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RUSSIA AND THE GLOBAL COMPETITION FOR AFRICA:
THE MILITARY DIMENSION

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Abstract: *The present paper focuses on the phenomenon of the growing military presence of foreign powers in Africa, which in effect is a precursor to the imminent new scramble for the political and economic influence on the continent, and on Russia's prospects for the use of hard power instruments on the African continent in light of this development. After the end of the Cold War, it seemed for some time that Africa would no longer remain a pawn on the global geopolitical chessboard but strive to pursue its own agenda. The advent of the African Union (AU) in 2001, the establishment of the African Standby Force in 2003, and the insistence of the AU on finding "African solutions to African problems" may have raised hopes for the minimization of foreign political and military influence on the continent. Yet since some years later, we have been witnessing rapid militarization by traditional and emerging external powers of Africa's strategic regions, first and foremost of the Horn of Africa, but others as well. Among the countries that have particularly raised their military profile on the continent in recent years are the United States, France, China, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. The reasons for this phenomenon include not only the ongoing intensification of geopolitical competition on the global and regional scales, but also the inevitable increase in the importance of Africa's resource, human and economic potential within the emerging model of global development. Under the circumstances, with Russia once again laying a claim to be a weighty player on the world stage, it cannot but try to gain a foothold on the continent to augment its global influence, which invites research on the accompanying political, military and economic implications.*

Keywords: Africa, Russia, the United States, France, China, Turkey, Djibouti, geopolitical competition, military power, hard power.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten or more years, a lot has been said and written about the need for Russia to "return" to Africa. An increase in the importance of Africa's resource, human and economic

potential within the emerging model of global development is inevitable, and with Russia once again laying a claim to be a weighty player on the world stage, it cannot but try to gain a foothold on the continent to augment its global influence. It is generally agreed in academic circles that the main obstacles to Russia's comeback to the African continent include the lack of a comprehensive foreign economic policy towards African countries [Abramova, 2017, p. 3] and, in general, the insufficient and inept use of instruments of soft power [Oğultürk, 2017, p. 134–136]. These incontrovertible observations, however, do not reflect the marked increase in the role of hard power mechanisms in influencing the situation in African countries, of which we have been witnesses in recent years. It is all the more remarkable that the range of external actors able to project military power in Africa has expanded spectacularly, and the *de facto* monopoly on the use of force and foreign intervention (the United Nations missions notwithstanding) that Western countries entertained in Africa after the collapse of the Soviet Union has practically been broken. Curiously enough, this development has been triggered to a great extent by Western powers themselves, first and foremost the United States, which since the 2000s have rapidly expanded their military involvement in Africa within the context – but in fact under the guise of – the Global War on Terror. Under the circumstances Russia, which seems to remain committed to the full participation in the new geopolitical competition (“the New Great Game”), explores the avenues for developing sustainable yet affordable hard power mechanisms for protecting and advancing its interests on the African continent.

THE AMERICAN MILITARY “EMPIRE” IN AFRICA

The new scramble for Africa, in which all leading powers of the planet are now participating to one extent or the other, is increasingly characterized by the growth of foreign military presence on the continent. Indeed, it may be the United States that opened the proverbial Pandora's box. The most visible result of the War on Terror, launched by the U.S. after the events of September 11, 2001, has not been the eradication of international terrorists and not even a decline in the level of their activity, but a sharp increase in the number of American military facilities around the world, including in Africa. While formally there is just one U.S. military base in Africa – in Djibouti – there have also appeared U.S. drone bases in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Somalia and several other countries of the continent. In addition, there are cooperative security and forward operating locations and various other U.S. military outposts in many other African countries, including such strategically important ones as Kenya, Tunisia and Senegal, and this network is constantly expanding. An important advantage of these outposts is their scalability: if necessary, these military facilities with little permanent staff can be quickly expanded and reinforced; they also enable personnel and supplies to move quickly across the continent.

In Africa, the U.S. follows two main strategies to strengthen and legitimize its presence on the continent even as the commitment of actual U.S. troops on the ground is kept at the minimum, which lowers human losses without hurting America's strategic goals. The first has been to involve America's allies in its overseas operations (“coalitions of the willing”), as was the case with the War on Terror, to which many countries committed troops. The second strategy has been to provide logistical and material support to own operations of allies (“leading from behind”). The examples of this include the support rendered to the French in Mali, to the Kenyans in Somalia, to the Saudis and Emiratis in Yemen, etc. These approaches notwithstanding, as of March 2018, over 6,000 U.S. uniformed troops (and up to 7,200 including support personnel and contractors) are stationed in Africa [US Senate Committee..., 2018] in staggering 46 locations [Turse, 2018]. According to another report, American military personnel is present in 50 of 54 African countries [Neuhaus, 2017].

