

# Soft Power Diplomacy of Russia's Encroachment in Africa: Stakes and Implications

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.7011089>

Received: 04 November 2022; Accepted: 09 November 2023; Published: 12 December 2023

## ABSTRACT

Within recent years, Russia has arguably expanded her influence in Africa more than any other external international actor. These engagements extend from deepening ties in North Africa, expanding its reach in the Central African Republic, the Sahel, and rekindling Cold War ties in parts of Africa. This article gears at examining the strategies taken by Russia in the implantation of her roots in Africa and the geostrategic implications. From analyses made from research carried out, it was discovered that the soft power hands used by Russia in her diplomatic moves in Africa have been through irregular (and frequently extralegal) means in expanding her grounds. This has been through deployment of mercenaries, disinformation, election interference, support for coups, and arms for resources deals, among others within different parts of Africa. This low-cost, high influence strategy seeks to advance a very different world order than the rules-based, democratic political systems to which most Africans aspire from influence from the West. It was also discovered that the outcomes of Russia's interventions in Africa, therefore, had far reaching implications for governance norms and security on the African continent.

**Key Words:** Soft Power, Encroachment and Diplomacy

## INTRODUCTION

Recent development discourses indicate that Russia has increasingly pursued its economic and political interests on the African continent with the use of both official and unofficial means which has destabilize the countries in question. International actors should recognize and effectively counter Russia's policies by supporting strong institutions, as well as small and medium businesses and independent media. Russia's rising footprint in Africa is part of its global ambitions, seeking more influence in international politics. On a larger scale, Russia's foreign policy agenda competes directly with other global players like the United States, the European Union and China. In Africa, this competition for influence and access to natural resources plays out in the types of economic and security engagements it participates in. the thesis galvanized in this write-up is the means through which Russia has taken in gaining her grounds in Africa. It also takes a vivid look on the implication of the unconventional strategic moves of Russia within the African continent.

### Russia in Africa: The Long Tail of Influence

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1990, Russia has maintained a minimal presence in Africa. This was also weakened by the collapse of the Soviet Union but within the past ten years there have been a considerable uptick in Russian activities including through the embedding of official Kremlin representatives in state-run institutions, and deployment of Private Military Contractors (PMCs).<sup>[1]</sup> With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Africa is fast becoming crucial to Putin's efforts to dilute the influence of the

United States and its international alliances.[2] As a result of the bipolarisation of the World that came as a 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.[3] While not all Africans were willing to embrace Soviet socialism, the Soviet Union was still able to sign co-operation treaties with more than thirty (37) African countries and has been providing range of economic assistance for agricultural development, health, peacekeeping initiatives and infrastructural development.[4]

Russia also played a role in the Angola war of 1975-1992, the Mozambique civil war of 1977-1992, and the Ogaden conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia that started in 1977 and ended in 1978, where she provided military assistance.[5] To showcase of the triumph of Russia over the West in Africa as from 1960s, Soviets sponsored large-scale cultural and educational programmes across Africa, which extended to the training of elites in Marxist-Leninist doctrine.[6] Approximately 250,000 Africans were known to have studied in the Soviet Union before the collapse of the USSR 1991. This clearly illustrates how Russia was able to mount her influence in cultural and academic domain in Africa.[7] Amongst some of the African students were Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, who went in for 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.[8] Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Moscow became a symbol of the ideology of a vanguards communist state as African nations fought to secure independence from colonial powers and assert a direction of their own choosing.[9] 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.[10]"

Normalizing 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 Russians cooperation following western sanctions. As part of his African charm offensive in 2019, Putin ordered Russia to cancel \$20 000.000.000 in African debts owed to the former Soviet Union.[11] This was a gesture that would symbolize what had been evolving into a mutually beneficial relationship between Putin's Russia and Africa over the duration of more than ten years.

Within the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Africa represents the most important region in terms of neutrality and economic back bone of Russia. Not only is the revival of this Soviet past symbolically important but the continent was also home to substantial natural resources, including minerals such as manganese, bauxite and chromium, which were in shortage and essential to Russian industry. In Putin's Russia, Africa was 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.[12]

### **Russia's Arm Support Packages to Africa**

Within the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Russia has gained a reputation among African leaders as a military partner against Islamist terrorism and against those fighting the influence of the West in their countries. Having emerged from the Syrian battlefields as seemingly victorious, Russia has managed to carve actors operating on the continent today. As its reputation has grown, so too has its offering of supports 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.[13]

In several circumstances, Russia has made gains by stepping into vacuums the West has left behind in Africa 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.[\[14\]](#) 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 % of Egypt's major weaponry imports.[\[15\]](#)

