Research article

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE TRANSVAAL IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY OF THE LATE 19th CENTURY

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GORELIK Boris Moiseevich, PhD (History), Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Sub-Saharan Africa, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0001-8839-3889. E-mail: boris.gorelik@inafr.ru

Abstract. This article examines the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and the Transvaal in 1898, placing it within the broader context of Russian foreign policy in the late 19th century. While previous studies have explored the negotiations surrounding this event, this article delves deeper into the motivations behind Russia's interest in the Transvaal. Challenging the view that Russian interest stemmed largely from growing migration and economic ties, this article argues that the decision to establish diplomatic relations was driven by strategic considerations within the complex European political landscape. The Transvaal's emergence as a significant gold producer and its resistance to British expansionism placed it at the center of geopolitical rivalries, particularly between Great Britain and Germany. Russia, seeking to maximize its influence in the world, recognized the potential of leveraging the Transvaal situation to its advantage. By establishing diplomatic ties, Russia aimed to gain access to information and potentially influence the dynamics between the major European powers vying for control in Southern Africa. This move aligns with Russia's broader foreign policy strategy of the time, which involved engaging with various regions, including Africa, to advance its interests in the face of European colonial competition.

Based on documents from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Empire and the National Archives of South Africa, this article demonstrates that Russia's engagement with the Transvaal was not an isolated incident but a calculated move within its overall foreign policy framework. By supporting the independence of states like the Transvaal, Russia sought to counterbalance the growing dominance of other European powers and protect its own strategic interests.

Keywords: history of Russian-African relations, Russian Empire, Transvaal, South African Republic, diplomatic relations between Russia and the Transvaal, foreign policy of the Russian Empire, Russian interests in Africa, Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902

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INTRODUCTION

In 1898, the South African Republic (the Transvaal Republic) became the first country in southern Africa with which the Russian Empire established diplomatic relations. The circumstances of the establishment of a Russian diplomatic mission in this republic have already been studied. Since the 1990s, documents on negotiations to establish direct relations between the two states have been published. [Davidson et al. 1999; Khritinin 1999]. The research articles and books by the staff of the Centre for African Studies of the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire reveal the course of these negotiations, the arguments of supporters and opponents of the Russian-Transvaal rapprochement, and the vicissitudes of the establishment of their respective missions in St. Petersburg and Johannesburg [Davidson, Filatova 2010; Marchenko 1992].

And yet, to my knowledge, only one work—a monograph by prominent Africanists A.B. Davidson and I.I. Filatova [Davidson, Filatova 1998]—attempts to identify the reasons for the Russian government's interest in establishing diplomatic relations with the Transvaal. According to these researchers, the Russian government in the late 19th century focused its attention on South Africa because of the growing migration from the Russian Empire to the Cape Colony and the Transvaal, as well as requests from businesspeople for assistance in establishing trade and economic relations. The rapid development of gold mining in the Transvaal also played a role. The owners of Russian gold mining enterprises wanted to gain access to the technologies of their South African competitors [Davidson, Filatova 1998: 195, 202].

Davidson and Filatova see the main reason for Russia's interest in establishing intergovernmental ties with the Transvaal in the fact that the Boer republics and Great Britain were in a political confrontation that could escalate into a military one. Thus, the conditions were created for Russia to "bring them to its side as allies" [Davidson, Filatova 1998: 196].

Historical studies published in recent decades have made it possible to study Russian-Transvaal relations not only in connection with the Russian-British antagonism but also in the broader context of Russian foreign policy. It seems promising to turn to the publications of I.S. Rybachenok of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Having studied the views of Russian statesmen and diplomats on the fundamental interests of the empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I.S. Rybachenok interprets the growing interest in events in Africa at that time as a sign that the ruling circles of the Russian Empire had realized the interconnectedness of political actions in different regions. Russian politicians and diplomats saw that the intertwining of European and colonial contradictions provided an opportunity for new combinations and arrangements. While the European powers fought for control over the most important, in an economic and military/strategic sense, regions of Africa, Russia, whose interests were only indirectly involved, could use this confrontation in its own interests [Rybachenok 2007: 268, 296–297].

For example, the Russian government was concerned about the regime of navigation through the Suez Canal, which provided a sea route from the western part of Russia to the Far East. It was interested either in the neutral status of the canal or in the growing influence of allied France in the region. Assistance to Ethiopia was seen in St Petersburg, among other things, as a means of inducing the Ethiopian emperor to take heed of the Russian recommendations in the field of foreign policy. This was supposed to be an

instrument of Russian influence on the European states that were competing for dominance in the region. Russia also closely followed the “scramble” for Morocco, in which were involved Great Britain, Germany, Spain, and France. Meanwhile, in the south of the continent, the contradictions between the aspirations of Great Britain, which wanted to establish undivided domination there, and Germany, which favored the Transvaal, became clear.

