

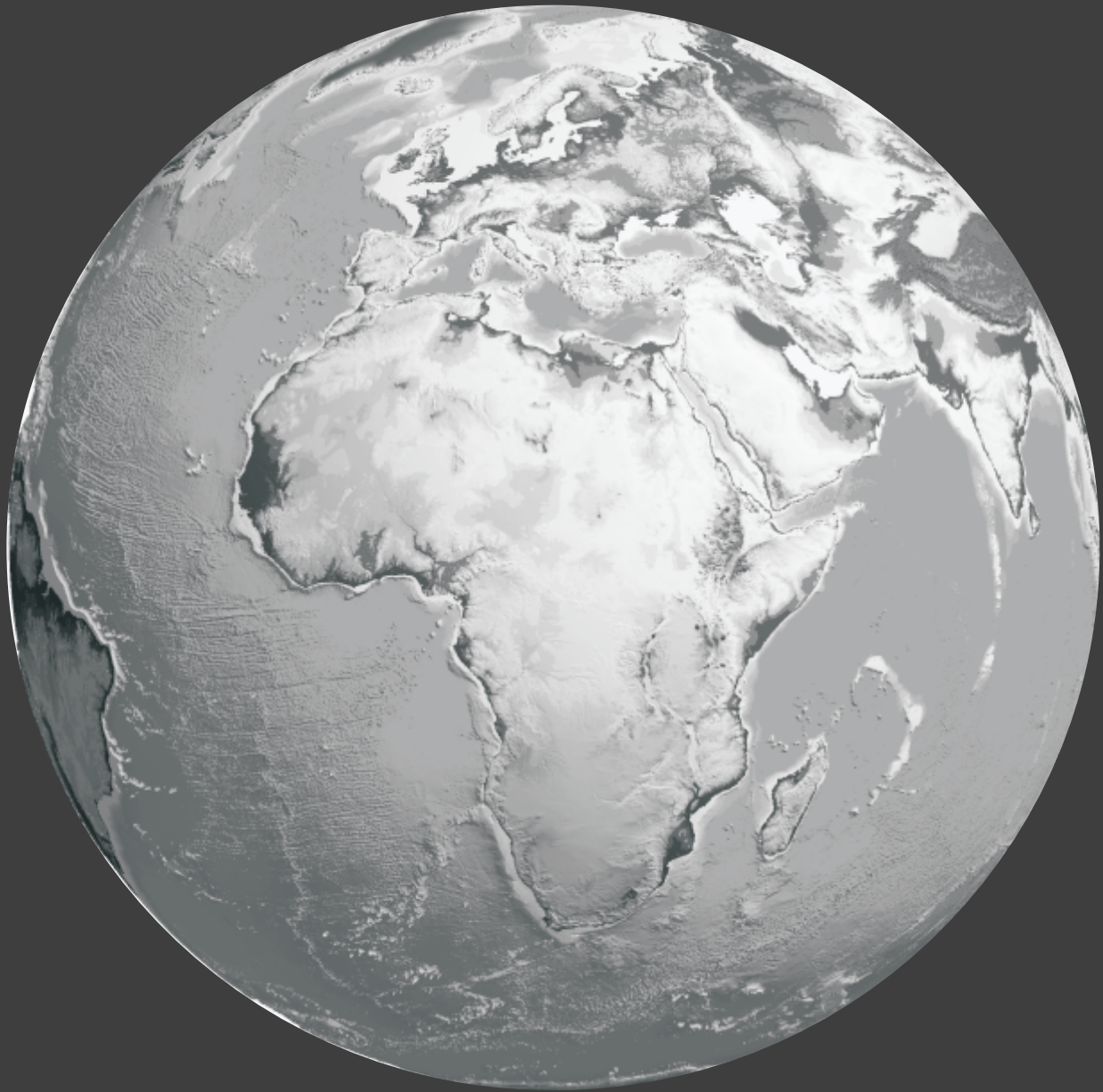
# Africa Trends

Volume 9, Issue 1

January-June 2020

ISSN: 2456-7329

*A Biannual Magazine on Africa*



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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<i><b>In This Issue</b></i>	<i><b>Page</b></i>
<b>EDITOR'S NOTE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>COVER STORY</b>	<b>4-10</b>
<i><b>China's Africa Strategy: Salient Facets and Implications</b></i> <i>G. G. Dwivedi</i>	
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	<b>11-15</b>
<i><b>Israel's Changing Africa Relations</b></i> <i>Jatin Kumar</i>	
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	<b>16-22</b>
<i><b>Russia's Re-engagements in Africa</b></i> <i>Kamala Kumari</i>	
<b>VIEWPOINT</b>	<b>23-32</b>
<i><b>Rising US-Iran Hostilities: Implications for Africa</b></i> <i>Nagapushpa Devendra</i>	
<b>BOOK REVIEW</b>	<b>33-36</b>
<i><b>James Hamill, Africa's Lost Leader: South Africa's Continental Role Since Apartheid</b></i> <i>Aarushi Vikram</i>	

## ***Disclaimer***

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## Editor's Note

While India has been engaging with Africa as a partner in its development, other countries too are exploring opportunities for enhancing their role in the continent of hope. This issue brings to you the role of some such countries.

In the cover story, Maj. Gen. (Dr.) G. G. Dwivedi looks at the changing role of China in Africa and highlights its implications for India. In the first commentary, Dr. Jatin Kumar unveils the trajectory of Israel-Africa relations in the context of the Arab influence in the continent of Africa. In the second commentary, Ms. Kamala Kumari examines the Russian engagement with Africa and suggests new areas for further cooperation that Russia might ponder upon. In the viewpoint, Ms. Nagapushpa Devendra focuses on the role of Iran in Africa and suggests that it might be detrimental to American interests on the continent. Ms. Aarushi Vikram reviews James Hamill's "Africa's Lost Leader: South Africa's Continental Role Since Apartheid" which reveals factors that have constrained the emergence of South Africa as a 'hegemon' in the continent.

We welcome your feedback!

## Cover Story

### CHINA'S AFRICA STRATEGY: SALIENT FACETS AND IMPLICATIONS

China's engagement with Africa is an important component of its grand strategy. Chinese investment in Africa has expanded both in scope and size, marking a definite shift from the traditional model of 'resources for infrastructure'. Today, even the African governments are well aware of Chinese interests and have refined their negotiating skills to pursue their objectives.

G. G. Dwivedi\*

#### Background

On assuming mantle of Fifth Generation leadership of People's Republic of China (PRC), President Xi Jinping unfolded his China Dream (*Zhong Meng*); 'prosperous and powerful' China. It envisioned restoration of China's past grandeur and rejuvenation (*fuxing*), given China was a global economic power for better part of the last two millenniums. To extend its strategic outreach, Xi pronounced China's 'international economic cooperation vision' in 2013 which later got incarnated as 'Belt Road Initiative' (BRI). The BRI covers Eurasia, South-South East Asia and Africa. The underlying rationale is to use abundant wealth as soft power to extend its influence through 'cheque book diplomacy'. Alongside, the 'Maritime Silk Route' initiative was also launched to effectively control the maritime space.

**Till 1990s, China's influence in Africa was rather limited...**

Till 1990s, China's influence in Africa was rather limited and its economic engagement insignificant. Main thrust of Beijing's diplomatic activities then was to defend its core interests like 'One China' principle and winning over friends across Africa. Over last two decades, Beijing has adopted a proactive approach to engage

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with Africa. To position itself as a leader of the developing world, China has expanded its scope of bilateral and multilateral engagements. Africa is integral to Beijing's grand design to shape a new global order

China's changing approach to Africa is driven by its national interests; namely continent's strategic location, oil and rare earth metals besides fish. While China's engagement with Africa is multi-dimensional, its geo political intent often overrides economic considerations. China has evolved a clear 'Africa Policy' enunciated in its updated 2015 White Paper.<sup>1</sup>

Africa on the other hand does not have an overt China policy.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, African leaders are increasingly treating China as a great power. Broad objectives of Africa China policy include mobilising Chinese financial resources, winning Beijing's support in the international arena and seeking alternate development partners

China's Africa strategy has yielded considerable success in building close ties with nations of the continent and Beijing an ideal test case in projecting its influence beyond its borders. This paper delves into the salient facets of China's Africa Strategy and its implications.

