

Russia in Africa

A new arena for geopolitical competition

SUMMARY

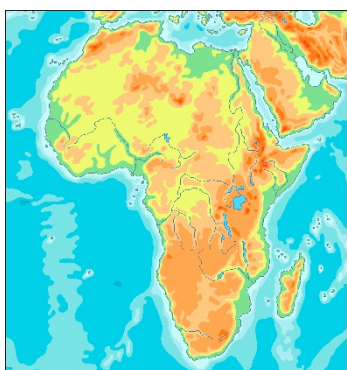
During the Cold War, post-colonial Africa was an important front in the geopolitical contest for international influence. However, in the 1990s, post-Soviet turmoil ended many of Russia's global ambitions, including in Africa. By contrast, recent years have seen a renewed Russian interest in the continent, as part of President Vladimir Putin's drive to reassert his country as a major global player.

As in other parts of the world, Russia has various means of promoting its influence. Moscow has long been the continent's leading supplier of weapons, and it has military cooperation deals with nearly two dozen African countries. Among other things, these provide for the presence of military trainers and advisors, and a small but growing number of Russian 'boots on the ground', many of them coming from shadowy private military companies closely linked to Putin's entourage.

Russia's military presence in countries such as the Central African Republic often goes hand-in-hand with commercial interests. Overall, Russian trade and investment in the continent is quite small, except in the strategic energy and mining sectors: oil, gas, diamonds, gold, aluminium and nickel are among the African minerals extracted by Russian companies.

Russia's African toolkit also includes covert political influence operations – again, involving shady Kremlin-linked organisations, soft power (building on Soviet-era links and a growing media presence), and increasingly close diplomatic ties. On the other hand, Russian development and humanitarian aid to the continent is minimal.

While Russia's influence in Africa is growing, it remains a comparatively marginal player in most of the continent, except in a few key countries and economic sectors. Its overall objective appears to be geopolitical competition with other more established players, rather than disinterested help for African partners. Its role is therefore viewed with concern by the EU institutions and Member States.



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Russia's African comeback

Africa was an important front in the **Cold War contest** for global influence between the USA and the USSR. Many African countries were drawn to the Soviet Union's Marxist-Leninist and anti-imperialist ideology. At various stages, Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique, Angola, Egypt and Libya were key Soviet allies.

In the 1980s, with the economy under strain and relations with the West having improved, Soviet interest in Africa declined. In the economic and political turmoil of the **1990s**, Russia lacked the resources to pursue its predecessor's global superpower ambitions. At this time, Russia closed several of its embassies, consulates and cultural centres in Africa.

Since 2000, Vladimir Putin has presided over a more assertive Russian foreign policy (for example, the 2008 Georgian War), geopolitical competition with the West, and efforts to project power abroad – not only in former Soviet countries, but also further afield. In 2009, then-President Dmitry Medvedev's [tour](#) of four African countries marked a revival of Moscow's interest in the continent. Since then, following a pattern seen in other regions as diverse as the [Western Balkans](#), the [Middle East](#) and Latin America, Russia has used a range of military, economic and soft power tools to gradually rebuild its influence.

Unlike the Soviet Union, modern Russia is far from being the equal of geopolitical rivals such as the United States, China and the EU. Nevertheless, it has skilfully exploited niche strengths, enabling it to punch above its weight in many African countries and assert itself as a key player.

Russia's African toolkit

Military cooperation

Since 2015, Russia has signed military agreements with [over 20](#) African countries (see Map 1). These envisage various forms of cooperation, including weapons sales, access to African sea ports and air bases, training at Russian military academies for African officers, counter-terrorism, peace-keeping and the presence of Russian military advisers.

