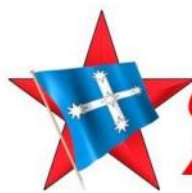




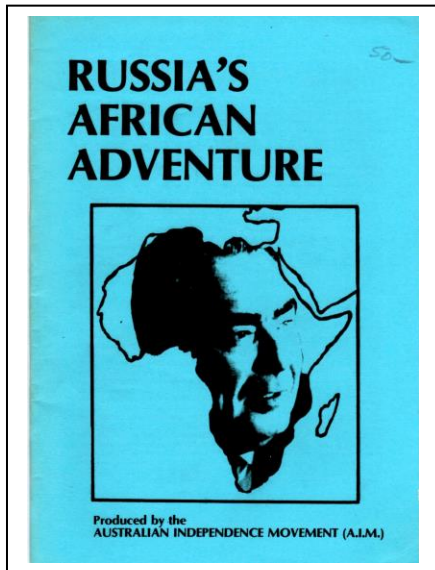
Russia's New African Adventure



***Communist Party of
Australia (Marxist-Leninist)***

For an Independent and Socialist Australia

Russia's New African Adventure



Back in the 1982, when the Soviet Union still existed, the Australian Independence Movement published *Russia's African Adventure*, partly to expose the role of Soviet social-imperialism on that continent, and partly to use the example of its expansion there to warn Australians against its involvement here.

Khrushchev had set the Soviet Union on a course of departure from the socialist road. It still spoke of socialism, but it had restored capitalism and practiced imperialism.

A decade later, the Soviet Union was no more. Some on the Left were disillusioned and spoke of the “failure of socialism”. Others on the Left, ourselves included, spoke of the logical outcome of embrace of revisionism and denied that the formal dismantling of left-over institutions from the Soviet era meant anything like the “failure of socialism”.

For a further decade and more, the mighty Soviet superpower went into such terminal decline that the US began premature celebrations of its status as the only superpower.

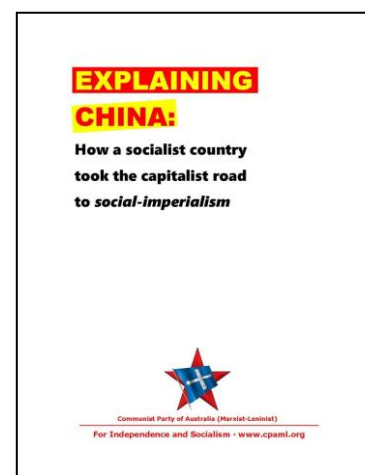
Under Yeltsin and Putin, the 1990s and the first decade of the new century saw a weakened Russian Federation deliver the last vestiges of the wealth and power created under socialism to a group of crony capitalists, referred to by many as oligarchs (from Ancient Greek ὀλίγος (oligos) 'few', and ἄρχειν (archein) 'rule'). The Russian oligarchy was the political foundation for Putin, who in turn protected and expanded their interests. The Russian oligarchs could not simply inherit all the power and influence that had accrued to Soviet social-imperialism. Much of it lapsed or was taken over and absorbed by US and other Western imperialist monopoly capitalist corporations. It took time for the post-1990s Russian oligarchs to establish a complete system of monopoly capitalism with the characteristics of imperialism as identified by Lenin.

Also on the horizon was another formerly socialist country advancing steadily on the path of restoring capitalism, without undergoing the complexities and disruption of the political collapse that saw the transition from Gorbachev to Yelstin, and through Yeltsin to Putin. China was able to systematically restore monopoly capitalism, and for reasons that we put forward in our booklet *Explaining China*, had developed by the turn of the century into a social-imperialist power that was beginning to challenge the supremacy of US imperialism as the world's single superpower.

“Russia is returning to Africa”

Ever since Putin sent his invading army into Ukraine, the world's focus on Russia's activities has quite rightly been on that conflict.

Again, there are different responses from different parts of the Left. Some have supported Putin, arguing that the so-called “special military operation” launched on February 24, 2022 was a justified



response to NATO expansion and the attacks on ethnic Russians in the Donbass region by neo-Nazis backed by Zelensky's government. Those comrades generally deny that Russia is imperialist or that its invasion of Ukraine should be condemned.

Others on the Left, ourselves included, say that Russia is imperialist and condemn its invasion of Ukraine.

But if Russia is imperialist, then its ambitions must extend beyond the seizure of parts of Ukraine.


Apologists for US imperialism say that Putin regrets the passing of the Soviet Union and wants to recreate it. Putin does not regret the passing of the Soviet Union. He is an anti-Communist. What he regrets is that Gorbachev agreed to the secession from the Soviet Union of those Soviet Republics that were part of the Soviet Union, in return for empty pledges by Reagan and other US leaders that they would not be invited to join NATO, and that NATO's borders would not be pushed eastwards. Fourteen of those republics left the USSR. Eleven of those states, together with the Russian Federation, set up the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) although two (Georgia and Ukraine) subsequently withdrew. Others, like Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan have strong ties with China. It is true that Putin would like to see a strong Russia surrounded by compliant and dependent former Soviet republics, but Russia's hold over those republics is unstable. Under Putin, Russia has fought wars with the Chechens and Georgians.


The assistance of Russia's army and airforce helped the Syrian government turn the tide against ISIS. Russia now operates two bases in Syria: the Tartus naval base and the Hmeimim air base, both leased from Syria.

But it is in Africa that Putin's ambitions are on display. Anti-imperialist sentiment in several African nations is directed at both the former colonial power, France, and the arrogant superpower, the US.

China expands its influence by offering capital to support infrastructure projects and to invest in extractive industries that local capitalists cannot finance on their own. In return, it avoids involvement in local politics, working cooperatively with the corrupt and the clean, with the democratic and demagogic.

Oppose the exploitation of Africa's people and resources by Australian capitalists!



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The imperialist bloc headed by the United States has a significant commercial and investment presence in Africa backed up by the military strength of the United States Africa Command (Africom), the website of which asserts that its mission is to “advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.”

Even Australian capitalists are seeking access to mineral resources in Africa, as we have outlined in our booklet “Expose the exploitation of Africa's people and resources by Australian capitalists!” here:

[Australian+Mining+Africa.pdf \(cpaml.org\)](http://cpaml.org) .

In this new scramble for Africa, Russian imperialism is determined to win a share of the action.

Its approach is somewhat more clumsy than that of the Chinese. It doesn't hide behind a Belt and Road cloak but seeks to extend its influence, and its access to the

continent's resources, through active support for anti-popular regimes. It prefers to work through private mercenary forces controlled by Russian oligarchs than by having to commit its state military forces.

These mercenaries offer training and at times take on opponents of the countries that enlist their support.