## Salient Facets

### Changed Approach

Chinese approach with regards to engagement with Africa has undergone significant change over the years. While infrastructure remains predominant, China's engagement with the region has evolved significantly driven by new narrative. It is no more about resources or offering blank cheques and guaranteed results. Instead, the focus is on creating opportunities to fast track economic development through major infrastructure projects. These are in sync with Beijing's global ambitions. Most of the investments are being undertaken by Chinese state owned companies to facilitate nation's exports.

China's Africa strategy 2.0 has four overarching components. These are: access to natural resources particularly oil and gas, tap huge market for Chinese exports, strengthen Sino-African relations to enhance international influence and play more constructive role in regional stability. Even the African governments look up to China to contribute to their economic development through aid, investment, infrastructure development and trade. Some even aspire to replicate China's rapid economic development model. Essential facets of China's Africa strategy are enumerated in the succeeding paras.

### Economic Engagement

Chinese economic engagement with Africa has grown over the years. In terms of investment, as per Global Tracker, between 2005-18, it stands at \$299 billion.<sup>3</sup> Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) especially in technology and 'Small and Medium Enterprises' are critical component of China's current investment policy in Africa. In terms of FDI growth rate, Chinese investment increased by 24 per cent during 2010-14 while American FDI grew only by 10

**China's changing approach to Africa is driven by its national interests...**

**China's Africa strategy 2.0 has four overarching components.**

per cent. Chinese financing helps closing massive infrastructure gap estimated at \$170 billion per year by the African Development.<sup>4</sup>

As per McKinsey, there are over 10,000 Chinese owned companies operating in Africa; Huawei and Transsion have become as well-known as General Electric and Coca-Cola. Low-cost smart phones as ZTE and Tecno are gaining increasing market share, with latter claiming 25 per cent of continent's smart phone market.<sup>5</sup> Jack Ma owner of Alibaba launched \$10 million initiative for the African entrepreneurs. There is significant competition amongst the Chinese companies vying for the same contracts. More than 25 per cent of Chinese investment is concentrated in Nigeria and Angola.

Third summit meeting of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held in Beijing in 2018 where vast majority of Africa's 55 countries top leaders participated. Xi Jinping committed \$60 billion in new financing for Africa. It marked a shift in focus revealing China's

**...the reason for the shift is the effort to rebrand China in Africa...**

attempt to shed the tag of 'neo-colonialism'.<sup>6</sup> From traditional model of 'resource for infrastructure', China apparently is recasting towards next stage of equity investment.<sup>7</sup> One of the reason for the shift is the effort to rebrand China in Africa in the wake of global accusations of Beijing engineering debt traps. Case in point is China's occupation of Kenya's profitable Mombasa port where China had lent 550 billion Kenya Shilling for Kenya's Railway project which, Nairobi is unable to pay.<sup>8</sup>

Djibouti is another a country in severe debt distress as a result of excessive Chinese borrowing, with public external debt as percent of GDP increasing from 50% to 85% in two years.<sup>9</sup>

### **Military Dimensions and UN Peace Keeping**

For many years, Chinese leaders dismissed external military deployments as characteristic of Western imperialism. Hence, until recently, experts considered China's relations with the African states to be focussed mostly on economic matters. In fact Africa's relations with the major powers appeared to follow a pattern; collaboration with US in defence and counter terrorism and with China in trade-economic arena. Over the past decade, China's role in

**China's policy with regards to defence in Africa is significantly different from US strategy.**

peace and security has grown rapidly through arms sale, military cooperation and peace keeping deployments in Africa. It is has made efforts to adopt a systematic pan-African approach to security. China's policy with regards to defence in Africa is significantly different from US strategy. It is a comprehensive blend of trade cum investment alongside cultural exchanges, medical assistance and anti-piracy operations.

It was in 2008, the Chinese Navy undertook its first operational deployment beyond Asia-Pacific in the Gulf of Aden to support UN sanctioned anti-piracy task force. In March 2011, Beijing deployed a warship to evacuate Chinese nationals in the wake of mounting violence in Libya. Since 2012, People Liberation Army (PLA) has been sending combat troops to high risk theatres like Northern Mali and Southern Sudan. Currently around 2500 Chinese troops

and police personnel are deployed across the continent. In September 2015, China joined UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) and built 8000 strong peace keeping standby force.<sup>10</sup> Beijing also allocated \$1 billion over 10 years to UN peacekeeping and development fund besides \$100 million in new funding to the African Union's rapid deployment capability.

In 2016, PLA located troops in Djibouti, with ten years lease at \$20 million annually; its first permanent overseas deployment.<sup>11</sup> All these moves are in sync with the 'New Historic Missions' Doctrine, which calls for an expeditionary capability which can safeguard growing Chinese interests on the African Continent, maintain naval presence in the Western Indian Ocean, protect merchant ships from piracy and support its UN missions in the region.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, China passed a counter- terrorism law authorizing PLA's deployment on overseas counter terrorism missions. PLA has also established as active partner in the defence diplomacy encompassing training, arms sale and establishment of military facilities.

**All these moves are in sync with the 'New Historic Missions' Doctrine,...**

At the China-Africa 'Defence and Security Forum' 2018, organised by China's Ministry of National Defence, Beijing showcased an increasingly strategic approach to its defence relations with the African countries. According to recent data provided by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), between 2009-13 and 2014-18, States in Sub-Saharan Africa received 25 per cent of total arms shipment with top five importers being Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Cameroon and Senegal.<sup>13</sup> China was the second largest supplier of weapons to Sub- Sahara Africa after Russia, accounting for 22 per cent.

### Soft Power Projection

In its pursuit to acquire great power status, soft power with Chinese characteristics has been the core of Beijing's grand policy. It is primarily driven through non-coercive approach combining politico-diplomatic measures along with economic initiatives and education cum cultural exchanges. China's persistent claims about its peaceful rise enables it to soft sell various projects through attractive loan options or gifts-case in point funding of \$200 million African Union Headquarters. Today total Chinese diaspora in Africa is estimated at one million.

Since the 1960s, in the garb of anti- colonial initiatives, political party training has been an important element of China's engagement with Africa, steered by its 'Central Party School' to export ideology and culture. Over a period of time, these programs have been restructured and expanded in scope, becoming highly technical, hands on to share China's experience; its model of economic development and governance. Wang Huning is the architect of Chinese concept of soft power to achieve nation's strategic objectives.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese model is based on the subordination of military and government to the party and state sponsored capitalism.

**..., in the garb of anti-colonial initiatives, political party training has been an important element of China's engagement with Africa,...**



## Implications

China's engagement with Africa is a critical element of Beijing's strategy to regain its rightful place in the global polity. Africa provides China an excellent platform to test its ability to exert influence in the extended neighbourhood. China's role in Africa defies conventional approach as it has astutely combined its role as a long established diplomatic partner and of late as an investor. Chinese interests in Africa are multi-prong; include trade, security, diplomacy and soft power. Beijing is a major aid donor but its intent and aid practices are often misunderstood. It has adopted benign approach vis-à-vis other nations like the US, wherein it portrays as the flag bearer of the developing world. China also refrains from paying heed to American values of democratizations and mode of governance.

### **China's engagement with Africa is a critical element of Beijing's strategy to regain its rightful place in the global polity.**

As per Rand Corporation report, China has sought a constructive role as a contributor to the stability of the region, partly to mitigate security related threats to its economic interests. African governments look up China to lend political recognition and legitimacy as also contribute to their economic development. They also expect China to deal with them in ways that US and Western governments do not. China is the largest trading partner of Africa and has economic ties with the continent have expanded over the years. Overall, African officials view China's role positively.<sup>15</sup>

However, China's presence in Africa is not without controversy. Some nations are critical of Chinese engagement with respect to poor labour condition, unsustainable developmental practices and unfair negotiation deals by taking advantage of African government relative weakness. In few cases resentment at Chinese business practices has let to popular protest and violence. Many countries have been pushed into debt trap due to Beijing's BRI; Kenya being the latest victim. Even the Chinese policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Africa has come under scrutiny.