Russia's weaponry dealings 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 Private Military Contractors, subsidiary shell companies and official government representatives. These "Regime Support Packages" were Russia's and Putin's way of shaping the next twenty years of Africa's diplomatic affairs in their favour.[\[16\]](#) The war in Ukraine, which could spill over into Europe, could last as long as ten years, according to some commentators. Russia's military and economic resources were undoubtedly going 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.[\[17\]](#)

### **Russians Private Military Contractors (PMCs) in Africa**

In international relations, Russia leads the way on global PMCs, with their increasing deployment overseas mostly in Africa and part of her settle lite states in Middle East.[\[18\]](#) From 1990s, governments around the world began outsourcing security and anti-rebel services to Private Military Contractors, including South Africa's Executive Outcomes. Unlike mercenaries, who are often seen as hired guns, Private Military Contractors operate as a more risk-averse option for ensuring the security of territory, and protecting lucrative commercial relationships and contracts between Russia and the country in concern.[\[19\]](#) But they have equally been known in training weaker state militaries, engaged in covert operations including assassinations of political figures, and suppressing civilian movements and political dissidents.[\[20\]](#) Since the ratification of UN Mercenary Convention in 2002[\[21\]](#) prohibiting governments from recruiting, training, employing and financing so-called mercenaries, the use of Private Military Contractors has proliferated. Mercenary factions were often unregistered and mainly comprised of disaffected criminals or former rebels, while Private Military Contractors operated as registered businesses, were well-structured, partially transparent, and consisted of trained former soldiers and special services officers. This meant Russia sponsored military actions in Africa without officially declaring them.[\[22\]](#)

Russia's increasing deployment of Private Military Contractors in Africa 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 recognized that home grown 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 has increasingly taken the form of Private Military Contractors deployment, in particular Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group, in place of official Kremlin troops.[\[23\]](#)

From research made, it has been proven that Russia has deployed Private Military Contractors in at least twenty one (21) countries since 2014, with the majority on the African continent.[\[24\]](#) Expansion was on an

upward trajectory until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. Between 2014 and 2018, Russia's

Private Military Contractors activities in Africa have tripled.[\[25\]](#) 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.[\[26\]](#) 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 counter-terrorism operations in the country.[\[27\]](#) 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 Barchans. From critical look, it was believed the French withdrawal came in response to the presence of Wagner, which earned an estimated \$10.8 000.000 per month, even though only 1,000 Wagner troops were currently deployed in Mali which made up less than half the 2,400 French troops that had been active in the country.[\[28\]](#) This represents another case of how conflicts have driven African leaders to seek short-term supports from nations beyond the sphere of their natural allies.

### **Expansion of Wagner Group's in Libya**

It has been proven beyond limit that Wagner's troops have been supporting the Libyan National Army since 2019 and its military offensives to overthrow the UN-recognized Government of National Accord in Libya. General Khalifa Haftar, who leads the Libyan National Army, was seen as Russia's most important partner in Libya.[\[29\]](#) Despite a plethora of state-backed militaries and militias fighting in the country, Wagner became one of the most decisive actors, operating largely unhindered by the restrictions of international law. It was estimated that 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.[\[30\]](#) 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.[\[31\]](#)

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 benefited 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.[\[32\]](#) As conflict accelerates at an unprecedented rate, African governments are struggling to combat insurgencies in addition to their other urgent priorities. This compelled some leaders to call for external security support in the form of Private Military Contractors and mercenaries. The increasing rate of Private Military Contractors' activities in some of the most fragile parts of Africa coincided with reduction in the appetite for formal foreign military assistance.[\[33\]](#)

### **Russia's Conventional Military Agreements with Africans**

With Russia steadily increasing its economic and political stakes in Africa, future security and Private Military Contractors contracts may fall in the favour of the Kremlin. Russia being already Africa's leading arms supplier, with at least 15 countries receiving more than a third of all arms from the Kremlin.[\[34\]](#) 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 were estimated to value \$12.2 000.000.000. Additionally, Russia has signed at least 16 contracts for nuclear cooperation agreements with African states.[\[35\]](#) The map below summarizes Russia military co-operation ties in Africa.

## Russia's Military Soft Diplomacy in Africa



Source: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/04/russia-nuclear-africa>, retrieved on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2022.

