# RUSSIA–AFRICA PARTNERSHIP: CURRENT AGENDA AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

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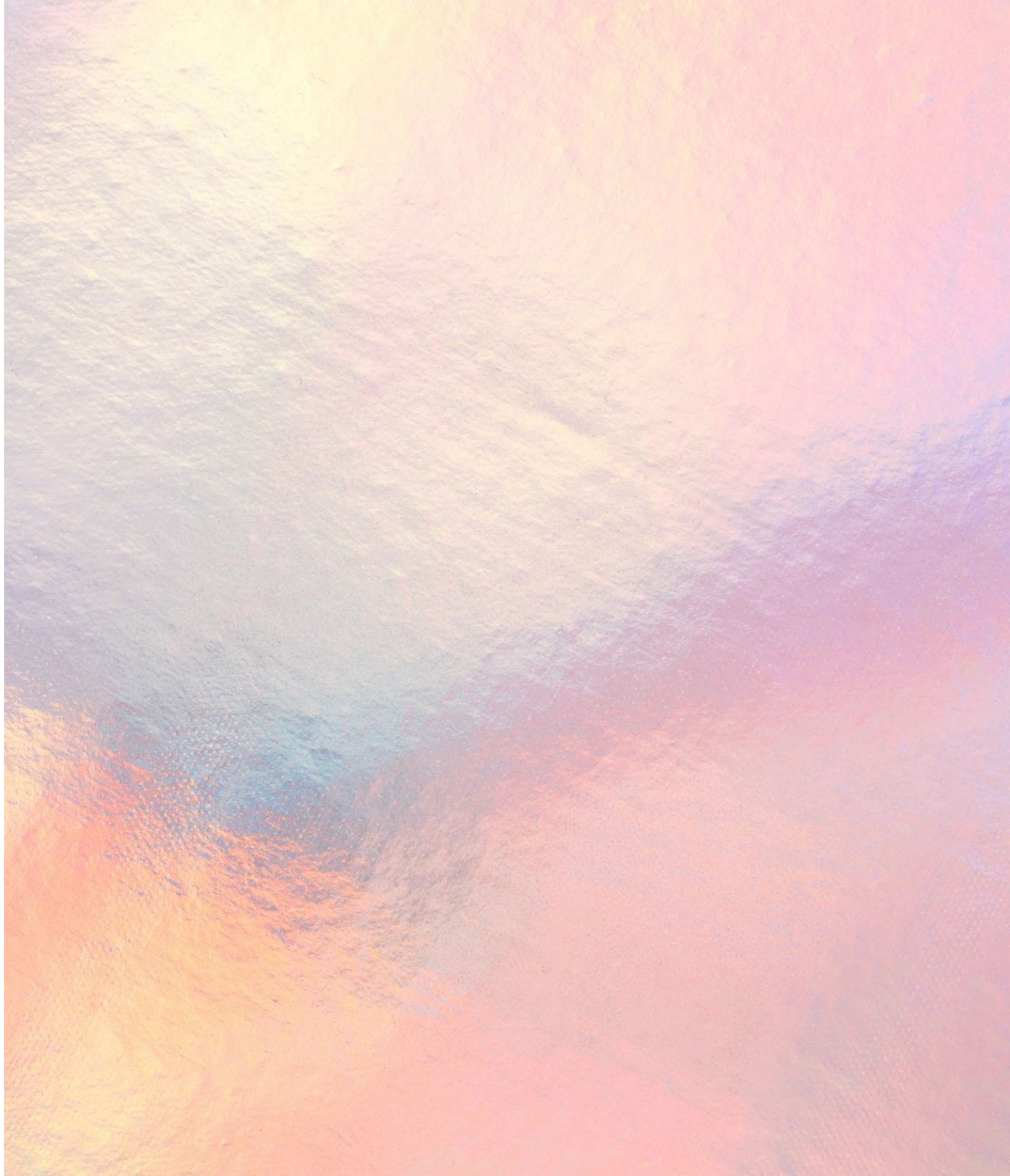
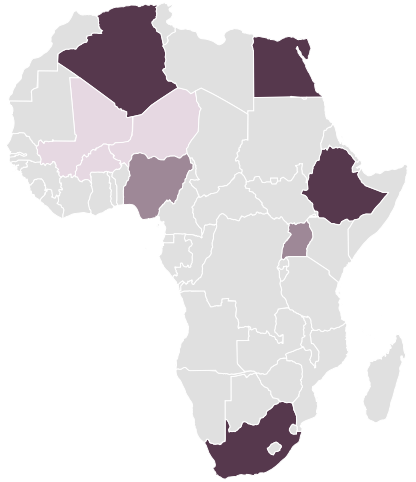
Expert on African affairs



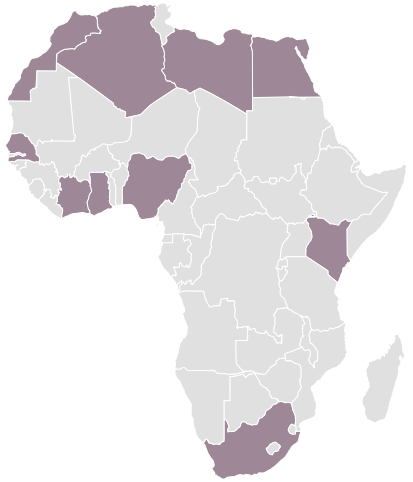
# RUSSIA–AFRICA: KEY FIGURES (2025)