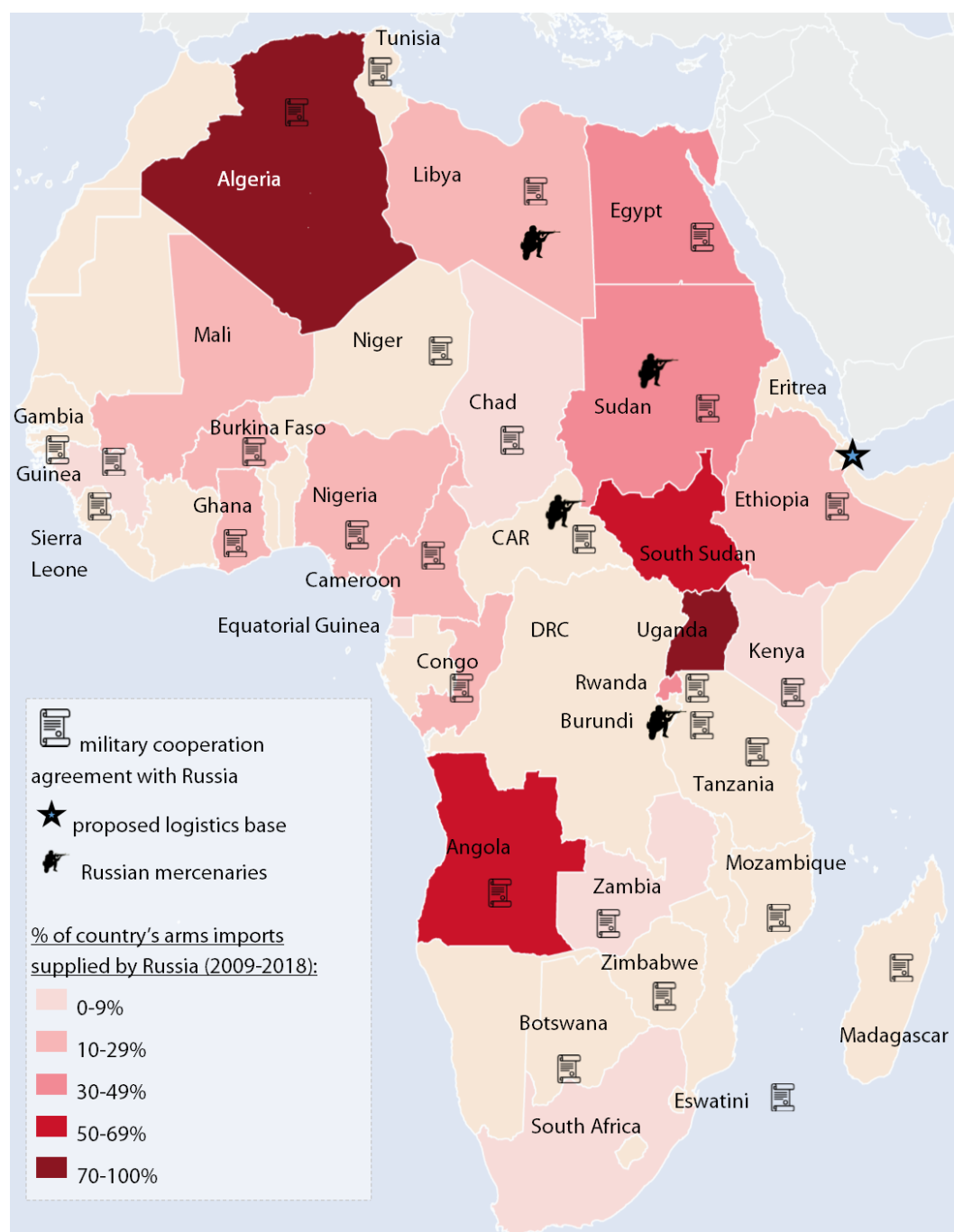
Russia is Africa's leading arms supplier

Russia's two biggest defence customers in Africa are Algeria and Egypt, which purchased [US\\$8 billion](#) and US\$3.1 billion worth of Russian arms during the 10-year 2009-2018 period; however, it also supplies many sub-Saharan countries. Altogether, Russia accounted for 39 % of the continent's defence imports during the period, with a clearly rising trend, from US\$1.1 billion worth of Russian exports in 2009 to double that amount 10 years later (US\$2.1 billion).

There are several factors that give Russia a competitive edge as an arms supplier. In countries such as Angola and Algeria, exports can build on long-established relationships going back to Soviet times. Russian weapons, while sophisticated, are often relatively [cheap and robust](#) – an advantage for cash-strapped African countries.

In 2018, Russia exported [US\\$19 billion](#) of weapons to the rest of the world, making the defence industry one of the country's few major manufacturing sectors to successfully compete on international markets. Apart from the economic benefits for Russia, arms sales help to build geopolitical influence in purchasing countries. In some cases, weapons are part of a larger deal; for example, Zimbabwe [reportedly](#) granted cheap platinum mining concessions to Russia in exchange for helicopters. In the Central African Republic, there are suggestions that Russia may have secured profitable access to the country's mineral resources in exchange for shipments of [donated weapons](#).

Map 1: Russian military presence in Africa



Sources: [Swedish Defence Research Agency](#), [SIPRI](#).

African seaports and air bases help Russia project international military power

Apart from Syria, Russia has no bases of its own outside its ex-Soviet neighbourhood, a factor that limits its capacity to project military power internationally. It therefore has deals with several African countries giving it access to airbases and [seaports](#). This has also led to [speculation](#) about negotiations with countries including Sudan and Mozambique, with a view to establishing permanent bases there. So far, Moscow has come closest to this goal in [Eritrea](#), where in September 2018 it signed a preliminary agreement to establish a logistics base. The new facility, once built, will make Russia one of several [countries](#) – including the US, China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – with bases in this strategically located region, close to the entrance to the Red Sea.

