



Section 5. Political science

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POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RISING RUSSIAN INTEREST IN AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The vast natural resources available in Africa, the corresponding energy needs, an increased demand for raw materials in Russia, and the need to forge diplomatic coalition that will counter balance Western dominance in Africa that has spurred rising Russian interest in Africa. In spite of limitless opportunities that such an association potentially offers, it remains to be seen whether Africa will benefit in the long run from Russian involvement as well as whether Russian can maximize the potentials its rising interests in Africa offer. Through the examination of primary and secondary sources which were interpreted following a qualitative analyses and presented thematically. This article examines these issues, first looking at the historical basis for the present cooperation between Russia and Africa. The second part gives an overview of various political and economic initiatives already taken to strengthen Russo-African ties; this is followed by analysis of the political economy of rising Russian interest in Africa. The final part addresses the reasons why Africa is seemingly retrogressing and offers solutions that could aid Africa to fully maximize the benefits of rising Russian interest.

Keywords: *Political Economy, Africa, Russia, interest, prospects, challenges*

Historical Background

The relationship between the African states and Russian is not only economic but also socio-political. Politically, the relationship between African states and Russia dates back to the preindependence era and revolve around fighting colonialism and imperialism of the western European countries. The early relationship between Africans and Russians, for instance, evolved in response to the west-

ern world's domination of Africans as colonized people. In spite of western European countries early contact with Africa in the Fourteenth century, it was the Russians who had a better understanding of the plight of Africans as oppressed people dominated by western imperialism. Russian had more sympathy with African Nationalism than most European countries (Encyclopedia Britannica 2011).

Russian offered support to Africa countries in the struggle for freedom and independence. It was in this context that African Nationalism got its inspiration from the domestic socialist policies or the soviet union and from the ideas of Vladimir Lenin's theory of imperialism (Mazui and Tidy 1986) contend that Lenin's theory inspired many African nationalist not only to speak against colonialism and imperialism but also to revolt against domination by colonial masters. Lenin view imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism and reason that the revolution against Western capitalism was a revolution against its highest stage. Domestic socialism was, for him, the appropriate economic policy suitably positioned to counter imperialism which was the cornerstone of international capitalism. Lenin views resonated well with the aspirations of many Africans who detested western imperial domination and demanded independence.

Russo-African political and Economic initiative after 1945

The beginning of the cold war in the aftermath of the Second World War saw the intensification of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the African states. The Soviet Union presented itself as a country that had the interest of poor countries at heart. During the 1950 and early 1960s, the Soviet Union under the leadership of President Nikita Khrushchev actively supported Africa's revolution and instructed soviet scholars to defend African Nationalism and support revolution against imperialism on the continent. One Russian scholar, I. I. potekhin, perfectly contextualized and linked the idea of pan-Africanism with the Russian philosophy of socialism and imperialism when he stated that;

Pan-Africanism as an ideology contains much of what is alien to our (soviet) ideology. However, pan-Africanism aims at uniting all the peoples of Africa for the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and for their national liberation. In addition, from this point of view pan-Africanism deserves the support of all people of good will of all striving for the ideas of progress and democracy (Mazui and Tidy 1986. 367). The Soviet Union supported African states when many Western countries including the United States were reluctant to

extend moral support to freedom fighters owing to the socio-economic and political relations they had with minority regimes in Africa.

In 1973, for instance, after many global countries recognized Guinea Bissau's independence from Portugal, the united states vetoed its application for united Nations membership (Mazui and Tidy 1986. 367) the continued support for Portugal by Western countries was based on its membership of the North Atlantic Treaty organization (NATO), despite the fact that Portugal was under the fascist rule of Salazar and caitano and was reluctant to Liberate its colonies in Africa, notably Angola, Guinea-Bissau contribution to the independence of Africa can be summarized in three ways. First Lenin philosophy of domestic socialism and his theory of Anti-imperialism provided a theoretical attack on economic imperialism (Marxism, or socialism) in the struggle for the liberation of the continent. It extended considerable financial and material support to the movement engaged in liberation struggles in Africa.

Second, the Soviet Union socialist policies of raising an economically backward country to an industrial one through widespread Literacy programs and the massive introduction of social welfare policies.