Valery Zakharov, a former Russian military intelligence officer now in charge of training undertaken by oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner mercenary army, said in an interview with CNN: "Russia is returning to Africa."

"We were present in many countries during the time of the Soviet Union, and Russia is coming back to the same position. We still have connections and we are trying to re-establish them," he said.

We will now take a look at some particular examples of Russia's imperialist activities across the length and breadth of Africa (see map p.39). By way of introduction, a measure of Russia's growing political and diplomatic out-maneuvering of the US imperialists across the continent was the United Nations vote on 2 March, 2022 – in which 17 of the 54 African nations voted against or abstained from condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine. For each country, we look mainly at trade, investment and military cooperation. The picture is uneven, with some countries now regarded as part of a Russian sphere of influence, whilst others are either trying to balance Western and Russian influence, or are closely aligned to the West and have little or no Russian presence. What is undeniable is the growing Russian presence in Africa. It is an imperialist presence although it will continue to struggle to reach the levels of influence of the US, China and EU countries.

By way of conclusion, we will briefly look at some examples of Russian "soft" influence.

Algeria

The visit of the Algerian Minister of Industry Ahmed Zeghdar to Moscow on June 18 2022 to participate in the activities of the 25th International Economic Forum in St Petersburg was a sign of the Algerian authorities' commitment to close cooperation with Russia in light of Western calls for a boycott of Russia after it launched the war on Ukraine.

It was reported that Algeria hopes to attract more Russian investments considering the emigration of Russian capital from its traditional investment areas in the West after recent sanctions and its search for new markets. The Algerian minister explained Algeria's "promising" prospects regarding the investment climate.

Economic ties go back some decades. Through a 2006 Memorandum of Understanding, Russia's Gazprom and Transneft helped Algeria's state-owned hydrocarbons company Sonatrach to develop its LNG output. In 2019, Algeria brought in a new energy law offering attractive contract terms to foreign investors including tax incentives. This led to MOUs with investors including the US's Exxon Mobil and Russia's Lukoil. After Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov's visit to Algiers in January 2019, the Russian Ministry of Energy also discussed the possibility of producing Lada automobiles in Algeria.

Flag of the Wagner Group by Haisollokopas is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.



Sonatrach has also been under pressure to increase its gas supplies to Europe, and Spain in particular, to make up for shortfalls in Russian gas following European Union sanctions. However, its CEO has ruled that out citing limited production capacity. Whatever the reason, the Algerian decision clearly supports Russia's desire to remain in the European energy market.

The same is true for military ties. Algeria is dependent on Russian arms imports, buying 81% of its military equipment from Russia over the last three years. During the 2010s, Russian arms exports increased by 129% percent from the previous decade. In 2022, Algeria is Russia's third largest arms client only behind India and China. Algeria has cooperated in military exercises with Russia since 2017. The two countries have conducted joint military exercises in disputed areas, such as South Ossetia in October 2021, and have agreed to perform a similar activity on the Algerian borders with Morocco in November 2022—an agreement made during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The joint anti-terrorist exercises dubbed "Desert Shield 2022" will be held in Algeria's desert for the first time.

The two countries held a four-day joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea in late October 2022. Russian warships docked in the port of Algiers to take part in the drill.

Angola

Like Mozambique, Angola is a former Portuguese colony. In its independence struggle, the eventual winner, the MPLA was backed by the Soviet Union and its ally Cuba.

Russian banks provide easy loan facilities for the purchase of Russian goods. A typical example is the Komsomol-on-Amur Sukhoi plant from the Rostec consortium. Sales of the Sukhoi aircraft are supported with loan provisions. A USD 1 billion loan to Angola for purchasing Russian helicopters and SU30 fighters was agreed in 2013.

Russia's Roskosmos has long been a partner of Angola in the space satellites industry. The first satellite, Angosat-1, was launched into orbit at the end of 2017. The export contract for Angosat-1 amounted to US\$327.6 million and was signed on 26 June 2009 between the Angolan Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology and Russia's Rosoboronexport. The company is the sole state intermediary agency for Russia's exports/imports of defence-related and dual use products, technologies and services. It is ranked among the leading operators in the international arms market. The Russian corporation Energy was appointed as the main contractor. In 2011, Vnesheconombank, Roseximbank, VTB and Gazprombank entered into a loan agreement with the Angolan Ministry of Finance, under which the African country got a credit line for US\$278.46 million for a period of 13 years. In 2015, the construction of a satellite flight control centre began in Luanda, the capital and largest city in Angola. Angola financed the construction of ground infrastructure at a cost of US\$54.3 million.

Another large Russian investor in Angola is Alrosa, a Russian group of diamond mining companies accounting for 95% of country's diamond production and 27% of the global diamond extraction. Alrosa mines diamonds in Angola, Botswana and Mozambique.

Benin

Formerly known as the Republic of Dahomey and a French colony until 1960, Benin is a small country on the West African coast. It was once a centre of the slave trade. A self-described Marxist-Leninist state called the People's Republic of Benin existed between 1975 and 1990, during which time the country under President Kerekou (1972-1991) maintained close relations with the Soviet Union. In 1991, it was replaced by the multi-party Republic of Benin.

Relations between the Russian Federation and Benin were maintained. Kerekou, in a second presidential stint between 1996 and 2006 renounced “Marxism-Leninism” (actually the revisionist variant practiced in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev) and said he had become a born-again Christian.

On June 14, 2019, a Center for the Development of Business and Cooperation with Russia was opened in the country’s capital. The Centre’s president Mr. Serge Phocas Odunlami said that he aimed to make Benin Russia's gateway to Africa. “As Russia is a country that is becoming increasingly geopolitical and economic in the world, it is good that Africa develops strategies of rapprochement and cooperation with this prosperous country,” he said.

Under its current President, businessman Patrice Talon, a cotton grower and investor with wealth valued at US\$400 million, democratic rights have been eroded and political opponents jailed. He has moved to restore relations with France and Benin was one of three African countries visited by France’s President Macron in July 2022 as the latter sought to curtail Russian influence on the continent, branding Russia as "one of the last imperial colonial powers" for its invasion of Ukraine.

Botswana

Landlocked Botswana is the world's biggest diamond producing country. The former British Protectorate of Bechuanaland has every reason to be an investment target for Russian oligarchs, but those investments have been small to date. Norilsk Nickel (or Nornickel), which mined nickel in Francistown, is a Russian company. However, the trade and economic cooperation between the two countries is dwarfed many, many times over by that between Botswana and the US, which also extends to other areas. According to UN figures, there is a substantial trade imbalance in Russia’s favour: Russia’s exports to Botswana in 2020 amounted to US\$173.8 million while Botswana’s exports to Russia only came to US\$9.31 million.

