MILITARY RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA, BEFORE AND AFTER THE WAR IN UKRAINE

by Abdelhak Bassou
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Preface

In partnership with the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS), the Atlantic Council is proud to present the joint report, *Russia’s influence in Africa: A security perspective on the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine.*

Russia emerged as a major player in this conflict on March 3, 2022, when seventeen African states abstained from voting on the United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The number of abstaining countries was surprising, as well as which specific nations abstained; some, like Morocco and Senegal, are known for their proximity to the Western camp. Moreover, unambiguous statements that accompanied nations’ votes made their intentions patent. Some invoked the hypocrisy of the Western world, quick to save Ukraine while ignoring wars in Africa. Other nations expressed grievances regarding the treatment of African students at the Polish border in the early days of the conflict. Others still wished to preserve the Russia that fought on their side during wars of independence and fought the racist regime of apartheid in South Africa. Finally, some nations wished to remain non-aligned with either of the belligerents, so as not to threaten commercial relationships, or simply remain neutral towards a war that did not concern them.

Despite these intentions, Africa was quickly roped into the conflict. On June 3rd, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Senegalese President Macky Sall, in his capacity as current Chair of the African Union (AU), to discuss blocked grain shipments that threatened to worsen food insecurity in Africa. Their meeting in Sochi was publicized internationally. The energy crisis and Europe’s supply chain issues then drew the African continent as courted player in the conflict, with a string of natural resource discoveries from Senegal to Mozambique promising potential alternatives.

The beginning of 2023 ushered in an elaborate diplomatic dance that included visits by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Angola, South Africa, Eswatini, Tunisia and Mauritania. Qin Gang, China’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs, succeeded in reaching African hearts and minds today?

The authors of this report, Sarah Daly and Abdelhak Bassou, have been minimally renewed and stands precarious. Popular pro-
tests of Western, and particularly, French, interference have erupted throughout the region. Some protesters have been seen brandishing Russian flags and, more menacingly, there have been sightings of Wagner militia troops. Though ostracized in Europe for its war against Ukraine, Russia seems far more welcome on the African continent.

How deep are the roots of Russian influence in Africa? Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, what is Vladimir Putin’s ambition in a region where he has signaled great interest? How can the West respond to this strategy of influence and sway young African opinions that seek a path to sovereignty for their continent? Is it possible for former European powers to overcome the mistrust that endures from the colonial period? What will cooperation with the United States entail? Historically, the United States has successfully convinced several parts of the world of the strength of its model. Will it succeed in reaching African hearts and minds today?

The authors of this report, Sarah Daly and Abdelhak Bassou, are fellows at the Atlantic Council and Policy Center for the New South and analyze Russia’s role in Africa from a security perspective. Beginning from a historical understanding of Russian relations since the fifteenth century, they analyze the evolution and current dynamics of the nation’s influence. With consideration for the security tools deployed by Russia on the continent (including training, technology transfer, defense agreements, militias, etc.), they examine the sustainability of Russian strategy in light of the uncertain war in Ukraine and African expectations. This report, published in both English and French for the first time since our collaboration began, is a valuable resource to understand the critical changes underway for the continent and their impact on the rest of the world.

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Introduction

In a recent telephone conversation, Russian President Vladimir Putin officially invited Asissi Gotta, the military chief of the transition in Mali, to take part in the second Russia-Africa summit to be held in Saint-Petersburg. This summit is scheduled for July 2023, according to Mikhail Bogdanov, the special representative of the president of Russia to the Middle East and Africa and deputy foreign minister. Russia is openly optimistic that several African leaders will attend the planned summit, according to Russian Ambassador-at-Large Oleg Ozerov: “Russia expects that most African leaders will be at the Russia-Africa summit in 2023... We are getting positive responses. I think most African heads of state will be at the forum.”1

Despite Russia’s war with Ukraine, President Putin remains keen on maintaining and strengthening relations with Africa, and this planned summit is a follow-up, four years later, to the October 2019 meeting in Sacci attended by a multitude of African leaders. Russia’s determination to hold the Summit with African countries—amid its ongoing war in Ukraine and difficulties imposed on Moscow by Western sanctions—is either: the result of Africa’s importance to Russian foreign policy and, therefore, the meeting with African leaders must take place, regardless of conditions; because Russia needs African states to counter Western attempts to isolate it on the international stage; or because Russia seeks to show that its war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the West do not impact the normal operations of the Russian state, which continues to hold normal relations with the rest of the world, including Africa.

