

REPORTS

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AFRICAN VECTOR OF RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY AMID THE BREAKDOWN OF THE OLD WORLD ORDER²

The events of February 2022 and the Russian special military operation in Ukraine have significantly altered our country's foreign policy priorities. Today Western states are waging a war of annihilation against us, so Russia must give up on its illusory aspirations to become part of the Western world. The West has never regarded Russia as an equal partner, but imposed a system of interaction where our country was assigned the role of a semi-colony, following the orders of the suzerain and providing it with the necessary material, financial and human resources. In order to achieve this goal, all means of colonial influence were used against the Russian Federation, including shrinkage of the industrial potential and reorientation of the Russian economy toward the export of natural resources; technological, financial and informational dependence on the West; destruction of the national system of education, science and culture; narrowing of the sphere of application of the Russian language; bribery of elites; "brain drain"; imposition of a Western system of values on Russian youth, and much more. They also wanted to weaken, or, rather, disintegrate the Russian army and surround the Russian territory with military bases of NATO countries, which they have successfully accomplished in the 1990s and 2000s. Since Russia possessed a strong nuclear capability, they had to create a system of checks and balances that would make it impossible for our country to react in time to a preventive nuclear strike. A major role in this policy was assigned to the former republics of the Soviet Union, primarily Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Inside Russia, the bet was made on support of those political forces which, should they come to power, were ready to make a complete compromise with the West.

Despite the undoubted success of these efforts in Ukraine and Georgia, the policy has not generally yielded the desired results. Moreover, despite numerous sanctions, over the past 10 years Russia has significantly strengthened its defense and economic potential, and repeated attempts to change the Kremlin's political course have failed. In this context, it was essential to use fundamentally new lever-

age on our country, including unleashing of a direct armed conflict on our borders. To a certain extent, the events in Ukraine simply "unmasked" and transformed our confrontation from a partially camouflaged to an overt form. The West has openly and collectively opposed us, using every conceivable and inconceivable instrument of pressure – economical, diplomatic, political, informational, military and humanitarian. In the difficult situation which Russia is facing today, we need to finally part with our illusions and intensify work with countries that are willing to continue cooperating with us. These are not only India and China, but also other developing states, former colonies and semi-colonies of the West. Every effort must be made to ensure that these countries continue to perceive Russia as one of the *key pillars and beacon of the developing world*; a state rising up against the modern sophisticated forms of exploitation and robbery by the united West. Today we find ourselves in the same boat with the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and have no choice but to defend our independence and sovereignty by taking up arms against the collective West on our own borders.

In 2022, the process of transformation of the modern world has significantly accelerated. Multipolarity as a new emerging world order potentially opens the door to a more equitable system of international relations that takes into account the interests of the widest possible range of the global community members, more effective and rapid development of many states, although it does not preclude competition and confrontation between them.

"Against this background, there is a reassessment of the comparative importance and role of the regions of the world as zones of clashing interests of the participants in the renewed rivalry. In the context of extreme undesirability of ultra-dangerous direct confrontation between the old and new players, the geostrategic, political and military importance of the peripheral zones of rivalry has increased [5]," including the African continent.

Numerous manifestations of the profound crisis in the modern world order signify a need for change. In defining a different configuration of the world order, old and new players will need raw and fuel resources, personnel, knowledge and skills, previously untapped markets and spheres of influence. In this sense, Russia and Africa are becoming increasingly close.

Both Russia and African states have unique natural resources, not yet fully explored and divided, and a huge territory with a population density below the world average. The struggle to include Russia and Africa alike in the sphere of influence of a particular player will grow increasingly more fierce in the coming years. In the emerging new bipolarity, the main adversaries in this struggle will be the United States and China.