The Soviet Union not only condemned imperialism and colonization in Africa but also provided practical solutions and alternative through its socialist policies. Third and most importantly the Soviet Union was and is still one of the world super powers and had a permanent seat and veto powers in the security council of the United Nations. This gave the Soviet Union the moral authority and a platform to speak against colonialism and defend the plight of the poor countries in Africa. Comparatively though the United States spent more money on Africa than the Soviet Union, especially in alleviating poverty and underdevelopment. Russia provided military support and trained cadres during the wars of liberation in Southern Africa region (Alexius Amtaika 2013).

The First Russian- African summit 23–24 October, 2019

In his efforts to strengthen relations between African States and Russian, President Vladimir Putin organized the summit which

was co-hosted by him and the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi at sochi in Russia. The motto of the summit was “peace, security and development. It was attended by seventeenth heads of states. It was aimed at laying a good foundation for further deepening the Russia-Africa partnership in the interest of African States and Russia in prosperity and wellbeing. The conference also set out to strengthen the legal and contractual framework for cooperation in communication and mass media, promote mutual participation of the masses.

President Putin sought to rekindle relations established during the cold war and pledged to double trade with African countries.

It should be worth noting that, for president Putin, and arguably for many African states, the summit conference may be simply that, it took place. President Putin needs to retain his relations in Africa that help him dilute UN. Condemnations and economic sanctions over his attack on Ukraine (Russia-Africa summit 2019 wikipedia.org).

The second Russian- African summit 27–28 July, 2023

This summit took place in St. Petersburg on the 27 and 28 July, 2023 with the presence of 43 heads of States from Africa. President Putin used the summit to try to reassure African countries that Russia would provide free grain from its own reserves and find a way to move its shipments to countries most in need.

Many resolutions were taken in the conference inter alia.

- Russia will find solutions on the supply of grains and fertilizers to the continent despite the suspension of the black sea grain agreement;
- President Putin also announced a debt cancellation initiative to the tune of 23 Billion Dollars;
- He equally endorsed the need for the African union to be granted full membership in the G20 club of nations. This conference was highly successful with the presence of 43 heads of states from Africa.

Political economy of Russian interest in Africa

It can be argued that the rise of Russian interest in Africa is fundamentally driven by

motivations such as the quest for resources, business opportunities, diplomatic openings, and strategic alliance. Africa holds a central place in president Putin’s foreign policy which declares its determination to end an unjust “unipolar” world order dominated by a United States and its European allies, and replace it with a “multipolar” geometry among great powers including Russia. Africa is a primary audience for Putin’s narrative in which he promised Russian help to African states in casting off the lingering vestiges of European colonization (Russian –African summit 2023) Wikipedia. Org).

Also, Africa is the single largest audience for Putin’s campaign against diplomatic isolation. African states are central to Moscow’s periodic appeals for nation’s votes or at least abstention, against UN resolutions condemning the brutal assault on Ukraine.

Trade Flows

In the domain of Trade flows, during the independence period there were many exchanges between Russia and African States. Such connections collapse into low levels of economic engagement during the 1970s and 1980s, the arms trade being an exception. One of the major barriers that impacted on this co-operation and relationship negatively was language. Many Africans speak western European languages, such as English, French and Portuguese. These languages indirectly link Africa countries to the economies of Western European countries. This suggests that language and economics are interlinked, and since business cannot take place in the absence of language. This explains why African countries have maintained their close relationship with former colonial masters in spite of a better past of oppression and imperialism. The low level of contact between Russia and Africa countries have led to calls being made by African governments to review its policies toward Africa. Trade between Russia and Africa amounted to only US \$6 billion in 2009 (Klomegah 2008). Low levels of trade with Russia are mainly blamed on the lack of knowledge and expertise among African economies in entering into the challenging Russian market. Apart from its sheer size and language problems, Russia presents a serious challenge to many African countries in terms of the bureaucratic hurdles

that make doing business with that country difficult, as African countries lack the resources to help their companies do business with Russia. Consequently, Africa countries prefer to stick to their regional or traditional markets such as the European Union, Canada, Japan, and the U.S.A where they receive trade benefits. In order to boost trade relationship with Africa, Russian leaders have made only two visits to Africa-one in 2009, when Russia president Dimitry Medvedev visited four African countries namely Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia and Angola (Smoicheko 2009). In 2006, Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Africa. These visits reflects positive development in revitalizing the Russian African relationship and reasserting Moscow's clout in a former soviet sphere of influence.

