

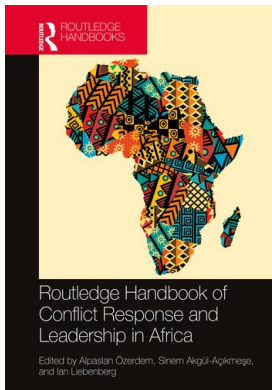
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RUSSIA IN THE ‘NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA’

A new search for leadership?

Inan Rüma

Introduction

Africa has become yet again an area of great-power rivalry to the extent that the notorious ‘scramble for Africa’ of the 19th century is re-occurring. This time with a salient difference: African societies have also manifested various self-government levels, though not always in line with universal democratic human development. Moreover, the continent’s conflicts have provoked foreign powers’ involvement in line with their search for influence in world politics. This chapter analyses the Russian role in Africa with a focus on its leadership capacity in the context of conflict management. Impressive and controversial activism has recently been observed in Russian foreign policy. Their main claim has been recognition as a major power in a multipolar world, with a say in world politics’ major issues. Africa emerged particularly important in this respect on the grounds of former Soviet influence in this continent and the absence of the Russian Empire (due in fact to its lack of ability) in the notorious ‘scramble’ in the 19th century.

Leadership has been a crucial issue since the absence of responsible leadership is considered the reason for the continued challenges that African development has faced. In such a taxonomy of studies on leadership, it is concluded that the bulk of studies originate from outside Africa and that the ones within Africa originate from South Africa, which has aspired to regional leadership (Fourie, van der Merwe and van der Merwe, 2017, p. 239). It can be argued that leadership plays a vital role in effecting conflict response but is frequently examined merely at the macro level of the state, government, and international organizations, as this book aims at problematizing. This macro-level study is on Russia’s attempt at leadership in Africa tired by conflict as elsewhere in the world. Therefore, the concepts of leadership and management are rather analysed at an interstate level in this chapter, and it could thus provide only achievements at the level of state. The main approach and argument in this chapter indeed is that this (inter)state level leadership and/or management has not been concerned with human development in African countries.

In contrast, this latter should and could have been the focus, also within the frameworks of peacebuilding, conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. To note, human development is used in this chapter simply in line with the definition by the UNDP: “The human development approach, developed by the economist Mahbub Ul Haq, is anchored in the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen’s work on human capabilities, often framed in terms of whether people are able to ‘be’ and ‘do’ desirable things in life. Examples include Beings: well

fed, sheltered, healthy. Doings: work, education, voting, participating in community life. Freedom of choice is central to the approach" (UNDP, 2020). Since this chapter is rather within the scope of foreign policy, foreign relations can be added to this rather political-economic approach. That is to say, whether any foreign relation could result in increasing the well-being of the citizens in a given country can be questioned.

There have been the usual problems of definitions on leadership and/or management, as discussed extensively in Winston and Patterson (2006). Since this chapter is rather at the interstate level, the following definitions seem plausible since they fit into foreign policy. Leadership as "the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement" (Rauch and Behling, 1984, p. 46) seems explanatory concerning Russian activities because Russian foreign policy targeted particular groups in power to increase its presence and influence in Africa. Moreover, leadership is also defined as "about tapping into individual motivations in the interest of furthering an organization wide goal" (Prentice, 1961), which can be useful in explaining the attempt at furthering Russian foreign policy goals through the support given to some African rulers known with authoritarian behaviour.

Legitimate leadership has indeed been equated with democracy in the international mainstream (Fourie, van der Merwe and van der Merwe, 2017, p. 242) and is reflected as such into this rather geopolitically defined postcolonial continent that is marked by fragmentation, underdevelopment, and foreign military intervention (two recent examples on these discussions in the mainstream can be found at UN, 2016; Olewé, 2019). In fact, colonialism has formed an Africa that has not been monolithic as a modern entity and has since then become the insurmountable framework in this continent. Post-Cold War great power competition has also reflected colonial divisions, and Africa could not help but remain under "dictates and constraints" of major international actors (Nel and McGowan, 1999 in Paki and Cocodia, 2011, p. 1). For example, the recent intervention in Libya has manifested a controversial case for the notion of responsibility to protect (R2P) with a quick military intervention as opposed to a negotiated transition. Chief Executive of the South African Institute of International Affairs Elizabeth Sidiropoulos could still use the typical term of 'chessboard' while defining foreign powers' competition to control the continent's natural resources and pursue the interests of their military industry (Sputnik 2019). Therefore, it is argued that Africa can neither compete nor cooperate (Paki and Cocodia, 2011). The significant novelty added to this picture is the growing middle class in Africa: the market opportunities have broadened foreign powers' commercial interests (Sputnik, 2019).

