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Security, Soft Power and Regime Support: Spheres of Russian Influence in Africa

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Overview

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the extent to which Vladimir Putin is prepared to go to assert his view of Russia's interests beyond the country's borders. As the world focuses on Russia's latest aggression in Europe, Western nations must not lose sight of the broader strategic confrontation that has re-emerged with Russia in recent years across Africa. The United Nations (UN) vote on 2 March – in which 17 African nations voted against or abstained from condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine – shows that the UK, Europe and the United States cannot take African support for granted. As the crisis in Europe unfolds, it is not too late for Western governments to reconsider their engagement in Africa, just as African nations are reappraising their role on the world stage.

For many reasons, understanding the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war and Russia's influence in Africa is critical. Though African nations are bound by cultures, ethnicities and political histories, the reaction to Putin's actions has not been uniform on the continent. While many African leaders are repulsed by Russia's invasion of a sovereign democratic country, others are considering the evolving geopolitical repercussions and understandably asking what they could mean for them. Despite the urgency of the Ukraine response in recent weeks, the primary concerns of African governments are still much closer to home. Before the war in Ukraine began, 2022 was looking to be a decisive yet turbulent year for Africa. With elections due in Angola, Kenya, Libya and Senegal, rising tensions had been expected into the second half of the year. Factors such as the pandemic, insecurity and inflation had already been feeding into widespread insecurity across the continent, with the cost of living, food and fuel prices, and youth unemployment now at an all-time high. Poverty levels are on the rise once more while expectations of the electorate for their leaders to deliver rapid socioeconomic transformation are as high as ever. Youth-led protests in Malawi, which took place in December 2021, could well be mirrored in countries including Burkina Faso, Chad and Nigeria this year. This is notwithstanding the ongoing instability in the Sahel and Libya, and the continuing insurgencies in eastern Congo, northern Mozambique, northern Nigeria and Somalia. African leaders will understandably seek a full range of support to help confront these mounting challenges – including that offered by China and Russia.

Experts in international affairs have referred to a “new scramble” that is underway in Africa; one that could well benefit Africans, but which nevertheless carries high stakes.¹ Over the past decade, the amount of Chinese investment in Africa – with all its associated interests and influence – has soared. The biggest sources of foreign direct investment in Africa are still firms based in France, the United States and the UK but others, especially Chinese state-backed companies, are catching up. Recent policy moves by the West that bring renewed commitment to the continent underline how China's growing economic presence in Africa has triggered geostrategic competition that works in the continent's favour. In addition, Turkey has opened 26 new embassies in Africa in just five years and since 2008, Turkish

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made 30 visits to the continent. Other actors seeking new or deeper diplomatic and commercial ties with African nations include Brazil, Israel and the Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Western governments are therefore facing increasing competition for influence.

Yet escalating tensions with Russia show that Western nations are faced with a much broader concern in Africa than the loss of competitive edge. With its abundant natural resources, proximity to Europe and some 54 votes at the UN General Assembly – or three votes at the UN Security Council – Africa represents an attractive arena to Russia in which it can pursue its interests with limited economic and political costs. Ahead of the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, Putin acknowledged the competing interests on the “continent of opportunities” and stressed Russia’s desire to avoid participating in a new “repartition” of the continent’s wealth.

Two distinct, now common, explanations have emerged to explain Russia’s growing interest in Africa. The first argues that Russia is intent on rekindling old Soviet-era ties to the continent to extract resources in return for security assistance – a mutually beneficial yet opportunistic strategy that is, at the least, short term and transactional, but which could also produce more allies on the international stage. The alternative suggests that Putin considers Africa a so-called second frontier, after Eastern Europe, for encircling Western Europe. Proponents of this argument assert that by fostering instability, disrupting elections, exporting arms and potentially fuelling migration politics, Putin’s “grand strategy” works to threaten the West away from Africa. By framing Russia’s interventions on the continent as the return of an old anti-colonial ally or bulwark against extremism, Russia’s intentions become – according to this second assessment – an extension of Putin’s imperialist ambitions.

Whichever alternative explains Russia’s interests in Africa, there are important reasons why it has proved so capable of expanding its influence on the continent so quickly. The answer lies in both Russia’s strategic consistency over the past ten years and the West’s growing hesitancy to commit to overseas military assistance during the same period. Russia exploits not only vulnerabilities on the continent but also a declining confidence in the liberal democratic reforms of some African countries – a vulnerability that is apparent globally – as leaders are diverted to deal with acute and mounting security threats. This is why there urgently need to be ambitious commitments from the West to African leaders, and a responsive approach to their priorities in order to prove the West can be a dependable partner. With the invasion of Ukraine putting greater pressure on Moscow to secure lucrative transactions in Africa and nurture its newfound allies there, a trend of Russian interference is only likely to grow.

This paper explores what is known about Russia’s interests, capabilities and strategic objectives for the African continent today, and what Western leaders and African leaders should understand about this growing sphere of Russian influence.

Overview also available in French translation

Russia in Africa: The Long Tail of Influence

Having maintained a minimal presence in Africa in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the past ten years have seen a considerable uptick in Russian activities including via the embedding of official Kremlin representatives in state-run institutions, and deployment of private military contractors (PMCs). Africa is fast becoming crucial to Putin's efforts to dilute the influence of the United States and its international alliances.

During much of the Cold War, and as part of its ideological confrontation with the West, the Soviet Union forged close relationships with many African nations through its support of national liberation movements on the continent. Following the end of the European colonial period, the Soviet Union sought to exploit the West's colonial legacy to undercut Western influence on the continent, first establishing ties with North Africa and eventually forming connections with leaders in sub-Saharan Africa too. While not all Africans were willing to embrace Soviet socialism, the Soviet Union was still able to sign cooperation treaties with 37 African countries and provide a range of economic assistance for agricultural development, health care and infrastructure.

