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Russia Makes Big Strides to Expand Arms Sales in Africa

ALEX GORKA
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The Egyptian-Russian deal for the purchase of Ka-52K helicopters is at the final stage. According to Andrei Boginsky, the CEO of Russian Helicopters Group, Egypt is expected to decide this month on the purchase of Russia's deck-based Kamov Ka-52K 'Alligator' helicopters for Mistral-type amphibious assault ships. Cairo is seeking to boost its blue water capabilities.

Russia is the second in the list of the largest arms exporters. Its share in world arms exports accounts for 23%. In the period from 2012 to 2016 Russia supplied its weapons to 50 countries. The exports are almost unaffected by Western sanctions. Rostec Corporation CEO Sergey Chemezov said that Russia's arms exports would exceed \$13 billion in 2017. Last year, Russia also signed \$9.5 billion in new arms-export contracts, which currently total \$50 billion. The marketability of Russian military hardware has been given a boost because of their performance in the Syrian theater of operations.

Africa is the most promising region for increasing Russian arms supplies. The continent's collective GDP has grown over three times this century up to around \$6 trillion. Overall, the continent achieved average real annual GDP growth of 5.4% between 2000 and 2010, adding \$78 billion annually to GDP. It has slowed down to 3.3%, or \$69 billion, a year between 2010 and 2015. The Africa's defense expenditure grew from over \$17 billion in 2000 to over \$39 billion in 2000 to \$39,1 billion in 2015 (\$41,3 billion in 2014).

Military spending in North Africa continues to rise. It was \$18.7 billion in 2016 - 1.5% more than in 2015 and a 145% increase compared with 2007. \$8,1 billion of this sum was spent on arms purchases.

In the period of 2014–2015, Russia delivered \$ 810 million of arms to the countries of the continent.

Egypt is the most populous country in North Africa and the Arab world, the third-most populous in Africa and the fifteenth-most populous in the world. Last year, the country's population reached 92 million. In 2015, Egypt signed \$5 billion arms deals with Russia to include the acquisition of 50 MiG-29M combat aircraft, Buk-M2E and Antey-2500 long range air defense systems and about 50 Ka-52K helicopters for Egypt's new Mistral-class assault ships bought in France.

The two countries signed several agreements for the renovation of military production factories on Egyptian soil. A protocol has been signed to grant Egypt access to GLONASS, the Russian global satellite positioning system. The Egyptian government mulls sending peacekeeping troops to support the de-escalation zones to be established in Syria under the auspices of Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

Cairo is fighting the Islamic State (IS) on the Sinai Peninsula. The group poses a grave threat to Egypt. IS militants can also strike Egypt from Libya. The terrorist group's presence in Libya brings Egypt and Algeria together as the two great nations face the same threat.

Algeria – the country with a population of 40 million – may be seen as an easy prey. Jihadists are not wasting time getting increasingly entrenched in the oil-rich areas in the southern part of the country – the vast area beyond the Atlas Mountains and the High Plateaux that border the Mediterranean, comprising 85 per cent of the national territory and but less than 9 per cent of its population.

Last October, the IS formally announced the start of operations in Algeria. Its leaders have threatened to strike the countries of Maghreb. In response to the growing threat, Algeria is strengthening ties with Russia. It has recently purchased 40 Mi-28 Night Hunter attack helicopters from that country. In September 2015, Moscow and Algiers signed a contract for the delivery of 14 Su-30MKA fighters to Algeria in 2016-2017. In February, 2016, Russia and Algeria laid out a roadmap for deepening bilateral economic and military cooperation during Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Algiers. In 2000-2015 Russia weapons' supplies exceeded \$7, 6 billion. Russia accounted for around 80% of Algerian arms purchases and 60% of its exports to the continent. In the period of 2016–2020 Russia is to supply 190 tanks, 42 combat helicopters, and two submarines.

By rendering aid to the biggest Arab country with a 1,200 km coastline, Russia is making a significant contribution into preventing a major crisis. Due to its geographic proximity Algeria is a privileged partner of France and, by extension, of the European Union. Instability in the country may prompt refugee flows to Europe. Algeria is a key supplier of oil and gas to the West, with the third largest conventional oil reserves (12.2 billion barrels) in Africa, and the 10th biggest gas reserves (4.5 trillion cubic metres) in the world.

There was a major breakthrough in military cooperation with Angola in 2013 when a \$1 billion agreement was signed to launch export of Russian jets, tanks, artillery, arms, and ammunition. Before this deal there had been no arms sales since 2003.

Nigeria is an important market. The country is a middle-income, mixed economy and emerging market, with expanding manufacturing, financial, service, communications, technology and entertainment sectors. It is ranked as the 21st-largest economy in the world in terms of nominal GDP, and the 20th-largest in terms of purchasing power parity. It is the largest economy in Africa; its re-emergent manufacturing sector became the largest on the continent in 2013, and it produces a large proportion of goods and services for the West African subcontinent. Its GDP annual growth rate averaged 3.99 percent from 1982 until 2016.

In 2014–2015 Russia exported to Nigeria 6 transport helicopters and 6 Mig-29M warplanes. 12 more Mi-171 transport choppers are to be delivered this year. In 2016, the parties agreed to establish military technical cooperation which would be tagged 'Joint Defence Technical Cooperation Committee' (JDTCC).

Russia became a major partner of Uganda in 2010, when a \$740 million contract was signed to supply 6 Su-30MK2, 44 new T-90S tanks, air defense systems and a number of other weapons. This deal made Uganda the largest partner of «Rosoboronexport» in sub-Saharan Africa till 2013 when Russia signed the \$ 1 billion cooperation agreement with Angola. In 2011–2012 Russia delivered to Uganda \$596 million worth weapons and equipment, including 6 Su-30 warplanes and tanks. Uganda accounts for 22% of Russian military exports to the Sub-Saharan African countries. 74% of its military imports fall on Russia.

All in all, Africa accounted for 11% of Russia arms exports in 2011–2015. Russia supplies 30% of heavy weapons to North Africa and 27% to the Sub-Saharan countries. It is the leading armor and the second helicopter exporter to the continent. Many African countries prefer to purchase inexpensive equipment, especially the systems that have already been used. The exported Mil Mi-8 and Mi-24 helicopters have gone through major renovation.

Russia exports the Mil Mi-8/17 and Mi-24/35 helicopters to Angola, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda. In 2016, Tanzania and Somalia made requests for Russian military equipment supplies.

Russia's position as an arms exporter has been strengthened as it started to build service centers on African soil. The first helicopter service center was built in South Africa in 2013. Since then, 5 helicopter service centers have been built in Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia with three more to be built soon. Russia offers programs of modernization to keep prices low and capabilities high. It also offers bank loans on acceptable conditions. Russia granted a \$3 billion loan to Angola in 2013. It is ready to build enterprises and infrastructure sites on African soil.

The terrorist threat is a burning issue, making the growing demand for arms supplies and military aid a stable trend. Moreover, the countries of the continent have been building up their participation in regional and international peacekeeping missions. Russia has great experience and efficient policy to meet the needs of African states.