Relations soured after Botswana’s state-controlled mining company, BCL, reneged on a deal to buy into a South African venture run by London-listed, Russian-controlled Nornickel, the largest producer of nickel and platinum in the world. Nornickel tried to take Botswana to the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA) but Botswana banned to move according to its own laws.

Botswana has openly declared that it will seek to take advantage of Western sanctions on Russian diamonds to expand its place in the international market, and will seek investments from non-Russian sources to try and produce synthetic fuel from the country’s carbon deposits so as to penetrate the European market for energy. It was one of the African countries that voted in the UN to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Burkina-Faso

Burkina-Faso is another former French colony. It won its independence in 1960. Between 1982 and 1987, the country was led by the courageous revolutionary and Marxist, Thomas Sankara until he was killed in the 1987 coup led by Blaise Compaoré, who became president and ruled the country until his removal on 31 October 2014.

In 2016, Islamic jihadists associated with Al-Qaeda began launching terrorist attacks in the country’s north. Instability deepened and there have been a series of coups, with the most recent in September 2022 leading to a seizure of power by 34-year-old Capt. Ibrahim Traore.

Some 3000 of the 5000 French troops deployed to the Sahel to fight terrorism were based in Burkina-Faso, but resentment at France’s colonial past saw massive demonstrations against them

around the time of Traore's coup. During the coup, civilians and troops took to the streets with Russian flags, saying they wanted the country's security partnership with France replaced by one with Russia. The Wagner group's founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin, welcomed the coup and hailed Traore for doing "what was necessary... for the good of the people".

While there has been no decision yet to involve the Wagner Group in the security of the new regime, Burkina-Faso is strategically located next to Mali and has good deposits of the one mineral that is of political value to Putin in withstanding the effects of Western sanctions – gold. There are currently 17 industrial mining operations working in Burkina-Faso. Just one of them is currently under Russian control, but 16 of them are under Western control, and many are Canadian miners or mining companies.

US imperialism responded to Traore's power grab in November 2022 by excluding Burkina-Faso from its trade agreement with African nations. This was meant to put pressure on Traore but may result in him seeking closer trade ties with Russia.

Burundi

A landlocked former colony of Germany and Belgium and regarded as the poorest country in the world, Burundi has been devastated by years of civil war, ethnic conflict and political corruption. In 2015 President Pierre Nkurunziza defied the Constitution to stand for a third term in office, but this was opposed by the US and its bloc who cut off aid to Burundi. In response to the loss of Western aid, in 2016 Burundi's central bank signed a deal with Russia's Gazprombank to facilitate foreign investment in the African nation which currently has few foreign investors. According to Burundi's Vice-President, the agreement "is a guarantee for Russian companies which are interested in the East Africa Community through Burundi".

The Constitution was amended in 2018 to ensure that Nkurunziza could remain in power until 2034, with China and Russia vetoing condemnation of Nkurunziza's administration at the UN. "Burundians are glad to have the sincere support of Russia in the face of aggression (from the United States, France, and Belgium)," read an article on a pro-government website announcing Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2018 message of support for Nkurunziza. By the time of the 2020 elections, however, Nkurunziza was ill and declined to stand for election. The new President was Nkurunziza's hand-picked successor Evariste Ndayishimiye. The Russian PMC Patriot Group has been employed to protect officials and assets.

While Russia can hope to continue influencing Burundi's votes at the UN, and will seek investment opportunities in the country, economic relations are still at a very early stage. According to UN data, in 2020 Russia imported a mere US\$20,244 from Burundi which, in 2021 had imported US\$11.99 million from Russia.

Cameroon

Cameroon, which lies to the west of the Central African Republic, was a German colony until the end of the First World War when it was placed under joint mandates held by France and the UK.

In 2013, Cameroon's Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Russia for the delivery of Mil Mi-17 transport helicopters. This was followed by an April 2015, Russia-Cameroon military-technical cooperation agreement.

In 2016, the country's second oil refinery at Kribi, the Cameroon port at the end of the Exxon-Chevron Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline, was planned by Russian firm Rusgaz, several other oil companies operating in the country and the government of Cameroon.

In April 2022, Joseph Beti Assomo, Cameroon's defence minister, made a visit to Moscow which culminated in a new military cooperation agreement between the two countries for military cooperation, training, research, information exchange and support in fight against terrorism. The north of Cameroon has seen a continuing Boko Haram insurgency.

Cabo (Cape) Verde

This collection of ten volcanic Atlantic Ocean islands off the west coast of Africa was a Portuguese colony until 1975. Although the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) has only described Cape Verde as tiny and an insignificant business opportunity for Russia (mainly fishing and tourism), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in 2019 referred to Cape Verde as Russia's traditional partner in Africa. "We value the friendship. Cooperation is growing between the two countries. I would like bilateral trade and economic cooperation to reach the level of political contacts, which is very high," he told Cape Verde's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Communities and Defence, Luis Filipe Lopes Tavares. Lavrov went on to speak of "mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, the fuel and energy sector, tourism and agriculture."

Although tiny, Cape Verde is recognised by both the Russians and NATO as having strategic geopolitical importance.

Central African Republic

Another former French colony, the Central African Republic (CAR) has significant mineral deposits and other resources, such as uranium reserves, crude oil, gold, diamonds, cobalt, lumber, and hydropower, as well as significant quantities of arable land. Despite this it is among the ten poorest countries in the world. CAR has seen a number of coups since independence and the French have until recently been able to exercise considerable neo-colonial influence including military involvement.

In October 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held talks with CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadera. CAR reportedly needed help in fighting more than a dozen militias.

By February 2018, Moscow sent planes to CAR, while Russian "contractors" appeared on the ground to protect mining projects and provide security training. These include the Wagner Group, Patriot Group and Sewa Security Services.

Russia has moved quickly to displace the French as the main guarantors of the CAR regime's existence, using both hard and soft tactics. The streets are plastered with propaganda posters proclaiming "Russia: hand in hand with your army!" A local radio station churns out Russian ballads and language lessons. New recruits to the army are being trained in Russian, using Russian weapons.

Touadera's reliance on Wagner has created other opportunities for Wagner's founder Prigozhin. 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 diamonds in the country. Lobaye Invest was founded through M Invest and is a subsidiary of M-Finance, established by Prigozhin. Lobaye Invest had won exploration rights at seven sites to look for diamonds and gold. Lobaye Invest also funds the radio station in the Central African Republic (CAR). It also finances the training of army recruits in the CAR by some 250 Russian mercenaries, with more on the way.



(Above: Russian mercenaries in Koundili, CAR, by Florence Maiguélé CorbeauNews CC BY-SA 4.0.)