### **Even the Chinese policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Africa has come under scrutiny.**

While USA and China may not be strategic rivals in Africa, the two are in competition due to conflicting business interest. Chinese engagement in Africa has been primarily focussed on the extraction of natural resources, infrastructure development and manufacturing, with 'no string attached' approach. US on the other hand has concentrated on high-tech trade and services as also on aid through policies aimed at promoting democracy, good governance and human development. Mr John Bolton former 'National Security Adviser' to President Trump while outlining US Administration new Africa strategy had stated: "greatest threat to America in Africa comes not from migration or extremism but from China due to Beijing's corrupt and predatory business practices."<sup>16</sup>

India's engagement with Africa was summed up in two words; "Continuity and Change", by Shri H V Shringla, Foreign Secretary recently in a speech at a conference on Africa in New Delhi.<sup>17</sup> He further elaborated that India's relationship with Africa has been advanced

using consultative and responsive mechanism under the rubric of India-Africa Forum Summit. India's association with Africa is more about facilitating the capacity building of African people. There are thousands of African students studying in India at any given point. Thirteen of the current or former Presidents, Vice Presidents and PMs have studied at institutions in India. PM Modi in his speech to the Ugandan Parliament in 2019 had said that India's priority is Africans: every man, woman and child in Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The 2015 Summit in New Delhi saw participation from 54 countries of African Continent. India's trade with Africa in 2019 was valued at \$69 billion.<sup>19</sup> Delhi's bilateral partnership with Africa is defined by the spirit of 'developing together as equals' with emphasis on capacity building, skill development and investment in 'Small and Medium Enterprises'. While Indian projects have had positive impact on lives of Africans, there is a definite realisation that the partnership is yet to attain its full potential. Poor track record of project delivery and implementation in comparison to China is one area of principle concerns. Indian Government has enunciated "Ten Guiding Principles for India-Africa Engagement" in July 2018 to have coherent Africa policy in place. Whereas India cannot compete with China's economic prowess, Delhi can definitely take advantage of growing realisation in Africa about Beijing's terms of engagements which are being resisted.

**While Indian projects have had positive impact on lives of Africans, there is a definite realisation that the partnership is yet to attain its full potential.**

China's engagement with Africa is an important component of its grand strategy. Chinese investment in Africa has expanded both in scope and size, marking a definite shift from the traditional model of 'resources for infrastructure'. Today, even the African governments are well aware of Chinese interests and have refined their negotiating skills to pursue their objectives. Still, Chinese presence in Africa has not been without controversy. India needs a coherent Africa policy and leverage its inherent advantage of goodwill, marked by human touch. Given its strategic location and vast growth opportunities, Africa will be an arena of inter power rivalry, with China being a major player.

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<sup>1</sup> White Paper, 'China Africa Policy', 2015, at <http://www.chinadaily.com.in>world>2015-12> (Accessed on January 28, 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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## Commentary

### ISRAEL'S CHANGING AFRICA RELATIONS

Israel's outreach to Africa has been an integral part of its 'peripheral diplomacy doctrine' of the 1950s and 1960s which seems to be revived in Netanyahu's 'Return to Africa policy'. Additionally, varied factors such as fear of expansion of Iranian influence in the African region have also compelled Israel to engage more actively with Africa.

**Jatin Kumar\***

Israel's relations with African countries go back to the late 1950s when it began extending significant support to many African countries undergoing decolonisation.<sup>1</sup> Since then the relations have experienced many fluctuations with a major shift seen in the past few years. There has been an accelerated improvement under the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu, who proactively pursues an African region centric 'Return to Africa policy'.

The relations began to flourish with the setting up of an Israeli consulate in Accra (Ghana) in 1956.<sup>2</sup> The decade spanning 1956 to late 1960s marked a golden period in Israel-African relations under the leadership of then Foreign Minister Golda Meir.<sup>3</sup> Israel successfully established diplomatic missions in 32 African countries till the mid-1960s and under Meir's initiative fostered closer relations with leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Israel offered considerable aid to the newly independent countries in areas such as agriculture, medicine, defence, infrastructure, setting up of educational and professional training institutions. This benefited Israel since these new countries served as favourable markets for Israeli products.

**...these new countries served as favourable markets for Israeli products.**

The above engagements were guided by the Israeli foreign policy interest of attracting a large number of votes which these newly independent African countries held in the different international bodies such as the United Nation (UN).<sup>5</sup> Israel intended on leveraging these votes to overcome international isolation and gain global acceptance.

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Israel enjoyed cordial ties with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was formed in 1963 and hosted a delegation of conciliation in 1971, comprising Presidents of Senegal, Nigeria, Zaire and Cameroon in order to ensure advancement of peace with its neighbouring countries.<sup>6</sup> In addition, around 30 Israeli missions commenced operation in various African countries until 1973 “and hundreds of experts from the Israel Foreign Ministry’s Centre for International Cooperation (MASHAV) guided, trained and managed large projects in all these fields”.<sup>7</sup>

The relations underwent a rough phase in 1967 with the defeat of the Arabs in the June war “as Israel began to be perceived as a colonizing state”.<sup>8</sup> The relations were further strained due to the 1973 Arab-Israeli war which resulted in many Sub-Saharan African countries severing diplomatic relations with Israel and inclining towards Arab countries. It allowed them to receive cheap oil and financial aid from the Arab states during the global oil crisis which gripped the region at that time.<sup>9</sup> The diplomatic engagements were substituted by business and covert military ties between Israel and Africa in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

**A US-tilted unipolar world in the post-cold war period provided a conducive environment for the normalisation of ties.**

The 1980s witnessed a gradual improvement in ties between Israel and countries such as Zaire, Liberia, Cote D’Ivoire and Cameroon. These positive developments continued into the late 1990s, when official ties between Israel and another 39 African countries were re-established.<sup>11</sup> This was encouraged by the signing of the Oslo Peace agreement between Israel-PLO in 1993 and the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994, which successfully eliminated the previously existing political obstacles preventing African countries from reaching out to Israel.<sup>12</sup> A US-tilted unipolar world in the post-cold war period provided a conducive environment for the normalisation of ties.

**Israel’s Return to Africa**

Since the mid-2000s, Israel’s engagement with the African continent has intensified through the signing of various agreements and investment programs aimed at infrastructural development and aiding the agriculture and energy sectors. Many Israeli firms are operating in Africa such as Innovation: Africa, which have shared their technological expertise with villages in African countries such as Senegal, Cameroon, South Africa, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup>

The ties between Israel and some of the African countries were revitalised in 2016 with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s state visit to Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda). This was followed by a visit of President of Chad, Idriss Deby, to Israel in November 2018. Furthermore, in April 2019, Israel opened its embassy in Kigali (Capital of Rwanda) and operationalised direct flight between Tel Aviv and Kigali.<sup>14</sup> All the above initiatives were in pursuance of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s ‘Return to Africa policy’ and his constant efforts helped establish diplomatic ties with countries such as Guinea (2016), Chad (2019) and Rwanda (2019).

Apart from diplomatic outreach, Israel's engagement with Africa includes investment in areas such as green energy, agricultural productivity enhancement and provision of clean water. To effectuate the same Israel and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) signed a MoU in June 2017.<sup>15</sup>

As part of this agreement, Israel based Energiya Global committed an investment to the tune of \$1 billion by 2021 aimed at green power projects in 15 West African countries.<sup>16</sup> The private sector participation has been equally forthcoming as evident by initiatives such as provision of water efficient seed to farmers in the agriculture sector. Israeli companies such as Innovation: Africa and NUFiltration have played a significant role in providing clean water to various African countries. To help eradicate Cholera in Cameroon, in 2018, Israeli Ambassador started a programme to install NUFiltration water purification system in the country.<sup>17</sup> Similar technologies are also being used in areas of Ghana (Pediatorkorpe) where kidney failure due to polluted water is common.

**...the emerging challenges in the African region have further expanded the opportunities for engagement between Israel and Africa.**

In the defence and security domain, the emerging challenges in the African region have further expanded the opportunities for engagement between Israel and Africa. The security threat caused by the groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabab have necessitated security innovations in the region and in such a situation Israel has proved to be a dependable technology provider.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the African region, especially Sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as an appealing market for Israel's sophisticated defence equipment and technologies<sup>19</sup>, with its defence exports reaching \$275 million in 2016.<sup>20</sup>

Israel's relationship with the African countries is also vital from its security perspective. For instance, Sudan has been a major irritant for Israel since the late 1940s, participating in the 1948 and 1967 wars against it. It has also served as a smuggling route for weapons to Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip.<sup>21</sup> However, the relations with Sudan have significantly improved in the last few years.

