

RE-SOVEREIGNISING AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER FORMATION

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Abstract. This article is devoted to an examination of both the theoretical and practical aspects of the strengthening of sovereignty on the African continent. The first part of the article comprises a critical analysis of the ‘conventional’ social sciences, concluding that there is no enough literature addressing the issue of sovereignty. The theoretical part of the article also provides a matrix of conjugations of concepts, both synonymous (sovereignty and security) and antonymous to the former (hegemony and neocolonialism). The article then goes on to present the main classifications of types of sovereignty, hegemony and neocolonialism as interpreted by leading Soviet, Russian, Western and African scholars. The theoretical framework of the study is based on the works of the prominent Russian intellectual V.L. Tsymbursky, who distinguished between ‘sovereignty of fact’ and ‘sovereignty of recognition’, and also divided the political and legal nature of sovereignty. This framework is used to examine both the current situation in the Sahel and the broader African context, and the unprecedented rise in efforts to strengthen sovereignty in Africa that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the peak of the Non-Aligned Movement’s and the UNCTAD’s activities. The author identifies the problem of sovereignty defense (ensuring comprehensive security) in the declarations of the BRICS summits in 2009–2022. Conclusions are drawn about the ‘double evolution’ of the external structures of ‘geopolitical recognition’ that took place immediately after the collapse of the USSR and in recent years, when the erosion of the Western-centric system is observed. The final part of the study draws parallels between the Russian and African approaches to the defense of sovereignty in the current world system and concludes that lessons of the previous attempt to consolidate the ‘Global South’ (1970s–1980s) should be taken into account.

Keywords: Africa, Russia, sovereignty, Non-Aligned Movement, BRICS, hegemony, multipolarity, global governance, economic science, dependent development

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In the contemporary world, the notion of sovereignty is regarded as being of a highly ambivalent nature, often devalued and instrumentalized in the sense attributed to it by interpreters in the context of “games of sovereignty” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 9, 21]. Back then, the first president (1960–1966) of independent Ghana, K. Nkrumah (1909–1972),

at the dawn of African independence, in the early 1960s, observed: “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, *in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty*” [Nkrumah 1966: ix]. In the 21st century, it is not only this particular concept that is being manipulated but also the entire related discourse, as liberation from neocolonial dependence is replaced by narratives of “true emancipation,” including various elements of the “new ethics”.

In this article, within the framework of “correcting names,” an attempt has been made to bring the concept of sovereignty, in its African dimension, back into a more rigorous framework and, among other things, to fill it with substantive and practical content. This is facilitated by two previous special issues of the *Journal of the Institute for African Studies* (No. 2 and No. 3 for 2024), which featured a rigorous scientific discourse involving prominent Russian and African intellectuals. In fact, certain aspects of applied concepts of sovereignty were elaborated, and this paper will contain many references to those works.

Let us first consider the representation of this concept in the social sciences, as well as its juxtaposition with other related and antonymous concepts, and explore the relationship between sovereignty “on the ground” and “geopolitical structures of recognition”. Further, we will show that at present, in light of the institutionalization of BRICS, there is already a second attempt to strengthen the sovereignty of the continent’s countries (the first was in the 1970s and 1980s with the active participation of the Non-Aligned Movement). The article also presents the interconnection of Russia’s and Africa’s re-sovereignizations in the context of the formation of a multipolar world.

SOVEREIGNTY: A SCIENCE THAT IS NOT TAUGHT

Conventional Western-centric social sciences, be it economics, political science, or the combination of the two, international political economy (IPE), usually lack theoretical sections that show how a state can strengthen its sovereignty and position within the prevailing international relations system and get rid of a dependent status. Thus, classical IPE is predominantly founded on the contributions of the so-called “magnificent seven”—R. Gilpin (USA), P. Katzenstein (USA), R. Keohane (USA), C. Kindleberger (USA), R. Cox (Canada), S. Krasner (USA), and S. Strange (UK) [de Oliveira, Kvangraven 2023: 1677]. Consequently, the pool of authors is conventionally ethnocentric (the Anglo-Saxon core of the “Collective West”), but, nevertheless, the theories they develop claim to be universal [Dugin 2024: 12-13; 17–18]. At the same time, the imperatives of national sovereignty are stigmatized, for example, through the dissemination of narratives such as “techno-nationalism” or the “Balkanization of the Internet” [Degterev 2022: 367].

It is acknowledged even by Western experts that the classical IPE ignores a number of issues that are important for the Global South and especially for Africa. Instead of discussing the advantages of hegemonic stability, it is more important for Africans to understand the mechanisms of resistance to this hegemony. Rather than on the mechanisms of domestic political decision-making, the focus should be on achieving liberation from the influence of comprador elites in the formation of national policy. Instead of the advantages of international regimes, their limitations on African countries’ ability to exit dependent development should be assessed [de Oliveira, Kvangraven 2023: 1678]. At the same time, it is no longer profitable for the Western world to advocate trade liberalization as an unconditional good, as its relative benefits are maximized for the People’s Republic of China but not for the United States of America [Degterev 2024b: 65–68].

Thus, mainstream Western-centric science is rather in favor of maintaining the *status quo* (“rich North, poor South”), while the applied interests of researchers from the center and the periphery do not quite coincide, to put it mildly. At the same time, proponents of critical theories, including Western intellectuals, are categorized as “writers and critics,” i.e., they are excluded from “conventional” academic science. They are recognized only within the framework of so-called heterodox economics [Degterev 2024c: 62–64], i.e., the securely fenced “Speaker’s Corner” in the “Hyde Park” of “conventional” economic science. On the continent itself, the glorious days of *CODESRIA*¹ under the leadership of political scientist and economist Samir Amin (1931–2018), one of the founders of the world-systems approach, have passed [Khokholkova 2024: 35–38], the agency of African science is often in question [Degterev 2024a], and a significant proportion of academic journals are owned by mainstream (primarily British) publishing companies [Shai 2024: 110–111].

