



Russia Looks to Expand Its Influence in Africa

OE Watch Commentary: Russian influence in Africa is not a new phenomenon. Back in the days of the Cold War the Soviet Union had deep ties to the continent, providing arms, training, and ideological support to African independence movements. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia partly turned away from its African relationships. Now, as the accompanying article from the *Institute for Security Studies* relates, Russia is renewing old ties and forging new ones on the continent.

According to the accompanying article, Russia's involvement in the continent is often most welcome. From an African perspective, having yet another player in the areas of trade and politics helps to level the playing field. Additionally, Russia does not place the preconditions on trade such as respecting human rights that the West frequently insists upon. The result has been significant growth in trade between Russia and Africa, with one report stating it grew 185 percent between 2005 and 2015.

Some of that trade can be ascribed to arms sales. Indeed, Russia has a long history of being a major supplier of weapons to Africa. One need only look at the flag of Mozambique, emboldened with the image of an AK-47, to know how important and longstanding Russian-supplied weapons are to the continent. That history continues as Russian weapons are often the ones that appear in countries with arms embargoes.

Russian military influence is not limited to arms sales. Large numbers of Russian soldiers serve as peacekeepers and trainers in Africa. Additionally, numerous African countries attend Russian-hosted military exercises, either as participants or observers, with those countries that are major trading partners with Russia more likely to attend. Nor should it be overlooked that many of Russia's investments in Africa are related to energy – oil, gas, and nuclear – through its state-owned firms that often have military ties.

Russia's Africa connections have not been without controversy. The country has been accused of exacerbating conflicts through its ignoring of arms embargoes and undermining governance through lack of transparency in economic deals. Still, despite these problems and competition with the bigger Chinese player, Russia is gradually increasing its influence in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Through energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa.”



Vladimir Putin and the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé.

Source: Kremlin/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Alpha_Condé_\(2017-09-28\)_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_and_Alpha_Condé_(2017-09-28)_1.jpg), CC By 4.0.

Source: Ronak Gopaldas, “Russia and Africa Meet Again,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 13 March 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/russia-and-africa-meet-again>

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Indeed, as Stephanie Wolters of the Institute for Security Studies notes, ‘Russia’s position hasn’t really changed much in the past few years – i.e. bargaining for African support in multilateral institutions in return for UN Security Council vetoes.’

However, through strategic energy diplomacy, military might and soft power, Russia will gradually increase its influence in Africa on an incremental, rather than an exponential, level.

Russia’s push to level the playing field and create a more equitable power balance in international relations is likely to appeal to Africa’s leaders.

When a River Runs Through It: Riverine Operations in Contemporary Conflict

By LTC (R) Lester Grau, LTC (R) Leroy Denniston

Waterways and population centers will be factors in future war. Frequently they will be collocated and will become operational key terrain. Riverine operations will be a part of future military actions and will be an Army problem. The best way to prepare for a future problem is through study, training, and equipment design and development.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/195094>