**Israel's relationship with the African countries is also vital from its security**

## Conclusion

Israel's outreach to Africa has been an integral part of its 'peripheral diplomacy doctrine'<sup>22</sup> of the 1950s and 1960s which seems to be revived in Netanyahu's 'Return to Africa policy'. Additionally, varied factors such as fear of expansion of Iranian influence in the African region have also compelled Israel to engage more actively with Africa.

The African region holds immense potential in terms of the market it offers for defence, agriculture, energy and other commercial goods. Since the African economies are in their nascent growth stage, Israel can benefit from its exports to Africa of goods and services in the fields of tourism, health, irrigation, to name a few. Israeli investment in Africa in the

form of establishment of firms and introduction of its technological know-how in the rural areas, have helped create new employment opportunities.

**Israel's relations with Africa will benefit both in the economic, political and security arena.**

Thus, Israel's relations with Africa will benefit both in the economic, political and security arena. Although the opportunities for engagement are vast, there are a few challenges that need to be addressed. Jihadist groups in East Africa have time and again threatened Israel's interests in the region. Though this will hamper Israel's development initiatives, it provides scope for collaboration between Israel and African countries in tackling terrorism related problems.

While the smoothening of Israel's relations with some of the Arab countries has removed a major roadblock for improving ties with the African region, the progress on Israel-Palestinian peace process could create a conducive environment for deepening Israel-Africa ties. However, internal stability in the political and security domains within Africa will remain prerequisites for ensuring the same.

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## Commentary

### RUSSIA'S RE-ENGAGEMENTS IN AFRICA

The impression of Russia's political influence is embedded in African society and is being further nurtured by Russia. With president Putin assuming power in 2000, Russia's re-engagement in Africa has grown manifold and Russia is again ready to be a major player in Africa.

**Kamala Kumari\***

Africa is a geopolitical arena where many big powers have been engaging either due to their own strategic interests or due to the changing dynamics of geopolitics. Russia is no exception. Russia's interests in Africa are mainly due to heavy investments in raw resource megaprojects and as one of the major suppliers of arms. However, Russia needs to unveil an ambitious and new vision that could satisfy the requirement of African countries and subsequently could be leveraged for tangible rewards for Russia, and the year 2019 set the tone for such actions.

#### Historical Background

Russia has had links with Africa since centuries. Russians, several times in their history had interacted with Africa, even though Africa was never a Russian colony. It is believed that Russian explorers, sailors and merchants did visit Africa including Afanasy Nikitin, who visited Ethiopia in the 1470s. Orthodox missionaries from Russia met Ethiopian and Coptic Christians numerous times. Even Peter the Great had engagements in Madagascar and Ethiopia. The first diplomatic relationships were established in 1898 with Ethiopia and South Africa however, Cairo and Alexandria had consulates even in the 18th century.<sup>1</sup>

In the Soviet era, Russia had been a significant supplier of arms to Africa. At that time, Soviet arms trade was largely confined to countries that were ideologically aligned, or at least friendly to USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), giving the commercial relationships clear Cold War overtones.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Soviet Russia and African countries was basically "an exchange in all sectors: political (socialist policy), economic, social (sending Soviet teachers and doctors to work in those countries and (on the other

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hand), reception of African students in Soviet schools) and military (sending weapons and technicians)".<sup>3</sup>

The Soviet Russia-Africa engagement in the real sense commenced at an opportune time in the early 1950s. Change of power in Soviet-Russia due to Stalin's death coincided with the independence movements in Africa, generating interest in Soviet Russia for the possibilities of engagement "with the newly independent states and the anti-colonial movements across the continent". However, the first major arms transfer by Soviet Union took place in 1955, to Egypt. Ten years later, Soviet Union established diplomatic ties with the newly-independent African countries namely Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Sudan, Morocco and Libya. These countries were invited to Moscow in 1961; "to attend the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) with the aim to outline the vision..., of how the developing African countries could bypass capitalism and advance straight to socialism, fostered by the USSR".

**The Soviet Russia-Africa engagement in the real sense commenced at an opportune time in the early 1950s.**

Subsequently, "one of the most prestigious schools in Moscow bore the name of Patrice Lumumba, the Soviet-supported Congolese independence leader brutally executed in 1961; and till 1992, the Patrice Lumumba University recruited and educated generations of foreign leaders, especially African leaders, (and was just one of the many such ways in which the Soviet Union cultivated ties with Africa)".<sup>4</sup> Transcending its brief strategic hibernation during the last years of the Soviet era and in the initial year's post-1991, Russia has managed well in the new scenario, giving a new direction to its bilateral relations with different African countries. When Vladimir Putin became the president in 2000, he created a new dynamic for foreign policy making and foreign policy that was holistic. He systematically restored the position Russia had lost after the disintegration of Soviet Union and the turbulent decade that followed.

President Vladimir Putin became the first ever Russian leader to visit Sub-Saharan Africa in 2006. This visit was followed by series of ministerial level bilateral visits to South Africa, Angola and Ethiopia, resulting in surge of Russian investments. President Dmitry Medvedev accompanied by a delegation of 300 businessmen visited Nigeria, Angola, and Namibia in June 2009. This visit indicated "Russia's intensifying desire to foster investment and involve and engage with the region. For example, with South Africa, the political initiatives included, a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, covering joint work in healthcare and intellectual property rights".<sup>5</sup>

Russia's interests in Africa are not new however, to compete with other major powers and keeping the current geopolitical realities in mind, Russia must make sound investments so as to have access to natural resources and other business opportunities.

### **Russia-Africa Relationship Today**

For Russia, Africa is strategically and geopolitically important, as the developing economies could emerge as significant markets for Russia's arms and its strategic interests. Post the

**...economic sanctions constrict Russia's trade with the West, making Africa an attractive alternative opportunity for investment.**

sanctions on Russia imposed by the West after the Ukrainian crisis; the Russo-African relationship has become an important aspect of their international engagements. The economic sanctions constrict Russia's trade with the West, making Africa an attractive alternative opportunity for investment. Apart from trade and commerce, the fifty-four countries of Africa are potential supporters for Russia in the UN as "three of the 54 countries sit in the Security Council; ... and form the largest and most coherent voting bloc"<sup>6</sup>. Also, Russia's presence in Africa provides credibility to its status as a global power.

Besides, Russia's trade with Africa increased tenfold between 2000 and 2012. Russia, in fact, is a better alternative to US weaponry, as US weaponry is costly, both politically and monetarily. In 2014, when the Nigerian request for Cobra attack helicopters was rejected by US, Nigeria cancelled the U.S. military training program to fight Boko Haram and instead opted for Russia. Till date Russia continues to train Nigerian Special Forces. The Russian soldiers involved in peacekeeping operations in Africa, surpass those of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States combined. Apart from these, Russia has invested heavily in raw resource megaprojects. It, signed "a \$4 billion deal with Uganda, to build and operate a crude oil refinery; and \$3 billion deal with Zimbabwe, to develop platinum mine"<sup>7</sup>.

**Russia has also expanded its ties with Egypt...**

Russia has also expanded its ties with Egypt, the bilateral trade already doubled to \$5.5 billion in 2014; in June 2015 they held their first joint naval drills and in October 2016, military exercises. Later, Russia negotiated with Egypt to build its first nuclear power plant. Russia also deployed Special Forces to

Egypt on the Libyan border, signaling, Russia's growing role in Libya, a country with the world's ninth largest reserves of oil. Relations with Tunisia and Algeria have also deepened. For the first time, in the history of Russia-Tunisia relations, a Memorandum of Understanding on nuclear cooperation with Tunisia was signed in June 2015 which grew into a nuclear cooperation agreement in September 2016. Algeria has been a favourite of Russia as it remains a "top buyer of Russian arms and also signed a \$1 billion arms deal, supposedly the largest export contract for main battle tanks in the world."<sup>8</sup> The two countries also have agreements on energy and counterterrorism. The draft proposal to legalise 'private military companies' (PMCs, meaning 'mercenaries'), in Russia, could give Russia, a competitive edge over its rivals and consequently also, enable Russia to leverage its strategic advantage; by "helping Russia carve out a niche as a reliable security provider in Africa and to reap energy, mineral, economic, and other 'rewards' in incentivising Russia, to undertake a full-on 'Pivot to Africa' policy"<sup>9</sup>.

