

## Russia returning to Africa

by Johan Burger

For most casual observers, the prominent non-Western country active in Africa is China. Its Belt and Road Initiative and its active foreign investment in many African countries have highlighted its presence on the continent. The extent to which many commodity exporters are dependent on exports to China have created accusations of Chinese neo-colonisation of Africa. However, many of these observers have not noted an increasing Russian presence in Africa. This article therefore attempts to highlight the most recent initiatives by Russia to expand its presence and influence in the last investment frontier in the world, i.e. Africa.

### Positioning Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa

Experts believe a new “fight for Africa” is unfolding. The main players are China, the EU, and the United States. India, Brazil, Turkey, Iran, South Korea and the Gulf countries are also interested in increasing cooperation with Africa. Russia’s volume of trade and economic interaction with Africa is inferior to almost all of the abovementioned players. Currently, Russia’s trade with Africa is less than \$12 billion. Nevertheless, in some areas, competition between Russia and other players is quite serious (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

During the heyday of the former Soviet Union, it had a strong influence in Africa. This changed after the demise of the Soviet union. Under Putin, it now seems Russia has new aspirations for Africa, which is reflected in Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s visit to Africa in early March 2018.

According to Gopaldas (2018)<sup>2</sup>, Russia’s timing is good as Africa is both searching for and being courted by new strategic partners, amid changing geopolitical dynamics. First, significant changes among Africa’s traditional partners in the West, such as Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, have seen them adopt a more insular approach to foreign policy and international affairs. Apart from China, Russia is an obvious beneficiary, especially since Western sanctions after its invasion of Crimea meant it needed to find alternative trading partners. As president, Putin also places value on geopolitical relations and Russia’s dominance globally.

Russia’s method of trade and investment in Africa – without conditions or the moral prescriptions of the West (like China) – also opens the way for economic interactions on the continent. Indeed, trade and investment between Russia and Africa witnessed growth of 185% between 2005 and 2015 (Gopaldas, 2018).<sup>3</sup>

As Russia’s interests in Africa expand, so does the field for possible conflict and competition with other players. For example, it is not only Russia that is trying to help Africa in the construction of nuclear power plants, but there is already serious competition, and there have been cases of opposition to Russia’s interests (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>4</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov undertook a five-day tour to Africa in March 2018, including visits to Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. This clearly indicates Russia is setting itself up to return to Africa. It is also seen as a reaction to the cooling off of Russia’s relations with the West. In addition, sanctions against it have influenced Russia’s decision to reorient its attention to new partners, including Africa (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>5</sup>

Lavrov’s visit to Africa, which coincided with that of former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, was significant. Gopaldas (2018)<sup>6</sup> quotes Alex Vines of Chatham House, who stated that “the Russian trip is

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<sup>1</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

<sup>4</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

really about commercial priorities, a bit about defence, while the US one is very much about peace and security.”

From a business perspective, Africa’s growing middle class is creating a huge new consumer market, also for Russian goods and services. Africa’s resources in the field of energy, minerals and raw materials can supplement the needs of Russia in this regard.

According to Kulkova (2018)<sup>7</sup>, Russia’s main interests in Africa are the following:

- Strengthening political cooperation with African countries to ensure support of Russia’s position on international affairs, as well as strengthening political interaction with African countries.
- Development of trade and economic relations – extraction/purchase of mineral resources, tropical farming products in Africa, and increase of fruit and vegetable supplies to Russia, which largely came to replace products from the EU countries. Delivery of Russian agricultural products, fertilizers, engineering products, weapons, equipment, etc. to Africa.
- Export of Russian services and technologies – for example, construction of nuclear power plants, other infrastructure facilities (hydroelectric power stations, light industry plants, processing of agricultural raw materials), technologies in oil refining and pipeline construction, launching satellites of African countries.

From the above, it is clear that Russia is striving to consolidate its position in Sub-Saharan Africa. Interaction with the region appears to be important for it.