Egypt and Russia: convergence of regional interests

Under the rule of Egyptian President Nasser (1954-1970), [his country](#) and the Soviet Union were close allies. Subsequently, the relationship became more distant. However, cooperation with Russia has now stepped up, especially since the 2013 overthrow of President Morsi. Under his successor, President Sisi, Egypt has turned to Russia to modernise its military equipment: [orders](#) for high-end Russian jet fighters, missiles and helicopters are aimed at boosting its capacity to project military force in the region. The two countries have [signed](#) an agreement on sharing air space and bases. In 2017, military cooperation [reportedly](#) also included the deployment of Russian special forces to western Egypt in support of Libya's [General Haftar](#).

In 2016, Russia [agreed](#) to lend Egypt US\$25 billion over 35 years to build and operate a 4 800 MW [nuclear plant](#) contracted to Rosatom, the Russian state-owned nuclear company. Economic ties have also benefited from the April 2018 [resumption](#) of direct flights between the two countries, suspended for two and a half years in 2015 after over 200 Russian tourists were killed when a charter plane exploded over the Sinai Peninsula. The flight ban had a serious impact on Egypt, visited in 2015 by [2.2 million](#) Russians, making it the fifth most popular destination for Russian tourists.

Russian boots on the ground in several African countries

Russia's armed forces contribute just [78 security personnel](#) (police and military) to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa – a tiny number compared to the total of over 70 000 UN peacekeepers including over 6 000 from EU countries, 2 500 from China and 34 from the US) on the continent.

On the other hand, numerous and credible reports claim that several hundred mercenaries from Russian private military companies (PMCs) are present on African soil. The activities of these PMCs first came under the spotlight in eastern Ukraine, where they fought alongside pro-Russian separatists. Officially, PMCs operate [independently](#) from the authorities in pursuit of their own [business interests](#). However, there is [evidence](#) to suggest that Russian groups known to operate in Africa, such as Wagner and Patriot, have close links to the Kremlin and act on its instructions. For example, Wagner is believed to get funding from Russian businessman and Putin ally, Yevgeny Prigozhin, also linked to the notorious St Petersburg troll factory that plays a part in Kremlin influence operations across the world. For Moscow, mercenaries have the advantage of deniability in situations where deployment of regular troops would be contentious.

It should be emphasised that Russian mercenaries are concentrated in just a handful of African countries: apart from the Central African Republic (see boxed text below), they are reportedly present in [Burundi](#), [Sudan](#) and [Libya](#). For comparison, apart from UN peacekeepers, the US has around [7 500 military personnel](#) including 1 000 contractors spread across 53 African countries.

Russia's growing military footprint in the Central African Republic

Since 2013, the Central African Republic (CAR), which is wracked by violent conflict between multiple armed groups, has been under a UN [arms embargo](#). The embargo has been renewed annually, despite repeated calls by the country's president for it to be lifted so that government forces can fight more effectively against rebel militia. Although the embargo remains in place (currently until January 2020), in December 2017 Russia requested and, in the absence of opposition in the UN Security Council, obtained a derogation allowing it to [equip](#) government troops with weapons. France, which opposed a previous request in November 2017, did not object in December, and was later itself granted a similar derogation.

Most training for CAR forces was initially provided by the EU's [EUTM RCA](#) mission. Since then, however, Russia has also branched out into training, following an August 2018 [military cooperation deal](#). Under this deal, Russian instructors trained as many as [1 300 military staff](#) in 2018, both in the CAR itself and in Russia. By comparison, EUTM RCA trained about 4 000 soldiers between July 2016 and March 2019. All but five of the [175 trainers](#) notified by the Russian federation to the UN are employed by Russian private military companies. Apart from trainers, there are also 40 Russian special-forces personnel in the presidential bodyguard unit, as well as a security advisor – [Valery Zakharov](#) – to the CAR president.

As the actions of private military companies are not always transparent or officially endorsed by the Russian state, the total size of Moscow's security presence in the CAR is not known: one estimate suggests there could be as many as [1 400](#) personnel. The still unexplained [murder](#) in July 2018 of three Russian journalists investigating Wagner PMC raises questions about the company's role in the CAR.