Africa has indeed been remarkable with economic growth even under the global economic crisis, partly because of its multilateral economic relations in addition to its low direct dependency on the USA. This was due to the primary products, macroeconomic stabilization and improvements in governance. Therefore, "home to the world's largest free trade area and a 1.2 billion-person market" (World Bank, 2019a), the continent exposes new opportunities for investment (Saïdane and Le Noir, 2015). As a result, Africa has become a destination for international investors and capital movements (Mestrallet, 2015). It is even argued that following a decade-long average growth around 5.6%, the 'emergence' of African countries can be said to be similar to Asian Tigers in the 1980s (Diarrassouba, 2015, p. 399). This 'emergence' is mentioned even at the level of the World Economic Forum (Coleman, 2020). However, the redistribution of the fruits of this growth has been very inegalitarian, and large parts of the population are far removed from the improvements (Derreumaux, 2015, p. 405).

The formation of a middle class whose revenues allows domestic consumption and the domestic market can contribute to growth, but it also veils social inequality (Mestrallet, 2015, p. 393), as is also underlined in the World Bank and World Economic Forum. Finally, although African economic growth is considerable, it is fragile because it concerns mostly resource-rich

countries and is sensitive to global recession (Grell-Brisk, 2019). For instance, although one may observe significant improvement in the GDP growth as well as GNI per capita (World Bank, 2019b), poverty is still a serious problem. To put it simply, “economic growth, largely due to the sale of commodities, simply does not reach ordinary people”, so the absolute number of poor people in Africa has risen from 278 million to 413 million (Wilhelm, 2020). Dependency has long been an issue in African politics. There has often been a search for endogenous development in the continent. Under neo-liberal globalization, these efforts were halted, and the elements of a global market economy were imposed. This has resulted in weakening public service (as indeed elsewhere). In the absence of significant regional cooperation, African societies were left vulnerable to the global market forces (Mouandjo and Lewis, 2002, p. 343). As a result, state weaknesses in structural reforms have continued (Derreumaux, 2015, p. 405). This gives way to foreign interference, including newcomers such as China and the Russian Federation. The critical argument that Africa does not need such ‘cooperation’, which has often brought more misery to its people, has been restated. The alternative is posed in terms of shared values and focusing on development projects like vocational training and skills development rather than on military cooperation in exchange for natural resources (Mugabi, 2019).

This is the framework in which Russia’s new activism in Africa has taken place. It is highly questionable whether it is in line with human development in this continent. In this sense, the Russian attempt at leadership is aimed rather at its own presence and influence than the development of the continent. As observed and substantiated by many, it has rather been a show-off in line with new Russian foreign policy activism. In fact, Russia is considered a newcomer compared to Europe and the United States or even to China (Sun, 2020). It is then added to the already present rivalries and dependency, indeed successfully on its part. Therefore, Russian leadership/management has not been relevant for peacebuilding.

Russia in Africa

Russian foreign policy has experienced waves called Euro-Atlanticism and opposing Eurasianism in the post-Cold War era. The immediate post-Soviet years were defined by the so-called Atlanticism in the 1990s, arguing for cooperation with the USA, Europe, and international organizations. In that process, Russia perceived that it was not treated equally and fairly; hence Atlanticism was replaced by Eurasianism (Kubyskhin and Sergunin, 2015, p. 32). Russia’s main motivation has been to be known as a major power having a say in a multipolar world (Trenin, 2011, p. 10). Within this framework, geopolitics and status have been among crucial aspects of Russian foreign policy. In other words, Russian national interest and security have been redefined in terms of geopolitical expansionism rather than institutional cooperation (Morozova, 2009, pp. 671 and 675). This is the base of the Russian approach to and presence in Africa. It is indeed argued that Russian efforts to “re-asserting itself in Africa” stems from its aim to regain its status as a global player and seems a revival of “old Soviet Africa strategy” (Cohen, 2009). Therefore, Russia emerged again as a participant in the rivalries between the major powers and joint new scramble for Africa in the 21st century. Africa is once again viewed in Moscow as an important counterbalance to Western hostility (Matusevich, 2019, p. 35).

