

# RUSSIA-SUDAN RELATIONS IN THE EARLY 21st CENTURY:

## A lost opportunity or the foundation for a new beginning?

© 2019 S. KOSTELYANETS

DOI: 10.31857/S032150750006275-4

*Over the past decade or even longer, a lot has been contemplated and written about the need for Russia to «return» to the African continent. An increase in the importance of Africa's resource, human and economic potential within the emerging model of world development is undeniable, and with Russia once again claiming to be a weighty player on the global arena, it cannot but seek to expand its presence on the continent to restore its international standing. The first Russia-Africa Summit poised to take place in Sochi (Russia) in October 2019 attests to the growing importance that Moscow attaches to the continent.*

*In recent years, within its new foreign policy approach to Africa, Russia has established special relations with a number of African countries. Russia developed particularly close cooperation with Sudan, just short of establishing a full-fledged strategic partnership, raising hopes in Moscow that it gained a viable foothold on the continent and, consequently, access to farther parts of the continent. Indeed, Russia capitalized on its standing with Khartoum as it managed to penetrate politically and economically into the Central African Republic.*

*On 11 April 2019, Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir was removed from power by the Sudanese military and placed under arrest. This put Moscow, which was seen as a close ally of the ousted President, in a precarious position. Even so, the present study argues that the intensity of political and military relations and the convergence of national interests have laid a solid foundation for the close friendship and comprehensive ties between Russia and Sudan. However, the shortcomings of Moscow's economic policy for Africa in general and Sudan in particular must be addressed promptly if Russia were to establish itself on the continent.*

*Keywords: Russia, Sudan, military coup, international diplomacy, military-technical cooperation, economic cooperation, strategic partnership*

**Since at least 2014, when the political rift between the Russian Federation and the West became particularly pronounced and rippled implacably into other areas of cooperation, including trade and investment, Moscow has been vigorously pursuing the path of intensifying its relations - both political and economic - with developing countries. While Asian countries have in general received much more focused attention under the new foreign policy, it seems that the African dimension has also been gaining in significance for Russian diplomacy, slowly but steadily, with the first Russia-Africa Summit poised to take place in October 2019.**

The continuing escalation of geopolitical competition on the global and regional scales is indeed a major driver behind Russia's endeavor to «return» to Africa after its abrupt and unilateral withdrawal in the early 1990s after the collapse of the USSR. Yet both international academia and industry mostly agree that Africa is gradually becoming an increasingly important element in the emerging model of global development due to its huge resource, human and economic potential, and this trend could simply no longer be ignored by Moscow, which is once more laying a claim to be a weighty actor on the world stage and, consequently, is compelled to maintain broader global presence.

There is a growing consensus in academic circles that the major impediments to Russia's comeback to Africa involve the lack of a comprehensive foreign economic policy toward African countries [1, p. 3] as

well as the insufficient and inexpert use of soft power tools [2, p. 134]. Under the circumstances Moscow, which appears to have become an ambitious contender for the political and economic influence in Africa, explores the avenues for developing sustainable and cost-effective mechanisms for defending and advancing its interests on the continent. Developing special relations with key countries in Africa would be a logical consequence of this effort.

### RUSSIA-SUDAN: THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Peculiarly, in the 2010s it was Sudan under President Omar al-Bashir that became one of the primary testing grounds on the continent for Moscow's new approaches to bilateral relations with African countries. Indeed, the state in Northeast

---

Sergey V. KOSTELYANETS, PhD (Political Science), Senior Research Fellow, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Senior Research Fellow, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Associate Professor, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) (sergey.kostelyanyets@gmail.com)

Africa did not lead in most rankings that appraised African countries' ties with Moscow, neither in terms of trade turnover or investment nor the level of cultural and humanitarian exchange, yet it came to occupy a special place in Russia's Africa policy. By 2019, relations between the two countries were at their best-ever point in history and only kept on strengthening by the day. In early 2019, Sudan's Ambassador to Russia Nadir Babiker confirmed his country's commitment to developing a strategic partnership with Russia [3].