In all these cases, it was advantageous for Russia to ensure that African states remained independent. And the establishment of official ties with them indicates that the Russian government appropriately assessed their importance in international politics [Golikov, Rybachenok 2011: 97; Rybachenok 2012: 321]. As early as 1868, diplomatic relations with Egypt were established. And in 1897–1899, Russian diplomatic missions appeared in Morocco, Ethiopia, and the South African Republic [Rybachenok 2020: 103].

This article examines the establishment of Russian-Transvaal intergovernmental relations from the angle of the Russian Empire’s foreign policy priorities in the period immediately preceding the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. Documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire and the National Archives of South Africa are used.

EARLY INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONTACTS

In the 19th century, the Russian Empire was the only major European power that did not have colonies in Africa and had no intention of acquiring them. Russian presence and influence in Southern Africa were minimal.

Meanwhile, political and colonial contradictions on other continents repeatedly brought Russia into armed confrontation with the British Empire. Therefore, people in Southern Africa who were anti-British felt that Russia could prevent British expansion and socio-political hegemony. As early as 1841, a Russian sailor who visited the Cape Colony recorded the statement of a Boer winemaker, dissatisfied with the compensation from the British colonial authorities for his freed slaves: “You, Russians, are strong: why do you not deliver us from these porter-bloated eaters of roast beef?” [Butakov 1844: 22]. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain in Central Asia (“The Great Game”) intensified. News of a possible war with Russia reached the Cape Colony, inspiring local opponents of British colonial rule.

The political leaders of the countries created by the Boers in the 1850s—the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State—were also thinking about bringing Russia to their side.

In the early decades of these sparsely populated agrarian republics, their economic situation was very difficult. Unwise agricultural land distribution policies left half of the white inhabitants without land. State power in the republics was weak. It was impossible to ensure effective tax collection and military service of citizens [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 195]. At the same time, Britain became increasingly interested in expansion throughout the region. Prior to the discovery of rich diamond deposits in West Griqualand, Britain had prioritized taking control of the entire coastline so that military vessels of other powers would not be able to use South African bays without its knowledge [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 164]. But after the British annexation in 1871 of the diamond fields claimed by the Orange Free State and the discovery of gold in what soon became Southern Rhodesia and Bechuanaland, the empire continued to push deeper into the subcontinent, having realized its economic potential.

In the mid-1870s, the Minister of Colonies Lord Carnarvon believed that there were favorable circumstances for forcing the republics to join the confederation under the

control of the British Empire [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 195]. Foreign loans for large-scale modernization projects taken by the Transvaal on the initiative of President T.F. Burgers burdened the country's economy. In addition, the republic, whose armed forces were formed on the militia principle, could not find enough volunteers to defend itself in the event of an invasion by Zulu and Pedi groups, let alone resist British colonial troops. There was a threat of annexation of the republic [Appelgryn 1979: 233]. In the 1870s in the Transvaal, attempts began to involve Russia in the defense of the political independence of this state. To gain access to the Indian Ocean and strengthen the republic's international ties, President Burgers decided to build a railway from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay in Portuguese Mozambique (present Maputo Bay) [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 194]. In 1875, the British Foreign Office was informed that Burgers had asked Russia, along with Germany and the United States, to act as a guarantor that Delagoa would not come under the control of the British Empire. But Baron A.G. Jomini, who ran the Russian Foreign Office, showed no interest in the South African question. In response to an inquiry from a British colleague, he stated that he did not know about Burgers and had little knowledge of the Transvaal [Uys 1933: 153].

Meanwhile, the financial crisis in the republic was worsening. By early 1877, the foreign debt had grown so high that civil servants were no longer paid their salaries [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 195]. The white population, dissatisfied with the country's leadership, was divided and offered no resistance when in January of the same year the British Commissioner, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, arrived in Pretoria, the capital of the Boer state, with a small military detachment.

Expecting Britain to end the independence of the republic, Vice-President Paul Kruger tried to organize resistance with international support. On 10 March 1877, he proposed to the president and the government to draw the attention of Russia, Germany, and the USA to Britain's aggressive intentions towards the Transvaal [Appelgryn 1979: 233; Engelbrecht 1925: 218]. This idea did not come to fruition. A month later, Shepstone, as a special representative of his government, announced the annexation of the Transvaal.

Boer nationalists saw this annexation as a violation by Britain of the conventions of the 1850s under which it recognized the independence of the republics. Kruger led the resistance. In December 1880, the Boers turned to armed struggle. Fighting with British troops lasted three months. The British Empire suffered a major military defeat for the first time since the US War of Independence of 1775–1783. The British government, forced to use troops to maintain order in Ireland, where a radical movement for political independence and the complete elimination of English land ownership was growing, did not send reinforcements to Southern Africa.