The Soviets also played a role in three major wars – Angola (1975 to 1992), Mozambique (1977 to 1992), and the Ogaden conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia (1977 to 1978) – providing military assistance. To cultivate its image on the continent, the Soviets sponsored large-scale cultural and educational programmes across Africa, which extended to the training of elites in Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Approximately 250,000 Africans were known to have studied in the Soviet Union before its collapse in 1991, underlining how Russia was able to assert its influence in cultural and academic sectors.² Of those who studied there, prominent African leaders were to emerge, including the post-apartheid South African Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, who undertook military training in the Soviet Union, and Chad's Youssouf Saleh Abbas and the Central African Republic's Michel Djotodia, who, among other politicians, studied at Moscow's Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University.³ Over time, Moscow became a symbol of the ideology of a vanguardist communist state as African nations fought to secure independence from colonial powers and assert a direction of their own choosing. Mozambique, for example, revealed flags with Kalashnikovs in its post-independence aftermath, with the country's constitution stating at the time that the Russian weapon represented a "resistance to colonialism and national strategy".⁴ ⁵

Rekindling these historical ties and seeking new ones across Africa has become of strategic importance to Putin, with this focus accelerating since his growing isolation following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This strategic focus is linked inextricably to Putin's attempts to challenge Western dominance of global governance and to seek alternative markets for Russian corporations following Western sanctions.

As part of his African charm offensive in 2019, Putin ordered Russia to cancel \$20 billion in African debts owed to the former Soviet Union – a gesture that would symbolise what had been evolving into a mutually beneficial relationship between Putin’s Russia and Africa over the duration of more than ten years.

For Russia today, especially in the wake of the Ukraine invasion, Africa represents the most important region. Not only is the revival of this Soviet past symbolically important but the continent is also home to substantial natural resources, including minerals such as manganese, bauxite and chromium, which are in shortage and essential to Russian industry. In Putin’s Russia, Africa is also seen as a powerful voting bloc that can strengthen the Kremlin on the international stage. For Africa’s leadership, the deepening of relations with Russia risks a potential loss of agency in terms of national sovereignty and profits from natural resources. Putin’s opportunism, however, plays into the biggest fears of some African leaders: the declining interest of the United States in the continent, and growing instability and unrest on the ground.

Arms for Influence: Russia’s “Regime Support Packages”

Over the past decade, Russia has gained a reputation among African leaders as a military partner against Islamist terrorism. Having emerged from the Syrian battlefields as seemingly victorious, Russia has managed to carve a niche amid the constellation of actors operating on the continent today. As its reputation has grown, so too has its offering of support to African-host governments, ranging from conventional military assistance to carefully crafted political and social-disinformation campaigns made possible through the Kremlin’s cyber-security capabilities.

In many cases, Russia has made gains by stepping into vacuums the West has left behind – and which China is reluctant to fill. Russian arms and security support have come with few political demands on African leaders, in stark contrast to decades of European or American assistance. For example, after the US pulled out of an arrangement with the Nigerian government in 2014 to supply the country with a shipment of attack helicopters because of its concerns about human rights in Nigeria, Russia then secured a deal with Nigeria for six Mi-35 helicopters.⁶ Similarly, the cut back in military aid and arms from the United States to Egypt since the military coup there in 2013 has left the door wide open to Russia. This has been successfully exploited by Russia, which today accounts for 31 per cent of Egypt’s major weaponry imports.⁷

Russia’s weapons deals with African nations have proved to be fast and responsive, with generally few political conditions. This is largely because Russia’s laws do not dictate high levels of transparency on the sale of weapons, with such details typically falling under the state’s secrecy laws. More recent developments, such as the fulfilling of requests through the deployment of military contractors, make

such deals even more streamlined and less political for the Kremlin. Most of the services that Russia offers today are structured in meticulously deceptive ways and actioned through a variety of vessels, including proxy PMCs, subsidiary shell companies and official government representatives. These “Regime Support Packages” are Russia’s and Putin’s way of shaping the next 20 years in their favour.

The war in Ukraine, which could spill over into Europe, could last as long as ten years, according to some commentators. Russian resources – military and economic – will undoubtedly start to strain over this time. In this scenario, Russian transactions and the country’s footprint in Africa become an insurance policy for Putin, with the continent potentially becoming a source of regular “economic and political” replenishment for the Kremlin.

Private Military Contractors

Russia leads the way on global PMCs, with their increasing deployment overseas. From the 1990s, governments around the world began outsourcing security and anti-rebel services to PMCs, including South Africa’s Executive Outcomes. Unlike mercenaries, who are often seen as hired guns, PMCs operate as a more risk-averse option for ensuring the security of territory, and protecting lucrative commercial relationships and contracts. But they have equally been known to train weaker state militaries, engage in covert operations including assassinations of political figures, and suppress civilian movements and political dissidents.

Since the UN Mercenary Convention was ratified in 2002 to prohibit governments from recruiting, training, employing and financing so-called mercenaries, the use of PMCs has proliferated. Mercenary factions are often unregistered, and mainly comprise disaffected criminals or former rebels, while PMCs operate as registered businesses, are well-structured, partially transparent, and consist of trained former soldiers and special services officers. Their use means a state can sponsor military action abroad without having to officially declare it.

Russia’s increasing deployment of PMCs has coincided with the Kremlin’s renewed foreign-policy assertiveness following the invasion of Crimea. With conflict and political, electoral and civil insecurity accelerating across sub-Saharan Africa, governments have recognised that homegrown security forces may be ill-equipped to defend land and defeat insurgencies simultaneously. As relations with the West continue to weaken, this has resulted in African calls for Russian support, which increasingly takes the form of PMCs’ deployment, in particular Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Wagner Group, in place of official Kremlin troops.

Figure 1 – How the activity of Russian private military contractors is proliferating across Africa



Source: CSIS Transnational Threats Project

Russia has deployed PMCs in at least 21 countries since 2014, with the majority on the African continent.⁸ Expansion was on an upward trajectory until the start of the pandemic in 2019. Between 2014 and 2018, Russia's PMC activity in Africa more than tripled. In Sudan, Wagner reportedly trained Rapid Support Forces in the Darfur region and the military personnel of the army on the command of former President Omar al-Bashir's regime. Similar deployments were recorded in Libya in support of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), in the Central African Republic where hundreds of Wagner men arrived in 2018 to guard diamond mines, train the army and provide bodyguards for embattled President Faustin Archange Touadéra, and more recently in Mali, where France has been

scaling down counterterrorism operations in the country. In December 2021, Wagner was deployed to Mali to support the transitional military government and pursue natural resource contracts in the country – following the withdrawal of French troops that had been assigned to the anti-insurgency operation Barkhane. It is believed the French withdrawal came in response to the presence of Wagner, which earns an estimated \$10.8 million per month, even though only 1,000 Wagner troops are currently deployed in Mali – less than half the 2,400 French troops that had been active in the country.⁹ This represents another case of how conflict is driving African leaders to seek short-term support from nations beyond the sphere of their natural allies.

