

## Russia's New Scramble For Africa

By Ariel Cohen

The Kremlin has launched an ambitious project to restore Moscow's past glory on the African continent. Policy makers in the U.S. and Europe need to understand that it's happening—and formulate an effective response—before they find their own relationships with Africa changing in significant and problematic ways.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and more than a hundred Russian businessmen last week visited Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia and Angola on the longest tour of Africa a Russian leader has undertaken since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike President Obama, who is going to Africa next week for a brief stop to talk about global warming, Mr. Medvedev and his team targeted oil, gas, diamonds and uranium. Mr. Medvedev is trying to score points before his G-8 meeting with Western leaders in Italy July 8-10.

In Cairo, Mr. Medvedev and President Hosni Mubarak signed a 10-year strategic cooperation pact, reminiscent of Soviet Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation with developing countries. Under the deal, Russian arms supplies to Egypt—a major Soviet weapons client—may be renewed.

Russia's state-owned RosAtom is aiming for a \$1.8 billion contract to help build the first nuclear power plant in Egypt, almost half of the going rate of approximately \$3.5 billion per reactor. RosAtom would threaten the chances of France's Areva, General-Electric-Hitachi and Toshiba, to break into the Middle Eastern civilian nuclear market.

Next, Mr. Medvedev and his traveling companions went to Nigeria, Africa's largest exporter of oil. There they agreed on a \$2.5 billion joint project between state-owned Gazprom and the Nigerian state oil company to develop large oil and gas fields and construct a gas pipeline from Nigeria to Europe. The new pipeline would give Russia control over the supply of Nigerian gas to Europe, and thereby reinforce the dependence of European consumers on Russia.

In Angola, Mr. Medvedev finalized another agreement on economic cooperation and arranged a \$300 million loan to support the launch of Angolan satellite Angosat. Russian resources company Zarubezhneft is seeking greater access to Angolan oil fields and wants to broaden cooperation with Angolan state oil company, Sonangol. Meanwhile, a number of Russian companies are seeking access to Namibian uranium reserves.

By all appearances Mr. Medvedev and, by extension, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin are reviving the old Soviet Africa strategy. The Soviet Union maintained friendly relations with many African countries, including Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique. Starting in the 1950s, Africa was viewed as a prime economic battlefield between Soviet command-and-control planning and Western capitalism. From the 1960s to the '80s, Western institutions like the World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development poured billions of dollars into supporting governments in countries like Zaire and Nigeria. Moscow offered similar

funding to its "friends."

Angola, in particular, was the theater where the jockeying for influence between the Soviet Union and the U.S. played out. Soviet ships ferried tens of thousands of Cuban troops to support the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola in the 1970s war for independence from Portugal, while the U.S. and South Africa supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. After independence in 1975, a 27-year-long civil war between these two groups postponed normal development.

Africa lost its significance as an ideological chessboard after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the current volume of trade between Africa and Russia is trivial. But the continent remains an economic prize. China has spent billions of dollars in the past few years gaining friends, influencing dictators, and tying African countries to Beijing.

Now the Kremlin is trying to regain its status as a global player, including re-asserting itself in Africa. Mr. Medvedev's visit to Africa appears to be the first coordinated attempt by Moscow to do so.

Where once the Soviet Union sought political hegemony, today's Kremlin is after economic objectives like trade and access to raw materials. But a shift in Africa's relationship with Russia will have consequences for many.

Africans may benefit from increased competition among the world's powers to develop its vast resources. Russia and China have already invested billions to gain a foothold there. Western

companies are similarly interested. The income generated from developing these resources has the potential to generate jobs and boost incomes in Africa. But this isn't a sure thing. Resource-rich countries are vulnerable to corruption and instability. A flood of Russian money could facilitate corruption in places where that's already a problem. Moreover, Moscow and Beijing are comfortable working with oppressive regimes, like Sudan's, that Western countries condemn. As a result, Africans may suffer even more as Russia and China expand their influence.

If Europe and the U.S. abandon Africa to Russia and China, Africa may be lost for the West. Worse, the fruits of Africa's resource wealth may be squandered. The West should continue to press African governments to improve transparency and the rule of law. It must shift its approach away from development assistance and, instead, emphasize the benefits of trade and competition. Such policies have historically proven the most effect path to development.

As President Obama heads for Africa, he and other Western leaders must understand that Russia and China are engaged in carving out zones of economic influence on the continent. The U.S. and Europe should utilize their technological, financial and "soft power" advantages—or be overtaken by ruthless competitors.

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### Trying to rebuild the Soviet sphere.



Let's be friends: Dmitri Medvedev and Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, June 23, 2009.

## U.N. Mission To Nowhere

By Bertil Lintner

There is little hope for a release of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi when United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits the country tomorrow. So far, the ruling military junta has ignored all calls by the international community for a negotiated solution to the country's political problems. Mr. Ban's visit will follow eight previous visits by U.N. envoy Ibrahim Gambari—all of which failed to achieve anything but a few cosmetic changes and publicity stunts. Once the dust has settled, it has always been business as usual.

