



RUSSIA AND AFRICA: MYTHS AND REALITY

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OBSERVATOIRE

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INTRODUCTION

On October 24, the first Russia-Africa summit will take place in Sochi. Co-chaired by Vladimir Putin and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, it will be the culmination of a particularly dense political and economic sequence, marked - among others - by a business forum (October 23), a Russia-Africa interparliamentary conference at the State Duma (July 3), and the annual meeting of Afreximbank in Moscow (June 18-22). Vladimir Putin has also received several African heads of state¹ in recent months, while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Russia's Special Representative for Africa and the Middle East, Mikhail Bogdanov, increased contacts at all levels with representatives from most countries of the African continent.

Russia's African policy is of relatively recent interest in France. Since the late 1980s and the Soviet withdrawal led by Mikhail Gorbachev, Africa had indeed ceased to be a topic of discussion, except for a few specialists, for some economic players who had witnessed Moscow's first initiatives and, of course, for the diplomats and military personnel stationed in the region. It is only at the beginning of 2018, when the first deliveries of Russian arms and dozens of "advisers" arrived in Bangui from Moscow, that the French media discovered Russia's "big comeback" to Africa. This Central African lens strongly shapes perceptions in Paris: Russian involvement appears to be a new phenomenon, echoing the East-West confrontation, and Central Africa appears as a decisive part of a great continent-wide strategy, where Russia is poised to establish itself as a major player.

Russia's comeback to Africa actually dates back to Vladimir Putin's second term (2004-2008). It was first part of a logic of "economic diplomacy" and concerned countries (Algeria, Libya, Angola, Namibia, Guinea) in which the Soviet Union had invested significant resources between the end of the 1950's and the *Perestroika*². Moscow was trying, with various fortunes, to mobilize its "Cold War" era networks and convert old ideological affinities into business flows. At a second stage, Russia sought, according to opportunities and events, to widen its geographic range of interests, to include states historically rooted in the Western sphere of influence (Morocco, Nigeria, and South Africa in particular), that have great economic potential and can serve as political relays in the concerned subregions of the continent or even beyond. Finally, since 2014 and the crisis of relations between Moscow and the West, the security dimension of Russia's policy in Africa is becoming visible, with some much more offensive new aspects (deployment of private military companies, establishment of cooperation between local intelligence services and Russian "force structures").

What is the scale of the Russian presence in Africa today? What are the Kremlin's real goals? Can we talk about a continent-wide overall vision? While there is every

1. Filipe Nyusi (Mozambique) on August 23; Denis Sassou Nguesso (Congo) on May 23; João Lourenço (Angola) on April 4; Emmerson Mnangagwa (Zimbabwe) on January 15. Vladimir Putin also had a meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on June 28, on the sidelines of the G20 in Osaka, Japan.

2. On this topic, read in particular Matusevich, M. (2009), "Revisiting the Soviet Moment in Sub-Saharan African", *History Compass*, 7(5), pp. 1259-1268.



reason to believe that Russia's commitment to Africa is sustainable, its strategic footprint will probably not increase significantly in the future. The catch-up effect following the 1990's erasure is largely exhausted and the development of relations now faces strong structural constraints. Seen from Moscow, Africa remains a peripheral theater, and it also appears last in the order of Russia's regional priorities in the Concept of Foreign Policy endorsed in November 2016³. It is quite poorly known, powerful Western and Asians players are already strongly involved, and Russia is beginning to experience disappointments that illustrate the relative fragility of its positions.

3. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451>

1. DISENGAGEMENT AND REDISCOVERY OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

The 1990's decade saw a general decline in Russia's positions on the international scene, with the notable exception of China, and Africa is the region of the world where this process was the fastest and the most pronounced. As early as 1992, Moscow announced the closure of nine embassies⁴, four consulates⁵ and thirteen of the twenty cultural centers it had until then on the continent. Most offices of ex-Soviet news agencies - which often served as KGB and GRU coverages - were dismantled for lack of funding and interest from the Center. Trade between Africa and Russia amounted to only \$760 million in 1993, less than 2% of the country's foreign trade⁶. As an extension of Gorbachev's policy⁷, the Yeltsin administration disengaged Russia from Africa, which was synonymous with economic backwardness and ruinous geopolitical adventures for Moscow. The priority at the time was - according to then Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev - to "join the community of civilized states".