Expanding the Wagner Group's African Footprint Via Libya

Wagner's troops have been supporting the LNA since 2019 and its military offensives to overthrow the UN-recognised Government of National Accord in Libya. General Khalifa Haftar, who leads the LNA, is seen as Russia's most important partner in Libya.¹⁰ Despite a plethora of state-backed militaries and militias fighting in the country, Wagner is becoming one of the most decisive actors, operating largely unhindered by the restrictions of international law. It is estimated that in the region of 2,000 Russian Wagner troops were deployed to Libya in the last two years, making it one of the largest areas of activity for this Kremlin proxy vessel.¹¹ During its time in Libya, Wagner has violated human rights including in the arbitrary beheadings of three civilians in al-Sbeaa village and the deliberate placing of unmarked landmines in Libyan towns.¹²

With Libya a destination for international militaries, and rebel militias from Syria, Chad and Sudan, Wagner has been able to network freely with a range of non-state actors and form relationships that benefit the Kremlin. It is believed that Wagner trained Chad's mercenary group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), while it was deployed in Libya in 2020. In April 2021, FACT went on to assassinate President Idriss Deby on a battlefield in Chad's Tibesti region, with the goal of overthrowing the government.

As conflict accelerates at an unprecedented rate, African governments are struggling to combat insurgencies in addition to their other urgent priorities. This is compelling some leaders to call for external security support in the form of PMCs and mercenaries. Turkish PMC SADAT, for example, is supporting state militaries in Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia¹³ while South Africa's Dyck Advisory Group has previously operated in Mozambique. The increasing rate of PMC activity in some of the most fragile parts of the world is coinciding with a reduction in the appetite for formal foreign military assistance. However, this reliance on PMCs is a risky tactic, and should not represent the future of warfare and counterinsurgency, nor become a response to the scaling back of deployment programmes by nations including France and the United States. Governments around the world, including those in the West, should recognise the global threats that are emerging and intensifying,

particularly in Africa, where Islamist extremism is taking root at speed, and where PMCs are likely to further inflame divisions, communal tensions and the conditions that produced such insurgencies in the first place.

Conventional Military Agreements

With Russia steadily increasing its economic and political stakes in Africa, future security and PMC contracts may fall in the favour of the Kremlin. Russia is already Africa's leading arms supplier, with at least 15 countries receiving more than a third of all arms from the Kremlin.¹⁴ The 2019 Russia-Africa Summit further advanced these military ties. The Kremlin signed deals with more than 30 African countries to supply military equipment, including through 50 contracts, agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) covering economic, military, environmental and nuclear sectors. These deals are estimated to value \$12.2 billion. Additionally, Russia has signed at least 16 contracts for nuclear cooperation agreements with African states.¹⁵

well as raise Russia's status as a diplomatic broker; in 2019, for instance, Russia brokered a peace agreement between the government of the Central African Republic and rebel armed groups.¹⁶ The AU has facilitated Russia's participation as an observer at several African peace talks in recent years, and this is partly a measure of the influence that Russia has gained as a result of its seeming willingness to participate in training exercises and peacekeeping missions in line with the AU's priorities.

Nigeria's Military Agreement with Russia

When President Muhammadu Buhari met Putin at the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit, he expressed a desire to complete a military-based deal. Two years later, in August 2021, Nigeria and Russia signed an agreement under which Russia would supply equipment to Nigeria and train the country's military. Nigeria's ambassador to Russia emphasised that President Buhari felt Russia could help to counter Boko Haram's destabilising insurgency, reiterating that "the Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation between both countries provides a legal framework for the supply of military equipment, provision of after sales services, training of personnel in respective educational establishments and technology transfer, among others."¹⁷

Despite this growing influence on the continent, Russia has so far struggled to exert the same level of soft power it had during the Soviet era. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that Russia's Wagner operations extend beyond narrow security objectives and are adapting to opportunities that secure more covert influence for the country.

Political Technologies and Government Strategists

Wagner is a shadow vessel of the Kremlin, affording Putin and Russia a cost-effective way to shape foreign policy while receiving financial reward, yet simultaneously working under the rules of so-called plausible deniability. With these advantages at play, Wagner's assignments have increasingly extended beyond security and protection as they have become agents for broader, regime-backed Africa-support packages that extend to political assistance.

Russian political strategists are often sent by the Kremlin to support regimes, resulting in one of the most sophisticated yet covert and multifaceted methodologies of infiltrating governments, which work to shape and reshape political sentiment in favour of one-party, one-candidate rule.

The Central African Republic and Political Strategists

It is thought that more than 1,000 Wagner troops have been deployed in the Central African Republic (CAR) since Moscow dispatched military equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and heavy armoured vehicles, to the capital Bangui in 2018.¹⁸ This intervention by Wagner and the Kremlin has coincided with President Faustin Archange Touadéra assembling a close-knit team of Russian advisors who all have a stake in the Russian mining-exploration firm, Lobaye Invest, and include his National Security Advisor Valery Zakharov. Locally dubbed “Russian instructors”, Wagner men fought against rebels in Bambari, a town in which they had been documented training CAR troops in anti-rebel tactics. The battle prompted Zakharov to affirm that the CAR government would control “all the territory” of the “Central African Republic in the near future”. As with other PMCs, Wagner blurs the lines between legally sanctioned modes of conflict and security and heavy-handed tactics deemed violations of human rights. In March 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that it had received reports of mass executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, forced displacement of civilians and attacks on humanitarian workers that were “attributable to private military contractors allied with the CAR military, including the Wagner Group”.

Electoral Interference

Allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election prompted a change in the global security paradigm. It was alleged that Kremlin-backed hackers, including the so-called Internet Research Agency (IRA) – a disinformation operation believed to be funded by Wagner’s Prigozhin – stole data on half a million voters from the website of a state election board. More than 3 million Russian troll tweets aimed at undermining opposition parties to Donald Trump were also recorded daily during the campaigning season.¹⁹ Described as “strategically decisive and critically important to control its domestic populace and influence adversary states” by the US Defence Intelligence Agency, these tactics are also said to be “attempts to change people’s behaviour or beliefs in favour of Russian governmental objectives”.²⁰ The Kremlin has since been implicated in attempting to influence the Brexit vote in the UK in 2016 and the 2017 French presidential elections.²¹

Alongside China, Russia is the biggest proponent of cyber-warfare and electoral interference. However, Russia enhances these belligerent tactics by embedding official government representatives in host states, and shaping political and public opinion from within. In Africa, where some governments are still struggling to commit to a sustained programme of democratic reforms and political freedoms, Russia’s ability to convince leaders that power is within their grasp, without due process, is becoming destructive.