Obviously, this global perspective is not acceptable for Russia and Africa, because it puts at risk their economic identity. Even now Africa is expressing concerns about

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China's growing influence on the continent, along with the habitual discontent about the former colonialists and the United States, while simultaneously accepting financial injections and economic assistance from either side. For Russia, unambiguously described in Western strategies as an adversary and "aggressor," entangled with economic sanctions, a "turn to East" is also risky in terms of falling under the influence of a much more economically powerful China.

In this regard, the development strategies of Africa and Russia complement each other in many ways. It is quite indicative that, in the context of the new emerging model of global development, both countries understand the need to rely on their own potential and to cooperate not with one key partner, but with a range of players. For instance, in Africa, both at the continental level and at the level of regional conglomerates and individual countries, the concept of "African ownership" has been increasingly adopted since the early 2000s, suggesting the ability to own one's development. Today the concept is becoming Pan-African. In 2013, the key strategic document of the African Union, Agenda 2063, put forth "Africa-centered development" as a starting point in the continent's growth agenda. According to the African economists, this approach does not mean that Africa refuses to participate in international economic relations, but that it shifts the focus of its development to the domestic market and localization of imported goods and services. Integration within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area should play a key role in this process [8].

As for Russia, it needs a new strategy for socio-economic development. The key objectives of this strategy include accelerated development of the Russian economy in order to ensure the growth of welfare of its citizens; saturation of the domestic market with necessary goods and services; revival of national industry; real growth of exports of non-energy commodities; ensuring presence of the Russian Federation among the leading countries of the world in research and development – among other steps, through creation of an effective system of higher education; achieving "digital maturity" in key sectors of the economy and social services; reforming the financial system and establishing a new mechanism of international settlements.

In our opinion, African direction of Russia's foreign economic activity can make a significant contribution to solving the aforementioned problems. Moreover, in conditions of increasing tension in relations with Western partners, the growth of China's economic and political power and influence in Asia, and escalation of the situation in the Middle East, the African vector of Russia's foreign policy takes on special significance. Politically, the support of Africans is extremely important for us as they account for more than a quarter of all votes at the UN. Economically, Africa is the most important market for sale of our industrial products and application of Russian technologies, including localization of our country's production capacities on the continent, training of personnel, and transfer of knowledge and skills. Between 2014 and 2019, the African consumer market has doubled in size and continues to grow at a faster rate than the rest of the world (4–5% per year versus 1.5–2%) [7]. Rapidly increasing demand for goods and services opens up new opportunities for sale of Russian industrial products on the African market.

We also need Africa as a supplier of essential strategic raw materials for successful development of modern high-tech industries. These are primarily manganese, chromium, bauxite, uranium, lithium, and rare earth metals.

Russia, which is also focused on import substitution and revival of national industry and agriculture, has 10 times less population than Africa. Meanwhile, to ensure accelerated development of production, access to large foreign markets is required. For a long period of its modern history, Russia was primarily focused on the development of economic ties with the Western world; now it has found itself in a very vulnerable position. Its intended role as a "gas station," a raw materials appendage of the developed countries and simultaneously an importer of Western industrial products, technologies and "values" was being implanted for over 20 years with obvious success, manifesting in degradation of the domestic industry, science and education and, as a consequence, a strong technological and informational dependence on the United States and Europe.

Economic sovereignty of the Russian Federation has been undermined, whereas its political status and international prestige have significantly diminished. Moreover, the disappointing, bordering on profound cataclysmic trends in the economy and society of the leading Western countries preclude favorable attitude of the United States and its allies to the very idea of restoring a powerful, multi-sectoral and self-sufficient economic complex in our country, even in the case of hypothetical substantial concessions from Moscow.

Meanwhile, the contemporary Russia needs a true economic breakthrough, which is impossible without restoration of multi-sectoral industry and development of domestic technology. Expansion of any production, including its high-tech varieties, is rooted in the growing demand for a certain type of product and the possibility of localization of the production process outside the country as close as possible to the consumer.

That is why it is very important for us today to identify the key focus in our relationship with the African continent, to find the niche that will allow us to designate a special role to Russia in the development of Africa, distinguishing it from other partners of African countries and simultaneously matching the strategic objectives of both the Russian Federation and the African Union.

