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The Trajectory of Russia-Africa Relations: Highlighting Continuity and Discontinuity.

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Abstract

At the height of the Cold War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), in ideological competition with the United States of America (USA), made inroads into Africa and gradually held sway over some countries therein. Owing largely to domestic issues, the USSR collapsed in 1991, thus ending the long-standing Cold War. From 1992 to 1999, the Russian Federation as the successor state to the USSR had minimal relations with Africa. However, in the 2000s, Russia rekindled its interest in geo-strategic Africa. This article highlights features of Soviet-African relations that were stopped and those that remain part of Russia's African policy. To achieve this, the historical approach was adopted and data was collected from secondary sources. The article concludes that in the trajectory of Russo-African relations, Soviet support for liberation movements, economic aid, and the promotion of Marxist-Leninist ideology in Africa ended while state scholarships, arms sales, and military training continued.

Keywords: Africa, Arms, Cold War, Russia, Soft Power, Soviet Union

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Introduction

The political, economic, military, and diplomatic relations between the Russian Federation and the countries of the African continent have been intriguing research areas for a growing number of scholars the world over (Fidan & Aras, 2010; Adibe, 2019; Besenyő, 2019a; Matusevich, 2019; Stronski, 2019; Neethling, 2020; Siegle, 2021; Droin & Dolbaia, 2023; Gopaldas, 2023; Ramani, 2023). These multifaceted relations that were developed during the Cold War between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) continue to evolve in the post-Cold War era.

According to Mills and Pienaar (2000), the period 1960-1980 was the 'golden era' of USSR-Africa relations, as the USSR, competing with the United States (U.S.) and its Western allies for influence in Africa, provided the much-needed military, political and economic support to some African states (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021). Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 which marked the end of the superpower rivalry, relations between Russia and Africa diminished significantly in the 1990s as Russia reckoned with the domestic causes of the USSR's disintegration. However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, Russia under President Vladimir Putin has made conscious efforts to regain its lost prestige and sphere of influence. As it was during the Cold War, Africa has become part and parcel of Putin's international ambitions in the post-Cold War era.

Today, Russia has developed an interest in Africa's solid minerals and natural resources. As a result, Russian companies such as Alrosa, Gazprom, Lukoil, and Rosneft are among the active foreign companies in the extractive industry of several resource-rich African countries. Though Russia's investment is less than 1 percent of the total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Africa (Gopaldas, 2023) and the value of its trade with the continent is small compared to that of China which was 254 billion USD in 2021, Russia dominates the export of weapons and military equipment to Africa (Droin & Dolbaia, 2023). A new initiative in Russo-African relations which expectedly has caught the attention of the West is the Russian president and African leaders' summit diplomacy. In 2019 and 2023, the first and second editions of the Russia-Africa Summit took place in Sochi and St. Petersburg respectively with distinct themes and number of African leaders in attendance.

Looking back at the bi-polar world order in the twentieth century, Soviet Africa policy of anti-colonial struggle support, arms sales, economic aid and technical assistance, Marxism-Leninism propagation, and state scholarships were driven by its national interest in the context of geopolitical competition with the U.S. With the Cold War long over, the Russian Federation in great power competition with the U.S.,

retained a few of Soviet Africa policy while it ceased pursuing others that had achieved the goal intended in the Cold War years or had become irrelevant or unsustainable in the post-Cold War era.

This article examines the trajectory of Soviet to Russia's relations with Africa. It highlights aspects of their enduring relationship that stopped and those that continued from the Cold War period to the year 2023 in the post-Cold War era. Following this introduction is the second section that focuses on Realism as the suitable theoretical framework for the theme of this article. The third section is a review of the extant literature on Russo-African relations from the pre-Cold War to the post-Cold War era. The fourth section is a critical examination of Soviet Union's relations with Africa in the Cold War years. The fifth section examines Russia-Africa relations in the post-Cold War era while the sixth section concludes the article.

Theoretical Framework

In the catalogue of International Relations (IR) theories, no single theory sufficiently explains Russia's long-standing and multiple relations with Africa. However, this article employs the theoretical lens of Realism in the discourse of continuity and discontinuity of Soviet Africa policy in the trajectory of Russo-African relations.