The primary U.S. base in Djibouti has been in place since 2001, when the Americans took over Camp Lemonnier, a base previously abandoned by the French Foreign Legion. In 2013, Americans “borrowed” from the French a functioning facility – the Chabelley Airfield, located 9 km south-east of Camp Lemonier, and which has been refitted as a base of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The latter are actively used in missions over the vast territory stretching from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Yemen. The American contingent in Djibouti numbers 4,000 men (including 3,150 uniformed troops) and is subordinate to the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), which became fully operational in 2008 and is headquartered in a suburb of Stuttgart in Germany. According to the lease agreement, which in 2014 was extended by 20 years, the U.S. pays \$63 million annually to the government of Djibouti (and additionally \$7 million per annum in development assistance) [Schmitt, 2014].

AFRICOM: IN SEARCH OF A NEW MISSION?

While U.S. military presence in Africa is nearly ubiquitous, the main focus is placed on three key strategic regions: the Horn of Africa, the Sahara/Sahel region, and the Gulf of Guinea. AFRICOM, which is responsible for all U.S. military activity in the African countries with the only exception of Egypt, is officially tasked with conflict prevention and capacity building within the official “3Ds” approach of U.S. foreign policy (defense, diplomacy and development) [Sidebar On The 3Ds..., 2010], and is thus positioned partly as a soft power instrument. However, AFRICOM is also widely believed to be entrusted with controlling Africa's resource wealth and containing the influence of other powers. Some researchers go so far as to call AFRICOM the spearhead of U.S. “oil and terrorism policy” [Lubeck, 2007]. The U.S. military itself frequently poses the creation of AFRICOM as a reaction to China's “broadly based engagement in Africa” [Hofstedt, 2009, p. 79].

Par for the course, the official five Lines of Effort (LoEs) of AFRICOM say nothing of global competition. The LoEs include (1) developing security and stability in East Africa, (2) degrading violent extremist organizations in Sahel and Maghreb regions and containing instability in Libya, (3) containing and degrading Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa, (4) interdicting illegal activity in Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa, and (5) building peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance capacity of African countries [*US Senate Committee...*, 2018]. However, there is no end in sight for any of these LoEs. Yet General Thomas Waldhauser, Commander of AFRICOM, openly expresses his concerns with emergent Chinese military presence in Africa [Tadjdeh, 2017] and with Russian activities in the north of the continent [Browne, 2017], which may be indicative of the gradual revival of Cold War thinking on part of the U.S. military in Africa – certainly in line with the general disquieting trends in Sino-American and U.S.-Russian relations. During Donald Trump's presidency there have appeared reports that the U.S. may reduce the number of troops in Africa amid the general shift in focus toward Russia and China [Gibbons-Neff, 2018], yet it remains to be seen whether these expectations materialize given the tenacious efforts on part of AFRICOM leadership to position Pentagon's assets in Africa as an indispensable instrument in maintaining America's global influence vis-à-vis its international rivals.

FRANCE: FROM FRANÇA-FRIQUE TO MULTILATERALISM

The Global War on Terror that the U.S. declared in 2001 carried the official name of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). OEF came to incorporate a number of separate operations, one of them being Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA). As mentioned previously, a number of American allies joined the War on Terror. Its African component – OEF-HOA – came to involve France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Spain. OEF-HOA is operating

mostly from Djibouti, which indeed has become a magnet for foreign military bases precisely since the start of the War on Terror.

In 2001, France still far surpassed the U.S. in terms of military presence in Africa. However, since the late 1990s, France had been in process of reducing its overseas military forces due to budgetary concerns [Hansen, 2008]. Washington's emergent involvement in Africa, despite particular concerns that France was going to lose Africa to the U.S. [Zachary, 2011], gave Paris a chance to prop up its waning military reach on the continent. In fact, without the U.S. (also the U.K., but to a lesser extent), which provided strategic airlift and aerial refueling support to the French military intervention in Mali in 2013 (Operation Serval), the success of the operation would have been questionable.

