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## MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

DMITRY EFREMENKO. RUSSIA AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES  
AT A NEW HISTORICAL TURN: CHANGING INTERACTION  
IN THE CONTEXT OF A SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION  
IN UKRAINE

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*Abstract.* The article analyzes the changes in Russia's relations with African countries caused by the conduct of a special military operation in Ukraine. Since the mid-2010s and up to the beginning of SMO (Special Military Operation), there has been a strengthening of

*these relations, which became especially noticeable after the Russia-Africa summit (2019). In addition to the growth of trade and the expansion of military-technical cooperation, a new significant factor of the Russian presence in Africa was the deployment of the activity of private military companies ("Wagner Group"). In the conditions of SMO interaction with African states in the spheres of trade and economy will go through a stage of painful transformation caused by Western sanctions pressure. At the same time, ensuring food security and preventing hunger in many countries of the Global South becomes a key problem. The modalities of Russia's presence on the African continent will inevitably be determined by the general confrontation between Russia and Western countries. In the longer term, African countries may become beneficiaries of the transformation of the US-centric world order, and SMO has become a strong factor in the acceleration of it.*

In the early spring of 2022, demonstrations were held in several African cities, whose participants, waving Russian tricolors, welcomed the special military operation in Ukraine launched by Moscow on February 24. The demonstrations were not too numerous, but the very fact of their holding attracted attention in the West, which was gripped by a powerful wave of anti-Russian hysteria. Almost immediately there were statements about a kind of "Putinophilia" characteristic of certain segments of society in African countries [Kane, 2022; Bensimon, 2022]. However, the real background of these speeches was, of course, not a deep understanding of the causes and goals of the Russian special operation, but a growing rejection of Western policy towards the Global South, intertwined with specific economic, political, social, ethno-religious and other circumstances in various countries and regions of the African continent. In this optics, Russia and Putin are seen as a force symbolizing an alternative to the world order controlled by the West and in some cases able to offer quite concrete solutions in the interests of specific local actors.

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A much more significant event, both encouraging for Moscow and alarming for Washington, Brussels and the capitals of former European colonial empires, was the voting in the UN General Assembly in March 2022 on draft resolutions condemning Russia's actions, when many African countries abstained, did not participate in the vote or even spoke out against. It can be said that in the conditions of powerful political and diplomatic pressure from the West, these states had an "instinct of non-alignment", connected both with the historical memory of the influence of the Soviet-American confrontation on the Third world countries, and with their assessment of the changing balance of forces on the world stage. According to Angela Stent, "many ... countries in the Global South view Russia as a large authoritarian country with which they can do business and accuse the United States of hypocrisy, given Washington's past wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan" [Stent, 2022]. The main motivations of the abstaining African countries, including the Republic of South Africa, can be summarized as follows:

- military actions in Ukraine are, first of all, a proxy war between Russia and the United States, in which African states should not provide explicit support to either side;
- it is all the more necessary to take such a position if one or more African countries seek to mediate in this conflict;
- it is important that relations with Russia in the areas of trade and security continue to develop [Stremmlau, 2022].

### **Forced Adjustment of Priorities in the Conditions of SMO**

The military confrontation in Ukraine has become a powerful driver of the accelerated transformation of the world order, which has both immediate and delayed effects. Due to the relative remoteness of Africa from the theater of military operations, it can be concluded that the most significant

consequences for the countries and peoples of the continent will manifest themselves in the medium term, although the aggravation of the food crisis, rising prices and a dramatic redistribution of interactions of key players – buyers and sellers – in the hydrocarbon markets are important components of the current political and economic agenda. In the future, the geopolitical and geo-economic changes associated with the course and results of SMO will be of decisive importance.

From the point of view of military operations in Ukraine, several medium-term scenarios can be considered:

- sustained prolongation of military operations in case of continuation and further escalation of military and economic support for Kiev from the West;

- achieving a long-term truce and fixing the actual territorial control of the parties along the front line (due to the exhaustion of the parties of the possibility of continuing active hostilities, as well as the growing crisis in the economy and voter fatigue in the EU and the United States from the consequences of the military conflict and anti-Russian sanctions);

- the collapse of the current Ukrainian statehood as a result of a turning point on the fronts and economic collapse.