While Russia takes a competitive advantage from being able to draw on historic Soviet-era military ties to Africa, there have been also an entrenching Russian influence in African institutions, including the African Union (AU) and regional bodies such as West Africa's economic community ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African State (ECCAS) just to name a few.<sup>[36]</sup> Russia has prioritized her relations with the AU and involvement with union-led security operations, including: sending soldiers and providing training. This was meant to counter-balance American and European influence as well as raise Russia's status as a diplomatic broker in Africa with the current era.<sup>[37]</sup> In 2019, for instance, Russia brokered a peace agreement between the government of the Central African Republic and rebel armed groups.<sup>[38]</sup> The AU has facilitated Russia's participation as an observer at several African peace talks in recent years, and this was 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.<sup>[39]</sup>

### Russia's Military Accords with Nigeria

By 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari met Putin during the Russian-Africa Summit and Putin 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.[\[40\]](#)

Nigeria's Ambassador to Russia emphasized that President Buhari felt Russia could help to counter Boko Haram's destabilizing 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."[\[41\]](#) Despite this growing influence in military cooperation between Nigeria and Russia 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 recognize that Russia's Wagner operations extend beyond narrow security objectives and are adapting to opportunities that secure more covert influence for the country.[\[42\]](#)

### **Russia's Diplomatic Moves and Governance Strategies in Africa**

It has been discovered that 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.[\[43\]](#) 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.[\[44\]](#)

It was as a result of this that more than 100.00 Wagner troops have been deployed in the Central African Republic (CAR) since Moscow dispatched military equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and heavy armored vehicles, to the capital Bangui in 2018.[\[45\]](#) 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.[\[46\]](#) 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 Private Military Contractors, 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".[\[47\]](#)

### **Russian Interference in Electoral Issues in Africa**

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. 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.[\[48\]](#) 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 Organization and criticism of French and US politics."[\[49\]](#) It is believed that Russia accelerated 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.

### **Russia's Electoral Interference in Madagascar**

Prigozhin who was the founder of Wagner was alleged to have sponsored an interference campaign in Madagascar's 2018 elections. Prior to the Russian government officially and openly deepening its defense relations with Madagascar, Wagner was deployed to the country to protect Russian political strategists and geologists.[\[50\]](#) Initially supporting the incumbent President Rajaonarimampianina, Wagner then went on to offer assistance to as many as six other political candidates.[\[51\]](#) Close to the end of the election campaign, the political strategists protected by Wagner began supporting eventual winner Andry Rajoelina. It was 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.[\[52\]](#)

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.[\[53\]](#) 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.[\[54\]](#)

Many factors have led 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.[\[55\]](#) 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.[\[56\]](#)

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".[\[57\]](#) 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.

### **RUSSIA IN ENERGY SECTOR**

Firstly, after providing help to Central African Republic in 2018, Russia's Lobaye received a license from the government of Central African Republic to search for and extract gold and diamond in the country.[\[58\]](#) Lobaye Invest was founded through M-Invest and was a subsidiary of M-Finance, established by Wagner's founder Prigozhin.[\[59\]](#) Secondly, in Sudan it is alleged that Wagner provided Private Military Contractors support to Omar al-Bashir's regime through Russia's shell company. Wagner also guarded the gold mines of

these companies in Sudan.[\[60\]](#) In addition 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 licenses it already had in Egypt and Mozambique.[\[61\]](#)

More so, in Democratic Republic of the Congo Russian Company Alrosa, accounting for 95 % of Russia's diamond production, signed a pact with Congolese diamond-mining company Bakwanga[\[62\]](#), with the intention to "exchange technologies for sustainable development of the diamond-mining industry". Approximately 80% of MIBA's stock was owned by the Congolese government.[\[63\]](#) Although the negotiations took compensatory arrangement initiative following a toxic leak at an Alrosa- operated diamond mine in Angola, which left at least twelve people dead and which spilled into neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (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.[\[64\]](#)

Most Russian's state companies identified Africa as a key economic potential. The world's largest diamond-mining company, Alrosa, focused on expanding its operations in Angola and Zimbabwe. The General Manager of Alrosa company is the son of Putin's aide and Kremlin Chief of Staff Sergey Ivanov, who also holds a seat on Russia's Security Council.[\[65\]](#) 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 licenses 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.[\[66\]](#)

### **Soft Power of Russia in Africa**

While the Kremlin views the forging of strong relations with African leaders as geo-political sustenance, Russia was actively engaged in a campaign of indoctrination within African societies, much like it does on home soil. Although Russia was not well known for its soft-power activities, this reputation downplayed 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 one hundred and two hundred Russian "Spin Doctors", have been sent to Africa with the aim of influencing political marketing and social-media discourse.[\[67\]](#) The COVID-19 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.[\[68\]](#)

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 Private Military Contractors 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.[\[69\]](#) 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.



## Soft Power in Educational Programmes

Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow was established in memory of Patrice Lumumba. From research carried out, over 50,000 to 250,00 African Students have studied in the University. 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.

