

Africa in the 21st century: New insights into the problem of security

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Abstract. A sharp increase in geopolitical tensions following the start of a special military operation in Ukraine and the introduction of unprecedented Western sanctions against Russia has reverberated around the planet, and Africa is no exception in this regard. Under the circumstances, old threats to African countries have intensified and new ones have emerged, shaped by a complex interplay of local and international political and economic factors. If left unchecked, these threats may undermine Africa's economic progress and have a knock-on effect on the continental integration agenda. Suitably, scholarly interest in African security has been and will keep growing as the interplay becomes more complicated.

The Centre for Sociological and Political Sciences Studies of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences held the international conference "Between Promise and Peril: African Security in the 21st Century". The scope of the conference covered such security-related topics in the African context as peacekeeping and counter-insurgency, private military companies and hybrid warfare, nuclear terrorism and peaceful atom, state fragility and neo-patrimonialism. A grave peril is that Africa once again becomes a proxy battlefield for conflicts between great powers. Participants paid special attention to the dynamics between local and foreign factors of destabilization in African countries. A particular focus of presenters was also made on the dilemma of state-building in Africa and its impact on African security. Most participants agreed that Africa's security is no longer a regional issue but a global one as the geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of the continent is increasing steadily.

Keywords: Africa, security, hybrid warfare, information warfare, nuclear energy, state-building

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Африка в XXI веке: новый взгляд на проблемы безопасности

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Резюме. Заметный рост геополитической напряженности, связанный с началом спецоперации Вооруженных сил России на Украине, повлиял на ситуацию, сложившуюся в мире. Африка в этом смысле - не исключение: усилились старые угрозы безопасности и возникли новые, обусловленные сложным взаимодействием местных и международных политических и экономических факторов. Конференция «Надежды и угрозы: безопасность в Африке в XXI веке», проведенная в июне 2022 г. Институтом Африки РАН, была посвящена обсуждению вопросов миротворчества, терроризма и роли частных военных компаний и др.

Ключевые слова: Африка, безопасность, гибридные войны, информационные войны, атомная энергетика, государственное строительство

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In 2022, the world entered swiftly into a state of uncertainty and tension. The profound and deepening rupture between Russia and the West has sent waves of alarm and frustration across the globe, with no country remaining immune to its impact.

The evolution of traditional threats and emergence of new causes of insecurity and instability on the African continent became an ascendant theme of the online international conference “**Between Promise and Peril: African Security in the 21st Century**”, which was held conjointly by the Institute for African Studies (IAS) of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russia), University of the Free State (UFS) (Bloemfontein, South Africa) and the Independent University of Banja Luka (NUBL) (Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The conference, which took place in June 2022, gathered speakers from the aforementioned three institutions, as well as representatives of Stellenbosch University (Stellenbosch, South Africa), Security Research Centre (Banja Luka), and the private sector, who shared their ideas on the global, regional and national dimensions of the security challenges that Africa is currently facing.

In his opening remarks, Russia’s Ambassador to South Africa **Ilya Rogachev** drew attention to the fact that the global geopolitical fight for Africa has only been intensifying, which undermines the sovereignty of African countries and escalates the risks of political and military destabilization. In particular, Ambassador Rogachev noted that an example of detrimental interference in African affairs is “Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act”, which is set to become a law in the United States somewhere in 2022 and which will allow Americans to impose sanctions against African governments, government officials, and other individuals and entities who facilitate the development of Russo-African relations in a number of spheres, among them military and technical cooperation. In conclusion, Rogachev stressed that when analyzing causes of conflicts, unconstitutional takeovers of power and other disruptive phenomena in Africa, it is imperative to look for foreign beneficiaries of these events.

Following his address, Rector of the Independent University of Banja Luka, Prof. **Zoran Kalinić** highlighted the importance of deepening academic cooperation among the co-organizing institutions in the field of African Studies.

The next speaker in the opening session, Deputy Director of the Institute for African Studies, Prof. **Leonid Fituni** insisted that African countries and Russia have found themselves in the same boat in terms of them having become the *de facto* resource colonies of the West and that this situation has become untenable for Moscow, with Russia entering the struggle for decolonization that Africa had already been waging for decades.

Dean of the Faculty of Political Science at the Independent University of Banja Luka, Dr. **Ostoja Barašin** gave an overview of the history and concept of hybrid war, which has come to characterize a number of modern armed conflicts, including in Africa.