Less likely is the scenario that Washington and Brussels made the main bet on at the beginning of their campaign, imposing sanctions of unprecedented scale against Moscow: an explosive increase in the socio-economic crisis in Russia combined with military failures, protests in large industrial centers, the rise of ethnic separatism, the split of elites and – as a result – the collapse of the existing political regime.

None of the most likely scenarios provides for a comprehensive political settlement and normalization of relations between Russia and the West; a confrontation comparable to the darkest periods of the Cold War will remain a routine for many years, if not decades. Under all scenarios, the destruction of the US-centric world order and the crisis of the liberal model of

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globalization will occur, but their speed and the scale of the accompanying shocks will be different.

With a high degree of probability, Africa will become one of the sites of confrontation, in which, in addition to the West and Russia, a number of other international actors will participate. At the same time, this confrontation will ultimately contribute to strengthening the political subjectivity and influence of African countries as part of the Global South, which has its own interests and political and economic agenda in the context of the transformation of the world order.

The formation of a holistic African policy of Russia, going beyond the framework of bilateral relations with priority partners, has long remained a good wish. The potential of the continent and the prospects for cooperation with African states in Russia have been recognized repeatedly, but only the Sochi Russia-Africa summit, held on October 23–24, 2019, gave the necessary impetus to Russia's policy, which is based on the vision of African countries as a community of actors whose importance in the transformation of the world order is gradually increasing. The Summit contributed to the formation of an institutional framework for cooperation between Russia and African countries, in particular, the structuring of interaction with the African Union [Abramova, Fituni, 2021]. It can be said that by the beginning of 2022, a common framework approach of Moscow to interaction with the countries of the black continent had been formed:

“Today, Russia is trying not to view Africa as an arena of rivalry with the United States or other unfriendly centers of power, and politics in this region is not thought of as an element of a global zero-sum game. It is determined primarily by considerations of building relations between Russia and the African countries themselves, which have independent value, as well as economic and political benefits that can be extracted” [Maslov, Suslov, 2022, p. 130].

This approach has not always been maintained flawlessly by Moscow: in some cases, a special tradition of relations with a particular country or group of countries remains dominant.

Relations with Egypt, the countries of the Greater Maghreb, as well as with Sudan are simultaneously and justifiably viewed from the perspective of Russian involvement in the affairs of the Middle East and interaction with the Arab world. It should also be taken into account that cooperation with some states becomes the object of special attention of certain Russian influence groups, including state corporations and large non-state companies (for example, Gazprom in Algeria, Alrosa in Zimbabwe and Angola, Rusal in Guinea, etc.), private military companies and the law enforcement agencies backing them, etc.

However, it is more significant that after the start of the SMO and the deployment of various forms of hybrid confrontation between Russia and the West, it will no longer be possible to keep this approach unchanged in relation to Africa. Even if Russia would still like to consider its presence on the African continent regardless of the confrontation with the West, the other side is acting in the logic of a zero-sum game, and now this logic is being broadcast to regions remote from the Ukrainian theater of operations. Discrediting, zeroing out Russia's presence and influence in a particular African country is becoming a desirable goal for the West, which has – at least in relation to the macro-region itself – a high level of priority. In turn, the Russian leadership will have to calculate the consequences of certain steps on the African continent in terms of their possible impact on achieving tactical or strategic goals in the post-Soviet space, as well as preserving Russia's status as one of the most important sovereign actors in the system of international relations, strengthening its ties with the countries of the Global South.

### **De-dollarization of Trade and Search for Optimal Formats of Economic Cooperation**

In the conditions of SMO policy of economizing relations with African countries with increased attention to investment cooperation and technological cooperation will undergo forced

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changes due to Western sanctions. A radical reduction in the ability to trade in dollars and other Western currencies will lead to the fact that the main means of payment with a high degree of probability will be the Chinese yuan (RMB). In other words, even in the absence of serious coordination between Moscow and Beijing on the African continent, trade and economic cooperation between Russia and African countries will contribute to the expansion of China's economic presence in Africa.

