

for Islamist groups opposed to the Moscow-backed secular regimes of Central Asia.

Finally, Moscow is fortunate that both pro-American and anti-American regimes in the Middle East all oppose radical Sunni Islamists, and that radical Shi'a Hezbollah and even radical Sunni Hamas are focused on events in Lebanon and Palestine respectively. Moscow, though, has little capacity itself to prevent the rise of more anti-Russian Sunni radicals in the region; it depends on others to do this instead. The unpopularity and incompetence of so many Middle Eastern dictatorships combined with the declining appetite of the U.S. and its allies for military intervention in the wake of the Iraqi and Afghan imbroglios increases the prospects for radical Sunni Islamists gaining power in one or more of these countries. These new radical regimes, of course, will undoubtedly see America, Israel, and the West in general as their main enemies. But they might well identify Moscow as an enemy too, and decide to help radical Muslim groups fighting against it. Nor will Russia's

having had good relations with the regime(s) ousted by Sunni radicals serve to endear Moscow to them.

The negative scenarios for Russia outlined here, of course, might not arise. The Muslim Middle East may continue to ignore what is happening in the North Caucasus, and thus do nothing to exacerbate the problems Moscow faces there. Although America is retreating from Iraq and may well retreat from Afghanistan, radical Sunni forces there and elsewhere in the Middle East may yet be kept at bay. Even if they do gain strength, they may be consumed by conflict with more immediate enemies in the region and with the U.S. rather than with Russia. The problem for Moscow is that there is not much it can do to influence developments in the Middle East that could impact Russia. Trying to be friends with everyone in the region willing to be friends with Moscow—plus trying to make economic gains wherever it can—may well be the best that Russian foreign policy can do in the Middle East under present circumstances.

#### *About the Author*

Mark N. Katz is Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. During Fall 2010, he is also a Visiting Scholar at the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, DC.

#### ANALYSIS

## Russia and Africa: Coming Back?

By Vladimir Shubin, Moscow

### Abstract

As recent Presidential visits demonstrate, Russia is placing increasing priority on relations with African countries. However, this should not be viewed as a new phenomenon, positive relations between Moscow and many African countries date back several decades. An important challenge for these relationships is to improve economic trade links to match the recent increase in political interaction. Several common economic interests exist between Russia and certain African countries, and thus the development of these should be a priority for Russia's foreign policy, in order to consolidate these relationships.

The recent visit of South African President Jacob Zuma to Moscow represents the latest example of a process that is often regarded as "Russia coming back to Africa". Speaking in Moscow, President Zuma referred to Russia as "a historic friend of the South African people", underlining Moscow's past support for Africa, by stating that: "We [South Africa] have fond memories of that solidarity and friendship, which existed when

friends of the oppressed in South Africa and Africa were very few. It is the basis on which we can build stronger political, economic and social ties".

Similar perceptions about Russia are evident in other African countries as well. Not only did Russia never have colonies in Africa, but it made a vital contribution to decolonization in various ways: from initiating the Declaration on Granting Independence to Colo-

nial Countries and Peoples, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1960, to versatile assistance, including military, to the liberation movements, primarily in Southern Africa.

Russia's "return" to Africa was highlighted last year, when President Medvedev visited Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia and Angola. Indeed, this trip was unique, as no previous Russian leader had visited Tropical Africa, although in 2006 Vladimir Putin did cross the Equator to visit Cape Town.

Medvedev's visit provides convincing proof that the Russian leadership has at last turned their attention towards Africa. Medvedev has stated that "in the [19]90s we did not pay so much attention to distant continents, such as Africa and Latin America, but now we are simply obliged to do it", he said. Furthermore, in response to a journalist's question Medvedev admitted that "frankly, we were almost too late. We should have begun working with our African partners earlier, more so, because our ties with many of them have not been interrupted, they are based on decades of developing friendly relations".

Medvedev's remarks about uninterrupted ties between Russia and Africa are accurate. Indeed, the characterization of Russia as "returning" to Africa, which is often used by researchers and journalists, is inaccurate for a simple reason: Russia never left Africa. Even during the 1990s, when attention was diverted from Africa, Russia maintained nearly 40 embassies in African countries and thousands of African students continued to study in Russian universities.

### Neglect of the Yeltsin Years

In the early 1990s, Yeltsin's Russia, led by his notorious first Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, sacrificed Africa and the South as important vectors for Russian foreign policy, in favor of the West in a vain attempt to attract soft credits and technology transfer. During this period, a number of Russian Embassies and Consulates in African countries were closed, along with the majority of trade missions and cultural centers. In addition, most of the economic projects initiated in the Soviet era were also terminated.

