

# The Return of Russia-Africa Relations

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**Abstract:** Russia-Africa relations have entered a rapid phase of decline in political and economic terms after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under the imperatives of the post-Cold War era, Russia-Africa relations were in need of a comprehensive stage of reconstruction. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Russian foreign policy started to be reconstructed on the principles of economic benefit and pragmatism. At this stage, the perception of Africa in Russia changed within the framework of the new national priorities, and Russia-Africa relations gained a new positive momentum. This article argues that the rising trend of the African continent in the international arena presents a new series of opportunities to Russia in economic and political domains. With the effect of the new foreign policy understanding that depended on the control of economic and energy resources during the Putin period, geo-political relations are gradually supplemented by geo-economic relations. Significant countries of the world that hold political and economic powers currently aim to develop economic interests and political influence on the African continent. Russia uses every opportunity to demonstrate its willingness to acquire its former prestige among world states. Therefore, Russia is willing to come back to the African continent slowly, pursuing a 'brand new' road map this time.

**Key Words:** Russia, Africa, Russian foreign policy, Africa external affairs, Post-Cold War era.

The decade of the 2000s witnessed a revival of Russia's interest in Africa. This revival emerged within the framework of Russia's new foreign policy, which began developing in the late 1990s and consolidated recently. After experiencing a golden age during the USSR period, particularly the 1960s, Russia-Africa relations regressed considerably with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the Russian Federation (the Soviet Union's successor) has never withdrawn from the continent, its involvement in Africa declined dur-

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ing its initial years. The early 1990s were years in which Russia attempted to develop relations with the West while moving away from Africa. Failing to achieve a desired momentum in its relations with the West, Russia began developing a larger-scale, multi-dimensional policy encompassing the former Soviet geography and the Middle East initially, and China, Africa and Latin America afterwards. Y.M. Primakov's attempts to develop this type of multi-dimensional foreign policy during his time as foreign minister failed to fulfill its objectives due to economic problems and the Chechnya crisis. This process, which gained a new momentum during the period of former President V. Putin during the 2000s, has developed radically with the rise of oil prices and the effect of an accommodating international structure. Russia's geopolitical priorities and agenda have expanded to develop a concurrent geo-economical profundity as a result of its growing economy, foreign trade and investments in this new era. These changes in Russian foreign policy were felt in several domains. Russia was accepted as the eighth member of the G-7 club. Negotiations were established with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and Russia achieved observer country status. Relations with the Far East were kept intact by maintaining close relations with China, the predicted super-power of the 21st Century. Friendly relations with Syria, Iran and, to a lesser extent, Hamas indicated that Russia would return to the Middle East as well. Closeness with Venezuela showed that Russian foreign policy-makers considered relations with Latin America important.

In this context, it would therefore be unthinkable for the African continent to remain out of Russia's expanding area of interest. In the old days, the Soviet Union had close relations with the nations of Africa. In this stage, therefore, Africa has emerged as a domain in which the Russian Federation can obtain economic revenue and demonstrate its effectiveness on a global scale. Russia's relations with Africa, first regressing, then stagnating, have taken a new turn. In this article, we will focus on Russia's relations Africa within the contextual framework of its new foreign policy tendencies. In short, we will seek answers to the following three questions. How are Russia's relations with African nations and where have these relations been going recently? What is Russia's new road map for re-developing relations with Africa? Is Russia returning to Africa after a long period of inactivity?

### **Background and Perspective**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and transition to a market economy brought major economic and political problems and changes for Russia. Russian diplomacy faced major difficulties during the early 1990s. Moscow's more proximate, domestic problems were so exhausting that Moscow had neither the time nor the opportunity to deal with Africa. After the dissolution

of the communist system, Russia inherited a lot of responsibilities from the old Soviet Union, including technical-economic assistance for 37 African countries and trade agreements with 42 countries. The issue of technical-economic cooperation was *de facto* out of the agenda, and several joint projects were left incomplete (Deich and Polikanov 2003a: 52). The Soviet Union-Africa trade volume was \$1.3 billion on the eve of the Soviet dissolution. This volume declined to as low as \$740 million by 1994. Cultural and scientific relations with Africa had been quite active during the Soviet period, but experienced a serious weakening in the post-Cold War period (Deich and Polikanov 2003b: 106).

B. N. Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation at the end of 1991, declared that Russia's policy of foreign aid would be halted and that Russia would ask African countries to repay their debts as soon as possible. In response, African countries demanded that Russia either erase or reduce the debts they owed the Soviet Union (Deich 2007: 28). All this damaged Russia's image in the African continent. The model that Russia had previously developed in its relations with African countries lost validity, and there was no new model at hand (Emelyanov 2000: 314). The African continent disappeared from the Russian radar screen.<sup>1</sup> Africa left the orbit of Russian foreign policy (Deich and Polikanov 2003b: 121). During the 1990s, the African press and discourse referred to Russia as "the land that turned its back on the continent" (Solodovnikov 2000: 6).