It is a considerable challenge to bring together African heads of state in Russia, despite the United Nations (UN) vote by African countries last October, signaling a turning point in African positions toward Russia and its war in Ukraine. The challenge is great and begs the question of whether Russia-Africa relations are strong enough to withstand the war in Ukraine.

This paper examines this issue, and attempts to determine whether the war in Ukraine, launched by Russia in February 2022, will affect Russia-Africa relations, have no impact, or strengthen Russia-Africa ties.

1. Religion as a Vehicle for Dialogue as Early as the Fifteenth Century

Russia’s first relations with Africa were steeped in religion—namely, Christianity. Russians and Africans came into contact as early as the fifteenth century through pilgrimages to Jerusalem that inspired Russian travelers, and other Slavic writers visiting Africa and writing about their journeys, leading to a broader knowledge of Africa in Russia. Egyptians (Copts) and Ethiopians (Orthodox Church) were the first Africans to become familiar to Russians. Encounters between Africans and Russians did not, however, lead to official and lasting relations between state structures (kingdoms and empires), despite occasional events including a trip to Moscow by the patriarchs of Alexandria and Sinai in 1556 to solicit the tsar’s charity.2

2. First Military Intervention: Action in Africa to Counter the Europeans

Russia’s first military interaction with Africa occurred in the late nineteenth century, in Ethiopia. How and why?

As of the late eighteenth century, the United Kingdom (UK) and other European powers of the time hindered Russian expansion into the Middle East and Africa. The land of the tsars was restituted by other Europeans and largely overlooked at the 1885 Berlin Conference on the partition of Africa. Faced with this rejection and an inability to deal with the Europeans, Russia turned away from Africa and concentrated its focus on Asia, the Arctic, and the Great North, while keeping an eye on colonial advances in Africa.

When the UK extended its dominion over most of the Nile in 1882, it sought to ally itself with Italy against France. Therefore, it ceded the port of Mutsaev to Italy. This handover met two major hurdles.

- Mutsaev is Ethiopia’s outlet to the Red Sea, and the country had always claimed its right to this gateway.
- The agreement between Italy and the UK enabled the latter to link its Mediterranean colonies to the Indian Ocean, something Russia could not accept, as Russia had always sought to contain British presence in Egypt and Sudan, and to prevent any junction between British colonies in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific.

Russian and Ethiopian interests converged, and this convergence gave Russia the opportunity to assert itself against its European antagonists and find an opening in Africa. Russia, which had until then ignored the Negus’ calls for help, revised its position and decided to reconsider its policy of indifference regarding Africa. A delegation from Emperor Menelik II was received in Saint Petersburg in 1895, and Tsar Nicholas II agreed to provide Ethiopia with assistance against Italy. History retains the name of Nikolai Leontov, the Russian military adviser in charge of training the Ethiopian emperor’s soldiers. He was also charged with recruiting and leading Russian volunteers into battle at the decisive battle of Adwa, marking Ethiopia’s landmark victory against Italy in 1896.

