

# Russia in Africa: An atlas

## SUMMARY

This series of maps illustrates Russia's expanding diplomatic, economic and military engagement across the African continent. It also provides a visual representation of the deployment of hybrid tools, such as information manipulation campaigns, and the multi-faceted presence of the paramilitary company Wagner, both of which are integral parts of Russia's current strategy in Africa.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the subsequent open confrontation with the West in all arenas, has put the spotlight on the African continent again as an area of geopolitical rivalry. Russia's current engagement on the continent seeks to break the diplomatic and economic isolation imposed by the West, to reassert its own relevance on the international stage as the champion of the new 'polycentric world', and to advance its geo-strategic ambitions in mining, energy and military presence in key areas, such as the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Russia made significant diplomatic efforts to ensure a high turnout at the second Russia-Africa summit, held in Saint Petersburg in July 2023, which was well attended but by significantly fewer Heads of State than the first summit, in 2019. However, the 2023 summit failed to address several African leaders' concerns about the impact of the war in Ukraine on their countries' economies. As evidenced in votes on recent United Nations (UN) resolutions, the African countries' positions on the war vary greatly. Russia's expanding influence in Africa also plays out through non-official channels, such as the use of private military companies (such as the Wagner Group) and information manipulation campaigns.

Russia has concluded military cooperation agreements with 43 African countries, and is a major, though declining, arms supplier to Africa. This cooperation is not linked to democratic pledges, and in multiple African countries hit by coups, Russia has continued or strengthened its military cooperation. Beyond arms, Russia's trade with Africa is relatively insignificant compared with other trade partners. Russia's presence is stronger in the African mining and energy markets, notably through mining concessions to Wagner-associated companies, and it has signed nuclear cooperation agreements with 20 countries, with plans to build nuclear plants in Egypt and Nigeria.



### IN THIS BRIEFING

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## Introduction

Russia's policies and interests in the African continent [have evolved](#) over the years. Historic ties inherited as part of the Soviet legacy loosened in the years following the USSR's collapse, with domestic turmoil leading Russia to a strategic withdrawal from Africa. After Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014, which sparked a shift in Western relations with Russia, Africa re-emerged as a zone of peripheral interest for Russia. Russian presence in Africa started to expand, although neither strategically nor homogeneously. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the subsequent open confrontation with the West in all arenas, has put the spotlight on the African continent again as an area of geopolitical rivalry. Notably, the new Foreign Policy Concept [adopted](#) by the Russian government in March 2023, devotes a distinct section to Africa for the first time.

In this new phase, Russia's engagement on the continent can be characterised as both [opportunistic and strategic](#), focused exclusively on measures that are both low-cost and high-impact. It takes advantage of shifting societal, political and security fissures across the continent (see Figure 1), leveraging local elites who seek external sponsorship without democratic strings attached, and exploiting – and magnifying – African grievances towards ex-colonial powers. In exchange, Russia expects African countries to help it to break the diplomatic and economic isolation imposed by the West, reasserting its own relevance on the international stage as the champion of the new 'polycentric world', and to advance its geo-strategic ambitions. This involves pursuing lucrative opportunities in the extractive industries, enlarging its nuclear cooperation with the continent, and expanding its military presence in key areas such as the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Figure 1 – African countries' exposure to threats to peace and security

Rank	Country	NI	Rank	Country	NI	Rank	Country	NI
136	Central African Republic	3.07	104	Djibouti	4.92	73	South Africa	5.66
135	Democratic Republic of the Congo	3.40	103	Mozambique	4.95	69	Madagascar	5.75
130	South Sudan	3.56	102	Eswatini	4.99	65	Benin	5.84
130	Mali	3.56	98	Zimbabwe	5.10	61	Tunisia	5.95
129	Somalia	3.62	97	Uganda	5.11	58	Liberia	6.01
128	Chad	3.73	96	Guinea-Bissau	5.13	57	Senegal	6.02
124	Ethiopia	4.26	95	Togo	5.14	56	Tanzania	6.05
123	Burundi	4.32	91	Cote d'Ivoire	5.22	48	Zambia	6.23
122	Cameroon	4.33	91	Mauritania	5.22	47	Morocco	6.24
120	Nigeria	4.37	88	Egypt	5.33	41	The Gambia	6.36
119	Niger	4.51	87	Kenya	5.38	34	Sierra Leone	6.46
117	Eritrea	4.54	85	Lesotho	5.43	33	Rwanda	6.48
114	Burkina Faso	4.75	83	Algeria	5.51	30	Malawi	6.60
111	Sudan	4.79	81	Equatorial Guinea	5.52	29	Botswana	6.61
109	Libya	4.83	80	Namibia	5.54	19	Ghana	7.01
107	Congo	4.86	77	Angola	5.59	11	Mauritius	7.45
106	Guinea	4.87	73	Gabon	5.66		World average	5.74

