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## Russia-Africa Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Symbiotic or Predatory?

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***Abstract:** Africa, a promising continent with political clout, is a strategic region that has caught the attention of foreign powers over the years. Notable among these foreign powers is the Russian Federation, the successor state of the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia-Africa relations receded owing to the dwindling economy of Russia, not forgetting that Africa was no longer considered a strategic region to Russia. Today, Russia with a rekindled interest in Africa is pursuing among other things, economic, military, and diplomatic relations with African countries. Much as this is a welcome development in the African continent, the multifaceted relations between Moscow and the capital of many African states have been labelled by some in the West as 'predatory'. The objective of this study is to ascertain if Russo-African relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been symbiotic or predatory. The paper adopts the historical approach, and data were garnered from secondary sources. Theoretically, Constructivism was employed to throw light on Russia-Africa relationship since the 2000s. The paper concludes that though unpleasant instances are conspicuous in their multifaceted relations, it can safely be said that Russo-African relations in the new millennium have to a great extent been mutually beneficial.*

Key words: Africa, Arms Sales, Foreign Powers, Russia, Summit, United Nations

## 1. Introduction

Russia's relations with Africa historically go back to the period her predecessor, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), held sway in the continent. During the Cold War (an era of Soviet expansionism, heightened tensions, ideological rivalry, and arms race between the superpowers – the U.S. and USSR), the Soviet Union, which has a non-colonial power profile in Africa, seized the opportunity of independence struggles against European colonial powers, the exit of Portugal from Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique following the 1974 Carnation Revolution, intra and inter-African state conflicts e.g. Angolan Civil War (1975), Ethiopia-Somalia 'Ogaden War' (1977-1978), and the opposition to white minority rule and racism in Southern Africa, to make inroads into Africa (see Brayton, 1979, pp. 253-256; Bienen, 1982, pp. 155-161; Matusевич, 2009, p. 6). But in the year 1991, the massive USSR collapsed which not only marked the end of the Cold War, but brought its relations with Africa to a record low, as the successor state, Russia, "curtailed its global ambitions" (Standish, 2019).

Today, the Russian Federation, unlike the Soviet Union that was bent on spreading Marxism-Leninism in Africa and elsewhere, is consolidating its relations with former pro-Soviet African countries as well as establishing relations with other African states based on national interests. Against this backdrop, this paper examines Russo-African relations in the new millennium with the aim of ascertaining if the relationship is symbiotic (i.e. mutually beneficial to the parties involved) or predatory (characterised by exploitation; where the stronger party tends to prey on the weaker party to advance its economic interests).

Immediately after this background to the study, are four sections.

The first section is titled 'research methodology' where the sources of data used in the paper were briefly stated. Theoretically, Constructivism was found suitable in expounding Russia's relations with the African continent in section two, seeing that it permits a subjective definition of Russo-African relations as either symbiotic or predatory. Section three, which is the nucleus of the paper, has five inherent subheadings on the multifaceted relations between the Russian Federation and Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the unpleasant events in their relations. Findings in this section will inform our final thought on Russo-African relations as either symbiotic or predatory in the fourth section.

## 2. Research Methodology

Before an in-depth study of Russia-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is carried out, mentioning the process of data collection for the paper is imperative. Here the 'how' question *vis-à-vis* data collection is answered. For this qualitative research, non-numerical data were gathered from secondary sources: extant literature, journal articles, online news sites, and think tanks papers.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Following the successful importation of constructivism into International Relations (IR) by Nicholas G. Onuf (1989), several scholars have developed constructivism as a social theory in IR by either contributing to the theory or critiquing fellow constructivists' works, in the post-Cold War era. These intellectuals include: Alexander Wendt (1987, 1992, 1994, 1999), Friedrich V. Kratochwil (1989),

Peter Katzenstein (1996), Emanuel Alder (1997, 2013), John G. Ruggie (1998), Guzzini Stefano (2000), and Maja Zehfuss (2002). Succinctly, constructivists state that real ‘international relations’, precisely international politics, is a social construction. ‘Agents’ such as sovereign states attach ‘meanings’ to material objects as they socially relate *inter se* rather than considering the actual material objects. In other words, it is from states’ social relationship that their shared knowledge/understanding or the intersubjective/ideational structure originates (see Hurd, 2008; Behraves, 2011; Sterling-Folker and Badie, 2011, Cristol, 2019; Ogunnoiki and Adeyemi, 2019).