Currently, Russia is offering fully funded scholarships to many African students. For instance, in Angola over 300 master's level students just within 21<sup>st</sup> century were annually sent to Russia.[\[70\]](#) 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.[\[71\]](#)

## The implication of Russian Media in the Central African Republic

In order to show case 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 characterizes 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 Private Military Contractor'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.[\[72\]](#) Russia also worked 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.[\[73\]](#) He is also behind the 2020 launch of a pan-African Radio Project that was financed by Russia.[\[74\]](#) Meanwhile Russian media exports, such as Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, are expanding their reach on the continent including in Eritrea.[\[75\]](#)

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICAN ACTIVISTS AND INFLUENCERS

From close look taken based on comparative studies, there have been allegations of pro-Russian hackers in Africa working to de-legitimize 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, influencers that she pays in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Niger.[\[76\]](#) 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.[\[77\]](#)

In addition, 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.[\[78\]](#) Many were traced to Nigerian phone numbers, with recipients based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[\[79\]](#) Such tactics were part of a larger strategy under which Russia was outsourcing in her African disinformation and propaganda campaigns to local residents on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Telegram, therefore making them more credible and harder to track.

## Implications of Russian Growing Influence in Africa

Russia has been working to shape African sentiment in two ways, firstly in favour of Russia and secondly,

against Western governments. Pro-Russia movements were built, and generations of youth were being exposed to methods of Russian training and education. Putin was also created and reinforced chasms in the relations and attitudes that Africans, including leaders, held towards Western powers. As he put it in 2018: “We see how arrays of Western countries are resorting to pressure, intimidation and blackmail of sovereign African governments.”[\[80\]](#) 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.”[\[81\]](#)

### **United Nations Vote on Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine**

After a year-long siege of Tripoli in western Libya, warlord Khalifa Haftar and his forces beat a hasty retreat in mid-2020 from their collapsing front lines to territory controlled by his proxy coalition of tribal groups and militias in central and Eastern Libya. Along with them were an estimated 1,200 Russian mercenaries with the Wagner Group. They were in Libya as part of a Russian gambit to carve out a zone of influence in this geographically strategic territory linking Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Russia has been supporting Haftar’s forces with snipers, anti-aircraft systems, and hundreds of flights delivering military logistics since 2019.[\[82\]](#) Despite the military setback, and subsequent ceasefire and formation of a fragile Government of National Unity, Russia is on track to achieve its key objectives including gaining revenues from oil fields in Eastern Libya, naval access to deep-water ports in the Eastern Mediterranean, and establishing itself as a power-broker in a Region bordering NATO’s Southern flank.[\[83\]](#)

Libya provided a vignette of how Russia pursues its strategic goals in Africa: expanding geo-political influence through low cost ventures that hold economic windfalls for Moscow and President Vladimir Putin’s close associates.[\[84\]](#) In this way, Russia’s strategy in Africa has been both opportunistic and calculating. It has been opportunistic in the sense that it is willing to take risks and quickly deploy mercenary forces to crisis contexts when the opening presents itself, similar to what Moscow did in Syria. It is calculating in that it aims to expand Russia’s power projection including over strategic chokeholds in the Eastern Mediterranean and Suez Canal that could affect NATO force deployments in times of crisis.

It is further calculating in that it sees Africa as a way to balance Western influence through what amounts to asymmetric tactics. Moscow’s forays into Africa extend the geostrategic playing field. Russia has similarly recognized the polarizing effect that large inflows of Syrian refugees have had on European politics. Keeping a hand on the spigot regulating refugee flows from Africa, therefore, provides Russia further leverage over Europe. Russia’s interest in Africa, triggered by Moscow’s isolation following its annexation of Crimea and ventures into eastern Ukraine, also provides an opportunity to advance Putin’s vision of a post-liberal international world order.[\[85\]](#) This takes the form of challenging democratic norms and the principles of a rules-based international system. Rather than offering an alternative model, as does Chinese authoritarianism, the Russian strategy appears to be aimed at smearing the perception that democracy offers a more effective, equitable, transparent, or inclusive form of governance. This worldview, in which all political systems hold moral and governance equivalence, plays to the advantage of Moscow’s elite-focused, transactional, and unregulated model.

Africa, with its weak governments, abundant natural resources, colonial legacies, proximity to Europe, and fifty-four votes at the United Nations General Assembly, provides Russia an easy and attractive theatre where it can advance its interests with limited financial or political costs. Russia’s approach to expanding its influence in Africa stands in stark contrast to the Biden Administration’s emphasis on democracy as a foundational platform for international security, cooperation on transnational challenges, and development.[\[86\]](#) Defending freedom, supporting a free press, upholding universal rights, and respecting the rule of law

are all central elements of the administration's strategy to contain and reverse advancing authoritarianism globally.