Yet just as the narrative had gained momentum, it came to an abrupt halt on 11 April 2019, when President al-Bashir, who had ruled Sudan since 1989, was deposed by the military amid large-scale popular protests. The fall of the old regime had far-reaching foreign policy implications. In particular, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt immediately intensified their competition with Turkey and Qatar for influence on Sudan's newly formed Transitional Military Council. Moscow also found itself in a precarious position, seen as a close ally of the ousted President. Predictably, Western media spread dubious reports about the role of Russia in assisting the regime with its attempts to suppress the protests [4]. Nevertheless, on 16 April 2019, Moscow recognized the new Sudanese authorities. On 30 April 2019, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov reiterated Moscow's commitment to developing relations of Sudan in the course of a meeting with Ambassador Babiker [5]. In all probability, the foundation of relations between Moscow and Khartoum should withstand the test of political turbulence in the Northeast Africa country. More perilous are the prospects of furthering the development of cooperation in political, economic and military spheres, which was supposed to culminate in the establishment of a strategic partnership.

It must be noted here, however, that the 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation focuses on the development of strategic relations with international organizations (UN, BRICS, G-20, etc.), otherwise mentioning the importance of strengthening bilateral strategic partnerships only with China and India [6]. On the other hand, besides the high-priority strategic ties with these two countries, Russia has also signed strategic partnership declarations with over 20 other countries, including a number of African states: Algeria (2001), Morocco (2002), Egypt (2009, 2018), South Africa (2013). For comparison, China has developed approximately 50 strategic partnerships, with nations as diverse as Afghanistan, Australia and India; India - about 20 partnerships; Japan - around 10 [7]. As for Sudan, the country established a strategic partnership with China in 2015, and also has been actively working on developing such a relationship with Turkey since at least 2017.

In general, the course of the development of international relations has accentuated the importance of bilateral strategic partnerships as a tool

to advance national interests despite the proliferation of multilateral security and economic organizations. The ouster of President al-Bashir, on the one hand, endangered the perspectives of a launch of a strategic partnership with Sudan, but, on the other, presented Russia with new opportunities. The international isolation of Sudan and its socio-economic difficulties effectively impeded the development of trade and investment cooperation between the two countries. The deposition of al-Bashir provided Sudan with an opportunity - contingent on the removal of international sanctions - to integrate in the global economic system, join the World Trade Organization, and obtain international loans. Moscow's existing strategic partnerships with Cairo and Abu Dhabi - key players in the new Sudan - should also facilitate the furthering of strategic cooperation with Khartoum. In this connection, it would be imperative to evaluate the depth of relations between the two countries and the prospects for the future.

### **HIGH-LEVEL VISITS: THE PAST AND PRESENT**

Sudan's growing emphasis on cooperation with the Russian Federation became evident in the landmark visit to the country by President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir on 22-23 November 2017. It was in fact the first time that al-Bashir, who had been in power for 28 years - since the 1989 coup, paid a visit to the USSR or Russia. If we glance further back at the history of high-profile meetings between leaders in Moscow and Khartoum, we will find only two such diplomatic occurrences: in November 1961, Leonid Brezhnev, at that time the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, went to Khartoum, where he signed the Agreement between the USSR and Sudan on economic cooperation, and also pledged a 20 million ruble line of credit to finance Soviet technical assistance; in 1986, al-Bashir's predecessor, the newly elected Sudanese Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, visited Moscow, which stood on his rather ambitious itinerary alongside Washington, Tripoli, Riyadh and Tehran, and attempted to mend ties that had become nearly frozen under the ousted President Jaafar an-Nimeiry.

The Sochi visit in November 2017, however, eclipsed the historical precursors at least in terms of sensationalism, which was reflected in the call by President al-Bashir for Russia to protect Sudan from aggressive actions of the United States, which was supposedly seeking to partition Sudan into five countries. Al-Bashir continued with a proposal to discuss the joint use of military bases on the Red Sea [8]. Presumably, a Russian base could be established in the city of Port Sudan and include air and naval facilities, which ostensibly would hamper American meddling in the African country. Besides the geopolitical segment, the meeting between al-Bashir and Vladimir Putin involved an extensive discussion of military-technical and economic cooperation between Russia and Sudan.