The theory of Realism is a mainstream theory in IR that concentrates on the reality of international politics (Gold & McGlinchey, 2017). To prominent Realists such as Hans J. Morgenthau, power sits at the centre of international politics. Furthermore, they contend that sovereign states are the principal actors in the anarchic international system where their actions are guided by national interest (Trifunović & Ćurčić, 2021). Here, national interest is to be understood as encompassing a state's survival, economic prosperity and development, and aspirations.

Realism like a few IR theories has its shortcomings in the framing of Russia-Africa relations. First, Realists argue that sovereign states are the principal actors in international relations. Thus, they fail to comprehend the importance and role of non-state actors such as Russian companies with a visible presence in resource-rich Africa. Second, Realists have a pessimistic worldview. They believe self-interest is what drives states to relate with one another (Manan, 2017). On the contrary, Russia is forging cooperation with its African partners in areas that are mutually beneficial to them e.g. security and energy.

Akin to the Cold War superpower rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Russia is in great power competition with the U.S., striving to replace the U.S.-dominated international order with a multipolar

world order (Ferragamo, 2023). To regain and surpass the geopolitical influence of the Soviet Union in Africa, Russia has continued and discontinued several Soviet Africa policies. On continuity, Russia has ramped up its military training and arms exports to Africa. Unlike the Soviet Union which trained liberation fighters and sold weapons used in intra/inter-state wars, Russia is committed to training African military personnel in dealing with the security challenges of the twenty-first century. Moreover, it has sold weapons to African countries e.g. Nigeria for counterinsurgency operations and other national security purposes (Omotuyi, 2019). Another notable Soviet policy for the African continent that Russia adopted is state scholarships. During the Cold War, state scholarships served as a soft power tool that attracted African youths to Soviet technical schools and universities such as Patrice Lumumba University (later renamed Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN)). Over 50,000 Africans received tertiary education in the Soviet Union, some of whom were on Soviet scholarships (Katsakioris, 2021a). As at 2019, there were more than 17,000 African students in the Russian Federation (President of Russia, 2019). Courtesy of the Russian government, some of these African students enrolled in Russian higher institutions of learning. To date, Russia continues to offer state scholarships to the nationals of African countries with no ideological indoctrination agenda, unlike the Soviet Union.

Transitioning from a socialist union of fifteen republics to a democratic federation, Russia ceased spreading Marxism-Leninism – its version of socialism, and its support for anti-colonial struggles as most African countries had gained independence from their European colonial masters before the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, Moscow in the early 1990s discontinued economic aid and technical assistance to Africa as it dealt with pressing political and economic problems stemming from the defunct Soviet Union (Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021).

Literature Review

Historically, several scholars agree that the trajectory of Russia-Africa relations dates back to the Middle Ages. During this period, Russians came in contact with Africans in and outside of Africa in an informal setting. According to Shubin (2004), the Holy Land in the Christian faith was a meeting point for pilgrims, making it possible for Russian Orthodox Christians to interact with Egyptian and Ethiopian Christians. Similarly, Russian Muslims met Africans in the holy sites of Islam. Shubin added that in the Middle Ages, Africa was visited by not only Russian sailors but also explorers and merchants.

In 1556, Patriarch Joachim of Alexandria sent a letter to Russian Tsar Ivan IV seeking his assistance for St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula which had been ransacked by Ottoman Turks. In response to the letter, Tsar Ivan IV sent a Smolensk merchant by the name Vasily Poznyakov to Egypt

in 1558 (see Ramani, 2023). Building on the religious connection it had with Egypt, Tsarist Russia opened a consulate in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, Tsarist Russia was set to expand its diplomatic reach in North Africa, and to East and Southern Africa. In the year 1898, it opened a consulate in Tangier, Morocco, and commenced diplomatic relations with Ethiopia and the South African Republic (Transvaal Republic) (Shubin 2004; Besenyő, 2019b). Central and West Africa received little or no diplomatic attention from Tsarist Russia, unlike the aforementioned sub-regions of the continent. However, shortly after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Moscow's interest in African affairs dropped which was not rekindled until the mid-1950s when the decolonisation process of the continent began amid the superpower rivalry (Ramani, 2023).