Russia stood to achieve a dual objective. On one hand, it impeded British and Italian ambitions in Africa. On the other, it paved the way for Russian incursion on the continent—a dream the Cossack Ataman Nicholas Ivanovich Achinov, a merchant from the city of Penza, attempted to realize as early as 1833.3

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1 The first Russia-Africa summit was held in Sochi in October 2019.
2 Information and comments reported by several African media in July 2022.
3 “Moscow is used here to mean the Russian Empire, the USSR, and present-day Russia at the same time.”
5 It fell just at the end of the eighteenth century that Russia opened two consulates in Egypt, and diplomatic relations were established between Russia and Ethiopia in 1894.
6 Nicholas Ivanovich Achinov persuaded hundreds of his compatriots, including the governor of Nizhny Novgorod, of the strategic importance of a colony in Africa. He led an incursion and settled on the foothills of the Great Lakes of Kenya, in which he named “New Moscow.” The ruling chief of the Taga, after seeing prior conflicts of the tsar, immediately had Achinov expelled and led his Russian mercenaries out of the territory. Achinov was captured and sent to Russia, where he was exiled in prison and died in 1834.
3. Military Relations between the USSR and Africa (1917–1990)

During both its heyday and in its decline, the Soviet Union’s policy in Africa was never specific to the continent. It was always part of a general policy toward the non-American and non-European world.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was presented in Africa as a vector for anti-colonialist doctrine, defending the oppressed against Western imperialism. However, the Russians realized as early as 1920 that the revolutionary conflagration they hoped Africa’s revolutions would fuel was not happening. Joseph Stalin eventually became convinced that Africa’s revolutionary leaders, who spoke more of African revolution than of international revolution, were unreliable, lacking in credibility, and willing to deal with the imperialists, whom they fought only verbally. Africans focused more on antagonism between poor and rich countries, with no concern for the principle of class conflict dear to the Soviets. In the eyes of the Soviets, Africa’s revolutions failed to grasp the meaning of revolution and the destiny of world civilization. As a result, there was little question at that time of the necessity of a radical military effort or cooperation with Africa in this direction.7

In 1955, the Soviet Union established the Warsaw Pact, which made the Soviet Union more confident in dealing with the West. It established a balance of power in Europe, and Moscow was no longer in fear that the West would take military action against it. As the Cold War set in, each side sought to assert itself inside and outside Russia. His actions, therefore, were directed toward course correction.

At the same time, decolonized countries sought to act against colonialism, and these efforts culminated in the Summit of Bandung, which established an Afro-Asian movement. While sub-Saharan countries do not import much given their economic level, each side sought to support an escalation that could lead to a nuclear war.

The Western psyche at the time was dominated by the view of Francis Fukuyama, who assumed a victory of the democratic and liberal world over all other ideologies in his book The End of History and the Last Man.8

Accordingly, a number of these movements, which took power in their countries after independence, maintained military ties to the Soviet Union—particularly in terms of arms supplies.9

While sub-Saharan countries do not import much given their limited financial resources, North African countries—especially Algeria, Libya, and Egypt—were important clients of USSR weaponry. The adoption of Soviet revolutionary doctrine by a number of these countries also compelled them to align with Moscow in terms of military doctrine. Most military officers in these sub-Saharan and North African countries trained in Soviet military academies.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the USSR, Russia was absent from Africa for nearly two decades, before returning to capitalize on the relationship’s Soviet legacy.

The same applied in Libya that same year, again in return for arms contracts, in addition to gas and railroads.10

II. The Military and Security Aspect of the Post-USSR Russia-Africa Relationship

1. Putin: Recovering Instruments of Power

In his first term in office, Putin paid little attention to Africa, as he was mostly focused on restoring the Russian state, and then on actions in his immediate vicinity, such as Chechnya, Georgia, and other surrounding states. It was not until September 2006 that President Putin undertook a mini tour of Africa, which took him first to South Africa and then to Morocco. This mini tour was followed by Putin successively to Angola, Namibia, and Nigeria in 2009.

At the turn of the century, Africa had been merely a Cold War-era confrontation theater in the eyes of Russia. That period being over, Russia did not see any specific strategic or geo-political importance for Africa in its foreign policy.