Meanwhile, the US, Europe, and Asia were competing for influence on the African continent. Unresponsive to this competition, Russia desperately missed the old days. For instance, during the 1990s, although Russia and China both had interests in the African continent, it was China that achieved great progress while Russian influence was declining (Solodovnikov 2000: 6). By 1992, nine Russian embassies and three Russian consulates in Africa had been shut down, and the number of personnel in the remaining ones had been decreased. The number of representative agencies and trade attachés on the African continent were restricted and Russian cultural centres were closed. In the same way, African countries also reduced the number of their representatives in Russia (Deich and Polikanov 2003a: 50). Russia-African relations were then in a stage of breakdown, so there was an urgent need for extensive and decisive policies. The relationships that were established during the Soviet era had to be protected, developed, and adapted in accordance with the new international system.

It is possible to identify Russia's attitude towards the rest of the world in general, and Africa in particular, during the Yeltsin and Putin periods by means of the "Foreign Policy Concept" documents published in 1993, 2000 and

2008. During the initial years of the construction of the Russian federation, Foreign Affairs Minister A. Kozirev pursued a strategy of maintaining close relations with the West in order to resolve international conflicts. A 1993 document contained a list of the ten most important regions for Russian interests in their order of significance. First on the list were the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The US was fourth, Europe was fifth, and China was sixth. Africa was the ninth, followed only by Latin America, the tenth and the final region on the list (“Russian Federation’s Foreign Policy Concept” 1993: 6-20).

During the 2000s, disagreements with the West on a number of international issues led Russia to change its foreign policy mentality. The 2000 Foreign Policy Concept document was more pragmatic than its predecessor (1993). There was still a top ten list, but the order of countries had changed. The CIS countries still constituted the first item, but Europe had become the second highest priority. The US was the third, and China had risen to the fourth. Africa was still ahead of Latin America and merited a separate paragraph explaining how Russia wished to see Africa’s regional conflicts end as soon as possible. The document stated that Russia wanted to develop political relations with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other regional organisations, and that it was necessary for Russia to participate in multilateral projects by means of using the opportunities provided by such organisations (Ivanov 2002: 210-230).

After the shaky years of the first Yeltsin period, then-Foreign Minister Y. M. Primakov attempted to enforce economic reforms and adopt a multi-dimensional foreign policy line with a special reference to the former Soviet republics and the Middle East. It was during the firm and dedicated years of the Putin period after 2000 that the economy became more stable, increasing oil prices led to a budget surplus, the gross domestic product experienced an upsurge, and foreign debt declined. Encouraged by such developments, Russia started giving indications that it would not recognise or embrace the unipolar world system in the post-Soviet period. Russia’s growing economic and political power led to a change in its approach toward Africa, with which it used to have closer relations. To Russia, Africa’s role in the contemporary system of international politics was important and multidimensional. Africa’s significance in world politics would increase even further if the continent’s bloodshed and violent conflicts could be stopped. Because many countries were already aware of this, they were strengthening and expanding their efforts on the African continent. It was imperative that Russia avoid engaging too late and falling behind them (Gavrilov 2004: 505).

United Kingdom and France were originally the most important players in Africa's destiny. Colonialism and the slave trade left permanent scars on the continent. The bipolar period witnessed the growing interest of the Soviet Union in Africa. When the Cold War ended, the competition for political and economic superiority in Africa slowed. The consequence was a power vacuum, which was soon filled by the US and China. These two were later followed by India, Brazil, some Middle Eastern countries, and the Republic of South Africa, Africa's regional power.

Russia-Africa relations began to become livelier towards the end of the 1990s. Reciprocal visits by the highest ranking officials were initiated. According to the International Relations Committee of the Russian Federation Council, Russia was coming back to Africa by returning to the traces the Soviet Union left on the continent during the Cold War period.<sup>2</sup> A. Elua, the Madagascar Republic's ambassador in Moscow, summarised the situation with these words: "We had lost one another for a short while after the dissolution of the Soviet Union."<sup>3</sup> High-ranking Russian officials started to refer to Africa's importance for Russia's foreign policy in their speeches. The speeches of Yeltsin, as well as prime ministers V. Chernomyrdin and Y. M. Primakov, also showed similar signals and explanations. In the programme of "Dni Afriki" (African Days) organised in Moscow on May 24, 1999, former Foreign Affairs Minister I. S. Ivanov specifically mentioned that Russia perceived Africa as "a years-long tested and reliable ally, which has been actively making its existence better known on world issues."<sup>4</sup> In his formal visit to Washington in 1999, deputy minister of Russian foreign affairs G. Karasin explained that Russia had not left Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The Russian perception of Africa had begun to change in accordance with the framework of new values and national priorities at the beginning of the 21st Century. Russia started to establish close relations with Angola, its former ally. Deputy Foreign Minister V. Sredin said that Russia-Angola relations were "stepping up to the stage of strategic partnership."<sup>6</sup> From 2001 to 2005, Russian interest in Africa began growing, and Russia-Africa relations gained positive dynamism. In 2001, the Presidents of Algeria, Gabon, Guinea, Egypt, Nigeria, and Prime Minister of Ethiopia visited Moscow. In his meeting with the president of Gabon, O. Bongo, in April 2001, Putin mentioned that Russia wanted to establish friendly relations with all countries of the world, and Africa was no less important than any other region (Deich and Polikanov 2003a: 53). Russia participated in the African Action Plan, which was accepted by the G-8 countries at the 2002 Kananaskis Summit in Canada. It also participated in the application of the "New Partnership for African Development" (NEPAD) programme (Korendiasov 2003: 97-105).

