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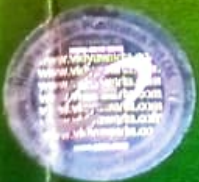
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New Milestones in Russia Africa Relations

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ahead of Russia in its Africa policy.

Yeltsin Period: Africa Downgraded

The foreign policy followed under President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev was conciliatory towards the West. The pro-western policies have bearings of domestic politics where the worsening economic conditions which resulted in the tilt towards the West. The primary reason to tilt towards the West was to save free falling Russian economy. The oil and gas sector which has had been core element to Russian economy were not performing. This provides 50 percent of federal budget revenue and accounted for 20-25 per cent of GDP. As a result of extreme dependability on hydrocarbon revenue, the sharp decline of oil prices caused worsening in economic situation. In 1990s, price of international oil was almost stranded around \$25; it was a too low price to support Russian economy. When Russia turns to IMF, the IMF demanded free market reforms in Russia to which Yeltsin government agreed. This led to the mindless privatization as most of oil resources were sold off far below its actual value. "Mr. Roman Abramovich bought the company for about \$100 million in 1995 and sold it for \$13.1 billion ten years later thus garnering profit of 130 times."¹

In its efforts to maintain close relations with the West, Russia overlooked its traditional allies of third world including Africa. This was easily reflected in its 'Foreign Policy Concept' document published in 1993. Africa was not only sidelined but perceived as a location where Soviet over spent which led to its collapse. Rather than taking it mutual benefitted for both Africa was considered as a liability during the Yeltsin period. Furthermore, Russia decided to close nine embassies and nine consulates by 1992 in Africa. The number of personnel in the remaining embassies and consulates were decreased. Yeltsin government did not halt there, it not only halted foreign aid to Africa but

Introduction

The relations between Africa and Russia are of immense importance. With the changing time and circumstances relations have changed accordingly. Certain international, domestic factors as well as changes in leadership had reshaped the relations between these two. The relationship between Russia (at time USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and African countries was essentially marked during the second half of the twentieth century, by an exchange in all sectors: political (socialist policy), military (sending weapons and technicians), economic, social (sending Soviet teachers and doctors to work in those countries and on the other hand, reception of African students in soviet schools). However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and Africa have seen major ups and downs. Russia started developing links with Africa towards the latter half of 1990s. However, a phase of resurgence in Russia-Africa relations started when Mr. Vladimir Putin became the President of Russia in 1999. The present paper tries to highlight different sets of Russia-Africa relations, Under President Yeltsin when Africa downgraded and under President Putin when resurgence in the relations took place. The study further highlights several phases and challenges

also demanded that African countries to repay their debt as soon as possible. The trade too was badly affected, on the eve of the disintegration of the USSR trade volume was \$ 2.7 billion which declined to \$ 740 million by 1994. In 2001 the amount of the Russian-African trade was just 60 percent of that in 1990s. In addition to it, Russia had neither signed legal treaties with African countries, nor had developed banking system to complete financial transactions. "The international dealers not only reduced profit of Russian traders but also prevented the demonstration of real capacity, enhancing efficiency of trade and expanding mutually advantageous trade between Russia and Africa."² There were considerable difficulties faced in the transportation of export and import goods also because of loss of many ex-Soviet ports. Due to the ignorance and poor knowledge of local market, consumer taste, and poor understanding of the role of advertisement especially based on the demonstration of the export goods.

Primakov Period: Smooth Change

However, the policy makers realized the folly of not paying adequate attention to third world in general and Africa in particular. The process of change thus started in Russia. In 1996, Yevgeny Primakov was appointed as foreign minister, who was an expert on third world affairs. The status given to Russia provided yet another reason to conduct relations with Africa as a responsible international actor. "Russia also viewed it as an opportunity to work as a bridge between the G8 and global south mainly Africa."³³ Pamela A. Jordan,

'A bridge between the global North and Africa? Putin's Russia and G8 development commitment', *African Studies Quarterly*, Volume 11, Issue 4, Summer 2010.

Russia started connecting back to African market. In the trade and commerce sector following changes were brought;

The understanding of the importance of

renewing the contractual and legal basis of trade and economic co-operation with African partners became clearer than earlier.

The projects of the Soviet-African co-operation built earlier were considered potential consumers of Russian machines and equipment and sites of co-operation in science and technology.

The expenses for training African students and post-graduates in Russia increased.

African countries too facilitated access to the continent for Russian private capital, which demonstrates interest in the African market.

The functioning of the trade representations that survived in some countries improved.

Intergovernmental commissions for trade and co-operation in economy, science and technology resumed their activity.