At the moment, the possibilities of expanding economic cooperation between Russia and a number of African countries under the auspices of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative are not entirely clear. Structuring such cooperation could contribute to the evolution of the Belt and Road towards a new global platform for supporting trade, investment, logistics and technological development, free (or having a high level of autonomy) from the institutions of the Washington Consensus. However, for such an evolution, a certain correction of the initial idea of this initiative is necessary, including overcoming the attitude that any significant cooperation project is necessarily sanctioned in Beijing.

The BRICS and BRICS+ formats play a very positive role in terms of the development of Russia's relations with African countries. First of all, the inclusion of the Republic of South Africa in this club has finally turned Pretoria into a privileged partner of Moscow on the continent. In fact, South Africa has become one of Russia's main "entry points" to Africa, at least south of the Sahara. South Africa's chairmanship in the group makes it possible to assess the level and prospects of its members' interaction with African countries every five years, regularly emphasizing BRICS support for African regionalism and the rapidly growing economic interdependence of the continent and the group's members [Atif, Akbar, 2019]. The almost annual participation of several African countries (apart from South Africa) in the BRICS+ format and the emergence of opportunities for access to financing from the New Development Bank further strengthens the positive perception of partnership with BRICS

(and hence with Russia) in African public opinion. For Russia, in the context of its opposition to Western sanctions pressure, the creation of an independent BRICS payment system and its use for trade with other countries of the Global South becomes a priority.

The expected expansion of the BRICS membership (with a likely change in the name of the group) opens up new opportunities for African countries, of which Egypt (and in the future, most likely Algeria and Nigeria) is the most likely candidate for joining the group. For Russia, such an expansion would be desirable for a number of reasons, among which the further strengthening of partnership with African countries, not mediated by structures and formats of multilateral cooperation controlled by the West, seems to be quite significant. An important result of the latter will be an increase in the proximity of the views and interests of non-Western actors of the world order regarding the ways of its transformation.

### **Food Security as a Key Element of the Russia–Africa Dialogue**

In the context of SMO, the intensive dialogue between Russia and other non-Western countries on the issues of promoting development and food security becomes especially relevant. There is no doubt that the current aggravation of the global food crisis will directly affect Russian-African relations. In an effort to undermine Russia's partnership with the countries of the global South, representatives of the United States and the EU insist that the main cause of the food crisis is the "Russian invasion of Ukraine" [McDonough, Zhou, 2022; Lu, 2022]. At the same time, the more fundamental reasons associated with the anti-crisis economic measures of the United States and the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption of supply chains and distribution channels of agricultural products during the same period, as well as climate change, are deliberately ranked as secondary compared to the military actions in Ukraine.

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The effectiveness of a direct and open dialogue on food security issues was convincingly confirmed by the meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin with Chairman of the African Union, President of Senegal Macky Sall on June 3, 2022 in Sochi. The leader of the African Union demonstrated an understanding of Moscow's main arguments and called for the lifting of those anti-Russian sanctions that prevent the supply of mineral fertilizers, wheat and other grain crops from Russia [Ndebele, 2022]. It is no less significant that the leadership of the African Union for a long time refrained from responding positively to the request of the President of Ukraine to speak online to the heads of the member states of this association. When the speech did take place, it turned out that only four African leaders listened to it live [Hochet-Bodin, 2022].