This intervention by Wagner and the Kremlin has coincided with President 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. “He pays me a salary, therefore, I work for him,” Zakharov told CNN.

A report in April 2021 indicated that Russia intended to invest \$11 billion in reconstruction projects in the CAR. Russian construction firms are interested in investing in the CAR “because we are a country in reconstruction,” Pascal Bida Koyagbé, CAR’s minister in charge of strategic investments, told Russian state media. “We are in discussions with the Russian state, with public and private banks, to have a financing advantage. We have plenty of guarantees to offer, including mining guarantees,” Koyagbé added.

The following month, Russia made the third of a series of arms shipments to CAR. Moscow had donated hundreds of weapons in 2019 and airlifted 10 BRDM-2 armored personnel vehicles as a gift in 2020. The third batch of weapons was also free of charge: assault rifles, machine guns, sniper rifles, pistols, RPGs, hand grenades and ammunition.

Although France, the US India and China account for most of CAR’s trade relations, Russia has effectively brought the country into its sphere of influence by supplying the means by which the state protects itself.

Chad

The former French colony of Chad lies directly to the south of Libya, and to the south of Chad lies the Central African Republic. Chad has been fighting ethnic rebels and Islamic terrorists linked to Al-Qaeda and ISIS for some years, relying mainly on French troops. In April 2021, its long-time authoritarian President, Idriss Déby, was killed by rebels from the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT). FACT had been based in Haftar’s eastern Libya at a facility which was also hosting Wagner contractors, and had received training from them. With French help, the Chadian government withstood the assassination, the Presidency passing to Déby’s son who immediately scrapped the constitution, dissolved the parliament and suspended elections. In February 2022, the Chadian junta accused Wagner of assisting rebels from the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR). Despite this allegation, Chad was one of nine African countries attending the Army 2022 International

Military and Technical Forum in Moscow. The others were Burundi, the Republic of Guinea, Cameroon, Mali, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and the Republic of South Africa. All were described by Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu as “friends” who disproved claims that Russia “had been isolated.”

With its deposits of gold, uranium, bauxite, titanium etc, Chad remains a prize in the struggles between Russia, France and the USA. It is currently suffering drought and grain shortages, the latter a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Cormoros

The four Cormoros islands are located in the Mozambique Channel, a stretch of ocean between the east coast of Africa and Madagascar. It was a French colony until 1975 and France retains administrative control of Mayotte, one of the four islands. In 2018 Prigozhin employees flew to Comoros via Belarus. Their objective was to test if “political technologies” might be used to inflame the row between Paris and the Comoros government over the status of Mayotte.

Following a November 2018 meeting between Sergei Lavrov and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Comoro Islands, El-Amine Souef, a memorandum of understanding was signed for Russia to train law enforcement personnel for the Comoro Islands. Lavrov also spoke of the potential for cooperation in fishing, renewable energy, the provision of fresh water and agriculture.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

This former Belgian colony has also been known as the Congo (Kinshasa) and Zaire, or just as the Congo. From 1965-1997 Zaire was ruled by pro-US dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and relations with the Soviet Union/Russian Federation were pretty much non-existent. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with the Foreign Minister of the DRC in April 2009, stating that Russia would increase cooperation with DR Congo. In 2010, thirty officers of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) were awarded scholarships to study in Russian military academies.

Russian involvement in infrastructure projects and in mining and energy advanced around 2018-19. In 2019, the African Union (AU) invited Russia to participate in the Grand Inga Dam hydro-electric project. Worth an estimated \$14 billion, the invitation to Russia followed the withdrawal of a Spanish company from the project.

In October 2019, Putin met with the leaders of both the DRC and the Republic of the Congo at the Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum, held in Sochi. On the eve of the Summit, Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov later confirmed that the DRC and Russia “are working on some large [not mentioned] joint projects in geological exploration, extraction and transportation of mineral resources” as well as “in transportation, energy and agriculture”. Following the Summit, Russian Railways (OAO RZhD) signed a memorandum of partnership with the DRC worth \$500 million on modernization and development of the local railway system (currently 4,000 kilometers, out of which only 858 kilometers are electrified). The Russians have noted that the DRC is extremely rich in coltan, also known as tantalite—an element indispensable for modern electronics. As stated by Russian sources, half of the coltan needs of the United States’ military-industrial complex is covered by imports from the DRC. It is an area in which Russia will seek involvement on a denial of access (to the resource) basis.

In early 2019, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the separatist-controlled, unrecognized but Moscow-backed Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) opened a cultural representation office in Kolwezi

(population over 418,000), located near the DRC's Musonoi mine. The area is endowed with copper, cobalt, uranium, radium, oxide ore and lime.

As the Moscow Times noted in November 2018, Russia's growing involvement in the DRC stems from the African state's vast mineral wealth.

Djibouti

Once part of French Somaliland, the tiny country is strategically located near the world's busiest shipping lanes, controlling access to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and acts as a refueling and transshipment center.

Djibouti hosts military bases belonging to Germany, Spain, Italy, France, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and Saudi Arabia, all close to each other. Russia and India both want to set up military bases there.



Chinese People's Liberation Army personnel attending the opening ceremony of China's new military base in Djibouti on August 1, 2017. — Photo by STR, AFP via Getty Images

In 2021, at a meeting between Russian and Djibouti officials, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said a number of Russian companies were showing interest in working in Djibouti and wanted to find partners there. "We consider it important to assist representatives of the business community, to establish direct contacts, especially since we have recently formed a Russian-Djibouti business club," Lavrov said.

Meanwhile, US imperialism's 2nd Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB), comprising 800 troops, was deployed to Africa in 2020 and has already conducted activities in more than 15 countries across the continent with a regular presence in 11 of them. That includes training Djiboutian forces to use American military equipment purchased through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales process. According to the US Defense News, the "Army hopes the 2nd SFAB can ultimately help integrate African partners with NATO forces". The imperialists – all of them -are indeed scrambling for advantage, influence and control.

Egypt

Like Nigeria, Egypt had been criticised by the US for human rights violations. The cut back in military aid and arms from the United States to Egypt since the military coup there in 2013 has created opportunities for Russia. Russia today accounts for 31 per cent of Egypt's major weaponry imports.

Russia's trade presence in Africa, outside of military hardware, remains insignificant compared to the US, European countries and China. Russia has little to offer in the way of consumer goods although it has exported rather large amounts of grain to Africa. With imports from Russia worth US\$5 billion for 2021 and a positive trade balance of over US\$1 billion for Q1 2022 alone, the Egyptian market is certainly a cornerstone of Russia's foreign trade.

Russian investments in Egypt amounted to \$8 billion at the end of 2020. Most of them are concentrated in the energy sector. Given the critical state of the Egyptian economy, the Nidaa Masr party and Egyptian businessmen have called for further concessions to attract Russian capitalists to invest in Egypt, especially in industry, energy and tourism.