At the plenary session of the Russia-Africa Economic Forum in 2019, Vladimir Putin said that the trade turnover between our countries, which exceeded 20 billion dollars in 2018, is insufficient and should at least double in the coming years [3].

Trade is undoubtedly the most important aspect of foreign economic activity, and the prospects for increasing trade turnover between Russia and African states are quite favorable. Moreover, the structure of our exports to Africa in 2019 in terms of non-resource and non-energy component, which reached 80%, was nearly perfect [4]. In the commodity structure of Russian exports to Africa in 2019, machinery, equipment and vehicles accounted for almost 25%, mineral products – 20%, metals and metal products – 8.5%, chemical products and rubber – 5%, timber and pulp&paper products – 4%. An increase in Russian-African trade can be achieved both through its diversification and geographical expansion (to date, 84% of Russia's total trade is with seven states: Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, South

Africa, Tunisia, Nigeria, and Sudan), and as a result of an increase in the supply of African goods to Russia. These are primarily agricultural products and unique types of minerals of strategic importance, which we often buy through European and other intermediaries [2].

“Cooperation with African states in the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), one of the flagship projects of Africa’s prospective development until 2063, also seems quite appropriate. However, cooperation in trade and financial investments will be significantly behind the leading actors in the short term” [1].

Still, we believe that in our mid- and long-term relations, working out bilateral opportunities for *technological partnership* could be *crucial* to attracting African countries and contributing to Russia’s successful economic development. This area can become a driver of development of the interacting parties in the conditions of the fourth industrial revolution and stimulates establishment of new strategic alliances.

Export of technology is, first and foremost, the export of products manufactured by companies in knowledge-intensive industries. Such products are manufactured using the latest equipment and technology, with engagement of highly qualified, specially trained personnel, embodying modern scientific achievements, best practices, and high socio-economic efficiency. At the same time, technology export suggests licensing the manufacturing of knowledge-intensive products, localization of manufacturing of a particular product or its individual components, as well as personnel training and cooperation in the scientific domain. It is obvious that this form of interaction is in the interests of both Russia (which thus obtains a large market for its exports and strengthens its influence on the African continent through training) and Africa (which increases the production of new goods with high added value inside the continent and receives highly qualified personnel trained by the Russian party) [1].

In the transforming world, “the demand for Russian technology in Africa can grow significantly, because Russia has high competencies in the areas that are topical for the African continent today. These are the agricultural sector (including seed farming, animal husbandry, fertilizer production, processing and storage of agricultural products); medicine (not only the production of drugs and vaccines, but also development of a network of medical institutions); digital technology, transport and energy infrastructure, space, construction, water supply, and mining” [1].

All of these plans are designed for the long and medium term. However, today we need to develop the tactics for interaction with African partners which would render effective and rapid results.

Most African states have now assumed a “wait-and-see” attitude toward Russia. This is manifested in the results of the vote in the UN General Assembly on the U.S.-Ukrainian resolution condemning Russia’s military operation in Ukraine. Out of 54 African states, 28 voted for the resolution; 17 countries abstained – Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Congo, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, CAR, Equatorial Guinea, South Sudan; 8 states did not vote – Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Togo, and Eswatini. Eritrea was the only African country that voted against the resolution.

Almost all African countries have no sympathy for Western partners, but are heavily economically dependent on the United States and the EU. In the current situation, further development of Russian-African relations will directly depend on the success of our special military operation in Ukraine. In this case, the sympathies of most African states will be on the side of the Russian Federation. However, even today, there is a number of special considerations.

1. It is necessary to revise approaches to cooperation with African integration groupings, primarily with the African Union, in order to strengthen Russia’s influence at this platform. It may be advisable to separate interaction with the African Union into an individual agenda, in order to distinguish it from relations with the African continent as a whole.