For much of the Cold War which began a couple of years after the horrendous Second World War ended in 1945, Russia, now the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), competed with the U.S. for geopolitical influence in Africa. As a result, it supported liberation movements, utilised state scholarships and Marxism-Leninism, cultivated relationships with African political elites, and provided economic assistance for development, military training, weapons, and advisers to African countries (Stronski, 2019). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 which marked the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation emerged as the successor state.

In the early 1990s, Russia forsook Soviet Union's internationalisation of socialism. It looked inwards, focusing on economic recovery and other pressing domestic issues in the Federation as well as its neighbourhood. Outside of its immediate region, the building of cordial relations with the West became a top priority for Moscow while Africa lost its Cold War geopolitical significance (Vayez, 2020; Singh, 2022). Though Africa at the time was not considered a strategic region in Russia's foreign policy, it did not exit Africa. Therefore, it is not factual to label Russia's reinvigorated interest in Africa since the 2000s as it staging a 'comeback' or 'return' to the continent.

Following years of what appears to be Russia's post-Cold War near-absence in Africa (Jacobsen & Larsen, 2023), Moscow has over the last two decades deepened relations with the continent. Across Africa, Russian companies with expanding presence have invested in the extractive industry of African countries. Increasing in number are arms sales and military cooperation between Russia with African countries while the Russia-Africa Summit has become a high point in the trajectory of Russo-African relations. That said, Russia-Africa trade volume remains relatively small which the Kremlin had planned to boost before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Undisputedly, extant literature abounds on Soviet-Africa relations from pre-Cold War to the Cold War years. On top of that, there is a growing scholarship on the Russian Federation as a state actor engaging the countries of the African continent in the post-Cold War era. However, there is a paucity of literature on the continuity and discontinuity of Soviet Africa policy in the trajectory of Russia-Africa relations. This article therefore adds to the existing body of knowledge on the theme.

Soviet-Africa relations in the Cold War era: a flashback

The Cold War era in world history was a period of tension, ideological rivalry, arms race, scramble for a sphere of influence, espionage, proxy wars, and outer space competition between the superpowers – the U.S. which represented the capitalist West, and the Soviet Union which represented the socialist Eastern bloc. In Africa, the Soviet Union had two primary goals. First, was to compete for geopolitical influence with the powers in the West – the U.S., Britain, and France. Though China under Chairman Mao gained a degree of influence in Africa after it provided an interest-free loan for the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) in the 1970s (see Waters, 1982; Debeche, 1987), the USSR's rival, in the Cold War context, was chiefly the U.S. Second, was to propagate Marxism-Leninism as a pathway to development. Discussed below are the avenues and strategies employed by the Soviet Union in pursuit of these goals in Africa.

Soviet support to Africa: Liberation movements, political crisis, and wars

The Soviet Union arrived in Africa at a time when the decolonisation of the continent was gathering momentum (Matusevich, 2019). The Soviet Union supported liberation movements in parts of Africa as well as anti-racist/anti-white minority rule struggle in Southern Africa with weapons and military training. These movements include the *Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria*, *South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) in present-day Namibia*, *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) in Angola*, *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique*, *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau*, the *Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)*, and the *African National Congress (ANC) in apartheid South Africa* (Brayton, 1979; Spence, 1985; Matusevich, 2019). For its anti-colonial stance in the continent, some newly independent African states warmly embraced the Soviet Union. Angola for example which received Soviet military support during its liberation struggle looked up to the USSR.

The Congo Crisis of 1960-1961 was one of several instances the U.S. and the Soviet Union vied for influence in Third World countries (Iandolo, 2014). Not long after Congo attained political independence

from Belgium on the 30th of June 1960, Moïse Tshombe, the leader of the copper-endowed Katanga province, declared the secession of the province from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on the 11th of July 1960. Thus, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba appealed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to use force if the need arises, against the secessionists. On the 14th of July 1960, the UNSC adopted Resolution 143 which created *Opération des Nations Unies au Congo* (ONUC). Nevertheless, the unwillingness of the United Nations (UN) Operation to use force prompted Patrice Lumumba to seek Soviet assistance (see Iandolo, 2011, 2012, 2014; Ogunnoiki, 2019).