Military cooperation

The military cooperation over the past decade, as Russia has built new security relationships with African countries, it has supported Wagner's provision of soldiers, advisors, trainers and weapons to help elites maintain their power in the face of insurgencies or communal conflict. Wagner Finances its role not only with funding from Russian States but also by negotiating concessionary deals with the ruling elites to mine gold, diamonds or other minerals, or to extract valuable hardwoods from forest lands. Wagner and other prigozhinlinked companies have been prominent, if uneven in execution, recent years in the central African Republic/Libya, Mozambique, Sudan and Mali (Kirtika sharad 2023).

The end of the cold war has not only extinguished a number of proxy wars, it has also dramatically affected the flow of external resources to the African government. As Jeffery Lefebvre observed in the new world order, "the days of right-wing and left-wing dictatorial regimes being lavished with aid and excessed for their internal excesses were over" Russia's presence in the continent with the Wagner company linked to the Russian president Vladimir Putin with a goal to train African soldiers and sell sophisticated weapons to friendly African countries she has signed defense agreement with. To this end, four countries in Africa are in the spot light, the Republic of Central Africa (CAR), Sudan, Libya and Mozambique have signed this de-

fense agreement with Russia. In Mali after the military takeover, there was an uproar in the capital city Bamako where the masses were jubilating, requesting for the deployment of Russian fighters into the country after many years of Islamic insurgency in the North that has led to the death of several persons (Tarh 2021). Russia military pacts with these countries is a big threat to France that had hitherto exclusive rights to provide military equipment and train military officers of her former colonies.

The Tragedy of Africa's continued Retrogression

There is no gainsaying that Africa countries have relatively larger endowments of natural resources than Russia, while Russia have engaged in high rates of savings, investment in education, capital accumulation, sound macroeconomic management practices, relatively open trade policies dynamic agricultural sectors, the maintenance of relatively equitable income distribution, and political credibility, African countries, with the exception of a few, have done the exact opposite (political Articles 2009).

The main obstacle to African development is the corrupt autocratic leadership and incompetent government that most African countries have been saddled with since independence.

African is widely considered among the world's most corrupt places, a factor seen as contributing to the stunted development and impoverishment of many African states of the ten countries considered most corrupt in the world, six are in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Transparency international, a leading global watchdog on corruption (Furphy 2010). A 2002 African union study estimated that corruption cost the continent roughly US \$150billion a year. To compare, developed countries gave US \$22.5 billion in aid to sub-Saharan Africa in 2008, according to the organized action for Economic Cooperation and Development (Hanson 2009). Transparency international 2010 corruption perception's index, released in October 2010, identified Africa as the most corrupt region in the world (Transparency international 2010). Sub-saharan Africa is also one of the most underdeveloped regions on earth (United Nations 2010)

while government commit large sums to addressing the plethora of problems hindering development on the continent, corruption remains a major obstacle to achieving much needed progress (Furphy 2010) corruption results in the deviation of funds intended for development and undermines the rule of law, breeds inequality and justice and discourages foreign investment, this further impeding development (Furphy 2010).

Conclusion

The prospect of strong socio-political and economic cooperation between Africa and Russia raises much optimism in view of the boundless human and natural resources available in Africa and Russia. At present, the identified goals of the Russian-African partnership- such as political solidarity, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural collaboration are far from being realized, as Africa continues to retrogress under the burden of corruption, poverty, bad governance, and an unfavourable balance of trade. The rising interest of Russia in Africa has not conferred simply because Russia is out to serve its own interest but because Africa has not positioned itself to reap the vast benefits that strong Russian-African ties can confer.

There must be concerted efforts to entrench true democracy all over Africa. The need for effective institutions that provide checks and balances as well as credible accountability mechanisms, which will ensure that benefits are spread equitably, cannot be overemphasized. These include a free press and strong civic society. African governments need to demonstrate a clear commitment to human rights and the rule of law, because it is only when a government is grounded in the rule of law, fairly and consistently applied to leaders as well as their citizens, including minorities, are respected will therefore bring stability and prosperity (Annan 2010). Increased foreign direct investment and transfer of technology from Russia to Africa will also go a long way in alleviating the problems of Africa as opposed to food or financial aid.

The article has examined and assessed the historical basis for the present cooperation between Russia and Africa and the political and economic initiative already taken to strengthen ties. The study equally analyzes the political economy of rising Russian interest in Africa and addresses the reasons why Africa is seemingly retrogressing and lastly offers solutions that could help Africa to fully maximize the benefit of rising Russian interest.

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