In such a difficult environment, of utmost importance are “*beacons*,” i.e., the authors whose works illuminate the “gloomy darkness” of “conventionality.” And while the latter, in the spirit of neoliberal determinism, is designed to show that there is no choice (Thatcher’s *There is no alternative!*)², “beacons” do give hope! As a rule, these are sufficiently convinced intellectuals who are sure of a different future for Africa and do not succumb to the pressure of opportunistic discursive hegemony.

In the field of economics, the Egyptian Samir Amin [Amin 2012], who spent most of his life in Dakar (Senegal), and the Nigerian political economist Claude Ake (1939–1996) [Ake 1981], are worthy of mention, along with some others. Among them, incidentally, are Western critical scholars, including Ian Taylor (1969–2021), who bequeathed his research library to Addis Ababa University [Vasiliev, Degterev, Shaw 2021: 12; 21–38]; Ingrid Kvangraven [de Oliveira, Kvangraven 2023]; Pdraig Carmody, who presents a balanced view of the continent’s economic development [Carmody, Murphy 2024]; and critical scholar Mark Langan [Langan 2018; Langan 2023]. Original theories of integration in Africa are developed by the Nigerian Ernest Aniche [Aniche 2024].

The humanitarian sphere is of equal importance in ensuring sovereignty. It is noteworthy that the Russia-Africa Economic Forum and the Russia-Africa Humanitarian Forum³ were both convened in St Petersburg in 2023 as part of the Russia-Africa Summit. The brilliant Kenyan intellectual Macharia Munene shows how throughout the 20th century, there was an invisible battle between two representations of Africa: colonial (neocolonial) and African proper one [Munene 2024]. One of those who awakened African identity was the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop [Sadovskaya 2024]. The South African professor Kgotatso Shai employs an Afrocentric approach in contemporary academic research [Shai 2024].

A number of African intellectuals are trying to balance between the conventional Western discourse and an unbiased analysis of the continent’s real problems [Moyo 2024; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021] by weaving in narratives of postcolonial studies [Fituni, Abramova 2020; Degterev 2023: 25–35], but following the mainstream agenda only serves to diminish the acuity of their analysis. A notable example of this can be seen in the work of Ali Mazrui (1933–2014), the Kenyan-American North-South scholar, who, in his time, sought to navigate the complex relationship between the American academy and African interests, until the

¹ *Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique (CODESRIA)* — a pan-African research organization headquartered in Dakar, Senegal.

² Chen J. TINA: An Acronym for “There Is No Alternative” Defined. *Investopedia*. 10.09.2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/t/tina-there-no-alternative.asp> (accessed: 11.10.2024)

³ Second Summit. Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum. For peace, security and development. *Roscongress*. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/> (accessed: 11.10.2024)

Guyanese scholar and Pan-African activist Walter Rodney (1942–1980) exposed the absurdity of such a line in an intellectual debate [Munene 2024: 13].

Among the “beacons” is the prominent Russian intellectual V.L. Tsymbursky, who in the “twilight” of the 1990s conceptualized sovereignty, trying to defend it, albeit in mental space, in his famous work and manifesto of geopolitical isolationism, “The Island of Russia” [Tsymbursky 1993]. After a series of his early articles on the topic of sovereignty in the early 1990s [Tsymbursky 1992], in 2008 he delivered a keynote report, some provisions of which were clarified in the speeches of other participants of the workshop [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008], which formed the basis for a number of initial assumptions for the analysis within the framework of this article.

SOVEREIGNTY AS A COUNTER TO NEOCOLONIALISM

The notion of sovereignty in absolute terms implies the impossibility of influencing the country’s decisions in domestic and foreign policy through various instruments of influence in the political, economic, informational, and other spheres. In periods of global transformation, such as the present one, certain types of transnational ties are being securitized (in a broader context, politicized), and attempts are being made to use them as levers of pressure on individual actors. In this context, powerful states that are not under hegemonic pressure become the poles of the emerging multipolar world.

Maintaining a sovereign state requires constant development of the concept and its practical adaptation to the challenges of modernity (“*Marxism is not a dogma but a guide to action*”), including the consideration of the impact of the latest scientific and technological achievements (social communications, cloud storage, artificial intelligence, and others) on the mechanisms of cross-border public influence.

Due to the ambivalence of the concepts and categories used, it makes sense to “conjugate” such concepts as sovereignty, security, hegemony, and neocolonialism (see Table 1).

Table 1. **Concept conjugation matrix**

+	–
Sovereignty (<i>economic, information, etc.</i>)	Hegemonism (<i>in economy, ICT, etc.</i>)
Security (<i>economic, information, etc.</i>)	Neocolonialism (<i>economic, informational, etc.</i>)

Source: compiled by the author.

Indeed, state sovereignty in certain spheres is aimed at strengthening security, i.e., protection from internal and external threats. Thus, these concepts are generally quite close in their content. For example, in the Russian Federation, the concept of (external) economic security is popular in the economic sphere, which is applied, among other areas, to the analysis of the socio-economic situation on the African continent [Morozenskaya, Gavrilova, Kalinichenko 2024].