Another meeting between the two presidents took place extraordinarily soon - on 14 July 2018 in the

Kremlin - on the sidelines of the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Al-Bashir particularly noted the progress in the sphere of military and technical cooperation and training, but also mentioned expanding trade in agricultural products, increasing Russian investment in mining industry, and plans to promote travel and tourism between the two countries [9]. In 2018, Putin accepted al-Bashir's offer to visit Sudan at an undisclosed future date [10]. In March 2019, al-Bashir was invited to the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit [11]. All in all, the unprecedented frequency of official visits to Russia by the Sudanese President was indicative of Sudan's newfound special place in Moscow's broader strategy for Africa.

## KEY FACTORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Notwithstanding the present modest figures for trade turnover and investment, Russia considers Sudan to be one of its key partners in Africa. Indeed, there is objective truth to Sudan being a pivotal African country. Firstly, according to the 2017 data from the World Bank, it was the largest economy on the entire eastern coast of Africa between Egypt and the South African Republic [12]. Secondly, it possesses rich land resources (Sudan used to be called an Arab «bread-basket»), a relatively developed industrial base, and occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of North Africa, Tropical Africa and the Middle East. In 2018, the Sudanese establishment demonstrated its significant weight in the region when it successfully mediated the conflict in South Sudan. Sudan could indeed become Russia's key if not to all of Africa then to the region of the Greater African Horn. Back in 2017, President al-Bashir declared that Sudan could become Russia's gateway to the rest of the continent. Interestingly, for China, Sudan was one of the main springboards for its phenomenally successful economic penetration of the continent, and Moscow could also benefit from learning from this Chinese experience of strengthening relations with Africa.

A key facilitating factor for Russia-Sudan ties under al-Bashir was the two countries' political proximity regarding a number of international and regional issues. At the heart of these friendly relations lay the Russian policy on the crisis in Sudan's rebellious province of Darfur. From the very onset of the conflict, the Russian leadership has been stressing that any actions to stabilize the situation in the region should be undertaken only with the full agreement of the official Khartoum and that only a political decision can put an end to the conflict in Darfur. This approach has fully corresponded to Russia's staunch support of the principle of non-intervention, which it has cultivated in response to the Western criticism of its campaigns in Chechnya, and also as a reaction to the abuse by the West of the concept of the responsibility to protect - in Yugoslavia in 1999 and elsewhere. The same principle was reiterated in the course of the April meeting between Bogdanov and Babiker [5]. In addition, Russia has been providing humanitarian

assistance to Darfur, particularly considerable quantities of rice and wheat, which helped to alleviate the situation of the population of the region.

In 2009, Russia backed Khartoum with regard to the warrant of arrest against President al-Bashir, which had been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) earlier that year, and spoke out against the charges against the incumbent leader of Sudan. In this connection, Mikhail V. Margelov, the special representative of the President of the Russian Federation for Sudan, stated that «the untimely fulfillment of the ICC decision to arrest the president of Sudan will create a dangerous precedent in the system of international relations and could negatively affect the situation both inside Sudan and the overall situation in the region» [13]. Sudanese officials at that point highly praised Russia's support for the suspension of the ICC decision. In its first public statement on 11 April 2019, the Transitional Military Council also declared that it would not hand over al-Bashir to ICC. In recent years, Sudan also enjoyed Russia's support at the UN Security Council regarding the withdrawal of forces of the United Nations - African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which Khartoum saw as a vital step toward regaining full sovereignty over its territory.

Essentially, on the international arena, Russia and Sudan shared key values and interests and had a common vision of how global security should be managed. This level of understanding was further reinforced by Track 1.5 and Track 2 processes, such as the International Scientific and Practical Conference on Darfur Conflict, which was held in Moscow in October 2009, and regular smaller conferences and round-tables that discussed Russian-Sudanese relations and other regional issues and attracted scholars from both countries [14, pp. 37-39]. The intensifying contacts between the academia of the two countries undeniably contributed to further opportunities for raising the level of relations between Russia and Sudan.