By February 2018, "nine planes with weapons were sent by Russia along with contractors to train local soldiers; and secure mining projects; marking the beginning of highest-profile military foray in Sub-Saharan Africa"<sup>10</sup>. Since the 2014 economic sanctions, in sub-Saharan Africa, alone, Russia has signed 19 military cooperation deals, with Ethiopia, Nigeria and

Zimbabwe; and simultaneously reviving some of the so called lapsed relationships due to the Soviet Union's disintegration. Russia further aims, like many others such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to set up bases that will facilitate so as to "mediate in diplomatic stand-offs and strike business deals".<sup>11</sup>

Russia's push into Africa is broadly for arms sales and economic influence, as it has great potential for cooperation based on mutual interest. However, Russia's objective is also geopolitical and geostrategic in nature. The North African countries on the Mediterranean's southern coast could potentially favour Russia, a traditional land power, in its military moves in the Middle East and North Africa, which would eventually, limit the West's ability to maneuver; and also give access to additional warm water ports.<sup>12</sup> Speaking at Russia's premier annual Valdai conference in October 2016, President Putin said, "Africa cannot be on the periphery of international relations".<sup>13</sup> In fact, Russia, with help from its trusted partner China, could have more robust engagement, as it will be able to partner to protect China's dream project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - particularly the ones which fall in Africa, in exchange for lucrative commercial contracts in energy or mining deals, as China controls 'a sizeable amount of extractive industries' in Africa.<sup>14</sup>

**Russia's push into Africa is broadly for arms sales and economic influence,...**

The prospects of deepening the Russia Africa engagement are huge and in the process, it might face some challenges as well, or there may encounter concerns in terms of competition, but nothing serious that can hamper the process of this engagement process entirely.

**The prospects of deepening the Russia Africa engagement are huge...**

### Exploring New Areas of Cooperation

Times have changed significantly for Russia, as its efforts to regain its Soviet-era influence in Africa have achieved success. Moreover, "Russia is clearly showing that, open partnership with and support of Africa remains a priority".<sup>15</sup>

On January 14, 2018, marking the 60th anniversary of Russia-Ghana diplomatic relations, Foreign Ministers of Russia and Ghana, exchanged congratulatory messages and "emphasized the traditionally friendly nature of Russia-Ghana relations hinting of an active political dialogue on key international and African affairs, and agreed to improve mutually beneficial cooperation in economy, trade and culture as well as other areas".<sup>16</sup>

African countries have been eager to find a viable third balancing partner and Russia seems far better suited than any other country, to play the role. The ultimate 'reward', of making Russia their strategic partner is to counterbalance any real or imagined fears of, or from China.<sup>17</sup> It is anticipated that, Russia and China may create an environment for 'friendly' and complementary multipolar competition in Africa benefiting and diversifying relationships and solidifying stability in the continent.<sup>18</sup>

**African countries have been eager to find a viable third balancing partner and Russia seems far better suited...**

Russia sees lot of potential in Africa, given the concerns about rising Islamist extremism, in some countries and defense spending across Africa. Russia being the second-largest arms exporter in the world, after the United States, already sells billions of dollars in weapons annually across Africa. And in mid-December 2017, an exemption to arms embargo on Central African Republic was granted by UN following a petition from Russia to supply the country's embattled military with light arms and ammunition.<sup>19</sup> Russian arms are cheaper than American and other West-produced arms, and have a comparative advantage over their competitors. Hence, keeping the importance of the African market for the Russian arms industry, Russia since 2013, has built several service centers in Africa, to maintain and repair Russian helicopters and other arms exports. It also offers modernization programs for existing weapons stocks, providing relatively inexpensive ways to enhance military readiness, suggesting sales are part of a broad package of military technical cooperation and assistance.<sup>20</sup>

**...Russia needs Africa and Africa also needs Russia.**

Bearing the external political and economic challenges in mind, Russia needs Africa and Africa also needs Russia. Since 2014, Russia has signed several deals for cooperation with governments in Sub-Saharan Africa such as 19 military deals, valid for five years and further renewable and also stepped up its efforts to diversify its economic and diplomatic partnerships. Apart from these, there are agreements regarding training as well as coordination for counter-terrorism and piracy.<sup>21</sup> In October 2018 Russia indicated that it will send more equipment and military trainers to Central African Republic, intensifying its military engagement in Africa.<sup>22</sup> Russia's trade with Africa increased from \$5.7 billion in 2009 to \$20 billion in 2018.<sup>23</sup> Also, Russia would continue support in reforming the security sector, for strengthening combat effectiveness and training of the armed forces.<sup>24</sup> In October 2019 Russia once again stated its ambition to expand its existing power with the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, Russia.<sup>25</sup> Putin held back-to-back bilateral meetings, and \$12.5 billion worth of deals were signed<sup>26</sup> with an emphasis on creating more opportunities and posturing to be seen as a global power.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, being a part of BRICS too would enable Russia to play an active role in the future engagements in Africa. President Vladimir Putin met the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on the sidelines of the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. "BRICS remains important as a kind of a balance within the G20 to balance the influence of the G7 grouping... In 2017, BRICS countries' joint contribution to the world economy was 23.6 percent, and according to IMF predictions this is set to rise to 26.8 percent by 2022".<sup>28</sup> The power balance has been affected due to the presence of BRICS countries in African market. As the BRICS member-countries, account for 30% of foreign exchange (over \$ 200 billion), with total investments estimated at 50-60 billion dollars... Subsequently, further consolidation of BRICS and other International implications, are most likely to further shape the Russian-African relations.<sup>29</sup>

**There is further potential for cooperation at multilateral level as well, particularly with India...**

There is further potential for cooperation at multilateral level as well, particularly with India, as India is strategic partner of Russia and would be comfortable working together with Russia in Africa. However, this needs to be further explored.

## Conclusion

The impression of Russia's political influence is embedded in African society and is being further nurtured by Russia. With president Putin assuming power in 2000, Russia's re-engagement in Africa has grown manifold and Russia is again ready to be a major player in Africa. Political and economic compulsion for Russia and Russia becoming a reliable 'third party' for Africa make the Russia-Africa engagement strong and long lasting and is expected to remain so for a long time. In the process, the engagement would deepen and expand and the year 2019, has already set the tone in this regard. In the times to come, Russia, as part of BRICS, could also play significant role in paving way for multilateral cooperation, including along with India.

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## Viewpoint

### RISING US-IRAN HOSTILITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

Iran has already demonstrated its ability to conduct subversive activities in Africa, directly or indirectly through Hezbollah. In the long-run, the US and its allies will view Iranian activities in the continent as threats to their interests. This could trigger an aggressive policy against the Iranian proxies in the continent as they did in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Any such actions can cause profound effects in the region and beyond.

**Nagapushpa Devendra\***

Tension between the US and Iran escalated after the assassination of Iranian military commander, General Qassim Soleimani by the Trump administration on January 3, 2020. Tehran launched a series of missile attacks on a military base that hosts American troops in Iraq. This is the first direct engagement between both the countries since the naval battle precipitating the Vincennes event on July 3, 1998. Though there has been ease in tension after Iran mistakenly shoot down of Ukrainian Flight 752 amid the escalation killing all 176 people on January 8, the crisis is hardly over.

The Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),<sup>1</sup> and its affiliated militias<sup>2</sup> in the region and beyond are still fuming. They issued statements saying that the missile strike in Iraq is only a first step in their reprisal and that the crisis is not over: It has been paused. They have also warned countries that helped Washington to execute the assassination.<sup>3</sup> In response, the US officials said they would preemptively attack Iranian backed forces that they perceived as a threat in the region.<sup>4</sup> International community urged Iran and US to restraint, the offensive and engage through diplomacy.

At this point, the pressure for the Iranian government to retaliate against the US is considerable, but an offensive act against the American troops or bases in the region would eliminate any prospects for the US administration to

**...an offensive act against the American troops or bases in the region would eliminate any prospects for the US administration to reconcile with Iran.**

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reconcile with Iran. Instead, Washington will likely respond with punitive measures and sanctions. Trump administration's maximum pressure policy in the aftermath of US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018, has deteriorated Iranian economy both internationally and domestically. Anti-government demonstrations kept erupting time to time, and its role in Syria and Iraq pushed back. Most importantly, aggressive retaliation would make it harder for Europe and its major allies like Russia and China to continue supporting Tehran in the international forum.

