



Russia Makes Strategic Inroads into Africa

OE Watch Commentary: While a great deal of attention has been devoted to China's increasing influence in Africa, generally underreported has also been Russia's inroads into the continent. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African news site *The Conversation* points out, back in the days of the Soviet Union, there was strong diplomatic and/or military support from Moscow for several African countries. When the Soviet Union collapsed, so did that support. However, more than 25 years later, and in line with Vladimir Putin's aspirations of great-power status for his country, Russia is reestablishing itself in Africa.

To an extent, Russia is following the same playbook China uses in its dealings with Africa. Like China, Russian investments and trade on the continent come with none of the prescriptions or conditions institutions such as the IMF and World Bank frequently impose. Also, like China, Russia is investing heavily in Africa's energy and minerals sectors.



Vladimir Putin met with President of the Central African Republic Faustin Archange Touadera.
Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57534>, CC 4.0.

Trade and investment between Russia and Africa grew by 185 percent from 2005 to 2015. On the energy side, Russia has been investing heavily in Africa's oil, gas, and nuclear power sectors, with Russian companies such as Gazprom, Lukoil, Rostec, and Rosatom being quite active on the continent. These companies, the article points out, are mostly state-run, and their investments are often linked to both Russian military and diplomatic interests.

As for Russia's interest in African minerals, it is especially evident in several countries, including Zimbabwe, where it is developing that country's large deposits of platinum group metals, and in Angola, where it mines diamonds. Then there is the resource rich Central African Republic (CAR), where in 2017, Russian military instructors and what has been described as "170 civilian advisors," were sent to train that country's army and presidential guard. The next year, three Russian journalists in CAR, investigating what other articles have referred to as a private military company with Kremlin links, were found murdered in a remote area.

Besides minerals and energy, Russia has another revenue stream from Africa as a major supplier of weapons to several nations. These military ties, as the article notes, are frequently linked to bilateral military agreements. Russia has also been active in providing troops for UN peacekeeping operations. However, while Russia is anxious to play a key role in Africa's future, its own economy has experienced only modest growth, limiting its ability to do so. This is in contrast to China, whose strong economy has allowed it to make massive investments in Africa. Still, while Russia's domestic economy may limit what it can do in Africa, it has, under Putin, returned to a prominent role there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Russia is gradually increasing its influence in Africa through strategic investment in energy and minerals. It's also using military muscle and soft power.”

Source: Theo Neethling, “How Russia is growing its strategic influence in Africa,” *The Conversation*, 6 February 2019. <https://theconversation.com/how-russia-is-growing-its-strategic-influence-in-africa-110930>

Much has been made about China's role and profile in Africa and the factors underlying its activities on the continent. Less debated is the spread and depth of Russia's contemporary presence and profile in Africa.

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For African leaders, the key word is agency and the question is how to play the renewed Russian attention to their countries' advantage, and not to fall victim to the contemporary “geopolitical chess” game played by the major powers on the continent.