### **Russia's Strategies of Goal Achievement in Africa**

The rate at which Russia trades with Africa is small compared to other countries like China and Korea. She does not offer compelling ideological, social, or cultural resonance for many in Africa. Despite this, Russia has gained outsized influence in Africa in recent years by playing the cards it has well. Where it has realized most influence in Libya, Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Mali. She for the past years have employed a combination of mercenary and disinformation interventions in support of isolated leaders or proxies which have been spears of a more conventional set of engagements that aimed at fostering a positive Russian image as a means of advancing its elite-based diplomacy.[\[87\]](#)

### **The Wagner Group**

Russia has been deploying Mercenaries from the Wagner Group[\[88\]](#) for the past years have been deployed in Libya, CAR, Sudan, and Mozambique. In each case, following the Syrian model, the Russians supported a beleaguered leader facing a security challenge in a geographically strategic country with mineral or hydrocarbon assets. In addition to its Libya intervention, Russia struck a deal with the elected President of CAR, Faustin-Archange Touadéra in 2018, to help stave off a threat from the Islamist Seleka militia groups.[\[89\]](#) An estimated 400 Wagner troops were deployed to northern CAR. A Russian Valery Zakharov became Touadéra national security advisor and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Also, Charles-Armel Doubane was subsequently sacked for voicing disapproval of undue Russian influence. Reports suggested Wagner simultaneously negotiated a revenue-sharing deal with the rebels while gaining control of lucrative gold and diamond mines in the North.[\[90\]](#) Wagner was also involved in repelling a separate rebel offensive on Bangui following flawed elections in December 2020 that kept Touadéra in power with active Russian backing.

Concerning the case of Sudan, Russia was a backer of longtime dictator Omer al-Bashir. This included the deployment of Wagner forces to support the Sudanese military while gaining access to gold mines in the west of the country.[\[91\]](#) When Bashir was faced with nation-wide protests in 2019, the Wagner Group reportedly advised Bashir to crack down harshly on the protesters. Russia appears to have maintained influence with the military leaders who ultimately toppled Bashir; including maintaining previously negotiated mining agreements.[\[92\]](#) There were also reports of Wagner having deployed to assist the Mozambican government respond to the rapidly expanding militant Islamist group threat in the North. Non-coincidentally, the Region was home to a multi-billion-dollar gem mining operation and liquefied national gas reserves.

### **Disinformation to Undermine Democratic values**

After the August Military takeover in Mali, jubilant supporters of the military's action came onto the streets in Bamako to celebrate. Curiously, some of those celebrants were waving Russian flags. Many others were holding identical pre-printed posters celebrating Malian-Russian cooperation, photos of Vladimir Putin, and messages thanking Russia for its support. The scene was remarkable in that Russia does not have strong bilateral, cultural, or historical ties with Mali. While seemingly incongruent, the pro-Russian sentiments were consistent with a line of messaging that began in Bamako a year earlier following the signing of a fuzzy security cooperation agreement between Mali and Russia.[\[93\]](#) Social media sites blamed the former colonial power, France, for Mali's militant Islamist insurgency in the North and called for France to pull out the 5,000 troops it had deployed to help combat the jihadists. These themes were subsequently picked up in protests organized by opposition groups in the months leading to the coup.[\[94\]](#)

While the details behind the sudden pro-Russian messaging in Mali remain to be fully understood, the experience parallels other Russian-sponsored disinformation campaigns in Africa. These began in 2018 with clunky efforts to influence the Presidential election in Madagascar. These were followed by anti-French messaging on social media in CAR subsequent to the signing of a security cooperation agreement with Russia. The well-documented instance of Russian disinformation in Africa is in Libya. Starting in January 2019, criticisms of the West, the United Nations, and the UN-backed Government of National Accord became common on Libyan social media networks. The same pages and users praised Russia's role as a stabilizing actor. The messaging in Libya also seemed aimed at obscuring the truth and sowing confusion for both domestic and international audiences. While mainstream news outlets drew attention to the allegations of systematic human rights violations by Haftar's forces including the targeting of hospitals and migration centers, the pro-Russian social media platforms contended that all sides were responsible for human rights abuses. Investigative analysis by Stanford's Internet Observatory working with Facebook and Twitter was able to identify dozens of social media accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers that presented themselves as authentic domestic voices, but were actually based outside of Libya.[\[95\]](#) As a result of this investigative work, these fake accounts and pages were eventually shut down.