The position of the African countries contributed to the conclusion of a grain deal in July 2022, achieved through the mediation of Turkey. The deal itself is important not only in terms of unblocking grain supplies from the northern Black Sea region to the world market and facilitating the export of Russian grain and fertilizers, but also for understanding the possibilities and limits of compromise between the warring parties (one of them, in addition to the major part of Ukraine controlled by the Kiev regime, certainly includes the collective West). By entering into a deal, Russia has not only demonstrated good will, but has also received a lever of pressure in its hands, which, if appropriate circumstances occur, it can use [Prokopenko, 2022]. In the early autumn of 2022, this lever has already begun to be used at the level of political rhetoric, one of the important addressees of which were the countries of the Global South. In particular, the statement of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin that only a smaller part of Ukrainian grain supplies is sent to countries in dire need of it, while the larger part is unloaded at the ports of EU countries, emphasizes that for one of the parties to the deal, the needs of the Global South were just a bargaining chip. In fact, the interests of Europe, which suffered from a crop

failure due to a record drought, turn out to be a priority, and the supplies themselves become a way of paying for weapons sent by the West to the Kiev regime. Thus, the grain deal turns out to be not a prologue to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, but something like fuel regularly thrown into the hotbed of war. The actual deceleration of the other part of the deal, related to the facilitation of trade opportunities in Russian fertilizers and cereals, also becomes an argument significant for assessing the situation of countries gripped by famine or on its threshold.

The decision of the Russian leadership on the possibility of free transfer to developing countries of 300 thousand tons of potash fertilizers blocked in the ports of the Baltic countries further highlights the divergence in interests and goals between the US-led bloc, tightening and expanding sanctions regimes, and the countries of the Global South. The reaction of the EU leadership to this initiative will clarify the possibility and expediency of further steps on the part of Moscow, the purpose of which will be to reveal the true essence of Western sanctions, their inconsistency with international law and the interests of the majority of global community.

### **Hard, Soft and Sharp Power in the “Wagnerian” Manner**

Today, Russia is favored by its very stable perception in the African public opinion as the heir of the Soviet superpower, which played a huge role in supporting the struggle for the liberation of Africa from colonial oppression, strengthening state independence, developing industry and socio-economic infrastructure of many countries of the continent, forming a stratum of qualified national personnel in the civil and military spheres. In Africa, they remember the readiness of the USSR to undertake armed intervention, not excluding the use of atomic weapons, during the Suez crisis of 1956–1957, the outcome of which had a major impact on the processes of decolonization

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throughout the world. The involvement of the USSR in the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia in Ogaden, the wars in Angola and Mozambique, and the significant impact on the dynamics of other armed conflicts on the African continent created Moscow's reputation as a global player ready to project its military power on the continent to implement its own ideological guidelines and expand the sphere of political influence.

The dramatic changes of the 1990s, when Yeltsin's Russia abandoned attempts to keep the Soviet sphere of influence in Africa and implement a special political and ideological project there, did not mean the annihilation of the Russian presence in the macroregion as one of the largest arms suppliers. Moreover, having quickly moved from ideological bias to indifference with regard to the quality of political institutions and democracy in the arms-buying countries, Russia managed to retain such large arms markets as Algeria, for example, and at the same time use new opportunities where the USSR had not been active before. Russia managed to occupy vacant niches in the African arms markets when the United States began to link the supply of military equipment with respect for human rights or other political conditions, as was the case with Egypt (2013) and Nigeria (2014).

Moscow's successful military intervention in Syria on the side of the Bashar al-Assad regime has contributed to the fact that an increasing number of African governments have begun to consider Russia as a partner capable of providing very effective and multifaceted support in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism and / or separatism. In addition to supplying weapons and sending military advisers, the involvement of private military companies (PMCs) to solve security problems has become a particularly effective and relatively low-cost tool for expanding Russia's political and military influence in various regions of the African continent since the mid-2010s. In Western literature, as well as in the Russian media and the blogosphere, first of all they call the "Wagner Group," affiliated with

entrepreneur Evgeny Prigozhin. There is no reason to assert that the activity of Russian PMCs in Africa is limited only to the Wagner Group, but, first of all, it is customary to associate the accelerated expansion of Russian influence on the continent in recent years with Wagnerians [Siegle, 2021]. There was not only an expansion of the geography of the demand for Russian PMCs (Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya, Mozambique, Mali, etc.), but, in fact, geopolitical shifts caused by the “exodus” of some Wagnerian clients from the French sphere of influence. Although the latter is largely explained by the strategic miscalculations of Paris itself, there are grounds for a high assessment of the deployment of the Wagner Group's activity in terms of geopolitical dynamics.