The opposite phenomena to sovereignty, in the nature of their impact, are hegemonism and neocolonialism, which impose relations of dependence and non-self-reliance. The first refers to the US policy (as the leader of the “Collective West,” possessing the status of a much more than sovereign state itself) and global American-centric institutions and regimes (e.g., the IMF or the World Bank), which emerged in the

second half of the 20th century, when “the hegemony of American imperialism over European capitalism was established” [Sirotkina 2020: 82]. The concept under discussion here is that of neocolonialism of a new type [Degterev 2023: 22–25], the critical analysis of which as a holistic negative phenomenon is offered, for example, within the framework of the world-system approach. Neocolonialism as a more traditional phenomenon refers rather to the sub-imperial centers of power of the “Collective West,” the former metropolises, such as France [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022]. In both cases, it is about the establishment of dependent development and a kind of “opening up” of national sovereignty, in an effort to consolidate their influence on the African continent [Abramova 2024: 4–5].

The concept of sovereignty is complex, and it is important to prioritize those areas that are truly critical for the sustainable development of the country. For example, the aforementioned V.L. Tsymbursky identifies four components of sovereignty in relation to the four (historical) understandings of sovereignty and four social functions according to T. Parsons: political and military command power (*sovereignty of the monarch*; political function); economic and civil community (*sovereignty of the people-population*; economic-adaptive function), cultural and linguistic criterion (*sovereignty of the nation-ethnos*, cultural function), and the purely technocratic criterion of governability (*sovereignty of the state*, integrative function) [Tsymbursky 1992: 6]. At the same time, he speaks of a kind of competition between different readings of sovereignty within the framework of national ideologies: some place greater emphasis on military or political power, others on economic power. In connection with the prioritized types of sovereignty, the authorities “continue to change political images, determining the dynamics of foreign and domestic political strategies, multiplying the myths of power” [Tsymbursky 1992: 6]. In fact, we are talking about different strategic cultures [Degterev 2024b: 59–64] when defending the sovereignty of this or that state.

The other side’s perspective, which can be considered a form of “self-disclosure session”, encompasses also four (like V.L. Tsymbursky’s) first-level dimensions of the structural power: control over security (*NATO*), over production (*OECD*), over finances (*Bretton Woods*), and over knowledge, “pillars of Western hegemony”, identified by British scholar of international political economy, S. Strange (1923–1998). Additionally, she identifies four secondary power structures, namely control over transport systems (sea and air), trade, energy, and welfare (aid) [Strange 1994; Degterev 2024b: 53–59]. In the context of the conjugation of concepts (see *Table 1*), S. Strange’s structural power can well be used to analyze the neocolonial policies of individual states, such as France [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022]. The American publicist W. Engdahl defines the “three pillars of the British Empire” as control over world trade, international banking, and global hydrocarbon production [Engdahl 2004: 1–10].

K. Nkrumah, who introduced the notion of “neo-colonialism” into a wide scientific circulation, in his work “Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism,” appears to attach key importance to the control of Western investment capital over the extraction of natural resources in Africa, including via the system of subsidiary companies [Nkrumah 1965]. At the present stage, the negative aspects of the participation of Commonwealth financial structures in the equity of African companies for African sovereignty are vividly presented by the Kenyan researcher C. Amuhaya⁴. A team of authors led by the Russian

⁴ Amuhaya C.A. Britain’s ‘common’ wealth: How London ensures that Africa never prospers. *RT*. 21.05.2024. <https://www.rt.com/africa/597982-uk-financial-institutions-africa/> (accessed: 11.10.2024)

Africanist L.L. Fituni demonstrates the role of international sanctions as an instrument of the Western neocolonial policies in Africa [Fituni 2021]. At the same time, S. Strange attributes trade and energy only to the secondary power structures and does not take into account the sanctions aspect, which may be a move of a disinformation nature.

The seminal Soviet work on Western neocolonialism for the “Znanie” Society by A.V. Kiva and E.A. Tarabrin identifies three key tools: “political manoeuvres of the neo-colonisers,” “economic arsenal,” and “socio-political aspects” [Kiva, Tarabrin 1976]. Certainly, the neocolonialism of individual Western states manifests with its own country-specific features [Abramova 2023: 95–107; Bokeria et al. 2022: 675–681]. The British neocolonialism in Soviet literature is best reflected in the work of E.A. Tarabrin [Tarabrin 1969], whilst the French one is in the book by E.G. Korenchuk [Korenchuk 1981]. In the context of the ongoing discourse on the “beacons” in the social sciences, it is imperative to acknowledge two pivotal figures in the USSR and the Russian Federation, who have meticulously developed the concept of counteraction to neocolonialism over the course of their careers. These are E.A. Tarabrin (1918–2004) and L.L. Fituni (1953–2023). Both were deputy directors of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in different years.

It is evident that a number of components of sovereignty (economic, food, information) have been the focus of the greatest degree of elaboration, while the realization of the need for others (e.g., language) is less obvious (for example, it became the subject of a dispute between the Senegalese scholar and social activist Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986) and the first president of Senegal (1960–1980), Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) [Sadovskaya 2024; 25, 28]), and is even contested by a number of influential lobbies within African countries [Nikolskaya 2024: 121–124]. Nevertheless, the role of African languages is growing in a number of countries on the continent, including with the support of the Russian Federation [Davydov 2024].

As part of efforts to stigmatize sovereignty, it is often wrongly associated with autarky. Achieving sovereignty is not equivalent to autarky for a number of reasons. Firstly, as the experience of the special military operation in Ukraine demonstrates, in modern conditions, even in the context of intense hostilities, we are not talking about a “total war”. The agenda does not entail a complete breakdown of trade and economic relations with unfriendly countries; rather, it focuses on the management of asymmetric dependencies, both long-term (vulnerabilities) and short-term (sensitivities). It is important that a nation should not depend on an unfriendly state to a greater extent than the latter depends on it [Keohane, Nye 2011: 9–16; Degterev 2024b: 45–53].