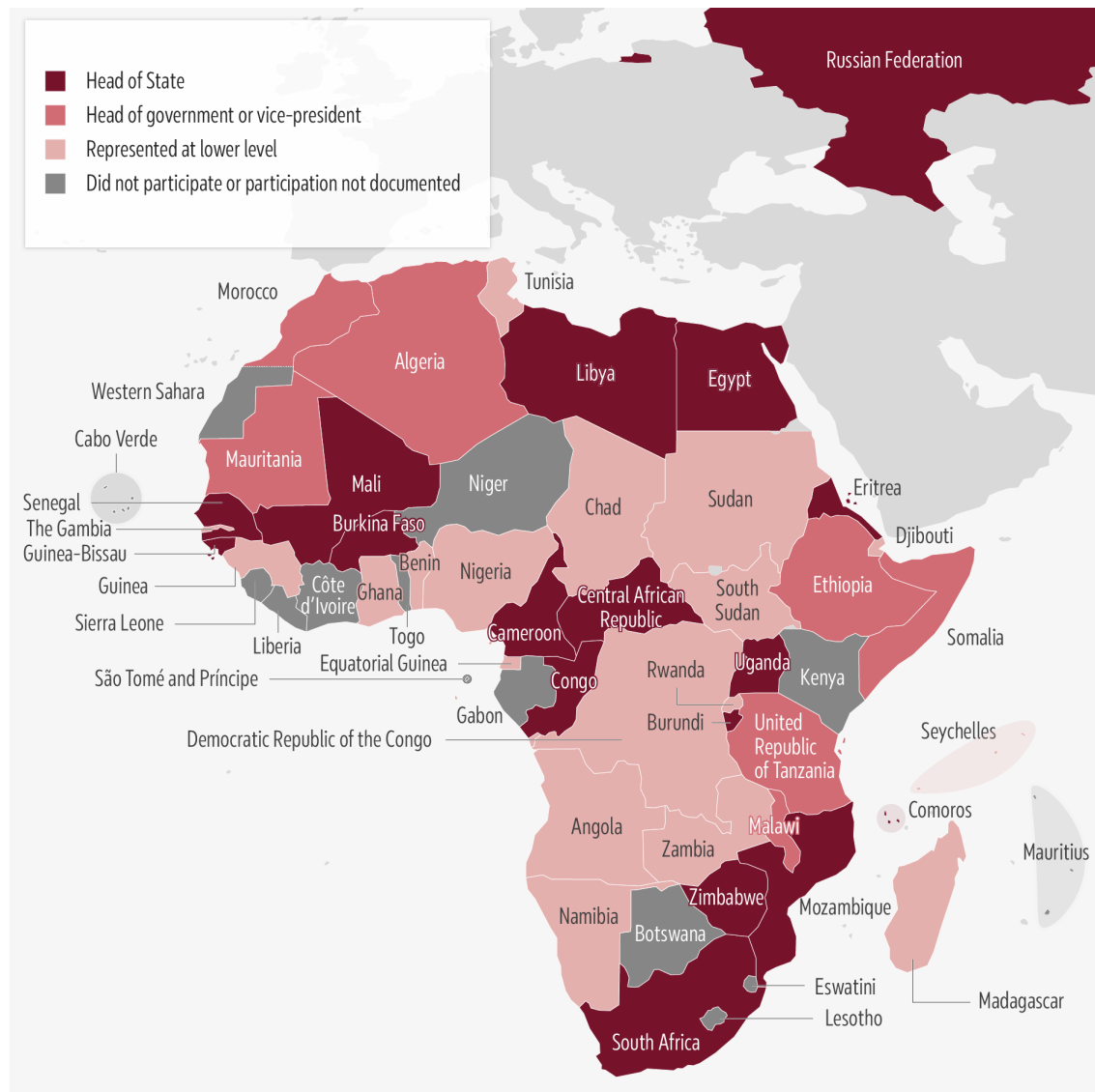
Data source: EPRS, Normandy Index, July 2023. Higher positions in the table (lower NI scores) denote worse security situations.

The [Normandy Index](#) (NI) measures the level of threat to peace, security and democracy across the world, giving an indication of a country's level of resilience to global threats including terrorism, energy insecurity, disinformation and crime (as laid down in the [EU Global Strategy](#)). The countries most at risk in terms of peace and security, i.e. those with lower NI scores, occupy higher positions on the table. Russia's presence and influence is most evident in countries with a NI score of 5 out of 10 or lower.

## Diplomacy

### Russia-Africa summits

Figure 2 – Attendance at Russia-Africa summit (Saint Petersburg, Russia, 27-28 July 2023)