**...Iran also cannot stay quiet given its reputation for leadership in the region.**

On the other hand, Iran also cannot stay quiet given its reputation for leadership in the region. Secondly, lack of response from the government can further widen the fictions between the IRGC and the power centers in Iran, including religious authorities, bureaucracy, and traditional elites in the long-run. But for now, Iranian government is likely to focus

on the internal matters and may use Solemani's assassination to unite the country against US and its allies, particularly Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The IRGC, as well will refrain from attempting any kind of offensive act for two reasons. Firstly, after Solemani, Corps power inside the country has shrunk in the absence of a replacement leader of Solemani's status and power. Secondly, the on-going economic crisis

**...the Corps will try to show their flexibility in responding to internal pressures...**

has placed the Corps in direct confrontation with the people who aren't appeased with their policies outside Iran.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the Corps will try to show their flexibility in responding to internal pressures while not trying to attract further sanctions on their entities, which plays a major role in shaping Iranian economy.<sup>7</sup> At the same time they will attempt to regain its status in home, which might take some time.

However, unlike the Iranian government and the IRGC, its proxy groups or militias are not bound by any such internal or external pressures. Their sole purpose is to cast out American troops from parts of Africa and West Asia.<sup>8</sup> Solemani was like a father figure to these groups. Most of the proxy groups have already vowed vengeance.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it seems likely that if there is any further retaliation, they may not necessarily come from the Iranian government or the IRGC, but will come from these proxy groups in the region who may look for soft targets in areas the US least expects a counterblow.

These developments have put the African nations in a perplexing situation, given their geo-political and geo-economic stakes in the US on the one hand, and their developing strategic partnership with the Iranian government on the other hand. Iran has established close ties in the continent, particularly with the nations that are antagonistic towards US presence, stand against the unilateral actions, and were swift to speak out against the violation of sovereignty of weak states by the great powers in the international forum. To further strengthen Tehran's grip on the continent, the IRGC had pushed forward its agenda of establishing Shi'ite armed forces. They managed to form several proxy groups who have been active in moving against the US and its allies' interests in parts of the African continent.

In the light of this background, Africa may face a challenging situation in future where it must deal with the American interests on the continent. Simultaneously, it needs to secure its interest vis-à-vis the Iranians and take precautionary measures to keep a tap on the activities of various Iranian proxy groups in order to protect the US personnel and civilians in the continent.

### **Africa- new focus of US-Iran rivalry**

Africa has become a new arena of contest between the US and Iran. But, since international focus remains centered on the Persian Gulf and the Levant, Africa's significance is often overlooked. This is surprising given the fact that both sides see so much potential in the continent that they have been developing ties on both economic and security fronts. In the recent months, their race to influence Africa has sharpened. This has forced America to take an aggressive stance, at least rhetorically, to challenge Tehran's ambitions. We also witness a robust foreign policy under the leadership of President Donald Trump.

**Africa has become a new arena of contest between the US and Iran.**

Following 9/11, the US played a major role in Africa due to the US administration's policy of mobilizing the world on the so called, "War on Terror". The US administration rationed out its economic aid for the African nations based on its commitment to countering terrorism, which led to the establishment of strategic US military bases and areas for military exercise.<sup>10</sup> Under the Trump administration, Pentagon's approach to Africa expanded beyond military cooperation. In December 2018, the Trump administration rolled out a new strategy for engaging Africa. The strategy, as outlined by then National Security Adviser John Bolton, is built on the basis of these three aspects:

- i. Advancing American and African prosperity through increased commercial ties
- ii. Enhancing security through counter-terrorism efforts
- iii. Promoting American interests and African "self-reliance" through a more targeted and selective use of the US foreign aid.<sup>11</sup>

In reality, this strategy's over-arching purpose is to contain the Iranian and its allies (Russia-China) influence in the continent. In recent years, Iran's engagement in Africa grew more rapidly than America's. Iran adopted a pragmatic form of diplomacy towards African nations to decrease the impact of the US's unilateral sanction. Trade has become an integral element of new Iran-Africa relationship.

**In recent years, Iran's engagement in Africa grew more rapidly than America's.**

According to Iranian officials, the value of Iranian foreign direct investment in South Africa alone is estimated to be \$135 billion, whereas for the US, despite being the largest trade partner of the continent, its trade with South Africa was \$14 billion in 2018.<sup>12</sup> In 2019, the Iranian investment in South Africa decreased to a very large extent, given its crippled economy and secondary sanctions. It was estimated that trade between Iran and South Africa

was below than \$100 million,<sup>13</sup> whereas the US investment in South Africa was \$7.8 billion in 2019, 6.8% increase from the previous year. Nevertheless, South Africa continued to remain committed to support Iran against the US sanctions.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Iran has developed a special interest in East African countries where there is limited or reduced US naval presence,<sup>15</sup> especially those in the Horn of Africa, and Red Sea.<sup>16</sup> Periodic docking by warships at the ports were pointers of Iranian presence in East Africa. Iranian corps believes that establishing naval bases is not less than developing nuclear technology.<sup>17</sup> Iranian Navy maintains the ports of Sudan,<sup>18</sup> Eritrea,<sup>19</sup> Djibouti,<sup>20</sup> and Tanzania<sup>21</sup> as its primary base in the Red Sea. There are also unsubstantial claims of Tehran using its naval bases in Africa states like Somalia to smuggle weapons<sup>22</sup> along Tanzania for uranium<sup>23</sup>.

### **Periodic docking by warships at the ports were pointers of Iranian presence in East Africa.**

West Africa is vital to US interests in terms of counter-terrorism operations and energy resources. Every year, the US-led exercise is conducted in this part of Africa in order to provide critical training for regional militaries struggling to counter growing terror- activities. However, the US administration is considering the withdrawal some 5000-7000 troops across the continents. This includes 1000 military personnel from West Africa,<sup>24</sup> particularly Niger, Chad and Mali.<sup>25</sup> The US officials warned the administration that the withdrawal will degrade the security situation in this region of West Africa where deep religious-ethnic division, poverty and vast ungoverned space provide an ideal breeding ground for extremism.<sup>26</sup> Taking advantage of this situation, Iran is aggressively trying to acquire political, economic and military support throughout the continent. It has multiple economic projects in states like Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leon, Benin, Nigeria and Ghana.

### **West Africa is vital to US interests in terms of counter-terrorism operations and energy resources.**

For Iran, Nigeria managed to gain particular importance in West Africa, given its largest Muslim population among which five to ten million are Shia's,<sup>27</sup> and strategic importance as one of the oil rich country in the continent. Also Nigeria has the history of supporting Iran, since its Islamic revolution in 1979. Since 2019, Iran is working towards improving its ties with the Nigerian government. Both the nations seek closer cooperation in areas of trade, investment, agriculture and technology transfer. The Iranian delegations have also declared it would explore investment in the automobile, community housing, and pharmaceutical industries.<sup>28</sup>

Iran also tried to influence the country's political system by supporting the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), who does not recognize the authority of the Nigerian government, and views its leaders both Muslim and Christian as corrupt. This group was banned in 2019 over the alleged "acts of terrorism and illegality". So far, Iran has not publically condemned the banning, possibly because it does not want to jeopardize mediation efforts to secure the release of the group's leader Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife.<sup>29</sup>

The African continent integrates well into Iranian policies and ambition to lead an anti-US front. In fact, President Hassan Rouhani has enunciated on several occasions that Iran was with Africa during its fight against the apartheid regime and now it is time for the continent to formulate an independent policy in the face of US aggression. He further stated that Iran enjoys close political, economic, and cultural relations with countries in Africa. And that it should not let the US's illegal sanctions affect Iran-Africa relationship.<sup>30</sup>

**The African continent integrates well into Iranian policies and ambition to lead an anti-US front.**

### Challenges

The US and Iranian attention to Africa is a blessing in disguise for the governments and the people in the continent. The competition has undoubtedly meant a financial and developmental windfall for the region as the two sides seek to re-gain their allegiance. These efforts have drawn the states into regional conflicts, not only between the US and Iran, but also among Iran and its allies like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. For example, in 2012-13, Iranian operatives (IRGC) were arrested in Kenya for planning to attack the US interests in the region.<sup>31</sup> In 2015, Sudan completely severed its ties with Iran over its support to Omar al-Bashir's government and participating in a Saudi-led intervention in the Yemen crisis on behalf of the Sunni Arab alliance. General Mohamd Hamdan Dagalo,<sup>32</sup> the deputy chief of Sudan's new Transitional Military Council, reiterated the same in 2019, when he met Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah.<sup>33</sup> In 2016, two Iranian operatives and their Kenyan driver of local embassy were arrested on the charge of connection with a terrorist act after surveilling the Israeli embassy.<sup>34</sup>

**The competition has undoubtedly meant a financial and developmental windfall for the region ...**

After JCPOA, Iran re-designed its Africa policy to counter the US and its allies. IRGC and its proxy groups in the continent became more cautious and looks for plausible deniability to avoid detection of when, where and who they attack.