The “Russia-Africa Business Council” was founded in 2002, with the participation of 60 businessmen who were active in the oil, gas, finance, and tourism sectors of Africa. Organized on October 24-25, 2006, the Russia-South Africa Business Forum took part as one of the organizers of “Expo-Russia.”<sup>7</sup> Although it fell short of having a serious presence until 2008, this council is reconstructing itself, and G.G. Petrov, Russian Federation Commerce and Industry Chamber Vice-President, pointed to it as an umbrella institution for serving bilateral business relations. Russia’s ambassador to Ethiopia was accredited to the African Union commission in October 2005. Relations were launched with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where the Republic of South Africa plays a central role, as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), where Nigeria plays a central role.

Growing interest in Africa among Russian political and economic circles was easily observable in 2006 and 2007. Putin visited the Republic of South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco in September 2006. These visits were the first of their kind, as Putin was reported to be the first Russian leader who went to the south of the Equator. Putin’s visits to Africa, including South Africa and Morocco, were in fact an open message to the world announcing that Russia is coming back to the region where it traditionally had geopolitical interests, and Russia is doing this in a qualitatively new way. In symbolic terms, because South Africa and Morocco were located on opposite extremes of the African continent, Putin was sending the message that the entire African continent was important to Russia (Shedrin 2006). The Republic of South Africa turned out to be an important pilot region for Russia’s expansion into Africa and its relations with the continent. Russian business circles selected this country as a base for African expansion.<sup>8</sup>

The Russian Federation’s Foreign Ministers visited some African countries. Former Prime Minister Fradkov visited Angola, Namibia, and the Republic of South Africa in March 2007. There were also inter-parliamentary visits between Russia and African countries. In the July 2007 summit of G-8 countries in Heiligendamm, Germany, Putin mentioned that the solution to Africa’s energy problem would pave the way for the continent’s development. Putin sent a message to African presidents and governments on “Africans’ Day” celebrations in May 2007. An international exhibition named “*Mir Afriki*” (African World) and a forum named “*Afrika Sevodnya*” (Today’s Africa) were planned for 2007. However, neither took place. The Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity and Cooperation Society signed a cooperation memorandum on May 19, 2008.<sup>9</sup>

The Russian Foreign Ministry published a document entitled “A Comprehensive Look at Russian Federation Foreign Policy” on March 27, 2007. The document mentioned that the “policy of developing traditional friendly relations with Africa and cooperation on mutual interests provided the opportunity to use the African factor in such a way as to make progress on our international interests and reach our economic goals.” The document advocated actively participating to resolve conflicts in the African continent, easing the debts of African countries, contributing to the development of trained human capital, and continuing humanitarian assistance to the continent. Political relations were said to be supplemented by better commercial-economic relations.<sup>10</sup> In sum, this document provided a clear answer to the question: “Is Africa still necessary for Russia?”

The 2007 activity report of the Russian Federation’s Foreign Ministry stated that “a new dynamism started to appear in the development of Russia-Africa traditional friendly relations.” The report said that 230 Russian soldiers and police participated in UN-supported peace-keeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Western Sahara, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sudan. More than 500 students from 16 African countries received practical training in military education centres that were institutionally connected to the Russian Defence Ministry. Seventy-eight persons from the security forces of 17 African countries received peace-keeping training at the Russian Ministry of the Interior. One hundred fifty African experts were educated in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Volgograd academies, all of which were connected to the interior ministry. Bilateral mixed economic commissions and business councils were formed for the purpose of raising commercial-economic relations to the level of diplomatic relations. The Russian Federation’s Foreign Ministry continued to provide political-diplomatic support to Russian firms operating on the continent. According to 2007 figures, Russian investment in sub-Saharan Africa was as high as \$1.5 billion. Russia’s trade volume with these countries grew by 20 percent, surpassing \$1.3 billion. By the year 2007, 4,500 African students were being educated in Russia, and 50 percent of them were funded by Russia from the federal budget. Eight hundred state-funded fellowships were reserved for African students in the 2007-2008 budget. Assistance was allocated for fighting AIDS and malaria on the continent. Humanitarian and financial aid was provided to Kenya, Sudan, Guinea, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and other countries.<sup>11</sup>