Put in another way, constructivism (the ‘middle ground’ between realists/neorealists/liberal institutionalists and critical theorists/feminists/postmodernists/poststructuralists (see Alder, 1997, pp. 319-320)), is the viewpoint that “the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world.” (Alder, 1997, p. 322) These interpretations are not immutable but can change from time to time.

In recent years, several African states have interpreted their relations with the Russian Federation as symbiotic. Contrariwise, the erstwhile U.S. National Security Adviser, Mr John Bolton, tagged Russia’s business practices in Africa as “predatory” (Holland and Wroughton, 2018). As the successor state of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has been in the good books of many African countries. In the eyes of these African polities, Russia is a traditional friend in

times of need. To Russia, African states are not only its partners, but the African continent as a whole, is a ‘new’ market for its exports.

In the security interests of several African states, the Russian Federation has sold affordable military equipment to their national governments to combat Islamic extremists *et alia*. On the part of many African countries, they have fed the Russian economy with the much-needed natural resources and minerals. Furthermore, over a dozen African states diplomatically abstained from voting on the UNGA resolution that censure Russia’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, a territory of Ukraine, in the year 2014.

That said, Russia has not always followed the ‘norms’ in her engagement with Africa. In recent years, Russia has meddled in the electoral process of some African countries, and covertly reached deals with the national governments of a few African states through a process that is not transparent.

#### 4. Russia-Africa Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Years back, the U.S. and its allies in the European Union (EU) sanctioned Russia, isolating several of its businesses from their market after Kremlin illegally annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, and backed pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Thus, “Africa presented Moscow with a unique opportunity to offset the loss of access to western markets.” (Akinola and Ogunnubi, 2021, p. 4) To have followed the economic sanctions was the Russian financial crisis (2014-2015), caused majorly by the devaluation of Russia’s currency ‘ruble’, debilitating sanctions from the West, and plummeting oil prices (Kuepper, 2019).

Now out of the woods (i.e. the financial crisis), Moscow more than before, is eager to strengthen Russo-African diplomatic, trade and military ties at a time the U.S. influence on the continent is waning after the immediate past president of the U.S., Donald Trump, reportedly made the derogatory “shithole countries” comment, and announced U.S. military drawdown from Africa in 2018. It is possible that the aforementioned military scale back will create a power vacuum in Africa, a lacuna opportunist Russia will gladly fill (Paduano, 2019; Standish, 2019; see Stronski, 2019, p. 5; Akinola and Ogunnubi, 2021, p. 4).

#### 4.1 Russia-Africa Economic Relations

Agricultural products remain part of Russia’s trade with Africa. Russia is one of the world’s largest producers of wheat which it exports to Africa, and from Africa, it imports fruit, coffee, cocoa etc. (Hedenskog, 2018, p. 2; Akhiyadov, 2019; Vayez, 2020)

In 2018, Russia-Africa trade amounted to around \$20 billion, \$7.7 billion of which was with Russia’s largest trading partner in the continent, Egypt (a North African country, where it is building the Russian Industrial Zone (RIZ) that will gulp \$7 billion in investment). In comparison to a few foreign powers, Russia’s trade volume with Africa in 2018 was dwarfed by that of India (\$63 billion), and China (\$204.2 billion). Hopefully, Russia will double its trade with Africa in the not too distant future (DW, 2019; Foy and Munshi, 2019; Miner and Ugwe, 2019; President of Russia, 2019; Sidiropoulos, 2019; Tasamba, 2019). Furthermore, Putin at the maiden Russia-Africa Summit stated that Russia has written

off more than \$20 billion of Africa’s debt (Korsuskaya and Balmforth, 2019; Winsor, 2019).