Western analysts associate the secret of Wagnerians' success in Africa, firstly, with the “immaturity” of African elites, with whom Russians quite easily manage to find a common language, avoiding excessive domestic political demands, and secondly, with the willingness of the PMCs leadership to intervene in a critical security situation, providing political (often physical) survival of the relevant leader and his entourage in exchange for access to local mineral resources [Siegle, 2021]. Wagnerians, without burdening official Moscow with additional formal obligations, offer customers a kind of “regime support packages”, ranging from conventional military assistance to carefully planned campaigns of (dis)information impact [El-Badawy *et al.*, 2022].

As for information operations, the accusations of structures close to Evgeny Prigozhin of involvement in ensuring the electoral success of Donald Trump in 2016 [Efremenko, 2020] created unprecedented advertising for them, obviously facilitating opportunities for promotion in markets beyond the full control of the United States and its allies. Attempts to visualize the “Eugene Prigozhin galaxy” on a geographical map showing the crossing the entire continent from the coast of Cyrenaica to the Cape of Good Hope with almost a continuous

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“Wagnerian” strip [Laruelle, Limonier, 2021, p. 322], and completely turn Prigozhin into a legendary figure, comparable only to S. Rhodes. However, upon closer examination, it turns out that we are talking about inhomogeneous types of activities that differ in their scale, instrumentation, intensity and duration of action. It is obvious that the Wagner Group uses tools of informational influence on public opinion in African countries of interest to it, although specific examples of such influence are often confirmed only by indirect data and such not always reliable methods as open source intelligence (OSINT).

A relatively more realistic explanation of the activities of the Wagner Group and its connection with the promotion of the Kremlin’s interests in the countries of the Global South is offered by Marlène Laruelle and Kevin Limonier. Following the journalist Mark Galeotti, they write about a special area of entrepreneurial activity focused on strengthening Russia’s positions in different parts of the world. In this case, we are talking about the possibilities of profit-making and accumulation of political and symbolic capital in the process of forming “networks of Russian influence” abroad [Galeotti, 2019]. Among the various categories of entrepreneurs in this field, Laruelle and Limonier distinguish an elite stratum of “tycoons”, naming, however, only two names – Evgeny Prigozhin and Konstantin Malofeev. The “tycoons” do not require public funds to start their activity – on the contrary, relying on their proximity to the “vertical of power”, they decide on risky investments of their own funds in those countries and regions where traditional tools for promoting the political and economic interests of the state are ineffective and – in almost all cases – unprofitable. Such investments do not always justify themselves, but where it is possible to achieve success and ensure influence on the political, military and economic elites of the country concerned, they pay off both by participating in profits from the development of local resources and by new preferences within Russia [Laruelle, Limonier, 2021]. The weak side of the analysis of Laruelle and

Limonier can be considered an attempt to form a special cluster of these two entrepreneurs, ignoring the presence of strong non-monetary motivations in each of them, providing them with special positions among the Russian political, economic and power elite.

Nevertheless, such a model of promoting Russian interests contributes to the development of Russia's military-technical cooperation with countries where the activity of conditional Wagnerians is unfolding, promotion of Russian fuel, energy, raw materials and technology companies to high-risk markets, and expansion of constructive political dialogue at the interstate level. In particular, only in the period 2017–2019 Russia has signed 19 agreements with African countries on the development of military-technical cooperation; it is significant that even during the period of SMO implementation, the sharply increased US pressure aimed at blocking almost all ties between African countries and Russia could not prevent the achievement of agreements on cooperation in the field of military personnel training and information exchange, which Moscow concluded with Madagascar and Cameroon.