The final opening remarks were given by Dr. **Dragana Popović**, Director at the Institute for Scientific Research at the Independent University of Banja Luka, who emphasized the need to look at three pillars of security - environmental, socio-economic and resource sustainability, which are key requisites for implementing Africa's master plan - Agenda 2063.

The conference consisted of three discussion panels, titled respectively “*Africa’s Security Landscape: Regional and International Outlook*”, “*Africa’s New Perils: Beyond Conventional Warfare Threats*”, and “*Addressing Sources of Insecurity in Africa: Promise and Pitfalls*”.

The theme of the *first panel*, chaired by Dr. **Predrag Obrenović** (NUBL), reflected the growing role of the continent and its stability for the world, but also how this changing role affects social and political processes inside Africa.

The panel started with a paper by Prof. **Hussein Solomon** (UFS), who attempted to answer the question of why most strategies on countering insurgency and countering terrorism (COIN-CT) in Africa and elsewhere in the world have failed despite the substantial support provided by the international community. He identified specific challenges and policy errors undermining COIN-CT efforts on the continent, such as the misguided recruitment and selection practices in Africa’s national armies and law enforcement agencies, the presence of terrorist and insurgent sympathizers inside the government, the judiciary and the army, the disregard for the well-being of rank-and-file members of the armed forces. The results of these are widespread desertions, security breaches, criminalization and the generally low morale of African soldiers involved in COIN-CT operations, which leads to repeated failures.

Dr. **Tatyana Denisova** (IAS) examined economic drivers of insurgencies in West and Central Africa, coming to a conclusion that the crisis of public administration in many African countries and accompanying state incapacities impel various groups to compete violently for access to natural resources and for control over trade and supply chains in order to survive and for their leaders to enrich themselves. In the near absence of formal economy, criminal enterprises flourish and interweave with insurgents, engendering “war economy” and stimulating the degradation of public consciousness, values and attitudes of local inhabitants, which serves to perpetuate armed conflicts.

Dr. **Dragisa Jurisic** (Security Research Centre, Banja Luka) argued that African countries have a hard time managing security challenges because interests of various global and regional actors often differ. The UN, AU, EU, NATO, Africa’s eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), *ad hoc* military groupings such as MNJTF and G5 Sahel, as well as non-Western powers such as China, India, Japan, Russia, Turkey and a number of Gulf countries, all

are inclined to pursue their own narrow interests in Africa contingent on their domestic political and economic circumstances and usually at the expense of the security of other actors, which has become one of the main reasons for the continent's current instability.

Yury Vidakas (IAS), whose focus was on United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa and Moscow's views in their regard, referred to the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation to highlight the conceptual basis of Russia's commitment to settle armed conflicts and facilitate post-crisis nation-building on the African continent.

Siniša Bundalo (NUBL) offered an analysis of France's current policy for Africa. To compensate for the failure of the concept of *Françafrique*, which positioned former French colonies in Africa as a French backyard and which has been discredited throughout African countries, Paris has been promoting the Francophonie (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie - OIF), which pays more attention to cultural and humanitarian cooperation. More problematic, however, is the impending transformation of France's military strategy for Africa, which brings up the controversy of Paris's traditional great power ambitions and limited present-day resources.

Dr. **Sergey Kostelyanets** (IAS) reviewed the role of private military and security companies (PMSCs) in military-political conflicts and international peacekeeping in Africa. The presenter emphasized the growing profile of private paramilitary enterprises, both African and foreign, in supplying security services to international and regional organizations, national governments and businesses. The proliferation of PMSCs undermines the monopoly of African states on violence; PMSCs also often serve as refuge for former warlords and various criminal elements, who strive to gain legal rights to carry weapons. At the same time, contracts with PMSCs allow international and regional actors to reduce the commitment of regular soldiers, the latter being undesirable due to public opinion risks (in particular, in developed countries) or low professionalism, and react more swiftly to political-military crises.

The *second panel*, chaired by Dr. **Sergey Kostelyanets**, centred on new security threats in Africa, such as hybrid and information warfare, nuclear terror, and energy issues. The panel was inaugurated by Prof. **Vladimir Shubin** (IAS), who discussed the term "hybrid war" and argued that it is used fallaciously. The true kind of "hybrid war", in the presenter's opinion, is the regime change strategy utilized by Washington in recalcitrant countries.