Several African heads of state and government visited Moscow in the late 1990's (including Nelson Mandela, who made a state visit in April 1999), but it was not until 2001 that one could observe the first sign of tangible interest of post-Soviet Russia for Africa. In December of that year, former Prime Minister (1998-1999) and former Foreign Minister (1996-1998) Yevgeny Primakov, appointed by the new President Vladimir Putin to head the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russia, made a tour that led him to Angola, Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa⁸. Yet it will take nearly five years for a new Russian breakthrough to take place on the African continent. In March 2006, Vladimir Putin visited Algeria, Moscow's long-time partner in the Maghreb. He offered to cancel Algiers' debt towards Moscow - which amounted to \$4.7 billion - in return for armament contracts worth more than \$6.3 billion⁹. Their implementation was sometimes complex, but a few years later, they were followed by new agreements of even greater magnitude. A couple of months later, Moscow and Algiers added another component - gas - to their cooperation. Thus, in August 2006, Gazprom and Sonatrach reached an agreement concerning the prospecting and extraction of gas in Algeria, as well as the modernization of the Algerian network of gas pipelines. At the time, this agreement worried many European countries, who feared to see the emergence of a "gas OPEC".

4. Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Liberia, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Togo, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

5. Mozambique, Angola, Madagascar and the Congo.

6. Susanne M. Birgerson, Alexander M. Kozhemiakin, Roger E. Kanet, « La politique russe en Afrique : engagement ou coopération ? [Russian policy in Africa: commitment or cooperation?] », *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 1996, 3 (September), p. 154.

7. Mark Webber (1992). "Soviet Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: the Final Phase", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, pp. 1-30.

8. Arnaud Kalika, « Le "grand retour" de la Russie en Afrique ? » [Russia's « big comeback » in Africa?], *Russie.Nei. Visions*, n° 114, IFRI, avril 2019, p. 20.

9. José Garçon, « Moscou efface la dette d'Alger pour placer ses armes [Moscow clears Algiers' debt to place its weapons] », *Libération*, March 13, 2006.

The Russian-Algerian agreements were to serve as a matrix to move toward closer relations with Libya. In April 2008, just weeks before leaving the Kremlin and taking over the Russian government, Vladimir Putin met his counterpart Muammar Gaddafi in Tripoli. On this occasion, Moscow erased \$4.6 billion of debt incurred by Libya at the time of the Soviet Union. Tripoli pledged to buy \$3 billion worth of military equipment, including fighter jets, tanks and anti-aircraft systems. An agreement on the participation of the Russian Railways (RZD) in the construction of a line between Sirte and Benghazi was also concluded. Finally, the Libyan head of state said he supported the gas cartel project, while a few months earlier Gazprom had taken stakes in four projects in Libya. However, the visit of the Jamahiriya leader to Moscow in October 2008 - the first one since 1986 - highlighted the difficulty for the Kremlin to secure the implementation of previous commitments¹⁰.

Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012) confirmed Moscow's renewed interest for the African continent. Russia's new head of state made an extensive tour in June 2009, with stops in Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia and Angola¹¹. These visits did not lead to the signature of any significant contract. It seems that they were meant to show the countries of the region a form of continuity after those of Vladimir Putin in Pretoria (2006) and Casablanca (2006). The end of Dmitry Medvedev's mandate also saw the beginning of the institutionalization of Russia's African policy. In March 2011, the Russian President appointed a special representative for cooperation with Africa. He chose Mikhail Margelov, then chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament. As an Arabist coming from a dynasty of military leaders (his grandfather, General Vasily Margelov, was at the origin of the Soviet airborne forces), Mikhail Margelov occupied that position until October 2014. He organized the first Russian-African business forum in December 2011 and helped to structure Moscow's policy on the African continent. However, he paid for his proximity to Dmitry Medvedev and his positions on Libya, an issue that openly divided the Russian executive in 2011 and precipitated Vladimir Putin's decision to return to the Kremlin¹².

10. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1049923>

11. <https://saiia.org.za/research/russian-president-medvedevs-visit-to-africa-june-2009/>

12. On this topic, read Mikhail Zygar, *Vsja kremliovskia rat'*, pp. 249 and following. This book was published in English in 2016 by PublicAffairs under the title *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin*.

2. EGYPT 2013: THE TURNING POINT

When Vladimir Putin went back to his Kremlin quarters in May 2012, Russia had already reappeared in the African landscape, but its comeback was still limited geographically, economically and politically. The change of scale was to come after 2013, thanks to the historic reunion with Egypt. Having been a gateway for USSR in Africa and the Middle East in the mid-1950s, as well as its main ally in the Arab world, Egypt had kept its distance from Moscow since the 1972 break initiated by Sadat, even though contacts had been renewed in the late 1990s through Yevgeny Primakov - a connoisseur of Egypt, where he had long been a correspondent for Pravda - and Vladimir Putin had gone to Cairo in 2005. The military coup in July 2013 and the US procrastination opened a new era in Russian-Egyptian relations: they certainly did not become a political-military alliance as under Nasser, but they indisputably became similar to a strategic partnership.

The Russian-Egyptian rapprochement revolves around three major axes: arms sales, civilian nuclear power and cooperation on regional issues such as Libya and Syria. As early as November 2013, Russian Defense and Foreign Ministers Sergei Shoigu and Sergey Lavrov traveled to Cairo. On this occasion, a first round of contracts worth approximately \$3 billion was finalized¹³. Between 2013 and 2017, the Egyptian military received, among others, forty-six MiG-29M combat aircraft, Buk-M1-2 and S-300VM anti-aircraft systems, as well as forty-six Ka-52 attack helicopters originally designed for the Mistral's that France was to sell to Russia and which were sold to Egypt in 2015¹⁴. This process will probably continue: in the spring of 2019, the Russian media reported a new contract, this time on the delivery of Su-35 fighter-bombers¹⁵. In 2016, the Russian and Egyptian navies conducted exercises in the eastern Mediterranean, while the airborne troops of both countries now meet every year for joint maneuvers.

This resurgent strategic partnership between Moscow and Cairo has a strong energy dimension. Under an agreement signed in 2015, Rosatom will build the country's first nuclear power plant in Dabaa, west of Alexandria, consisting of four 1,200-megawatt reactors. The project, estimated at about \$25 billion and expected to be completed by 2029, is 85% financed by a loan from the Russian state, which hopes to seal the bilateral partnership for several decades, as in Turkey. In the field of hydrocarbons, the public group Rosneft finalized the purchase of a 30% stake in the Zohr gas project for \$1.12 billion. In 2017, it also delivered around ten LNG shipments to Egypt.

Trade links as a whole have grown significantly, with bilateral trade volume rising from \$2.8 billion in 2011 to nearly \$8 billion in 2018¹⁶. Russia has thus significantly increased its grain exports to Egypt, the world's largest importer, of which 85% of wheat

13. Igor Delanoë, « Poutine/Al-Sissi : l'alliance russo-égyptienne retrouvée ? », *Moyen-Orient*, n°30, April-June 2016, p. 38.

14. SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (consulted 26.08.2019).

15. <https://bmpd.livejournal.com/3573506.html>

16. Figures provided by Vladimir Putin after his meeting with Abdel Fattah el-Sisi at the end of April 2019 in Beijing. <https://tass.com/politics/1055954>



supplies came from Russia in the 2017-2018 season, compared to only 40% in 2014. The creation by 2021 of a Russian industrial zone east of Port Said - a project expected to drain massive investments and create 35,000 jobs locally¹⁷ - will contribute to the development of business flows and to the diversification of bilateral links. In addition, Moscow's restrictions on direct air links after the attack in Sinai on October 31, 2015, which cost the lives of 218 Russian citizens out of 224 passengers, will be lifted in the medium term. This will allow the flow of tourists from Russia to return to levels close to 2014 (3 million Russians had visited Egypt that year¹⁸).

The new relations with Egypt are all the more valuable in the eyes of the Kremlin as they can exert an influence on the region. Thus Moscow and Cairo closely coordinate their policies on the Libyan issue, where their positions coincide on the essentials¹⁹. Russia also appreciates the role played by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in the Syrian issue, whether it is his support for Moscow's various diplomatic initiatives or his positioning in the Arab League²⁰. According to several of our Russian interlocutors, in recent months the two countries have had regular meetings on the situation in Sudan, another common subject of concern²¹.

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

18. Only connections between Moscow and Cairo resumed in April 2018, as the Russian authorities have still not endorsed the resumption of charter flights to the Red Sea resorts due to doubts about the security of Egyptian airport facilities.

19. Arnaud Dubien, « Russie-Afrique du Nord : vieux amis et nouveaux partenaires [Russia-North Africa: old friends and new partners] », *Diplomatie*, n° 94, September-October 2018, p. 70.

20. <https://madamasr.com/en/2018/05/01/feature/politics/syria-cooperation-highlights-progress-in-egypt-russia-relations-as-hurdles-remain/>

21. Interviews with an expert from the African Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow on July 15, 2019. On the interests and role of Russia in recent events in Khartoum, read Samuel Ramani "Moscow's Hand in Sudan Future" <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79488>

3. MOROCCO, NIGERIA, SOUTH AFRICA: MOSCOW IS SEEKING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Expanding the geography of its interests on the African continent beyond the circle of its former clients or “socialist camp” friends has been one of Moscow’s constant preoccupations for the past fifteen years. Thus, in September 2006, just a few months after going to Algiers, Vladimir Putin paid an official visit to Morocco. However, it is only after the 2014 Russian-Western crisis, and thanks to Russia’s growing involvement in Syria and the Middle East, that bilateral relations became denser. In March 2016, King of Morocco Mohammed VI - accompanied by a dozen ministers - was received in the Kremlin by Vladimir Putin, fourteen years after his first visit to Moscow and fifty years after that of his father Hassan II to USSR. The development of economic cooperation is on the agenda, but important and sometimes sensitive political issues are also subject to discussion. Morocco is one of the main beneficiaries of the counter-sanctions introduced by Moscow in August 2014 on European agri-food products: it has, for example, considerably increased its exports of fruit and vegetables to Russia. The country also hopes to attract many Russian tourists, in particular thanks to the opening of a direct air link - Casablanca being at the moment one of the few African cities, with Cairo and, since the end of 2018, Addis Ababa, to be connected to Moscow. In 2018, bilateral trade volume reached \$1.47 billion²². Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev’s visit to Rabat, in October 2017, and the 7th session of the Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation held in 2018 and co-chaired by Dmitri Patrushev, Minister of Agriculture, clearly demonstrate a desire to follow the impulses given at the highest level. Russian companies Gazprom, Novatek and Stroytransgaz have expressed interest in investing in natural gas projects in Morocco, particularly in the Jorf Lasfar LNG terminal. On the other hand, the prospects for Rosatom - which was to sign a cooperation agreement in civilian nuclear power - and Rosoboronexport - which delivered some anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems to the kingdom in the 2000’s - seem limited. It should be noted that Russian-Moroccan relations have recently gained a significant security dimension. The head of the Russian National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, made a two-day visit to Morocco in December 2016, echoing the one that Abdellatif Hammouchi, the Director General of the Moroccan General Directorate for National Security (DGSN) General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DGST)²³, made to Moscow in April of that year. The Russian-Algerian strategic partnership and the (modestly concealed in public) discrepancies between Moscow and Rabat over Western Sahara²⁴ do not therefore prevent Russia and the Kingdom from developing pragmatic and ambitious relations in almost all fields.