Following the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit, Facebook announced that Russian cyber-networks were responsible for disinformation campaigns including electoral manipulation in at least eight African nations, among them Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Libya and Sudan.²⁴ According to Facebook's security department, Russia posts "global and political information including topics such as Russian politics in Africa, elections in Madagascar and Mozambique, election monitoring by a local non-governmental organisation and criticism of French and US politics." It is believed that Russia accelerates such disinformation campaigns with the support of locally recruited Africans, with illicit cyber-activities particularly acute in the Central African Republic where falsified content covering Covid-19, upcoming elections and French policy in Africa were all disseminated.

Electoral Interference in Madagascar

Wagner's founder Prigozhin is alleged to have sponsored an interference campaign in Madagascar's 2018 elections. Prior to the Russian government officially and openly deepening its defence relations with Madagascar, Wagner was deployed to the country to protect Russian political strategists and geologists. Initially supporting the incumbent President Rajaonarimampianina, Wagner then went on to offer assistance to as many as six other political candidates. Close to the end of the election campaign, the political strategists protected by Wagner began supporting eventual winner Andry Rajoelina. It is thought that one of the last acts of Rajaonarimampianina's administration was to facilitate a Russian firm's takeover of Madagascar's national chromite producer, Kraoma. Wagner men were deployed to guard the chromite mines in the months following the commercial agreement.

Africa's political institutions are evolving and some are trying to establish sustainable ground. The collapse of South Africa's apartheid system marked a seminal moment in Africa's pursuit for democracy and a key milestone for the AU. Several civilian and military dictatorships have met their demise over the past 30 years, paving the way for governments based on constitutional systems that seek open and resilient societies. Despite this, Africa is today experiencing its biggest bout of civil discord since post-colonial times. Six military coups have been documented in the region since 2021 and rising anti-state sentiment means that governments are politically weaker than before.²²

Several factors are leading to African societies losing faith in central government and political leadership, which is leaving a vacuum that countries such as Russia claim to be able to 'repair'. For example, while Kenya, Ghana and Liberia abide by presidential limits of two terms, several African nations have amended their constitutions to allow their terms to be extended, in some cases indefinitely.²³ Burundi, Cameroon, Chad and Uganda are among several African nations whose presidents have overreached their terms by committing what has been coined a "constitutional coup". Africans view these as a breach of trust

between the state and society, with stability in turn being eroded. Underlying issues of poverty and inequality further exacerbate tensions, and as populations grow faster, and economies are not able to be restructured to allow for public services and the private sector to keep up, the gap between leaders and the people becomes ever wider.

Africa has one of the highest levels of social exclusion in the world. The region recently experienced some of the largest waves of social unrest globally when Covid-19 and associated government-led lockdowns took effect. The pandemic triggered a paralysis of institutional systems, and ultimately exposed deep fissures in the relationship between leaders and citizens as well as the concept of individual identity – the key factor behind social exclusion. Despite democracy taking root with more regular elections, free and fair electoral processes have been challenging to implement across Africa as a whole. Allegations of underhand tactics to sway citizens into voting a particular way or the falsifying of results have been levelled at several African nations in recent years. These factors are eroding the social contract in many African states and fuelling cycles of unrest, criminal activity and, in some cases, radicalisation and recruitment into local Islamist groups.

Russia has come to benefit from such divides, banking on the anxieties of the serving political elite. This has been made clear in other regions, specifically the past Kremlin-backed interventions in Venezuela and Syria where institutions have collapsed to a point that these countries are close to being deemed “failed states”. While Africa is not at such a point where there is an inherent failure of the economic, social and political fabric, the issues are growing. Furthermore, the presence of instability gives Russia the conditions in which it can strengthen ties with African leaders while posing short-term and heavy-handed solutions to deep and complex systemic problems. While the immediate sense of physical and political security the Kremlin can offer may be attractive to some African leaders, especially those overwhelmed by competing threats today, it is likely that the same will only be able to deliver limited reassurances.

Energy Investment and Shell Companies

African nations recognise their own continent’s own resource and financial potential. The AU’s Agenda 2063 for economic, political, and social unity entered a pivotal phase last year. On 1 January 2021, trading began under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which brings together signatory states with the aim of creating a single market to eliminate tariffs on 90 per cent of goods and ultimately to unlock a potential combined gross domestic product of \$3.4 trillion. ²⁴

China and Russia are already embedded in Africa’s markets and the AfCFTA could serve as an additional means to extend the economic influence both nations have in the region. Double taxation agreements (DTAs) with African nations, for example, greatly boost Sino-African trade and drive China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) deeper into the region’s developing markets. Prior to the pandemic, Russia’s trade

turnover with Africa had grown 17 per cent to \$20 billion between 2018 and 2019,²⁵ with the Kremlin's strategic rollout of DTAs partially responsible for this increased activity. But DTAs and trade agreements such as the AfCFTA are not going to be the only vehicles facilitating commercial investment and foreign ownership in Africa. Russia, in particular, has also been upping its stake in Africa's growing energy industries via its proxy vessels and the influencing of governments from within.

Where the general process for oil and gas, and other natural resource entities, would be to obtain a licence from governments whether for investment and/or exploration purposes, this global standard of tendering is being undermined by Russia's increasingly aggressive approach in this sector. Examples of energy and natural resources deals between Russia and Africa are outlined below:

- **Central African Republic:** A few months after Moscow provided munitions to the country in 2018, Russia's Lobaye Invest received a licence from the CAR government to search for and extract gold and diamond in the country. Lobaye Invest was founded through M Invest and is a subsidiary of M-Finance, established by Wagner's founder Prigozhin.
- **Sudan:** It is alleged that Wagner provided PMCs support to Omar al-Bashir's regime through Russia's shell company, Meroe Gold, based in Sudan, but also through M Invest. Wagner also guarded the gold mines of these companies in Sudan.²⁶ The US administration included M Invest on its sanction list in July 2020.
- **Mozambique:** Russian oil company Rosneft and Nigeria-based Oranto Petroleum signed an agreement in May 2018 to cooperate on oil and gas projects in Africa. The deal expanded Rosneft's reach into Africa, adding to the exploration licences it already held in Egypt and Mozambique.^{27, 28}
- **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):** Russian company Alrosa, which accounts for 95 per cent of Russia's diamond production,²⁹ signed an MOU with Congolese diamond-mining company Bakwanga (known as MIBA), with the intention to "exchange technologies for sustainable development of the diamond-mining industry". Approximately 80 per cent of MIBA's stock is owned by the Congolese government.³⁰ Although the negotiations have been going on for a while, the MOU is thought to be a compensatory arrangement following a toxic leak at an Alrosa-operated diamond mine in Angola, which left at least twelve people dead and which spilled into neighbouring DRC, leaving thousands sick. Following the leak, the DRC's Environment Minister Eve Bazaiba said the country would be seeking compensation from Alrosa but did not specify how much.³¹