Second, sovereignty is not the same as self-reliance, because there is such a thing as *collective self-reliance*. In modern conditions, this implies “collective insurance” on the part of institutions such as the Alliance of Sahel States (for each of the three Sahel states separately), as well as the “final insurance” in the face of the non-Western world, the vanguard of which is the BRICS [Bordachev, Suslov 2024]. Interaction with the latter does not pose a threat to national security, since non-Western countries do not securitize bilateral trade and economic relations for the sake of maintaining a “rules-based order” at all costs. In addition, this concept assumes temporary “de-linking,” and later, when their own structural power is enhanced, “relinking” (restoration of ties) with Western countries [Degterev 2024c: 74–77]. In today’s reality, de-linking has a limited impact on African economies, given the increasing role of non-Western countries in both the global economy and politics [Abramova, Fituni 2022: 838; Abramova 2024: 3–4]. A significant

proportion of African trade and investment is already conducted with non-Western partners.

THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF SOVEREIGNTY: STRUCTURES OF RECOGNITION

Sovereignty at the country level is directly linked to the geopolitical processes taking place at the global level. This phenomenon was perhaps best demonstrated by the Russian intellectual V.L. Tsymbursky, who, in his writings, introduced two key innovations in the conceptualization of sovereignty.

Firstly, he distinguished between “sovereignty of fact,” i.e., the actual effective exercise of power over territory, and “sovereignty of recognition,” which stems from the international legal maxim: “a state is and becomes an international person only and exclusively through recognition” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 1]. In this case, the “sovereignty of recognition” is also based on the mutual recognition of sovereignty by states, and R. Dahl’s famous formula of power⁵ takes the following form: “X exercises power over A, and Y, exercising power over B, recognizes the power over A by the right of X” [The idea of sovereignty 2008: 14].

The sovereignty of recognition is exercised by “geopolitical structures of consent” or “structures of recognition” [The idea of Sovereignty 2008: 15], which V.L. Tsymbursky elaborated in his 1992 article. In particular, he identifies “world, regional, bloc, federative <...> structures of consent characterized by the distribution of various types and forms of sovereignty among their members” [Tsymbursky 1992: 10]. At the same time, the “legitimizing community” focuses more “on procedural compliance rather than on the values proclaimed by the regimes, in both foreign and domestic political spheres” [Tsymbursky 1992: 11]. Examples of such communities include the Holy Alliance in the 19th century, the socialist community, and the quasi-global “community of Western democracies” in the late 20th century.

Indeed, in his analysis of sovereignty, V.L. Tsymbursky rethinks the colossal geopolitical changes after the collapse of the USSR and the dismantling of the previous structures of recognition: the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the Warsaw Treaty Organization, the declining influence of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In his view, by the end of the 20th century, the sovereignty of recognition had prevailed over the sovereignty of fact [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 23]. At present, history has taken “another turn of the spiral,” and the Western-centric institutions of recognition are already experiencing erosion. Actually, V.L. Tsymbursky noted the existence of “different systems of recognition” of sovereignty [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 28]. Specifically, he highlighted non-Western “civilizational platforms” (or “social systems” according to A.I. Fursov [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 103]), which he described as areas “where the authority of Euro-Atlantic institutions is problematic and unstable” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 42].

Indeed, in recent years, in elections in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, observers from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)⁶ and the OSCE

⁵ “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” [Dahl 1957: 202–203].

⁶ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is one of the institutions of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Parliamentary Assembly have increasingly been replaced by representatives of non-Western regional organizations. The cases of S.G. Tikhonovskaya (Belarus), J. Guaidó (Venezuela), and numerous others demonstrate that the waving of “democratic patents” [The idea of sovereignty 2008: 24] without the “sovereignty of fact” is no longer adequate. The technology of humanitarian intervention is increasingly becoming a relic of the unipolar world [Khudaykulova 2016]. Nevertheless, the West is testing new technologies of external recognition, including at the expense of numerous diasporas (the election of M. Sandu in November 2024), which poses a challenge for a number of African countries that also have numerous diasporas in the West.

The conceptual approaches of V.L. Tsymbursky do not contradict the approaches of a number of Western authors who have studied the dynamics of sovereignty in Africa. For example, the American researcher of sovereignty, R. Jackson, in his analysis of the stability of African states within the international system, also emphasized the important role of recognition structures, including the Organization of African Unity [Jackson, Rosberg 1982: 18–19], the UN, the International Organization of Francophonie, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and the Lomé Convention regime (ACP-EU format) [Jackson, Rosberg 1982: 20]. Indeed, within the framework of the late not-so-lamented “*Françafrique*” [Filippov 2024], France supported through a wide range of neo-colonial instruments, including armed interventions, regimes loyal to it [Davidchuk, Degterev, Sidibe 2022]. It is noteworthy that the recognition of the independence of the former French colonies in 1960 usually took place on the same day that the newly formed countries signed agreements on defense and military assistance, as well as on strategic raw materials with France [Korenchuk 1981: 90].

In recent years, the concept of the nation-state brought to the African continent has taken root and strengthened. In this context, it is no longer necessary to absolutize the so-called multiple sovereignty in African countries [Loshkarev 2024], which, in fact, in the figurative interpretation of the Russian researcher A.I. Soloviev, is “a kind of a split form of national sovereignty” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 97]. Traditional institutions of power at the moment, in general, do not contradict the state institutions. They do not openly challenge them, as is now happening with aggressive non-state actors such as the JNIM in the Sahel.