In Egypt, the openness of the government to Russia has seen both countries jointly invest in a 1300-acre Free Trade Zone for Russian manufacturers in Port Said in Egypt that will attract investments of up to USD 7 billion. Russian bilateral trade with Egypt has subsequently boomed, and rose 37% in 2018.

Agreements at Sochi in 2019 covered a planned re-organisation of Egypt's historical economic backbone: its beleaguered rail transport sector. Russian behemoths TransMashHolding and RZHD have teamed up to provide 1300 train carriages and USD 900 million worth of tracks, respectively. Russia is also creating an industrial zone near the Suez Canal

Russia also has nuclear technology expertise and is promoting nuclear energy around the continent. In Egypt, Russia is extending a \$25 billion loan to cover 85% of the cost of the El Dabaa nuclear power plant, which its own company, Rosatom, is constructing. Rosatom is the world's biggest nuclear company by foreign orders.

Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea is a former Spanish colony that won its independence in 1968. Since the mid-1990s, Equatorial Guinea has become one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest oil producers with a high GDP and grossly unequal distribution of revenues from the oil. The US Exxon-Mobil and Chevron are two of the companies exploiting the country's oil reserves. Its Gini coefficient of 65.0 is the highest in the entire world.

In 2011, the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea signed an agreement to "stimulate the flow of capital and promote the development of mutually beneficial trade-economic and scientific-technical cooperation".

In 2019, Equatorial Guinea sought an agreement with Gazprom, Lukoil and Rosneft at the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi. In 2019 Lukoil was awarded a licence by the Equatorial Guinean government to develop the Fortuna gas field. Whilst at Sochi, State-owned Russian geological exploration company Rosgeo signed an MoU with the Equatorial Guineans to conduct geological mapping. The project went into operation in October 2020.

There are few oil-independent sectors in the local economy. One is timber which, according to the OECD, is controlled by Russian and Chinese investors.

Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport has a contract with Equatorial Guinea.

Eritrea

The former Italian colony was administered by the British from 1942-1952. It then entered a federal administration with Ethiopia. In 1962 Ethiopia annexed Eritrea. This was followed by a war for independence led by the Eritrean Liberation Front, which lasted until victory in 1991. Further conflict with Ethiopia occurred from 1998-2000. Hostilities remained until a peace agreement in 2018. In November 2020, Eritrea supported Ethiopia in a war against the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia's Tigray Province.

The Ethiopian regime during its fight with Eritrea was heavily backed by Soviet social-imperialism. This has not stopped Eritrea from becoming a political ally of the Russian Federation and a country keen to welcome Russian capital.

In 2018, Sergei Lavrov called for the lifting of sanctions imposed by the UN in 2009 against Eritrea because of alleged support of al-Shabab in Somalia and a border dispute with Djibouti. Lavrov revealed that Russia's truck maker KAMAZ was already working in Eritrea, supplying its products to that country, as was Gazprombank Global Resources, which was building cooperation in the banking sector.

At the same time, Lavrov announced Russian intentions to establish a port and logistics hub in Eritrea, ostensibly related to export from the country of potash. Eritrea has an extensive Red Sea coastline and its ports are likely to be important for military purpose. Petroleum exports from Russia account for the largest share (24%) of Suez southbound petroleum traffic. Russia is likely to build a naval presence in Eritrea's waters to safeguard its shipments and to further advance its exports. Significantly, Lavrov added "We undoubtedly would like to thank you (Eritrea) for the close coordination of our approaches at the UN and other international venues."

The "closeness" of that "coordination" became apparent in March 2022 when Eritrea was the only African country to vote against the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Eswatini

Formerly a British colony, Eswatini gained its independence as Swaziland in 1968, changing its name in 2018 to Eswatini. It is a country of 1.1 million people and entirely within South Africa. It is an absolute monarchy, with a Prime Minister appointed by the King. As of 2019, it was the only African country that recognised Taiwan rather than the People's Republic of China.

At the 2019 Sochi Summit, Eswatini and Russia's Roscongress Foundation signed an MoU to facilitate trade and investment between the two countries. Trade is minimal and investment almost non-existent at present. In 2020, Eswatini exported goods worth \$1.44 million to Russia (mainly citrus, fruit juice and tropical fruits) while Russia exported goods worth \$647,000 (mainly refined petroleum, wheat and electrical ignitions).

Ethiopia

Landlocked Ethiopia maintained its independence during the first Scramble for Africa, finally succumbing to Fascist Italy in 1935, but resuming its independence in 1944 after several years of British administration. Between 1974 and 1991 Ethiopia was ruled by the Derg, a vicious ally of Soviet social-imperialism.



(Above: Putin meets Ethiopian PM at Sochi Photo: Donat Sorokin/ Tass via Getty Images)

Although the governments of Ethiopia and Russia signed deal a few years ago to develop nuclear energy for Ethiopia, to be used for medical and other non-military applications, Russia's presence in Ethiopia does not yet match that of the EU, the US or China. The Ethiopians are keen to encourage Russian investors. In February 2021, Ethiopian State Minister Tsion Teklu received a delegation of Russian investors from St. Petersburg city. They had decided to invest in three different projects in Energy, Innovation, and Trade.

In February 2022, Russian ERSO Energy solutions, an electro-technical holding company with a global presence entered discussions on investment opportunities in Ethiopia's energy sector.

On November 7, 2022 A business forum entitled 'the Russian – Ethiopia – Djibouti Business Forum' was held in Moscow by the Coordinating Committee for Economic Cooperation with Africa (AFROCOM). Officials from the three countries said that AFROCOM was preparing to launch Russian Business Support Centres in both countries in the Horn of Africa in the near future.

A factor assisting in Russia's soft diplomacy is religion. More than half of Russians define themselves as Orthodox Christians and more than 44% of Ethiopians also identify as Orthodox. The two countries' patriarchs have maintained contacts for decades and exchanged visits in recent years.

Like many other African countries, the trade imbalance with Russia is in the latter's favour. Russian exports to Ethiopia amounted to US\$194.69 million during 2021; Ethiopian exports to Russia were US\$20.2 million during the same period.

Military ties were strengthened in a military cooperation agreement between the two countries signed in 2018 and reaffirmed in 2021.

The second Russia-Africa summit is set to take place in 2022 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Gabon

Gabon is a small country (population 2.3 million) located on the West Coast of Central Africa. The former French colony gained its independence in 1960.

Timber and oil are the main industries.