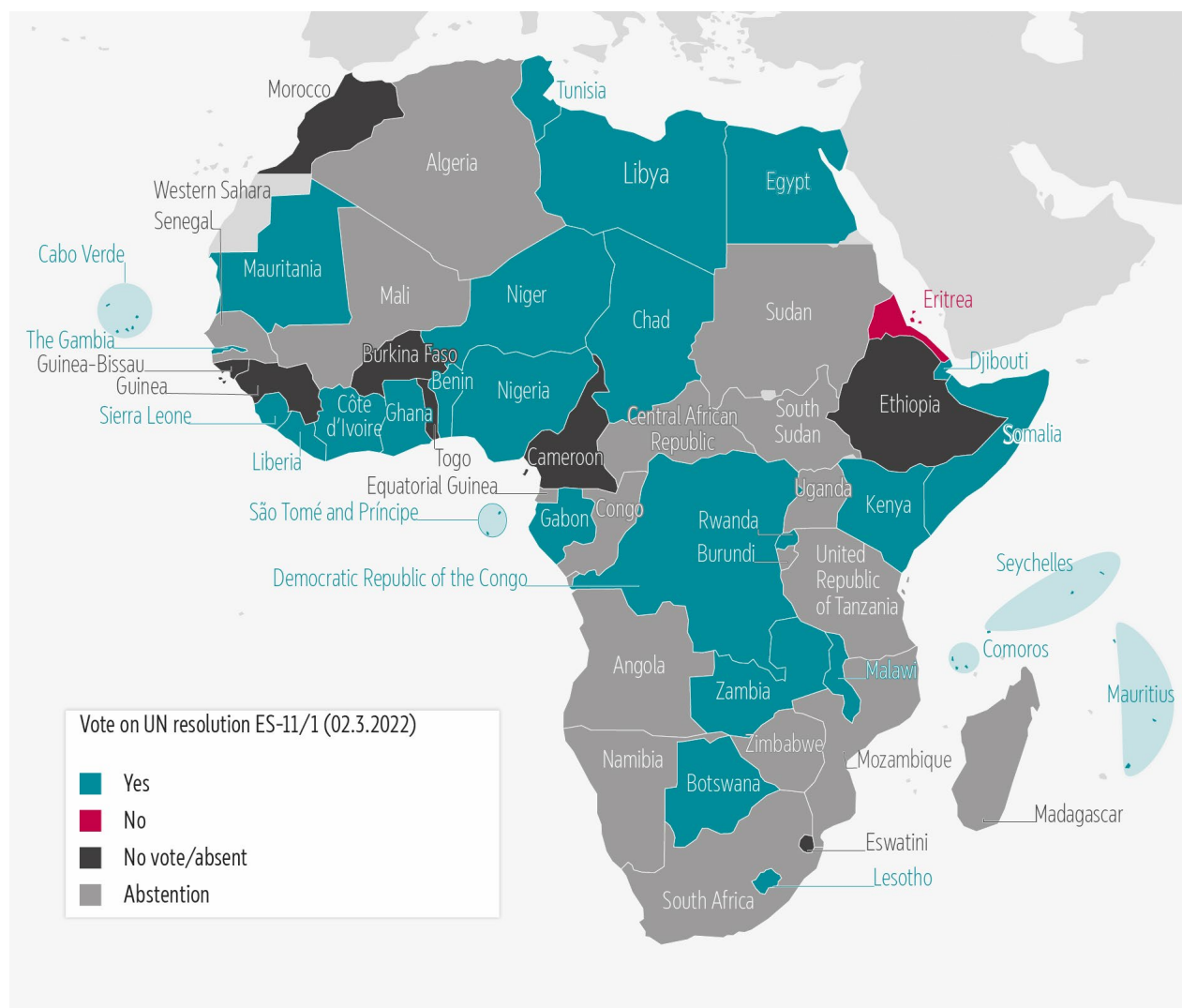


Data sources: [Official summit website](#); [Tass](#), accessed 4 December 2023.

The second Russia-Africa summit (27-28 July 2023) gathered 49 of the 55 African Union's members. Of these, 17 were represented by their Head of State, a significantly lower number than at the first summit (Sochi, 2019).<sup>1</sup> Cooperation on trade and economy, the environment, science and technology was [enhanced](#) through the [Russia-Africa Partnership Forum](#). In the security area, participants adopted declarations on [preventing an arms race in outer space](#), [ensuring international information security](#), and on the [establishment](#) of a joint security mechanism aimed at combating terrorism in Africa. Several military and business deals were also announced. Some African leaders voiced their [concerns](#) about the effects of the war in Ukraine on their economies. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin [rejected](#) their request to extend the [Black Sea Grain initiative](#), which would ensure safe corridors for grain exports, and instead offered to donate grain to a number of countries.<sup>2</sup> Putin also [dismissed](#) an African proposed peace plan for Ukraine as 'hard to implement'. He did not condemn the military coups in West Africa, in contrast to the African Union's position.

## Africa's UN voting on the war in Ukraine: A divided continent

Figure 3 – Vote on the withdrawal of Russia troops from Ukraine (ES 11/1, March 2022)