Russian companies have been implementing a number of interesting projects in African countries. From a mining perspective, it is cooperating with Zimbabwe (where Russia is developing one of the world’s largest deposits of platinum group metals) (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>8</sup>

It seems that Russia is actively re-establishing links with Angola. Firstly, Alrosa mines diamonds in that country. Secondly, there are talks with Angola in the field of hydrocarbon production; it is one of the largest oil-producing countries in Africa and a member of OPEC (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, Russia’s Roscosmos recently offered to build Angola’s second satellite, AngoSat-2, which was accepted by Angola. Payment for the production of the second satellite would come from the insurance reimbursement for the lost AngoSat-1 satellite worth US\$121 million. The rest of the total cost of US\$320 million will be paid by Russia (Ayemoba, 2018).<sup>10</sup>

Angola and Mozambique will be actively cooperating with Russia in the field of military-technical cooperation. Russia and Mozambique are planning to jointly develop and produce military equipment (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>11</sup> The agreement between the two countries, signed in late January 2017, stipulates the deliveries of arms and military equipment, as well as other military-oriented products, spare parts and components. The agreement, originally signed for five years, will be automatically prolonged for another five years unless one of the parties withdraws (Anon, 2018a).<sup>12</sup>

For Lavrov, it is important to strengthen contacts with the new government of Zimbabwe, which came to power after the displacement of president Robert Mugabe (Kulkova, 2018).<sup>13</sup> It would be interesting to see how this relationship evolves, given the interest China has also been showing in Zimbabwe, and the influence China has been seen to wield in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe’s president has recently paid a visit to China, where collaboration within the Belt and Road Initiative was discussed.

As for the relationship between Russia and Namibia, an intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Namibia was recently established. It seems that Russia has big plans to increase the exports of its agricultural products to Namibia (wheat, dairy products, poultry, etc.)

<sup>7</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://africabusinesscommunities.com/news/angola-accepts-russian-offer-to-build-angosat-2/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://tass.com/defense/993217>

<sup>13</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

(Kulkova, 2018).<sup>14</sup> There is also the potential of competition for the support of Namibia between Russia and China. As was the case with Zimbabwe, Namibian President Geingob also recently visited China and discussed participation in the Belt and Road Initiative with China's president.

A United Nations sanctions committee recently allowed Russia to sell weapons to the government in Central African Republic (C.A.R.), which is struggling to contain an ethnic and religious conflict. The arms were accompanied by a small group of Russian military trainers. C.A.R.'s president is quoted as saying he now wants more cooperation with Russia, including in the fields of infrastructure and education. Vulnerable fragile states, such as C.A.R., that have intense security demands and requirements, are the sorts of places that the Russians are looking to improve their market share (Kelemen, 2018).<sup>15</sup>

According to the Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Russian company wanted to participate in developing Uganda's planned crude-export pipeline by partnering with the local unit of GCC Services of the UAE. Other Russian companies wanting to invest in Uganda, include one that wants to supply equipment for power stations generating between 2.5 megawatts and 60 megawatts, and RusHydro PJSC, a Russian hydroelectricity company, who also wants to invest in Uganda (Ojambo, 2018).<sup>16</sup>

While the above paints the general picture of Russia in Africa, one could also look at Russia's presence in greater depth in specific countries. Some of these relationships are of a security nature, whilst others are more business-related. Some countries even exhibit a dual relationship, where both economic relations and geo-security relations are forged.

## Russia in Sudan

The relationship between Russia and Sudan is by no means new. For decades, there were economic, political and military relations between the two countries. Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, along with China, opposed initiatives to send peacekeeping missions to Darfur, although Sudan itself accepted the peacekeeping mission through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. In addition, Russia has been a major arms supplier for a considerable time (Ismail, 2018).<sup>17</sup>

President al-Bashir recently announced that Sudan and Russia had agreed on a programme to boost Sudan's military capabilities. The plan aimed to enable the Sudanese military to counter any threat. Russia would develop the Sudanese armed forces in a way that would deter any aggressor. Apparently it was during this trip to Russia in November 2017 that al-Bashir asked for Russia's cooperation in the field of nuclear power. Sudan's air force is comprised mainly of Russian warplanes, and the bulk of its military equipment has also been traditionally supplied by Russia (Anon, 2018b).<sup>18</sup> The programme regarding the development of the Sudanese military, is therefore a mere continuation of a historical trend.