Russia's disinformation efforts have begun "franchising" their model by creating or sponsoring African hosts for the pro-Russian and anti-West messaging. This approach gives the disinformation campaign more cultural context while making it more difficult for ordinary readers to identify inauthentic accounts. Disinformation operations linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin have now been seen in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.[\[96\]](#) In one model, Russian operatives posing as a fictional news organization, Peace Data were able to contract unsuspecting journalists in foreign countries to submit content on polarizing topic.[\[97\]](#) With so many African journalists relying on small paid jobs, this approach highly effected recruitment method. In another instance, a Russian-sponsored Ghanaian troll factory was used to foment social polarization.[\[98\]](#)

### **Russia's Attitude of Votes at United Nations**

The relations between Russia's influence campaigns in Africa and Moscow's broader anti-democratic ideological agenda is seen in the courting of African members of the United Nations Security Council. Africa has three rotating seats (the "A3") on the fifteen-member Security Council.[\[99\]](#) By wooing these members, Russia has been able to marshal these votes in support of Russian interests. In January 2019, when the Security Council considered a request from opposition figures in the Democratic Republic of Congo to conduct an investigation into the widely viewed fraudulent presidential election, the A3[\[100\]](#) sided with Russia and blocked the initiative. Similarly, in April 2019, the A3 supported Russian efforts to block a statement condemning the coup in Sudan invoking the principle of non-intervention. In that same month, the A3 voted with Russia to block a UK-sponsored resolution calling for a ceasefire in Libya and condemning the actions of Libyan warlord, Khalifa Haftar. Paradoxically, Russia has thus been able to use African votes at the Security Council to undermine African agency and democratic voices of reform on the continent.[\[101\]](#)

### **Conventional and Security Operations**

Russia also maintains a series of conventional security, economic, and cultural initiatives in Africa. The most high-profile of these was the Russia-Africa Summit of October 2019 where Vladimir Putin hosted forty-three African heads of state in Sochi. At the Summit, Putin promised debt forgiveness and to double trade with Africa over the next five years. in the domain of security operation, Russia has signed roughly two dozen security cooperation agreements in Africa in recent years, a significant expansion from the limited security ties it maintained on the continent over the previous two decades. One tangible aspect of these agreements has been an attempt by Russia to secure port and base access to support naval operations

in the Red Sea and Mediterranean.

### **Economic and Social Engagements**

Russia's within the 21<sup>st</sup> century invested more than 20.000.000.000 Dollars in trade in Africa. This was heavily imbalanced toward Russian exports of arms and grain to Africa. Mineral, diamond, and oil contracts were typically negotiated by Russian parastatals such as *Rosneft* and *Lukoil*.[\[102\]](#) This was a sector in which Russia brought technical expertise and financing. The details surrounding these contracts, however, were nearly always shrouded in secrecy, making it difficult to assess their true value or the contributions they may bring to African treasuries. Russia has natural resource deals with roughly twenty African countries. Russia was the leading exporter of arms to Africa controlling forty-nine percent of the overall arms market in Africa.[\[103\]](#) Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, and Zambia were the leading customers of Russian arms in Africa. Russian arms were seen as affordable, easy to maintain, and reliable. African customers were increasingly willing to purchase more sophisticated weaponry from Russia, including fighter aircraft, helicopters, tanks, and air defense systems.[\[104\]](#) It is not uncommon for Russia to leverage its arms as part of an "arms-for-resources" deal. Russia has also attempted to negotiate nuclear power deals on the continent. In 2020, Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation, *Rosa tom*, provided a 25.000.000.000 Dollars loan to begin construction of Egypt's first nuclear power plant. The hefty price tag and limited technical capacity would seemingly make this a less viable industry for Africa. Nonetheless, Russia was at varying stages of negotiation with seventeen African countries and has preliminary nuclear project deals in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Zambia.[\[105\]](#)

### **RUSSIA'S SOFT POWER IN EDUCATION**

Another strategy of normalization or implication of Russia's soft was in the domain of education. Russia maintains a series of educational and cultural exchanges with Africa. An estimated 15,000 Africans study at Russian universities mainly from Nigeria, Angola, Morocco, Namibia, and Tunisia.[\[106\]](#) This represents a steady growth that Moscow says will continue. Given the limited opportunities for tertiary education for many Africans, these scholarships are highly welcomed by the recipients. They also facilitate loyal and long-term ties to these individuals, who often go on to senior roles in government.[\[107\]](#)

### **Diplomatic Implications of Russia's Soft Power Moves: Africa and the West**

Since Russia's involvement is less, the havoc it can create is marginal. That is, Russia may be a nuisance but not a priority concern. That assessment, however, overlooks the level of instability that can be created in Africa with a relatively small level of resources. Given Africa's generally underfunded governments, weak states, and lax oversight capacity, Russia's pursuit of low-cost narrow objectives coopting political leaders and accessing resources can have profound impacts on the politics, sovereignty, and stability of the continent. Leaders in CAR, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Congo, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe were all seen as being in some way compromised by Moscow. Disinformation campaigns in other African countries were adding further strains to already fragile political systems.