Currently, researchers are offering divergent interpretations of the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS) in September 2023. For example, the Russian researcher I.D. Loshkariov speaks in this regard of the “laboratory of minilateralism,” emphasizing the innovative nature of the alliance [Loshkariov 2024b]. Using V.L. Tsymbursky’s terminology, this constitutes “the creation of a special <...> geopolitical structure of recognition” [Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 26]. Indeed, the leaders of the three Sahel states, who came to power through military means, recognize each other’s legitimacy and sovereignty and are committed to jointly defending it. This minilateralism of ASS can be regarded as a transitional phase, a process of getting out from under the hegemonism of individual countries to the formation of self-sufficient regional organizations, the poles of a multipolar world.

Secondly, V.L. Tsymbursky distinguished between political sovereignty and legal sovereignty. In his opinion, in periods of significant international transformations, there is a “powerful invasion of the purely political attitude to sovereignty in the field of law-making” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 30]. When discussing V.L. Tsymbursky’s

report, the Russian expert in the field of social philosophy and political theory Y.A. Krasin (1929–2023) specified this position in the following way:

“Law enshrines the general ‘rules of the game’ that reflect the established balance of public interests. But in the process of historical development, this balance changes, and real political relations are squeezed into the procrustean bed of legal conservatism. The resulting contradiction first finds expression in the legal consciousness. An increasing number of citizens perceive outdated legal norms as unfair. The pressure on the legally formalized ‘rules of the game’ is growing, giving rise to the need to change them. In fact, this contradiction between politics and law is the driving force behind the evolution of legal systems” [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 83].

Indeed, existing normative attitudes have not kept pace with the wave of “*coupvolutions*”⁷ that has occurred in the Sahel [Fain, Issaev, Korotayev 2024]. What is needed is a thoughtful analysis of the evolving public interests within the sociology of change [The Idea of Sovereignty 2008: 111], which would allow legal norms to be adapted to new social realities. Otherwise, politics prevails over law, including within the framework of ECOWAS [Adu, Meziaev 2024], referring to the traditional “structure of recognition.”

The improvement of external conditions of their development, due to shifts in global dynamics, has also become an important factor in strengthening sovereignty for many African states. Using the conceptual approach outlined above (correlating “sovereignty of fact” and “geopolitical structures of recognition”), it makes sense to undertake a comparative analysis of the situation in the 1960s–1980s and the present era.

THE “BANDUNG SPIRIT” AND LOST HOPES FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER

In the first few decades after the Year of Africa (1960), the continent experienced an unprecedented emotional upsurge. The “Bandung spirit” (referring to the Bandung Conference of Asia and Africa in 1955) was clearly felt, and there was a high level of optimism regarding the imminent economic revival of the newly independent African states. A number of them outlined large-scale programs of industrialization and the development of national industry, either by adopting a socialist orientation with the support of the USSR [Abramova 2022: 73–85; Davidchuk, Degterev, Korendyasov 2022], or (as in the case of Nigeria) by building a “capitalist” economy with elements of planning. Many declared the choice of a special, African way of development— in “socialist” Tanzania, it was *ujamaa*, and in neighboring “capitalist” Kenya, *harambe* [Mbithi, Rasmusson 1977; Vasiliev, Degterev, Shaw 2021: 255].

In the international arena, these years saw a rise in the influence of the countries of the “Global South,” which sought to reinforce the importance of state sovereignty in key international regimes, including economic, trade, information, and others [Krasner 1985]. By consolidating their position and with the active support of the USSR, they managed to change the international agenda in their favor. For example, in the context of the formation of the New International Economic Order, the concept of collective self-reliance became widely spread [Degterevev 2024c], and a code of conduct for transnational companies was being developed [Sauvant 2015]. In the field of international trade, the

⁷ A portmanteau term for “*coup d’état*” and “*revolution*.”

Generalized System of Preferences for developing countries (GSP) was established, and in 1976, the Integrated Programme for Commodities (IPC) was launched to stabilize world markets for 18 commodities [Bello 2006].

In the humanitarian sphere, the New International Information and Communication Order was proclaimed, and the report of the Sean MacBride Commission, presented in 1980 to the XXI session of the UNESCO General Conference in Belgrade, proposed practical measures to eliminate inequalities in the exchange of information [Usacheva 2024]. Pan-African discussions on the social sciences boiled “on the margins” of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa) events [Khokholkova 2024], with Africans themselves setting the agenda for key International Congresses of Africanists held every five years on the continent [Degterev 2024a: 66–67].

Reviewing the processes that took place during this period in various spheres of activity, it can be concluded that the 1970s and early 1980s became a time of real strengthening of the national sovereignty of the young African states, as well as the peak of the influence of non-Western countries on the mechanisms of global governance. To a large extent, this was possible due to the unique configuration of the system of international relations, in which the USSR and the CMEA countries actively supported the independent states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America both “on the ground” [Grekov et al. 1987] and at the global level, in the UN institutions. Being largely Western-centric at the time of their creation [Degterev 2024b: 172–173], many post-war international organizations became much more non-Western after the successful process of decolonization [Denisov, Urnov 2010], while the US did not immediately change its strategy and, by inertia, continued funding these institutions, although the “controlling stake” in them gradually shifted in favor of the “Global South” [Krasner 1985: 10–11].

However, at a certain point, the countries of the “Collective West” again seized the initiative, regaining their former influence, both in international affairs and “on the ground”—in all key spheres of life of the “Global South.” The Indian intellectual V. Prashad (another “beacon” of the Global South) believes that the “beginning of the end” was the creation of the “Group of Seven” in 1975, which allowed the “crystallization” of the structural power of the “Collective West” [Prashad 2012].