The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept stated that: “Russia will enhance its multi-pronged interaction with African States at the multilateral and bilateral levels, including through dialogue and cooperation within the G8, and contribute to

a prompt resolution of regional conflicts and crisis situations in Africa. We will develop political dialogue with the African Union and sub-regional organizations, taking advantage of their capabilities to involve Russia in economic projects implemented on the continent.”<sup>12</sup> Africa was again the ninth, followed only by Latin America, on the list of the ten most important regions for Russian interests in the 2008 document. All these developments pointed to Russia’s acknowledgement of Africa’s growing role in the contemporary world as well as Russia’s desire to participate in the resolution of international problems on the continent in order to create a multi-polar world system. Russia was coming back to Africa slowly, but changing conditions invalidated past methods of engagement. Russia now had to draw a brand new road map in Africa.

### **The New Road Map**

Russian experts put forth various opinions regarding Russia’s new road map in Africa. First and foremost, they mention that Russia’s relations with the developing world should rely on three fundamental principles: “economism,” “universalism,” and “pragmatism.” (Simonyan and Avakov 1996: 177-178). The basis of Russia-Africa relations in the post-Soviet period should be shaped by “intelligent pragmatism” (*razumniy pragmatism*) and diplomatic relations should be “economised” (Solodovnikov 2000: 11).

According to S. M. Rogov, director of the Institute for USA and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a large portion of Africa and other regions such as Afghanistan have fallen into “black holes” during the globalisation process, becoming centres of instability. In these conditions, Russia should avoid embracing extremism or revealing a radical image, and refuse to embrace “big brother” responsibilities. Rogov recommends that Russia construct interest-based and realist relations with Africa, rather than ideology-based and romantic relations. Rogov acknowledges that Africa has some rapidly-developing countries, like Botswana, and quite wealthy ones, like South Africa, while some regions of Russia, such as Tuva, have levels of development resembling some countries of the mid-Africa. Although Russia’s reconstruction deserves the highest priority, this does not require ignoring other countries of the world. Russia’s resources are limited, but it could still accomplish a lot of things on several domains. If Russia wants to play a significant role in world affairs as an interest-seeking state instead of a superpower, Rogov believes it should not remain isolated from the rest of the world but instead remain continually active.<sup>13</sup>

According to A. B. Davidson, a well-known historian and Africa expert at the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the loss of Russia’s relative advantage in Africa would be a great state-made mistake, as

this advantage was achieved in return for several efforts in the past.<sup>14</sup> A. M. Vasilyev, director of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on contacts with African leaders, claimed that Russia should be as active in Africa as it was during the Soviet Union period, but it should abandon its former ideological approach and pursue pragmatic purposes only.<sup>15</sup> Russia should preserve its traditional friendly relations and consider the most recent transitions in the African continent. Most importantly, Russia should not look down on Africa's problems because they are not so different from its own.<sup>16</sup> According to Andrei Maslov, general press director of the *Af-Ro*<sup>17</sup>, a journal on Russia-Africa business and commercial relations, Russia should support the existence and independence of African states as well as their regional integration processes. The reason is simple: Regional integration is the most natural response to US and Chinese efforts to establish hegemony in other parts of the world.<sup>18</sup>

How should Russia develop good relations with Africa? The list of Africa-friendly countries include the US, United Kingdom, France, China, Japan, India, and Brazil. China, India and Brazil all played a significant role in Africa's recovery from economic and systemic crises during the 1990s. China developed a policy of cooperation with African countries without interfering in their domestic affairs and political structures, focusing on investment in areas that did not require vast resources but returned good revenues. Thus, Russian experts generally argue that Russia should benefit from China's past experience in its conduct of relations with the African continent (Deich 2001: 100-112, Deich et al. 2003: 48-49).