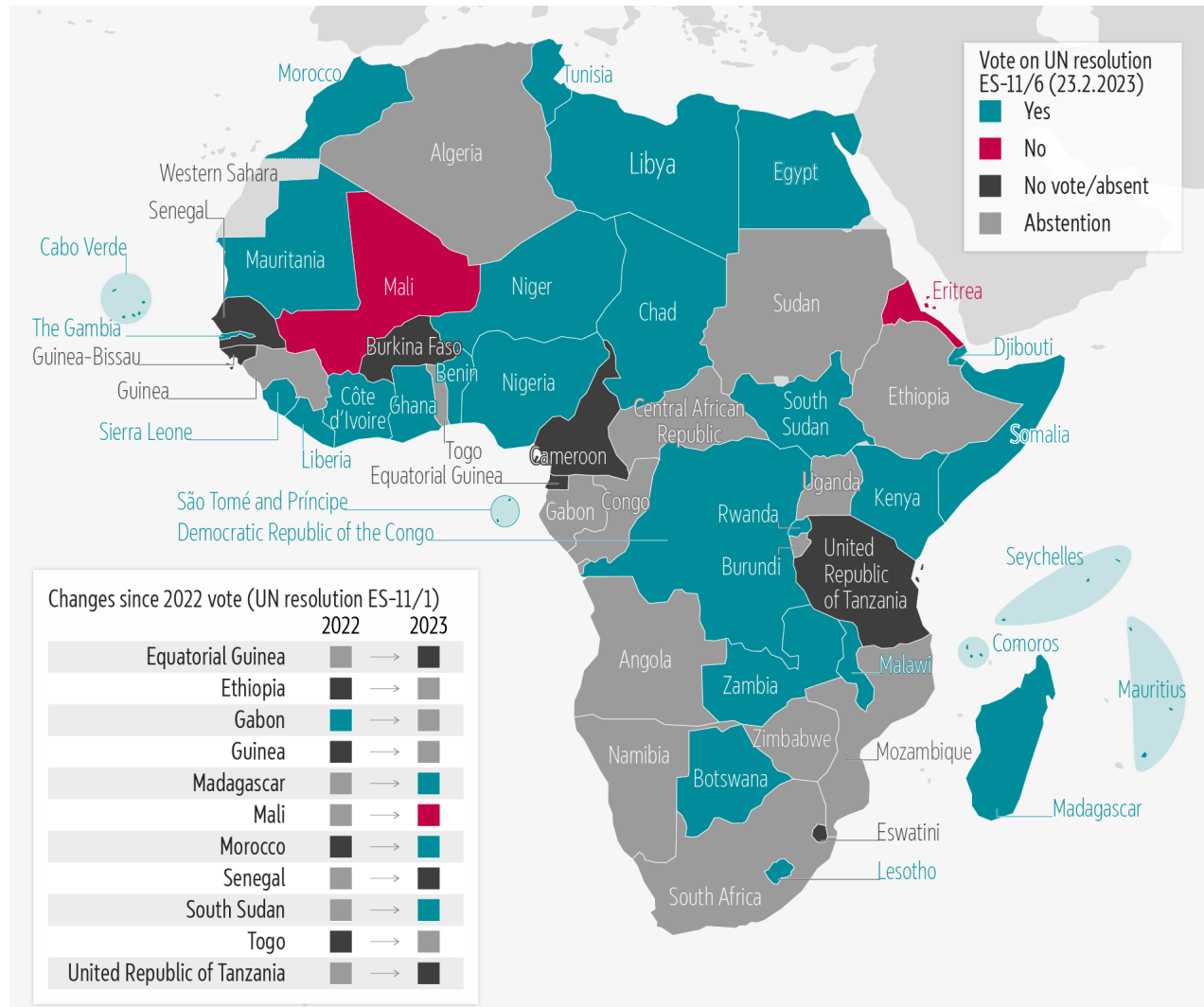


Data sources: [UN vote on A/RES/ES-11/1](#), 2 March 2022.

The [11th Emergency Special Session](#) of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) convened on 28 February 2022, four days after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The UN Security Council called this special session after its permanent members failed to reach unanimity at its meeting on 25 February 2022, thus preventing it from exercising its primary responsibility, the maintenance of international peace and security.<sup>3</sup>

On 2 March 2022 the UNGA [adopted](#) its first resolution in this setting by 141 votes in favour to 5 against, with 35 abstentions. Resolution ES-11/1 ([Aggression against Ukraine](#)) 'deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the Charter' and demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of 'all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders'.

Figure 4 – Vote on an immediate end to the war in Ukraine (ES 11/6, February 2023)



Data sources: [UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-11/6](#) and [UN News](#), 23 February 2023.