This stance is consistent with previous ones; neither the tsars nor the USSR ever attached any importance to Africa outside specific circumstances stemming from the animosity or rivalry Russia always harbored toward the West. However, this semblance of indifference did not apply to all; some USSR allies retained certain privileges even with the continuer state of Russia, especially regarding military matters.

In 2006, on his visit to Algiers, Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote off Algeria’s $4.5 billion debt, in return for sizable arms-purchase contracts.

The Western psyche at the time was dominated by the views of Francis Fukuyama, who assumed a victory of the democratic and liberal world over all other ideologies in his book The End of History and the Last Man.

10. See DIPLOMATI’SIDE, March-April 2021, 43.
As history attests, Russia turns to Africa in times of crisis or of rivalry with the West. Putin is no exception. The Ukraine crisis and the annexation of Crimea brought severe Western sanctions against Russia. So, starting in 2014, Moscow remembered Africa and sought new economic, political, and military relations there, reinforcing existing ones, such as those with Algeria and Egypt.

This great return of Africa to Russia’s foreign policy is evident in military and security matters. While Russia signed only seven military cooperation agreements between 2010 and 2017, this number jumped to twenty from 2017 to 2021. More than half of these twenty agreements were signed with countries that had no previous military ties to Russia. After 2014, military cooperation came to the forefront of Russia’s new ties to Africa, seemingly dominating other areas such as agriculture, minerals, and civil nuclear technology.12

Despite the talk of diversified cooperation, Russian officials rarely hesitate to put peace, security, and stability in Africa at the forefront.13 Besides, arms contracts often enable other forms of military cooperation, including the use of African ports to pave the way for Russian security contractors (which are genuine armies) to gain a foothold on the continent. These contractors frequently serve as proxies for Russia’s military when the latter does not deem it appropriate to be officially present.

The drive to develop all kinds of relationships with Africa, particularly military ones, culminated in the 2019 Sochi summit. At this meeting, and throughout the 2015–2019 period, Russia presented itself to Africans as strong and proud of its success in Syria, giving so far as to talk of the quality of combat-tested Russian weaponry.14 In the country of Bashar al-Assad, Russia defied the Western coalition against terrorism and, by means of horrific intervention, managed to keep its ally Bashar in power—against, and in spite of, the will of his people and the international community. Russia also presented itself as the power that defied the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and as a state that possessed and produced a safe and effective arsenal of weapons capable of turning the tide in favor of a president on the brink of collapse.

Africans attending the Sochi summit were in awe of Russian military might. This led to the signature of the aforementioned twenty contracted agreements for arms, training, and security and defense consulting. Between this summit in Sochi and the upcoming one in Saint-Petersburg, the war in Ukraine broke out, and Russian military capacities were again put into play. Were they as effective as in Syria? Are Africans still as in awe of Russian power as they were in 2019? What are the assumptions and scenarios for Afro-Russian military relations following the Ukraine war? The following section considers these questions.

1. An Ongoing War, with Uncertain Outcomes

Eight months into the war with Ukraine, which the Russians continue to refer to as a “special operation,” many uncertainties remain regarding its outcome.

- Russian forces now seem bogged down in Ukraine. Russia started the war, but no longer has control over the decision to end it. That decision now belongs to Ukraine and its Western supporters.

- Comparing the strength of the warring parties at the beginning of the war and today casts doubt on the possibility of either side winning the war. While Russia initially seemed stronger and was able to capture pieces of Ukrainian territory, the counteroffensive launched by Ukraine since September 2022 and increased Western military aid seem to be reversing the balance of power in Kyiv’s favor.

- Annexation of Ukrainian territories leads Russia and Ukraine to radicalize positions—one to uphold the annexation and the other to express the unwrapping determination to liberate its territories.

- Despite agreements on prisoner-of-war exchanges and cereal exports to the rest of the world, the possibility of negotiations on an end to hostilities, or even a ceasefire, seems to be getting further and further away.

However, these doubts do not preclude us from assessing the facts and taking stock of the situation regarding this war’s strategic objectives.

