



Will Russia Establish a Military Base in the Red Sea?

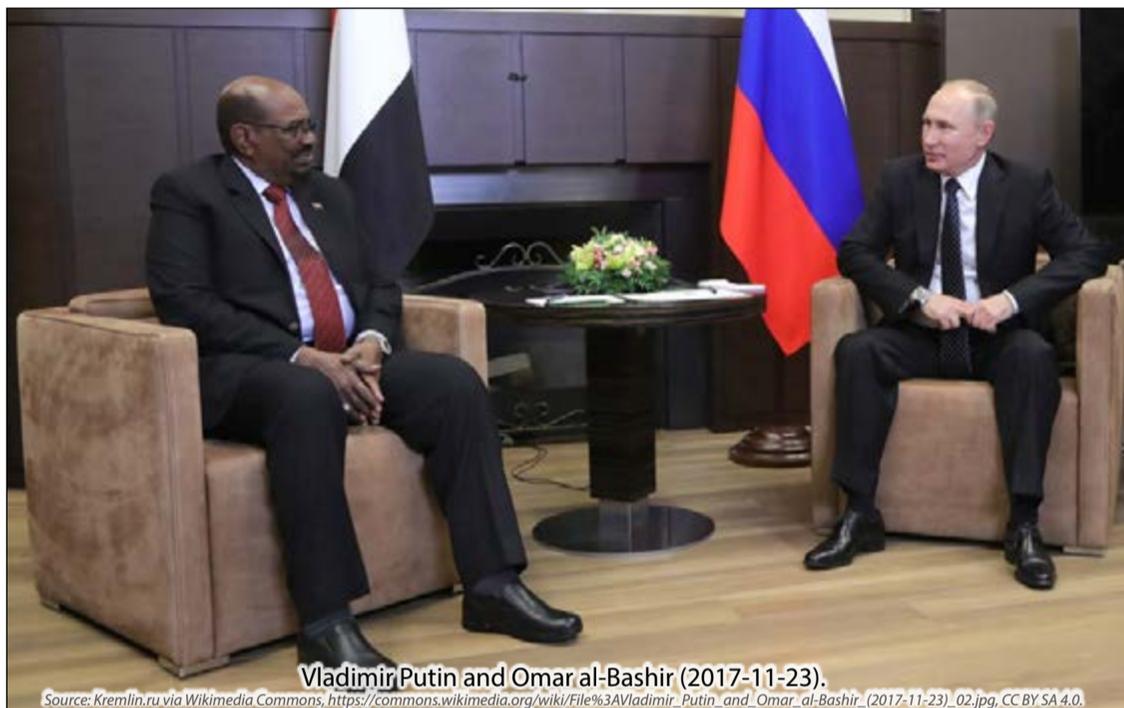
OE Watch Commentary: In late November, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir visited Russia and met with Russian President Putin and Defense Minister Shoigu in Sochi. As the accompanying passages from Middle Eastern and African sources point out, a top item on the agenda during these meetings was the issue of Russia establishing a military base in Sudan, in the Red Sea. Russia's expansion into Sudan and the Red Sea would be an indication of Moscow's growing influence in Africa. While Russia has been expanding its presence in the Middle East and the Mediterranean via Syria, Egypt and Libya, it would now be moving further south along the Red Sea. This would give it access to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

As the first two passages discuss, the Sudanese President asked Russia to establish a base in Sudan as "protection from the aggressive acts of the United States." The first reaction from the Russian side was positive, with Frants Klintsevich, First Deputy Chairman of the Defense and Security Committee of Russia's Federation Council, saying that "there are no reasons for Russia to reject this" but adding that the ultimate decision would be up to the President. Bashir also said that Sudan would like to purchase Su-30 and Su-35 war planes; and S-300 air defense systems from Russia. As the passages note, Sudan still uses air defense systems from the Soviet era.

The third passage reports on Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's comments that Russia regards Sudan as a major partner in Africa. As the fourth passage notes, despite the Sudanese President being charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, Russia has not taken a negative stance against him. On the contrary, Russia condemned the ICC decision and withdrew from the organization in 2016 (after the court released a report accusing Russia of war crimes when it seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014). The passage discusses that Russia has pursued a balanced policy toward Sudan and South Sudan, and that it has common interests with the Sudans, on the issue of the Red Sea.