- Trade turnover: almost **$30 billion**, 50% growth since 2018. Russia's share on selected African markets continues to grow (fertilizers – 20%, wheat – 32%); non-energy exports account for about 50% of total exports to Africa.
- Education: nearly **40,000 African students** are currently studying in Russia.
- Diplomatic support: African countries are giving Russia above **50% of its support in UNGA**.
- Expanded presence: **4 new embassies**, 2 trade missions, and 2 intergovernmental commissions established since 2022.

Main political partners*



Main trading partners*



**Compiled by the author, based on OSINT and expert assessment*

# EXTERNAL MYTHS ABOUT RUSSIA IN AFRICA

01

"Russia's presence in Africa is a byproduct of Western isolation and politically-driven."

02

"Russia–Africa relations are hierarchical — a subject–object model."

03

"Russia's main approach in Africa is 'resources for security.'"

# MYTH 1. RUSSIA'S TURN TO AFRICA IS A RESULT OF WESTERN ISOLATION

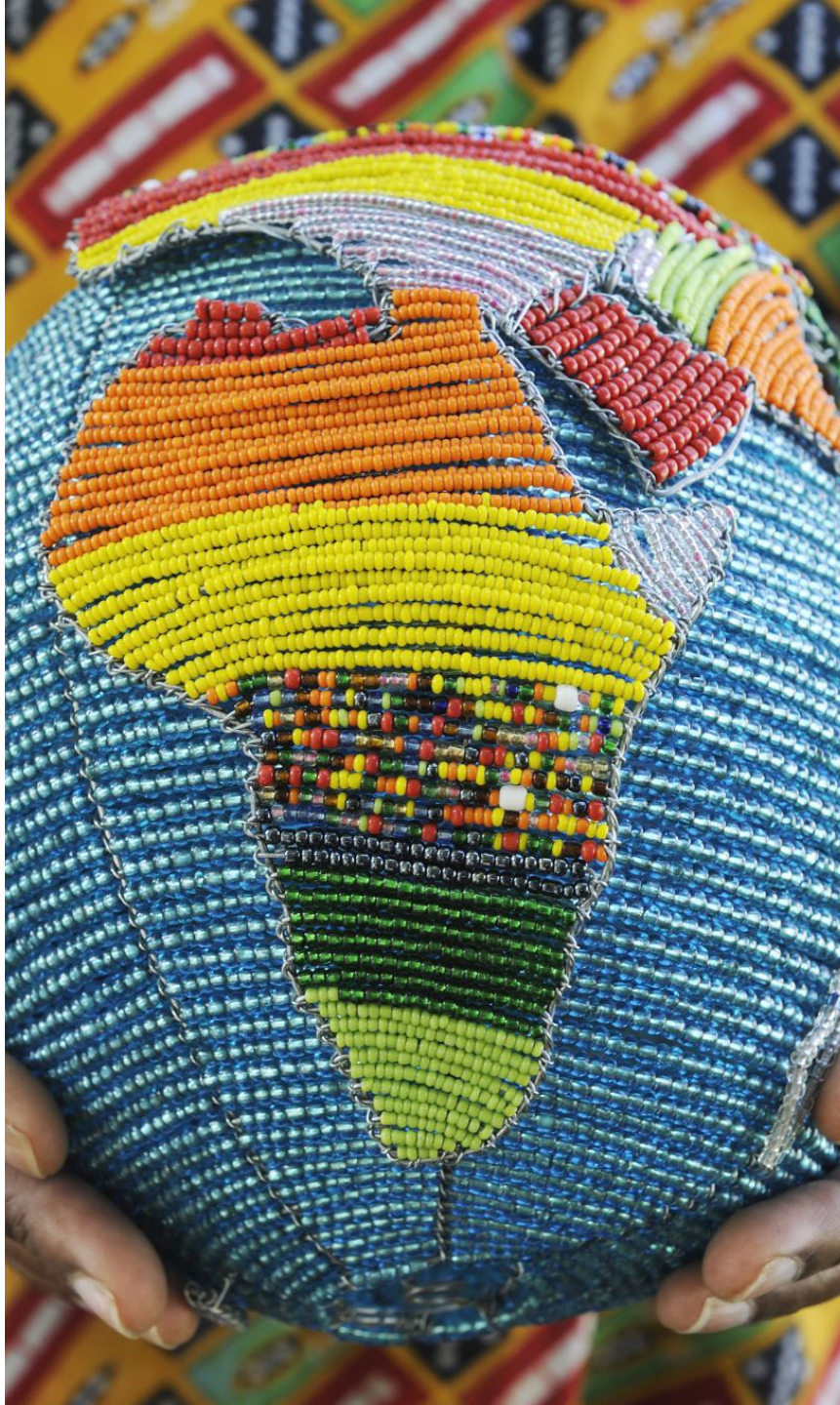
While sanctions in 2014 have had some impact, the **intensification of Russia–Africa** ties is driven not by a break with the West, it **stems from**:

- Growing agency and independence of African states, and
- Development of the Russian economy, especially in agriculture, engineering, and ICT, resulting in **growing importance of African markets for Russia and Russian supplies for Africa**.