The question of whether the appearance of Russian PMCs in a particular country can become a prologue to the military presence of Russia as a state stands out. The primary objective here is to assess the feasibility and price of such a presence, taking into account the strategic importance of the region. It is also essential to understand the Russian capabilities to project military force at such a considerable distance from national borders for a long time. In fact, we are talking about agreements with the leadership of Sudan, allowing the use of the Red Sea Port of Sudan as a Russian naval base on lease terms for a period of 25 years. The presence of such a base would make it possible to establish a presence at a point located near the strategically important line of commercial and military communications through the Suez Canal (on its other side Syrian seaports perform a similar function for Russia) and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

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Judging by numerous reports, representatives of the Wagner Group made their contribution to the preparation of these agreements thanks to close contacts with the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, and after the overthrow of the latter in 2019, with the new de facto leader of the country, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. However, the agreements have not been finalized; under increasing American pressure, the Sudanese leadership uses delay tactics that allow representatives of the US intelligence community to conclude that Moscow will never get access to the Red Sea [Mackinnon, Gramer, Detsch, 2022]. However, Khartoum will make the final decision, most likely, based on the assessment of the results of PMCs. Similarly, other African countries will make decisions on the further development of military-technical cooperation with Russia, taking into account the degree of success or failure of the special operation itself, the effectiveness of the Russian military-industrial complex in general and specific types of weapons in particular. The Wagner Group can partly claim an exclusive assessment, having already demonstrated in the course of SMO a very high level of combat capability during its operation and having accumulated combat experience, which no other PMCs, including American and British ones, have. Metaphorically, we can say that Wagnerians have quite enough reasons to call themselves “the best in hell.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Formation of a Common Discursive Space**

The previous analysis shows that on the African continent, Russia has sufficient grounds to count on a constructive dialogue and understanding of the motives of its actions. Moreover, we are talking about both influential elites and a wider audience. In this regard, the analytical material published on the website of the Brookings Institution in June 2022 [Blankenship, Ordu 2022] is of interest. Its authors analyzed more than 2.5 million messages on Twitter<sup>2</sup> in the period from February 14 to June 9, dedicated to the military actions in Ukraine, the creators of which were in Africa or are explicitly

connected with it. The messages were processed with the use of Twarc toolkit (<https://twarc-project.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>). The aim of the study was to identify the influence of the main Russian narratives spreading throughout the African continent. Despite the undisguised bias, the authors of the work showed that the content of a significant part of the tweets (about 200 thousand) for February-March was not in favor of Ukraine and the position of the West. In particular, the creators of these messages focused on the situation of African students studying at Ukrainian universities, whose difficulties with evacuation to EU countries they associated with poorly concealed racism of the Ukrainian authorities and their Western partners. In addition, a large number of tweets drew parallels with the current situation or the historical past of the African continent, the countries of the Near and Middle East. Commenting on the Western coverage of events in Ukraine, the authors of the tweets pointed out that the conflicts in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and – especially – the military actions and the humanitarian disaster in Tigray (Ethiopia) were practically ignored by European and American public opinion. Many reports emphasized that Russia, unlike key Western countries, has not tarnished itself as a colonial power and as a country in which racial enslavement was carried out. At the same time, the United States and the European Union continue neo-colonialist practices, carrying out economic plunder of Africa. With regard to Russia, they seek to act in a similar way, deliberately ignoring the legitimate interests of its security, which ultimately led to the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis into a military phase.

It is obvious that the ever-growing Internet audience in African countries is quite receptive to sources of information alternative to Western ones. It is important that when submitting information, the interests, concerns and even the peculiarities of the emotional perception of this audience are taken into account. At the same time, the critical attitude of many Africans towards the policies of the West and – especially – the former colonial

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powers does not guarantee the success of non-Western sources of information. A lot depends on the specific circumstances and the presentation of the material. So, in particular, the perception of the food security issues of African countries in the context of SMO was not in favor of the Russian position: on average, only one out of every ten tweets linked the aggravation of the food crisis with Western sanctions, while most of the messages contained criticism of Russia's actions [Blankenship, Ordu 2022].