22. <http://russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2019-02/torgovlya-mezhdu-rossiye-i-marokko-v-2018-g/>

23. <http://fr.le360.ma/politique/securite-revelations-sur-la-visite-de-hammouchi-en-russie-67747>

24. Mohammed Issam Laaroussi, “Russia’s Search for Strategic Partnership in North Africa: Balancing Algeria and Morocco”, The Washington Institute, February 19, 2019. Document available at the following website address: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/russias-search-for-strategic-partnerships-in-north-africa-balancing-algeria>

Despite Moscow's support for the Abuja government during the Biafran war in the late 1960's²⁵, relations between the USSR and Nigeria remained embryonic during the Cold War. They paradoxically became the first to attract the Russian leaders' attention at the beginning of this century. Thus, in March 2001, Vladimir Putin received newly elected President Obasanjo, while Dmitry Medvedev met his successor Umaru Musa Yar'dua in 2008 on the sidelines of the Toyako G8 and then went on a state visit to Nigeria in June 2009. Several documents were signed on this occasion, including agreements on the protection of investments, civilian nuclear power, space and gas exploration. Most of them went unheeded, particularly those concerning Gazprom, which was at the time interested in the trans-Saharan gas pipeline projects. Some even turned into a fiasco²⁶, such as the acquisition of the company ALSCON by RUSAL. The volume of bilateral trade never really took off (it was only \$766 million in 2018). Today, the priority and potentially the most promising axis of the partnership between Moscow and Abuja is the fight against the Boko Haram group against terrorism. Nigerian soldiers were sent to Russia to train there²⁷, while Rosoboronexport delivered them a dozen Mi-35M attack helicopters, in 2016 and then in 2018 (on the other hand, information circulating about the possible sale of Su-30 fighter-bombers have not been confirmed to date). In May 2017, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu had extensive talks in Moscow with his Nigerian counterpart Mansur Mohammed Dan Ali. It also seems that Rosatom is not giving up the idea of building a plant in the country²⁸, but this project, if confirmed, will not be implemented before 2030-2035.

South Africa is undoubtedly the main frustration for Moscow on the continent. Yet Russia's first steps in this country had been rather promising. Following on from Vladimir Putin's visit to Pretoria in September 2006, two major metallurgical and mining groups, Evraz and Renova - controlled respectively by influential oligarchs Roman Abramovich and Viktor Vekselberg - made important investments in buying Highveld Steel and Vanadium and taking 49% in the United Manganese of Kalahari joint venture. Diplomatic relations were developing both bilaterally and within the BRICS group, a format highly praised by the South African authorities. In 2009, the coming to power in Pretoria of Jacob Zuma, former ANC intelligence chief and having had close contact with the KGB during the years of struggle against apartheid, gave Moscow a glimpse of the possibility for a historic breakthrough in the main economic power of the continent. The privileged vector was, as in many other countries, civilian nuclear power. In 2014, Rosatom seemed to take a decisive advantage in the race to build six to eight new reactors with a total capacity of 9,600 MW, a mega-contract valued at nearly \$70 billion. The opaque conditions of this arrangement and suspicions of corruption in the entourage of the head of state – who was finally pushed to the

25. Olatunde J B. Ojo, "The Soviet Union and Nigeria: The Quest for Influence 1967-1983", *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 20, n° 2 (1985), pp. 167-189.

26. Abiodun Adetokundo, "Nigeria-Russia Bilateral Relations: Problems and Prospects", *RUDN Journal of Russian History*, Vol.16, n° 3, 2017, p. 485.