Binary oppositions like "West vs. non-West" are typical of Western political thinking.

- **Russia does not frame its African policy as opposition to anyone** – neither in official discourse nor in expert analysis.
- Meanwhile, countering Russian influence in Africa is explicitly included in the strategic documents of the U.S. and most EU states.

African countries do not prioritise ties with Russia over other partners; rather, they pursue a strategy of strategic balancing, expanding diplomatic and economic options across multiple actors. In this context, **engagement with Russia is one element of broader multipolar (apolar) cooperation**.



# MYTH 2. RUSSIA–AFRICA RELATIONS ARE HIERARCHICAL – A SUBJECT–OBJECT MODEL

- **African agency** is visible in **who defines the agenda** and sets priorities in Russia–Africa cooperation.
- Flexibility of **Russian regional strategy** allows **African states to shape engagement** around their **own development goals**. **Projects** not aligned with national priorities are **delayed or cancelled** (e.g. South Africa nuclear case).
- Growing Russia's **multilateral coordination** with Rwanda, Egypt, Algeria, AU, Nigeria, and Senegal shows **recognition of African agency**.
- Russia's approach – based on **sovereignty, self-reliance, integration, and human capital** – can **strengthen African agency** rather than limit it.

**Russia**'s advantage in Africa is that it **does not need a policy aimed at putting African countries in a long-term dependent position**, facilitating access to their natural resources, and **supporting its own financial system, labour market and multinationals**.

Moscow, unlike most external players, can afford to promote a more honest and understandable agenda for Africa: **self-reliance**, **sovereignty**, continental **integration**, infrastructure and human capital development, security, all of them supporting African agency.

# MYTH 3. RUSSIA'S MAIN APPROACH IN AFRICA IS 'RESOURCES FOR SECURITY'

- Widespread belief: Russia's engagement in Africa follows a "resources in exchange for security" model.
- This model is largely a myth – **in countries with Russian security presence** (CAR, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso), **no large-scale resource extraction is taking place**.
- Actual **resource projects** (e.g. *Rusal* in Guinea, *Renova* in South Africa, *Nordgold* in Burkina Faso, *Rosatom* in Tanzania and Namibia) **are commercial ventures**, launched independently of military cooperation.
- About **50% of Russia's imports from Africa are agricultural and food products**; raw materials make up only ~10%.

# WHY RUSSIA NEEDS AFRICA'S SOVEREIGNTY

**No African state joined Western sanctions** against Russia — most pursue **independent, non-aligned policies**.

Even **pro-Western governments** combine critical rhetoric with **pragmatic cooperation**, reflecting **public sentiment and economic interests**.

**Trade data** illustrates this pragmatism: Russia trades **$2 billion with Morocco** and **$0.5 billion with Kenya**.

**Russia benefits from Africa's sovereignty**: stronger, more autonomous states mean **new markets, stable institutions, and reliable partners**.

# STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN ECONOMIES

- Fresh water exists – but it doesn't reach the consumer.
- Natural gas exists – but it is exported to Europe and Asia instead of serving domestic needs.
- Arable land exists – but it is used for export crops or yields remain low per hectare.
- Capital inflows exist – but they are often tied to debt and external conditionalities.

Not the absence of resources, but their inefficient mobilisation and external dependence.

A sustainable development strategy for Africa thus requires **sovereign decision-making**, local value creation, infrastructure connectivity, and domestic resource utilisation – turning potential into real economic power.

# BETWEEN SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

Supporting sovereignty is no longer just an ideological slogan – over the past five years, it has gained real and practical meaning.

***Case Study: Difference between food security and food sovereignty***

The 1996 FAO World Food Summit defined food security as "access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food." This definition focuses on **access, not production**, allowing external actors: states, corporations, and traders to shape African food systems through: land acquisitions in developing countries, limited technology transfer, and pressure to liberalize imports.

As a result, import dependence and vulnerability to global markets persist.

| **Food Security** | **Food Sovereignty** |
| --- | --- |
| Access to food ensured mainly through **imports and aid** | Ability to **produce and control** one's own food system |
| Driven by **international institutions and markets** | Driven by **national policies and local producers** |
| Maintains **dependence** | Builds **self-reliance and resilience** |
| Prioritizes **trade liberalization** | Prioritizes **domestic production and protection** |

# STRENGTHENING AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY

Reducing import dependence will, paradoxically, require more imports – not of finished goods, but of the means of production – the **tools of sovereignty,** such as:

1. Fertilizers;
2. Digital technologies;
3. Industrial equipment;
4. Machinery and tools;
5. Management solutions.

Knowledge sharing and research will play a decisive role – and the advantage will go to those who can ensure localization of production first, and R&D capacity next.

# THANK YOU FOR ATTENTION