
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN AFRICA

Interview with professor O. Igho Natufe, Nigeria



O. Igho Natufe is a Nigerian-born Sovietologist and a specialist in International Relations and Soviet/Russian Foreign Policy. Dr. Natufe is an alumnus of the People's Friendship University, a former university professor of Political Science (University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, 1978—1980, and the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, 1980—1989) and senior advisor to the Government of Canada (1970—1978, 1989—2011). He is author of several of scientific research, including “Soviet policy in Africa: from Lenin to Brezhnev”. In his interview he speaks about IR studies in Africa, about mutual perceptions of Russians

and Africans, about his recent book on Soviet and Russian Foreign Policy, about scramble for Africa between great and emerging powers. He expects Russia, the USA, and China to enhance their influence in Africa, at the expense of Britain and France. Prof. Natufe pays a special attention to the role of African Diaspora in Development of African countries.

Key words: Africa, Russia, scramble for Africa, mutual perceptions, IR studies in Africa

Sir Natufe. O. Igho, in your recent book you analyze and present the Russian's strategies to regain lost influence. According to your point of view, can we predict a return of Russia to Africa? What could be Russian motivations and ideological message of such a return?

O. Igho Natufe: Russia has already returned to Africa. The temporary withdrawal from Africa instituted by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in the last years of the Soviet Union caused Russia a great strategic loss in Africa. As Russia re-builds its global strategic outreach befitting of a super power, we will see a gradual and systematic re-entry of Russia into Africa. But this re-entry will be anchored on well-defined criteria as opposed to the grandiose presence of the Soviet Union (Russia's predecessor) in almost every African country. Since foreign policy is concerned with a study of options available to a country in its relationship to other countries and the international political system, I expect Russia to prioritize its policy in Africa dictated by its “financial constraints and strategic interests”, as I posited in my book, «Russian Foreign Policy In Search Of Lost Influence» [Natufe 2015]. This view corresponds to the analysis of Professor Alexei Vasiliev's categorization of Russia's three key priorities in Africa as follows: first, North Africa; second, Republic of South Africa; and third, a group of sub-Saharan African countries that include Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Namibia, Guinea, and Mali.

Actually the fight against Boko Haram is one of the highest priorities of Cameroonian, Nigerian and Chadian government. USA also decided to send 300 U.S soldiers in Cameroon in order to help national army. Taking into account Russian's high profile

in questions of international security and especially fight against Islamic State in Syria, what could be an implication of Russia in resolving Boko Haram problem?

O. Igho Natufe: Note that the USA did not just “decide” to send its soldiers to Cameroon in the fight against Boko Haram. The governments of Nigeria, Tchad, and Cameroon specifically requested for US military assistance. None of these countries have invited Russia to help them in their fight against Boko Haram. Russia’s involvement in the fight against Islamic State was at the invitation of the President of Syria. Thus, it is highly speculative to talk about the “implication of Russia in resolving Boko Haram problem” in the absence of an invitation from these countries seeking Russia’s involvement.

You worked in Africa, you worked in Russia. What are the mutual perceptions of Russians and Africans? How these perceptions evolved since Soviet times? Which proposals can you do for keeping strong connection between new generations of Russia and Africa?

O. Igho Natufe: When Russians and Africans discuss the state of their bilateral relations, they always recall, with nostalgia, the positive and active involvement of the Soviet Union in the anti-colonial struggle in Africa. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called “end of the cold war” has altered the contours of Russian-African relations. Both parties, especially the “new generations” of Russians and Africans have to re-define the basis of their relations in both economic and strategic terms.

You worked as political science professor at the University of Ghana. What are the main African think tanks and schools of international relations (IR) at the continent? Are they concentrated at universities mostly or these are applied analysis centers closer to decision-makers’?

O. Igho Natufe: The main think tanks in Africa are concentrated in universities and institutes of international relations closely linked to the governments in respective African countries.

What are according to you, top-priority topics of African IR researchers at the moment? Is there some country’s specialization in this sphere?

O. Igho Natufe: Terrorism and the policies of the great powers (Russia, USA, China, Britain, France, India and Brazil) current dominate IR research in African universities and institutes of international relations.

For many years you worked as a senior advisor to the Government of Canada. Nowadays there are some representatives of African intellectual Diaspora who works abroad. I would mention also an example of Dambisa Moyo, who worked for World Bank and is an author of the book “Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa”. What can African intellectual Diaspora do to promote the development of continent abroad?

O. Igho Natufe: I am familiar with Dambisa Moyo’s book. For the African Diaspora to promote the development of the African continent there must be a synergy between the government of an African country and citizens of that country in the Diaspora, for example. Unfortunately, most members of the African Diaspora have assumed sub-

servient roles in their interaction with the governments of their respective African countries. Thus, instead of projecting a strategic construct for developing their respective countries, most members of the African Diaspora have become stooges of respective African governments. For there to be progress on this front, we need a dedicated and conscientious African Diaspora that can articulate an independent development strategy for Africa, irrespective of the political party in power in respective African countries.

You know positions of Western countries to Africa, position of Russia, China and of course position of African countries. How do you think, what great powers will enhance their influence in Africa, what non-regional actors will lose their influence and what has to be the attitudes of African states to these processes?

O. Igho Natufe: The scramble for Africa is still on, irrespective of the independence of African countries from colonialism. While in 1884/1885, African leaders were not invited to the Berlin Conference on the partition of Africa, it is interesting to note that African leaders are actively involved in the current scramble for Africa as allies of the great powers, who are building their respective spheres of interest in Africa. I expect Russia, the USA, and China to “enhance their influence in Africa”, at the expense of Britain and France. As for African states, I expect their attitudes to be informed by their declared national interests.

Being a PFUR alumni and working all over the world, do you believe that people's friendship can change the world?

O. Igho Natufe: I believe in the power of the people as a mechanism to change the world and make it a better place for all. At the same time we must recognize the dialectics of the unity and struggle of opposites, as we engage in a battle of ideas to change the world according to our respective ideological prism.

Interviewed by Tafotie Deffo Jerry Rowllings

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В АФРИКЕ

Интервью с профессором О. Иго Натуфе

О. Иго Натуфе является советологом и специалистом в области международных отношений и советской/российской внешней политики нигерийского происхождения. Доктор Натуфе является выпускником Университета дружбы народов, профессором политологии Универси-

тета Ганы (г. Аккра, Гана, 1978—1980 гг.) и Университета Бенина (г. Бенин-Сити, Нигерия, 1980—1989 гг.), а также старшим советником правительства Канады (1970—1978 гг., 1989—2011 гг.). Он является автором нескольких научных исследований, в том числе «Советская политика в Африке: от Ленина до Брежнева». В своем интервью он говорит о международных исследованиях в Африке; о взаимном восприятии россиян и африканцев; о своей недавней книге, посвященной советской и российской внешней политике; о борьбе за Африку между великими и восходящими державами. Он ожидает, что Россия, США и Китай усилят свое влияние в Африке за счет Великобритании и Франции. Профессор Натufe уделяет особое внимание роли африканской диаспоры в развитии африканских стран.

Ключевые слова: Африка, Россия, борьба за Африку, взаимное восприятие, международные исследования в Африке

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