The Nigerian Civil War (6th of July 1967 – 15th of January 1970) was an intra-state war that led to the death of over 1 million people (Falola & Heaton, 2008). During the war between the military junta led by the federalist, Major-General (later General) Yakubu Gowon and the military governor of the Eastern Region turned leader of the breakaway Republic of Biafra, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Soviet Union was willing and did sell military equipment to the Gowon military regime in Lagos. At first, Nigeria's former colonial master, Britain, was against the sale of weapons to any of the warring parties, it made a U-turn and only sold a limited number of arms and ammunition to the Federal Military Government (FMG). On the part of the U.S., it chose to be neutral, refusing to supply arms to either the Gowon military regime or the Biafran army. This notwithstanding, its presence in the war was felt through humanitarian aid to Biafrans following the FMG blockade of Biafra, and the reportedly weaponising of the ensuing starvation (Ojo, 1976; Ogunbadejo, 1980a, 1980b; Matusevich 2003, 2017; Bello, 2021).

In appreciation for Moscow's support for the FMG, General Gowon paid a historic state visit to the Soviet Union in May 1974, the very first by a Nigerian leader (Ojo, 1976; Ogunbadejo, 1976, 1988; Wapmut, 2014; Omotuyi, 2019). Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was unable to gain immense political influence over pro-West Nigeria in the post-civil war period. As a matter of fact, before and during the Nigerian Civil War, Soviet influence declined in West Africa – the sub-region Moscow hoped would be the base for the export of the socialist model of development to other sub-regions in Africa (Iandolo, 2012). On the 24th of February 1966, the Soviet-friendly government of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was dislodged in a *coup d'état*. Also, Mali's first president, Modibo Keita, was on the 19th of November 1968 overthrown in a *coup d'état* while Sékou Touré, the first president of Guinea, turned to the West (see Iandolo, 2011; Matusevich, 2021).

Apart from the Nigerian Civil War, the Soviet Union also sold weapons and military equipment to socialist-oriented Angola and Mozambique in the early years of the Angolan Civil War (1975-2002) and

Mozambican Civil War (1977-1992) respectively. Moreover, Ethiopia took delivery of arms worth millions of US dollars (USD) from the Soviet Union during the inter-state ‘Ogaden War’ with Somalia (1977-1978) (Grey 1984; El-Badawi et al., 2022). Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, its years of military assistance to Somalia did not translate into long-standing political influence. Like Somalia, Egypt ceased being in the Soviet sphere of influence in the second half of the 1970s (Grey 1984; Desfosses, 1987).

Soviet ideology propagation and economic relations with Africa

At the height of the Cold War, Africa became a theatre for ideological competition, mainly between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Following the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, former Portuguese colonies – Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique gained their independence. During the decolonisation of these Lusophone countries, Soviet’s scientific socialism (Marxism-Leninism) became an appealing ideology to *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), and *Frente de Libertação Mocambique* (FRELIMO). Some young Africans who belonged to these political parties-cum-liberation movements were admitted on state scholarships into tertiary institutions in the Soviet Union (Ogunnoiki, 2018; Katsakioris, 2019a, 2019b, 2021b). Though not a Lusophone country, Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa also found the Soviet kind of socialism attractive enough to adopt. Following the revolutionary *coup d’état* on the 12th of September 1974 which dethroned Emperor Haile Selassie, the Derg junta (i.e. the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC)) led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam turned Ethiopia into a Marxist-Leninist state in 1975 (Meredith, 2006; Abbink, 2015).

In its economic relations with Africa, the Soviet Union traded for decades with several African states. In the 1960s for instance, Nigeria exported cash crops such as cocoa beans, palm products, and peanuts to the Soviet Union while it imported Soviet-made machinery, textiles, and automobiles to mention a few (see Ogunbadejo, 1976). Aside from giving economic aid to African states such as Angola and Ethiopia (Bienen, 1982; Desfosses, 1987), the Soviet Union offered technical assistance to Nigeria and a few African countries based on bilateral economic and technical cooperation agreements (Ogunbadejo, 1976, 1980b; Webber, 1992). In 1979, the contract for the construction of the Ajaokuta Steel Complex in Kogi state, Nigeria, was awarded to the Soviets (Alli-Balogun, 1988; Wapmut, 2014). Despite the funds earmarked or expended on it by successive federal governments since the return of Nigeria to civil rule on the 29th of May 1999, the Ajaokuta Steel Complex, which when operational would be a catalyst for the industrialisation of the Nigerian economy (Agbu, 2002), has thus far been moribund. Under the Buhari administration, 11 companies indicated interest in the Complex on a concessional basis. Of these 11 companies, 3 were Russian. Presently, there is a renewed hope in Nigeria that the Complex will be

fully functional in the near future, as the government of President Bola Tinubu has laid out a 3-year revival plan for the Ajaokuta Steel Complex (Izuake, 2023).