The more recent build-up of French military presence in Africa used the Mali conflict of 2012–2013 as the main pretext. Launched in 2014 as the successor of Operation Serval, Operation Barkhane provides for the deployment of some 3,500 French troops in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali and Niger (the G5 Sahel countries). One of the largest French overseas military bases is now located in Gao (Mali) (1,000 personnel). As French President Francois Hollande said, “the Barkhane force will allow for a rapid and efficient intervention in the event of a crisis in the region” [Hollande..., 2014]. It certainly seems that France does not prioritize developing an exit strategy, but rather plans for a long-term deployment in the region. Simultaneously, Paris maintains its major colonial-era military bases in Djibouti (1,450 personnel in 2017), Ivory Coast (900), Gabon (450) and Senegal (350) [The Military Balance..., 2017].

The French base in Djibouti, which in fact consists of separate naval, air force and army installations, is a gem among France's overseas military assets due to its strategic location near the bottleneck of the Bab el-Mandeb strait, which is only 30 km wide and connects the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. When Djibouti gained independence from France in 1977, France retained the right to keep its troops in the country indefinitely. The sharp end of the French stick in Djibouti is 4 Dassault Mirage 2000 jet fighters, supported by attack and transport helicopters. The rent of the base costs France €30 million annually [Barluet, 2018].

Naturally, France's military and political interests are mostly limited to francophone states – its former colonies, where French companies usually enjoy preferences in extracting uranium, gold, oil and other natural resources. For France, which still largely relies on nuclear reactors for its electricity production, uranium mines of the Sahel are the key interest in the region. Most mines are located in Mali, Niger, Chad and Gabon. As was the case with Djibouti, upon gaining their independence most former French colonies signed bilateral treaties on military cooperation with France, and a good number of these treaties are still in force today. In the 1970s, these arrangements have been expanded to former Belgian colonies. France's influence is also supported by currency links and special relations between governing elites. However, what was called *Françafrique* – the system of special, exclusive relations between African countries and France – seems to be no longer a viable option for developing or even maintaining the current level of French influence on the continent. France's new expansion in the Sahel region of Africa since 2013 has been notable for its multilateral nature, with the strong involvement of other European countries, the U.S. and even Canada, which allows Paris to share financial and material burden of operations in Africa with its allies while maintaining its strategic posture.

EUROPEAN ALLIES AND THEIR MILITARY POSTURE IN AFRICA

Getting Germany on board with operations in Africa has been especially tricky as the country is traditionally averse to overseas deployments of troops. For years Germany has maintained small military presence in Djibouti within the framework of OEF-HOA and Operation Atalanta (the European Union's counter-piracy operation). A German Lockheed P-3

Orion maritime surveillance aircraft and 85 personnel are deployed to the Horn of Africa, but mostly tasked with anti-piracy patrols, just like the contingent from Spain [The Military Balance..., 2017], which also has no own bases in Djibouti and makes use of French and U.S. facilities.

More interestingly, in 2017 Germany opened a logistics air base in Niger's capital Niamey [Maiga, 2018], which marks the first time Germany possesses a military object in Africa since the Second World War and highlights Berlin's mounting concerns with migration flows and instability in the Sahara/Sahel region, as well as its desire to penetrate the region economically in view of France's increasingly frequent setbacks in keeping out corporations from China and other emerging powers, which often offer more lucrative deals for Africa's resources. While Berlin links the establishment of the base with the need to support Germany's growing troop contribution to the UN mission in Mali, the facility has also been tasked with assisting France's Operation Barkhane, which Paris strives to "Europeanize" (Italy and Spain are also expected to join the operation).

Initially all U.S. allies that participated in OEF-HOA were quartered at French and U.S. facilities or hotels in Djibouti City. In 2012, the Italians set up their own military installation (dubbed National Military Support Base) in Djibouti, 1.5 km south of Camp Lemonnier, albeit small (up to 300 personnel), but housing a special operations unit and equipped with UAVs remotely controlled from the base of Amendola in Italy's Puglia region [Dinucci, 2013]. Italy's move to establish military presence in the Horn of Africa may be viewed not only through the lens of its strategic partnership with the U.S., but also within the concept of the "enlarged Mediterranean" advanced by a number of officers of the Italian military, particularly admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi, Chief of Italy's Naval Staff (2013–2016) until his retirement, who argued that "the Italian Navy not only had to safeguard Italy's borders in the Mediterranean... but address a wide variety of tasks in an 'enlarged Mediterranean' that stretched from Gibraltar to the Persian Gulf" [Hattendorf, p. 210]. Italy pays for the base the yearly rent of approximately €30 million [Dinucci, 2013].