The Russian Federation, though endowed with mineral resources, is experiencing shortages of some resources needed in its metallurgical and manufacturing sectors – manganese, chrome, mercury, titanium, and bauxite. It also faces depletion of some resources reserves: copper, nickel, tin, zinc, not forgetting its need of coltan, all of which are mined in Africa (see Giles, 2013, p. 16; Saunders, 2014; Hedenskog, 2018, p. 2; BBC News, 2020; Vayez, 2020).

Owing to its mineral resources shortage, and its expertise in oil and gas, mineral extraction, and nuclear energy which Africa urgently needs, Russian companies: *Gazprom*, *Rosneft*, and *Lukoil* (hydrocarbons), *Alrosa* (diamonds), *Rusal* (aluminium), *Rosatom* (nuclear energy), *Renova* (manganese) have economic engagement in resource-rich Africa. Others include: *Rostec*, *Rusal Boksit*, *Russkiy Aluminsky*, and *Norilsk Nickel*. For example, *Alrosa* operates in Angola, *Lukoil* and *Rosatom* are active in Egypt and Nigeria, *Rosneft* has interest in Egypt, *Rusal* operates in Guinea, and *Renova* has a project in South Africa (Lopatoz 2007 as cited in Fidan and Aras, 2010, p. 57; Saunders, 2014; Foy et al., 2019; Foy and Munshi, 2019; see Adibe, 2019; Dedet, 2019; Russell and Pichon, 2019, pp. 6-7; Kommersant, 2019 as cited in Sukhankin, 2020).

Recently, the diversification of electricity generation is being taken seriously in Africa in order to address the existing energy deficit that has left millions of Africans in darkness, as well as to meet growing demand for power in the nearest future (Sidiropoulos, 2019). In this regard, Russia has concluded

agreements to transfer nuclear technology to several African countries to boost their power generation, and make epileptic power supply a thing of the past in the continent. Zambia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Egypt and Nigeria are among the countries to have on their soil Russian-built nuclear power plants (see Adibe, 2019; van Eyssen, 2019; BBC News, 2020).

#### 4.2 Russia-Africa Military Links

As mentioned by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit, the Russian Federation has concluded Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC) agreements with over 30 African countries for the purpose of strengthening their armed forces' combat capability (President of Russia, 2019).

Aside training a number of African countries' military personnel, "Russia is an important defence partner for Africa and the major supplier of arms to the region." (BBC News, 2020) It is no longer news that some African states, especially those across the semi-arid Sahel region, have years-long been combating resilient Islamic jihadist and extremist groups e.g. Boko Haram and the splinter group, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the states bordering Lake Chad, al-Shabaab in East Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)/the Islamic State (IS) in North Africa, and the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in Mozambique, Southern Africa. Against some of these Islamic militant groups and for other security purposes, Russia has sold military equipment which include fighter jets, combat and transport helicopters, anti-tank missiles and engines for fighter planes to several African states – Angola, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda etc. (see Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), n.d. as cited in Stronski,

2019, p. 15; BBC News, 2020). In the September of 2014, Russia and Egypt reached a preliminary arms deal worth \$3.5 billion (Reuters Staff, 2014 as cited in Ogunnoiki and Salihu, 2020, p. 18). Going by the SIPRI Fact Sheet (2019), Russia accounted for 49% of total arms imports into North Africa, and 28% of arms exports to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) between 2014-2018 (Wezeman et al., 2019, p. 8).