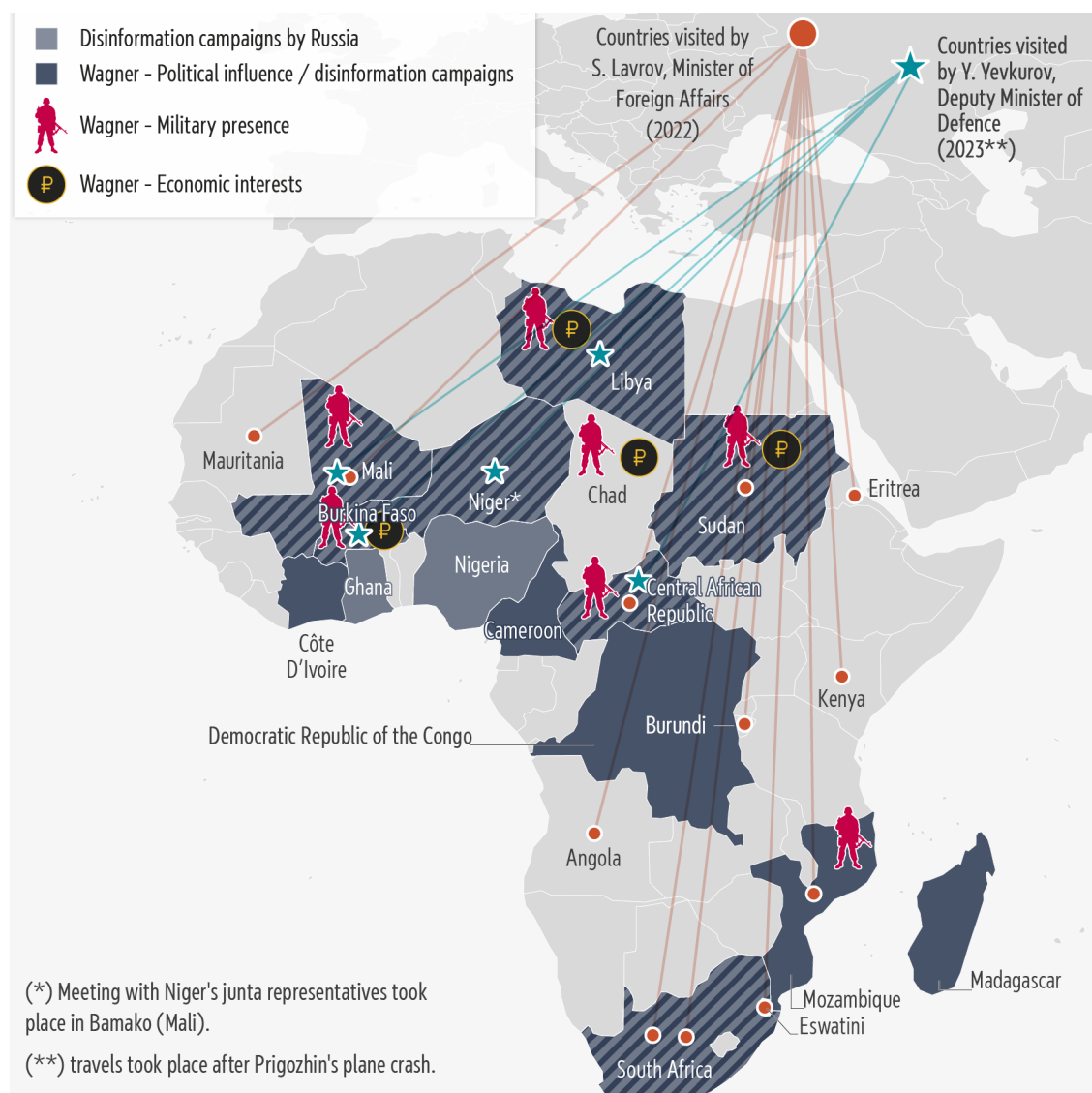
Since the 2 March 2022 vote, the 11th Emergency Special Session has adopted five more resolutions, including on the suspension of the Russian Federation's rights of membership in the Human Rights Council and the condemnation of the illegal 'referenda' held in the annexed territories. The latest resolution was [adopted](#) on 23 February 2023, marking one year since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, with 141 in favour to 7 against, with 32 abstentions. The resolution ([Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine - ES-11/6](#)) notably demands the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine and reaffirms Ukraine's territorial integrity. Intense lobbying preceded each resolution; the Russian Federation's request that one vote be held [in secret](#) was rejected by the UNGA.



## Political and military influence

### Wagner and other means of foreign interference

Figure 5 – Wagner and Russian interference in Africa



Main sources: [Atlantic Council](#), June 2023; [Tony Blair Institute for Global Change](#), March 2022; [Le Monde](#), 6 July 2023; [All eyes on Wagner](#), accessed 4 December 2023; [Osborn and Zufferey](#), 2023.