On December 1 2020, newly appointed Russian Ambassador to Gabon Ilyas Iskanderov met with the Minister of Investment Promotion, Carmen Ndaot. He said that Russia's main interest in cooperation concern the extraction and processing of hydrocarbons, agriculture, infrastructure and the timber

industry. “These are priority areas for the rapid and economic development of your country and these areas are interesting for Russia, for Russian investors,” he said.

In May 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held talks with Gabonese Foreign Minister Pacome Moubelet-Boubeya on the state of their bilateral relations. “We agreed to take further steps to implement promising projects in hydrocarbon production, energy and infrastructure development. A number of Russian companies are showing a specific interest in finding partners in Gabon and promoting mutually beneficial agreements on the ground,” Lavrov said.

Lavrov also said that Russia had been training personnel for the Gabon army and law enforcement agencies, and planned to expand it further. “There are relevant agreements in place between the defence ministries, and a legal framework for this. We are ready to supply military products to help increase the defence capability of the Gabonese Republic,” he said. The Wagner Group has participated in the training of Gabonese military personnel.

Lavrov also offered support in addressing the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Although Gabon condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the UN, it has shielded Russia from international criticism. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council since January 2022, Gabon took the lead in voting against Russia's exclusion from the Human Rights Council.

Gambia

Located in West Africa, Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa. Gambia was a British colony from 1765 until 1965. It has generally held to a pro-US stance since then, but subject to EU and US sanctions over human rights abuses since around 2006 it has moved closer to China and Russia, severing ties with Taiwan in 2013 and building ties with the Russian Federation which it recognised after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In September 2016, Gambia and Russia signed an agreement on military cooperation. Other MoUs cover fishing (both open catch and aquaculture) and tourism.

Ghana

Ghana is a coastal country in West Africa. Formerly a British colony, it became independent in 1957. Although it has had a close relationship with the US and Britain, it enjoyed good relations with the Soviet Union, particularly during the Presidency of Kwame Nkrumah (1957-1966) and was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In 2018, the Russian Federation set aside US\$1billion to assist Russian companies wanting to invest in Ghana's economy. The Russian Railway Company, Geo Services, said it was ready to invest over US\$12.5billion in the redevelopment of Ghana's Railway network.

In 2008, Lukoil announced it would invest US\$100 million in the development of Ghana's oil deposits. It has focused on upstream exploration and is still carrying on activities.

In 2021, Boris Ivanov, founder of GBP Global Resources, visited Ghana to discuss engaging in a gold refinery business built at Tarkwa by the Soviet Union.

In August 2022, Russia and Ghana agreed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) to coordinate and exchange information regarding Russian technological solutions for small modular reactors (SMRs) through Rosatom.

Guinea

Located on the West Coast of Central Africa, and formerly French Guinea, it achieved its independence in 1958. (It is sometimes called Guinea-Conakry to distinguish it from Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea.)

The second largest producer of bauxite in the world, a joint venture between the government of Guinea and RUSAL of Russia, produces some 2.5 million tonnes annually, nearly all of which is exported to Russia and Eastern Europe. Russian involvement began in 2001 with a deal that exchanged Russian arms for access to bauxite deposits. Those arms have included Russian jet fighters.

As much as 25% of Russia's aluminium is made from Guinean bauxite. In 2021, Rusal planned to evacuate its staff when there was a coup against Guinea's President Conde. However, a spokesman for Putin urged caution, saying "We, of course, are closely following what is happening in Guinea. We would like to see the situation in Guinea back on track as soon as possible. We expect in any case that the business interests of our entrepreneurs, our companies will be ensured and won't be affected."

Russia has moved to develop good relations with coup leader Colonel Mamady Doumbouya despite initial condemnation of the coup. Many Russian companies are exempt from paying land taxes and salaries and enjoy the renewal of long-term contracts. A military agreement signed in 2018 that promised to "revive the fruitful cooperation" that had existed under Seke Toure during the Soviet era, is still intact.

Guinea-Bissau

Formerly a Portuguese colony, Guinea-Bissau gained its independence in 1973 in a struggle conducted under the leadership of Marxist Amilcar Cabral who was assassinated in the same year. Guinea-Bissau is another country whose appreciation for Soviet support in its independence war now translates into a willingness to seek Russian investment and other support.

It is easy to see how Putin trades on these feelings. Welcoming Guinea-Bissau's President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who is also Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), at the Kremlin on October 25, 2022, Putin said "Throughout the history of Guinea-Bissau, its fight for independence and afterward, during the formation of Guinea-Bissau statehood, Russia – both the Soviet Union and Russia – and your country have always enjoyed very good and very warm relations. And today we continue to develop the very same relations."

Putin added, "I know that you are now the head of the Economic Community of West African States, with 400 million people living in its member countries and an overall GDP of US\$550 billion. And in general, Russia has very decent trade with it and, most importantly, very good trade growth."

Embaló visited Ukrainian President Zelensky in Kyiv the following day, and passed on a message from Putin to the effect that he was willing to negotiate with the Ukrainian.

In August 2001, Russia forgave eighty percent of Guinea-Bissau's debt, which was reported to be valued at US\$178 million. References to Russian debt forgiveness are contrasted with the colonial and imperialist practices of those European powers and the US who have long exploited Africa.

Ivory Coast

The former French colony on the southern coast of West Africa gained its independence in 1960. It kept close ties to France for much of the post-colonial period, even though there was a brief clash in 2004 when a lone Ivory Coast helicopter attacked a French peacekeeping position in the rebel town

of Bouaké at 1 pm, killing nine French soldiers and wounding 31. French President Jacques Chirac ordered the destruction of the Ivorian air force which consisted of less than a dozen helicopter gunships and ground attack aircraft.

Relations with Russia developed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia has sent UN missions to the country, but has also been the recipient of blood diamonds, as well as legitimate diamond imports, despite its participation in the Kimberly Process.

In 2007, Russia assisted Ivory Coast to rebuild its small airforce, providing it with an Antonov An-32 tactical transport plane, a Mil Mi-24 attack helicopter and two Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-23 attack aircraft.

In 2017, a further 3 attack helicopters were delivered.

In June 2019, Russian Presidential adviser Anton Kobyakov met with Vice-President of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire Daniel Kablan Duncan to discuss investment and trading cooperation ahead of the Sochi Summit. Duncan told Kobyakov, "We enjoy friendly relations that encompass many areas of interaction, including political dialogue, security, trade, economic and technical military ties, energy, and scientific, cultural, and cultural exchanges. Cote d'Ivoire is one of Russia's largest trading partners in sub-Saharan Africa, and the beginning of 2019 has been marked by a significant increase in mutual trade. The outlook for cooperation in energy seems promising. The development of gas production is associated with capital-intensive deep-sea projects (more than 3,000 meters), and therefore we are interested in involving a major Russian company in the development of projects of this nature."