The fundamental national interests of Sudan - unity, sovereignty, stability - will inevitably be pursued by any future Sudanese government, which ushers the way for cultivating a comprehensive strategic partnership with Moscow.

## MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Throughout the years of the conflict in Darfur, Russia was eager to provide not just diplomatic support or academic expertise, but also something more tangible - namely, military hardware - to Khartoum, despite the latter's poor international standing (the United States put Sudan on the State Sponsors of Terror List in 1993; UN sanctions against Sudan were imposed in 1996 in connection with the assassination attempt on Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in 1995). In the early 2000s, amid an oil boom in Sudan, Khartoum signed a number of large contracts for the delivery of Russian military equipment as part of the country's long-term

rearmament program. In 2000, Sudan ordered 30 BTR-80A infantry fighting vehicles, and additional 60 - in 2004; in 2002 - 12 fighter planes (MiG-29S/MiG-29UB) for \$120 million; in 2000-2017, Sudan obtained in total 52 combat helicopters (Mi-24P/Mi-35P) and 37 transport helicopters (Mi-8MT/Mi-17) from Russia. In addition, in 2011, Sudan procured 100 Kornet/AT-14 anti-tank systems. In 20 years from 1997 to 2017, Sudan imported \$997 million worth of weapons from Russia, which is nearly twice the amount of imports over the same period from Sudan's strategic partner - China (\$575 million). The domination of Soviet/Russian-made military hardware on the Sudanese market is buttressed by the fact that the third and fourth largest arms suppliers to Sudan have been Belarus (\$297 million) and Ukraine (\$288 million) [15], inheritors of vast Soviet arsenals. Most recently, Sudanese officials expressed interest in obtaining Su-30/Su-35 fighter planes and S-300 missile systems from Russia, but such ambitious deals were contingent on the availability of finance in the cash-strapped Northeast African country.

The arms sales were predictably accompanied with professional military education of Sudanese officers in Russia, as well as on-the-spot technical training related to equipment purchases. For example, Sudanese pilots of transport helicopters underwent training in the Russian city of Kazan [16], while on average 30 Russian specialists - military advisers and instructors - continuously conducted training and consulting in Sudan [17]. President al-Bashir stressed his appreciation of the role Russia played in preparing Sudanese military personnel during his visit to Moscow in 2018 [9]. In 2016, the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Russian-Sudanese Commission on Military-Technical cooperation was held in Khartoum, followed by the second meeting in Moscow in 2017. The meetings paved the way for the institutionalization of the collaboration of Sudan and Russia in the military-technical sphere. In 2018, Russia and Sudan began consultations on the opening of a representative office of the Russian Ministry of Defense in Khartoum. The office was to be responsible for facilitating military-technical cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the area of after-sales support for Russian-made military hardware [18]. In addition, in early 2019, the Russian Foreign Ministry acknowledged that private military and security companies from Russia were carrying out training programs in the interest of the Sudanese armed forces [19].

Russia never publicly responded to the offer of the former Sudanese leader with regard to military basing rights, 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. At the same time, for a number of objective reasons, the very idea of deploying Russian military in the Sudan was approached with much caution in Moscow. On the one hand, Russia would find it

difficult to avoid getting drawn in Sudan's numerous internal and border conflicts; on the other, the move would upset not only traditional competitors in the West, but also the regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia or Sudan's largest trading partner China [20, p. 194]. In 2019, Russia declared the intent to sign an agreement simplifying visits of Russian military vessels to Sudanese ports [21], which stopped far short of plans to establish any permanent military installations in Port Sudan.