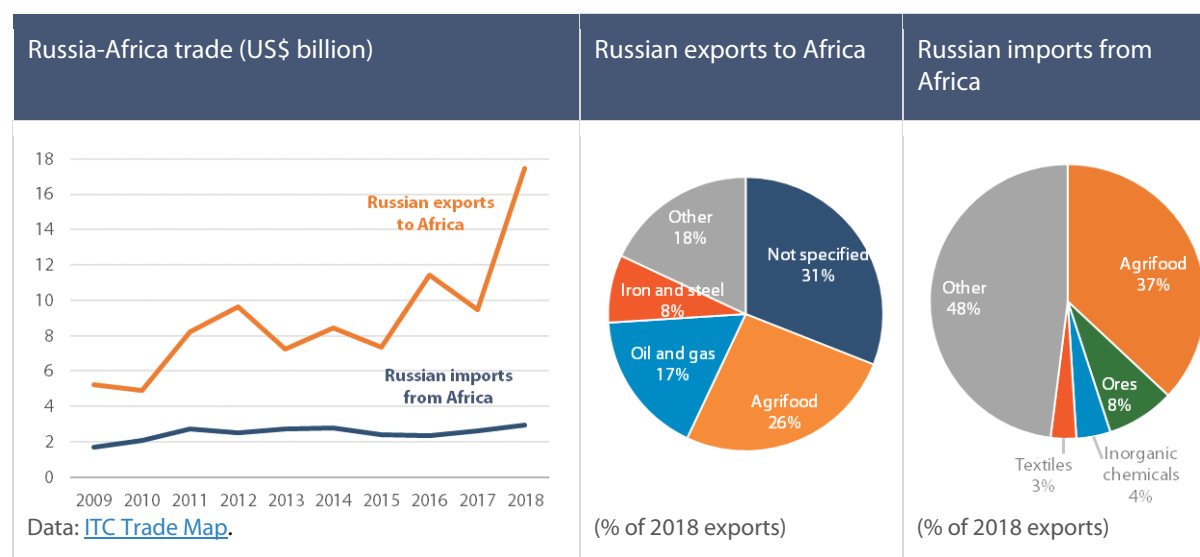
With only 2 staff officers, Russia is not an important player in the UN mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). However, it has built up direct relations with the conflicting parties. Since 2017, there have been African Union-backed peace talks between the CAR government and 14 rebel groups. In August 2018, Russia launched a parallel initiative, with Zakharov leading peace talks in Khartoum with just five of the groups. At that time, there were [concerns](#) that the existence of two peace processes involving different actors would prevent either one from making much headway. However, since then, there has been progress, with a merger between the two initiatives leading in February 2019 to an [agreement](#), this time between the government and all the main rebel groups, in which Russia played a prominent role. Although implementation since then has been patchy and violence continues, the deal is widely seen as a step forward.

[Evidence](#) suggests that Russia's military activities are at least partly motivated by interest in the CAR's abundant natural resources, including gold, diamonds and uranium, with Russia offering military assistance in exchange for mining concessions. While Russia [acknowledges](#) that it has negotiated some concessions with the government, it declines to give details. There are suspicions that under pressure, the CAR has effectively [mortgaged](#) its mineral assets for a fraction of their value.