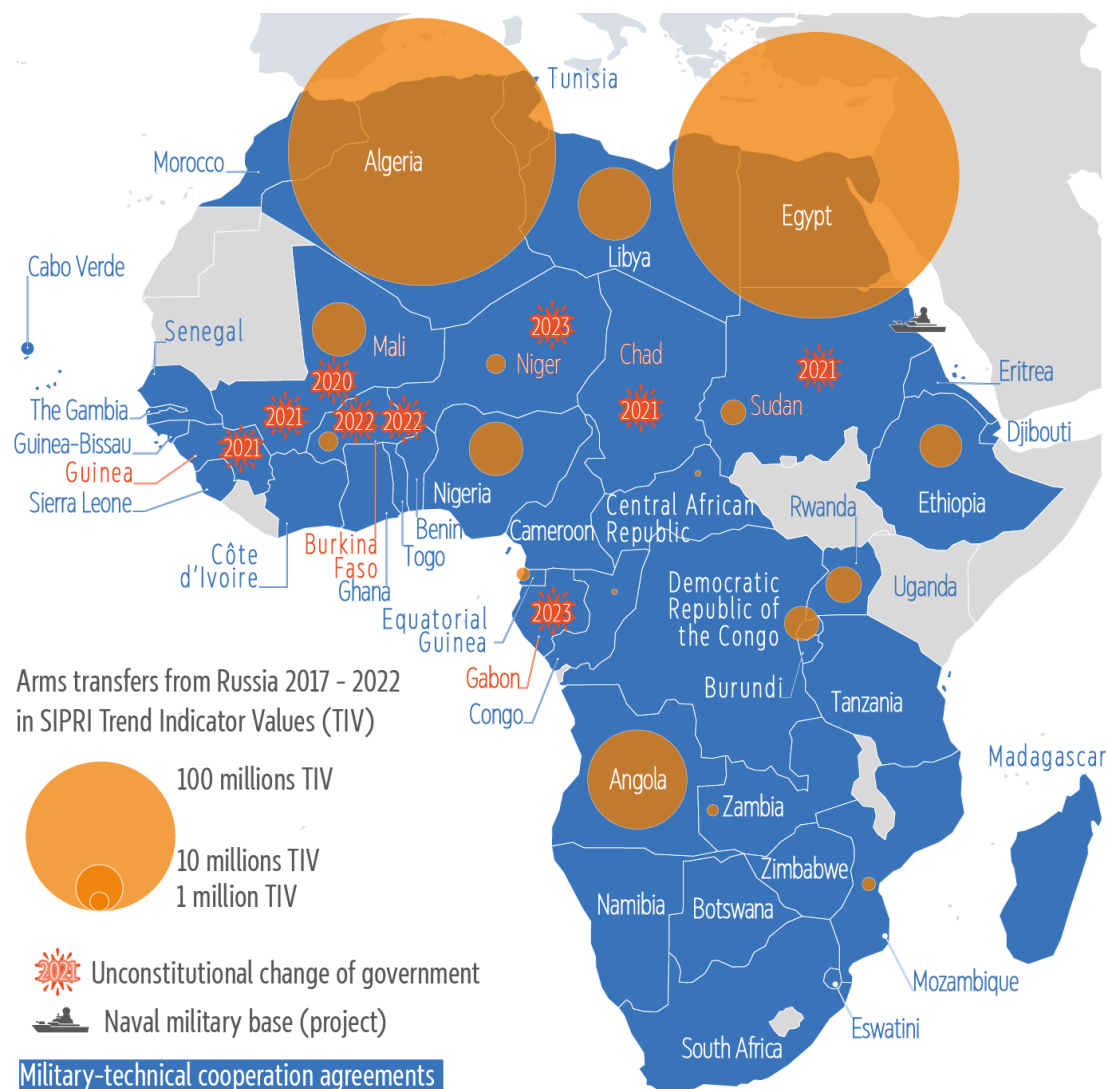
Russia's penetration into the African continent has also been conducted through non-official channels, such as the activities of [private military companies](#) (PMCs) and political interference through information manipulation campaigns. Verified [reports](#) indicate that at least seven Russian PMCs have carried out a minimum of 34 operations in 16 African countries since 2005. Amongst them, those conducted by the [Wagner Group](#) (and its subsidiaries, such as Sewa) have had the most strategic significance. Clearly falling into the category of mercenary operations, they entail not only a lasting military presence in the country, but also political influence campaigns and opaque economic relations relating to extractive industries. The long-standing denial by Russia of any connection with the Wagner Group [blew up](#) after the unsuccessful mutiny by the leader of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, in June 2023. After Prigozhin's death in an [allegedly accidental](#) plane crash, the Kremlin [sent](#) Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-bek Yevkurov and Major General Andrei Averyanov of the Russian military intelligence agency (GRU) to reassure leaders of Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Niger about the continuity of Russian operations in their countries.

To this end, a new military structure, the [Africa Corps](#), was [created](#) under the Russian Ministry of Defence in December 2023, in an effort to regroup former Wagner assets under [government control](#).

Furthermore, dozens of disinformation and [information manipulation campaigns](#) in several African countries, with precise strategic objectives such as spreading anti-French, anti-EU or anti-UN narratives, denigrating national institutions, and promoting xenophobic sentiments and ethnic confrontation, have been connected to the Russian government, according to the [African Centre for Strategic Studies](#) and [other analysts](#).

## Military agreements

Figure 6 – Russia-Africa military agreements and arms trade, and recent coups



Data sources: [SIPRI](#), March 2023; [BBC](#), 22 June 2022; [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation](#), accessed 4 December 2023; [VOA](#), 3 October 2023.

Since 2015 Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 43 African countries (as of November 2023). They entail varying levels of engagement, from broad and ceremonial agreements to more specific and substantial cooperation in areas such as military personnel training, weapons supply, counter-terrorism support, and access to military or civilian ports and air bases. In countries where a coup has occurred, Russia has continued or strengthened its military cooperation.