Notably, the United Kingdom has largely stayed out of the "race" for bases in Africa. While in the colonial era British military expanse in Africa was only rivaled by that of France, currently the British army has only one permanent facility on the continent – in Kenya, 200 km north of Nairobi, where the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) is located. Up to 10,000 British personnel per year undergo exercises in the rugged terrain of this part of Kenya. In addition, the UK provides occasional logistical support to its allies in Africa (e.g., to France in Mali) and carries out training missions in a number of countries of the continent – Gabon, Malawi, Nigeria, etc. [The British Army, 2018].

THE BIG TRIO FROM ASIA: JAPAN, CHINA, INDIA

Japan joined the War on Terror along with America's European allies. In 2011, Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) established their own base (180 personnel) right next to Camp Lemonnier – officially in response to piracy off the coast of Somalia. Since 2016, as the abating pirate threat ceased to provide a sufficient justification for the deployment, JSDF has refocused on rescuing Japanese citizens in Africa, and, more recently, – on countering growing Chinese influence in the region: the Japanese have leased additional territory to expand their base, which already costs them €30 million annually [Kubo, 2016]. There have even been reports about frictions between China and Japan off the Djiboutian coast when Japanese frogmen approached a Chinese warship [Lo, 2017]. In the region Japan is pursuing its own initiative – the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, which in certain aspects is analogous (and rival) to China's Maritime Silk Road project and aims at improving connectivity between Asia and Africa. Yet for historical (and, sequentially, constitutional) reasons Japan is limited in its ability

to project military power overseas, thus being forced to continue to rely largely on soft power mechanisms in fortifying its stance in Africa.

Indeed, American, French, Italian, and Japanese military bases being located within few kilometers of each other is no extraordinary circumstance as these nations are close allies. The inauguration of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti (approximately 10 km from the U.S. base) in the summer of 2017 marked an important geopolitical shift. It is estimated that the facility is capable of housing up to 10,000 personnel, and its large underground storage spaces are designed for storing fuel, munitions and equipment. According to various sources, the rent for China will range from \$20 to \$100 million per year. The lease agreement is for 10 years with the possibility of extension for another 10 years. According to official Chinese sources, the base will support China's missions including escorting, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance in Africa and West Asia, secure Chinese maritime trade, and also facilitate overseas tasks such as protecting and evacuating Chinese living overseas, emergency rescue, and military cooperation with foreign countries [*China sets up...*, 2017]. In addition, military presence in Djibouti will undoubtedly complement China's growing weapons sales in Africa.

All in all, the construction of the base is intrinsically linked to the implementation of the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road project, which has been endorsed by Chinese leader Xi Jinping since 2013, and which undoubtedly implies expansion of not only trade, but also of the presence of the Chinese navy in the world's oceans, which necessitates the establishment of new military facilities along the route and elsewhere on the planet. Indeed, China is supposedly already constructing a military base in Pakistan [Gertz, 2018] and allegedly has even approached Vanuatu about building a military presence in the country [Wroe, 2018], which in combination with Chinese development of deep water port facilities in Sri Lanka (Hambantota) and Myanmar (Kyaukpyu) gives new strength to the prevailing theory of the "string of pearls" – the network of naval bases and dual-use ports that China might be constructing along the route between Mainland China and the Mediterranean Sea.

In all likelihood, China will take the fullest advantage of interweaving its soft power and hard power influence in African in general and in Djibouti in particular. Naturally, Chinese companies are now expected to be given a larger stake in the Port of Doraleh, which is connected to the new Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway, also operated by China, and which in the foreseeable future will replace the Port of Djibouti as the country's main shipping hub [Strengthening Djibouti..., 2015]. The importance of the port cannot be underestimated as Djibouti has practical monopoly over the international trade of landlocked Ethiopia – one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. Furthermore, in July 2018, Djibouti opened the first phase of \$3.5 billion free trade zone financed exclusively by Chinese corporations [Djibouti Opens..., 2018]. The People's Republic has also recently offered to mediate the border row between Djibouti and Eritrea, thus flexing its diplomatic muscles.

India is another rising power which is very much concerned with growing presence of foreign militaries, particularly China's, on the shores of the Indian Ocean. While the main areas of contention between New Delhi and Beijing lie in Asia – in such states as Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Myanmar, India has also become wary of military aspects of China's penetration of Africa. The latest (2015) Indian Maritime Security Strategy "expands India's maritime areas of interest southwards and westwards by bringing the southwest Indian Ocean and Red Sea within its primary area of interest, and the western coast of Africa, the Mediterranean Sea and other areas of interest within its secondary area of interest" [Mann, 2017, p. 4].