Subsequently, the Structural Adjustment Programs of the Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF and the World Bank), in response to the induced debt crisis, reformatted entire sectors, countries, and regions [Riddell 1992], in some cases leading to irreversible consequences that have not been overcome to this day. At the same time, the traditional personalized neo-colonial dependency on the former metropolises was largely replaced by an impersonal collective neo-colonialism, in which structural dependency, i.e., imposed “rules of the game,” played the key role. Meanwhile, the USSR was gradually moving towards convergence with the “Collective West,” softening its approaches [Kurylev et al. 2022].

At the national level, Structural Adjustment Programs have led to a reduction in social spending and the erosion of nation-states, in some cases leading to the formation of the phenomenon of “failed states.” The place was gradually taken over by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which took over a number of state functions to provide basic social services in the areas of food security, agriculture, health care, education, and water supply. By the mid-1990s, in a number of countries, Western NGOs were involved in almost every sphere of activity, and the salaries of government officials

were often paid predominantly with funds from Western lenders. Under such conditions, it became difficult to speak of genuine national sovereignty and the opportunities for the country's development that it provides. The significant reduction in the layer of sovereignly thinking national intellectuals at that time also contributed to this [Munene 2024].

In the international arena, the initial momentum from the initiatives of the united "Global South" of the late 1970s and mid-1980s gradually began to "fade". The agenda of the New International Economic Order became increasingly declarative, as evidenced by the annual UN General Assembly voting process on the "Right to Development" resolution. It gradually became hushed up in ECOSOC, UNDP⁸, and UNGA meetings. The UN Centre on Transnational Corporations (UNCTC), which had effectively monitored violations by Western companies in the Global South, was closed. The position of Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation in the UN Secretariat was also eliminated [Bello 2006].

After several UN Development Decades [Larionova 2020], the role of the egalitarian United Nations (*one country, one vote*) as a key platform for global economic development has steadily declined, and the US-centric World Bank and IMF with their weighted voting system, as well as the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (DAC OECD), whose members are only developed countries, have come to the fore. Established in Geneva on the initiative of the Sri Lankan intellectual Godfrey Gunatilaka, the "Third World Secretariat" (the "non-Western OECD") in the format of the Southern Commission (1987–1990) and the Southern Secretariat (1991–present), chaired by the retired first president of Tanzania (1964–1985), J. Nyerere (1922–1999), became increasingly dependent on Western benefactors to fund its activities [Degterev 2024c: 63].

At the 8th UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Cartagena (1992), the mandate of this organization, which had advocated linking trade liberalization to development, was significantly reduced. The developed countries succeeded in blocking any attempts by UNCTAD to participate in the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, i.e., in the real reform of the international trade regime. The organization's functions were henceforth limited to "analysis, consensus-building on certain trade-related issues, and technical assistance" [Bello 2006]. The structural power of the "Global South" in trade was undergoing a gradual decline, while the World Trade Organization (WTO), which had been created on the basis of the project of the American professor J. Jackson⁹ and which recognized trade liberalization as an unconditional good, emerged as the main regulator of foreign trade instead of UNCTAD.

However, even in this "reduced" form, UNCTAD posed a danger because it criticized the outcomes of Structural Adjustment Programs, argued for fair prices for natural resources (rather than radical trade liberalization) as a way to develop the "Global South," and exposed the failure of Western countries to comply with their GATT commitments. There have been repeated attempts to "abolish" UNCTAD altogether, as a significant part of its regulatory functions was transferred to the WTO [Bello 2006].

The continent's information agenda gradually came to be dominated by 'conventional' narratives, promoted, among others, by the Pan-African News Agency

⁸ The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is the United Nations' global network for providing grant-based and non-politicized development assistance to its member states.

⁹ Interview with Professor John Jackson on the WTO's Dispute Settlement System. *WTO*. https://wto.org/english/forums_e/debates_e/debate41_e.htm (accessed: 10.10.2024)

(PANA), which was initially created for the opposite purpose [Usacheva 2024: 49–50]. Consequently, alternative sources of information on the continent were restricted. Pan-African narratives in the social sciences were gradually phased out, with democratization studies [Tieku 2021: 665–667] and Western science indexes gaining weight.

REVITALIZING AFRICAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTIPOLARITY

The emergence of a multipolar world order offers new hope for strengthening African sovereignty. In 2009, BRIC was established, with South Africa’s accession the following year. It is the BRICS that V. Prashad considers a real attempt to restore the agency of the countries of the “Global South,” dedicating to it the third chapter of his work under the characteristic title “Locomotives of the South” [Prashad 2012]. Africa has been the focus of the new institution almost from the very beginning. In 2023, at the Johannesburg summit, two more African states were admitted to BRICS: Ethiopia, where the AU is headquartered, and Egypt. Subsequent to this development, in 2024, Algeria, Nigeria, and Uganda were also proposed the status of BRICS partner states.

The analysis of the declarations and joint statements of the BRICS leaders (2009–2022) shows (*Table 2*) that security issues play an important role and are mentioned in each declaration without exception. According to our conjugation of concepts (*Table 1*), security is a related concept to sovereignty.

Table 2. Security in BRICS Summit Declarations, 2009–2022

Years	Traditional security	Food security	Information security	Energy security	Health security	Financial security	Security of international trade	Environmental security
2009	√	√		√				
2010	√	√						
2011	√	√	√	√				
2012	√	√		√				
2013	√	√	√					
2014	√	√	√			√	√	√
2015	√	√	√	√	√			√
2016	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
2017	√	√	√	√	√		√	
2018	√	√	√	√		√	√	
2019	√	√	√	√	√			
2020	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2021	√	√	√	√	√	√		
2022	√	√	√	√	√	√		

Source: compiled by the author

The BRICS declarations refer both to the traditional (military) understanding of security and to a broader analysis of peace, security, development, and cooperation (“partnership for global stability, security and prosperity”). Since 2017, in the final declarations of the BRICS summits, a separate section with characteristic titles has been allocated for security in the narrow sense (mainly traditional security threats): “Ensuring Peace and Security” (2022), “Peace, Security and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation” (2021), “Politics and Security” (2020), “Situation in Regions of the World” (2019), “Strengthening and Expanding BRICS Cooperation in International Peace and Security” (2018), “International Peace and Security” (2017).