Russia's military ties with African countries are not always about arms sales. Sometimes, it purportedly involves the use of a private mercenary group. Russia has been active in the Central African Republic (CAR), officially helping the embattled UN-backed government of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra (who has a Russian Security Adviser by the name Valery Zakharov) against rebel groups, and in stabilising the fragile state (BBC News, 2020). On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2018, three Russian journalists were killed in the CAR while investigating the alleged presence of the Wagner Group (a mercenary group reportedly led by the opulent Russian businessman, Yevgeny Prigozhin a.k.a Putin's Chef). No one knows for sure who was behind the attack, but in the country are several active militia groups. The CAR, a former French colony, and country where Christians are the majority, plunged into violence with religious colouration after President François Bozizé, a Christian, was overthrown by a coalition of Muslim rebel groups called the *Seleka* in March 2013. Led by Michel Djotodia, he declared himself president of the country. A band of mostly Christian militias, called the *anti-Balaka*, rose to counter the *Seleka* rebels. In December 2017, Russia got the United Nations (UN) approval to train and arm the CAR's army, as the UN had placed an arms embargo on the country in 2013

(BBC News, 2018; Aljazeera, 2018; Korsuskaya and Balmforth, 2019).

In the Maghreb region, Russia has stepped up its involvement in the long-standing Libyan Civil War (2011-?). Moscow and Cairo support the warlord, General Khalifa Haftar, in his war against the Government of National Accord (GNA) which is recognised by the UN and supported by Turkey. Purportedly, the Wagner Group has deployed hundreds of Russian contractors in support of General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) (Balestrieri, 2020; Tchoubar, 2020).

Unlike some of the competing foreign powers which in their security/commercial interests have built a military base in diminutive Djibouti which is strategically located in the Horn of Africa (HoA) – the U.S. after 9/11 terrorist attacks, Japan (2011) and China (2017) (see Igrouane, 2019; Neethling, 2020; Pheiffer, 2020), Russia is yet to build a military base(s) in Africa to make its presence felt, security-wise, in the continent more than it has through UN peacekeeping operations. Though on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 2018, Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, announced his country's plan to establish a logistics centre in the Horn of Africa (HoA), Eritrea to be precise, it reportedly may establish its first military base in the continent in the CAR (Roth, 2019; Russia Business Day, 2019; Pheiffer, 2020). Following a draft deal between Khartoum and Moscow, the Russian government on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020, published on its website its plan to build a naval base in Sudan's Red Sea coast. The base, which will serve as a "logistical support centre" for "repairs and resupply operations and rest for crew members", will

accommodate 300 military and civilian personnel and four ships (Aljazeera, 2020).

In a rare show of military-to-military cooperation, Russia landed two Tupolev Tu-160 'blackjack' bombers in South Africa's Waterkloof Air Force Base in Tshwane on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2019. The arrival of the aircrafts coincided with the commencement of the first Russia-Africa Summit in Russia. This was the first time the supersonic Soviet-era aircrafts, capable of launching nuclear missiles, touched down in the African continent (Korsuskaya and Balmforth, 2019; Sguazzin, 2019; Winsor, 2019).

#### 4.3 Russia-Africa Diplomatic Ties

At the United Nations (UN), Russia, one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that wield veto power, has been courting Africa. Out of the five regional voting blocs in the UNGA: i) the African Group, ii) Asia-Pacific Group, iii) Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), iv) Western European and Other Group (WEOG), and v) the Eastern European Group (EEG), the African Group is the largest, with a total of 54 member states which makes the voting power of the Group significant in the decision-making of the UNGA. In the year 2014 for instance, a total of 58 countries in the UNGA abstained from voting on the resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea. Among these countries were over 20 African countries – Algeria, Egypt, Gabon, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa to mention a few (Dedet, 2019; Devermont, 2019; Russell and Pichon, 2019, p. 8; Standish, 2019; see Stronski, 2019, p. 7).