Russia-Africa relations in the post-Cold War era: a leap from the past to present

In the history of the Soviet Union, the 1980s was a period of lingering economic stagnation and the crumbling of the massive empire in Eastern Europe. Despite Mikhail Gorbachev's policies – *glasnost* (openness) which permitted freedom of expression, and the *perestroika* (restructuring) *vis-à-vis* the Soviet economy, the Soviet Union ceased to exist on Christmas Day, 25th of December 1991 (Negroponte, 2019). No sooner had the Soviet Union disintegrated than the Russian Federation as the successor state had minimal relations with Africa. Under Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, nine embassies and three consulates were closed in Africa, and Soviet economic aid programme for the continent was stopped (Besenyő, 2019a; Russell & Pichon, 2019; Neethling, 2020; Ukonne, 2020). But from the 2000s under President Vladimir Putin, and President Dmitry Medvedev, there has been a resurgence of Russia's relations with Africa.

In his address to the Russian Federal Assembly on the 25th of April 2005, President Putin stated that the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the twentieth century “was a major geopolitical disaster” (President of Russia, 2005, para. 6). To emerge as a great power on the world stage, regain the lost glory of the Soviet Union, if not exceed it, as a well as to counter U.S. hegemony, Moscow has revived old ties and indeed established new ones with sovereign states the world over, some of which are in Africa. A recent driver of Russia's rekindled interests in Africa is the punitive measure taken by mostly countries in the West against Russia following its annexation of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in March 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. With biting economic sanctions in place, the West expected Russia to become an international pariah. However, amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia has drawn closer to several African countries (Reuters, 2023).

Like its predecessor, the Russian Federation has strategic goals it strives to achieve in Africa. In the region, political influence is primary for Moscow (Besenyő, 2019a). In this regard, the sections below capture Russia's relations with African states to the year 2023 in the post-Cold War era.

Russia's engagement with Africa: Security, economics, and diplomacy

Africa as a continent is faced with security challenges both on land and in the maritime domain – armed robbery at sea, kidnapping, militancy, banditry, terrorism, piracy, etc. Across the land in Africa, active Islamic militant groups – the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal

Muslimin (JNIM), Boko Haram and the splinter group, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the west and central parts of the Sahel, al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa (HoA), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in North Africa, and the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in Central Africa have been security concerns of the governments of African countries. In Nigeria for instance, Abubakar Shekau-led Boko Haram carried out in the last decade deadly attacks, abducted schoolgirls, and displaced people in the Northeastern region of the country (Ezeani et al., 2021; Iwuoha & Onuoha, 2021). In the Lake Chad region which comprises four riparian countries – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, Boko Haram and ISWAP constitute a security threat to the people, peace, stability, and economic interests of the countries in the region (Oyewole, 2015; Onuoha et al., 2020; Onuoha, 2022, Okolie et al., 2023).

For the defence and national security of African countries, Russia without human rights precondition has sold fighter jets, helicopters, air defence systems, tanks and other weapons to Angola, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, and Uganda to mention a few (Hedenskog, 2018; Kondratenko, 2020; Gopaldas, 2023). Currently, Russia has military-technical cooperation with over 40 African countries. To build their military capability, some African states' military personnel and law enforcement officers have and are been trained in Russian institutions (President of Russia, 2023). Furthermore, Russia is leading the pack of top arms exporters to Africa – China, the U.S., and France (Kondratenko, 2020). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Fact Sheet (2022), Russia accounted for 40% of major arms imported into Africa between 2018 and 2022 (Wezeman et al., 2023). Topping the list of importers of Russian-made weapons and military equipment in Africa are Algeria and Egypt in North Africa, and Angola in Central Africa.