Trade and aid

The volume of Russian trade and investment is small

Figure 1: Russia-Africa trade in goods

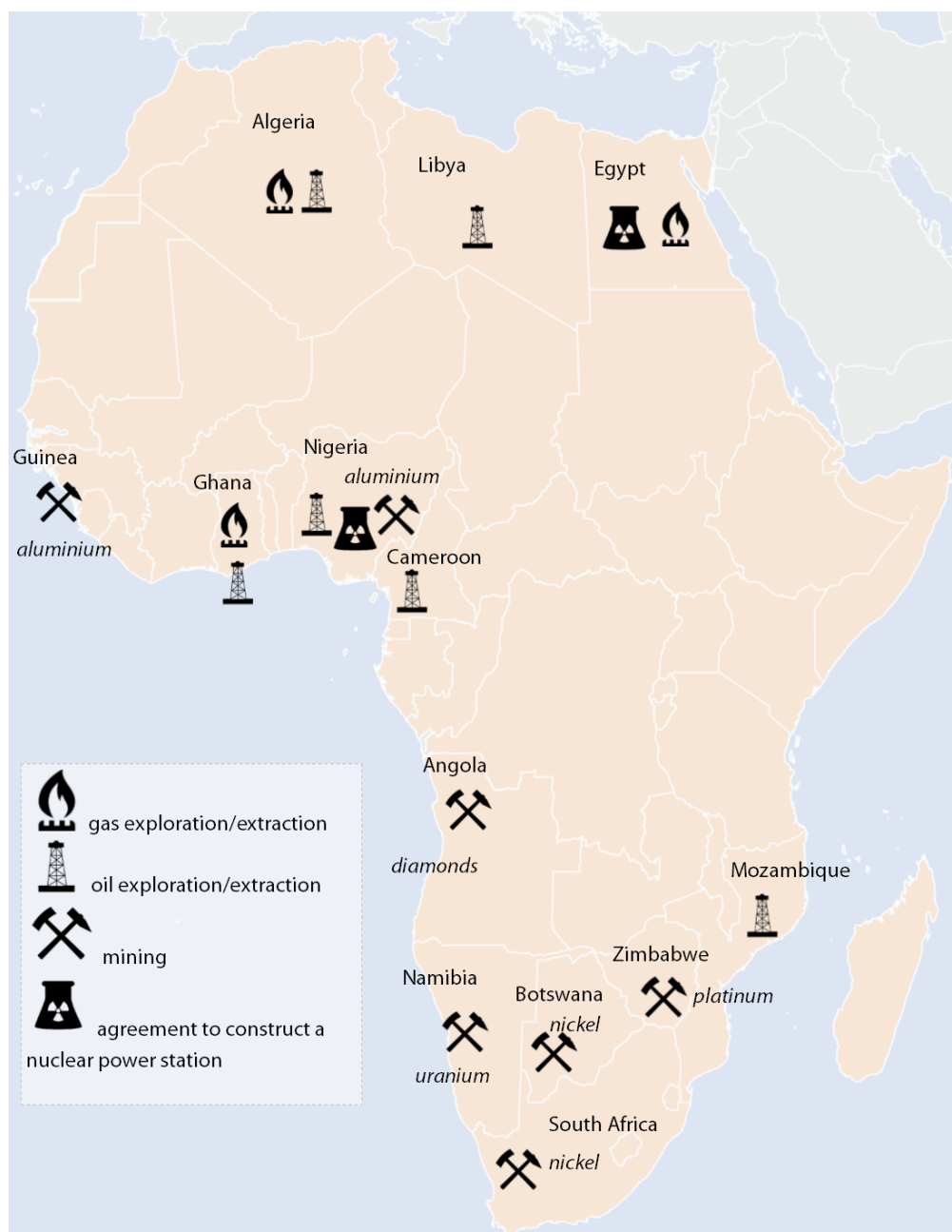


Russia's trade with Africa is booming, especially its exports (up 84 % in 2018). However, it still represents only 3 % of Russia's total international trade in goods, and 2 % of Africa's. The EU, China and the US are far larger partners for Africa (35 %, 20 % and 6 % respectively of African trade) than Russia. Weapons (included under non-specified items) are Russia's main export to Africa, which in turn exports mostly agricultural goods (such as fruit and cocoa) to Russia.

Russia is even less significant as an investment partner for Africa. Russian investments are often difficult to trace, as they are often channelled to Africa via third countries such as the British Virgin Islands; however, for the African countries included in UNCTAD [estimates](#), in 2017 less than 1 % of total foreign direct investment stock ultimately originated from Russia.

Russian energy and mining companies are increasingly active in Africa

Map 2: Russian energy and mining activity in Africa



Sources: [Rosneft](#), [Lukoil](#), [Gazprom](#).

The relatively small size of Russia's economic footprint in Africa is hardly surprising, given that it has a far smaller share of the global economy (2 %) than the continent's major trade partners. Nevertheless, there are several sectors where Russia has a significant presence, particularly in hydrocarbons and minerals, both of which are strategically important for many African countries, generating the lion's share of their exports.

Russian oil and gas companies such as Rosneft, Gazprom and Lukoil are increasingly interested in Africa, which is both a market for their exports – in June 2018 Rosneft signed a [deal](#) to supply Ghana with liquefied natural gas – and, more importantly, a region with substantial energy resources of its own. [Rosneft](#) has oil and gas projects in Algeria, Egypt and Mozambique, while [Lukoil](#) is active in

Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana and Nigeria. Such partnerships bring African countries the capital and know-how they need to tap into their energy potential. For their part, Russian energy companies gain an opportunity to expand production at lower cost than in Russia, where many of the country's untapped reserves are difficult to access, being located under deep water or in Arctic regions.

Energy cooperation is not confined to fossil fuels. At present, only South Africa has an operational nuclear power plant, but several other African countries are [considering](#) nuclear energy as a relatively cost-effective means of meeting growing energy demand. [Rosatom](#) state atomic energy is already building a power station in Egypt. It has signed a deal to build two more in [Nigeria](#), and it has nuclear energy agreements with several other African countries including [Ghana](#) and [Kenya](#), putting it in a favourable position to secure contracts there, should those countries decide to go ahead with their nuclear energy plans.

Russian mining companies are also well represented in Africa, extracting diamonds in [Angola](#) and platinum in [Zimbabwe](#). Aluminium producer Rusal owns mines in [Guinea](#), which has the world's largest bauxite deposits. Increasingly close military ties with the Central African Republic (gold, diamonds, uranium) and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (diamonds, copper, cobalt and coltan) are likely to open the door to Russian mining companies in those two countries, too.

Development and humanitarian aid remain limited

Russian [development aid](#), almost non-existent in the 1990s, has increased steadily since then, reaching a level of [US\\$1 billion](#) in 2016, according to the most recently available figures. Nevertheless, this is still much less than donors such as the EU, US and Japan, and in any case is mostly targeted at ex-Soviet countries such as Kyrgyzstan rather than Africa. More significantly, Russia [claims](#) to have forgiven African countries over US\$20 billion in Soviet-era debts.

Humanitarian aid was also relatively limited, amounting to [US\\$27 million](#) in 2018; again, only a small part of this went to Africa.

Diplomacy and soft power

Sergey Lavrov launches a diplomatic offensive

Growing Russian military and economic presence in Africa is flanked by increasingly close diplomatic ties. In this context Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's March 2018 [tour](#) of five African countries was significant. The first ever Russia-Africa [summit](#), chaired by the Russian and Egyptian presidents, took place on 24 October 2019 in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, the culmination of a series of events that has included Russia-Africa economic and parliamentary conferences.

