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# Russia set to enter African market

By Nikita Petrov  
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On September 17-21, the largest regional aerospace, defense, and security exhibition, Africa Aerospace and Defense-2008 is held at the Air Force Base Ysterplaat near Cape Town in South Africa.

The biennial event involving weapons manufacturers from all over the world attaches priority to aerospace and defense systems, as well as military and dual-purpose equipment.

A massive Russian delegation will attend the exhibition for the fifth time. The Russian pavilion, set up by Rosoboronexport, the main national state-owned arms exporter, and the Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service, features over 250 displays in the form of mock-ups, models, posters, video footage and advertising pamphlets.

The Russians are also displaying their Sukhoi Su-27 and Su-30MK Flanker fighter-interceptors and the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-29SKM Fulcrum air-superiority fighter.

The Dzerzhinsky Ural Railroad Car Works (Uralvagonzavod) based in Nizhny Tagil, Russia's Ural region, that has developed most of the country's post-war battle tanks is displaying its T-90S tank.

The Arzamas Engineering Plant and the Tula Instrument Design Bureau have brought their BTR-80A armored personnel carrier (APC), Metis-M and Konkurs-M guided anti-tank missiles and surface-to-air-missile (SAM) systems, respectively.

The Tula-based Splav (Alloy) State Research and Production Association has contributed its Grad and Smerch multiple-launch rocket systems.

The Popov Radio Plant based in Omsk, West Siberia, is displaying a new-generation mobile telecommunications system carried by the Vepr off-road vehicle.

The Russians have also brought the Hashim RPG-32 rocket launcher system, developed by the Jordan Russian Electronic Systems Co. Ltd. And Basalt Co., near Moscow.

The Russian-Indian joint venture BrahMos is displaying its BrahMos supersonic anti-ship cruise missile that can be launched from warships or aircraft.

It takes 14 hours to fly from Russia to Cape Town with stopovers in Amsterdam and Dubai, while the exhibition lasts only a few days. So, is it worth it?

Sergei Demensky, official representative of the Omsk-based Popov Radio Plant, said many African countries were Russia's traditional partners, and that the company offered unique engineering solutions making it possible to set up emergency and reserve telecommunications networks in conditions of high temperatures, earthquakes and sandstorms.

Alexander Fomin, first deputy director of the Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service, said Russian involvement could become an important stage in expanded cooperation with regional countries and other foreign states, and

that all technology, shown in Cape Town, would be used to uphold regional peace.

Other experts said off the record that current Russian efforts to enter the African market were motivated by the fact that Moscow has overlooked the region for many years since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The U.S.S.R. actively supported African national-liberation movements, delivering military equipment to all pro-socialist regimes that promised not to cooperate with the United States.

Even though African countries still have many Soviet-made tanks, APCs, artillery systems, airplanes and mountains of small firearms and other weaponry, China, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Israel supply parts and implement all local modernization programs.

China is actively operating in the African market because other leading arms exporters, including Russia, tend to neglect the region. Judging by the countries involved in Africa Aerospace and Defense-2008, this is not exactly so.

Beijing also takes advantage of the fact that Africa cannot afford to buy expensive hi-tech equipment offered by Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Washington and Moscow.

Chinese-made copies of Soviet-era weapons are quite popular in Angola, Namibia, Tanzania, Congo, Chad and other African states because Beijing can afford to dump them on the local market and to loan money to prospective customers.

However, Moscow stopped offering such loans several years ago because the former pro-socialist countries have failed to repay similar Soviet-era loans and because the Russian government was forced to write them off, all the more so as it could not get anything in exchange for the combat equipment.

But Angola is ready to allow Moscow to develop local diamond, polymetallic-ore and other mineral deposits. The Angolan government and other African governments would like to set up joint ventures with Russian capital.

However, Russian businessmen are reluctant to operate in Africa, citing excessive risks, such as political instability and inter-ethnic disagreements at every state-administration level. Moscow could lose its regional position because European and Asian investors do not fear such risks.

Russian weapon makers have drawn the right conclusions from their old-time mistakes. In 2002, the mixed Russian - South African commission for military-technical cooperation was established. In late November 2005, representatives of national defense industries held a joint seminar. In 2006, both countries signed an inter-governmental agreement on mutual copyright protection during their military-technical cooperation.

Russia and South Africa are moving to implement several attractive projects in this realm. For instance, unmanned aerial vehicles earmarked for third countries would be equipped with small Russian engines.

There are plans to establish a regional center that would service and repair Russian aircraft and to develop small-scale radar for the South African Armed Forces, to cooperate on third countries markets and to train South African officers at Russian military academies, to hold a joint tender for a new South African main battle tank and to cooperate in the sphere of space exploration.

Russian specialists are also ready to facilitate peace-keeping operations in African states.

Consequently, Moscow had every reason to display its weapons systems in South Africa because it should not relinquish control of this attractive market segment.

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