This approach can be explained by two main factors. At the time, the IMF's proposed (or imposed?) "reforms" were causing great damage to the Russian economy, leading to what Michael Cossudovsky terms the "Thirdworldisation" of Russia. Yet, the economic collapse in the early 1990s does not entirely explain the lack of attention paid to Africa. A psychological factor also played an important role. The right-wing media and politicians in Russia used Africa as a scapegoat for the country's declining fortunes, claiming that Africa had been

instrumental in the economic collapse by "eating Russia out of house and home". However, in reality, the USSR's economic co-operation with African countries was, by and large, mutually advantageous. Nonetheless, these false claims proved damaging and especially dangerous because they encouraged xenophobia and racism in "post-Soviet" Russia.

### The Return of Africa as a Priority

In current day Russia, the foreign policy of the "Yeltsin era" is often regarded as a lost decade, and since then Russia has developed a new foreign policy strategy. This new approach to foreign policy is often seen as the result of the change in leadership from Yeltsin to Putin. However, the process of change in foreign policy strategy actually began with appointment of Yevgeny Primakov, an outstanding expert on the Third World, to the post of foreign minister in January 1996. By 1996, it was becoming clear that the one-sided reliance on the West in Russian foreign policy was not bearing fruit. In addition, Moscow became increasingly confident as the situation within Russia improved during the 2000s, with Russia able to pay off most of its state debts and accumulate big currency reserves, encouraging Moscow to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Indeed, this greater confidence was reinforced with Russia's admission to the G8 (although not necessarily to the meetings of finance ministers), signaling its membership in a "group of the privileged". Russia must now conduct its relations with Africa with an awareness of this background. Although Russia's new status raises its international prestige, Moscow has to guard against hampering its traditionally friendly relations with African countries by joining the "club" of those who colonized and exploited African countries.

Unfortunately even with its improved economy, Russia is not in a position to act as an equal partner to the other members of the G8 in terms of the group's plans to provide "aid" to Africa, in order to lift it out of poverty. While, Russia has made a contribution to alleviating the debt of African countries (around 20 billion US dollars), and introduced a preferential system for traditional African export commodities (no import duties and no quota limitations), it has yet to develop a program of development assistance, or create a government body responsible for the delivery of aid.

Currently, the bulk of Russian aid is delivered through international organizations and funds, such as the Global Fund against AIDS, TB and Malaria, and these modest contributions are being "diluted" in the process. Russia's proclaimed objective is to provide a stable pattern of aid, via both multilateral and bilateral

levels, amounting to 0.7% of GNP, as recommended by the UN. However, Russia has a long way to go before it fulfills this promise.

### Russia's Interests in Africa

Russia has several broad interest areas in Africa, and seeks to develop bilateral relations with African countries and cooperate with Africa's continental and regional organizations.

In the political sphere, Russia and many African countries have common concerns about individual states and regions dominating the international system. Indeed, Russian–African relations can play an important role in opposing the tendency of one country or a limited group of countries to impose their will on the rest of the world and, from the Russian perspective, in particular to prevent Russia from being isolated. Most African countries and Russia are committed to the idea of a multi-polar world, and consider that the UN should play the central role in this multi-polar world. The states of the African continent constitute about a quarter of the members of the UN, while Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the UN is an arena in which Russia and Africa collaborate fruitfully.

Russia is also interested in issues of peace and security, and collaborates with African countries and the African Union on such issues. Russia participates in all current UN peace-keeping missions in Africa, and is involved in training 400 peacekeepers from Africa in Russia per year.

Taking into account Russia's interests and existing cooperation, it is hard to understand why, so far, Moscow (as distinct from a growing number of countries, including Turkey and Vietnam) has not convened a top-level Russia–Africa Forum, and is not planning to. As the successful June 2010 “Russia–Africa” International Parliamentary Conference demonstrated, such a forum would be welcomed by African countries.

During Medvedev's recent trip to Africa and other bilateral communications, it has been noted that economic ties between Russia and Africa are lagging behind political interaction. Nonetheless, there has been some development in economic and trade relations. In 2008, trade turnover increased and reached a peak of 8.2 billion US dollars (however, half of this was with one country, Egypt), although trade dropped considerably in 2009 due to the world financial crisis. However, this level of trade is well short of the full potential of economic cooperation between Russia and Africa.

Many analysts consider Moscow's more active policy in Africa as representing a “competition” with China for influence in the continent. However, Russia and China

have different niches in their relations with Africa. For example, Russia is not able to compete with China and other countries, in exporting cheap clothes or footwear, but, it is in a strong position to sell advanced technology. Soviet/Russian engineering and science has always been internationally acclaimed, and Russia continues to be strong in these fields and is able to find markets in Africa. For example, during Medvedev's recent visit, an agreement was signed under which Russian advanced technology and financial resources will be utilized to create an Angolan National System of Satellite Communications and Broadcasting (ANGOSAT).