The Russian embassy in London reported to St. Petersburg on the Anglo-Transvaal peace negotiations. Already in these reports, the Russian diplomats' pro-Boer sympathies can be traced. The embassy staff believed that the annexation of Transvaal was illegal and the demands of the supporters of the independence of the republic were just [Davidson, Filatova 1998: 197].

PROPOSALS TO ESTABLISH DIRECT LINKS

During the period of direct British rule in the Transvaal (1877–1881), the British authorities managed to reform the financial system and public administration, significantly increasing their efficiency [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 196]. In 1883, P. Kruger was elected president and directed his efforts towards achieving full political

independence from Great Britain. After the British troops left the Transvaal, the London Convention of 1884 was concluded. [Röhl 2015: 783]. The Transvaal became officially known again as the South African Republic. Its government could conclude agreements not only with the Orange Free State but also with other countries. For such a treaty to enter into force, the British government's authorization was required, which was considered to have been obtained if no objections were received from London within six months [Davidson, Filatova, 2010: 103].

The political and economic importance of the South African Republic increased after the discovery of extensive gold deposits in 1886 in the Witwatersrand mountain range (Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 199–201). The development of these deposits attracted large foreign capital as well as tens of thousands of migrants from different continents. At the time, the Transvaal mines became the largest source of gold in the world [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 195]. In addition, diamond deposits were discovered in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The Cape Colony was no longer the only source of these minerals in southern Africa.

The economic autonomy of the Boer republics hindered British expansion in the region. In particular, it complicated the plans of Cecil Rhodes, a financier and the founder of the largest diamond mining company, De Beers. Rhodes, who became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1890, sought to unite the subcontinent under the British flag [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 206–207]. The supporters of the Transvaal's incorporation into the British Empire wanted to exploit the discontent of a significant part of the population of the Boer republic: white migrant laborers (uitlanders), mostly British subjects. They demanded voting rights. Many owners of large businesses were also dissatisfied. They criticised the government for giving private individuals or Transvaal companies a monopoly on the production of certain goods, including dynamite needed for mining. Importing these goods was unprofitable because of high import duties.

The British government was also concerned about the Transvaal's strengthened political-economic ties with Germany. Not only did German investors own significant stakes in mining ventures in the Witwatersrand, but German capital also helped establish the State Bank of the South African Republic in 1894 [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 2010]. Joseph Chamberlain, appointed British Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1895, favored cooperation with Germany [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 2010]. But he and his colleagues in the government could not ignore the growing trade and economic competition from this power and its political ambitions in Southern Africa.

Russian diplomats also noticed that British interests in the region were in many ways at odds with German interests. This was reported to the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs in early 1895 by N.V. Charykov, Counsellor at the Embassy in Berlin. In a letter, which was read by Nicholas II, the diplomat noted that the South African Republic was comparable in size to Italy. The independence of this country, which the citizens defended in a war, was recognized by Great Britain. The official representative of the Transvaal, Baron Gerard Beelaerts van Blokland, was received at the Dutch royal court as an envoy, on a par with other diplomats of that rank. Charykov learned from him that there were hundreds of Russian migrants living in the South African Republic[1].

Beelaerts van Blokland expressed the opinion that Russia should open a consulate there, as Portugal, Germany, the United States, France, Belgium, and Turkey had already done. N.V. Charykov thought that, instead, the Russian consul in the Cape Colony could

[1] N.V. Charykov to N.P. Shishkin, 27 January (8 February) 1895. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI). Fonds 133. Series 470. Year 1895. File 17. Pp. 39-rev.-40.

be accredited in the Transvaal: "Without incurring unnecessary expenses, such an appointment would enable the Imperial Ministry to follow locally one of the manifestations of the now escalating colonial struggle between Germany and England"[2].

By then, the Transvaal had become the most prosperous and fastest growing territory on the subcontinent. Industrialization was underway, towns were growing, and more and more people were working in the mining industry. The Department of Trade and Industries of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to receive requests from Transvaal businesspeople to establish trade relations with the South African Republic. In the spring of 1895, the secretary of the Russian embassy in the Netherlands, A.E. Berends, was instructed to find out from Beelaerts van Blokland whether the Transvaal government was interested in establishing formal relations and concluding a trade treaty[3]. At the same time, the Russian consul in Cape Town, C.H. Knight, was instructed to provide information on the development of trade and industry in the South African Republic, as well as on the number of Russian subjects living there[4].