While defense cooperation and military-to-military ties between Russia and Sudan under al-Bashir attained strategic depth, the next logical step was to be the improvement of policy coordination mechanisms on security matters and the expansion of cooperation into such areas as intelligence-sharing, counterterrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, etc. The caveat was that Sudan's intelligence community had managed to forge very close ties with US security agencies, particularly CIA, within the framework of America's War on Terror. The CIA office in Khartoum is reportedly one of the largest such offices in the Middle East [22]. While even strategic partnerships are typically of non-exclusive nature, Moscow definitely had to take into account the presence of US intelligence assets in the Sudanese capital when considering the development of sensitive areas of cooperation with Sudan. On the other hand, the flourishing intelligence-sharing arrangement between Khartoum and Washington defied the Sudanese president's identification of the US as Sudan's most serious national security threat, which could not but make Moscow wary. Sudan, for its part, desperately needed the US to remove it from the State Sponsors of Terror List, which would enable it to receive significant amounts in debt relief, so it was unlikely to sever its ties with CIA and consequently get on America's bad side.

The change of the regime in Khartoum, on the one hand, may facilitate the resolution of internal and border conflicts in the country, which would make Sudan a more appealing strategic partner. On the other hand, the example of Egypt, which became a close partner of Moscow after a military coup backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE and a major buyer of Russian arms, may be indicative of the prospects of Russia-Sudan relations. In any case, Sudan will need Moscow to maintain its Russian-made military hardware, which constitutes the backbone of its arsenals. Given that one of the main threats in the Sahel is the proliferation of Islamist terrorism, counterterrorism could also become an important avenue of cooperation.

## DIPLOMATIC ENTENTE

In terms of international diplomacy, Sudan repeatedly supported Russia at the UN and other international organizations. In 2014, and then again in 2017, Sudan voted against the UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia for its actions in Crimea. In fact, in 2014, Sudan was one of just two African countries that supported Russia on

this vital geopolitical issue (the other one being Zimbabwe). In 2017, Khartoum again voted against the pro-Ukrainian resolution, this time along with a greater number of African countries - Burundi, Eritrea, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Al-Bashir's Sudan's unwavering support for Russia's position on Crimea was undeniably a prominent marker of strong bilateral relations. Sudan also repeatedly expressed support for Russia's policy on the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), particularly after the introduction of a Russian military contingent to SAR in September 2015. In December 2018, President al-Bashir became the first leader of an Arab League country to visit Damascus since the onset of the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, al-Bashir went to SAR aboard a Russian Air Force plane [23], which further underscored the alignment of policies of Khartoum and Moscow on Syria.

Undoubtedly, Russia and Sudan under al-Bashir enjoyed the most amicable relations in their history. Sudan even became a gateway to Africa for Russian diplomacy. In 2018-2019, Sudan served as the venue for a Russia-sponsored series of meetings between the Central African Republic's rival militias. In August 2019, some of the militias signed a preliminary agreement on convergence towards peace. The Khartoum initiative demonstrated not only Russia's deepening involvement in the Central African Republic [24], but also Sudan's role as a facilitator of this process. Thus Sudan was a valuable partner of Russia not just on global issues, such as Crimea, but, even more importantly, shared its vision on a number of regional matters.

Russia will continue to see Sudan as an important partner that may help Moscow advance its interests in the Middle East - North Africa subregion, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa as well. Khartoum may also be able to facilitate Russia's dialogue with the African Union, the Arab League, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In its turn, Sudan will still need Russia's support at the UN Security Council, but also will seek coordination with Russia regarding a number of conflicts in neighboring countries - in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Libya.

## ECONOMIC CONUNDRUM

The key problem of Russia-Sudan relations, however, was that in contrast to the visible progress in political and military-technical fields, economic ties between the two nations developed much slower. While arms exports are indeed an important item on Moscow's foreign trade agenda, they have always accounted for less than 5% of total Russian exports and will hardly lay the ground for ensuring sustainable long-term trade growth even with such conflict-affected countries as Sudan. In practice, Sudan, which has been engulfed in nearly permanent economic crisis since the 2011 secession of South Sudan, in 2018 imported only \$32 million worth of weapons, which is the lowest figure since 2000. The country, which is facing a bread and fuel crisis, in

2018 could barely afford the importation of even essential medicines. Admittedly, Sudan, whether before or after the coup, does not look as an attractive investment destination, but Moscow's track record for doing business with embattled governments - in Syria, Venezuela, and elsewhere - is impressive. Yet without achieving a significant level of financial transactions, including mutual investment, it is hard to speak of a lasting strategic partnership, as it would be standing on some shaky ground. To give former Sudanese President his dues, he applied much effort to foment economic exchange.