If we evaluate the Western analytics of information work in Africa by various Russian actors as quite realistic, then the cost / effectiveness ratio of many information events looks quite favorable. However, the point here is not only the moderate costs of attracting local journalists and bloggers to such events, but also the objective compatibility of political discourses and interests of Russia and the countries of the Global South. Recognition of independence, avoidance of external dictates, economic justice and cultural sovereignty as the highest political values is a common platform on which it is possible to build a more detailed model of positioning of various state actors within the changing world order. Among the Russian non-governmental initiatives aimed at building common spaces of political discourse with the Global South in combination with the implementation of economic programs should, in particular, be called the creation of the International Agency for Sovereign Development (IASD), the chairman of the Supervisory Board of which is Konstantin Malofeev. According to him, the agency not only seeks to pave the way for Russian investments to Africa and other countries of the Global South, but also to promote the growth of the national well-being of developing countries by strengthening their sovereignty, providing opportunities for them to conduct independent domestic and foreign policy. Specifically, we are talking about creating alternatives to bonded lending by international financial institutions, accompanied by strict requirements of a political and socio-economic nature; restructuring on more favorable terms of the sovereign debt of

developing countries; consolidation of assets of large African public and private companies in the hands of Africans; assistance to African states in creating their own operators for the development of mineral resources and overcoming the monopolization of this sphere by Western TNCs; combating sanctions practices of Western powers; assistance in overcoming the shortage of industry expertise and technology transfer [Malofeev, 2019].

This program, announced on the eve of the first Russia-Africa summit, remains fully relevant today, but at the same time, Russian investment opportunities in the conditions of SMO and the most severe sanctions from the West are sharply narrowed. Its implementation is possible provided that the efforts of the largest non-Western actors on the continent are coordinated, at least Russia and China, which have so far implemented their African strategies independently of each other. The very possibility of such coordination was discussed by Russian and Chinese experts even before the start of SMO [Kortunov et al. 2021], but in the context of escalating global tensions related both to the military actions in Ukraine and to the growing US pressure on China on the Taiwan issue, the chances of a transition to partial coordination of Moscow and Beijing's strategies in various regions of the world are beginning to increase. In addition to coordinating concrete steps, there is an increasing need for the formation of a common political language, a broad conceptual vision of global processes, including African anti-colonial narratives, Russian rejection of the unipolar world, and the Chinese idea of a Community of Common Destiny for Mankind (人類命運共同體).

It seems that one of the prerequisites for creating a common discursive space is the existence of an institutional format for a sustainable dialogue between Russia, China, India, other countries of Asia, Oceania, Africa and Latin America. BRICS and BRICS+, the SCO, the Belt and Road Initiative, the economic mechanisms of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the China-Africa and Russia-Africa summits are very important in

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terms of supporting political dialogue, but individually none of these formats is fully inclusive.

The convergence of the political discourses of Russia and the countries of the Global South in terms of content also requires serious efforts. In particular, attention should be paid here to the growing rejection in Russia of the left-liberal ideological symbiosis, which includes not only feminism and the promotion of the values of LBGT, but also postcolonial studies and critical racial theory [Lukin, 2021]. In this case, it is necessary to identify significant differences between this ideological construct, formed in the campuses of American and Western European universities, and the original interpretations of the legacy of colonialism, racism and imperialism in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is equally important to overcome political and ideological eclecticism, when, to the accompaniment of criticism of the West, flirting with the bearers of xenophobic attitudes and hatred towards migrants from developing countries begins.