27. <https://jamestown.org/program/nigeria-seeks-russian-military-aid-in-its-war-on-boko-haram/>

28. <https://africa-energy-portal.org/news/nigeria-engages-rosatom-nuclear-development>



exit in 2018 - however buried this intention. What is the level of relationship between Moscow and Pretoria today? Trade remains modest (\$1.078 billion in 2018). The most significant recent developments in bilateral economic relations are the purchase, by South African Naspers, of the Russian Avito classified ads website for more than \$1 billion²⁹; the inauguration in April of a factory in Boksburg (Gauteng province) by TMH Russian railway equipment manufacturer; and the commissioning of a GLONASS navigation system ground station at the Hartebeesthoek observatory. The introduction of a visa-free system for stays of less than 90 days should also contribute to the development of the tourist flow from Russia to South Africa, which has remained modest so far. On the political front, if the relations remain officially good, as testifies the tone of the Kremlin spokesperson's statements at the end of the Putin-Ramaphosa meeting on the sidelines of the Osaka G20³⁰, the two parties are perfectly aware cooperation will not go much further in the foreseeable future.

29. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-avito-m-a-naspers/naspers-takes-full-control-of-russian-classifieds-website-avito-idUSKCN1PJ2C5>

30. <https://tass.com/world/1066117>

4. STRENGTHS AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE «RUSSIAN COMEBACK» IN AFRICA

The Russia-Africa summit in Sochi symbolizes Moscow's comeback to the African continent. It gives a measure of the progress made since the 1990's withdrawal and the beginning of Russian reinvestment in the region about fifteen years ago. While there are many optical illusions in the West as to the nature and extent of this process, the perceptions of Africans themselves are unambiguous about the newfound influence of Russia at home. The Russians' view of Africa has also changed, as evidenced by the praiseworthy remarks made by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on June 21 at a Russian-African economic conference in Moscow³¹.

Russia is no longer an economic "dwarf" in Africa. In 2018, its trade turnover with the continent crossed the threshold of \$20 billion, an amount that certainly remains lower than those of China (\$204 billion) or France (€51.3 billion) but can be compared to those of Brazil or Turkey. Russian companies have a strong presence in the extractive sector - Alrosa has signed major contracts for diamond production in Angola and recently in Zimbabwe³²; Severstal owns gold mines in Burkina Faso and Guinea, a country where RUSAL - which has been established since the mid-2000's - produces 60% of its bauxite and recently recruited the former Russian ambassador to Conakry³³. Paradoxically, the hydrocarbon sector - a traditional vector of the Kremlin's economic diplomacy - has so far struggled to break through in Africa: Gazprom's projects in Algeria are modest and those in Libya have been frozen since the beginning of the civil war in 2011; Lukoil is certainly present in several countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast in particular) and in Egypt, but Africa represents only 0.31% of its current production; However, the deal could change if the agreements in offshore gas exploration signed in August 2019 by Rosneft with Mozambique – a country in which the group's boss, Igor Sechin, served as a military interpreter in the 1980s - were to materialize³⁴. In this context, Russia is seeking to diversify the structure of its trade with Africa by focusing on high-tech sectors. It is particularly positioning itself on the satellite launches market - for Angola in 2017³⁵ but also Tunisia starting from 2020³⁶. In the field of civil nuclear energy, Rosatom - in addition to reactor construction and mining assets purchase - has increased agreements with first-time buyers on the establishment of value chains, for example in Zambia,

31. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/24062019-dmitry-medvedev-economic-growth-makes-africa-highly-popular-with-investors-speech/>

32. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-zimbabwe-alrosa/russias-alrosa-returns-to-diamond-exploration-in-zimbabwe-idUSKCN1P824Y>

33. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/781445/economie/guinee-alexandre-bregadze-ex-diplomate-devenu-ambassadeur-du-geant-de-laluminium-rusal/>

34. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-rosneft-mozambique/rosneft-signs-memorandum-to-develop-offshore-gas-fields-in-mozambique-ifax-idUSKCN1VC1RA>

35. https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/espace/systeme-solaire/la-russie-a-retabli-le-contact-avec-le-satellite-angolais-perdu_119536

36. <https://www.agenceecofin.com/infrastructures/0107-67436-la-tunisie-avec-l-appui-de-la-russie-veut-lancer-une-constellation-de-30-satellites-dans-l-espace-d-ici-2023>

Sudan and Rwanda, with whom bilateral contacts have intensified since President Kagamé's visit to Moscow in June 2018³⁷. Russian IT security solutions provider Kaspersky Lab inaugurated in May 2019 a representative office in Kigali, from which it hopes to expand its presence in East Africa³⁸.