As of mid-2018, India's military has just one facility in Africa – a listening post in northern Madagascar, which has been in place since 2007 to monitor ship movements and maritime communications. However, in January 2018, after many delays (the plan of the Indian government to establish a military base on the Assumption Island in the Seychelles was first an-

nounced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Indian Ocean tour in March 2015), India finally signed an agreement with the Seychelles to introduce Indian military infrastructure to its territory [Bagchi, 2018]. There have also been negotiations between India and Mauritius about establishing Indian military presence on the island of Agalega. India has already financed the construction of a new airstrip and new jetty facilities on the island [Agalega..., 2017]. New Delhi's priority project is the development of a network of coastal radars in the Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, which would allow it to monitor maritime activities of its main rivals – China and Pakistan – and also enhance its counter-piracy capabilities.

Another path of India's maritime expansion has been to conclude logistics agreements with other powers that would provide its navy with access to their naval bases. India already has such agreements with the U.S. (2017, access to Diego Garcia base) and France (2018, Reunion and Djibouti bases) [Samanta, 2018]. In mainland Africa, Mozambique has become India's key partner and possibly closest military ally on the continent, with the Indian Navy making frequent port calls in the gas-rich nation. Overall, while India's efforts to construct its own arch of security in the Indian Ocean may not have been as visible as America's immoderate proliferation of military outposts in Africa, China's "string of pearls" strategy, or France's resurgence in francophone countries, New Delhi has certainly adopted the same hard power approach as the others to protecting its influence in this part of the world.

THE ARAB CONNECTION

China became the fifth and last country to establish a military installation in Djibouti. It will not stay the last for long, though. In 2017, Saudi Arabia began construction of a new base in the African Horn nation. For Riyadh, the apparent motivation for developing military infrastructure in this part of Africa is the strengthening of the naval blockade of the Houthis in Yemen and limiting Iranian influence in the countries of the region, which falls within its increasingly assertive anti-Iran foreign policy. Saudi Arabia may also use the future base as an intelligence outpost, monitoring maritime traffic near the Bab el-Mandeb strait.

Beyond a doubt, Djibouti maintains a number of advantages in the region, including its relative national stability and developed infrastructure, which make it so attractive for foreign militaries. Yet its two immediate neighbors – Eritrea and unrecognized Somaliland – have also decided to capitalize on their geographical proximity to the "Gate of Tears" ("Bab el-Mandeb" in Arabic). The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is a close ally of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and in the war in Yemen [Kostelyanets, 2016a, p. 30], has in fact been much more active on the African continent than its more powerful neighbor. While the Saudis have just recently embarked on their construction project, the Emiratis started to build a large military base in Assab in Eritrea in 2015. The facility includes an airfield (the UAE has already deployed fighter planes, attack helicopters and drones to the base), naval docks (under construction), and a motor pool that can accommodate at least an armored battalion [The UAE Joins..., 2016]. The base is poised to become one of the largest foreign military bases in Africa and, according to multiple reports, may cost the UAE \$500 million over the duration of the 30-year lease.

As if that were not enough, the Emiratis have taken up another naval project – in the port of Berbera in Somaliland. In February 2017, the Parliament of Somaliland by a vast margin approved the construction of the first foreign base in the country. For Somaliland, which had proclaimed independence in 1991, the base means not just more employment or hard currency inflows, but also implies more concrete foreign support for its sovereignty. The economic benefit is considerable, nevertheless: the 25-year framework agreement specifies that the UAE would invest \$1 billion in infrastructure projects in the country (roads, dams, cargo airport, etc.) [Somaliland, UAE sign..., 2017].

It is noteworthy that Emirati interests extend well beyond those of the Saudis. While the UAE partakes in the fierce opposition to Iran's growing regional influence, which the two monarchies consider an "existential threat", and has committed considerable resources to the war in Yemen, Abu Dhabi has done the most of all GCC countries in terms of economic expansion in Africa. The UAE (above all the Emirate of Dubai) has already become one of the largest transport and logistics hubs connecting Europe and Asia. In recent years, the UAE has been paying increasing attention to its ties with Africa, aiming to become a gateway to the Dark Continent for investors from around the world, but primarily from Asia. Port infrastructure is the key area for investment companies from the UAE. In 2016, DP World, one of the largest port operators globally, signed multi-million deals to upgrade the ports of Berbera and Bosaso (the latter is located in Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland). The apparent aim of these projects is to divert some Ethiopian trade from Djibouti. In fact, these deals follow the row with Djibouti over the control of the Horn nation's ports: since 2011 the Djiboutian government had been trying to renegotiate and then annul its contracts with DP World, and finally cancelled its Doraleh concession in February 2018 [Fattah, 2018]. It so seems that the UAE is now urgently building up permanent military footholds in the Horn to protect its economic influence and investments in the region.