Contrary, for example where Wagner has deployed troops to quell instability, it was likely to persist. Being a profit-seeking entity, Wagner has a strong incentive to see a manageable level of instability persisted, thereby justifying Wagner's perpetuation.[\[108\]](#) Since these arrangements often also entail Russian access to resources, arms sales, and heightened political leverage, Russian interests in Africa, cynically, were advanced by ongoing instability. African leaders who have embraced Russia's "Mercenary Diplomacy" have effectively ceded a degree of African sovereignty to Russia, much as has happened in Syria. As in other instances where vassal states were created, this arrangement was likely to endure for a long time as these African leaders and countries will find it difficult to extricate themselves from their

reliance on Moscow.[\[109\]](#)

Geo-strategically, if Russia becomes established as a key power broker in Libya with unfettered naval and air base access in the Eastern Mediterranean it is going to be in a stronger position to threaten Europe's Southern borders and disrupt NATO maritime movements in times of crisis. Sirte is only 700 miles from Rome. Russia already took her claim for untapped oil and gas reserves off the Libyan coast. Russia's interest in securing port access in the Red Sea expanded its capacity to be a disruptive force for naval and maritime passage along Africa's East Coast, as well. Russian influence in Libya and the Sahel provides Russia access to key nodes of African migration and human trafficking routes. Russia thus has the ability to provoke humanitarian and political crises for Europe while challenging spheres of historically European [\[110\]](#) influence in Africa.

Another strategic implication of Russian engagement in Africa was the weakening of democracy. This was partly an instrumental outcome of Russia's "*customarisng model*" of co-opting African leaders through opaque agreements disadvantageous to African countries.[\[111\]](#) In the process, popular participation and African agency more generally, were sidelined. This was reinforced by an ideological message from Russian representatives and disinformation that presidential term limits needed not be respected, truth was irrelevant, and democracy affords no advantages over authoritarianism. Deterioration in democratic norms had direct implications for African security and development. Nearly all of Africa's conflicts and forcibly displaced populations originate in authoritarian governments.[\[112\]](#) Since the continent's democracies have realized substantially higher levels of stability, sustained growth, rule of law, control of corruption, and living conditions, Russian efforts to roll back democratic governance norms will have far-reaching second and third-order effects.

## PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

In Russia's strategy in Africa, is highly unofficial "Mercenary Diplomacy" strategy that is of most concern. This approach, which draws on Russia's "comparative advantages" in Africa, the willingness to deploy mercenaries, disinformation, arms sales, and natural resource extraction through opaque compacts which is inherently destabilizing for the continent.[\[113\]](#) In short, African stability is not a priority for Russia. As it is largely pursued on a patron-client basis with compromised African leaders, moreover, Russia's unofficial strategy runs counter to the interests of the vast majority of African citizens.

The United States' security and economic interests in Africa are advanced by long-term partnerships with stable, democratic governments committed to the rule of law. It is these contexts that are most conducive to domestic security, private sector investments that generate jobs and profits, and cooperation against threats to the international order. There is, accordingly, a high level of overlap between African and American interests. This point was noted by President Biden in his inaugural foreign policy address,[\[114\]](#) democratic values: defending freedom, championing opportunity, upholding universal rights, respecting the rule of law, and treating every person with dignity."

With broad diplomatic, foreign direct investment (\$45 billion), trade (\$65 billion), development (\$10 billion), security (\$600 million), and cultural ties with Africa, U.S. engagement on the continent is an order of magnitude greater than that of Russia. Despite these extensive initiatives, there is a common perception that the United States has not been playing its historical leadership role in recent years, creating a power vacuum on the continent that Russia has tried to fill. A first priority for U.S. engagement in Africa, therefore, is to clearly articulate the shared interests and vision that the United States holds with Africa. In so doing, the United States can underscore that U.S. policy in Africa encompasses far more than simply countering Russia.

A second priority is for the U.S. to weigh-in on Russia's geo-strategic positioning on the continent,

particularly in Libya where the establishment of a Russian foothold poses a long-term threat to NATO. This does not mean that the U.S. should deploy forces to what is already a highly complex theatre. However, it should commit to supporting United Nations-backed stabilization efforts, while further isolating the influence of rebel warlord, Khalifa. Most pertinently, the United States is needed to help unify the efforts of European and NATO allies in this context. The lack of a cohesive European response has enabled Russia to expand its leverage in this strategic region.

A third priority is for the United States, working with African and international partners, to be more diplomatically active in conflict mitigation efforts. Countries such as CAR, Mali, Mozambique, and Sudan face genuine security challenges. If these countries perceive their security threats as spinning out of control and that they lack other options, they may be inclined to strike a deal with Moscow to send Wagner. These deals almost inevitably compromise the sovereignty of the African host and are difficult to terminate. It is in the interest of the United States and African stability to find options other than Russian mercenaries. To be clear, the United State should not be drawn directly into these conflicts. By working with host nations and regional bodies, though, U.S. diplomatic, technical, and financial support can serve as a stabilizing counterweight to Russian destabilization.