Consul Knight sent a detailed report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, indicating that there were not hundreds, as Beelaerts van Blokland believed, but up to 6,000 people of Russian birth living in this country[5]. Nevertheless, the Ministry decided that the time had not come to open a diplomatic mission. F.R. Osten-Sacken, Director of the Department of Internal Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated on 20 November (2 December) 1895 that there was no need to establish a consulate in the Transvaal[6].

JAMESON RAID AND RUSSIA'S POSITION

A few weeks later, following the wave of protests against discrimination against the uitlanders in the Transvaal, which began in the British press, the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes, decided that it was time to overthrow Paul Kruger and initiate rapprochement with Great Britain. He equipped an armed detachment under the leadership of his confederate Leander Starr Jameson, who was to penetrate the territory of the Republic and, with the assistance of uitlanders, to carry out a coup d'état. The preparation of this expedition, which came to be known as the "Jameson Raid," involved mine owners who wanted the government in Pretoria to be receptive to British demands [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 207–208].

But the Jameson Raid failed. The uitlanders did not come to the aid of the detachment, and it was defeated on 2 January 1896. L.S. Jameson was captured and sentenced to imprisonment by the Transvaal court. This Boer victory boosted Kruger's popularity, enabling him to form a defense alliance with the Orange Free State. The British government condemned the raid and sought to distance itself from its organizers. Rhodes, having been compromised, resigned as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 209].

[2] Ibid. Pp. 40 rev.–41.
[3] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to A.E. Berends, 23 March (4 April) 1895 Draft. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 1 rev.
[4] F.R. Osten-Sacken to C.H. Knight, 27 Match (8 April) 1895. Draft. AVPRI Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 2–2 rev.
[5] Statement of the Economic Situation of the Transvaal. 1895. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 9 rev.
[6] F.R. Osten-Sacken to M.N. Nikonov, 20 November (2 December) 1895. Draft. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 7.

The armed intervention of Great Britain in the Transvaal outraged the public in Europe and the USA because it was a conspiracy against a Christian state established and governed by Europeans. After the invasion of L.S. Jameson's unit into the Transvaal territory, Kruger asked Germany and France for support on 30 December 1895. Germany sent a cruiser from Zanzibar to Delagoa Bay and also prepared a detachment of its marines to be sent from Mozambique to the Transvaal. In response, Britain sent a special forces squadron to Delagoa [Newton, Benians 1936: 564].

From Berlin, the Ambassador Count N.D. Osten-Sacken reported to the Foreign Minister, Prince A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky, that the German government was thus endeavoring to prevent the formation of an unbroken chain of British colonies in Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Nile Valley. Recognizing that the Transvaal issue was "little known" to the Russian government, the ambassador nevertheless believed that what was happening in Southern Africa deserved attention. For Russia, wrote N.D. Osten-Sacken, this issue was of interest because it would "inevitably contribute to the multiplication of points of disagreement between Germany and England," and might potentially "become relevant in the field of European politics and international complications"[7].

In addition, Ambassador N.D. Osten-Sacken cited in his report the sensational telegram that Wilhelm II sent to Kruger on 3 January 1896 after the capture of L.S. Jameson. The Kaiser congratulated the president on the fact that the citizens of the republic had succeeded in defending the country's sovereignty by their own efforts [Röhl 2015: 785–786]. He hinted that friendly powers such as Germany would come to the aid of the Transvaal if necessary.

Foreign Minister A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky familiarized the Russian Emperor with the report of N.D. Osten-Saken. This material helped Nicholas II to prepare for a long conversation with the German ambassador Prince Hugo von Radolin, which took place on 6 January 1896. When discussing the South African events, the Tsar supported the position of the German government on the Transvaal question and sharply condemned the actions of Great Britain [Lepsius, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy 1924: 42–43].

Nicholas II responded similarly to Wilhelm II's private letter of 2 January 1896, handed over by Hugo von Radolin. The Kaiser expressed indignation at the plot against the South African government and declared, "<...> I will never allow the British to defeat the Transvaal!" [Goetz 1920: 301]. He also informed the Russian emperor that he would offer France to jointly defend the interests of their nations in the Transvaal and to insist on honoring international treaties. Wilhelm was probably referring to the Anglo-Transvaal conventions of the 1850s and 1880s, under which Britain recognized the independence of the Boer republic. The German emperor asked the Tsar to join this démarche [Goetz 1920: 301].

The Kaiser thus wished to involve France and Russia in an anti-British alliance of European powers. This was in line with the general direction of German foreign policy as outlined by its ideologist, Baron Friedrich August von Holstein. German diplomacy expected that the "continental league," i.e., the concerted actions of the Triple and Franco-Russian alliances, would make Great Britain realize the danger of its diplomatic isolation and the advantageousness of rapprochement with Germany [Yerusalimsky 1974: 87; Röhl 2015: 785–786].