Both positive and negative factors affect Russia-Africa relations. One of the primary negatives is on legal grounds. The international bilateral agreements for arranging relations between Russia and Africa have not yet been signed with the majority of the countries in Africa (Rubinstein 1997: 224). Furthermore, as of yet there is no "Russia-Africa" forum where high-ranking diplomatic bodies and representative agencies can meet. In contrast, Africa has such platforms and institutions currently operating with other countries, such as "US-Africa," "France-Africa," "China-Africa," "Japan-Africa" and "South Korea-Africa" councils or forums.<sup>19</sup>

Russia also has an image problem in Africa. The new post-Cold War generation in Africa (those who grew up and were socialised in the aftermath of the Soviet Union) do not know much about Africa's formerly close relations with the Soviets. While other countries have filled African markets with investment and consumer goods, thus promoting positive images of themselves, Russia has not. Furthermore, racially motivated attacks by Russian ultra-

nationalist groups against African students and workers have damaged the image of Russia in Africa. Mutual denunciations by the media doubly damage the images of both sides (Deich 2007: 21-44). Ongoing racist violence continues to seriously damage Russia's image among the African countries and their intelligentsia. In response to the rise in violent attacks against their citizens, almost all African ambassadors in Moscow demanded meetings with the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister on May 18, 2002, urging strong measures against such attacks.<sup>20</sup> Despite such protests, diplomatic notes and the efforts of the Russian security forces, racist attacks still continue. From January 2004 to January 2009, attacks against African and the Middle Easterners in Russia resulted in 16 people murdered and 248 beaten and wounded.<sup>21</sup>

In 2007, Russia maintained diplomatic relations with 53 African countries but lacked diplomatic presence in 13. Some Russian embassies in Africa have been attempting to make up for this deficiency by being accredited in a number of countries. Similarly, 14 African countries lack diplomatic representation in Moscow. Embassies in seven of them are accredited jointly with other countries.

Objectively speaking, Russia also has advantages, especially compared to other interested countries on the continent. First and foremost is the fact that Russia has never supported the colonisation of Africa or the slave trade. On the contrary, the former Soviet Union contributed politically and materially to the colonised African people's struggles for independence. It was the defender and supporter of Africa at international fora. In this regard, an important Russian advantage is the 100,000 Africans who received education or practical training at Russian universities and military schools. These students constitute an elite group of politicians and businesspeople in Africa.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, several Russian experts have produced geological maps that picture the under- and above-ground resources of a large portion of the continent, as well as its economic potential. This provides a significant advantage to Russia, especially relative to the US, China, India, Brazil and other countries that work actively on the continent.<sup>23</sup>

### **Geo-economics as a Supplement to Geo-politics**

Russian foreign policy-makers imply that they will pursue equality in relations with African countries, refrain from intervening in domestic politics, maintain mutual respect for independence and territorial integrity, and recognise the UN's role in the continent. Russia is willing to develop its commercial-economic relations by means of Russian firms that operate on the continent, have economic cooperation with the relatively developed countries of Africa, and expand these attempts to countries that once fell out of the Soviet Union's scope. Russia shapes these strategies in accordance with

the direct and indirect effects of Africa on world politics. In brief, Russia wants to contextualise its relations with Africa in an entirely pragmatic framework and bring this framework in line with its national interests.

Russia needs Africa as much as Africa needs Russia. According to A. M. Vasilyev, Russia's need for Africa is even greater than Africa's need for Russia.<sup>24</sup> In political terms, as Deputy Director of S. N. Kryukov pointed out, African countries can be regarded as Russia's foreign policy reserve. African countries are the first to support Russia in cases when Russia insists on its own stance in the international arena or resists pressure from the West.<sup>25</sup> Africa is necessary for Russia's trade as well. Russian products, machines, equipment, and weapons are familiar and easily repairable in Africa. Furthermore, Russia of late has been selling these goods not on credit but for real money.

Africa is also important to Russia because of its rich natural resources.<sup>26</sup> Africa's resource wealth provides potential new areas of expansion and opportunity for Russia. Several Russian firms currently work in the aluminium, manganese, and diamond industries. Africa is important as it is the supplier of several goods that Russia needs such as rubber, sea products, fish, cocoa, coffee and tea. Big Russian firms operate in several areas and domains on the continent. For instance, *Gazprom* is willing to establish a \$10 billion gas pipeline between Nigeria and Algeria. *Alrosa* extracts diamond in South Africa, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and Angola, and controls 60 percent of diamonds extracted in Angola. Other big companies that operate in Africa are *Norilskiy Nikel*, *Rusal Boksit*, *Lukoil*, *Tehnopromeksport*, *Stroytransgaz*, *Silovie Mashini*, *Tyajpromeksport*, *Russkiy Aluminiy* and *Renova*. *Lukoil* works in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast; *Rusal Boksit* operates in Guinea. *Russkiy Aluminiy* produces aluminium in Guinea. *Renova* administers manganese reserves in South Africa. Russia's aluminium industry is partially run by raw materials from Africa (Lopatov 2007).