The fundamental flaw in the U.N.'s approach to Burma is that it fails to take into account how transitions from authoritarianism to more pluralistic societies have occurred in Asia. At a U.N. press briefing June 29, a spokesman said Mr. Ban plans to focus on three issues during his visit to Burma: the resumption of dialogue between the junta and the opposition, a process of "national reconciliation," and the creation of "a condition conducive to credible elections in 2010."

However, it would be difficult to "resume" a dialogue that has never begun. The junta has never mentioned "national reconciliation" in its announcements to the people of Burma—only "national reconsolidation," code for perpetuating military rule without the participation of the opposition. The belief that the leader of the junta, Gen. Than Shwe, and Ms. Suu Kyi would sit down and discuss the country's future is outright naive.

History has shown authoritarian regimes never negotiate away their hold on power. They crumble when someone inside the establishment refuses to carry out certain orders. Some observers liken Burma to South Africa, where negotiations did lead to democratization, but this comparison is misleading. South Africa had white minority rule over a black and colored majority. It was not a military dictatorship even remotely comparable with Burma's political structure.

A better comparison for future political scenarios in Burma might be found in the Philippines or in Indonesia. Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos fell in early 1986 when then-defense minister, Juan Ponce Enrile, and Fidel Ramos, then head of the Philippine Constabulary, refused to obey orders to suppress massive demonstrations in Manila and elsewhere. They sided with the opposition—and Marcos had to flee the country. Similarly in Indonesia in May 1998, troops refused to storm the parliamentary buildings in Jakarta that had been occupied by pro-democracy students and other activists. At first, heavily armed troops surrounded the complex—and then they left. The chain of events in Indonesia are more obscure than in the Philippines, but the withdrawal of troops from the parliament marked the beginning of the end of the rule of the old dictator, Suharto. A transitional period followed which eventually led to the establishment of functioning democracy in Indonesia.

South Korea's democratic transition was also catalyzed by defectors from inside the government. In 1979 the country's powerful intelligence chief Kim Jae-gyu assassinated then President Park Chung-hee, for which Kim was in turn executed in 1980. The South Korea government spent several years trying to suppress the country's pro-democracy movement, culminating with a massacre in the city of Gwangju in May of 1980. But in the end South Korea became a thriving democracy—and the assassination of the authoritarian Park marked the beginning

of the end of the old regime.

In Taiwan, democracy came after years of antigovernment street demonstrations throughout the 1980s. The final transition to democracy was comparatively smooth. But Taiwan is unique: It has to survive in the shadow of China, and being a democracy is a strong card it needs to play in international diplomacy.

The only Asian country where authoritarianism has been replaced by democracy through dialogue and elections is the Maldives—but this is a special case. In October 2008, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom lost the election and handed power to Mohammed Nasheed, a

pro-democracy activist and former political prisoner. But even that transition came after violent protests in 2004 and 2005. The December 2004 tsunami had devastated the Maldives and turned many against the country's inept leadership. But it should also be remembered that the Maldives is a small country of just 300,000 inhabitants, and the economy is heavily dependent on tourism and, by extension, the country's international reputation.

The U.N. has not learned from this history. In nearly two decades, the U.N. has sent envoy after envoy to Burma, with no consequential results. The first "independent expert" the U.N. sent to the country to study violations of human rights was Sadako Ogata, a Japanese professor who later went on to become the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The report she submitted to the U.N.'s Commission of Human Rights in December 1990, was unusually bland for a rights advocate. General elections had been held that year in May, resulting in a landslide victory for Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party and Ms. Ogata concluded in her report that "it is not in dispute that it will be the task of the elected representatives of the National Assembly to draft a new constitution, on the basis of which a new government will be formed."

But the assembly was never convened. Instead the government began arresting elected MPs and three years later formed a "constituent assembly" consisting of mostly handpicked people to draw up a new constitution. In subsequent years, a slew of U.N. envoys could do nothing to change this. Eighteen years later, in May last year, a seriously flawed referendum was held that "affirmed" that constitution. Parliamentary elections under this new constitution are scheduled for 2010.

Change in Burma is not going to happen through some kind of U.N.-initiated dialogue. The country's military regime has on several occasions sent out "feelers" to various opposition personalities within the country and in exile, but these moves should be seen in the context of divide-and-rule rather than some sincere desire to discuss important matters with anyone outside the generals' own ranks.

While the opposition remains weak and factionalized, the military leaders have over the years showed a remarkable ability to sort out conflicts among themselves to maintain unity. The 2010 election is only designed to institutionalize the present order. Like in other countries in Asia, change will come when someone within the ruling elite turns against the top leadership. But, at least for now, there are no signs of such discontent within Burma's military establishment. This is the bitter reality and there is little meaning in the U.N.'s false hopes for Burma.

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### Ban Ki-moon can't fell the Burmese regime.



Ban Ki-moon



Aung San Suu Kyi