[7] N.D. Osten-Sacken to A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky, 22 December 1895 (3 January 1896). AVPRI. Fonds 133. Series 470. Year 1895. File 17. Pp. 400–400 rev.

Nicholas II replied that he agreed with everything Wilhelm had written [Lepsius, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy 1924: 43]. But his foreign minister soon clarified Russia's position on intervention in the Anglo-Transvaal conflict. In a conversation with the German ambassador on 8 January 1896, A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky confirmed that further British expansion in Africa was undesirable but that the Boers were unlikely to retain their independence. Moreover, the Transvaal was not independent even now because, according to the London Convention of 1884, the Transvaal government was obliged to coordinate with Great Britain its treaties with foreign countries. From this, according to the minister, it followed that the Boers recognized the British protectorate [Lepsius, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy 1924: 44].

Thus, Russia did not agree with the German interpretation of the Anglo-Transvaal Treaty of 1884. A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky's reasoning echoed the assertions of Lord Salisbury's government, which insisted that Great Britain retained suzerainty over the South African Republic.

GROWING INTEREST IN TRANSVAAL

Meanwhile, the Transvaal envoy Beelaerts van Blokland met with the Russian ambassador in Berlin, N.D. Osten-Sacken, in early January 1896. At this time, the Transvaal State Secretary W.J. Leyds, responsible for foreign affairs, was in Germany. It was probably Leyds who instructed the envoy to probe the Russian embassy. Beelaerts van Blokland shared with N.D. Osten-Sacken the idea of proclaiming the neutrality of the South African Republic on the condition of receiving from the European powers guarantees of protection of this country from British aggression[8].

Ambassador N.D. Osten-Sacken assumed that the probe was carried out on the initiative of Germany and therefore asked the German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, whether this idea was feasible. Marschall von Bieberstein replied that the Transvaal, as an independent state, had the right to negotiate with foreign governments on the matter[9]. The Russian ambassador did not know that a few days earlier, at the request of Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, the German representative in the Transvaal had submitted to Kruger the idea of a conference of European powers on the Transvaal question and informed him that Germany would support the request of the South African Republic to hold it [Lepsius, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy 1924: 31].

However, neither Russia nor its ally France was willing to guarantee the security of the Boer republic together with Germany. The Russian point of view was known from the above-mentioned conversation between von Radolin and A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky: the attempted coup d'état inspired by the British government and colonial authorities was outrageous but it was an internal affair of the British Empire, since the Transvaal could not be considered an independent state. As for France, its government was indifferent to the German initiative. It was satisfied with the course of negotiations with Great Britain to settle colonial issues [Yerusalimsky 1974: 86]. The prospect of rapprochement between these powers seemed real at that time.

[8] N.D. Osten-Sacken to A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky, 29 December 1895 (10 January 1896). AVPRI. Fonds 133. Series 470. Year 1895. File 17. Pp. 431–433 rev.

[9] N.D. Osten-Sacken to A.B. Lobanov-Rostovsky, 29 December 1895 (10 January 1896). AVPRI. Fonds 133. Series 470. Year 1895. File 17. Pp. 431–433 rev.

The Jameson Raid and the resulting aggravation of British-German relations demonstrated to Russian diplomacy the importance of what was happening in southern Africa. From 1896, the Russian embassy in Britain sent more frequent reports and briefings to the Foreign Office on the situation in the region, as well as on the investigation into the involvement of Rhodes's British South Africa Company in the armed invasion of the Transvaal. Public interest in the Boer republics in Russia has also grown since the attempted coup in the Transvaal, and the subsequent German demarches were discussed in the Russian press [Davidson 1997: 33; Davidson, Filatova 1998: 199].

Armed confrontation with Britain was very likely, but the Transvaal president and government became convinced that they had no reliable allies among the great powers. The British government began to adopt a harsher policy towards the Boer republics, hoping thereby to extract concessions and defend its interests in the region. The manifestation of this trend was the appointment of Sir Alfred Milner, a supporter of forceful methods of solving the Transvaal issue, as High Commissioner of South Africa [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 209]. In response, the government of the republic began to strengthen foreign relations.

In 1897, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State concluded a treaty on mutual assistance in case of external aggression [Giliomee, Mbenga 2007: 208]. The Transvaal embarked on a massive and costly rearmament, purchasing guns, artillery, and ammunition from Europe. In the area of domestic politics, the government limited agitation for voting rights for the uitlanders and abandoned reforms that might have weakened the dominance of the Boers in the political life of the country. In doing so, it accommodated many of the demands of the mines' owners.

State Secretary W.J. Leyds began to establish direct relations between the republic and European countries and reorganized the consular service. He wanted the republic to have diplomatic representations in the capitals of all the most important countries. This would mobilize the support of the governments and publics of these countries in favor of recognizing the sovereignty of the South African Republic. French Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux welcomed W.J. Leyds's intention to open a consulate in Paris.