The author of the final excerpt looks at the issue from a broader geopolitical perspective. He points to China opening a military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa; France's activities in Mali; and "the US presence in various parts of the continent." Now, with Russia's potential initiatives in the Horn of Africa, he claims that the "global powers' war of influence which was being fought in the Middle East, is expanding to Africa," and suggests that this war of influence is about to get more intense. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

"The global powers' war of influence, which is being fought in the Middle East, is taking place in Africa too. China opening a military base in Djibuti, the US's presence in various parts of the continent, Russia's new moves, and France's initiatives in African countries, particularly Mali, is a sign that this war will intensify."



Vladimir Putin and Omar al-Bashir (2017-11-23).

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_and_Omar_al-Bashir_\(2017-11-23\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_and_Omar_al-Bashir_(2017-11-23)_02.jpg), CC BY SA 4.0.

Source: "Bashir Discusses with Russia Setting up Military Base on Red Sea," *Asharq al-Awsat*, 26 November 2017. <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1095236/bashir-discusses-russia-setting-military-base-red-sea>

During his talks with Putin on Thursday in Sochi, the Sudanese president... called on Putin to tackle the US intervention in the Red Sea from the standpoint of setting up a Russian military base in the region...

In a first reaction over the Sudanese-Russian talks on possibility of setting up a military base on the Red Sea, Frants Klintsevich, First Deputy Chairman of the Defense and Security Committee of Russia's Federation Council, said that there are no reasons for Russia to reject this.

Yet, he pointed that such decision is taken by the Russian president who is the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

Source: "Sudan Devlet Başkanı: Putin'le Kızıldeniz'de askeri üs kurma konusunu ele aldık (Sudanese President: Putin and I discussed the issue of setting up a military base in the Red Sea)," *Tr.sputniknews.com*, 25 November 2017. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/rusya/201711251031145094-sudan-devlet-baskan-putin-kizildeniz/>

In his meeting with Putin, al-Bashir blamed the US for interfering in other countries' internal affairs, saying, "This is why there was a huge disaster in Syria. Sudan's division into two countries is also due to the US. Therefore we need protection against the aggressive acts of the United States. We want to cooperate with Russia in certain fields."

Bashir also talked about the defense cooperation between Russia and Sudan. Bashir, who said that Sudan still uses air defense systems produced in the Soviet era, said that they would like to purchase Su-30 and Su-35 war planes, along with S-300 air defense systems from Russia.

Source: "Africa: Dmitry Medvedev - Russia Regards Sudan As Major Partner in Africa," *AllAfrica.com*, 25 November 2017. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201711270360.html>

The Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, pointed out that Russia regards Sudan as a major partner in Africa.

(continued)



Continued: Will Russia Establish a Military Base in the Red Sea?

Source: Mustafa Erdemol, “Ortadoğu’da avantajlı hale geldikten sonra: Rusya, Afrika Boynuzu’na bir kez daha geri dönüyor (After getting in an advantageous position in the Middle East: Russia is once again returning to the Horn of Africa),” *Birgun.net*, 27 November 2017. <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/ortadogu-da-avantajli-hale-geldikten-sonra-rusya-afrika-boynuzu-na-bir-kez-daha-geri-donuyor-192719.html>

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was in Russia for a formal visit. Al-Bashir said that in his meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in Sochi, they had discussed setting up a military base in the Red Sea...

Russia’s policy of returning to the Horn of Africa started in 2015. Sudan split into two after Omar al-Bashir’s unforgivable mistakes and the US taking advantage of these mistakes. But Russia pursued a balanced policy toward each of the Sudans. It hosted the Foreign Ministers of both Sudan and South Sudan in Moscow and discussed “anti-terrorism policies” with them. Russia has common interests not only with the Sudans, but also with many other countries in the Horn of Africa when it comes to the Red Sea...

Thus Russia has not stood against Sudan’s President Al-Bashir. It condemned the International Criminal Court (ICC)’s... allegations of genocide, and then withdrew from the ICC...

The global powers’ war of influence, which is being fought in the Middle East, is continuing in Africa too. China opening a military base in Djibuti, the US’s presence in various parts of the continent, Russia’s new moves, and France’s initiatives in African countries, particularly Mali, is a sign that this war will get worse.

Thus there is nothing surprising about Russia establishing a military base in Sudan, in the Red Sea. If anything, one might ask what took them this long, and the answer is that Russia was busy in the Middle East with Syria. And with Ukraine of course.



Map showing the Gulf of Aden, located between Yemen and Somalia.

Source: By Norman Einstein (Own Work) via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AGulf_of_Aden_map.png, CC BY-SA 3.0.