While Russia tried to establish its own military bases in six countries (the Central African Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan), it seems that only the agreement with Sudan

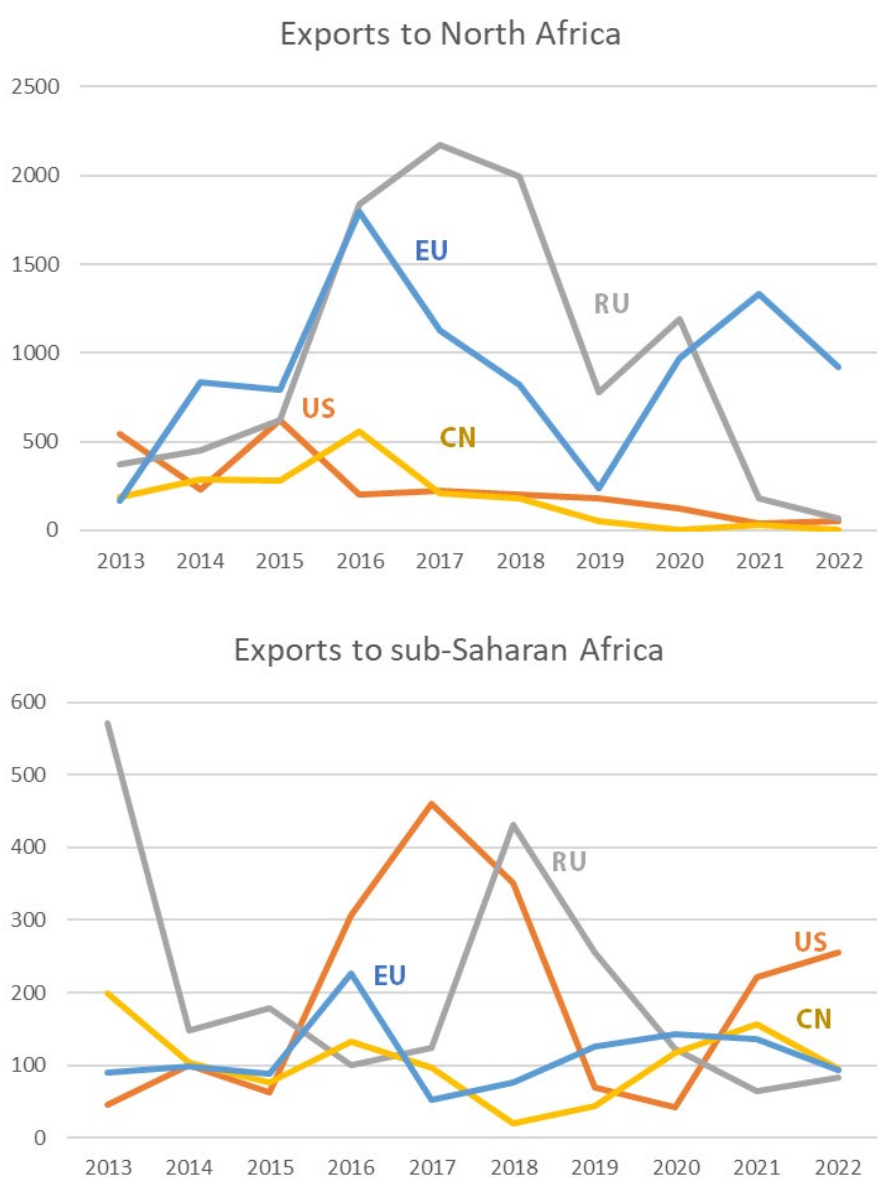
is still actively being pursued. If finalised, it would allow Russia to establish a 'logistical supply point' in Port Sudan for military ships, including nuclear ships, and install up to 300 troops on the base. A Russian military presence in the Red Sea would have [multiple strategic implications](#). By controlling strategic waterways in the area, Russia (and African partners) would notably gain a more prominent role in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

## Trade and energy

### Trade in arms

Through military cooperation agreements and ad hoc deals, Russia has become a major arms supplier to Africa. Imports from Russia [accounted](#) for 40% of African imports of major weapons systems for the 2018-2022 period, surpassing those from the US, Europe and China.

Figure 7 – Russian arms export to Africa



Figures are in [million SIPRI Trend Indicator Values \(TIV\)](#).

Data source: [SIPRI](#), March 2023.



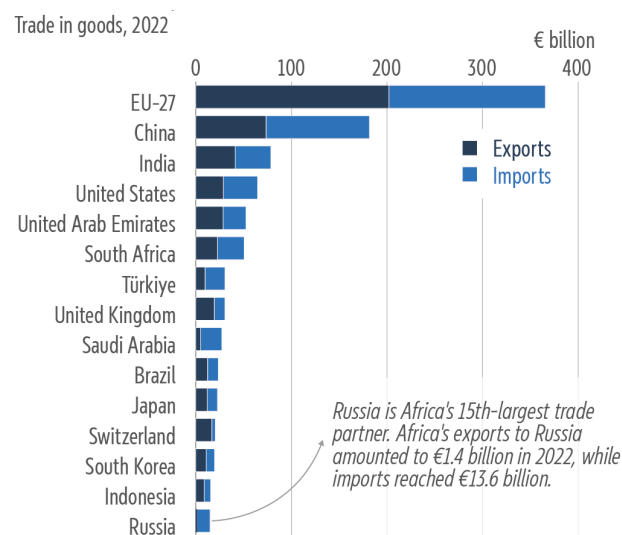
The preference for Russian supplies has several [explanations](#). Modern Russian arms are usually cheaper, they are compatible with the Soviet-era stocks retained by many states, and, unlike Western suppliers, Russia does not impose values-based conditionalities. However, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this preference seems to be [changing](#), particularly in Algeria and Egypt. Historically the main importers of Russian weaponry, the two countries are accelerating their diversification efforts under diplomatic pressure and an increased [perception](#) that Russia will not be able to maintain its production of advanced weapons systems under Western sanctions. Russia continues to be the [main supplier](#) of arms to smaller countries like Sudan and Central African Republic, which have fewer possibilities for diversification. Although much smaller in monetary value, these dependencies continue to have geopolitical significance.