The Russian disinterest in Africa in the 1990s might have stemmed from the Soviet citizens’ complaints on “too much help to the Third World” during the economic hardships of the 1980s. Regeneration of interest has been rather due to the oil boom of the 2000s, which energized Russian foreign policy. The Russian elite’s actual mood is that involvement in Africa displayed the Soviet Union’s equal status as a superpower, and so do current Russian activities (Matusevich, 2019, p. 36). As early as 1992, Russia’s first Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev

declared that Russia would have “a normal view of national interest” that would be in contrast to ideological Soviet foreign policy (Morozova, 2009, p. 668). Africa has been situated within this rather pragmatic formulation and implementation of national interest without necessarily an ideological content.

The main dynamic in this new foreign policy has rather been military relations and thus the Russian army. The army reform ended the mass mobilization army of the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, coupled with its foreign policy aim of being regionally focused. Rooted in the “reasonable sufficiency” of Gorbachev’s reforms in the 1980s, the structural changes in the Russian army’s units and commands also aimed at the increasing capability of intervention in regional crises (Lannon, 2011, pp. 30–32). Its effects could be observed in Ukraine, Crimea, and Syria, which showed that Russia acquired military intervention capability in distant geographies (Egeli, 2017, pp. 166 and 178). Russian elite’s perception of the world is still at the state level, and they perceive (international) systemic level behaviours by the US, the EU, and even China as advancements of the interests of these particular states (Rüma and Çelikpala, 2019, pp. 66–67).

To consider the army as the strongest foreign policy asset seems a natural consequence of this state and geopolitics-centred mentality. In this regard, it is not surprising that Russian involvement in African affairs mostly included the military aspect, as indeed observed by Paul Stronski in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

Russia also sees itself as having a historic footprint [from the era of the Soviet Union when it supported liberation movements]. . . . It can’t offer consumer goods like China but what it can offer is arms and occasional debt relief either in exchange for an arms deal or the rights to explore and drill for hydrocarbons or other extractables. We are seeing a Russian return that is trying to find a niche where they can be competitive. The niche they really own is arms.

(Beaumont, 2018)

The shift of emphasis by the West to migration and security also eased the penetration of other actors (Gopaladas, 2018). In other words, Russian penetration through arms deals or exploitation of energy resources could benefit from the concentration of European countries and the USA on other issues.

The Russian political mind and perspective regarding Africa are suitable for some African leaders who tend to authoritarianism because relations with Russia do not include human rights concerns; hence arms dealing with Russia is attractive (Adibe, 2019). Moreover, Russian discourse on an equitable balance of power in international relations appeals to the African elite (Gopaladas, 2018). Even in economic relations, the Russian state-centric approach also appeals to the African state elite tired of international pressure on private sector development (Stanley and Fletcher 2019). The Russian elite have been pretty opportunistic in penetrating areas with known European and American interests to display an image of significant power. For instance, the failure of peacekeeping in Central Africa manifested an opportunity (Mark Galeotti in Losh and Mathews, 2018). A similar scenario has taken place in Egypt where the coup leader Sisi regime has uneasy relations with Europe and the US. With the Egyptian approval of Russian military jets using Egypt’s airspace and bases, the Russian military presence in North Africa since Brezhnev’s rule in the Soviet Union (1964–1982) has been the longest. This also has a historical meaning as rather a newer manoeuvre of the Egyptian regime between NATO and Russia, following its earlier departure from the Soviet Union in the 1970s (Losh and Mathews, 2018).

With regard to (military) geopolitics that its elite adore, Russia could succeed in forming a chain from Syria to Central Africa through Sudan (Losh and Mathews, 2018). It also wanted a

logistics base in Djibouti but could not obtain it and then agreed with Eritrea; hence it argued that UN sanctions on this country can be lifted (Beaumont, 2018). All these expose a mentality of geopolitics at the interstate level both on the Russian elite's minds and their African counterparts, rather than human development in the corresponding societies. It thus shows that Russian leadership has been irrelevant to human development and even conflict resolution; it just aimed to enlarge its influence in Africa's geopolitics.

Putin is the only Russian president who ever visited Libya (in 2008) and succeeded in having a number of deals, yet they could not be maintained in later developments. Gazprom and Rosoboronexport (the state agency in charge of arm exports) lost their contract (Schumacher and Nitoiu, 2015). The new Russian activism started with the noteworthy tour by Dmitry Medvedev, then president, to Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia, and Angola in 2009. This was labelled as "an opening salvo of a major diplomatic offensive, aimed to score both economic and symbolic points". It indeed inaugurated a new Russian strategy of arms contracts (Egypt and Sudan) of cooperation in the gas and oil extraction industries (Nigeria and Angola) and of expanding presence in telecommunications (Angola) and even space exploration (Angola and Nigeria) (Matusevich, 2019). While Obama, who visited Africa at similar times, talked about global warming, Medvedev, as Russian president, targeted oil, gas, diamonds, and uranium (Cohen, 2009). The expedition hitherto continued in this manner: the Russian elite did not manifest any broader frame or reference to the idea, but their deals on arms and minerals generated influence. This indeed showed that Russian leadership/management has been irrelevant to human development as well as conflict resolution and has remained as piecemeal achievements for its presence and influence.