On the energy front, Russia has agreed to supply Sudan with a small-capacity floating nuclear plant to produce electricity, and will endeavour to complete the technical studies to build Sudan's nuclear power plant within 8 years. The project is part of a plan to generate more than 5000 megawatts by 2020 (Anon, 2018c).<sup>19</sup>

During the mentioned trip to Russia, al-Bashir blamed the USA for the secession of South Sudan in 2011, and claimed that the USA was now planning to split the rest of Sudan into five countries. Bashir apparently also discussed the establishment of military bases on the Red Sea coast with President Putin and his

<sup>14</sup> <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-interests-in-africa/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/07/600482806/russias-inroads-in-africa>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-28/uganda-says-russian-company-wants-role-in-crude-export-pipeline>

<sup>17</sup> <https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/03/26/russia-and-sudan-are-cozying-up/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/russia-to-boost-sudan-military-bashir-20180208>

<sup>19</sup> <http://sdeconews.com/story-z18766927>

defence minister. In addition, he expressed support for Russia's role in Syria (Adam, 2017).<sup>20</sup> According to Ismail (2018), al-Bashir also offered Sudan as a gateway into Africa for Russia.<sup>21</sup>

In a recent development, Sudan invited Russian companies to take part in the development of its oil industry. The Sudanese government offered Russian energy companies several oil sites, including both producing and untapped ones, as well as fields that are currently being developed by other foreign companies, whom the Russian players would help to increase production (Slav, 2018).<sup>22</sup>

Sudan has been eager to build an oil industry after the split with South Sudan when it seceded in 2011. After the secession, the two countries have remained mutually dependent on oil revenues, with South Sudan owning 75% of the oil reserves, while Sudan owns the only transport route to get oil to international markets. Rosneft, Gazprom, Lukoil, and Tatneft were among the Russian companies invited by the Government to tap into Sudan's oil resources (Slav, 2018).<sup>23</sup>

## Russia in Somaliland

Russia is reportedly negotiating with Somaliland leaders for a naval base to support its warships and submarines to operate in the region and the busy shipping lanes carrying most of Europe's goods. If realised, this would be Russia's first base in Africa since the Cold War and be a major step forward for Putin's programme to revive Russia's once proud navy (Knox, 2018).<sup>24</sup> The base is expected to be home to two destroyer-sized ships, four frigate class ships, two large submarine pens, two airstrips that can host up to six heavy aircraft and fifteen fighter jets, and other facilities (Akwei, 2018).<sup>25</sup> It is reported the naval base would be staffed by 1,500 people and service destroyers, frigates and submarines (Knox, 2018).<sup>26</sup>

The rumoured location of the base is outside of Zeila city, in Somaliland. It is also on the border with Djibouti - nearby the location of China's first overseas base in modern times that opened last year. As the US and China both have military facilities in Djibouti, it should not be a surprise that Russia would want facilities there too (Knox, 2018).<sup>27</sup>

According to Dr Andrew Foxall, director of the Russia and Eurasia Studies Centre, the Horn of Africa is strategically important for a number of reasons, amongst others because it allows both power projection into the Middle East and influence over the Suez Canal through the Gulf of Aden. The development of a facility in Somaliland could be seen as an attempt to build a blue-water navy (Knox, 2018).<sup>28</sup>

According to the Qaran News, Russia is proposing that it will recognise the breakaway republic of Somaliland in return for being allowed to establish the base. It also reported that Russia will ensure security in the breakaway country by training the Somaliland military (Akwei, 2018).<sup>29</sup>

Russia's possible base in Somaliland would be about much more than just spiting the Americans, as it would be part and parcel of Moscow's intended "Pivot to Africa." In this instance, Russia could potentially mediate between Somaliland and Somalia and then "balance" between both of them and their much larger neighbour of Ethiopia (Korybko, 2018).<sup>30</sup>