Of late, Russia has been cultivating its diplomatic links with African states. Since 2015, over a dozen African

heads of state have visited Russia for diverse reasons – former South African president, Jacob Zuma (May, 2015), Zimbabwe’s former president, Robert Mugabe (May, 2015), Morocco’s King Mohammed VI (March, 2016), Guinean president, Alpha Condé (June, 2016; September, 2017), Sudanese former president, Omar al-Bashir (November, 2017; July 2018), the CAR’s President Faustin-Archange Touadéra (October, 2017; May, 2018), Senegalese president, Macky Sall (June, 2018), Rwandan president, Paul Kagame (June, 2018), the president of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba (July, 2018), Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (October 2018), incumbent Zimbabwean president, Emmerson Mnangagwa (January, 2019), Angolan president, João Lourenço (April, 2019), the president of the Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou-Nguesso (May, 2019), and the president of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi (August, 2019) (BBC News, 2020; Dedet, 2019; kremlin.ru as cited in Stronski, 2019, p. 6).

In early March 2018, Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, toured five African countries (Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe), and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2018, was in Rwanda (Solomon, 2018; Russell and Pichon, 2019, p. 7). The following month, President Vladimir Putin was in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the 10<sup>th</sup> BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit which took place from July 25-27, 2018. We would recall here that Putin was in the ‘rainbow nation’ in 2006 (his first-ever visit to sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Giles, 2013, p. 8)) and in 2013.

From October 23-24, 2019, President Vladimir Putin played host to the representatives of all 54 African countries, with 43 African heads of state and

government in attendance at the maiden Russia-Africa Summit which took place in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi, Russia, to strengthen Russia-Africa camaraderie which was forged by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Co-chaired with the president of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who doubled as chairperson of the African Union (AU), President Putin in the two-day summit that accommodated over 3,000 delegates from both Russia and Africa, discussed trade and investment, nuclear energy and mineral extraction with his African counterpart (DW, 2019; Standish, 2019; Viswanathan, 2019). On the sidelines, President Putin met with President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt, Hage Geingob of Namibia, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (leader of Sudan’s ruling 11-member Sovereign Council), and their entourage. By the time Putin was done with his charm offensive in the Summit, deals worth \$12.5 billion had been concluded.

#### **4.4 Russia-Africa Space and Education Cooperation**

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century began in the year 2000 (the year Vladimir Putin was for the first time inaugurated as the president of the Russian Federation on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May), one of the areas Moscow has successfully cooperated with the national governments of African states is in space technology.

Nigeria, under the Obasanjo administration, launched the country’s maiden earth observation satellite, *NigeriaSat-1*, into orbit from the spaceport in Plesetsk Kosmodrome, Russia, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 2003. The micro-satellite, which was built to the tune of \$13

million by Surrey Satellite Technology Limited (SSTL) in the UK, had a five-year life span. However, it remained functional in space beyond five years. It was later replaced during Jonathan's administration with two new satellites – *NigeriaSat-2* which was built by the SSTL and *NigeriaSat-X*, built solely by Nigerian engineers. Both satellites (with a design life from 2011-2018) flew upward into space from the launch pad in Yasny, Russia, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, 2011. Plans for *NigeriaSat-3* and *NigeriaSAR-1* to replace the two Earth observation satellites, *NigeriaSat-2* and *NigeriaSat-X*, are underway (see Ogunnoiki, 2018a, p. 64; Iderawumi, 2021). Hopefully in March 2022, Angola will launch the telecommunications satellite *AngoSat-2* which is presently being developed in Russia by Reshetnev Information Satellite Systems Company, a Russian company in the space industry. *AngoSat-2* will replace *AngoSat-1* which contact with was lost on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, 2017 (Akinyemi, 2020).

Another area of cooperation between Russia and African countries is education. Compared to some African states, Russia's education sector remains attractive to a good number of young adults in Africa who seek a bachelor's or postgraduate degree. As President Putin rightly stated at the maiden Russia-Africa Summit:

*“Let me repeat that education and training are also an important area of cooperation. At present, over 17,000 Africans are studying in Russia. The annual quota for state-financed openings at Russian universities is almost 2,000. We will think on how we can*

*increase this number.”* (President of Russia, 2019)

Obviously, Russia's tertiary institutions, like it was during the Soviet Union, have been used by Kremlin to exert Russia's soft power (the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2004 as cited in Ogunnoiki, 2018b, p. 59)) over Africa in the new millennium.