In the maritime domain, Russia played a meaningful role in tackling Africa's maritime insecurity. Off the HoA is the Gulf of Aden – a strategic Sea Lane of Communication (SLOC) for vessels shipping goods to seaports in Europe and elsewhere. From the late 2000s to the early 2010s, the Gulf of Aden was a hotspot for piracy. Not only did Somali pirates hijack some vessels traversing the Gulf of Aden, but they also held the crew hostage for ransom (see Onuoha and Ogbonnaya, 2020). As part of international efforts to stamp out piracy, Russian naval ships in the year 2009 patrolled the waters off Somalia (see Kipp, 2010; Saradzhyan 2010). Russia's naval patrols complemented the anti-piracy operations of the U.S., the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2010; Ogunnoiki & Ekpo, 2019). To enhance military capability, Russia, China, and South Africa conducted joint naval exercises called *Mosi II* off the coast of South Africa from the 17th to the 27th of February 2023. For hosting the 10-day military drills amid Russia's war in neighbouring Ukraine which entered

its first year during the joint naval exercises, South Africa was barraged with criticism, especially from the West (BBC News, 2023).

Russia, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) roughly the same as or slightly bigger than that of South Korea and Spain (Siegle, 2021), sees Africa as a market for its wheat. For Africa, Russia is a destination for its cocoa, coffee, and a few other agricultural products (Hedenskog, 2018). Unlike its big sales of arms and military equipment to African countries, Russia's trade with Africa is small compared to other trading partners of Africa – China, the U.S., India, and France (Gopaldas, 2023). As at 2018, the worth of Russia's trade with Africa was just 10% of that of China which was slightly over 200 billion USD (see Ogunnoiki et al., 2021). In 2019, Russia planned to ramp up the two-way trade from 20 billion to 40 billion USD in the next five years. However, the value of Russia-Africa trade has dropped to around 18 billion USD a year (Anna, 2023). Thus far, Russia has cancelled 23 billion USD of African countries' debt and it plans to give out over 90 million USD for the development of African states, at their request (President of Russia, 2023).

Apart from being a profitable market, Africa is endowed with natural resources. Over the years, Russian companies such as Alrosa (diamonds), Gazprom (hydrocarbons), Lukoil (hydrocarbons), Rosneft (hydrocarbons), and Rusal (Aluminium) have invested in Algerian and Nigerian oil and gas; Angolan diamonds; and Guinean bauxite. Other resources Russia eyes in the continent include Zimbabwean platinum and Namibian uranium (Lopatov 2007 as cited in Fidan & Aras 2010; Adebajo, 2021). The growing demand for electricity in African economies has been a problem that the Russian state-owned company, Rosatom, is willing to assist in resolving. Specialising in nuclear energy, Rosatom has signed agreements with African countries such as Egypt and Nigeria on building nuclear power plants (Adibe 2019).

Diplomatically, President Vladimir Putin of Russia has for several reasons been to 5 out of 54 African countries thus far: Egypt (2005, 2015, 2017), Algeria (2006), Morocco (2006), Libya (2008), and South Africa (2006, 2013, 2018). In June 2009, former Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, toured Africa, visiting four African countries – Angola, Egypt, Namibia, and Nigeria to bolster bilateral ties and promote his country's economic interest (Shchedrov, 2009). President Medvedev was back in the continent in October 2010, this time around, visiting only Algeria.

The incumbent Foreign Minister of Russia, Mr Sergey Lavrov, has also made several trips to Africa. In July 2022, he visited the Congo Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Uganda (Biryabarema, 2022), Angola,

Eritrea, and Eswatini in January 2023, and Mali, Mauritania, South Africa, and Sudan in February 2023 to reinforce bilateral relations at a time the West was taking concrete steps to isolate Russia internationally for its military offensive against Ukraine (Reuters, 2023). A few days after the trip of Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Mr Dmytro Kuleba, to Africa, Lavrov paid a surprise visit to Kenya's capital, Nairobi in May 2023 (Aljazeera, 2023). The following month, he attended the 15th Summit of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) in Johannesburg, South Africa, standing in for President Putin who could not be physically present at the Summit as a result of the warrant for his arrest issued by the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) on allegation of war crimes in Ukraine, which South Africa, a signatory to the ICC's Rome Statute, is obliged to do (Bartlett, 2023).