- Russia, ever in pursuit of power, sees itself, alongside China, as the true “challenger” to a world order in which the United States and the West continue to dominate world affairs. President Putin makes an enemy of the West and accuses it of wanting, if not to exterminate Russia, to at least subjugate it and make it a weak and submissive state.

- The West seeks not only to weaken Russia to deter future aggression against other countries, but also to isolate it in order to restrict its sphere of influence and render it into a pariah state, alienated from the international community.

- Western military action (military aid to Ukraine), combined with economic sanctions, is backed by diplomatic action and efforts at the United Nations to get countries in the Global South including Africa, to isolate Russia and, thus, remove them from any Russian influence.

2. Africa Appears to Dislike Russia’s Actions in Ukraine, But Is Not Unanimous in Condemning Moscow

The position of African countries on the war in Ukraine remains generally ambiguous at both the political and diplomatic levels and shows no support for one side at the expense of the other. This ambivalence is clearly expressed in an examination of African votes on the three UN resolutions related to the war in Ukraine.

- When the United Nations put a resolution condemning Russia’s aggression against Ukraine to a vote in March 2022, twenty-eight African countries supported the resolution, thereby voting against Russia. Only one African country supported Russia and voted against the resolution. Seventeen African countries abstained and eight declared themselves absent. While half of African countries voted against Russia, another half did not seem inclined to isolate it.

- During the votes on suspending Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, this trend changed. Nine African countries supported Russia by voting against the resolution that excluded Russia from the Human Rights Council; only nine other countries voted for the exclusion. Thirty-six countries maintained ambiguous positions, either via abstention (twenty-three) or absence (thirteen). This time, most African countries stood aside from the intention to isolate Russia, neither frankly supporting Moscow nor clearly siding with the West.

As a result of the war’s outcome, the military relations between Russia and African countries have been defined by the outcome.
African countries were almost unanimous—if not in condemning Russia’s action, when it came to defending Ukraine’s territorial integrity. The question of human rights does not seem to be as important for Africa as it is for the West, so it seemed that suspension from the international human-rights body was not a point on which Africans would risk alienating Russia. However, when it came to defending Ukraine’s territorial integrity, African countries were almost unanimous—if not in condemning and isolating Russia, then in not supporting it (see table below).

On the other hand, the positions of some African countries changed between the time of Crimea’s annexation in 2014 and the annexation of other territories in 2022. While no African country supported the annexation of Ukrainian territories in 2022, Zimbabwe and Sudan voted against the resolution condemning Russia in 2014. Egypt, Gabon, and Senegal, which abstained in 2014, voted to condemn the 2022 annexations. These shifts show that some African countries, although tied to Russia through a variety of cooperative relationships, do not endorse Russia’s use of violence to attack neighbors or annex parts of their territories. Some countries remain ambiguous in their positions. This was the case for South Africa, which, while not supporting the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia, does not rule out arms sales to the latter.15

### African Countries’ Voting Records in Relation to the War in Ukraine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Against Russia and supporting the resolution</th>
<th>For Russia and against the resolution</th>
<th>Mixed positions between abstention and absence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Absence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. March vote: condemn the invasion and demand Russian withdrawal</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. April vote: suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. October vote: condemn Russia for annexing Ukrainian territories</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table compiled by the author from media reports and The United Nations website

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15 Questioned in writing by an opposition leader in October. South Africa’s Defence Minister Thandi Modise offered no clear answer on possible arms sales to Russia. She vaguely pointed out that South Africa’s arms-exporting agency, Armscor, would be allowed, “from time to time,” to avail itself of “commercial opportunities” with countries subject to international treaties, “excluding Russia.” These opportunities are subject to national security policy in another instance of ambiguous behavior. South Africa’s government allowed the yacht of a Russian oligarch, targeted by international sanctions, to dock in Cape Town despite opposition from the city’s mayor.