The restoration and intensification of economic ties between Russia and Sudan began actively in the late 1990s. The major milestones in the development of relations in this area include the conclusion of the 1999 Agreement on Trade and Technical and Economic Cooperation, which provided for the most-favored-nation treatment in trade and the establishment of mutual settlements in hard currency; the formation of the joint Sudanese-Russian High-Level Committee for Political Consultation and the Russian-Sudanese Business Council in 2010; the institution of the Russian-Sudanese Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation in 2013.

At the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission, Sudan offered the Russian side 25 projects with the total investment value of over \$6 billion. The Government of Sudan was particularly interested in large joint projects: the development of satellite and information technologies, exploration of hydrocarbon deposits and mineral resources, and construction of a nuclear research center, railways, and dams on the Nile. Since 2013, the Commission met every year. Unfortunately, despite frequent exchanges of delegations at different levels, it is difficult to speak of a qualitative breakthrough in the field of trade and economic relations.

For instance, in 2017, according to official data, the trade turnover between Russia and Sudan grew by 87% over the previous year and amounted to approximately \$290 million. However, in 2014, the turnover already stood at this level, but was followed by a significant decline in 2015-2016. For comparison, over the same period of 2014-2017, the Turkish-Sudanese trade increased from \$300 million to \$500 million.

At the same time, one of the most notable results of the Intergovernmental Commission's activities was the increase in the number of Russian companies operating in Sudan. Back in 2010, significant Russian-Sudanese projects could be counted on one hand: there was a service center for Russian-made helicopters in Khartoum; the Russian hydrotechnical design firm Hydroproject assisted with the development of hydro-systems on the rivers of Sudan. In 2004-2008, the Russian engineering construction company Stroytransgaz participated in the construction of a 366 km long section of the oil pipeline to Port Sudan.

Against the backdrop of the intensification of intergovernmental contacts in the 2000s, Russian

companies gradually began to arrive in Sudan. The joint Russian-Sudanese gold mining company Kush for Exploration and Production (Kush E&P), originally a subsidiary of Gazprombank (as of 2019 the bank holds a 17% stake in the company), now operates in Sudan's Red Sea State and South Kordofan. Since 2013, the company has been able to carry out geological exploration on a number of licensed blocks and enter the production phase, launching a gold processing plant with a capacity of 150 thousand tons of ore per year in May 2015 [26]. During the 2017 visit of the Sudanese president, an agreement was signed on the allocation of 6 additional exploration licenses in the south of the country to Kush E&P. In 2017, another Russian mining company, M Invest, obtained several concession areas for prospecting and mining of gold in Sudan.

In 2016, the Russian geological holding ROSGEO won a tender for the preparation of a metallogenic map of Sudan, which it delivered in December 2018. In 2019, ROSGEO offered the Sudanese side to prepare larger-scale maps of Sudan's metallic deposits. Besides, a number of smaller Russian companies also arrived in Sudan. Among the Russian-Sudanese agreements signed in the recent years, the agreement on cooperation in the field of peaceful use of atomic energy should be highlighted. It was reported that Russia's nuclear energy giant, Rosatom, planned to build several small floating nuclear power stations for Sudan, as well as a nuclear power plant with a capacity of 1.2 GW. However, China had signed a similar memorandum on the construction of a nuclear reactor in Sudan as early as in 2016, so the feasibility of this project was far from ascertained.

Unfortunately, Russian-Sudanese investment cooperation was not without failures. Most business ventures did not proceed further than signing memorandums of understanding and declarations of intent. A number of signed large contracts also were not fulfilled. In July 2015, a contract was announced between Sudan and the Russian gold mining company Siberian for Mining for geological exploration in the north of Sudan. According to the company's press release, it invested \$10 million in exploration in Sudan and discovered rich deposits of gold ore. In 2017, it was reported that the company signed a new contract with the Sudanese government on the extraction of gold ore and construction of a gold processing plant. Regrettably, the company's forecasts for the extent of extractable deposits proved to be over optimistic, and the company was stripped of its licenses in early 2018.