TURKEY'S AFRICAN VENTURE

To add to the conundrum, Turkey jumped into the fray for the hard power influence in the Horn of Africa in 2017, when it opened its first military base in Africa – in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. The declared task of the Turkish contingent (about 200 personnel) is the training and support of the Somali army in its confrontation with terrorist groups [Hussein, 2017]. It should be noted that Turkey has been strongly focused on the development of ties with Somalia for a number of years. The relations moved to a new level in 2011, when Recep Erdoğan (then Turkish Prime Minister) made a visit to Mogadishu. At the time Somalia was experiencing the worst famine in decades. Since then Ankara has not only provided humanitarian assistance to the embattled country, but made considerable investment in Somali infrastructure (primarily in the capital, where it built roads, electrical networks, a large hospital and a new terminal of Aden Abdulle International Airport, formerly known as Mogadishu International Airport) [Kostelyanets, 2016b, p. 32]. Currently Turkish companies run the only two strategically important infrastructure objects under control of the Federal Government of Somalia: the international airport and the port of Mogadishu (both since 2013). Turkey has also been financing army and police reforms in the country since 2010, when the parties signed a military cooperation agreement.

In another bold move, at the end of 2017, Turkey reached an agreement with Sudan on the construction of a dock to maintain civilian and military vessels on the Red Sea island of Suakin, which Ankara simultaneously leased for 99 years. Considering that a Turkish military base had already been established in Qatar, new bases in Africa would enable Ankara to augment its power projection capability dramatically. While the estimates that before 2022 Turkey will have 60,000 troops stationed in its overseas bases in Africa and the Persian Gulf [Turkey to deploy..., 2018] may be exaggerated, the deployment numbers are bound to increase multifold. Ankara's turn to the south – in the direction of the territories of the former Ottoman Empire – may in part be a reaction to the European Union's refusal to grant Turkey the status of an official candidate for EU membership, but the search for new markets for Turkish goods (including weapons) and investment opportunities clearly dominates the agenda.

RUSSIA'S THREE FLAWED OPTIONS IN AFRICA

Over the past decade Russia has repeatedly demonstrated its desire to resume military presence in Africa, which it conclusively forfeited in 1991 after the evacuation of the Soviet naval

base on the Ethiopian (now Eritrean) island of Nokra on the Red Sea. In 2008–2011, Russia discussed the establishment of a Russian naval base on the Mediterranean with Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, but the deal was still in the works when the Libyan revolution erupted. In 2012–2014, Russia probed opportunities for leasing a parcel of land to build a base in Djibouti, but reportedly the Americans managed to head off the arrangement [Jacobs, 2017].

Since 2016, Russia has received three offers for hosting a military base in Africa. Firstly, Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA), has indicated his interest in hosting a Russian military base in the eastern part of Libya that is under his control. A Russian official confirmed that the field marshal had extended such an offer and that it was being considered in Moscow [Saudi cleric..., 2018]. Indeed, eastern coastal Libya (Cyrenaica) would be a perfect location for a naval base: located at the central part of the Mediterranean, it is also relatively far from major NATO bases, unlike the Russian naval base at Tartus in Syria, which is flanked by Turkey and British bases on Cyprus, and would more effectively support the permanent ship formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea. It would also buttress Russia's desire to renew the lucrative public infrastructure contracts concluded with Libya under Gaddafi. At present time, however, the obstacles to Russian military construction (and to major civil infrastructure projects as well) in Libya seem insurmountable. As of mid-2018, the country is still divided between LNA, the UN-backed Government of the National Accord, and other smaller armed actors; the UN arms embargo on Libya has been in place since 2011. Until the unity of the country is restored, Russia's permanent military presence in Cyrenaica would not only carry enormous security risks but would also be seen as illegitimate.