FIRST ATTEMPT AT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

As the Transvaal already had official relations with France, Russia's ally, an inquiry was submitted to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through Hanotaux in March 1897 about the possibility of establishing relations and concluding a trade treaty. Count V.N. Lamsdorf, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, made inquiries with the Russian ambassadors in Berlin and London and found out that the establishment of relations with the Boer republic would not require the sanction of the British government. The restrictions imposed by the London Convention of 1884 applied only to the Transvaal's entering into international agreements. Although Britain insisted on maintaining suzerainty, it did not regard the appointment of consuls as recognizing the independence of that state[10].

The Russian government went to great lengths to ensure that the establishment of diplomatic relations with South Africa by other powers did not provoke protests from Britain [Davidson, Filatova 2010: 103]. The British government anticipated that objections to the recognition of Transvaal representatives as diplomats could lead to undesirable consequences. A foreign government that accredited a Transvaal envoy

[10] E.E. Staal to V.N. Lamsdorf, 30 April (12 May) 1897. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 31.

would refer the question of the legality of accreditation and the status of the Boer republic to international arbitration. And its decision could question the British suzerainty over the Transvaal [Van Niekerk 1985: 199].

Thus, Russia could establish a representative office in the South African Republic without arousing British protest. The Transvaal mission in Europe justified the expediency of opening a Russian consulate by the fact that it would be more convenient for Russia to inform the government of the republic about its position on those South African affairs that affected the relations between the great powers[11].

This argument proved convincing. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to establish representative offices not only in those regions that were within the scope of the direct interests of the Empire but also where its expansion was not envisaged. Just a few weeks after receiving the Transvaal request, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count M.N. Muravyov, on the tsar's order, began to prepare for the establishment of a consulate in the South African Republic [Khritinin 1999: 73].

In the same year, 1897, Nicholas II ordered the establishment of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia (Abyssinia), Morocco, and Siam [Rybachenok 2020: 103]. Like the Transvaal, these states retained their independence but were the objects of colonial claims of European powers, with which Russia competed in other regions. Instructions to the head of the permanent Russian mission in Addis Ababa informed him that Russia had no immediate interests in Africa, but that the government wished to maintain Abyssinian independence. This would allow Russian diplomacy to "turn this country into an instrument of exerting pressure on England as our chief political rival" in order to induce it to make concessions on those political issues that directly affected Russia [Davidson et al. 1999: 129, 132].

Russia wanted to establish ties with the Transvaal because of its successful resistance to British expansion. In 1899, A.K. Bentkovsky, Director of the Second Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted that "Abyssinia in the north and the Transvaal in the south seem destined to serve as obstacles to the all-consuming imperialism of England"[12]. In his opinion, Russia benefited from the independence of the South African Republic. Not being able to provide practical assistance, Russian diplomacy could support the Boers morally. At the same time, A.K. Bentkovsky believed that Russia should cooperate with its ally, France, which did not accept the further spread of British influence in Southern Africa either[13].

Russia at that time spent 2.5 to 3 times less on the maintenance of its foreign missions than France and Great Britain [Rybachenok 2020: 102]. It did not manage to create such an extensive network of consular offices on different continents, as these powers had. But the Minister of Foreign Affairs M.N. Muravyov, in a letter of 28 March (9 April) 1897, tried to convince the Minister of Finance S.Y. Witte that it was necessary to allocate funds for representation in the Transvaal. The head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out that relations with the Boer republic would help Russia "to counteract

[11] Memorandum "Communication française", 6 (18) March 1897. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 24–24 rev.

[12] Memorandum by A.K. Bentkovsky, "Conflit anglo-transvaalien", 23 September (5 October) 1899. Copy. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 139 rev.–140. The text is based on a memorandum by I.Y. Korostovets, secretary of the Russian mission in Lisbon, "English influence in Portuguese Africa (Mozambique) and in the Transvaal", sent to Prince V.S. Obolensky, senior advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 25 March (6 April) 1899. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 97–126 rev.

[13] Memorandum by A.K. Bentkovsky, "Conflit anglo-transvaalien", 23 September (5 October) 1899. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 140.

the English aspiration to acquire a dominant influence in southern Africa". [Cited in: Khritinin 1999: 73]. Witte, without disputing the arguments of his colleague, replied on 29 April (11 May) that from an economic point of view, the establishment of a consulate in a country with which Russia had almost no trade ties was unjustified and proposed to reduce the budget [Cited in: Khritinin 1999: 75].