Russia's biggest state-owned companies are identifying Africa as a key economic hub. The world's largest diamond-mining company, Alrosa, is focusing on expanding its operations in Angola and Zimbabwe. Alrosa's president is the son of Putin's aide and Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergey Ivanov, who also holds a seat on Russia's Security Council. Similarly, another of Putin's associates, Igor Sechin, is the owner of Rosneft, which is also expanding operations in the region by obtaining or seeking licences in Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria and South Sudan. Rosneft also signed a deal in 2017 with Libyan National

Oil Corporation, significantly enhancing Russia's footprint in the country and its ability to support the LNA, which is fighting against the government of national accord, a UN-backed coalition consisting of predominantly Western governments.

Russian nuclear-power company Rosatom is also eyeing Africa as a primary market, with at least 14 MOUs signed with African governments to pursue nuclear and non-nuclear cooperation, extending to sectors such as medicine, agriculture and hydropower.⁵⁴ Rosatom comes with a reputation of overpromising and failing to deliver, with some claims suggesting it is more a public-relations vehicle for the Kremlin to market its "support packages" across Africa. In South Africa – which has been one of Russia's strongest allies in the region over the past ten years – a deal worth up to \$76 billion that was signed between Rosatom and the country's government prompted civil society, environmentalists and legal experts to question its nature. While South Africa had previously been pushing for better sources of renewable energy, the deal instead focused on nuclear power and so had triggered allegations of corruption on the part of former President Jacob Zuma. Parliamentary challenges eventually halted the deal in April 2017.³² In March 2022, however, Zuma asserted his support for Putin, calling him a "man of peace" and stating that "countries like Russia and China, thanks to their strong political and economic independence, have managed to defend their territories from these western bullies and must be applauded."³³

Russia in Africa: Soft Power

While the Kremlin views the forging of strong relations with African leaders as geopolitical sustenance, Russia is actively engaging in a campaign of indoctrination within African societies, much like it does on home soil. Although Russia is not well known for its soft-power activities, this reputation downplays the country's interest in improving its public perceptions abroad. Russia's soft-power involvement in Africa, which works both in parallel to and underpins its security and resources interests, has accelerated in recent years to infiltrate communications. Between 100 and 200 Russian "spin doctors" have been sent to Africa with the aim of influencing political marketing and social-media discourse.³⁴ The pandemic proved to be a particular opportunity for Putin to amplify the Russian brand overseas. Russia donated more than 300 million doses of Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine doses direct to the AU in a bid to advance its influence.³⁵

Almost 90 per cent of Africa was colonised by 1914. Despite foreign influences fading in the years following independence some 50 years later, French, English and Portuguese cultures still influence the attitudes and fabric of some African societies. But globalisation and competition for economic advantage are becoming the key factors shaping modern-day Africa. There are now more than 1 million Chinese speakers in the region, a sign of how strong the Sino-led programmes of economic assertiveness have been on the part of the Chinese Communist Party in Africa. Similarly, the soft-power measures of the Kremlin have been designed to craft an impression of Russian dependability as Africa diverts resources and political focus away from its usual allies in the West. While Russian influence is growing via commercial contracts and PMC deployment, the Kremlin is ensuring its influence is not simply a short-term measure but instead a means of embedding new generations of Russian-admiring Africans who will serve its interests in the decades to come.

Russia's experience in Libya will in no doubt have highlighted to Putin the drawbacks of having a soft-power deficit. In this case, Russia's military operations severely harmed its image, with the heavy civilian toll suffered in Libya as a result of Wagner's use of landmines and alleged chemical weapons causing damage to its reputation among the Libyan masses and political class. While the dynamics through which Putin exerts Russian influence within the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa are quite different to that felt in Libya since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, the pattern is much the same: to gain traction and leverage by assisting isolated political leaders. As Russia becomes persona non grata on the international stage following the invasion of Ukraine, it will likely need to counter this status by drawing both on Soviet-era tactics and 21st-century Russian disinformation campaigns to exert the soft power that can rebalance the consequences of its more destructive hard-power measures.

Education Programmes

During the Soviet era, it is estimated that between 50,000 and 250,000 Africans were taught in or by the Soviet Union.³⁶ Many enrolled at the Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow, which was established in memory of the former independence leader in Congo, Patrice Lumumba. Those educated in Soviet Russia went on to influence key sectors, such as medicine and industry, back on home soil in Africa. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian education among Africans declined significantly but these efforts have been renewed by Putin who seeks to influence the minds of Africa's younger generations. As of 2019, at least 17,000 African students were enrolled in Russian universities. State-owned companies operating in Africa are also becoming vessels for Kremlin soft-power projects; Rosatom, for instance, funds science, technology, engineering and mathematics-education programmes as well as scholarships for Africans to study in Russia.

As part of its efforts to double the number of African students in the coming years, Russia is offering scholarships directly too. Angola, for instance, plans to send 300 master's level students to Russia annually. Moreover, Russian soft-power influence is growing in the opposite direction with the Central African Republic announcing last year that learning Russian will become compulsory for university students. With the language taught there in schools since 2019, this example provides another way in which Russia is seeking to scale up its soft power on the continent to a degree last seen during the Soviet era.³⁷

Russian Media in the Central African Republic

To glorify the involvement of Russian security instructors in the Central African Republic, a propaganda feature called *Touriste* was released there as a joint CAR-Russia production. Financed by Wagner, the film characterises a Russia that is meant to be seen as strong and dependable on the continent while glossing over allegations of human-rights abuses carried out by the PMC's forces. Elsewhere in the country, Wagner has sponsored everything from beauty pageants to educational materials for children that promote Russia's involvement in Africa.³⁸ Russia is also working to assert its preferred narrative through conventional media sources, including pro-Russian television channels such as the Cameroon-based Afrique Media led by promoter Justin B Tagouh. He is also behind the 2020 launch of a pan-African radio project that was financed by Russia.³⁹ Meanwhile Russian media exports, such as RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik, are expanding their reach on the continent including in Eritrea.⁴⁰

Russia Connections with African Activists and Influencers

There are allegations of pro-Russian hackers in Africa working to de-legitimise the West, with a particular focus on France. Adopting an anti-colonial narrative, Russia is working to supplant the West as a more attractive alternative, using in-country influencers that it pays in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Niger. In Nigeria, anti-Putin tweets from high-profile influencers were recently met with a barrage of pro-Putin responses, with many immediately removed, indicating the likelihood that they were Russian bots working on behalf of the Kremlin.