Russia's worldview finds affinities in Africa

The Soviet Union projected itself as a champion of resistance to Western imperialism. This made it an attractive partner both for newly independent African countries and those still struggling to free themselves from colonial rule. Rebels in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique were inspired by [Marxist-Leninist](#) ideology, which at various stages was also influential in countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania.

Modern Russia is not driven by any particular ideology in its foreign policy, allying itself flexibly with whichever players suit its interests. An example of such flexibility was Madagascar's 2018 presidential [election](#), where Russia allegedly offered help to no fewer than six candidates, including the [incumbent](#), before abandoning them in favour of the frontrunner. However, one principle followed consistently by Moscow's foreign policy, whether in Ukraine, Venezuela or Libya, is opposition to what it sees as Western meddling in other countries' internal affairs in the name of promoting human rights and democracy. In line with this, Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, [criticised](#) French calls for an investigation into the results of the Democratic Republic of Congo's 2018

presidential election as 'interference'. In Sudan, Russia [warned](#) against 'external intervention' and denounced 'extremists and provocateurs' attempting to destabilise the country.

For many African countries, Russia's willingness to ignore human rights problems and offer no-strings-attached political and military support makes it a welcome ally. Relations with Burundi, facing EU sanctions over human rights violations, are reportedly [better](#) than ever. In Guinea, Russian Ambassador, Alexander Bregadze, [dismissed](#) democracy concerns, praising President Alpha Conde and encouraging him to stay on in power in spite of having reached the constitutional limit for his presidency (Bregadze's comments may have been [motivated](#) by his desire to secure preferential treatment for Russian aluminium producer Rusal, which obtains one-third of its bauxite from the country. After stepping down as ambassador, he now works for the company).

Russia has used its UN Security Council veto to shield African countries, such as [Zimbabwe](#) in 2008, from international human rights-related criticisms and sanctions. African countries have reciprocated: for example, in 2014, 25 out of 54 African countries abstained from the UN General Assembly Resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea, and two opposed it. In 2016, Russia withdrew its signature from the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court, at the same time expressing its [support](#) for several African countries considering doing likewise.

Soviet-era educational ties have created useful networks in Africa

In the past as many as [200 000](#) Africans trained at Soviet universities, polytechnics and military academies. Many studied at the People's Friendship University in Moscow, set up in 1960 to train future specialists from developing countries, and named after Congolese freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba. Alumni include several African leaders, such as Michel Djotodia and Hifikepunye Pohamba, ex-presidents of Egypt, the Central African Republic and Namibia respectively. Now renamed the Peoples' Friendship University, the institution is in the process of [reviving](#) its ties to Africa and currently hosts 1 200 students from the continent.

Kremlin interference in African political processes

Critical though it is of Western political meddling, the Kremlin is not above getting involved in African domestic politics in order to further its interests. Researchers from the London-based Dossier Centre (which is funded by Putin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky) have unearthed [details](#) of covert influence operations in Africa. According to them, Russia offered support to parties and candidates in South Africa, Zimbabwe and, as already mentioned above, Madagascar. Agents involved in these operations were not employed directly by the Russian state but by a company controlled by Yevgeny Prigozhin, referred to above in connection with the Wagner private military company. Apparently, there are around a dozen 'political strategists' working for Prigozhin; several were [spotted](#) in Madagascar ahead of the country's 2018 election, posing variously as election observers and tourists. In July 2019, two 'sociological researchers' arrested in [Libya](#) were also suspected of having links to Prigozhin. As with private military companies, Kremlin outsourcing of potentially controversial activities offers the advantage of deniability.

[Disinformation](#) plays a key role in Kremlin foreign and domestic influence operations, and Africa is no exception. According to documents seen by CNN reporters, in January 2019 Russian specialists advised the Sudanese government to spread [fake news](#) stories on social media linking demonstrators to Israeli support, anti-Islamic values and arson attacks on public buildings, in an effort to quell protests.

Influence of Kremlin media spreads across the continent

French government-commissioned reports suggest that Kremlin media (in particular, RT and Sputnik) are becoming increasingly popular in Africa; for example, RT's French-language services recently [succeeded](#) in adding hundreds of thousands of Facebook followers in just a few months. Their [indirect reach](#) is even wider: African media often lack the resources to adequately cover international issues, and therefore sometimes turn to Kremlin outlets as sources of relatively well-

drafted and readily available content. Moreover, the anti-Western line often followed in such content resonates with lingering resentment against the continent's former colonial rulers.