Dr. **Predrag Obrenović** and Dr. **Dragana Popović** continued the discussion of "hybrid warfare" and questioned the accuracy of the term, which may denote nothing but methods of war that had existed long before its origination. The authors, nevertheless, acknowledged the role of technological achievements in changing the nature of political-military conflicts, which have become characterized by the blurred lines between acts of war, international crimes, propaganda campaigns, etc.

Oleg Shulga (IAS) illustrated how "hybrid wars" have become a factor of destabilization in Africa. He referred to the "hybrid war" of the Western coalition against Libya in 2011, which entailed a propaganda campaign to demonize the Gaddafi regime, support of Libya's anti-Gaddafi forces on the ground, and an air campaign that targeted government facilities, and warned that similar hostile actions against African countries that, for instance, refuse to sever ties with Russia are highly likely in the future.

Dr. **Zdravko Todorovic** (NUBL) painted the big picture of threats to Africa in the context of rising geopolitical tensions and the looming fourth technological revolution. The ongoing global energy crisis is one of the markers of the revolutionary geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts and will have profound effects on the security of the African continent.

Dr. **Eben Coetzee** (UFS) spoke of the prospects of nuclear terrorism in Africa. He noted that risks are increasing as more and more African states are becoming interested in constructing nuclear power stations, while Islamic extremism on the continent is on the rise, just as transnational organized crime is. Thus nuclear terror may become feasible in Africa in the foreseeable future.

Dr. **Eldar Salakhedinov** (IAS) concluded the *second panel* with an evaluation of the influence of geopolitics and information warfare on energy security in Africa. He noted that the conflict in Ukraine has given a new impetus to competition among great powers for influence in Africa, with cooperation in nuclear sphere, i.e. nuclear plant construction, being an increasingly important foreign policy tool for such countries as Russia, France, China, South Korea, the USA and Japan.

The *third panel*, chaired by Dr. **Eben Coetzee**, dealt with an analysis of domestic and institutional sources of insecurity and instability in African countries. The opening report by **Gerrie Swart** (Acuity Africa Advisory) focused on unconstitutional changes of government in African countries and corresponding reactions of the African Union. The presenter attributed the recent poor track record in reacting to political destabilization in such countries as Chad, Guinea, Mali, Sudan and Burkina Faso to the AU's failure to apply norms and principles of the organization consistently, the uneven implementation of the AU decisions by member states, and the growing reluctance of member states and RECs to accept external intervention in internal crises even from the AU itself.

Dr. **Albert Schoeman** (UFS) presented a study of hybrid political orders on the example of Somaliland. Hybrid political orders, according to the author, acknowledge the role of traditional authorities and place a greater em-

phasis on people, as well as politics at the grassroots level, and may become a post-Western state-building approach better suited for fragile states in Africa.

Dr. **Jude Cocodia** (UFS) used another example from the Horn of Africa - that of Somalia - to illustrate how international media may be employed to demonize a conflicting party with dire consequences for a country. The Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which took power in Somalia in 2006, managed to bring order to the country devastated by decades of civil war, yet half a year later it was subverted by an invasion of Ethiopian army. Addis Ababa acted with the support of the US, which considered the ICU an adversary in the context of its War on Terror. The outcome of the invasion has been radicalization of Somalis, the emergence of a real terrorist threat - al-Shabaab, and the continuation of hostilities in Somalia.

Benjamin Mokoena (Stellenbosch University) brought up the topic of impediments to countering Islamist violent extremism on the example of Kenya. He highlighted state fragility, which implies insecurity, poor governance, unequal economic development, widespread corruption, and abusive structures of authority, as a fundamental constraint to the ability of African countries, in particular Kenya, to counter violent Islamism and terrorism.

In the concluding report, **Ruben Pretorius** (UFS) addressed the role of neo-patrimonialism as a destabilizing factor in Sub-Saharan Africa. Neo-patrimonialism is viewed as the principal driver of autocratization and an inhibitor of democratization. This is especially visible in resource rich countries, where the proceeds from selling natural riches in global markets greatly overshadow any other sources of revenue.

During the *Q&A session* at the end, participants expanded on the prospects of peacekeeping in Africa at the sub-regional level, the possibility of negotiations with insurgents and terrorists, the issue of state sovereignty in Africa, global sanction wars and their effects on foreign policy of African countries, Russia's nuclear cooperation with South Africa, the evolution of political situation in Somalia, etc. Most participants agreed that Africa's security is no longer a regional issue but a global one as the continent is swiftly gaining in geopolitical and geoeconomic weight.

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