Russia's diplomatic relations with Africa were taken to a whole new level with the launching of multilateral summit diplomacy. From the 23rd-24th of October 2019, the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit which took place in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi, Russia, was attended by representatives of Africa's 54 countries. In the meeting, President Putin emphasised that the maturing of relations with the sovereign states in Africa and the international organisations therein were among Russian foreign policy priorities (President of Russia, 2019). Though his statement is akin to paragraph 57 of The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2023) (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023), it can be argued that in reality, Africa is yet to be of great importance to the Russian Federation when Russia's activities and involvement in the geopolitics and geo-economics of Central Asia, Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East are compared with Africa.

It has been said that Russia in several ways drew inspiration from China for the first Russia-Africa Summit. Going by the Chinese playbook, China has since the year 2000 organised the triennial Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (AFP, 2019) where Chinese president, Xi Jinping, pledged in 2015 and 2018 respectively, 60 billion USD for Africa. In the second edition of the Russia-Africa Summit – which was to take place in 2022 but was rescheduled to mid-2023 (TASS, 2022), one can only expect that representatives of businesses and states' governments will pursue their interests, cut deals, and appraise Russo-African relations since the maiden Summit in 2019 (Clifford, 2021). This second Summit took place in the Russian city, St. Petersburg, from the 27th-28th of July 2023. The Summit was attended by only 17 African Heads of State and Government, unlike the first Summit which forty-three African leaders were present. To Russia, the low turnout was as result of Western pressure on African countries (Anna, 2023). At the 2-day event which centred on peace, security, and development, President Putin briefly recounted the support the defunct Soviet Union gave the peoples of Africa in ending colonialism in the second half of the twentieth century which in the twenty-first century has taken the form of neo-

colonialism. In line with its growing interest in Africa, Russia plans to expand its diplomatic presence in the continent. In this regard, Russia will upscale its staff in some of its operational embassies, new foreign missions will be established, and Russian embassies in Burkina Faso and Equatorial Guinea will be reopened (President of Russia, 2023).

Conclusion

In this article, we saw that Soviet relations with Africa began to take shape in the tense Cold War era. During this period, the Soviet Union gradually gained political influence after it threw its weight behind the decolonisation of the vast continent and sold [weapons and](#) military equipment employed in intra/inter-state wars. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 which marked the beginning of the post-Cold War era, the Russian Federation lowered its relations with Africa in the 1990s as Moscow became preoccupied with the domestic issues it inherited from the defunct Soviet Union. However, since the 2000s, the Kremlin has rekindled its interest in Africa, a geostrategic region in President Putin's international ambitions.

Russia prides itself on having the lion's share of arms sales to African countries. It has successfully hosted on Russian soil two editions of the Russia-Africa Summit where the Kremlin leveraged Soviet achievements in forging diplomatic relations with African countries. Much as Russian companies are active in several resource-rich African countries, Russia's economic engagement with Africa in recent years has not been the most outstanding of Russia's multiple relations with Africa. As at December 2023, there was no significant increase in Russia-Africa trade volume despite Russia's plan to upscale trade with Africa.

In our examination of the trajectory of Russia-Africa relations, we highlighted that Soviet support for liberation movements and its goal of converting, as many African states as possible to socialist-minded countries, ended in the Cold War period when many African countries under colonial rule had attained independence and the promotion of the Marxist-Leninist ideology was significant in the superpower rivalry. In the post-Cold War era, Russia as the successor state to the Soviet Union discontinued economic aid to African states in the 1990s citing its economic stagnation which made economic aid unsustainable at the time. However, in 2023, Russia expressed its willingness to offer funds for the development of African countries interested in its generosity. We also underscored in this study that Russia continued Soviet Africa policy of state scholarships, arms sales, and military training.

For future studies, promising and seasoned scholars can channel their research to Russia's engagements with the African continent that are devoid of Soviet origin. Private Military Company (PMC) – Wagner Group as a non-state actor in Africa's security, Russia and the electoral process of African democracies, its disinformation campaign, development of African countries' outer space satellites, and COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy are nascent research areas that welcome more scholarly contributions in the discourse of Russia-Africa relations.

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