The U.S. must not solely play the role of firefighter to Russia's arson in Africa. The United States should help by exposing and confronting Russian misbehavior. Yet, it is African governmental, media, civil society, and business leaders that must ultimately defend African interests against external spoilers. Similarly, the U.S. must work more closely with African members of the UN Security Council so that shared interests of security and development are advanced at these international fora.

A fourth priority is to help Africa fight Russian disinformation campaigns, which aim to foment political and ethnic polarization, distrust, and instability. Best practices from the Baltics, which have developed sophisticated Counter-Russian disinformation methods, have relied on coordinated efforts between commercial technology companies, news services, social media platforms, and government agencies. Some of these efforts tap networks of citizen volunteers to seek out and counter fake news.

Africa is starting from a much lower institutional capacity to combat these influences. Yet, young Africans have demonstrated great talent and innovation in adapting new digital technologies for the public good. U.S. support can strengthen the capacity of African governmental and non-governmental fact-checking and digital detective firms to identify fake Russian-sponsored accounts, trolls, and disinformation campaigns. In Africa, with ruling parties often the direct beneficiaries of Russian disinformation campaigns, such efforts may need to be organized through regional hubs rather than on a country-by-country basis. A focal point for U.S. efforts to counter disinformation is the interagency Global Engagement Center based in the State Department. Established in 2016, the Center has mostly focused on countering terrorist messaging. These efforts need to be further developed to respond to Russian disinformation globally, especially in Africa.

The United States also needs stronger outreach to social media firms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to elevate their efforts in exposing and taking down disinformation campaigns using their platforms in Africa. Facebook, in particular, has de-emphasized mitigation efforts in countries outside North America and Europe. The destabilizing effects of Russian disinformation in Africa, however, are amplified given the high starting levels of fragility.

The upshot is that if there is to be a change in Russian support for disinformation campaigns in Africa, Russia must bear greater reputational and financial costs. Responses to Russian disinformation, thus far, have not nearly been proportionate to the damages exacted by Russian actions, which include election meddling, subverting democracy, propping up illegitimate leaders, and inflaming tensions in already fragile countries. All of these destabilizing actions have real and long-lasting political, economic, and human costs.

U.S. Treasury sanctions on Yevgeny Prigozhin for his destabilizing activities in Sudan and CAR are useful and should be expanded. While such sanctions may not immediately curtail Prigozhin and his allies, they serve an important purpose of signaling the criminal nature of Prigozhin's activities on the continent to African governments and media. Not only does this raise awareness but it demonstrates to African interlocutors that there are potentially crippling costs tied to these engagements. To reinforce this point, U.S. sanctions should also extend to the networks of Russian banks and natural resource parastatals as well as African beneficiaries who are enabling this malignant behavior. Denying these firms access to international financial markets will increase the tangible costs to Russia and create stronger incentives to change course.

In recent years, the United States has passed legislation that creates a stronger legal platform from which to pursue legal and financial remedies for destabilizing activity sponsored by Russia or other international actors. The Global Magnitsky Act allows the executive branch to impose visa bans and freeze the assets on individuals anywhere in the world responsible for committing human rights violations or acts of significant corruption. The passing of the European Magnitsky Act established in December 2020 broadens the means to apply such penalties in a coordinated manner in defense of democracy and human rights.

The Global Fragility Act calls for all parts of the U.S. government to coordinate strategies to prevent violence and extremism and to focus foreign assistance on averting conflict in fragile countries.<sup>[115]</sup> The Act includes provisions for punitive actions to be taken against political actors that drive instability. These tools as well as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the Countering American Adversaries through Sanctions Act and laws pertaining to transnational criminal organizations provide the United States with a menu of legal means of increasing penalties on Russia for its destabilizing activity in Africa. In this way, the United States can help Africa become less of a permissive environment for Russia and other external actors seeking to exploit Africa's vulnerabilities at the expense of African stability, sovereignty, and democracy. This is in both African and U.S. interests.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that within the recent decades, the influence of Russia in most African countries have been felt in the political, economic and geo-strategy. The thesis in this article was what were strategies taken by Russia in the implantation of her roots in Africa and the geostrategic implications. Based on the material explored, it is clear that a wide range of strategies were used by Russia in strengthening her firm hood in most African countries. Indirect approaches were through her proxies which ranged from deployment of mercenaries, disinformation, election interference, support for coups, and arms for resources deals, among others and diplomatic moves in Mali, Sudan, Central African Republic just to name a few. Her moves through these different tentacles had profound implication within the African continent as a whole. Most of the countries witnessed frequent military take overs, targeted assassinations, flight of natural resources just to name a few which have affected African tremendously within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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