2. Russian activity in Africa is already bringing tangible fruit. The countries to which Russia provides economic support and military-technical assistance continue to be interested in strengthening our relations. On the contrary, states that do not work so closely with Russia have spoken out boldly against our actions. Thus, augmenting cooperation with them in the near future requires further evaluation. Russia should respond firmly and unequivocally, emphasizing the role of the USSR in the independence of African countries and inadmissibility of accusing Russia of neocolonialism and imperialism.

3. Russia should clearly and unambiguously state its position: abstaining countries should be “rewarded” (in terms of investment and security, including food security, etc.). We should start building a long-term partnership with these states.

4. Special attention should be paid to Eritrea, one of the five countries that voted against the anti-Russian resolution at the UN General Assembly and one of the two countries, along with Russia itself, that supported us at the UN Human Rights Council. In a situation where even Venezuela, an old and loyal ally of our country, has abstained, Eritrea’s position means an invitation to broad cooperation. Taking into account Eritrea’s extremely favorable location (from a military point of view as well), we should focus on building ties with this state, minding the political and image-related risks.

5. In the situation of a tough confrontation between the West and Russia, African countries can occupy the niche of more important partners in the near future: for instance, among the 35 states that abstained in the UN General Assembly vote on the Russian special operation, 16 represent the African continent.

6. At the same time, African countries can compete with us as suppliers of energy resources, especially oil and gas, to the EU. It is time to start working in this direction.

7. Particular attention should be paid to building Russia’s informational influence on the African continent using both official Russian mass media and social media. Despite the fact that in Africa the Western mass media have a lot of authority, there are many comments from regular Africans on social media in support of Russia. Current events are probably perceived as a demonstration of our country’s ability to defend its own interests, which is welcomed by Africans. Some social media comments also mention that Russia has always supported Africa, so now Africa should support Russia. Thus, current events can contribute to strengthening our country’s positive image in Africa.

8. We also need to consider the risk that African youth will become reluctant to study in Russia. Many news stories are devoted to the problems faced by African students in Ukraine; since Russia is often mentioned in these stories, and Africans tend to perceive the territory of the post-Soviet space as a single whole, the resulting fears and concerns can be extrapolated to our country.

9. Joint Russian projects with American and European companies on the continent can be discontinued by the decision of our partners. In this situation, it makes sense to look up to the companies of the third countries which abstained during the vote on the UN resolution on March 2 this year.

10. The main area of our cooperation in the near future should be to ensure food security of African states (including supplies of grain and other agricultural products, fertilizers, etc.). *We need to explain to our African partners that it is the West (and especially the U.S.) that is to be blamed for the threat of famine on the African continent, since it has completely cut off the supply of Russian products there, particularly food.* Cooperation in the biomedical field is also crucial. Even now African countries are concerned about rising food and fertilizer prices, whereas the combat against infections and other diseases is one of the continent's most pressing challenges. In the long term, we need to increase exports of high-tech Russian products to Africa. In response, we expect the African states to refuse to support Western economic sanctions and to increase cooperation with Russia across all areas.

11. Special attention should also be paid to the Pentagon's biological laboratories in Africa, actively promoting this topic. In 2020, the world learned about existence of U.S. biological programs in the following African countries: Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda [9]. Another source listed the following countries in the same year: Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – 49 biological laboratories were accounted for in these countries [6].

12. There is an urgent need to develop a new financial mechanism for our economic cooperation with African states with minimum connection to dollar and euro, using national and digital currencies, netting mechanisms and concessions.

13. It is extremely important to ensure a continuous and serious evaluation by professional researchers (experts on Africa rather than novices without the appropriate experience and knowledge of the continent) of the economic and political consequences of specific decisions for our country, steps taken by African governments and newly discovered circumstances in relation to their economic opportunities and actions (conjuncture). *To this end, it is necessary to support purpose-oriented analytical and advisory activity of specialized research structures which have proved their high applied performance,* providing them with adequate information, material and technical support.

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