3. The African Perception of Russian Military Power

### What Does the War in Ukraine Tell Us about Russian Military Power?

Observers are unanimous in their assessment. The Russian army, which was considered the world’s second most powerful, failed to prove itself in Ukraine, where the conduct of Russia’s “military operation” revealed several shortcomings.

- The Blitzkrieg, dear to Soviet strategy and favored by Putin, failed or was poorly implemented by the Russian army. Ukrainian forces far inferior in number and equipment where able to contain the Russian army. Russia was, therefore, forced to alter its plans, accept being bogged down, and suffer significant losses.
  - Russian intelligence was also ineffective. This was either out of fear of exposing reality to the master of the Kremlin regarding the hostility of Ukrainians to Russia, their resolve to defend their country, and the unwavering support of the West, or out of poor or weak analysis, not having accounted for the obstacles that Russia could encounter in invading Ukraine.
  - The failure of Russia’s logistics became clear to everyone from the very start of the “operation,” with images of convoys stepping over one another while exposing themselves to Ukrainian strikes. Moreover, the under-equipment (or even lack of equipment) of mobilized reservists clearly shows the shortcomings and logistical weaknesses of the Russian army.
  - The absence of noncommissioned officers in the Russian chain of command was widely felt, especially in the lack of discipline and poor execution of tactical plans.
  - There was a lack of professionalism among general Russian army officers who, in using their own cell phones, made it possible for Ukrainians to locate and eliminate them.
  - Russia’s armed forces lack cohesion because of overlaps between an army of professionals, militias comprising mercenaries and prisoners (like the Wagner Group) and fighters (like those Ramzan Kadyrov) more inclined to propaganda than real combat.
  - While Russian military equipment was highly praised by Kremlin officials for its proven effectiveness in combat theaters (especially in Syria), experts saw the precariousness of this equipment when faced with Western weaponry. Russia’s artillery, used in great measure by the Kremlin’s army, ceased to make a difference as soon as Ukraine received US Himars and French Caesar.

- Russia’s air force, though a striking force in Syria, was unable to secure the Ukrainian sky and unable to destroy the Ukrainian air force.

One is therefore justified in asking whether, in the face of such failures, Africans still have the same perception of Russia’s military power.

As mentioned above, Africans held Russian weaponry and strategy in high regard at the Sochi summit. Moscow’s military image shined brightly because of its performance in Syria. Today, what effect will Russia’s setbacks have on that image?

The continent’s military leaders and experts—especially those who rely on Russia for weapons, training, and territorial defense—certainly monitor Russia’s military performance in Ukraine and are forced to ask themselves a few questions.

- How could Russia supply them with weaponry, if its defense industry cannot keep up with Moscow’s current war effort?
- Has Russia reached a point where it needs assistance from far less powerful countries, such as Iran and North Korea?
- How can one rely on planes incapable of monopolizing the skies of Ukraine, a country that is struggling with air defense?
- How can one count on Russia to train African soldiers when its own army proved its tactical and strategic capability in Ukraine?

These questions are even more legitimate for African countries that rely on Russia, as Russia has an advantage that no African country has. Indeed, while Russia can compensate for its tactical, logistical, and strategic deficiencies through the threat of using tactical nuclear weapons in its arsenal, African countries can only rely on conventional weapons and strategies in their wars. But if such weapons and strategies, procured from Russia, are less effective than those supplied by the West, failure is inevitable.

Will African countries sourcing from Russia reconsider their positions? Will they change their minds and look to the West? Are the shortcomings that have arisen sufficient to call on African countries to switch suppliers and military partners? This does not yet seem to be the case.

- In April 2022, amid the war in Ukraine, Cameroon signed a military-cooperation agreement with Russia. This agreement covers the exchange of information on defense pol-
icy and international security, development of relations in combined training, and training of troops.

- In August 2022, Mali received new military equipment from Russia, after a secret mission to Moscow earlier that year by the Malian Army chief of staff. Mali has long-standing relations with Moscow and is reportedly one of the countries for which the relationship continues against all odds.