In October 2015, a \$70 million contract was signed between Sudan and the Russian venture company GTL to build a plant for the refining of associated petroleum gas into gasoline and diesel fuel. However, the plant, which was scheduled to be put online in 2017, never materialized. The Moscow Stock Exchange placed GTL shares in the sector of companies with increased investment risk, while company shares have fallen in price by more than 90% since their peak in 2016.

Nonetheless, in the course of the 2017 visit to Russia, the Sudanese president reiterated his country's interest in continuing or initiating cooperation in the fields of geological exploration, construction of nuclear or fossil-fuel power plants and oil refineries, agriculture and railway construction [8]. He further stressed the significance of the purchases of Russian wheat, the imported volume of which reached 860 thousand tons in 2016 and the record high of almost 1,5 million in 2017, making the African country the fourth largest importer of the commodity from Russia. However, it was obvious that without state support, including but not limited to the provision of various financial guarantees, preferably rendered within the framework of a long-term foreign economic policy, there was no reason to expect a substantial expansion of Russian business in Sudan.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the final analysis, it must be acknowledged that Russia did not fully realize its potential for developing trade and economic relations with Sudan during the era of President al-Bashir, which arose due to common views on many issues of politics and international relations and close military-technical ties. Indeed, Sudan was a high-risk jurisdiction, with regular and often violent popular protests and an ongoing armed insurgency, unstable financial system and unfavorable foreign exchange regulations, so, unsurprisingly, prudent Russian companies overlooked investment opportunities in this African country. Yet it must be recognized that many now-successful African countries suffered from these same problems just short time ago, but since then they have become lucrative markets that are quite difficult to penetrate. The absence of a comprehensive and robust foreign economic policy with regard to Sudan in particular and African countries in general, coupled with the lack of government support and guaranties, was the main obstacle not just to the economic penetration of the continent, but also to developing long-lasting strategic cooperation in other spheres.

Nevertheless, ahead of the 2019 military coup, Russia and Sudan achieved such a level of relations that failing to build on their foundation and formalize them as a strategic partnership would be a great missed opportunity for both countries. The precondition for this, however, would be a considerable makeover of Moscow's economic policy for Africa. The future post-transition regime in Sudan, whether autocratic or democratic, would prioritize economic cooperation and development assistance. In fact, it would be foolish for the Sudanese not to attempt to capitalize on the ongoing intensification of geopolitical competition in the Red Sea region. In this regard Russia, which has already developed a formidable presence in Sudan, must demonstrate the robustness, perseverance and versatility of its foreign policy for Africa.