The expediency of opening a consulate-general in the Transvaal was discussed by the ministers at the same time as the question of establishing relations with Morocco. Russia had no economic interests in this North African country either. But the government had concerns about the prospect of increasing British influence in Morocco. If Britain established itself not only on the northern but also on the southern shores of the Strait of Gibraltar (primarily in the Moroccan port of Tangier), it would be able to restrict access to the Mediterranean at its discretion [Morozov 2010: 45]. Therefore, the Russian military and naval ministers wanted an official observer in Tangier to collect and forward information on this issue to St. Petersburg.

As for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it expected that the information to be provided by the consul would help to maintain the balance of power of the European powers in the Mediterranean basin and, in the interests of Russian policy in various regions, to take advantage of the struggle of these powers for influence in Morocco [Zherlitsyna 2017: 168]. Funds for the establishment of Russian diplomatic missions were allocated more readily in case of interest of the army or the navy [Rybachenok 2020: 103]. Therefore, the consulate-general in Morocco was soon opened. But, as Muravyov reported on 5 (17) May in a letter to Witte, the establishment of a mission in the Transvaal was postponed "until a more favorable time" [Cited in: Khritinin 1999: 75].

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More than six months later, in February 1898, the issue of establishing relations was revisited. Now there was no question of a consulate-general, although France and Germany maintained missions of this level in the Transvaal capital. It was only expected that Russia would enter into official relations with the Boer republic. The conclusion of a commercial treaty and a consular convention was considered a matter for the future. In the meantime, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted to appoint a Russian subject residing in the republic as its representative. This person would be accredited to the Transvaal government as an honorary vice-consul and enjoy the same rights and privileges as consuls of other countries[14].

At Russia's request, the French consul-general in the South African Republic held preliminary talks about this. He spoke not with W.J. Leyds, who had resigned as state secretary due to illness, but with his successor, F.W. Reitz. The Transvaal government agreed to the appointment of a Russian consul[15]. And upon the arrival in Europe of W.J. Leyds in his new position as envoy of the South African Republic to France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Portugal, negotiations on the establishment of a Russian mission continued between him and the Russian ambassador in Paris, Prince L.P. Urusov. In August 1898, an agreement was reached[16].

While the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was looking for a candidate for the post of a non-staff vice-consul in Johannesburg, F.W. Reitz notified M.N. Muravyov of

[14] V.N. Lamsdorf to L.P. Urusov, 12 (24) February 1898. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 32–34.
[15] F.W. Reitz to M.N. Muravyov, 11 July 1898. Copy. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 75–75 об.
[16] L.P. Urusov to V.N. Lamsdorf, 6 (18) August 1898. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. Pp. 73–74.

the intention of the president of the South African Republic to accredit W.J. Leyds as envoy to Russia. A telegram was sent from St. Petersburg on 16 (28) September 1898 to the Transvaal State Secretary F.W. Reitz with the consent to this appointment [Marchenko 1992: 66].

W.J. Leyds was unable to come to Russia because of worsening symptoms of laryngeal disease. Credentials on his behalf were presented by the secretary of the Transvaal mission F.A. van der Hoeven, who arrived in the Russian capital in December 1898. [Marchenko 1992: 66]. The Transvaal mission in Europe was located in Brussels. From there W.J. Leyds coordinated the work of the consuls general in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Lisbon, and Lourenço Marques. But a South African consulate never opened in St. Petersburg.

At the end of 1898, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs found a Russian subject in the Transvaal who could be trusted to represent the interests of the empire as an honorary vice-consul. Only “people of impeccable reputation” were to be appointed to such a position, because, according to the Russian consular regulations, the functions of honorary and regular vice-consuls were the same [Safronova 2002: 216–217].

Baron R.A. von Gernet, an engineer, was considered for the post of Russian diplomat in the South African Republic. A native of the Estland province and husband of Princess L.E. Meshtcherskaya, he had been the private secretary of E.W. von Siemens, the founder of Siemens, which owned businesses in various countries, including Russia. In Johannesburg, R.A. von Gernet established a branch in Johannesburg, which was involved in the extraction of gold from waste by cyanidation [Rausch-Gernet 1998: 49; Von Stackelberg 1931: 104].

The Government of the South African Republic accepted the appointment of R.A. von Gernet as Russian vice-consul in Johannesburg. In May 1899, he was issued a consular exequatur, but in the same month he fell ill with typhoid fever[17]. R.A. von Gernet had to leave for Europe to recover his health. Since August, the management of the Johannesburg Russian vice-consulate was taken over by the French vice-consul in that city, J.-M. Colomiès[18]. R.A. von Gernet was unable to return to his diplomatic post, as the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) soon broke out, at the end of which the Transvaal lost its independence.