In the context of ensuring comprehensive sovereignty, the second pillar, the security-development nexus, plays an important role. Peace and security are also linked to the eradication of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Consequently, these aspects are not addressed in the section on classical interpretations of security but are “scattered” in other sections, primarily related to sustainable development (with the exception of cybersecurity, which is primarily addressed in the specialized section of security declarations).

Thus, certain aspects of sustainable development in the final declarations of the BRICS summits are securitized (i.e., considered in the context of security challenges in its broader interpretation). All summit declarations of 2009–2022, without exception, pay attention to food security, which is of particular importance for Africa [Sviridov, Andreeva 2024]. Since 2013, information security has also been regularly mentioned, including in connection with ensuring political sovereignty (the role of the media in the organization and conduct of elections). In recent years, a new dimension of information security is the regulation of artificial intelligence, as well as the neutralization of cyber threats in the financial sphere. Energy security as a separate concept appeared in the declarations of all summits except 2010 and 2013–2014. In the 2011–2012 period, the importance of nuclear energy was emphasized as one of the most promising areas of cooperation between Russia and African countries [Abramova 2024]. Health security is mentioned in the documents of the BRICS summits of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019–2022. It is notable that while the 2015 BRICS summit focused on global health security, the 2016–2017 and 2019 summits placed greater emphasis on medicines, and the 2020–2022 summits placed significant priority on vaccines and testing systems

The BRICS platform serves as an example of “club diplomacy,” a plurilateral format in which the positions of the non-Western world, the countries of the “Global South,” including the increasingly represented Africa, are being harmonized, as it used to be in the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement and on the platform of UNCTAD. Describing the latter, the Filipino intellectual V. Bello noted: “UNCTAD may not have the material resources of (Western) institutions, but it has something that billions of dollars from the World Bank and IMF cannot buy: legitimacy among developing countries” [Bello 2006]. Today, BRICS also has legitimacy among the Global South (hence the larger list of candidates for membership), funding from China and the Arab member states, and Russia’s adamant defense of its sovereignty. The structural power of non-Western countries is gradually increasing, as is their negotiating position in the international arena [Degterev 2024: 219–239].

Meanwhile, there is a crisis of legitimacy of Western-centric institutions, which find it increasingly difficult to claim global status [Clark 2021]. This applies to the WTO (trade liberalization benefits China more than the US), the IMF, and the World Bank (“highly centralized, highly unaccountable and highly opaque” [Bello 2006]), and the

Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC). The approaches of the OECD DAC are resented by many African countries and are associated more with anti-development, cementing the “matrix of dependency” of African countries on the “Collective West” and maintaining the neo-colonial *status quo* [Ngang 2024]. A new agenda and new formats for its implementation are needed. In this context, BRICS is increasingly acting as a platform for non-Western countries to agree on a new version of the global agenda.

Meanwhile, important changes are taking place “on the ground,” on the African continent, when the previous, neo-colonial approaches are no longer working. The African strategies of Western actors (France, Great Britain, and the United States) are being hastily adjusted, and there is a sense of confusion. An attempt is being made to declare any narratives that do not coincide with their official position as Russian or Chinese “propaganda and disinformation” [Okoli 2024].

The Germans are in a slightly better position, preferring in recent years to stay “behind the back” of the French in the Sahel and not to take part directly in hostilities [Trunov 2024], while at the same time promoting in the academic space the problem of sovereignty and even the abolition of the CFA franc as “the last colonial currency” [Gadha et al. 2022]. However, the true sovereignty of the FRG, which has hosted the US military since the World War II and is closely integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, is questionable. Without being fully sovereign oneself, it is quite difficult to teach sovereignty to others [Trunov 2024].

In this way, a “new normalcy” is gradually taking shape, with the issue of sovereignty becoming popular again on the African continent. Non-Western institutions that legitimize the rules of sovereign existence rather than so-called externally imposed standards of “good governance” are gradually establishing themselves as “structures of recognition” [Fituni 2021].

RUSSIA – AFRICA: ON THE SAME SIDE OF HISTORY

In the contemporary era of turbulent international transformations that has already begun, Russia and Africa are on the same side of history, or “in the same boat” [Abramova, Fituni 2022: 576]. The prominent African intellectual Samir Amin (1931–2018) felt this more acutely than others. In the preface to the Russian edition of his book “Russia and the Long Transition from Capitalism to Socialism,” he recalled how, as a child, he and his father celebrated the Soviet victory at Stalingrad in Port Said (Egypt) together with thousands of people: “*We* have won the war, *they* should get away” [Amin 2017: 14]. His father associated himself and millions of Africans with the Soviet people (“*we*”) and “them” (“*they*”) with the Western colonial powers. The link between the victory of the USSR and the struggle of the peoples of Asia and Africa against the colonizers was clearly imprinted on his mind.

This connection can still be traced today, in the context of the special military operation, when Russia acts as a structuring actor in world politics and also feels the sympathy of millions of Africans. After all, the beginning of the special military operation changed the relations not only between Russia and the West but also between the West and the rest of the world, including Africa, becoming “the starting point for the formation of a new geopolitical map of the world where African countries can once again begin to play an important role in contemporary international relations” [Adu 2024: 3]. These words are taken from a book on Africa’s perception of the special military

operation, written by Y.N. Adu, an Ivorian intellectual and an expert in international law, who has been living in Russia for many years.