While the very concept of soft power sometimes arouses skepticism in Moscow, Russia is deploying instruments of long-term influence in Africa. One of the most visible manifestations of this approach is the role played by state-owned media (RT, Sputnik) in French³⁹, English, and Portuguese, which are becoming sources of significant audience in many countries of the region. Russia is also very active in the field of medical cooperation: the Russian Ministry of Health and RUSAL have organized a vaccination campaign against the Ebola virus in Guinea. Russia's total aid to fight the epidemic amounts to \$60 million⁴⁰. This topic was also discussed during Mikhail Bogdanov's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in December 2018. A few days earlier, Russia delivered equipment to Zimbabwe to fight a cholera outbreak. Moscow's aid is usually provided through multilateral programs of WHO, UNICEF or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (\$100 million was provided by Russia to the latter). Education and training is another pillar of Russian soft power in Africa. In 2013, the number of African university students was estimated at about 8,000⁴¹. According to the deputy director of the Rossotrudnichestvo Agency, Alexander Radkov, nearly 30,000 young Africans have submitted applications this year, although the quota of free places offered by the Russian government is limited to 1819⁴². French sources report more modest figures⁴³.

Since 2014, the security aspect of Russian policy in Africa has been a priority, if not a preponderant aspect. Thus, in the last five years, Russia has signed agreements with some 20 countries, the most recent concerning Mali (June 2019), Congo (May 2019) and Madagascar (October 2018). They generally provide for the training of officers in Moscow, the delivery of new military equipment and/or the maintenance of existing equipment, joint exercises, the fight against terrorism and maritime piracy, these components varying according to the situation of the different countries. On the other hand, the opening of permanent military bases in Africa does not seem to be on the agenda for both financial and operational reasons. According to SIPRI, between 2000 and 2015, Russia delivered \$15 billion worth of weapons to Africa⁴⁴, figures that do not reflect the latest Egyptian contracts or those recently concluded with Equatorial Guinea.

37. Arnaud Kalika, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

38. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/kaspersky-lab-opens-new-office-kigali-boost-presence-east-africa>

39. Kevin Limonier, *Diffusion de l'information russe en Afrique. Essai de cartographie générale [The broadcasting of Russian information in Africa. A general cartography essay]*, IRSEM, November 13, 2018.

40. <https://tass.com/society/1024816>

41. A. Arkhangelskaya, V. Shubin, "Russia's Africa Policy", *SAIIA*, Occasional Paper n° 157, p. 20.

42. Olga Kulkova, « Chto Rossiya mojet predlojit Afrike [What can Russia offer Africa?] », *RSMD*, August 14, 2019, p. 6. The note is available at the following website address: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/chto-rossiya-mozhet-predlozhit-afrike/>

43. Arnaud Kalika, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

44. Evgeny Korendiasov, *Rossia nastupaet na rynki vooroujenii i voennoi tekhniki v Afrikié* [Russia on the offensive on African arms and military equipment markets], *RSMD*, May 11, 2017. Available at the following website address: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-nastupaet-na-rynki-vooruzheniy-i-voennoy-tekhniki-v-afrike/>