Russian soft-power influence was also in full swing during the Covid-19 pandemic, including through the dissemination of WhatsApp messages that linked to fake news supporting the efficacy of Russian-made vaccines while claiming that US-developed vaccines harmed immune systems. Many were traced to Nigerian phone numbers, with recipients based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁴¹ Such tactics are part of a larger strategy under which Russia is outsourcing its African disinformation and propaganda campaigns to local residents on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Telegram, therefore making them more credible and harder to track.

Wagner's Internet Research Agency in Africa

In May 2021, a disinformation network in Sudan was identified and subsequently removed by Facebook. The content portrayed Russia as a so-called friend of Sudan, with pages and profiles including positive stories that covered the benefits of a Kremlin-backed base in Port Sudan. It also displayed photos of aid sent by Wagner's founder Prigozhin, which was packaged with emblems of the Russian flag inside a heart, and Arabic text that read "From Russia with Love" and "courtesy of Yevgeny Prigozhin".⁴² The Facebook content was traced to Prigozhin's IRA. A total of 440,000 individual user accounts were attributed to the Facebook pages while most of the pro-Russia content was found to be administered from within Sudan rather than Russia, highlighting the domestic networks established by Wagner in Africa and the reach of the IRA.⁴³

In April 2020, CNN reported that Russia was outsourcing a social-media trolling operation targeting American social-media users from Ghana and Nigeria. Russian-funded trolls were paid to fan the flames of racial division in the United States on Twitter and Facebook, and pose as American accounts. The latest findings suggest that the IRA operation, once believed to be based in St Petersburg, has expanded to use Africa as a platform from which to influence civil-society discourse within and beyond Africa to divide and manipulate users.⁴⁸

The Implications of Growing Russian Influence

Putin and the Kremlin are working to shape African sentiment in two ways: in favour of Russia and against Western governments. Pro-Russia movements are building, and generations of youth are being exposed to methods of Russian training and education. Putin is also creating and reinforcing chasms in the relations and attitudes that Africans, including leaders, hold towards Western powers. As he put it in 2018: “We see how an array of Western countries are resorting to pressure, intimidation and blackmail of sovereign African governments.” Similarly, in February, in the midst of the war in Ukraine, Russia sought to remind South Africa about its role in fighting apartheid. Russia’s Foreign Ministry asserted: “For the next few decades, our country actively supported the South African people’s national liberation struggle ... Let’s underline that for a long time, the USSR remained the only major state that fundamentally refused contacts with the criminal [apartheid] regime.”

Currying favour with African nations works in the best interests of the Russian Federation and President Putin. Through energy and commercial investments, the Kremlin is establishing a vital source of funds and security. Russia’s PMCs, including Wagner, provide a covert way to advance business relations on the continent, and they offer an additional layer of security to regimes struggling to contain conflict and terrorism themselves. They ensure that long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships are forged with African states. With Africa at the core of this Russian strategy, the opportunity remains for Russia to deepen its ties with another nation – China – which also considers the continent insurance for the future. Additionally, Russian applications of cyber-warfare and political technologies are helping to smooth the path to government for African leaders, at times irrespective of political traction or legitimacy. With social-media campaigns, indoctrination strategies at the national and regional levels, and education programmes ensuring the next generation of Africans are versed in the Russian way, the Kremlin is creating a favourable long-term environment for Russia in Africa.

The UN Vote on Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine

If there is a long game for Putin in Africa, it is already proving beneficial. This has been demonstrated by the 2 March vote on the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. While the vote proved a notable rebuke to Putin from a continent that has long sought to protect its non-alignment posture since the legacy of the Cold War, it did reveal ideological faultlines within the African Union as well as the implications of Putin’s increasing patronage of some African nations.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, four African nations, namely Gabon, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, have explicitly come out against the actions of Putin. This stance has been bolstered by a statement

issued by the African Union on 24 February 2022, calling on Russia and “any other regional or international actor to imperatively respect international law, territorial integrity and [the] national sovereignty of Ukraine”.⁴⁴ During the UN vote of early March, in which 28 African nations voted in favour of the resolution, other countries from the continent chose to abstain or did not vote at all. While the vote was supported by 141 countries in total, 17 of the 35 countries that abstained were African.⁴⁵ This has been in keeping with a longer trend that included Russia relying on African countries to support it during a 2014 UN General Assembly resolution that was critical of Russia’s annexation of Crimea: 29 African countries voted against or abstained on this occasion while six did not participate.⁴⁶

While many African leaders and authority figures refrained from public condemnation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, several nations did publicly come out in support of Ukraine. Ghana’s representative to the UN Security Council said that his country stands with Ukraine, labelling the Russian invasion an “unprovoked” attack, while Nigeria’s Foreign Affairs Minister Geoffrey Onyeama said that Nigeria will impose sanctions on Russia and comply with any UN resolution. Five days before Russia’s invasion, Kenya’s UN envoy Martin Kimani claimed multilateralism was “on its deathbed” in the wake of Putin’s decision to employ military force over diplomatic engagement in Ukraine. Using Africa’s colonial history to warn Russia against its invasion of Ukraine, Kimani stated: “Rather than form nations that looked ever backward into history with a dangerous nostalgia, we chose to look forward to a greatness none of our many nations and peoples had ever known”. Similarly, Senegal’s President Macky Sall, who is also the AU’s chairman, pressed Putin to “seek a lasting ceasefire” in Ukraine during a call with his Russian counterpart on 24 February.

African nations who did not vote or abstained would have done so for a range of complex reasons. Most obviously, the leaders of Mali, the Central African Republic and Sudan depend entirely on Russia’s mercenary and political support to retain their power. For others who abstained or did not vote – including Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe – their ties to Russia have been growing through patronage, from the supply of Russian arms to the “regime-support packages” provided by the Kremlin. Finally, others are driven by strong non-alignment values or the desire to maintain neutrality, with Morocco, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa likely among this category. While those in the latter have been appalled by Putin’s actions, they intend to maintain their ties with Russia since, from their perspective, those links will not interfere with their commitment to peace and security.