Secondly, in the summer of 2017, a parliamentary delegation of Somaliland visited Moscow and reported on their country's readiness to lease land to Russia that could be used for constructing a naval facility on the shores of the Gulf of Aden. Apparently, Hargeisa does not consider the proximity of the Emirati base to be a problem for either Abu Dhabi or Moscow. The offered location – not far from Berbera in present-day Somaliland, where the USSR had a major naval base in 1974–1977 – is strategically equivalent to the coveted one in Djibouti, just about 50 km farther from the Bab el-Mandeb. Somaliland is also comparably stable, especially against the backdrop of the chaos in Somalia. On the other hand, the country seeks recognition of its independence and considers foreign military bases as an instrument to achieve this goal. It was for this reason that the Federal Government of Somalia called the agreement between the UAE and Somaliland on the construction of the port and naval base a “clear violation of international law” [Somalia Reports..., 2018]. It is unlikely that similar accusations would contribute to the advancement of Russia's influence in Somalia and other African countries, many of which face their own problems with separatism. Finally, the price of an “admission ticket” to the Horn country also matters: Somaliland's media even reported the amount of investment Hargeisa expects to receive from Moscow in exchange for the basing rights: \$250 million [Russia offers..., 2018], which is a huge sum to invest in one of the poorest countries in Africa, over 60% of whose GDP is linked to the trade in *qat* (a mild narcotic) [Elder, 2017]. There is also no permanent presence of the Russian Navy in the Gulf of Aden, although Russian ships conduct occasional anti-piracy missions in the area. Combined, these factors substantially lessen the attractiveness of a base deal with Somaliland.

The third proposal came from Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir during his visit to Moscow in November 2017. Al-Bashir appealed to President Putin to protect Sudan from the aggressive actions of the U.S. and expressed his interest in discussing with Russia the establishment of a Russian base on the Red Sea, presumably in the city of Port Sudan. Russia has not yet publicly responded to the offer of the Sudanese president, but it came as a strong sign when in March 2018 the Russian president accepted al-Bashir's invitation to visit Sudan, and again had a meeting with the Sudanese President in July 2018. The Sudanese proposal in many aspects is more advantageous in comparison with the ones received from Libya and Somaliland.

The linchpin, of course, is that Sudan is a United Nations member state and al-Bashir is its legitimate leader. In addition, Sudan is a really important African country, in fact the largest economy on the eastern coast of Africa between Egypt and the South African Republic. Furthermore, Sudan occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of North and Tropical Africa and the Middle East. The latter also means that a base in Sudan would not just serve Russian maritime interests, but potentially provide it with a “key” to the heart of the African continent.

At the same time, for a number of objective reasons, the very idea of deploying Russian military in the Sudan should be approached with much caution. First, Khartoum’s foreign policy is volatile, and only states with very strong economic positions in the Sudan – such as China – can be assured of long-term preservation of their position. The example of Iran is symptomatic: since 2008, the development of military-technical cooperation with Iran was considered the priority direction of foreign policy in Khartoum. With Iranian assistance, Sudan built the country’s largest military-industrial complex and two air bases. But in 2014, Saudi Arabia offered significant financial assistance to the Sudan in exchange for downgrading relations with Iran, and the Sudan accepted the offer. In January 2016, Khartoum even severed diplomatic relations with Teheran, following Riyadh’s decision to do so [Kostelyanets, 2016a, p. 32].

Russia’s foray in Sudan would be viewed with suspicion not only in the West, but also by China (the largest foreign investor in Sudan, owns a major oil terminal in Port Sudan), Saudi Arabia (Port Sudan is just about 300 km from Jeddah and Mecca) and Turkey, which is building its maritime infrastructure just 50 km south of Port Sudan in Suakin. Just how much effort the West and these and other countries would be willing to put into forestalling Russia in Sudan is incalculable, but the Sudanese government has previously exhibited the elasticity of its policies. Therefore, Russia would face a risk of another zigzag in Sudan’s international priorities.

It also goes without saying that al-Bashir, seeing the example of Syrian President Bashar Assad (indeed, just like Libya’s Field Marshal Haftar or Somaliland’s President Abdi), would hope that Moscow’s military clout could help him strengthen and legitimize his regime, and then Russia would find it difficult to avoid getting drawn in the Sudan’s numerous internal and border conflicts. In fact, it has already been widely reported that a Russian private military company has been deployed in Sudan [Russia Revisits..., 2018]. However, an involvement of Russian regular army units would be an entirely different matter. Sudan continues to fight insurrections in the west of the country in Darfur and in the south along its border with South Sudan and just in recent years has had border tensions with Chad, Egypt, Eritrea and South Sudan.

Lastly, like Hargeisa, but unlike Damascus, which will not charge Moscow a fee for the two bases on Syrian soil, cash-strapped Khartoum most likely expects serious monetary injections from Russia in exchange for the deployment of the Russian military in the country. For comparison, Ankara announced plans to invest \$650 million in the Sudanese economy as part of the agreement to build its facilities in Sudan’s Suakin [Kucukgocmen, 2017].

