

Russia-Africa Relations: Economic, Strategic and Geopolitical Dimensions

Multipolarity Presents New Opportunities for Russian Integration with Africa

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Following the Russia-Africa Economic Conference in Moscow last month and the Russia-Africa Parliamentary Conference on July 3rd, the first ever Russia-Africa political summit is scheduled for Sochi on October 24th. The summit will henceforth be planned as an annual event. About 3,000 delegates attended the economic conference, including a thousand African delegates. The volume of Russian trade with Africa is projected to double in the next 3-4 years. Currently, Russia's largest trading-partners on the African continent are Egypt, South Africa, Zambia, Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Kenya. The Russian Expo Center is cooperating on a number of African projects with Afreximbank, for example the construction and modernization of industrial infrastructure in Zambia and Angola, and mining projects in both Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone.

Furthermore, in May the governments of Russia and Egypt signed an agreement for a planned Russian industrial zone in Port Said. The Russian government has earmarked \$190 million for investment in the project, with a further \$7 billion coming from the private sector. Russian companies setting up shop in the planned industrial zone will receive preferential tariffs for energy, and a preferential tax regime. The project is scheduled to be completed by 2026. In May last year, the Russian and Ethiopian governments announced plans to build nuclear power facilities in Ethiopia, and an agreement has been reached with the Eritrean government to build a Russian military logistics-port (not planned as an actual naval base).

Under what global security-conditions is this kind of medium-term economic and infrastructural planning possible?

Under the conditions of the new multi-polarity, there is a new "scramble for Africa" with Russia, China, Brazil, India and the EU all showing heightened levels of economic interest. The Russian industrial sector suffers from shortages of manganese, chrome, mercury, bauxite and chromium, so access to Africa's minerals holds immense strategic value.

During Soviet times, a number of African nations benefitted from large-scale Soviet economic aid, and given the USSR's supporting role in the anti-colonial movements of a number of nations in both North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, we should not entirely discount the value of this anti-colonial ideological legacy in Russia's present-day economic competition with India, China, Brazil and the EU on the African continent.

Although most Russian diplomats discussing the Russian government's multi-levelled negotiations with their African counterparts have focused largely on trade and other

economic issues, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did mention that, during his meeting with Cote D'Ivoire's Foreign Minister Marcel Amon-Tanoh on July 17th, cooperation on defence, security and counter-terrorism had been discussed. Last year, Lavrov embarked on a week-long tour of African nations, during which he discussed trade and counter-terrorism in tandem.

This is not only prudent but a necessary compliment to any discussion of economic integration. Any coldly pragmatic analysis of the history of American militarism in the post-war period would come to the conclusion that the central purpose of American military intervention has most usually been to destroy the infrastructure of rival economic systems. Von Clausewitz was not entirely right – rather than observing that war was the continuation of politics by other means, he should have said that war was the continuation of economics by other means.

For example:

During the Korean war, in 20 out of North Korea's 23 largest cities, more than half of all the housing-stock was destroyed by American aerial bombardment.

During the Vietnam war, 13% of Vietnam's entire surface-area was poisoned by Napalm and Agent Orange. The legacy of this today not only renders tens of millions of hectares of Vietnamese land uncultivable, but also means that between 2 and 3 million Vietnamese people today have birth-defects which make them incapable of working.

A large component of the US government's Operation Mongoose was geared toward economic sabotage against Cuba.

During the 1999 NATO air-campaign against Yugoslavia, 400 state-owned factories were bombed, only a handful of which were in any way related to military production. Also, the use of depleted uranium munitions was devised to have a long-term impact on environmental health, and we can only surmise logically that this was decided upon because of the long-term economic burden which it would entail.

It seems obvious that the primary target of American aerial bombardment in the 2011 air-campaign against Libya was the country's infrastructure, electrical and water-supply systems.

It seems equally obvious that the destruction of as much housing and infrastructure as possible has been the principal mission assigned to American proxies in Syria and Donbass.

Quite recently, the US has attacked both Venezuela's electrical grid and its water-supply.

The historical pattern is clear. The principal function of the projection of US military power abroad during the entire post-war period has not been to kill people, but to destroy infrastructure and economic capacity. Given the Chinese industrial and infrastructural investments lost in Lybia, valuable lessons have been learned.

So taking the planned Russian industrial zone in Port Said as an example, the question arises, what does this intergovernmental agreement imply about developments in the global security-environment which the Russian and Egyptian governments envisage in the near future?

Well, the Port Said plan implies that both governments envisage the decline of American military potency in the region, and thus a degraded American capacity for economic vandalism. That is to say, it implies that we already live in a new global security-environment. This point is partially connected with the new American switch of naval concentration to the Pacific in an effort to counter Chinese economic power. Although this pivot to Asia was first announced by the Obama administration, only under Trump has it been coupled with a new tendency toward isolationism in other geo-strategic zones. Realistically, when we consider the way that the Chinese got their fingers burnt in Libya, we would have to counter-factually speculate that neither the Russian nor the Egyptian governments would consider the Port Said industrial zone plan viable if Hillary Clinton had been elected US president. It would simply have been far too risky an investment.

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