Until recently, most content of Russian origin disseminated in this way was not specifically tailored to African audiences, but Russia now has at least two news portals based in the continent, which publish stories of African interest. Neither has yet had much impact. As of October 2019, the [website](#) of the Morocco-based African Daily Voice was no longer functioning, while the Facebook [page](#) of Afrique Panorama, a French-language service operating from Madagascar, had yet to garner more than a few thousand likes (compared to over 1 million for [Sputnik](#)). Leaked documents (published by the Dossier Centre, mentioned in the previous section) envisage new media outlets including radio stations and newspapers in the Central African Republic and South Africa, but this does not seem to have happened yet.

Russia's Africa strategy

From commercial interests to a political strategy

Most of Russia's activities in Africa seem to be driven by commercial interests – selling weapons, investing in African oil and gas fields, and securing access to minerals needed by Russian industry. It is true that state-controlled companies such as Rosneft and Gazprom are often seen as arms of the Kremlin, prioritising foreign policy goals over profit (for example, Gazprom [cutting](#) gas prices for Armenia after it agreed not to sign an association agreement with the EU). However, keen [competition](#) between Russian companies – including privately owned operators such as Lukoil – for contracts in Africa suggests that there is a genuine commercial motivation.

However, when investments are combined with official (e.g. diplomatic) initiatives as well as more covert activities carried out by private but Kremlin-linked agents, a picture starts to emerge of a joined-up plan, coordinated at the level of the Russian state. Business interests aside, the overall goal is apparently to further Russian political influence in Africa.

How Africa fits in with Russia's global foreign policy

Russia's foreign policy priorities are set out in its 2016 [Foreign Policy Concept](#). The document distinguishes between North Africa, seen together with the Middle East as a potential source of instability and terrorism, and the rest of the continent. Sub-Saharan Africa comes last in the Concept's list of regions, with only a brief paragraph calling for Russia to 'expand multidimensional interaction with African States ... by improving political dialogue and promoting mutually beneficial trade and economic ties, stepping up comprehensive cooperation that serves common interests'. However, despite this only brief mention, the expansion of economic, military and political cooperation detailed in this briefing suggests that Russia's interest in Africa, including sub-Saharan countries, has grown considerably in recent years.

An overarching goal of Russian foreign policy stated in the Concept is 'to consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a centre of influence in today's world'. As Russia sees it, the collapse of the Soviet Union paved the way for a US-dominated [unipolar international order](#) based on liberal values, marginalising potential rivals, such as Russia and China, which do not share those values. Moscow therefore envisages a [multipolar world](#) in which it can resist US hegemony as one of several alternative 'poles'.

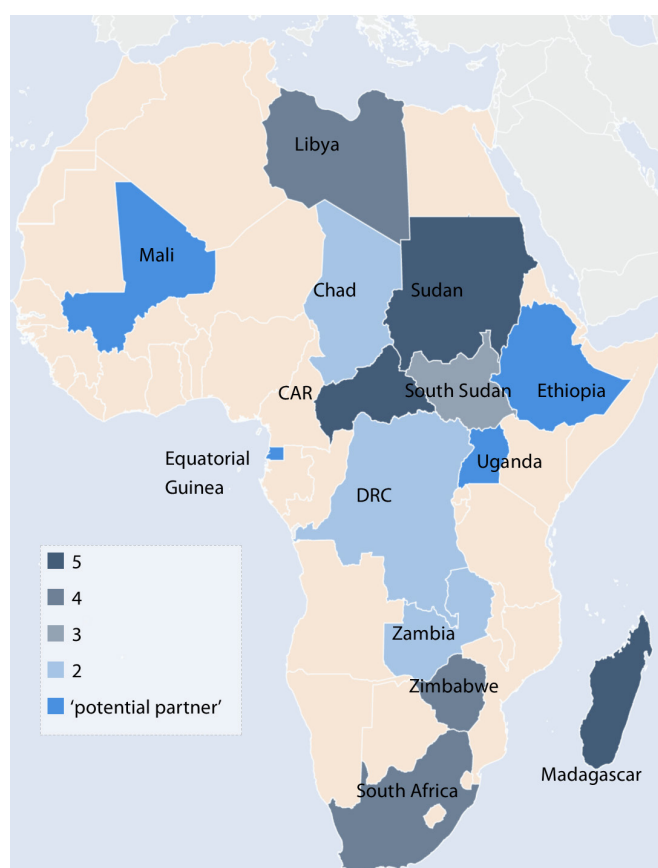
Given that Russia has less influence in Africa than its global competitors, it makes sense for it to focus on a few African countries in order to avoid spreading limited resources too thinly. This indeed is the approach suggested by the map below identifying the countries most receptive to Russian influence (Map 3); an [article](#) in UK newspaper The Guardian claims the map was circulated among political agents working for Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Russia's foreign policy often follows a '[zero-sum](#)' approach seeking to promote its own agenda by attacking Western interests. In the past, Moscow's activities in Africa co-existed alongside those of other players without much confrontation, but there are signs that, like eastern Europe, the [Western Balkans](#) and the [Middle East](#), the continent has become a front in Russia's geopolitical contest with the West for global influence.