The three options all carry serious political, financial and security risks, which so far have outweighed the Russian aspiration of advancing its global power status through restoring some of the Soviet-era military posts around the world or opening up totally new ones. To date Russia has taken different, less conspicuous routes for furthering hard power influence in Africa.

TWO AVENUES: COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION AND PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

The cornerstone of Russia’s counter-terrorism activities in Africa has been the increasingly close military cooperation between Russia and Egypt. It is reflected in joint naval drills,

tactical exercises of Russian airborne forces and Egyptian armed forces paratroopers, and political and possibly military coordination with regard to Libya. In 2017, Russian Special Forces reportedly carried out training for Egyptian and LNA militaries at Egypt's Sidi Barrani airbase 100 km from the Egypt-Libya border, which may have involved the use of drones to monitor Islamists' activities on the Libyan territory [Stewart, 2017]. While Russia officially refuted these specific claims, at the end of 2017, the countries signed an agreement on the reciprocal use of airbases and airspace. The five-year agreement does not apply to aircraft with long-range radar surveillance capabilities, command and control aircraft, or military aircraft carrying dangerous goods, and requires both sides to give five days advance notice before activating its clauses [The Russian Government Order..., 2017]. In this connection, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Russia did not plan to deploy any troops to Egypt on a permanent basis, but the agreement reflected the close partnership between the two countries [Lavrov..., 2017].

Russia's counter-terrorism cooperation with Africa is not limited to Egypt. In 2016, Moscow started sharing with Tunisia and Algeria high-resolution satellite imagery of terrorist groups moving across the Maghreb. According to media reports, Algerian and Tunisian officials credited Russia with helping them thwart several attempts to infiltrate their borders and smuggle weapons [Russia aids..., 2016]. The same year Russia deepened its counter-terrorism cooperation with Morocco [Russia and Morocco..., 2016]. While these developments came in the wake of the bombing of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt's Sinai in October 2015, counter-terrorism has certainly become an important pillar of Russia's engagement with African countries.

The second avenue of expanding Moscow's influence in Africa may be linked to the use of Russian private military companies (PMCs). It should be borne in mind that it was PMCs that paved the way for the Russian intervention in Syria in September 2015. PMCs have been active in Syria, Sudan, Libya (demining operations), and most recently the Central African Republic, where Russian contractors are now serving on the presidential guard [Vinograd, 2018]. In all of the above cases, PMCs deployed to Africa after high-level negotiations, often amid signing intergovernmental agreements on military and economic cooperation and arms contracts, which highlights their role as promoters of Russian foreign policy and arms exports rather than commercial enterprises. PMCs are flexible, mobile, and usually work under the radar, drawing much less media attention than foreign regular forces, and the government formally does not hold responsibility for their actions or losses. In this regard, Russia has learned much from Western PMCs, which may be more commercial in nature but frequently do the government's dirty work in developing countries.

CONCLUSION

Russia's recent thundering "return" to the Middle East is first and foremost an obvious result of the effective use of hard power rather than the tools of soft power such as economics or diplomacy, which played important but secondary roles. The most visible symbol of this return is the establishment of two permanent, sovereign Russian military bases in Syria. Indeed, Moscow has extensive experience in employing hard power to protect its interests, which may also become of use in the new African geopolitical reality. Nonetheless, political, financial and security risks of such an enterprise are aplenty, which dictates Russia's cautious policy on this matter. Zigzagging foreign policy trajectories of African regimes, the mounting price of the "admission ticket" to Africa amid high competition, and propagation of armed conflict present serious challenges, which are only exacerbated by economic difficulties at home.

Geostrategically, however, the establishment of a Russian base or multiple bases in Africa on the Mediterranean coast or the Indian Ocean fits well with the priorities defined in key Rus-

sian policy papers, for instance, Russia's 2017 Naval Doctrine, which stipulates the need to maintain the presence of the Russian Navy in "practically any area of the World Ocean" [Decree of the President..., 2017]. In this context, we may see Russia's effort at counter-terrorism cooperation and the deployment of PMCs in Africa as harbingers of future permanent military deployment on the continent.

In conclusion, it must be said that should Moscow follow this course, it is imperative not only to develop new accompanying economic, diplomatic and cultural strategies for the continent that would strengthen Russia's soft power arsenal, but, as a matter of principle, to build fair and equal partnerships with nations of the continent, thus avoiding being perceived as a new colonial power, but, on the contrary, positioning itself as a supporter of the sovereignty and statehood of African countries in the international arena and of the idea of "African solutions to African problems", a once compelling but ever more imperiled maxim of the African Union.

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