CONCLUSION

Russian diplomats paid close attention to the Transvaal after the republic managed to defend its independence in the Anglo-Boer War of 1880–1881. With a major defeat of British forces and an honourable peace treaty, the Transvaal asserted itself as a state to be reckoned with by European powers. Its international importance increased when Transvaal mines became the world’s largest supplier of gold and a major source of diamonds. By strengthening its economic position and foreign relations, the South African Republic was becoming an imposing barrier to British expansion in the subcontinent. At the same time, the Transvaal was expanding its political and economic ties with Germany, which was vying with Britain for influence in southern Africa.

[17] M. Torrente to F.W. Reitz, 9 June 1899 National Archives of South Africa. Repository TAB. Source SSA. Ref. RA3293/99.

[18] L.P. Urusov to V.A. Artsimovich, 28 August (9 September) 1899. AVPRI. Fonds 155. Series 929. File 2. P. 144.

It was after the contradictions between British and German colonial aspirations became apparent in the Transvaal issue that Russian diplomats established contacts with official representatives of the South African Republic in Europe. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire began to receive information about the thousands of Russian migrants living in the country and the interest of businessmen in establishing interstate relations with it. In 1895, the parties began preliminary discussions on establishing direct ties and concluding a trade treaty.

The decisive moment was the failed coup attempt in the Transvaal by pro-British interventionists (the Jameson Raid). It so aggravated Anglo-German relations that there were even discussions of Germany opening military action in defense of the Boer republic. It became obvious to Russian diplomats that the Transvaal question had acquired international significance and was affecting European politics.

Russia did not support the German initiative of joint demarches in defense of Transvaal independence. This would have been a step towards realizing the long-standing intention of German diplomacy to create and lead an anti-British alliance of European powers. The Russian Emperor and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs preferred to act independently.

The most persuasive reason for the Russian government to open a diplomatic mission in the Transvaal was the prospect of prompt and confidential communication with the President of the Republic and his ministers on Russia's position on those South African affairs that affected the relations of the European powers. By coordinating with France, Russia could morally support the Transvaal's resistance to colonial expansion to thwart British undivided dominance in southern Africa. At the same time, to avoid British objections, before establishing diplomatic relations, the Russian government endeavored to ensure that such a move would not be seen as a challenge to British suzerainty over the South African Republic.

Thus, the main reason for Russia's interest in establishing direct relations with the Boer republic was that the Transvaal issue involved Great Britain, Germany, and France, and relations with these powers played a decisive role in Russian foreign policy at that time.

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Научная статья

УСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ С ТРАНСВААЛЕМ В КОНТЕКСТЕ РОССИЙСКОЙ ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ КОНЦА XIX в.

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ГОРЕЛИК Борис Моисеевич, кандидат исторических наук, старший научный сотрудник, Центр изучения стран Африки южнее Сахары, Институт Африки РАН, Москва, Российская Федерация. ORCID: 0000-0001-8839-3889. E-mail: boris.gorelik@inafr.ru

Аннотация. Установление дипломатических отношений между Россией и Трансваалем (Южно-Африканской Республикой) в 1898 г. вписывается в широкий контекст российской внешней политики конца XIX в. В этой статье изучены причины заинтересованности

России в налаживании прямых межгосударственных контактов с Трансваалем. Автор оспаривает мнение о том, что заинтересованность России была во многом обусловлена ростом миграционных и экономических связей. Решение об установлении дипломатических отношений было продиктовано стратегическими соображениями в сложном европейском политическом контексте. Превращение Трансвааля в крупнейшего поставщика золота и его упорное сопротивление британскому экспансионизму поместили его в центр геополитического соперничества, прежде всего, Великобритании и Германии. Россия, стремившаяся усилить свое влияние в мире, осознала возможность использования ситуации в Трансваале в своих внешнеполитических целях. Установив дипломатические связи, Российская империя намеревалась получить доступ к информации с места событий и в перспективе влиять на отношения между ведущими европейскими государствами, претендующими на доминирование на юге Африки. Этот шаг соответствовал российской внешнеполитической стратегии, которая предполагала дипломатическое присутствие в различных регионах, включая африканские, для продвижения своих интересов в условиях колониального соперничества европейских держав. На основе документов из Архива внешней политики Российской империи и Национального архива Южной Африки показано, что взаимодействие России с Трансваалем было не частным случаем, а продуманным шагом в рамках внешнеполитического курса. Поддерживая суверенитет таких государств, как Трансвааль, Россия пыталась уравновесить усиливающееся влияние других европейских держав и защитить свои стратегические интересы.

Ключевые слова: история российско-африканских связей, Российская империя, Трансвааль, Южно-Африканская Республика, дипломатические отношения России и Трансвааля, внешняя политика Российской империи, интересы России в Африке, англо-бурская война 1899–1902 гг.

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