Despite Russia's vast territory and its under- and above-ground resources, Russia experiences a shortage of raw materials such as manganese, chrome, mercury, titanium, and aluminium. Imports fill the gap. Russian aluminium-processing companies supply approximately 80 percent of their needs with imported raw materials. Russian facilities that process metals like copper, nickel, zinc, tin, and antimony will probably experience difficulties due to shrinkage of the national reserves. Uranium reserves, which provide the essential component of the nuclear sector, are about to be used up. This means that Russia may soon become an uranium-importer. The Russian Federation Ministry of Natural Resources reports that the country will soon be unable to supply its need of manganese, chrome, bauxite, high-quality kaolin, bentonite, and similar metals from its own reserves (Lopatov 2003: 91).

An essential component of Russia-Africa relations is the domain of military-technical relations. These relations, established during the Soviet Union years, have always been given priority due to the purchase of military equipment and weapons. The militaries of several African countries, including Algeria, Angola, and Ethiopia, are 90 percent equipped with Soviet weaponry and military instruments. According to data provided by the London Strategic Research Centre, by the early 1990s 70 percent of tanks, 40 percent of combat planes, and 35 percent of helicopters in the African continent were Soviet-made (Emelyanov 2000: 326). These weapons and technical supplies require modernisation and spare parts. Because African militaries are accustomed to Soviet weapons and technology, Russia is the only country that can satisfy their need for new weapons purchases and the technical staff and military experts for providing instruction in their use.

The total cost of Russia's weapons delivery to African countries from 1999-2006 is \$1.4 billion.<sup>27</sup> Russia erased Algeria's total debt of \$4.7 billion during Putin's formal visit to the country in March 2006. During this visit, Algeria declared that it would purchase weapons from Russia costing a total of \$7.5 billion; the package was to include military planes, tanks, land and air defense missiles, weaponry modernization, and military ship repairs (Bakucharsky 2007: 118). African countries are willing to purchase more modern and advanced weapons from Russia and to convince Russia to help with the modernisation of their arms technology. In return, they propose alternative payback methods such as transferring the shares of their own companies to Russian firms or authorising them for administering their national, modern, valuable mine reserves. This is the reason why military-technical relations with African countries are a driver for Russia's business affairs in the continent.

Looking retrospectively at Russia-Africa relations that began developing at the beginning of the 21st Century, we can clearly put forth the following argument: From Russia's perspective, geo-political priorities are increasingly combined with geo-economic concerns in the relations with Africa. Former Foreign Minister I. S. Ivanov affirmed this situation in a 2001 speech:

Please see how a ruthless struggle has started among strong states for strengthening their existence in the African continent. The majority of interests there are in the economic domain. In this situation, why should Russia remain outside of multilateral economic projects in Africa and of mutually beneficial bilateral commercial-economic relations? Our country played the vanguard role in the decolonisation of the continent, and helped several African countries' independence struggle. They remember that very well.<sup>28</sup>

Russia's annual commercial-economic relations with the entire continent of Africa were on the level of \$4.45 billion in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco exemplify the North African countries with which Russia has traditionally had better relations. Among sub-Saharan countries, Russia's priority economic and political partners are Angola, Namibia, Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mali, Guinea, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and most recently, the Republic of South Africa.<sup>30</sup>

One of Russia's primary instruments for its conduct of relations with Africa is the policy of debt relief. The "Foreign Policy Concept" document of 1993 advocated putting diplomatic pressure on debtor countries to pay their debts. However, this firm strategy changed during the Putin years. Former Russian Prime Minister M. Fradkov mentions that Russia's policy of contextualising its relations with Africa on the basis of economics started off with this debt relief policy.<sup>31</sup> In 1999, Russia cancelled the debts of poor countries (the majority being from the African continent), totalling \$904 million. The amount of debt relief by Russia reached \$572 million by 2000 (Ivanov 2004: 379). In his visit to Algeria on March 11, 2006, as mentioned, Putin declared that he would erase Algeria's \$4.7 billion debt to Russia. In 2008, Russia announced debt relief worth \$20 billion on behalf of African countries.<sup>32</sup>

The most significant factor behind bringing geo-economically based relations alongside geopolitical prerogatives is a foreign policy attitude that relies on the control of economic and energy resources. Engaging in cooperation with African countries in the oil, gas, platinum-group metal, and diamond markets, Russia is attempting to be the world leader in production and market development. Russia's prominent energy companies (such as Lukoil, Gazprom, Sintezneftegaz and Rosneft) actively work in African countries like Angola, Namibia, Egypt, Algeria, and Libya. This subject also has a nuclear face. Uranium extracted from Africa is quite a significant raw material for Rosatom, which wants to compete for global nuclear leadership. Considering that energy resources have recently moved towards the gas and nuclear sectors, Russia-Africa cooperation further increases Russia's chance of becoming an energy super-power (Maslov 2005: 59-66, Maslov 2006: 61-75).