Given that Djibouti was becoming cramped for space, and the relatively long distance between Port Sudan and Ethiopia, Russia might have decided to build a base in Somaliland as an alternative entry to Ethiopia, with whom Somaliland is allied. Furthermore, Ethiopia's joint development of a port in Berbera with the

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/sudan-rapprochement-russia-171130124410870.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/03/26/russia-and-sudan-are-cozying-up/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Sudan-Extends-Invitation-To-Russian-Oil-Explorers.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Sudan-Extends-Invitation-To-Russian-Oil-Explorers.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6083147/vladimir-putin-russia-naval-base-somaliland-africa-suez-trade-route/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/russia-to-pitch-first-camp-in-africa-with-military-base-in-somaliland>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6083147/vladimir-putin-russia-naval-base-somaliland-africa-suez-trade-route/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6083147/vladimir-putin-russia-naval-base-somaliland-africa-suez-trade-route/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/6083147/vladimir-putin-russia-naval-base-somaliland-africa-suez-trade-route/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/russia-to-pitch-first-camp-in-africa-with-military-base-in-somaliland>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-strategic-implications-of-a-possible-russian-base-in-somaliland/5635083>

UAE, as well as Russia's increasing relations with both of these countries, point to tacit economic-strategic motivations behind its possible decision to build a base in nearby Zeila because it could "kill several birds with one stone" by strengthening Russia's ties with all three parties (Korybko, 2018).<sup>31</sup>

## Russia in Egypt

As for Russia's ties with Egypt, Soviet advisers were expelled from Egypt by President Anwar Sadat in 1972. It seems that the then Soviet leadership underestimated the intelligence and pride of the Egyptian leaders in their deals with the Egyptians. Also, they refused to provide Egypt with offensive weapons to support them in their struggle against Israel (Sheehan, 1972).<sup>32</sup>

Russia-Egypt ties, already on the rise in Putin's earlier years, noticeably improved after al-Sisi became president after the military coup in July 2013. Bilateral trade between the two countries doubled to \$5.5 billion in 2014. Russia and Egypt held their first joint naval drills in June 2015, and military exercises in October 2016. Russia had also deployed special forces to Egypt on the Libyan border in March 2017, which signalled Russia's growing role in Libya. In October 2017, Cairo finalized negotiations with Moscow to build Egypt's first nuclear power plant (Borschhevskaya, 2017).<sup>33</sup>

More recently, Egypt expects a massive boost in tourism after Russia's decision to resume flights to Cairo as of 11 April 2018 after a two-year suspension. In late 2015, Egyptian-Russian civilian air traffic was halted by Russia after a bomb went off aboard a Russian jet over the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 its passengers. Egypt's tourism sector suffered greatly since then, as Russians make up the largest number of the tourists to Egypt. For Egyptian tourism insiders, this decision will revive Russian tourism to the Red Sea coastal cities. A new round of negotiations between Russia and Egypt is expected later in April 2018 to discuss resuming flights to Red Sea resorts (Samir, 2018).<sup>34</sup>

Egyptian commentators stated that Russian tourism is of the utmost importance to the recovery of Egyptian tourism. According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, Russian tourists numbered between 2.8 and 3.1 million in 2014, bringing in estimated revenues of \$2.4 billion. Following the 2015 incident, Egypt has tightened security in its airports to satisfy Russian concerns. According to the Egyptian president, the return of the Russian tourists would reassure the world that Egypt is a country of safety and security (Samir, 2018).<sup>35</sup>

On a grander business scale, Egypt in 2014 announced the modernization of the Suez Canal. Originally, it was planned to complete the work in three years, but it was reduced to 12 months. The new Suez Canal includes a vast range of services, as well as several industrial parks, including those from Russia, China and Italy (Anon, 2016a).<sup>36</sup>

