

Race of Fury – The West and the Soul of Africa Again



Holding summits for African heads of governments is fast becoming a recurrent event among the global power brokers. The EU has had about 5 of these summits, probably to massage and codify her colonial exploitative economic spree with Africa because nothing significant has really emerged from those submits to enhance Africa's fortune. Following the example of China in the recent past, Russia too had, for the first time, invited the African heads of governments to a two-day Africa summit in Sochi from 23.-24 October, 2019. Over 40 African heads of government participated in the summit. Just like China, Russia has the privilege of entering into the African political space as a non-colonialists but Russia had the added advantage of having supported African states in their struggle for independence. During the Cold War, it had close ties with socialist states like Guinea, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Angola. Those countries have now become the boosters for the rebuilding of Russian interest in Africa. Neither China nor Russia cares about human rights in Africa, but Russia in particular does not hide her thirst for arm sales, nor even shy away from helping autocratic regimes to sway national elections, as has been reported from DR Congo and Guinea while the Chinese unbridled quest for mineral resources has no equal.

Obviously, both China and Russia are exploiting the vacuum created by the European colonialists from their lack of true and constructive commitment to Africa to market their respective products in Africa. But in the final analysis it is a race of fury for the control of Africa's natural resources, the global digital economy and power.

The primary products offered to the African heads of governments by Russia during the most recent summit are worrisome. Among others, Russia has offered nuclear technology alongside weapons and mining expertise to Africa. As part of the summit, the Russian energy group *Rosatom* signed a preliminary agreement with **Rwanda** to help her with the construction of an atomic research center and another contract with **Ethiopia** with the aim of building a high-performance nuclear power plant. Russia has granted **Egypt** a \$ 25 billion loan for the construction of a nuclear power plant and is supplying enriched uranium for a research reactor. In South Africa. *Rosatom* had made a deal to build eight \$75 billion nuclear power plants under former President Jacob Zuma, which was canceled after his removal from power. Truly, Africa needs power to drive her economic development but to suggest nuclear energy for Africa as an option considering its technical demands and environment threats is highly questionable and condemnable. Rather than nuclear energy, is there no wisdom to suggest the development of the rich supply of sun and wind in Africa for solar and wind plants as alternatives for Africa that

would be cheaper, cleaner and better.

However, it needs to be interrogated further whether these summits are about the development of Africa or the exploitation and control of her resources. Like China and the European colonialists, Russia is fast leaving her foot print in Africa. In **Guinea**, Russian corporations exploit huge bauxite deposits and run a gold mine without paying taxes.

In **Uganda**, the Russian corporate group *RT Global Resources* is building an oil refinery for three billion Euros. Russian companies are planning platinum mines in Zimbabwe and want to develop one of the largest diamond deposits in Angola.

Russia could thus double its trade volume with Africa to \$ 20 billion in 2019, though this remains modest when compared to China's \$ 300 billion.

Not only that, Russia is also strengthening its influence on the continent through military cooperation. Over the past four years, Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 19 African states, to supply weapons and training. 40% of all military exports to Africa come from Russia, 17% from China and 11% from the US. At the Sochi summit, Putin declared his intention to double arms exports to Africa and on the spot signed a contract with Nigeria to supply Mi-35 combat helicopters. In the **Central African Republic** Russia is very present with 200 military advisors and a Russian is the security advisor to the president. The country is attractive because of its uranium and gold deposits. In an agreement with **Mozambique** Russia supports the fight against Islamist terrorists in the North and also granted a debt swap in exchange for access to the large oil and gas fields. In **Sudan**, instructors train the security forces and Russian soldiers supported them in the brutal suppression of demonstrations last June.

Often, military training is not carried out directly by the Russian army, but by mercenaries of the *Wagner group*, a private security company already notorious through its operations in Crimea and Syria. During the Sochi summit, President Vladimir Putin declared that, "*Today, developing and strengthening mutually beneficial relations with African countries is one of the priorities of Russian foreign policy.*" But only time will show what this new found love with Africa practically means

However, it is viewed that there is a debt crisis hanging over the neck of the continent. This new wave of interest is indeed a feast on the soul of the African continent. Every resource that the continent can boast of is targeted; the level of resource extraction is massive. In return, there is promise of infrastructural development. It is the replay of an old story. In the 1980s, most African countries fell into a "debt trap" that led to a "lost development decade". The bail out by the International Monetary through the so-called HIPC initiative (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) came at a high cost, with the imposition of strict conditions which stifled all possibilities of development. With China's billions of credits for infrastructure projects, Russia's arms exports, and governments borrowing further billions on the financial markets, Africa is well on the way to a new debt crisis. Time will tell if the seemingly huge debt reliefs that China and Russia have granted to some African countries are worth the soul of the African continent which has become the main dish for the insatiable appetites of Russia, China and the powerful western countries.



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