Operations in several African countries appear to exemplify this approach. For example, it is [claimed](#) that agents employed by Yevgeny Prigozhin on behalf of the Kremlin orchestrated the December 2018 dismissal of pro-France Foreign Minister, Charles-Armel Dabandje, in the Central African Republic. They also poured oil on the fire of a long-running territorial dispute between French-ruled Mayotte and the remaining Comoros islands, and [organised](#) anti-French protests in Madagascar. Admittedly, these claims are based on leaked documents whose authenticity has yet to be proven. Nevertheless, it seems likely that, by undermining relations between France and its former colonies, the Kremlin hopes to bolster its own influence.

Not only the ends but also the means employed by Russia in Africa are familiar from [other parts](#) of the world. Although Russia has neither historical ties to the continent nor the economic or military clout to compete with the US or former colonial powers, such as France and Britain, as an equal, it skilfully exploits niche strengths in areas such as energy, the arms weapons trade and hybrid influence operations to punch above its weight.

Map 3: Russian influence operations in Africa



Documents purporting to come from political agents working for Yevgeny Prigozhin identify the geographical spread of Russian influence operations. The documents classify countries as 'potential partners' on a scale of 2 to 5, with 5 representing the highest level of activity.

What are the implications for Africa?

Cooperation with Russia benefits the continent in various ways, bringing investment for the energy and mining sectors, helping to build military capacity, and enabling governments to diversify their foreign relations in a way that reduces dependence on other international partners (such as China). However, Moscow's presence is far from disinterested. In the Central African Republic, leaked [documents](#) describing the country as a 'strategically important' bridgehead for Russian influence suggest that ending the country's civil war is less of a priority than geopolitical competition (in this case, with France) and access to valuable minerals. At the same time, Russia provides only minimal development and humanitarian aid to the continent.

Although some African governments welcome Russia's no-strings-attached support, such cooperation is not always in their countries' deeper interest. Political backing and arms supplies for repressive regimes undermine international efforts to promote good governance. In December 2018, then US National Security Adviser, John Bolton, [accused](#) Moscow of propping up authoritarian leaders on the continent. One such leader is Sudan's ex-President, Omar Al-Bashir, who was invited to visit Moscow in July 2018 despite being under an international arrest warrant on charges of war

crimes and genocide; his government also [allegedly](#) bought arms from Russia, despite being under an international arms embargo.

Similarly, shady business deals initiated by Russia often sacrifice African economic interests for the sake of enriching corrupt elites. An example was a secret US\$100 billion nuclear energy agreement with South Africa; [allegedly](#), the prospect of lucrative kickbacks persuaded then-President, Jacob Zuma, to bypass government procurement procedures and overlook the fact that Russia's offer was less favourable than the alternatives. In the end, the deal was scrapped after public pressure forced Pretoria to reveal the details.

EU position

Officially, the EU [considers](#) Russia a 'key partner on the international scene', with which it can cooperate on issues of mutual interest. However, especially since the post-Crimea downturn in EU-Russia relations, it views Moscow's increasingly assertive foreign policy and its efforts to rebuild global influence, with concern. In the Middle East, the EU has been particularly [critical](#) of Moscow's role in the Syrian civil war. In Africa, EU criticisms have been more muted; however, in its October 2018 [conclusions](#), the Council implicitly expressed its concerns about the risk of Russia-backed talks in the Central African Republic undermining the African Union's peace process, calling on 'all international actors, especially those engaged in the CAR, to support exclusively the action of the government and the African Initiative, in a properly coordinated and fully transparent manner'. In a similar vein, the French government [condemned](#) 'opportunistic initiatives', which in its view were unlikely to help stabilise the CAR. In April 2019 the EU High Representative was more explicit, emphasising 'the need for transparency of Russian activities on the ground', in reply to a [question](#) from the European Parliament about the situation in the CAR.

Although there is less of a clash between Russia and the EU in Africa than in some other regions of the world, the two sides have very different goals and interests. For example, as already mentioned, Russia is allegedly stirring up anti-French feeling in French-speaking Africa, and it offers diplomatic support to countries facing EU sanctions such as Zimbabwe in 2008 or Burundi in 2018. As a result, despite the EU's general policy of selective engagement with Moscow wherever possible, there are few areas of EU-Russia cooperation in Africa.

European Parliament position

The EP's most recent [resolution](#) on EU-Russia relations was adopted in March 2019. It points out the contradiction between 'Russia's polycentric vision of the concert of powers ... [and] the EU's belief in multilateralism and a rules-based international order' in general, and expresses concerns about 'continuous Russian support for authoritarian regimes'. Libya and the Central African Republic are mentioned as two countries where Russian interference has created tensions between the EU and Russia. For the EP, problems in these and many other areas mean that 'Russia can no longer be considered a strategic partner'.

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