The decision to build a Russian industrial zone in Egypt was agreed by President Vladimir Putin and President al-Sisi in 2014. The area of the Russian industrial park on the Suez Canal was expanded from 80 to 2,000 hectares, and has a friendlier tax regime for resident Russian firms. It is expected to provide 77,000 jobs, and the companies expect revenues to reach \$11.6 billion. The tax rate for businesses in the project and personal income tax will be 10%. Sales tax will be abolished (Anon, 2016a).<sup>37</sup>

Russian companies will design and construct the industrial facilities, jointly produce and supply various types of equipment, and provide the necessary technical assistance. It is estimated Russia will invest around \$4.6 billion in the construction of the industrial park by 2035. Construction of the industrial park will

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-strategic-implications-of-a-possible-russian-base-in-somaliland/5635083>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/08/06/archives/why-sadat-packed-off-the-russians-egypt.html>

<sup>33</sup> <http://thehill.com/opinion/international/351684-from-moscow-to-marrakech-russia-is-turning-to-africa>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/04/egypt-russia-resumed-flights-tourism-red-sea-revenues-summer.html>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/04/egypt-russia-resumed-flights-tourism-red-sea-revenues-summer.html>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.rt.com/business/368167-egypt-russian-industrial-zone/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.rt.com/business/368167-egypt-russian-industrial-zone/>

start in 2018 (Anon, 2016a).<sup>38</sup> Most of the money will come from private investors. Russian companies Kamaz, GAZ, UAZ, Transmashholding, Gazprom Neft, Tatneft, Inter RAO and others will be part of the new industrial hub. Russia had selected East Port Said to establish the industrial park in Egypt (Anon, 2016b).<sup>39</sup>

## Russia in Ethiopia

Lavrov's recent tour to Africa also appears to have an interest in re-establishing former Soviet-era ties with Ethiopia, with which Russia has long-standing diplomatic relations dating back to the 19th century. Lavrov pushed for a nuclear reactor to be built in Ethiopia by Russia as part of its policy of exporting atomic power facilities. In addition, he called for Russian membership in the African Union's Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL) (Blank, 2018).<sup>40</sup>

According to Ethiopia's ambassador to Russia, Grum Abay, more still needs to be done in order to maintain the relationship in decades to come, especially when it comes to trade. His view is that Ethiopia's ideas of trade are not geared to having more products available. Ethiopian companies have problems understanding the Russian market. According to him, Russia does not show enough interest in the African and Ethiopian markets. Both parties would need to work on that in the future (Mules, 2018).<sup>41</sup>

## General

Interestingly enough, the USA has raised alarm over China's naval ambitions in Africa, saying it could "place US security at risk". However, they have not yet commented at a similar level of intensity on the expansion of Russia in West, East and North Africa. In 2017, China finished work on its military barracks in Djibouti, with a capacity for up to 10 000 personnel, more than the combined number of soldiers and special forces at the French and US bases in the country (Aboubaker, 2018).<sup>42</sup>

The Pentagon operates its largest military base in Africa from Djibouti, using it against terror groups across East Africa, Somalia and the Middle East. However, they fear President Guelleh could break this agreement should his Chinese patrons call in another debt, leaving the US limited in its ability to project power in the region (Aboubaker, 2018).<sup>43</sup> This constraint would leave US interests vulnerable, given the expansion of China, Russia, Turkey, the UAE and Qatar in the region.

Russia has a notable military influence in Africa, both in terms of boots on the ground and military transactions with states. Russia is the second largest exporter of arms globally and a major supplier to Africa. Despite the controversy and moral issues around this (Russian weapons are often the ones showing up in countries under arms embargoes), it is likely to remain one of its comparative advantages (Gopaldas, 2018)<sup>44</sup>.

Russia's interests are not only of a military nature, but it has significant economic characteristics as well. Africa's large population, forecasted to grow to 2,4 billion by 2050 and more than 4 billion by 2100, provides a massive market for Russian goods and services. The fact that the middle class is growing in leaps and bounds in Africa, makes this market even more attractive to Russian businesses.