During this period, Iran used its soft-power as its ultimate mechanism to export its Islamic ideology more aggressively in the continent. The Iranian Revolution and ensuing events since 1979 has set up Islamism as an ideology to be reckoned with, sweeping up billions around the world along with capitalism and communism. Iran's end goal with the revolution is not to create a state; it is the expansion of the revolution - the one true way of awakening the oppressed and liberating the Third World from colonialism and neo-colonialism.<sup>35</sup>

This revolutionary vision pushed Iran to funds Islamic organizations or cultural centers which allegedly distribute Shi'ite propaganda, and recruits local population to form smaller groups of armed force. It also exports its clergies to African nations, who in turn stage seminars and conferences with local clerics in an effort to indoctrinate Khomeinist doctrine.<sup>36</sup> Representatives from various African countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Chad,

Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria, Mauritania, Senegal and Benin attend these Hajj talks. The outcome of such conferences is generally laced with anti-Saudi Arabia or anti-US propositions.

Exporting its ideology among Africa's vast Muslim community paved the path for Iran to ally with the Shia-based armed forces like IMN in the continent. It is reported that Iran has instructed its strongest ally, the Hezbollah, to increase its training of Nigerians and hoped to use Abuja as a base of operation to launch attacks and thwart Israeli and Western ambitions in the continent.<sup>37</sup> Given the Iranian influence, it comes as no surprise that Soleimani's death

**Iran is also alleged to be covertly engaged with al-Shabab in Mogadishu.**

has triggered "red alert" in Nigeria, fearing reactions by the IMN or other alleged Iranian proxies who have vowed to punish the US for the Baghdad assassination.<sup>38</sup>

Iran is also alleged to be covertly engaged with al-Shabab in Mogadishu. The UN reportedly provided substantial evidence that demonstrates Iran's arming and funding of al-Shabab.<sup>39</sup>

It stated that Somalian fighters were offered various incentives to join Iran-backed Hezbollah's activities in the continent. As per the document, an individual fighter earns at least \$2000, and if the fighters are killed, between \$25,000 to \$30,000 is provided to their family. Also, the fighters after returning home from Lebanon or Syria receives a monthly stipend of \$100 for unspecified period of time.<sup>40</sup>

The most interesting part here is that, while the IMN was contemplating its revenge, Somalian militants of al-Shabab pulled the plug by killing three American civilians in Kenya. In past, Iranian ambassador to the UN, Majid Takht Ravanchi, stated that Iran cannot be held responsible for the actions of other groups in the region and beyond.<sup>41</sup> Here it is notable that

**Hundreds of Iranian Islamic schools and seminaries played a major role...**

States often deny the fact that they are supporting or funding such groups. In most of the cases, other states may not know the amount of support a proxy group receives from another state.<sup>42</sup> Also, proxy groups offer a way of fighting that can limit the escalations.

The attack in Kenya seems to be a grim reminder of that fact that Shia proxies can target American soldiers anywhere in the continent. If we dissect the Iranian support to Shia-based groups in Africa, we discover that its influence is not limited to Nigeria and Somalia (quid pro quo, the US maintains heavy military outposts in both these countries). Though there is little information disclosed on the Tehran purported front in Africa, its activities providing social services through vast network of hospital and orphanages have increased to a large extent in recent years. Hundreds of Iranian Islamic schools and seminaries played a major role in further deepening its ties with African nations. Some of them are as follows:

- i. Senegal: Iran supports and funds the Islamic community whose members are mostly from the Niassene branch of the Tijani brotherhood and students/teachers from the Dakar University;<sup>43</sup>
- ii. South Africa: It supports the Karballah Foundation for Liberation, a Lebanese Islamic

Association; a branch in Johannesburg, which collaborates closely with Islamic Culture and Relation organization of Ahl-al Bait, Cape Town;

- iii. Sierra Leone: The Islamic Organizations in Freetown headed by Ahmad Tejan Sillah<sup>44</sup>
- iv. Tanzania: A seminary called Imamm Sadigh in Dar Es-Salaam;<sup>45</sup>
- v. Sub-Saharan African countries: Al-Mustafa University; adding to that, the university also has branches and seminaries in Cameroon, Malawi, Mali;<sup>46</sup>
- vi. Guinea: The Ahl al-Bait school;
- vii. Ivory Coast: The Zeynab seminary;
- viii. Madagascar: A branch of the university in the capital of Antananarivo. Other affiliated centers include Imam Sadjad Mosque, the RasulAkram Mosque and the Islamic Center of Dar al-Quran in the city of Mahajanga.

Iran has already demonstrated its ability to conduct subversive activities in Africa, directly or indirectly through Hezbollah. The Baghdad assassination is likely to bolster such activities and further stimulate anti-US and anti-Israeli sentiments in the continent. Iran has ordered IRGC to establish smaller groups to target US military bases in the continent. Iranian cells are said to be active in countries like Sudan, Chad, Ghana, Niger, Gambia and the Central African Republic.<sup>47</sup> In the long-run, the US and its allies will view Iranian activities in the continent as threats to their interests. This could trigger an aggressive policy against the Iranian proxies in the continent as they did in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Any such actions can cause profound effects in the region and beyond.

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- <sup>6</sup> The IRGC is not only Iran's most powerful military force but also dominates the country's key economic sectors, such as energy, construction, telecommunication, media, mining, electronics, automobile, banking, nuclear, and more. While IRGC leaders claim their involvement in the economic sector benefits the Iranian people and economy, in reality it spends most of the revenues on military expenditures at home and abroad.
- <sup>7</sup> Solemani was one of the strongest figures in Iran and the region. Reports indicated that he was the potential candidate for the presidential election in 2021 and was one of the chief advisors in the committee appointed by Supreme Leader to choose his successor.
- <sup>8</sup> The extreme political volatility in the region has given rise to several proxy groups. Few are formed with the help of a state or its armed forces and others are forced due to the internal crisis as a result of intervention or conflict. But as long as they share similar goal, a state or its armed forces will help and support them in every possible way, even if a particular group has not asked for it.
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## Book Review

James Hamill, *Africa's Lost Leader: South Africa's Continental Role Since Apartheid*, Routledge, UK, 2018.

ISSN: 1944-5571

ISBN: 978-1-138-54965-4

**Aarushi Vikram\***

James Hamill, in his book 'Africa's Lost Leader: South Africa's Continental Role Since Apartheid' debunks the perception of South Africa as the undisputed leader of Africa and paints South Africa as nothing more than a fragile hegemon. He supports this by arguing that South Africa has been reluctant to assume a hegemonic role, for a range of historical and contemporary reasons. South Africa has generated significant resentment, suspicion and even outright opposition from other African states. It has been unable to popularise its ideals in Africa or build a consensus around them. Lastly, South Africa has suffered from structural flaws in its economy, along with glaring weaknesses in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) created by chronic underfunding. He elaborates on these reasons through four parts in his book. Chapter one gives insight into the country's regional policy under its three post-apartheid presidents: Nelson Mandela, Jacob Zuma, and Thabo Mbeki. Chapter two is an analysis of South Africa's numerous image problems in the continent. Chapter three looks into the country's need to focus on domestic socio-economic change, at the expense of a deep, sustained engagement with other African states and finally, chapter four examines the shortfalls of the SANDF.