## References

1. Abramova I.O. Russia and Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in New Global Realities // Asia and Africa today. 2017. № 12. Pp. 2-7 (In Russ.)
2. Ogulturk M.C. Russia's Renewed Interests in the Horn of Africa As a Traditional and Rising Power // Rising Powers Quarterly. 2017. Vol. 2, № 1. Pp. 121-143.
3. Sudan seeks strategic partnership with Russia, ambassador said // RIA Novosti. 18.04.2018 (In Russ.) - <https://ria.ru/20180418/1518901915.html> (accessed 15.02.2019)
4. Fake news and public executions: Documents show a Russian company's plan for quelling protests in Sudan // CNN. 25.04.2019 - <https://cnn.it/2W13i88> (accessed 11.05.2019)
5. The meeting of the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Mikhail Bogdanov with the Ambassador of Sudan in Moscow N. Babiker // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 30.04.2019 (In Russ.) - [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3631152](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3631152) (accessed 16.05.2019)
6. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation // Rossiyskaya Gazeta. 31.12.2015 (In Russ.) - <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html> (accessed 15.02.2019)
7. Envall D., Hall I. Strategic partnerships: Helping or hindering security? // Australian National University. 15.06.2016 - <http://ir.bellschool.anu.edu.au/news-events/stories/3919/strategic-partnerships-helping-or-hindering-security> (accessed 16.02.2019)
8. Russia-Sudan Negotiations // President of Russia. 23.11.2017 (In Russ.) - <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56163> (accessed 18.02.2019)
9. The Meeting with President of Sudan Omar Bashir // President of Russia. 14.07.2018 (In Russ.) - <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57998> (accessed 19.02.2019)
10. The Sudanese President invites Putin to Khartoum // RIA Novosti. 22.03.2018 (In Russ.) - <https://ria.ru/20180322/1517057475.html> (accessed 15.02.2019)
11. Bogdanov invited the President of Sudan to attend the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi // Ekonomika segodnya. 16.03.2019 (In Russ.) - <https://rueconomics.ru/382584-bogdanov-predlozhit-prezidentu-sudana-posetit-sammit-rossiya-afrika-v-sochi> (accessed 19.03.2019)
12. GDP 2017 (current US\$) // World Bank - [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?year\\_high\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?year_high_desc=true) (accessed 19.03.2019)
13. Uproar in Sudan over Bashir war crimes warrant // The Guardian. 04.03.2009 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/mar/04/sudan-demonstrators-support-bashir> (accessed 21.03.2019)
14. Elkina E.A., Kostelyanets S.V., Kochanova T.V., Tkachenko A.A. Round Table - IGAD 30th Anniversary // Asia and Africa today. 2017. № 5. Pp. 37-39 (In Russ.)
15. Arms Transfers Database // SIPRI - <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers> (accessed 23.03.2019)
16. KVZ conducted training of specialists from the Republic of Sudan // Vertolety Rossii. 12.10.2018 (In Russ.) - [http://www.russianhelicopters.aero/ru/press/news/kvz\\_sudan\\_obuchenie](http://www.russianhelicopters.aero/ru/press/news/kvz_sudan_obuchenie) (accessed 21.03.2019)
17. Interview of Mikhail Shirinsky, Ambassador of Russia to the Republic of Sudan, to RIA Novosti, April 1, 2016 // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 01.04.2016 (In Russ.) - [http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/sd/-/asset\\_publisher/Xen9fAlVS0x7/content/id/2196277](http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/sd/-/asset_publisher/Xen9fAlVS0x7/content/id/2196277) (accessed 21.12.2018)
18. On the signing of the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Sudan on the establishment of a representative office of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation under the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Sudan // Tekhekspt. 05.06.2018 (In Russ.) - <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/557619762> (accessed 20.02.2019)
19. The Foreign Ministry confirmed the work of Russian private security firms in Sudan // RIA Novosti. 23.01.2019 (In Russ.) - <https://ria.ru/20190123/1549776656.html> (accessed 15.02.2019)
20. Kostelyanets S.V., Okeke O. Russia in the Global Competition for Africa: the Military Dimension // Vostok/Oriens. 2018. № 6. Pp. 184-198.
21. The agreement with Sudan does not imply the construction of a naval base, admiral says // RIA Novosti. 09.01.2019 (In Russ.) - <https://ria.ru/20190109/1549137826.html> (accessed 16.02.2019)
22. Sudanese official defends decision to have CIA office in Khartoum // Middle East Monitor. 11.04.2017 - <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170411-sudanese-official-defends-decision-to-have-cia-office-in-khartoum> (accessed 19.02.2019)
23. Russia and Sudan's economic ties may be behind Bashir's 'surprise' Syria visit // The National. 19.12.2018 - <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/russia-and-sudan-s-economic-ties-may-be-behind-bashir-s-surprise-syria-visit-1.803807> (accessed 18.03.2019)
24. Central African Republic militias sign agreement brokered by Russia and Sudan // The Defense Post. 29.08.2018 - <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/08/29/central-african-republic-armed-groups-agreement-russia-sudan> (accessed 18.03.2019)
25. Activities of the Russian-Sudanese gold mining enterprise Kush for Exploration and Production deserves support from the government of both countries // Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation. 10.06.2015 (In Russ.) - <http://www.mnr.gov.ru/news/detail.php?ID=141361> (accessed 19.01.2019)