Russian involvement: the political economy

Thierry Vircoulon in the International Crisis Group has observed a Russian strategy combining business, diplomacy, and arms sales (Beaumont, 2018). Though secondary, the economic aspect has not been underestimated, with Russian companies involved in the mining of resources such as coltan, cobalt, gold, and diamonds (Adibe, 2019). It is even claimed that Russia suggested a mediator role in Central Africa to access diamonds, gold, and uranium in the rebel-controlled areas (Beaumont, 2018). In this manner, Russian activism is also explained by the decline in its economy. Since its reach has diminished after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has attempted to use all its tools, ranging from arms deals to construction projects. It is also related to the domestic political economy and power struggle. Arms sales have reinforced the Russian military-industrial complex that is a strong ally to Putin (Losh and Mathews, 2018). Moreover, Russia is even said to be "desperate to find alternative trade partners to minimize the effects of Western sanctions" (Schumacher and Nitoiu, 2015, p. 102). Russia's sales of weaponry to African countries in 2017 had doubled compared to 2012, even ahead of the US's, as exposed by SIPRI (Signé, 2019). It signifies both military and economic gains for Russia.

As a matter of fact, the political economy of Russian economic involvement also reflected a geopolitical perspective since Russian investments are state led and often linked with military and diplomatic interests (Gopaldas, 2018). In fact, beginning with the 1970s and ideological orientation, the Soviet Union was also concerned with geopolitical value and alliances as well as with economic cooperation (Matusevich, 2019). In a comparative political-economic analysis of Russia and Africa, it was concluded that the resource-rich countries could manifest different regimes, particularly regarding development. In contrast to the "anti-developmental regimes" in Africa, Russia "exhibits high levels of industrialisation and represents an original model of 'developmental-cum-rentier' and dualistic economy" (Dufy and Sindzingre, 2016, p. 85). The striking part of this analysis is that Russia has not simply been an authoritarian state supporting

smaller fellows in Africa, but it has indirectly provided a political-economic model. However, there does not seem to be any substantial and successful implementation of such a model.

Russian–African trade of \$20 billion in 2018 was quite low compared to American–African trade of \$61 billion, China–Africa trade of \$200 billion, and EU–Africa trade of \$300 billion. However, Russia became the biggest supplier of arms with the conclusion of 23 security cooperation agreements (Stanley and Fletcher, 2019). Putin explicitly complained that the trade volume was pretty low, though doubled in five years to \$20 billion, and that almost 40% of that \$20 billion is with Egypt and so is not diversified (Miner and Ugwe, 2019). It is argued that Russia benefited from the timing of Africa searching for new partners and that Africa fit well into Russia's search for alternative trading partners following sanctions and its renewed emphasis on geopolitical relations (Gopaldas, 2018).

Russia's primary role characterizes Russia–Africa trading relations as an exporter, particularly in the food supply, metals, and machinery and equipment sectors. In 2018, Russia's exports to Sub-Saharan Africa were \$3 billion, while imports were at \$1.7 billion (Signé, 2019). African producers expected trade preferences in terms of tariffs and quotas, similar to those that some of them have with the United States (Sputnik, 2019). Therefore, Russia is a net winner in trade, which fits the major powers' historical position in Africa. It has thus taken its place in the dependency relations of this continent, as it indeed aimed to do. Russian Deputy Minister of Energy Pavel Sorokin said that Moscow also needed Africa.

It's basically cooperation, fair cooperation between two sides. It gives both of us an opportunity to find new technologies, to share this. I strongly believe that our companies, our track record shows that we do share technology, that we are ready to share culture, we are ready to take culture in from our partners and grow together. Because we are both on the path of growth and that means that we have to cooperate for the benefit of each of these parties.

(Miner and Ugwe, 2019)

This discourse has not been any different from that of other major powers. Thus it has been another element in Russian leadership/management to increase its presence and influence, and its outcome regarding conflict resolution and human development has remained doubtful.