Hamill introduces South Africa as a hegemonic power. He writes about the perception of South Africa as Africa's natural leader, peace and conflict manager and chief international interlocutor on security and economic development and balances it out with the contrasting reality of the South African government's lack of strategic vision for a regional role which has led it to engage in dangerous improvisation and ad hoc decision-making. He states that this perception of South Africa as Africa's "natural leader" comes as a result of using economic power as an instrument of coercion with non-compliance coming at a high cost along with an increasingly militarised South African state.

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In the first chapter, he begins by looking into the South African perception under President Nelson Mandela. Under Mandela, South Africa was extremely popular. This can be credited to the personality of Mandela, his dissonance regarding division and demagoguery, and his focus on reconciliation and nation-building. However, despite his popularity, South Africa was viewed with suspicion by some of the continent. There was also resentment which stemmed from the presumptuousness of a newly reconstituted state which was led by a movement which was the recipient of extensive African assistance throughout its liberation struggle. The word 'hegemony' had also been strategically replaced by the more diplomatic 'partnership'. Even so, Hamill opines that Mandela's foreign-policy interventions were unpredictable to the point of eccentricity. This was viewed by other states as South Africa seeking to dominate the region and impose its values, which was not received well.

Contrarily, under Mbeki, there was a clear shift in the emphasis and tone of South Africa's strategic priorities, especially in relation to the rest of the continent. Mbeki attempted to recover from the perception of South Africa under Mandela as 'a white state with a black leader' by developing partnerships with key African powers such as Nigeria, Ghana, Algeria, Mozambique and Tanzania. Mbeki's reorientation of South Africa succeeded on two contradictory fronts - South Africa's credentials among the continent's elites, as also the country's role as a regional norm entrepreneur seeking to promote its democratic values as wider African values, which is the behaviour of a classic hegemon. While Mbeki managed to improve South Africa's political standing within Africa, but his diplomatic strategy risked depleting the moral capital South Africa had accumulated in Western states, even though emergence of China as an important African actor provided an alternative to the Western model of political economy.

While Mandela and Mbeki's leadership had some successes and limitations, Jacob Zuma's presidency failed to make a significant impression on South African foreign policy and was unable to articulate the broadest contours of a 'Zuma Doctrine'. Zuma shifted the focus of South African politics to domestic politics as a contrast to Mbeki who focused more on South Africa's standing in the rest of the continent. However, Zuma's achievements have been negligible, and his presidency consistently reflected his near-continuous struggle for political survival.

In his second chapter, Hamill explores the image problem in Africa. Hamill recognises a dissonance in the Western perception of South Africa's image and the continental perception. While Western states viewed democratic South Africa as one with potential for positive influence on the continent and the state best equipped to lead it, many states within the continent resented Pretoria's paternalistic role and questioned its legitimacy to act as the leader and chief advocate for the continent. There was great distrust and at times, outright opposition, to South Africa as a leader within the continent. These perceptions led to two-fold outcomes for South Africa. While it offered a certain legitimacy to the state as an international actor, it was viewed as 'a bully, a self-interested hegemon that acts in bad faith' within the continent. For instance, while this perception led to South Africa being invited to join the BRICS group, other African states viewed this as the organisation providing an opportunity for South Africa to pursue its national interests to their detriment.

Another factor detrimental to the South African image was the prevalent xenophobia within the state. As Hamill notes, a toxic mixture of deprivation and resentment repeatedly resulted in xenophobic attacks on black communities. Furthermore, the government's post-apartheid immigration policies tended to be framed in a 'foreigner as a threat' discourse which only legitimised and emboldened grassroots prejudice.

Hamill further characterises South African economic expansion within Africa as problematic. He argues that South Africa's economic growth reinforced historical inequalities. The trade imbalance falls only slightly to a ratio of 5:1 in South Africa's favour against the rest of Africa. Further, some of South Africa's trade practices also highlight discrepancy between the state's ideals and behaviour.

Lastly, Hamill refers to barriers to democracy promotion. He opined that South Africa's promotion of democracy and human rights has encountered significant practical, if not always public, opposition which has contributed to its flaky image within the continent. Hamill also remarked that while the world looks at South Africa as a key model for resolving intractable conflicts after the experience of the transition from apartheid to democracy, many states within the continent are concerned that South Africa may be promoting a brand of conflict resolution in Africa that is increasingly a caricature of its own peace process. Lastly, Hamill points out that many African states failed to entirely acknowledge South Africa's experience on the continent and/or the contributions to African progress and wellbeing.

In the third chapter of his book, Hamill compares the African Renaissance vis-a-vis the South African Renaissance. He observes that after two decades into the democratic era, the failure to deliver fundamental socio-economic change began to impose serious political costs on the ruling African National Congress. He points out the lack of acknowledgement of the tension between domestic and foreign-based priorities on the government and ANC's part. In this chapter, Hamill looks into South Africa's inability to transform due to the structural weaknesses of its economy, widespread poverty in the country and other crippling socio-economic problems that continued to persist in the post-apartheid era. He remarks that South Africa continues to be one of the world's most unequal societies, with inequality as high as it was in 1994. Moreover, homelessness was exacerbated by the pace of urbanisation in the country. These challenges were to be addressed in an economy near stagnation, and that generated considerable pessimism across all sectors of business. This failure to transform South Africa hampered the state's ability to provide African leadership and project its influence across the continent. Hamill opines that the event which symbolised the end of South African dominance came in April 2014, when the Nigerian economy supplanted that of South Africa as the continent's largest. He subsequently also recognises that whereas South Africa's disengagement from the rest of Africa is neither possible nor desirable, the challenge is to find a way to meet its African responsibilities and contribute effectively to the continental development while pursuing domestic socio-economic objectives.

Finally, in his fourth chapter, Hamill looks into the plight of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). He opines that South Africa might be considered a military hegemon within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) zone and an influential power elsewhere on the continent, despite its reluctance to engage in coercive democracy. SANDF

is also viewed as relevant due to conflicts in Africa. Given its implications for state fragility, the demand for peace operations on the continent is likely to grow. These problems are likely to become South Africa's problems due to its reputation as perhaps the most militarily capable African state. Hamill remarks that SANDF's current crisis in capability and operational effectiveness has been a long time in the making. The practical consequences of the deterioration are such that South Africa increasingly lacks the capacity of effective intervention in other African states, both unilaterally and as part of a multilateral mission. Hamill also recognised the barriers to increasing the defence budget.

In conclusion, Hamill states that South Africa's material and ideational capabilities to assume the role of a hegemonic power in Africa in the democratic era was deficient during the presidencies of Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. He also concludes that the African National Congress finds itself in more strained political circumstances due to domestic socio-economic challenges which restrict the country's ability to help Africa. He also writes that due to tangible constraints on diplomatic interventions and real limitations in terms of material sources, South Africa will have to accept a more modest role within the continent and the actual scope of having a hegemon in Africa in the near future is unlikely. Lastly, he remarks that lack of skilful leadership, intellectual agility and political finesse - especially under Jacob Zuma - is the biggest challenge for South Africa in the new multipolarity emerging in Africa.

Hamill summarises the perception regarding South Africa as a key international and domestic actor under Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma. He highlights all the present barriers which limit the role of South Africa as a hegemon within the African continent. However, there are certain gaps within his work. Hamill's work is perception oriented, focusing on failures of the state. South Africa's post-conflict reconstruction is the biggest driver towards its recognition globally as the continent's leader. He has not effectively acknowledged the same. While Hamill's work is insightful, it leans slightly towards personal bias.

Moreover, since the release of the book, the leadership has shifted from Zuma to Cyril Ramaphosa which has generated hope among the masses for an upward swing for South Africa. There is hope for growth amidst the corruption left by Ramaphosa's predecessor. This makes Hamill's work inconclusive as there is possibility for big changes in the near future.

Despite the aforementioned factors, the book provides a much-needed insight into South Africa's failure to meet its potential, both as an international actor and as a continental player and looks into the measures that can be taken to rectify the same.

## Call for Contributions

MP-IDSAs invites articles, commentaries and book reviews for publication in *Africa Trends*, a biannual magazine on Africa. Submissions can focus on security, political and economic issues relating to African countries. Articles may focus on analysing bilateral, regional and multilateral developments of strategic significance to India's engagement with African countries.

Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: <http://www.idsa.in/africatrends>. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at [idsa.africatrends@gmail.com](mailto:idsa.africatrends@gmail.com).

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