indeed, a careful reading of contemporary events in

¹³³ RIAC, *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Remarks made during the meeting of the Chairman of the State Duma with the ambassadors of African countries in the Russian Federation, participants noted the importance of holding the Inter-Parliamentary Conference "Russia-Africa" in 2019, November 19, 2018. <http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/28831/>

¹³⁵ Economic forum Russia-Africa will determine the perspectives of sizable joint projects 28 August 2019. <https://rueconomics.ru/406706-ekonomicheskii-forum-rossiya-afrika-opredelit-perspektivy-sovmestnykh-masshtabnykh-proektov> (article in Russian)

¹³⁶ Countdown to the Russia-Africa Summit: Exploring what the partnership has to offer', 17 May 2019 <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/african-policy/countdown-to-the-russia-africa-summit-exploring-what-the-partnership-has-to-offer/>

Africa reveals a pattern of sustained Russian interests acquiring positions in the energy and security sectors through the use of state bank funding and privileged elite networks to capture significant financial gains.¹³⁷

As Russia focuses on deepening its relationship with Africa, African states should not shy away from engaging with Russia on some of the more difficult aspects of the Russian presence, whether these are state or non-state. These include the activity of private military companies in a number of African countries in conflict, as well as the large number of arms sales, including small arms which have been the scourge of African conflicts. (Yet, the sometime shrill critique by Western media of Russian involvement in conflict glosses over the involvement of Western special forces – for example – in the same or similar theatres of conflict.)

Moscow's stance of non-interference in the internal affairs of states (or only on the invitation of the formal government) means that where a state such as the CAR invites it to provide certain services, it regards this as legitimate requests. Military support provided by Russia to politicians enhances their political security, while in return Russia receives lucrative extractives contracts. Yet, such arrangements are not always sustainable in these societies in the longer term, and Russia's limited resources also means that it does not have the means to provide much support to countries in post-conflict peacebuilding.

The summit provides an opportunity to determine the future shape of relations between Russia and the continent. At the same time Africa needs to be realistic about what it can expect from the relationship. A critical dimension should be ensuring that Africa's priorities and home-grown initiatives are part of the outcomes.

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¹³⁷ See also on Mozambique and the VTB arms trade: <https://www.oligarchsinsider.com/vtb-capital-probed-on-mozambiques-secret-debt/>