The African nations that have chosen to condemn the invasion of Ukraine will also be motivated by a range of complex reasons but many are leading African democracies and democratising forces, including Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone and Zambia. While not uniform in their motivations or their approach to the UN vote, they do all share higher rankings in Freedom House’s Freedom in the World survey compared to those nations that

abstained or did not vote. Indeed, many from this list of countries have also taken the lead in condemning the rise of coups d'état sweeping across the continent. ⁴⁷

Beyond the evolving geopolitical impact, Africans are also being directly impacted by the Russia-Ukraine war in the immediate term. Nearly a quarter of Ukraine's international students are African, with Moroccans, Egyptians and Nigerians heavily represented. Africans fleeing the conflict have faced racial discrimination at the border, prompting a call from the African Union to "...show the same empathy and support to all people fleeing war notwithstanding their racial identity". Given existing food-scarcity challenges in Africa and pandemic-related costs, the war's disruption of major agricultural-supply flows could have dramatic consequences. Russia and Ukraine together account for 34 per cent of the world's wheat supply and Ukraine is a major exporter of other staples, such as sunflower oil and potatoes. Egypt alone depends on Ukraine for 70 per cent of its wheat and additional shortages could exacerbate existing tensions caused by food shortages. ⁴⁸ Protests have already erupted in Morocco over such food and fuel shortages. ⁴⁹ There is a silver lining, however, for African energy exporters since European countries are urgently seeking new sources of energy, a demand that could be partially met by the continent, which is home to some of the world's largest gas reserves.

Over the long term, however, Russia's actions in Ukraine could be detrimental to Africa's long-term economic stability. Both Russia and Ukraine are leading economies in the same agricultural markets that African nations depend on. Together they account for at least a quarter of wheat exports as well as 58 per cent of global sunflower-oil exports. Speaking of the impact of the continuing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Wandile Sihlobo, the chief economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa, said: "In the short term, between now and three months, the conflict will affect food supply primarily from a pricing perspective ... if the war stretches, there will be millions of Africans that will be in hunger".

Many of Africa's largest economies, including Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, are equally major exporters to Russian agricultural markets. South Africa, for example, sends 7 per cent of its citrus and 14 per cent of the country's apples and pears to Russia. Sihlobo went on to reiterate: "The challenge with all of these [African] countries is that with all of the sanctions that are placed on Russia by the US and European countries, it influences the financial services sector". While logistics are not immediately affected during the early stages of war, it is predicted that Africa will be negatively impacted as the conflict is likely to disrupt the payment system to all exporting countries to Russia. ⁵⁰

Sanctions are also exposing frailties in other segments of African economies. Startups, for example, have been notified of suspensions to their accounts, with many unable to access funds because their businesses have been flagged for "suspicious behaviour". Some international banks have claimed that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted a sudden review of accounts in "high-risk" jurisdictions globally, and African startups, which may struggle to submit sufficient "Know Your Client" details, are

often at the receiving end of forcible shutdowns as a result of insufficient due diligence. In Nigeria, at least 100 startup companies have been affected by this sudden review triggered by Russia's war in Ukraine.

While Russia's 21 richest individuals lost an estimated \$39 billion in the first day of the invasion,⁵¹ Russian businesses operating in Africa are also losing out. Lukoil – which has established operations in Senegal and Ghana – and its Chairman Vagit Alekperov have already lost \$14 billion this year; for Alekperov, this is thought to be up to 60 per cent of his net worth. This came after the company's share price fell by up to 80 per cent on the London Stock Exchange.⁵²

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions

There are several reasons for the West and reforming African leaders to be concerned, despite the complexity and range of perspectives shaping the long-term presence of Russia on the African continent.

- 1. Russia has gained a reputation in Africa for its use of unofficial, asymmetric and extra-legal tools.** Such tools include private military contractors (PMCs), disinformation technology and the embedding of Kremlin strategists. These methods of influence are relatively low-cost, and avoid any need to sustain traditional diplomatic, economic and security partnerships with African nations while also affording the Kremlin plausible deniability. It is a win-win scenario for Russia but there are already ample warning signs that such tactics are having destructive social and political impacts while violating international law.
- 2. Russia pursues narrow strategic objectives in Africa that hinder the continent's long-term stability and progress.** While US, European and China policy in the region relies on the building of strong, stable, secure and prosperous nations, Russia's policy suits insecurity and weak governance, despite its rhetoric. Russia's core strategic goals in Africa can be narrowed down to gaining influence, expanding its geostrategic presence to confront the West, establishing a source of natural resources and advancing a post-liberal international order. Instability gives Russia the conditions from which to strengthen its ties with African leaders in the guise of posing short-term and heavy-handed solutions to deep and complex systemic problems. While the immediate sense of physical and political security the Kremlin can offer may be attractive to some African leaders who today are overwhelmed by competing threats, it is likely it will deliver only limited and immediate reassurances. As seen in Syria and Venezuela – where the Kremlin-backed interventions to export its own authoritarian and kleptocratic governance model have simply led to dependency on Russia's "regime-support packages", this approach in Africa could lead to greater insecurities, deeply embedded corruption and proliferating debt in the long term. Despite polling in African nations over the past decade that has shown strong preferences for democracy and a majority rejection of authoritarian rule, it is the latter that will advance under Putin's strategy for Africa. ⁵³
- 3. Expanding Russian influence in Africa also threatens the stability of Europe.** The ongoing instability in Africa feeds into an ever-growing market for arms, which could prove beneficial to Russia in navigating the West's sanctions. Angola, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan are the largest recipients of Russian-arms exports on the continent, but the amount of African countries purchasing arms from the Kremlin has been growing over the past two decades. Russia has also asserted its influence in two major conflict zones on the continent: Libya and the Sahel. When

combined with Russia's access to Middle East ports, including Syria's Tartus port, Russia's unchecked influence in Libya and its growing presence in Sudan gives it a stronger position from which to disrupt NATO maritime movements during times of crisis. By securing port access in Africa along the Red Sea through Port Sudan, and with prospects of securing access to the Port of Tobruk in Libya, Russia would be positioned to disrupt naval and maritime passage along the central and eastern Mediterranean, and establish coastal airfields that would make global transit of Russian aircraft – including anti-submarine aircraft – possible. With greater influence in Libya and the Sahel, Russia additionally gains access to two key African migration and human-trafficking routes. This puts Russia in a stronger position to provoke humanitarian and political crises for Europe during times of hostility.