More than 620 million people in Africa do not have access to electricity. This provides Russia's nuclear industry with an attractive potential market. As such, Russia has already approached various countries in Africa to sound them out as potential clients, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Africa.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.rt.com/business/368167-egypt-russian-industrial-zone/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.rt.com/business/350883-russia-egypt-zone-investments/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://jamestown.org/program/sergei-lavrovs-africa-trip-regional-promises-and-global-ambitions/>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.dw.com/en/russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-makes-zimbabwe-stopover-during-africa-tour/a-42875110>

<sup>42</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201804250211.html>

<sup>43</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201804250211.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

Africa's resources are also part of the attraction for Russia. Not least of these is Namibia's uranium and Zimbabwe's platinum. In addition, various minerals and agricultural products from Africa are in demand in Russia.

Therefore, as stated by Gopaldas (2018)<sup>45</sup>, Russian energy interests include oil, gas and nuclear, with state-owned companies investing both in northern and southern Africa. Russia's security influence includes large representations in peacekeeping bodies and supplying arms and training to the continent. Its soft power is exerted by offering non-Western-centric avenues of diplomacy and support. Economically, the focus has been on energy diplomacy. Russia's investment charge has been led by companies such as Gazprom, Lukoil, Rostec and Rosatom, which have investments or interests in Algeria, Egypt, South Africa, Uganda and Angola.

According to Gopaldas (2018),<sup>46</sup> Russia's activities in Africa have not been without controversy. Some critics argue that Russia has exacerbated conflicts by supplying arms and training to the region. Commercially, Russian investment bank VTB's involvement, along with Credit Suisse, in Mozambique's "tuna bond saga" was seen as a prime example of the pitfalls of Russia's "non-moralistic" economic diplomacy in Africa. The Russian nuclear deal in South Africa has also been shrouded in controversy, eliciting significant objections from the South African population who saw it as unaffordable.

Diplomatically, Africa is of strategic interest to Russia in terms of the geopolitical support it offers – African states comprise the biggest geographic voting bloc across a multitude of global diplomatic, security and economic institutions, most notably the UN Security Council. Thus African support is enticing for Russia as it hopes to assert its dominance and relevance on the world. Gopaldas (2018)<sup>47</sup> quotes Stephanie Wolters of the Institute for Security Studies as stating that "Russia's position hasn't really changed much in the past few years – i.e. bargaining for African support in multilateral institutions in return for UN Security Council vetoes." It must be stated, though, that Russia is not alone in seeking Africa's support for its global agenda. Other countries, such as India and Japan, have been quite transparent in their aspirations to garner African support for their diplomatic initiatives.

Through strategic energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa on an incremental, rather than an exponential, level. African states should be aware of the opportunities and pitfalls of this – and view Russia's interest within a broader strategic context. There is a new "scramble for Africa", and African policymakers should exploit the renewed attention in an advantageous manner, instead of becoming a victim in this much vaunted scramble (Gopaldas, 2018).<sup>48</sup> The question, however, is to what extent Africa can exercise a choice given its somewhat vulnerable position vis-à-vis the larger powers operating on the continent.

It is clear that Russia is trying to reclaim the influence it had in Africa before 1989, when Glasnost and Perestroika destroyed the former Soviet Union. In addition, it is using Africa as a base to expand its influence beyond Africa. It has now succeeded in taking over the Crimea Peninsula, and has obtained a position of influence in Egypt alongside the Suez Canal. Further down south, Sudan has invited them to develop a physical presence in that country. Having a military presence in Somaliland, would give them a third base alongside the Red Sea approach to the Suez. It is now optimally placed to project power into the Middle East, the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean region. Africa, with this growing Russian presence, the existing Chinese presence, and the historical USA military presence, is becoming a possible future global power battlefield. This battlefield is becoming more crowded with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey also becoming players, albeit only economically for some of them. It is doubtful whether these foreign military bases are in Africa's best interest!

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-03-13-iss-today-russia-and-africa-meet-again/#.Wuhjuy17Fo4>

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