Russia is one of the few countries of the world capable of realising a nuclear-based transformation. It can produce uranium and utilise spent nuclear fuel. Russia signed treaties with some African countries on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The only active nuclear energy power plant in Africa is the Koeberg plant in the Republic of South Africa, which has periodically had to halt its activities because of technical problems. Russia offered to establish a nuclear power plant in South Africa (currently experiencing an energy shortage) with Russian technology and to cooperate with the country on uranium

production. Sergei Krienko, the president of Rosatom, announced on February 26, 2007 that three Russian companies, “Techsnabeksport”, “Renova” and “Vneshtogbank”, had decided to establish a joint firm for the purpose of extracting uranium in Namibia.<sup>33</sup> On this issue, Yuriy Trutnev, the Russian Minister of Natural Resources, stated that Russia would be willing to help construct a nuclear power plant in Namibia. Nevertheless, negotiations on the construction of nuclear power plant are still in the preliminary stage. Irina Esipova, the representative of Russia’s nuclear power construction company “Atomstroyeksport”, mentioned that countries that are willing to order the construction of nuclear power plants should arrange the legal infrastructure and cooperate with international institutions for this purpose.<sup>34</sup> North African countries also announced that they were ready for nuclear energy cooperation with Russia (Deich 2007: 90-91).

Independent of its being an instrument of foreign policy and a matter of economic interest, the uranium issue is a sensitive one for Russia. The country’s nuclear plants are currently operating off of raw materials that were stored up during the Soviet Union period.<sup>35</sup> In addition to its domestic consumption, Russia also supplies fuel for about 30 countries with which it has nuclear agreements. The processing and production of uranium are quite expensive in Russia because of low-quality uranium reserves in the country. To maintain its status as a large and reliable provider of nuclear fuel in the world market, Russia has to find uranium resources outside its territory (Deich 2007: 91).

Compared to its rivals, Russia is in a different situation on the energy issue. Russia’s rivals are reluctant to invest in energy production in Africa because they are already in need of energy resources themselves. Among the influential powers that operate in Africa (e.g. Russia, the US, United Kingdom, China, India, Japan, and Germany) Russia is the only energy-exporting country. Considering the rise of energy consumption in Africa, Russia seems to be the only powerful player. This is the reason why Russia is the “naturally responsible” player in the resolution of Africa’s energy problems.<sup>36</sup>

A. Maslow argues that Russia should cooperate with Germany on the African continent. There are indeed no serious economic or political conflicts between the two countries. Both countries are making progress toward establishing strategic energy alliances. Unlike the US, France, United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, and some others, Germany has no big energy firms that operate abroad. Germany currently purchases gas, oil, and other raw energy materials from foreign companies. This is advantageous for Russia, as Russia and Germany now have the potential to invest in third countries jointly.

## Conclusion

The Russian administration struggles for a multi-polar world system against the US pressure for a uni-polar system. Finding new allies in various regions has become quite important to Russia. If Russia-West relations had progressed smoothly, Moscow's involvement in Africa might have remained low (similar to the situation in the 1990s). Nevertheless, several developments damaged, if not destroyed altogether, the bridges between Russia and the West. These include NATO's continuous eastward expansion; Russia's disappointment during the 1998 Balkan Crisis; criticisms about Russia during the second Chechnya war in 1999; Russia's failure to prevent the current war in Iraq; serious Western opposition to Russia-Iran relations on the nuclear field; Kosovo's independence; and most recently, criticisms of Russia's conduct during the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008.

In its efforts to construct a multi-polar world system, Russia is willing to find and maintain friendly relations with countries that would support its cause. Russia attempts to establish close relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia; with Germany in Europe; with Armenia Caucasus; with Iran and Syria in the Middle East; with India in Southeast Asia; with China in the Far East; with Venezuela in South America; and finally, with Algeria, Egypt, South Africa and Angola in Africa. The basis of the close relations with the mentioned African countries is the legacy of prominent relations during the Soviet Union. As an outcome of its pragmatist policy, Russia seems successful in reconciling the diverging interests in different regions with the countries it wants to follow close relations.

Regional integrations are gaining speed in world politics. Africa is no exception to this trend. The most attractive organisation is the *African Union*, though it has yet to prove itself to the world. However, if it reaches its aims in the long run, Africa's weight and influence in international politics and world public opinion will undoubtedly grow. Russia has quite often benefited from the strategy of evaluating all possible scenarios before taking any action in its conduct of foreign policy. Similar to the case with the OIC, Russia has achieved an accredited status in the African Union as well. Russia's attempts to strengthen its relations with the African Union can be regarded as one of its long-term investments in Africa.

Africa is an important place for Russia, which has successfully used its energy as a foreign policy instrument. The upsurge in energy prices contributed to the stability of the Russian economy. Russia seems eager to enable its gradually growing service and industrial sectors to compete in regional and global markets, and to find markets and raw materials for the goods it produces. Africa is able to meet Russia's demands easily, thanks to its under- and

above-ground resources. The heritage of the Soviet Union period provides an even more auspicious atmosphere. Russia's weapons and military technology constitute an important dimension of its economy, and Africa is a significant market for this industry as African armies still predominantly use Soviet-made arms.