4. **Challenging Russia in Africa is essentially a battle of worldviews.** Russia is pursuing Putin's vision of a post-liberal international world order in Africa, a strategy veiled by old-world, anti-colonial rhetoric and disingenuous sympathy for African agency. This includes undermining the rules-based international system and principles of democratic reform in favour of arms for resources and unaccountable leadership. Russia's rules of engagement with African leadership are designed to challenge the virtues of democracy: efficacy, equitability, transparency and inclusivity. Russia has gained a receptive audience among Africa's leadership because it exploits genuine fears of insecurity. For some of the African political elite, democratisation and reform have become synonymous with instability and unrest. More needs to be done to rebuild confidence in liberal democracy and demonstrate how, to quote the US administration today, "defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law and treating every person with dignity" can help secure a prosperous future for African nations.

As the West is confronted with the realities of Russia's aggression in Europe, and confrontation remains an inevitability for the foreseeable future, Africa should be at the forefront of the West's wider strategic focus. The West should show its full commitment to African leaders now as the continent seeks dependable partners that can help it reach its potential and fulfil its needs.

Recommendations: Governance, Civil Society and Economies

The African Union's Agenda 2063 – marking 100 years since the establishment of the AU – is a vision of a unified Africa able to achieve its collective economic, social and political potential through a "sustainable and efficient" programme of working together. For this dream to be realised, suitable support from the international community is needed. The primary goal for Western leaders and their partners on the continent should be to serve as a stabilising counterweight to adversary forces, which must now include Russia.

In so doing, Western governments should resist the impulse to counter Russian influence through similar tactics. This will not serve African reformists because it will only intensify instability on the ground. Neither will it be in the interests of Western governments whose security and economic interests in

Africa are advanced through long-term partnerships with stable, democratic governments. Instead, Western leaders should work consistently to uphold the values that set Western liberal democracies apart from Russia. This means:

Incentivising legitimacy: Simply penalising those leaders who manipulate democratic processes is too reactive and may serve to reinforce growing negative perceptions of traditional Western actors on the continent. To rebalance the harms caused by Russia's influence, African leaders and international partners that are working to advance a rules-based order need to take decisive action. At the most basic level, the West and other international democratic actors should make an assertive effort to forge deeper diplomatic, economic and security partnerships with those countries in which leaders have come to and remain in power through legitimate means. This includes investing in democratic institutions – and avoiding the bypassing of due process in order to undercut Russia. Additionally, those who have been legitimately elected should not have to choose between international partners and it is reasonable that leaders will want multiple partners. Instead, emphasis should be on creating and securing a shared vision of rules-based stability for progress on the continent, with deepening partnerships to put this into practice.

Empowering Africa's civil society: Russian policy in the region is transactional and focuses entirely on securing the interests of the serving political elite. The West should work to strengthen African civil-society actors so they can better hold their leaders to account and actively contribute to the economic, social and political-reform agendas of their countries. This includes empowering citizen volunteers to identify and call out fake-news spread from Russian disinformation campaigns. Likewise, when African populations are protesting against rigged elections, limited democracy and corruption, international powers need to back them up diplomatically.

Accelerating African economic-transformation and industrialisation policies: For a long period, the economies of many African economies have struggled to grow in such a way that empowers the vast majority of the local population. As a result, most global extreme poverty is concentrated in Africa, a phenomenon on the rise since the pandemic. Africa needs to create around 15 million jobs per year to cater to its young, increasingly well-educated youth. By 2034, Africa will account for every one in two babies born globally, underlining the potential of the continent as a future driver of global growth and progress.

However, it is essential that the continent industrialises and transforms its economies from a model predominantly rooted in the extraction of natural resources to one based on local-value addition, small- and medium-sized enterprise growth, innovation, technology distribution and increased economic complexity. African nations need genuine partners who can support these local-industrialisation strategies so that sectors such as agri-processing, manufacturing and tradable services (including tech-based sectors) can thrive.

Russia's "extraction-and-arms" interventions do not meet the aspirations of the African people, and the West has the capital, capability and expertise to invest at scale in inclusive-growth industries. The West should therefore launch a sizeable, permanent and long-term package to accelerate African industrialisation tied to the African Continental Free Trade Area. This should include investment into productive sectors and enabling infrastructure, and improved support to African governments to enable them to roll out an industrial policy anchored to public-private collaboration and joint-problem solving. This approach should be implemented not only as a response to China's Belt and Road or to Russia's policies, but also to realise the immense opportunities and fortify the centrality of a global rules-based order. Germany's "Marshall Plan for Africa", which marked a shift from aid to investment, the EU's Global Gateway Strategy, which pledged €150 billion to Africa between 2021 and 2027, and the United States' International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which doubled lending capacity to \$60 billion, are all examples of recent adjustments that have been made to rebalance competition in light of Chinese and Russian economic assertiveness overseas.

Recommendations: Security

There also now needs to be a cohesive strategy between Western governments and Africa's reforming leaders to find alternatives to Russian mercenaries in the face of growing security threats on the continent. This means:

Enhancing and supporting a strong and responsive African security architecture. Russia's "influence-for-arms" strategy is aimed at securing leaders rather than states. The West should incentivise the strengthening of regional institutions, such as the African Union, by supporting collective security capabilities. Rather than relying on international peacekeeping, Africa's leadership should be able to debate and dispatch stabilising forces to secure fragile states and hold fellow leaders to account. The West should mitigate genuine security concerns by providing diplomatic, technical and financial support to Africa's leadership. In the absence of robust stabilising support, African leaders will be more inclined to sign deals with Russia and its Wagner Group, which are designed to entrench Russian influence and compromise hard-earned sovereignty. There is no clearer demonstration of this than in the Sahel region today.

Helping African partners to fight and disrupt Russia's disinformation campaigns. Russian disinformation nurtures political and ethnic divides, and fans distrust and instability. Lessons need to be applied from the Western Balkan countries that have developed effective counter-Russian disinformation methods. Western governments can build the capacity of African government and private-sector initiatives dedicated to disrupting sophisticated disinformation campaigns. To this end, Western governments should help to facilitate coordinated efforts between private technology companies, social-media platforms and government agencies. They should invest in young African talent

who are already demonstrating innovation in digital technologies for the public good. Much precedence and infrastructure has already been built to counter terrorist propaganda and these capabilities can be equally applied in Africa.

Also available in French translation:

Overview

Conclusion and Recommendations

Charts created with Highcharts unless otherwise credited.

Footnotes

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