torial Guinea, for example. According to Dmitry Shugayev, director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSVTS), Rosoboronexport's portfolio of contracts with sub-Saharan African countries alone amounted in the autumn of 2018 to \$3 billion⁴⁵. In addition to the Ministry of Defense, another actor is particularly active in Russian-African security cooperation: Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the National Security Council. It is through him that the Russian intelligence services discuss with their African counterparts, especially on the sidelines of his annual conference on security issues, to which he invites representatives of intelligence agencies from all around the world⁴⁶. Cybersecurity and the fight against "color revolutions" - a subject of concern for many African leaders - are among the recurring themes of his talks. Having been the topic of numerous articles in recent months in the Western press, Russian private security groups deployed in Africa are active in various segments, from the training of military forces (Central African Republic) to the security of sites belonging to Russian companies (Libya) and, perhaps, clandestine financial flows⁴⁷.

Russia still does not have a continent-wide "African policy". Its principle economic and security interests remain largely concentrated in North Africa, despite efforts - albeit rather coherent - aimed at developing its links in southern Africa, an area where it has long-standing, numerous and high-level contacts, but which are slow in bringing about a commercial effect. The rise of the security component, which goes hand in hand with the growing involvement of the Ministry of Defense and the National Security Council, raises the question of the overall coordination of Russian approaches. Sergei Shoigu and Nikolai Patrushev have political weight that exempts them from referring their initiatives back to Mikhail Bogdanov, who is "Mr. Africa" in Moscow. Along the same line, the major Russian groups that are active in Africa have so far played a solo game, which reflects both the rivalries between the concerned oligarchs and the compartmentalization habits in these entities, which are often state-owned and operate in sensitive sectors. The Russian Africanist community is fragmented and small, and its weight in the Muscovite bureaucracy is still low, a consequence of the Kremlin's long-term lack of interest in the continent. The mobilization for the Sochi Business Forum and Summit is helping to change things, but the challenge for the actors of Russia-Africa relations will be to maintain the state machine's involvement at a high level on the long term.

The general tone of the articles published in Western media on Russia's "great comeback" to Africa may give the impression of a triumphant march. It is not so. Moscow faces stiff competition from Europeans and from its Indian, Turkish and Chinese friends. In several countries, the economic breakthroughs of Russian groups were short-lived (for example, in 2017, Rosatom announced the freezing of its major mi-

45. <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/629828>

46. The most recent one, held in Ufa in May 2019, included talks with Namibian Special Services Chief Philemon Malima, as well as with representatives of intelligence agencies from Burundi, Uganda, Egypt and the Congo. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4005772>

47. On this topic, read Arnaud Kalika, *op.cit.*, pp. 20 and following.

ning project in Tanzania⁴⁸, while Rostec abandoned the construction of a refinery in Uganda, weakening Russian economic prospects in East Africa)⁴⁹. The overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir - on which the Russians had been relying heavily in recent years, though not blindly - the forced departure of Jacob Zuma from the South African presidency and the uncertainties in Algeria after the resignation of Abdelaziz Bouteflika underline the relative fragility of some Russian relays on the continent. Others - in Angola, Namibia or Mozambique - belong to a generation that will soon be leaving power, and it is doubtful that their successors were trained in the former USSR.

Is Africa destined to become the scene of a new Russian-Western confrontation, in particular Russian-French? Recent developments in Central Africa may suggest this. Certain declarations of the French Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense too. There are, however, rather positive precedents for interaction between Paris and Moscow, such as Russia's participation in EUFOR in Chad at the end of 2008. Many Russian and French economic actors see complementarities in some markets of the continent and consider they have an interest in cooperating. It is also likely that most of the concerned African leaders would rather see the antagonisms diminish between France and Russia. Africa was on the agenda of the French-Russian "2 + 2" format rebuilt in September 2019 and is likely to become one of the topics of the strategic dialogue that President Macron intends to re-establish with Russia.

48. <https://www.mining.com/russian-state-corporation-suspends-1-2-billion-uranium-project-tanzania/>

49. <https://afrique.latribune.fr/entreprises/industrie/energie-environnement/2016-12-28/rostec-abandonne-son-projet-de-raffinerie-en-ouganda.html>