Central African Republic as the epicentre and fellows

The Central African Republic emerged as the main ground of Russian involvement in Africa. In fact, Algeria can be considered the first since its strategic partnership agreement dates back to 2001. It included the first example of the typical picture of arms and energy sectors as well as military training and nuclear cooperation. Algeria has become the third most important customer for Russian weapons, and Russia palpably supported the regime during protests (Schumacher and Nitoiu, 2015, p. 103). However, the Central African Republic has “become emblematic of the wider Russian efforts in Africa” (Beaumont, 2018). It is said to be the (first) result of Russian objective “to confront U.S. influence overseas”. Relations between these two countries include bilateral treaties unknown to the public and strengthened the regime suffering from Western pressures. A United Nations security official explained it: “The Russians want to implant themselves in the Central African Republic so they have an axis of influence through Sudan in the north and southwards into Angola” (Losh and Mathews, 2018). This is indeed how Russia has formed allies to challenge the Euro-Atlantic-dominated order (Adibe, 2019). The Russian influence is to the extent that even Western diplomats express their embarrassment with the image of “Russians do while Westerners talk” (Vinograd, 2018).

Other countries follow suit. Morocco is a similar example. Morocco, Russia's most important phosphate supplier, helped Russia out of sanctions by agricultural exports and thus decreased its dependence on Euro-Atlantic military-industrial production and was satisfied to do all these without being subject to criticisms of its regime (Schumacher and Nitoiu, 2015, p. 102). Russian geologists are active in countries including Ghana, Madagascar, and Libya, along with companies such as Rosneft and Lukoil in oil and gas fields in Egypt and Mozambique (Signé, 2019). Russia invested in the world's largest platinum deposits in Zimbabwe (Stanley and Fletcher, 2019). Angola, which has had substantial relations with the Soviet Union between the 1960s and the 1980s, has become a target for Russian plans because of gas and oil fields that the EU is interested in developing as new energy sources alternative to Russia. Russia's space agency developed Angola's first national satellite (Losh and Mathews, 2018).

The military coup in Egypt in 2013 presented an opportunity. Visits resulted in the establishment of a commission on trade and economic cooperation in March 2014 including Russian support for Egypt's nuclear energy ambitions and increasing military cooperation at the level of joint military exercises and training Egyptian officers at Russian military academies. Egypt helped Russia decrease the cost of Western sanctions following the Ukrainian crisis by seriously increasing its agricultural exports to Russia (Schumacher and Nitoiu, 2015, p. 101). Lavrov visited Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, focusing on the arms trade, access to diamond reserves, and developing energy projects (Losh and Mathews, 2018). According to some observers, Russian military cooperation with South Africa's air force reached the level of landing two nuclear-capable strategic Tu-160 bombers as the first such deployment on the African continent (Moscow Times, 23 October 2019). Military assistance includes training presidential guards and helping with election strategies such as in Madagascar and the Central African Republic (Signé, 2019). Military assistance by Russia is followed by the energy and mining sectors, as observed in Mozambique or Angola (Signé, 2019). Peter Pham of the Atlantic Council noted that Russian peacekeepers in Africa outnumber the total from France, the UK, and the US (Gopaldas, 2018). The Russian search for African allies is also against diplomatic isolation by the West due to Russian involvement in Syria and Ukraine and "not least for their votes at the UN General Assembly" (Beaumont, 2018). It is to be noted that political relations also include the concern that Africa is the largest continental bloc in the UN General Assembly and often votes with a degree of unity (Stanley and Fletcher, 2019).

Russia has attempted to complement the controversial military and economic aspects with soft power instruments such as Russia Today, alternative credit rating agencies, visa-free access (for South Africans), and scholarships (Gopaldas, 2018). Soft power instruments are used, such as the Russian-Namibian Cultural and Education Centre; agreement between Zambia's Copperbelt University and the People's Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University); Russian language courses in Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Angola; and scholarships (15,000 Africans studying in Russia) (Signé, 2019). Putin even mentioned "the training of 'African cadres' by Russian universities" (Mugabi, 2019). The Russian elite tend to show it as a continuity. The Soviet Union had established the Africa Institute in 1959 and the Friendship of the People's University (also known as Lumumba University between 1961 – when first prime minister of Democratic Republic of Congo Patrice Lumumba was assassinated – and 1991, which is called the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia since 1992). African students came for education beginning in 1960, reaching 5,000 by the end of the decade (Matusевич, 2019). There have been 3,254 African graduates: the nearly one-third of them (1,038) who studied general medicine, added to those who studied engineering, including agronomy (621) and construction (336), make two-thirds of the total graduates. Studies such as political science, international relations, and economics seem lower, with a total number of

259 (RUDN, 2020). These alumni's role in social forces to observe a possible Russian influence beyond the state elite level would be an important topic for further research, particularly concerning conflict management and Russian soft power capability.