#### 4.5 Ugly Sides to Russia-Africa Relations

Africa is not a foreign policy priority for Russia like Europe where it exports hydrocarbon or the Middle East, a region it is presently a power broker. This was confirmed when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic hit Africa, as it did in other regions of the world, in the first quarter of 2020. Though, Russia was one of the countries with the highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19, as at the Q3 of 2020, it did not do much to assist African states in their fight against the deadly virus. This is in stark contrast to China's vaccine diplomacy in Africa (Tchoubar, 2020).

Before the aforementioned international health crisis, there were concerns in some quarters on Russia-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Steering the affairs of the Russian Federation is an authoritarian government with a poor rating internationally *vis-à-vis* the respect and protection of inalienable human rights. In Africa, Russia like its predecessor supports autocratic leaders such as former Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir. Al-Bashir, who an arrest warrant was issued for on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2009, and 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 2010, by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide that were committed on his watch in the Darfur Conflict



(2003), was dislodged on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2019, in a *coup d'état*.

To Kremlin, democratic principles such as human rights are not a conditionality in Russia's engagement with Africa, especially in the procurement of Russian military equipment which is relatively cheaper than those from the West (Adibe, 2019; Ilushina and McKenzie, 2019; Vayez, 2020). For instance, when the U.S. was reportedly unwilling to sell lethal weapons to Nigeria to fight Boko Haram in 2014 owing to allegations of human rights abuses by Nigerian soldiers, Nigeria turned to Russia, and in October 2019, signed a deal for the delivery of twelve Mi-35 attack helicopters (BBC News, 2014; Adibe, 2019; Adebajo, 2021). Though the Biden administration, unlike Obama's government, delivered on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2021, the first batch of six out of the twelve A-29 Super Tucano fighter planes ordered by the Buhari administration, to combat Islamic extremists in the country (Channels Television, 2021), Nigeria and the Russian Federation signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2021, a Military-Technical Cooperation agreement which is a legal framework for the supply of military equipment, after-sales services, personnel training among other things (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Moscow, 2021; Smith, 2021).

Like it did in the U.S. presidential election in 2016, Russia's meddling in some African states electoral process, such as Madagascar (2018), through political consultants, campaign strategists and disinformation experts, has cast a shadow over Russo-African relations (see Ghitis, 2019; Blank, 2020, p. 76; Akinola and Ogunnubi, 2021, p. 10). In the build-up to the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria for instance,

the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) claimed that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, hired Russian hackers to infiltrate the servers of the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) (Nwachukwu, 2018; Blank, 2020, p. 76). No doubt, Russia's interference in presidential hopefuls' electioneering and its support for autocratic regimes undermine the nascent liberal democracy in the continent.

Deals shrouded in secrecy between the national governments of the Russian Federation and some African countries are another issue that cannot be swept under the carpet. One covert agreement that came to light a few years back is the costly nuclear power deal between the leader of Russia and South Africa. In 2014, former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, who is currently facing charges of corruption, finalised a \$76 billion nuclear deal with President Vladimir Putin. It took two female activists by the name of Makoma Lekalakala, and Liz McDaid to prevent the nuclear energy deal from materialising. On the part of incumbent South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, he shelved the expensive deal (Hunter, 2014; Digges, 2018; Siegle, 2021).

## 5. Conclusion

Russia-Africa relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have largely been a relationship driven by national interests. As a whole, Africa has been a profitable market for Russian exports, a source of much-needed minerals for its industrialised economy, and diplomatic support in a quintessential universal international organisation. Russia on its part has among other things, sold military equipment and reached agreements to transfer nuclear technology to a number of African states that are faced

with lingering security challenges and power shortage. Though unpleasant instances are apparent in their multifaceted relations, it can safely be said that Russo-African relations in the new millennium have to a great extent been mutually beneficial.

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