

Future Perspectives of Russia-Africa Relations

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Global Research, May 29, 2020

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

While celebrating the Africa Day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed Russia's commitment to offer support and participate in the sustainable development processes in Africa. In a videoconference held May 28 with local and foreign media, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, highlighted the history leading to the establishment of the Africa Day, which is observed as an annual holiday symbolizing the desire of the peoples of the African continent to peace, independence and unity.

According to her,

"the close nature of friendly ties with African countries, the significant experience of mutually beneficial cooperation dates back to the early 1960s, when the Soviet Union unconditionally supported the desire of Africans to free themselves from colonial oppression. It provided them with substantial practical assistance in shaping the foundations of statehood, establishing national economies, and preparing civilian and military personnel."

In recent years, however, African countries have been actively gaining weight and influence in international affairs, are increasingly participating in solving pressing issues of modern world politics and economics, she said.

The creation of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum was one of the appreciable results of the first Russia-Africa Summit held last year, Zakharova noted, and expressed hope that "the mechanism of partnership between Russia and the African continent created during the summit will allow to establish and broaden cooperation."

Looking Back

Under the current circumstances, African leaders and business elites try, most importantly, to reflect on how far Africa has gone in building a unified identity and strides made in socio-economic development. These socio-economic developments in some individual countries were achieved by harnessing internal resources and through bilateral and multilateral relations with external countries and cooperation with development partners.

For example, Soviet Union and Africa had very close and, in many respects, allied relations with most of the African countries during the decolonization of Africa. For obvious reasons, the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991.

As a result, Russia has to struggle through many internal and external difficulties. The past few years, it is still struggling to survive both the United States and European sanctions. Moscow still has a long way to catch-up with many other foreign players there.

Currently, Russia seems to have attained relative political and economic stability.

“As we regained our statehood and control over the country, and the economy and the social sphere began to develop, Russian businesses began to look at promising projects abroad, and we began to return to Africa,” noted Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov early September during his interaction with students and staff of Moscow State Institute for International Relations.

Emphasizing that the process of returning to Africa has been ongoing for the past 15 years, he further explained:

“the return is now taking the form of resuming a very close political dialogue, which has always been at a strategic and friendly level, and now moving to a vigorous economic cooperation. But economic cooperation is not as far advanced as our political ties.”

Dmitry Medvedev, while addressing the Russia-Africa Economic forum in July, also added his voice about strengthening cooperation in all fronts.

“We must take advantage of all things without fail. It is also important that we implement as many projects as possible, that encompass new venues and, of course, new countries,” he said.

In addition, Medvedev stressed:

“It is important to have a sincere desire. Russia and African countries now have this sincere desire. We simply need to know each other better and be more open to one another. I am sure all of us will succeed if we work this way. Even if some things seem impossible, this situation persists only until it is accomplished. It was Nelson Mandela who made this absolutely true statement.”

Acknowledging undoubtedly that Africa has become a new world center for global development, Russian legislators at the State Duma (the lower chamber) have advocated for supporting business and economic cooperation with Africa.

State Duma has established relations with African parliaments. During an instant meeting held with the Ambassadors of African countries in the Russian Federation, Viacheslav Volodin, the Chairman of the State Duma, remarked:

“We propose to move from intentions to concrete steps. Our people will better understand each other through parliamentary relations.”

The full transcript is available at the official website.

Moving Forward

On April 29, Russian International Affairs Council ([RIAC](#)), a powerful Russian NGO that focuses on foreign policy, held an online conference with participation of experts on Africa.

Chairing the online discussion, Igor Ivanov, former Foreign Affairs Minister and now RIAC President, made an opening speech. He pointed out that Russia's task in Africa is to present a strategy and define priorities with the countries of the continent, build on the decisions of the first Russia-Africa Summit.

On the development of cooperation between Russia and African countries, Igor Ivanov pointed out a few steps here:

"Russia's task is to prevent a rollback in relations with African countries. It is necessary to use the momentum set by the first Russia-Africa Summit. First of all, it is necessary for Russia to define explicitly its priorities: why are we returning to Africa? Just to make money, strengthen our international presence, help African countries or to participate in the formation of the new world order together with the African countries? Some general statements of a fundamental nature were made at the first Summit, now it is necessary to move from general statements to specificity."

Sergey Lavrov, long ago, asked for more substantive dialogue on Russia-Africa issues, charting ways for effective cooperation. In an interview with the Hommes d'Afrique, he stressed "time is needed to solve all those issues, but it could start with experts' meetings, say, within the framework of the St Petersburg Economic Forum or the Valdai forum, and other events where business leaders of both countries participate."

Experts from the think-tank [Valdai Discussion Club](#), academic researchers from the Institute for African Studies and independent policy observers have noted Russia's policy, its current achievements and emerging economic opportunities and possibilities for partnerships in Africa. Quite interestingly, majority of them acknowledged the need for Russia to be more prominent as it should be and work more consistently to achieve its strategic goals, – comparing and citing largely unfulfilled pledges over the years.

Established in 2004, it's (the club) primary goal is to promote dialogue between Russian and the rest of the world. It hosted an expert discussion titled "Russia's Return to Africa: Interests, Challenges, Prospects" with participation of experts on Africa. Officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Africa Department were present.

"I would like to begin my speech with the words of Foreign Minister (Sergey Lavrov), who said, referring to the current situation: 'No more fairy tales,'" joked Oleg Ozerov from the Africa Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. "For us, Africa is not a terra incognita: the USSR actively worked there, having diplomatic relations with 35 countries. In general, there are no turns, reversals or zigzags in our policy. There is consistent development of relations with Africa. "

Over the past few years, contacts between Russia and Africa have expanded, and at the same time, this was also due to the African countries' interest in Russia, he added. Nevertheless, Oleg Ozerov is now Ambassador-at-Large with the key responsibility for expediting the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum created at the initiative of African participants during Sochi summit.

As Head of the Secretariat, the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum, his task is to prepare for the second Russia-Africa summit in 2022 in pursuance of the agreements, achieved during

the first Russia-Africa summit held on October 23-24 in Sochi. The Secretariat of the Forum will also organize annual political consultations of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the troika of the African Union.

In 2010-2017, Ozerov served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to Saudi Arabia, concurrently from 2011-2017, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The symbolic Russia-Africa Summit was the result of President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin authorities' progressive steps taken to move toward a new phase in consolidating political and economic ties broadly at the state levels with Africa. The final declaration, [joint declaration](#), seeks to consolidate the results of the summit. It has undoubtedly reaffirmed the goals of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Kester Kenn Klomegah writes frequently about Russia, Africa and the BRICS.

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