In Sochi, the Russia–Africa summit in October 2019 has been the zenith of the Russian show (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Fifty-four leaders were invited, and 43 confirmed. Olga Kulkova from the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for African Studies said that the summit included real economic benefits as well as soft power and would bring development to African countries such as affordable nuclear energy production. The Russian Industrial Zone (RIZ) in Egypt is to become a base (Sputnik, 2019). Putin proudly declared that Russian food exports (\$25 billion) to Africa were more than its arms exports (\$15 billion) (Mugabi, 2019). African leaders also referred to the Soviet past. Mali's president was quoted as saying: "We also owe this country our first industrial units" referring to 1961 and (debatably) equating Russia with USSR (Miner and Ugwe, 2019). Indeed, Soviet support to independence movements is still an issue (Gopaldas, 2018). The usage of old Soviet networks has been very important in this renewed Russian foreign policy to Africa and could be pretty personal. Igor Sechin, the CEO of Rosneft and known to be close to Putin, served as a Soviet officer in Angola and Mozambique in the 1980s. Some current Russian oligarchs have similar connections in Africa (Matusevich, 2019).

Russia's current role in Mali has been yet another issue. Following the controversial military coup in this West African country, it was reported that Russia could be its supporter on the grounds that the two commanders leading the coup were in Russia on a training programme organized by the Russian Armed Forces before the coup and had spent a year at the Higher Military College in Moscow (Muvunyi, 2020). It was recently observed that France declared itself ready to support the civil transition of power "on conditions set by" the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Sputnik, 2020a). On the other hand, Russia was pleased to affirm that progress had been achieved between the ECOWAS and "the military in Bamako on the transition period procedures" and that the sanctions imposed by the ECOWAS on Mali are being lifted. The declaration has also been the confirmation of Russian activities in Africa, which gives the impression of an effort to provide a counterweight against European powers and the US:

Russia will continue to be effectively involved, including as a permanent U.N. Security Council member, in the collective efforts to stabilise the situation in Mali, and in the Sahara-Sahel area in general, and also to provide support to countries in the region on a bilateral basis, including support for boosting their armed forces' fighting capacity and training their military and law-enforcement officers.

(Zakharova, 2020)

After all, in the words of a Russian diplomat with experience in Africa, "we can't just order anyone to do anything over there, as we once could in Soviet times. For our leaders, Africa was a battlefield of influence with the Americans. We used to be big patrons, but our government doesn't command the same kind of financial resources" (Losh and Mathews, 2018). Russia is in fact catching up with the West and China, relying on military expertise while trying to display "dialogue and reciprocity in perspective" (Miner and Ugwe, 2019). Moreover, from the African perspective, Russian involvement is complementary rather than competitive (Gopaldas, 2018). Andrei Kemarsky, director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Africa Department, seems to agree, saying that African partners view cooperation with Russia as a means of "countering the pressure of Western countries" (Losh and Mathews, 2018). For instance, North African countries tried to cooperate with Russia as a bargaining chip towards the US and EU (Schumacher and

Nitoiu, 2015, p. 104). African governments also consider geopolitics in major public contracts: Russian activism could benefit from the shortcomings of the European powers and the US, but these latter two have also revised their position, such as United States' Prosper Africa initiative that is rather different from the previous models concerned primarily with political reform. Moreover, China manifests "a subtle but fundamental strategic shift as it attempts to translate its economic clout into political influence" (Stanley and Fletcher, 2019).

Russia in Africa thus depends on the US in Africa: "[H]ow far Russia succeeds with what it wants from Africa will also largely depend on the responses of Africa's traditional allies, especially the United States, to its deepening interest in the continent" (Adibe, 2019). It has been usually said that American foreign aid is defined according to American security, economic interests, human need in a country, concern over human rights practices, as well as partisan politics in the domestic scene (Travis, 2010). Alex Vines of Chatham House argued that American motivation is peace and security while Russian motivation is about commerce and defence (Gopaldas, 2018). Recent American interest in Africa is due to the fact that seven out of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world were African and that Islamist extremist groups in North and Sub-Saharan Africa constitute a security concern. Otherwise, Africa has never been central in American foreign policy because of the American position that it was a European responsibility due to its colonial past (Olsen, 2017, pp. 2097–2098). American foreign policy to Africa has been a bipartisan issue, as there are no major differences between the George W. Bush and Barack Obama presidencies, which included pressure groups such as evangelical Christians. Overall, it has been "ambiguous, inconsistent and uncoordinated" (Olsen, 2017, p. 2108).