Despite both sides seeking closer business ties, the Ivory Coast remains politically closer to the Western imperialist bloc. Its current President Alassane Ouattara has strong links to French and other Western imperialist finance capital having worked for the Paris of the Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (West African Central Bank) and was its governor after 1988; he has also worked for the International Monetary Fund in Washington DC and spent four years as its Director of the African Department.

In the UN vote, it supported condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has warned fellow West African nations about the presence of Russian PMCs. The orientation of the leadership is in contrast to popular sentiment as measured by a Gallup Poll conducted in 2021. It found that approval of the Russian leadership was the second highest of thirteen Central and West African nations at 71%, behind only Mali at 84%.

The high popular support might be the result of Russian "soft tactics" and its influence on social media in particular. In February 2019, three accounts linked to Prigozhin were taken down for spreading misinformation and pushing an anti-western, pro-Russian agenda that had targeted the government of the Ivory Coast, as well as those of Madagascar, the CAR, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Sudan and Libya.

Kenya

The East African nation of Kenya was a British colony until it won its independence after a bloody eleven-year fight in 1963. Kenya's economy depends on trade, with both Russia and Ukraine importing coffee, tea, cut flowers and vegetables, and exporting wheat, oil, iron, steel, and fertilizers. Russian trade volume is twice that of Ukraine's. Whilst they are not dominating Kenyan trade, their presence is notable for its growth in recent years.

In 2019 at the Sochi Summit, then President Uhuru Kenyatta discussed some limited investment opportunities with the Russians, including construction of affordable houses, tourist charter flight services and space technology, as well as development of renewable energy and natural gas resources.

But Kenya remained loyal to Western imperialists and condemned Putin's invasion of Ukraine. In measured tones, its Ambassador to the UN criticised Russia's recognition of the Luhansk and Donetsk breakaway republics on February 21, saying, "This situation echoes our history. Kenya and almost every African country was birthed by the ending of empire... We believe that all states formed from empires that have collapsed or retreated have many peoples in them yearning for integration with peoples in neighbouring states. This is normal and understandable. After all, who does not want to be joined to their brethren and to make common purpose with them?"

"However, Kenya rejects such a yearning from being pursued by force. We must complete our recovery from the embers of dead empires in a way that does not plunge us back into new forms of domination and oppression," he said.

Having taken a strong stand on the Donbass issue, Kenya was reported on April 13 2022 as having failed to respond to a request by Ukraine that it be allowed to address the Kenyan Parliament.

Although Kenya stood to lose \$100 million with the imposition of sanctions against Russian businesses and financial transactions, Opposition leader Raila Odinga, a candidate in the August 2022 Presidential elections told an audience in Britain that he strongly supported the sanctions.

Odinga subsequently lost the Presidential race to William Ruto (50.5% to 48.8%). The new President quickly announced that he was open to purchasing fuel from Russia to try and keep prices down. He also indicated that he was keen to purchase fertiliser from Russia to help drought-stricken farmers. A phone call from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tried to keep Kenya in line over the Russia-Ukraine war at the UN, but a later statement from Ruto stressed the new government's support for multilateralism and working with all sides.

Lesotho

Lesotho, formerly the British colony of Basutoland, gained its independence in 1966. It is a landlocked enclave inside South Africa with 2.2 million people. After a raid by South Africa's apartheid regime on Lesotho in 1982, the country developed relations with China and the Soviet Union. Prime Minister Jonathon, who had developed these ties, was overthrown in a military coup in 1986.

Lesotho's economy is based on agriculture, livestock, manufacturing and mining. Water and diamonds are its significant natural resources.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Lesotho and the Russian Federation established diplomatic relations. Russia offers Lesotho students scholarships to Russian universities to study the Russian language and gain expertise in healthcare, mining and meteorology.

At Sochi in 2019, the two countries agreed that geological prospecting, mining and the energy industry were promising areas for Russian investment.

Lesotho has suffered as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine with global prices of wheat, sunflower or crude oil reaching unprecedented levels, leading to rising food and transport costs in Lesotho.

Liberia

Liberia was a case of reverse colonisation, with the West African Indigenous communities being required to accept the immigration of thousands of black Americans escaping oppression in the US. They created Africa's first independent republic in 1847. A military coup in 1980 resulted in the death of the last Americo-Liberian President and ushered in two decades of civil war in which up to one in ten Liberians were killed.

Liberia and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations in 1956, but the relationship was never particularly warm. Liberia has traditionally been aligned politically with the US.

In 2008, Russia's largest steel company, Severstal Mining, owned by billionaire Alexey Mordashov, acquired a controlling stake in Liberia's iron ore deposits in the Mano River Region, which includes Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2010, the company was awarded a 25-year mining contract although its subsidiary Putu Mining sought to disengage following a lowering of iron ore prices.

In December 2021, cyber experts claimed that a web page called "Empower Liberia", which had run a campaign against the government's handling of a contract for control of the country's rail infrastructure, was based in Russia and not a Liberian page at all.

During the Ebola crisis, Russia sent substantial medical aid to Liberia.

However, Liberia voted in the UN to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to suspend Russia from membership of the UN Human Rights Council.

Libya

When US imperialism orchestrated the overthrow and murder of Libya's Colonel Ghaddafi in October 2011, it thought it had eliminated an anti-imperialist opponent and created the conditions for a transition to a US-friendly regime that would expand US influence in the Mediterranean and Northern Africa (MENA).

A new government based in Tripoli, the Government of National Accord (GNA) won recognition from the UN but faced numerous opponents including those that remained loyal to Ghaddafi's son and, more importantly, a group based in the east of the country under the control of Khalifa Haftar who had set up a rival government, the Libyan House of Representatives, under the protection of his Libyan National Army (LNA) based in Tobruk.

In 2014, fighting broke out between the LNA and the GNA army. The LNA controls more than two-thirds of Libyan territory and has the backing of Egypt, which it borders. However, its attempt to capture Tripoli failed when Turkey entered the fray, backing the GNA for its own expansionist purposes, inflicting defeats on the LNA with attack drones.

In 2016 Khalifa Haftar hired up to 50 armed private security contractors from Russia ostensibly for mine clearance operations. It was a commercial arrangement with Oleg Krinitsyn, owner of private Russian firm RSB-group, who said he sent the contractors to eastern Libya in 2016 and withdrew them in February 2017.

Haftar visited Moscow in November 2021 and met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Lavrov also met with representatives of the GNA and it appeared that Russia was hoping that the two factions would merge, providing Russia with opportunities to extend its influence to all parts of Libya. This was not just a political and military preoccupation – Russian firms have investments in

Libya's oil industry that remain in a state of limbo. It is keen to revitalise those as well as to make use of new commercial opportunities, including military contracts. Extracting resources in return for security assistance is a common basis for the development of Russian imperialist ties to African countries.