Putin Era: Resurgence in Relations

A phase of resurgence in Russia Africa started when Putin came to power in 1999. Putin, a nationalist, had different perception about foreign policy. His government was not for pleasing the West. In his famous Munich speech he led a frontal attack on uni-polarity and demanded change,

'...What is a unipolar world? No matter how we beautify this term, it means one single circle of power, one single centre of force and one single centre of decision-making. This is a world of one master, one sovereign..... Today we are witnessing an almost unconstrained hyper use of force in international relations- military force... One state, the United States, has over stepped its border in all spheres – economic, political and humanitarian – and imposed itself on other states.... Illegal [unilateral military action has plunged the world into an] abyss of permanent conflicts... This is very dangerous. Nobody feels secure anymore because nobody can hide behind international

The international crude oil prices which were not simply increased, but it increased by many folds over the years. The prices hit a high of \$ 147 in July 2008, registering a growth of almost six times to that of prices of 1990s. Russia started to get back the space which was once occupied by Soviets and was filled up by the western powers as well as emerging powers in Africa. It would be wrong to say that Russia had abandoned Africa; it always maintained diplomatic presence in Africa. "The AU has been another important target of Russian diplomatic and security outreach in Africa and a tool for Russian diplomacy to counterbalance U.S. and European influence in Africa."⁵

Russia's new approach was reflected in policy documents. The Foreign Policy Concept document of 2000 was much different in content regarding Africa than the previous document. In 2007, the Russian Foreign Ministry published a document 'A Comprehensive Look at Russian Federation Foreign Policy' which highlighted need for close political relations supplemented by better commercial-economic relations. It also advocated active participation in African conflict resolution, involvement in development of trained human capital and continuing humanitarian assistance. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 reiterated Russian commitments to Africa. It again highlighted interaction with African states both at bilateral and multilateral levels and Russia's commitment to conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance.

A good indicator of resurgence in relationship is the visit by African heads of government to Russia. From 2001 to 2005, many African leaders paid official visit. Revival of military relation along with foreign relation was an important step to come closer to Africa. Russia started sending troops for peacekeeping operations where it participated in Democratic Republic of Congo, Western Sahara, Sierra Leone,

Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sudan. Russia wanted to take this presence to other countries in Africa. The main topic of discussion between President Putin and Guinean President Konte in 2001 was the development and strengthening of the bilateral economic relations. Russia utilized opportunity to discuss trade and commerce at the time of visits by heads of African states. The economic expansion was accompanied by debt relief. The amount of debt relief increased with the time, in 2008, Russia announced debt relief of \$ 20 billion for African countries. Russia extended assistance in many other sectors.

Challenges Ahead...

There is resurgence in Russia's Africa policy but it is still in not developed momentum. Russia does not have a dedicated 'Russia-Africa' forum where as several such forum exist in Africa like 'China-Africa', Japan-Africa, India-Africa, France-Africa, US-Africa etc. There is problem about image of Africa in Russia. As mentioned before, Africa seen as a liability and the cause of Soviet disintegration, Furthermore, the young generation in Russia is not aware about Africa. However the most serious problem is about the attitude of ultra nationalist groups in Russia. These racially motivated groups attack African students and workers in Russia. From 2004 to 2009, in these racially motivated attacks 16 people have been killed and 248 were beaten and wounded. The African diplomatic corps presence in Moscow have registered strong objection against such attacks.

This has created serious problem not only for Africans in Russia but also image of Russia in Africa. There are opportunities in the creation of small and medium size joint ventures for the production of fertilizers, agriculture equipment, construction material, glass and plastic articles of local materials. To tap the full opportunities extended by Africa, Russian entrepreneurs have to bring change in their

business practice. Russian entrepreneurs are not prepared to invest in projects with a return in the remote future. Russia's growing trade and investment with Africa could have both positive as well as negative outcome.

Conclusion

Russia needs Africa as much as Africa needs Russia; they have strong convergence of interest. There are several challenges which this relationship will have to face. The challenge before Russia is to maximize positive changes while minimizing negative outcome. As a legacy of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited close military relations. Similarly, in heavy machinery, Africans have been using Soviet machineries and are acquainted with technology. Russia can build on this technological base to continue supply of heavy machinery. Most interaction, government and business, it seems, is inter-bureaucratic, behind closed doors and away from the public eye. Africa still knows very little about Russia and vice versa. African nations constitute around a quarter of members of the UN and Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council, thus together they can play an influential role in the international relations. Over the past few years summits have become increasingly common and interactive dialogue involving African elites in politics, business and intellectual life could be used as a good platform to mature their relationship into deep ties. As the world is changing with immeasurable rate Russia must establish its footprints into multi layers of Africa.

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