Notwithstanding the economic strength China could invest or the military strength Russia could bring, it is still argued that the main determinant is still "Western" behaviour. A United Nations security official on Central Africa argues that "the French are hated as the old colonial power. American troops have left. It's a free country for the taking" (Losh and Mathews, 2018). However, Western insistence on transparency and the rule of law could have been complemented with trade instead of aid, in addition to their technological, financial, and "soft power" advantages (Cohen, 2009). All these comments lead to the thinking that Russian involvement is due to American and European failures or reluctance and is considered by the Africans as a balance or addition to the American and European presence.

Russia in Africa: assessments

To evaluate the overall Russian presence in Africa, its controversies are denounced. For instance, Russia has been criticized on the grounds of increasing conflicts in the continent through the supply of arms and training; the involvement of Russian VTB (Vneshtorgbank [foreign trade banks]) in a controversial financial scheme in Mozambique (along with Credit Suisse), interpreted as non-moralistic economic diplomacy; as well as its nuclear deal in South Africa (Gopaldas, 2018). Indeed, the cancellation of that nuclear agreement when South Africa had a new president displayed that Russia could also be a loser in African politics (Stanley and Fletcher, 2019). Russian (and Chinese) direct or indirect support to authoritarian regimes has been condemned as well, in terms not only of democratization but also of the misuse of resources, certainly including corruption by oppressive regimes that Russia has not bothered with (Cohen, 2009). Furthermore, Russian activism overshadows regional initiatives, such as undermining the African Union's mediation in the Central African Republic (Beaumont, 2018). It is recently reported that Russia has sent armoured reconnaissance and patrol vehicles again to the latter on a non-reimbursable basis (Sputnik, 2020b). Other partnerships, such as Europe–Africa, France–Africa, or even the newer China–Africa, have not delivered much for ordinary Africans

(Mugabi, 2019). Russia has just inserted itself into this picture of a merely self-serving foreign policy influence that is structurally fruitless for all concerned, primarily Africans. In light of these arguments, it can be said that Russian leadership/management remained irrelevant to conflict resolution and management. It is even argued that it fuelled conflicts by supplying arms.

Russian official discourse as a response to these criticisms is the usual denouncing of similar Western/American activities: when Russian military assistance to the Central African army is in question, the Russian response mentions American training of police officers and donations of military vehicles (Losh and Mathews, 2018). Moreover, Sputnik noted the praise by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic on “significant progress” in terms of political reforms, restoration of state authority, and transitional justice, indeed in the news announcing a new Russian arms transfer to this post-conflict country (Sputnik, 2020b). Besides, Russia has not refrained from expressing its standpoint (limited to geopolitics) rather abruptly as Evgeny Korendyasov, the head of Russian–African studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences: “There will be a battle for Africa and it will grow” (Losh and Mathews, 2018). Russian self-convinced primacy of geopolitics seems to clarify and justify all efforts on their part. Moreover, exactly like the Soviet critique of colonialism and racism benefited from the absence of the Russian Empire’s colonialism in Africa, now the Russian Federation claims a degree of continuity with the Soviet Union (Matusevich, 2019). In this manner, they want to rely on the continuity of a non-colonialist image in Africa to persuade Africans on the difference of their influence in this continent that tragically suffered from colonialism and imperialism.

The African plight has once again been emphasized thereby. The European and American imperialisms seem to be supplemented by contemporary rivals, China and Russia. These two latter seem to form zones of economic influence in Africa (Cohen, 2009). One would find poignant the Chinese zones in Africa while China was known to have had imperialist zones at the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, the picture is more complicated than this mere cliché of “opposition to the West” since Russia and China are also rivals to each other though with a similar discourse as explained by Adibe (2019):

It seems Russia is looking to muscle in on some of China’s influence on the continent as well. . . . Like China, Russia likes to create a sense of comradeship with Africans by reminding them that they never colonized any part of Africa and that they emphasize collaboration over aid, and by implication, respects them more than the continent’s traditional allies, who are often criticized for being patronizing or condescending towards Africans and the continent.