- A number of countries with agreements with Russia prior to the war are now trapped in Russia’s quagmire. Madagascar is one such case.

- Countries such as Algeria or Egypt—the former relying on Russia for all its armaments, while a large part of the latter’s forces rely on Russian equipment—are trapped and can only continue their relationship with Russia.

The major risk for Africa is that of Russia, keen on preserving its image among Africans for the capabilities of its armaments and military training, pushing African clients with Russian equipment that embrace its combat doctrine to go to war against countries that get their supplies from the West and follow Western doctrine. Nothing appears less certain, as Russia is tied up in its war in Ukraine and a victory for its clan in Africa is highly unlikely. However, it is not excluded that the African countries monitor the outcome of the war in Ukraine more closely.

**Conclusion**

Russia’s relationship with Africa is long-standing, dating back at least to the fifteenth century, but it only took on an institutional character at the end of the nineteenth century. At the time, Russia sent official military aid to Ethiopia and opened a diplomatic legation there.

The timeline of Russia-Africa ties indicates that the posture toward Europe in the first instance, and toward the West (Europe and the United States) in the second, determines the degree of Russian involvement and the timing of its actions in Africa. For the tsars, the Soviets, or Putin, Africa is a theater for confronting the West and countering European projects.

As far as the current war in Ukraine is concerned, and what positive or negative effects this could have on Russia-Africa relations, we should emphasize the following.

- It is premature to assess the effect of the present state of war between Russia and Ukraine on military-cooperation relations between Russia and Africa. Nevertheless, considering recent developments in this war, it is reasonable to anticipate several African questions on the sustain-ability of Afro-Russian cooperation in military matters. As noted in the previous paragraphs, Russia’s military has not demonstrated great qualities during the war in Ukraine, neither in terms of strategy nor of equipment performance. The fact that Russia is turning to Iran or North Korea to arm itself will raise questions for Africans. If Iranian drones are more effective, Africans might also turn to Iran. Russia might not be as admired in Saint Petersburg as it was in Sochi. It is not only Africans who are questioning the image of Russia’s military; Russia’s president himself has doubts about its weaponry and seems to find it necessary to praise its qualities and performance, and his country’s readiness to help and supply arms to countries of the Deep South, at a time when his army is still engaged in Ukraine and has not achieved the goals assigned to it.

- However, whatever the outcome of the war or its consequences, some African countries will continue to maintain military relations with Russia because their arsenals are Russian (as in the cases of Algeria and Egypt), or because they are tied to Russia by agreements made before the war in Ukraine.
About the Author

Abdelhak Bassou is Senior Fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, Member of its Editorial & Research Oversight Steering Committee, and Affiliate Professor at the Faculty of Governance, Economic and Social Sciences (FSGES) of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P).

Specializing in security, strategy and defense studies, he previously occupied several offices within the Directorate General of the Moroccan National Security where he was Borders’ Division Chief from 1978 to 1993. He was appointed Director of the Royal Institute of Police in 1998, before serving as the Chief of Regional Security in Errachidia from 1999 to 2003, and Sidi Kacem from 2003 to 2005. In 2006, he became Head of the Central General Intelligence until 2009. Bassou contributed to the output of several endeavors of international organizations including the Council of Arab Interior Ministers from 1986 to 1992, where he represented the Directorate General of National Security in various meetings.

Since 2018, Bassou has been directing and editing the collectively written annual report on Africa’s geopolitics, originally titled ‘Miroir d’Afrique’ and published by the Policy Center for the New South. His works have been featured in numerous world-renowned think tanks and institutions, including a contribution in ‘Towards EU-MENA Shared Prosperity’ (Bruegel, 2017), Evolving Human Security Challenges in the Atlantic Space (Jean Monnet Network, 2019), and is also a recurring author and participant in the HEC-PCNS Strategic Dialogues and its corresponding written volumes.

Abdelhak Bassou holds a Master’s Degree in Political Science and International Studies from the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences of Agdal in Rabat.

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