Of course, one of the most painful issues is the level of expertise in Africa, which presupposes detailed knowledge of individual countries, regions and societies, possession of a sufficient number of specialists in local, including rare languages. Despite the continuation after 1991 the work of several centers for macroregion research and training of personnel with appropriate specialization (Institute of Africa of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Asia and Africa of Moscow State University, RUDN University, MGIMO University of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation), the problem of reproduction of such personnel and their language training persists and even worsens, including due to the termination of the activity of teachers of some rare African languages who began their activities in Soviet times [Kuznetsov, 2021]. One of the possible solutions, especially relevant in the conditions of increasing blocking of scientific and educational exchanges with Western countries, is a significant expansion of the practice of sending Russian graduate students, young scientists and teachers to long-

term internships at African universities and research centers. Of course, this process should not be one-sided, and in addition to the development of student exchanges, it is important to attract African specialists in social sciences and humanities to Russia, including with the aim of forming new competence centers for the macro-region. The expansion of the quantitative composition and qualitative level of such centers is an urgent task, the solution of which will allow not only to meet the increasing needs of Russian authorities and economic actors in diverse information and qualified analysis, but also to overcome certain costs of functioning of specialized expert (epistemic) communities, whose representatives are sometimes reluctant to part with the monopoly on expert judgment.

Finally, it is worth paying attention to the expansion of the Russian diplomatic presence in Africa. It is no secret that a long business trip to an African country was often tacitly viewed as not the most favorable trajectory of a diplomatic career. At the same time, the recent mass mutual expulsions of diplomats from Russia and Western countries, with all the destructive impact of such actions on interstate relations, have highlighted the problem of staff redundancy in Russian diplomatic missions in some “prestigious” countries against the background of a shortage of qualified personnel in Russian embassies even in the most important states of Asia, Africa and Latin America. At the very least, we can expect that after this shake-up, the declared priority of relations with the global South will be reinforced by the quantitative and qualitative strengthening of Russian foreign institutions in these parts of the world.

## **Conclusion**

The special military operation has changed a lot and will change even more in Russia’s interaction with African states. And the mere statement that “Africa is becoming more important” is clearly not enough to characterize the expected

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vector of changes. It is quite obvious that for years to come, Moscow's main attention will be focused on Ukraine and, more broadly, the entire western flank of the former USSR. Even if military actions in Ukraine do not lead to a repeat of the Caribbean crisis, which has put the world on the verge of self-destruction, the confrontation between Russia and the West will retain its global and almost total character for a long time. It is in the context of the latter that the importance of the African continent will increase for Russia.

Depending on the specific circumstances, Moscow may act in different directions. It is very important for Russia to maintain neutrality or even receive the political support of a significant number of African countries, helping to strengthen their sovereignty and regional integration in such a way that, at the same time, the influence of the United States and former colonial metropolises on individual countries and the macro-region as a whole is reduced. Russia, however, will have to act using limited capabilities. The restoration of the Soviet sphere of influence, the scale of involvement comparable to intervention in the civil war in Syria are out of question. As in recent years, unconventional mechanisms and methods of influence can be used to achieve significant results with a relatively modest scale of resources used. The ideal option, the probability of which does not seem very high yet, would be coordination of efforts and division of labor with China, which can offer loans and investments in production and infrastructure to African countries, and Russia – stopping part of the security threats faced by insufficiently stable regimes.

At the same time, Moscow could consider to be a useful development for itself a crisis scenario, which would lead to the diversion of attention, forces and resources of the United States and / or former colonial powers from the Ukrainian theater of military operations. It is hardly appropriate to talk about the artificial construction of such a crisis, especially in conditions when interstate contradictions persist and even worsen in many

parts of Africa, fundamentalist currents spread, and economic and environmental problems generate new waves of migration. By forcing the confrontation with Russia and China, the West undermines the very possibility of joint efforts of the international community to solve the most acute African problems and achieve truly relevant sustainable development goals. At the same time, the destabilization of raw materials and food markets is taking place, ultimately – partial deglobalization, plunging countries and peoples of the planet into a state of deep uncertainty. If Russia manages to complete SMO not only by military success, but also by strengthening the status of a power offering a more just world order, then later there will be grounds to count on the implementation of Moscow's full-fledged strategy in Africa, focused no longer on achieving a preponderance in the confrontation imposed by the West, but on ensuring the needs and interests of the majority of humanity.

### Notes

1. The name of the blockbuster, one of the producers of which is E.V. Prigozhin. The film was released in the fall of 2022.
2. Blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation since March 4, 2022.

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