## Russian trade with Africa

Beyond the arms trade, Russia's trade with Africa has increased substantially since 2005, although it is still relatively insignificant when [compared](#) with other trade partners.

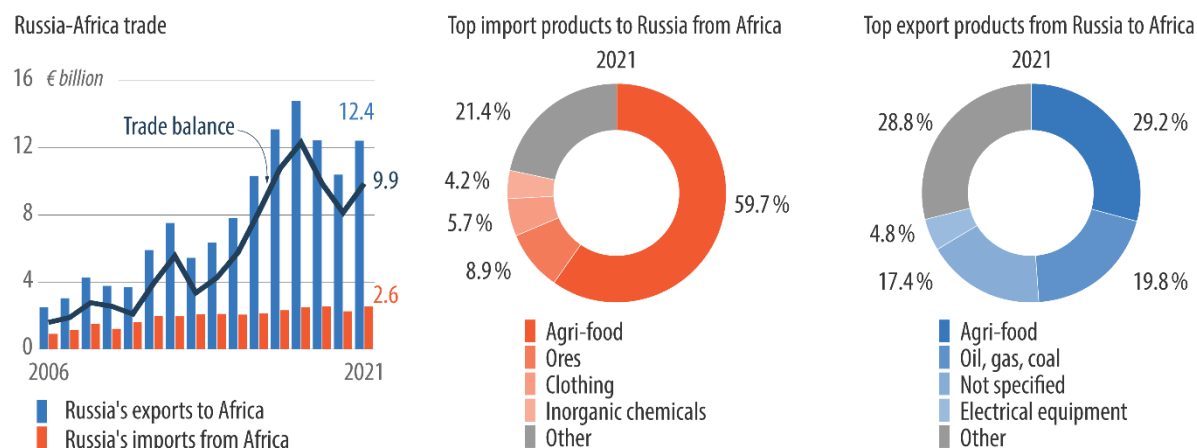
In [2022](#) Africa's imports from Russia represented less than 2 % of the continent's total imports, while the EU27 and China represented 25 % and 18 % of the market, respectively. Exports from Africa to Russia represent an even smaller share of the market (less than 1 % in 2022, against 33 % to the EU and 12.18 % to China). The United States share is approximately 5 % in both exports and imports.

Figure 8 – Africa's main trade partners



Data source: [IMF](#), accessed 30 January 2024.

Figure 9 – Russian trade with Africa in a snapshot



Data source: [Eurostat Comext](#), accessed 4 December 2023.

## Russia in the African mining and energy market

Figure 10 – Energy and mining cooperation



Main data sources: [S&P Global](#), 27 July 2023; [EIU](#), 2022; Rosatom (on [Mali](#) and [Burkina Faso](#)), 13 October 2023.

Russia has a [sizeable presence](#) in the African mining and energy market. Russian mining concessions are concentrated in countries characterised by [poor governance](#), such as the Central African Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan, which allows the line between official concessions and unofficial concessions to be blurred. This ambiguity is further exploited through the involvement of companies associated with Wagner.

In contrast to the mining sector, Russian involvement in oil and gas projects is more geographically diversified. However, it is worth noting that Russian companies are not official partners in any of the [major](#) African oil and gas projects. Indeed, Russia contributes to less than 1 % of [foreign direct investment](#) in the continent.

Russia has signed nuclear cooperation agreements with 20 countries. Amongst them, Egypt and Nigeria have signed preliminary plans to build nuclear plants. If these plans come to fruition, Egypt and Nigeria would join South Africa, which already has an operational nuclear power plant, in the ranks of African countries with nuclear energy capabilities supported by Russian technology.

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## FURTHER READING

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that EU-Africa meetings have also been [difficult](#) to set up in [recent years](#).

<sup>2</sup> Russia offered to donate 25 000 to 50 000 [tonnes of grain](#) to six countries (Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Mali, Somalia and Zimbabwe) – far from meeting Africa's needs.

<sup>3</sup> An emergency [special session](#) of the General Assembly must be called if requested by a vote of any nine members of the Security Council, or by a majority of the UN members, precluding the use of a veto by the Council's permanent members. It can authorise the UN to decide whether to use armed force, when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security. The decision to call the 11<sup>th</sup> emergency special session was taken by a recorded vote of 11 in favour to 1 against (Russian Federation), with 3 abstentions (China, India, United Arab Emirates). Before that, the Security Council had last called for convening an emergency special session of the General Assembly in 1982 (with regard to the situation involving Syria and Israel) and in 1980 (after the outbreak of the Soviet-Afghan war, when the former Soviet Union vetoed a draft resolution, leading members to invoke General Assembly resolution 377A(V), 'Uniting for peace', adopted in 1950).

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