According to S. Amin, “Russia (like China) is too big and too important as a country for its independence to be resigned to by those who want to dominate the world <...> Post-Soviet Russia, as well as the peoples that were part of the USSR, are once again taking up the challenge they have been taking up for centuries: either to accept a subordinate position as a periphery dominated by the new system of world imperialism or to embark on the path of independence...” [Amin 2017: 15]. Thus, the constant struggle for sovereignty is an imperative for the Russian Federation.

But the same dilemma is facing African countries as well: “either to accept a subordinate position as a periphery... or embark on the path to independence”. Yes, Africans were much more obviously marginalized because Russians have the same skin color as Europeans. But racism is primarily an economic category¹⁰.

In the early 1960s, K. Nkrumah, who promoted the independent development of Africa, got into a dispute with the first president of independent Côte d’Ivoire (1960–1993), F. Houphouët-Boigny (1905–1993), who favored the creation of a Franco-African community [Munene 2024: 12] and presented his vision in an article in the French journal *Le Monde diplomatique*¹¹. Similar illusions were present in the late USSR, as well as in the Russian Federation, as they intended to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community as equals [Kurylev et al. 2022]. In 2014, and especially with the beginning of the special military operation, the moment of truth came.

Over the past 25 years, the Russian Federation has come a long way in strengthening its own sovereignty by refusing new IMF loans as early as 2000, gradually enhancing the state’s position in economic policy, and strengthening the role of national development banks. Significant efforts have been made to enhance information and value sovereignty [Degterev 2022; Usacheva 2024], and a number of laws have been adopted to restrict the activities of foreign NGOs and strengthen political sovereignty.

Having accumulated solid experience in strengthening its own sovereignty, the Russian Federation is ready to share it with African countries, acting as a provider of comprehensive sovereignty. This is not an easy path, because sovereignty is a responsibility, and it is often easier (especially in a bureaucratic context) to rely on ready-made and “convenient” Western solutions (*colonial-franchise model*)¹² than to work through “sweat and tears” to develop one’s own solutions.

* * *

Sovereignty is a category that is underrepresented in contemporary Western-centric social science. It is intertwined with other related concepts, both synonymous (security) and antonymous (hegemonism and neo-colonialism). According to V.L. Tsymbursky’s approach, actual sovereignty is complemented by the “sovereignty of recognition” coming from external legitimizing structures. It is evident that these structures are undergoing a transformation, with non-Western institutions of “geopolitical recognition”

¹⁰ The African paradox: what the SMO showed to Russia and the West. *RIA Novosti Crimea*. 29.07.2024. (In Russ.). <https://crimea.ria.ru/20240729/paradoks-afriki-chto-pokazala-svo-rossii-i-zapadu-1139189750.html?ysclid=m3e9bdr3wv274493553> (accessed: 11.10.2024)

¹¹ Houphouët-Boigny F. Afrique et communauté franco-africaine. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. 1958. № 11. https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1958/11/HOUPHOUET_BOIGNY/22803 (accessed: 11.10.2024)

¹² Chadaev A. And now about the objective differences between the colonial venture-franchise and sovereign models. *Chadaev (Telegram Chanel)*. 29.04.2024. (In Russ.). <https://t.me/chadayevru/2771> (accessed: 11.10.2024)

replacing Western-centric ones. This was already in the 1970s and 1980s, during a period of heightened sovereignty aspirations, supported by the Non-Aligned Movement, UNCTAD, and a number of other institutions. It is imperative to draw the right conclusions from the previous attempt in order to avoid mistakes in the new phase of Africa's re-sovereignization.

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РЕСУВЕРЕНИЗАЦИЯ АФРИКИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ НОВОГО МИРОПОРЯДКА

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Аннотация. Данная работа посвящена как теоретическим, так и практическим аспектам укрепления суверенитета на Африканском континенте. В первой части проведен критический анализ «конвенциональной» общественной науки и сделан вывод о недостаточности работ, рассматривающих проблематику суверенитета. Также в теоретической части работы приведена матрица сопряжения понятий, как синонимичных (суверенитет и безопасность), так и антонимичных по отношению к первым (гегемонизм и неоколониализм). Показаны основные классификации видов суверенитета, гегемонизма и неоколониализма в трактовках ведущих советских, российских, западных и африканских исследователей. В качестве теоретической рамки исследования используются наработки выдающегося российского интеллектуала В.Л. Цымбурского, выделявшего «суверенитет факта» и «суверенитет признания», а также разделявшего политическую и правовую природу суверенитета. Сквозь данную рамку рассматривается как текущая ситуация в Сахеле и на Африканском континенте в целом, так и небывалый подъем усилий по укреплению суверенитета в Африке, который наблюдался в 1970–1980-е гг. на пике активности Движения неприсоединения и ЮНКТАД. Показана проблематика защиты суверенитета (обеспечения комплексной безопасности) в декларациях саммитов БРИКС 2009–2022 гг. Сделаны выводы о «двойной эволюции» внешних структур «геополитического признания», произошедшей сразу после распада СССР и в последние несколько лет, когда наблюдается эрозия западноцентричной системы. В заключительном разделе показана общность подходов РФ и Африки к защите суверенитета в текущей мир-системе, а также

сделан вывод о необходимости учесть уроки из предыдущей попытки консолидации «Глобального Юга» (1970–1980-е гг.).

Ключевые слова: Африка, Россия, суверенитет, Движение неприсоединения, БРИКС, гегемонизм, многополярность, глобальное управление, экономическая наука, зависимое развитие

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