Russia's new foreign policy road map requires establishing much better relations with African countries. Therefore, Russia will probably penetrate the continent in a more organised and powerful manner, even though this will never reach the level of the "African explosion" of the 1960s. In doing this, Russia will have to derive lessons from its experience during the 1990s. Russia-Africa relations have the potential to contribute to Russia's achievement of its priority national interests. This situation was summarised in a panel meeting entitled "Russia and Africa in the Short and Middle Future" organised by the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for African Studies on February 28, 2006. The message was as follows: "...developing a joint action with the African countries in the international arena would increase the probability of Russia's becoming an influential and independent centre of world politics." The primary justification for this optimism was the closeness of opinion between Russia and African countries on the construction of a new world order, and shared attitudes between the two on major international issues.<sup>37</sup>

There will be increasing involvement of the politically and economically powerful actors of the world such as the EU, US, Germany, United Kingdom, France, China, Japan, India, and Brazil on the African continent. These countries, with varying degrees, are willing to use Africa's resources, play a major role in African economies, make African countries' policies closer to their own, and be able to intervene in developments as needed. Being left out of the game within the context of this growing African trend would mean being left out of the game in the international stage as well. Because Russia wants to achieve its former prestige among the world's nations, Russia will definitely return to Africa. Recent developments already show this to be true.

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# Rusya-Afrika İlişkilerinin Geri Dönüşü

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**Özet:** Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşünden sonra Rusya-Afrika ilişkileri siyasi ve ekonomik anlamda hızlı bir düşüş sürecine girmiştir. Soğuk savaş sonrası dönemin şartları gereği, Rusya-Afrika ilişkilerinin geniş çapta yeniden yapılandırılması gerekmiştir. 21. yüzyılın ilk on yılında Rus dış politikası, ekonomik fayda ve pragmatizm ilkeleri temel alınarak yapılanmaya başlamıştır. Yeni milli öncelikler çerçevesinde Afrika'nın Rusya'da algılanış şekli değişmiş ve Rusya-Afrika ilişkileri yeni ve olumlu bir ivme kazanmıştır. Bu makalede, Afrika kıtasının uluslararası arenada yükselişinin, Rusya'ya ekonomik ve siyasi açıdan bir dizi yeni fırsat sunduğu savunulmaktadır. Putin döneminin ekonomi ve enerji kaynaklarının kontrolü odaklı yeni dış politika anlayışının etkisiyle, jeo-politik ilişkiler yerini yavaş yavaş jeo-ekonomik ilişkilere bırakmaya başlamıştır. Dünyanın siyasi ve ekonomik gücü elinde tutan ülkelerinin yeni politikası, Afrika kıtasından ekonomik menfaatler sağlamak ve kıta üzerinde siyasi hakimiyet kurmaya çalışmak yönündedir. Rusya, dünya devletleri arasındaki eski prestijli konumuna yeniden sahip olmaya çok istekli olduğunu her fırsatta göstermektedir. Bu sebeple Rusya, Afrika kıtasına yavaş yavaş geri dönmeyi arzu etmektedir fakat bu seferki yaklaşımı "yepyeni" bir yol haritası üzerinden olacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, Afrika, Rus dış politikası, Afrika dış ilişkileri, Soğuk savaş sonrası dönem.

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# Возрождение Российско-Африканских Отношений

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**Резюме:** После распада Советского Союза в политической и экономической сферах русско-африканских отношений начался процесс быстрого спада. После окончания эпохи “холодной войны” необходима была крупномасштабная реструктуризация русско-африканских отношений. В первое десятилетие XXI. века, русская внешняя политика начала формироваться на основах экономической выгоды и принципах прагматизма. В рамках новых национальных приоритетов изменилось восприятие Африки в России и русско-африканские отношения получили новый позитивный импульс. В данной статье утверждается, что тенденция роста Африканского континента на международной арене представляет новую серию возможностей для России в экономической и политической областях. Под влиянием нового понимания внешней политики периода Путина, основанной на зависимости от контроля над экономическими и энергетическими ресурсами, гео-политические отношения постепенно уступают место гео-экономическим отношениям. Новая политика мировых держав, обладающих политической и экономической властью направлена на обеспечение экономических интересов и установление политического господства над Африканским континентом. Россия использует любую возможность, чтобы продемонстрировать свое желание возрождения бывшего авторитета среди мировых государств. Поэтому Россия медленно возвращается на Африканский континент, но на этот раз подход России будет совсем иным.

**Ключевые Слова:** Россия, Африка, русская внешняя политика, внешняя политика Африки, период окончания “холодной войны”.

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