After all, this renewed Russia–Africa partnership could become another debt trap for Africa. There is a risk that by the time governments realize that it is a venture gone wrong, the debt owed to Russia may be too huge for them to service. It means that African leaders may add Russia, after China, on the list of its creditors, risking another disaster (Mugabi, 2019). Public debt levels and debt sustainability are already at worrying levels (World Bank, 2019a). In sum, Russia is simply added to already wearisome and fruitless foreign involvement in Africa.

The other side of the coin is the typical flaws of imperialist projects. African economic growth is considerable but fragile because it is mostly in resource-rich countries and sensitive to global recessions. This also makes China’s [and by the same token Russia’s] natural resource sector-specific foreign direct investment problematic (Grell-Brisk, 2019). It may sound as ridiculous as plausible, yet one senior Western diplomat accused the Russians of “terrifying incompetence”: “I almost wish they were being evil geniuses because it would give me more confidence. Their engagement with the armed groups has created a situation where potentially

no one trusts anyone . . . creating an atmosphere that really could be combustible” (Losh and Mathews, 2018). One can say that none of the foreign powers have been genius-like anyway, no matter evil or not.

Conclusion

The notorious ‘scramble for Africa’ has been mentioned regarding the power rivalry in the African continent, though not all African states are susceptible in contemporary world politics. A salient difference now is the variety of states, though public order and service delivery seem questionable in many cases. These states’ conflicts and instability have provoked foreign powers’ involvement in line with their search for influence in world politics. Thus this chapter discussed the Russian role of leadership/management in Africa’s conflict resolution within this framework of foreign involvement and great power rivalry.

Africa has not been famous for harmonious and productive state–society relations, though certainly it is not the only such place in the world. Therefore, an analysis should differentiate between the well-being of the elite and society more than the functioning welfare states in some other parts of the world. The Russian approach has been to penetrate this continent and insert its influence through authoritarian elite that strive to survive at the risk of international isolation. Since the Russian elite have also been associated with authoritarian and corrupt rule, there have not been inconveniences in their hearts and minds.

Moreover, Russia has been wise enough to focus on what it is best at, namely arms and minerals. So it has been involved in arms deals and mining contracts. In this fashion, its motivation has been countering European states and the US, as well as proving its great power status. It has benefited from the Soviet experience and its rump personal connections. Russian efforts have not exposed any principle; they have been just been power politics and business. It could succeed in forming a chain from Syria to Central Africa through Sudan, pretty in line with geopolitics that its elite are keen on. Therefore, it has not been related to human development in this deprived continent.

African recent economic growth increased foreign appetites as well as historical criticisms on the dependency of this continent that heavily suffered. The relation between economic growth and foreign involvement in human development has been questioned. It is indicated that Russian investments can contribute to the already troublesome debt burden on this continent. It is also observable in the net trade surplus Russia has vis-à-vis Africa. Therefore, Russia is simply added to the already controversial and ineffective foreign involvement in this continent dispossessed with imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Russian leadership/management has been manifested by its concern with being recognized as a global major power and its focus on geopolitics. Consequently, Russian involvement in Africa has included a military substance such as the supply of arms to the Central African Republic, military cooperation at the level of joint military exercises and training Egyptian officers at Russian military academies, and military cooperation with South Africa’s air force. Russia could succeed in forming a geopolitical axis from Syria to Central Africa through Sudan and Eritrea. The Russian strategy’s political economic pillar has been the minerals, such as phosphate in Morocco, oil and gas fields in Egypt and Mozambique, platinum in Zimbabwe, etc. These observations display that Russia’s role has been a major foreign power that benefits from balancing the European powers and the US as the traditional players in Africa in the eyes of African rulers. This role has been reproduced as a result of the shortcomings or even failures of these traditional players and the tendency of authoritarian rulers to evade their criticisms on human rights abuses and pressures on democratization. That is to say, Russia’s role remained at the state

level and in the foreign and defence policies frameworks; social forces substantially relevant to conflict resolution or management could not necessarily receive a positive outcome. One should also note that European powers and the US are pretty justifiably perceived as imperialist powers. Hence this African effort of balancing with Russia (and presumably with China) seems to have an anti-imperialist motivation.

Finally, good leadership can and should be in line with human development as defined by fundamental rights and freedoms, nutrition, housing, public health, employment, education, political participation, social recreation, and so on. Russian leadership/management in Africa has not been relevant to any of these. It has been relevant to the bad old great power rivalry in geopolitics and political economy. So it has been a bad leader. The consequences of bad leadership have been the contributions to the protraction of the conflicts and hence non-improvement in or even deterioration of people's lives.

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