Furthermore, there are many potential opportunities for Russian investments in Africa. At present, direct investments by Russian companies in Africa amount to approximately \$4 billion, which is about 4% of Russian direct investments abroad, while total Russian investments in Africa are approximately \$10 billion. Before the financial crisis, 17 large Russian companies were active in 13 African countries, with 44 existing and planned projects between them. The most active companies are Gazprom (8 projects), Lukoil (6), Alrosa, Rusal, Renkova, Rosatom, Norilsk-Nickel, Sintez (3 each). Of the host countries, South Africa hosts ten projects, Libya 7, Angola 5, Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Namibia 4, Nigeria 3, and Egypt, Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo 1.

Also, Russia is very interested in developing collaboration with Africa in the sphere of natural resources. Although, as distinct from, say, China or India, the import of minerals is not a “matter of life or death” for the Russian economy, but it is a matter of expediency. Most minerals are available in Russia. However, the conditions for their exploration and use are becoming increasingly difficult, because they are found mostly in remote areas of Siberia and the Far East, which have a severe climate. As a result, 35% of Russia's minerals deposits, including manganese, chrome, bauxite, zinc and tin, are losing their commercial profitability.

Collaboration is also of interest to both Russia and African countries, because 60% of all of world resources, including biogenetical resources, fresh water and minerals, are located in either Russia or Africa. Therefore, both sides stand to benefit from joining forces to safeguard their sovereign right to control this wealth, especially in the face of attempts to declare these resources “an international asset”, under a false pretext of “reestablishing justice”. Practical areas of cooperation that would be mutually beneficial include working out a joint approach to relations with transnational corporations, as well as coordinating efforts in the global markets to counter, among other things, speculative spasmodic leaps in prices.

A peculiar sphere of Russia's economic relations with Africa is the arms trade. The Soviet involvement in equipping and often advising the armed forces of various African countries is well known. However, the situation changed drastically in the early 1990s, when, with the deterioration of the economic situation in Russia, the method of payment for arms exports was switched from credit to cash. At the same time, the so called "democratic" mass media in Russia launched a campaign against arms sales, portraying them as immoral. This led to the loss of a number of traditional markets for Soviet/Russian arms to Western, primarily American and British, suppliers. However, in recent years the situation has been reversed, but it should be underlined that the Russian government has strengthened its control over arms deals and observes all sanctions and limitations imposed by the UN.

Finally, there are good opportunities for cooperation in the sphere of education. Over 50,000 Africans completed degrees in the Soviet Union and, currently, 4,500 African students are studying in Russia. Moreover, the Russian government has increased the number of scholarships available for African students to 700, although these scholarships remain very modest and in reality only cover tuition fees.

### State-Led Cooperation

In considering the development of Russia's relations with African countries, it is necessary to examine the role that the Russian state must play in strengthening ties. A consensus in Russia considers that, even in a free market economy, significant and sustained development in Africa will only be possible with the aid of strong support from the state. Up to the present time, by and large, only the biggest Russian companies have managed to find niche export markets in Africa, and

therefore state support is needed for small and medium businesses to make an impression. Besides, the actions of individual companies, even successful ones, cannot alone ensure a significant improvement in Russo-African economic relations. Therefore, a considerable contribution through the bilateral inter-governmental commissions formed with a number of African countries is required, although, unfortunately, some of the commissions are not active enough or have become dormant.

At the same time, there is a recent trend for Russian businessmen interested in Africa taking steps towards self-organization. A particularly vibrant and effective group, or at least the Russian part of it, is the Russian-South African Business Council, formed after Vladimir Putin's visit to Cape Town in 2006. It promotes technologies that are ecologically friendly and directed towards the rational use of natural resources. A further example is a new body, formed last year under the auspices of the Russian Chamber of Trade and Industry, the Co-ordination Committee on Economic Co-operation with Sub-Saharan African countries, chaired by Vladimir Dmitriev, Chair of the Vnesheconombank.

### Conclusion

Russia and Africa need each other. Russia is a vast market not only for African minerals, but for various other goods and products produced by African countries. At the same time, Russia has shown renewed interest and activity in Africa, which strengthens the position of African countries *vis-à-vis* both old and new external players. The signs for Russian-African relations appear good—declarations of intentions have been made, important bilateral agreements signed—now it remains to be seen how these intentions and agreements will be implemented in practice.

#### *About the Author*

Professor Vladimir Shubin is Deputy Director of the Institute for African Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences and a Professor at the Department of Contemporary Asian and African Studies at the Russian State University of Humanities. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Russia and Africa, including *The Hot "Cold War", the USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008) and *ANC: A View from Moscow* (2nd ed., Jacana media, Johannesburg, 2008).