With the LNA and GNA still at loggerheads, reports emerged in early 2018 that Haftar was about to invite the Wagner Group, a private military contractor (PMC) owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch who, as the sole supplier of catering needs to the Kremlin, is known as "Putin's chef". (Dmitri Utkin, a former special forces officer in charge of military affairs had suggested the group's name to Putin – his radio call sign during a stint as a commander in Syria was "Wagner", the German composer whose music Utkin admired).



Yevgeny Prigozhin assisting Vladimir Putin with his dinner at an event outside Moscow in 2011. Photograph: Reuters

In March 2019, 300 mercenaries from Wagner were sent to a base in Benghazi from where they participated in attacks on the GNA. Haftar again attempted capture Tripoli towards the end of 2019, but was pushed back with Turkey again coming to the aid of the GNA. Haftar deployed the Wagner Group to stop the Turkish army and the GNA forces from advancing eastward, to defend Sirte and the Libyan Oil Crescent.

At any one time since then, Wagner has had between 2-3000 fighters, mostly Russians, but also some from Belarus and Ukraine's Donbass region. Syrians are also reported to have been recruited for service in Libya. From May 2020, Russia has defied embargoes on the introduction of weapons to Syria by transporting supplies, including the "Wagner wagon" - manufactured in Russia by a company belonging to the Yevgeny Prigozhin group of companies – through the Russian base of Hmeimim in Syria. Russia has been supporting Haftar's forces with snipers, Mig-29 and Su-24 fighter jets, SA-22 surface-to-air missile, anti-aircraft systems, and hundreds of flights delivering military logistics.

Although Russian support has not yet succeeded in toppling the UN-backed GNA in Tripoli, a Russian military presence in Libya is key to Russia's agendas elsewhere on the African continent, especially in the Sahel region. The Sahel is an intermediate zone between the Sahara Desert to the north and the savannah grasslands to the south. The Sahel part of Africa includes – from west to east – parts of northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, Cameroon and Central African Republic, central Chad, central and southern Sudan, the extreme north of South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Madagascar

Madagascar is the large Indian Ocean island to the east of the African continent. It was a French colony until 1960.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, senior Russian officials held a number of high-level talks and exchanges with Madagascar's leadership. The country is rich in gold, cobalt, nickel, and uranium reserves, and then-President Hery Rajaonarimampianina promised Moscow lucrative access to its natural resources. This is when the Wagner Group appeared on the scene, along with Ferrum Mining, an apparent front company for Prigozhin. In October 2018, Russian warfare ship Severomorsk completed a port call to Madagascar's Antsiranana port. Wagner tried and failed to influence the November 2018 presidential election in Madagascar; regardless of that failure, in October 2019, the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement.

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.

On January 18, 2022, the Malagasy Minister of Defence, General Richard Rakotonirina visited Moscow. On March 25, a new 5-year bilateral military agreement was signed between the two countries. It comprises an automatic renewal clause, arms sales, collaboration in the development of military products, the training of military personnel and the maintenance of equipment.

Madagascar had abstained on UN votes condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but in October 2022, Rajoelina sacked his Foreign Minister for voting at the United Nations to condemn Russian-organised referendums to annex four partially-occupied regions in Ukraine. The person who replaced the Foreign Minister was General Richard Rakotonirina.

Malawi

Malawi was formerly the British protectorate of Nyasaland. It followed a convoluted path to independence, which was achieved in 1964. Malawi remained within the US imperialist sphere of influence until 2011 when both the British and the US suspended aid programs because of alleged human rights violations.

Malawi voted to support condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the UN and voted to expel Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. The war has disrupted deliveries of grain, vegetable oils and fertiliser to Malawi. Imports from Russia and Ukraine made up nearly two thirds of Malawi's wheat consumption in recent years and the country may face a shortage until alternative suppliers are contracted. At least one shipment of Russian fertiliser for Malawi left Europe in mid-November 2022.

Mali

Mali is another former French colony. In January 2012 a Tuareg rebellion began in Northern Mali, led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). On 11 January 2013, the French Armed Forces intervened at the request of the interim Malian government. France has committed up to 5000 troops, and Germany around 1000, under a UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) alongside others from G5 Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad). However, MINUSMA has been ineffective in controlling either the Tuareg rebels or Islamic terrorists aligned with Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Following several recent coups, Mali's military leaders agreed in September 2021 to a deal with the Wagner Group to hire nearly 1,000 mercenaries to help defeat the jihadists. In late 2021 and early 2022, Russian planes transported armed personnel and arms from Syria to Mali via an airbase near Bughazi in Libya.

Relations between Mali and France deteriorated to the point of seeing the French Ambassador expelled from the country, and French President Macron ordered the withdrawal of many of the French troops. On May 2, the military government announced breaking the defence accords concluded in 2013 with France.

On 12 August 2022, Germany suspended most of its operations in Mali after the local military-led government denied flyover rights to a United Nations peacekeeping mission. The reconnaissance patrols in eastern Mali were resumed in September 8 2022.

Mauritania

Mauritania is a relatively large country in the north west of Africa; nearly 90% of it is Saharan Desert country. It was colonised by the French and gained its independence in 1960. Nearly all of its 4.5 million people are Sunni Muslims.

The Soviet Union and Mauritania established diplomatic relations in 1964 and bean a long-standing commercial agreement which granted the Soviets access to the rich fishing grounds of Mauritania's coast.

Imports from Russia rose from 1 per cent to 11 per cent of the total between 2002 and 2008. This trend would appear to be associated with investments made by a Russian multinational (Integra Group) in sales activities in Mauritania in 2006.

The Russian Federation has condemned several coups in Mauritania (2005 and 2008) and urged the country's leaders to maintain stability.

Mauritania is part of the G5 Sahel states (Markina-Faso, Chad, Niger and, until May 2021, Mali) pledged to cooperate in fighting jihadist terrorism in the region.

Russia and Mauritania signed a major military cooperation agreement at the end June 2021.

Mauritius

Mauritius, like Cormoros and Senegal, is a group of islands regarded as part of the African continent geographically, and located in the Indian Ocean. Originally a French colony, it was taken from them by the British who still illegally occupy the island of Diego Garcia which they share with US imperialism.

Prior to the country gaining its independence in 1968, the British committed the crime of splitting off the Chagos Archipelago as the British Indian Ocean Territory, forcibly deporting its population and leasing its largest island, Diego Garcia, to the US to use as a military base. In 2019, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion ordering the UK to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, and in 2021, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruled in support of this, saying that the UK has "no sovereignty over the Chagos Islands".

In November 2018, two Memorandums of Understanding were signed between Mauritius and Russia aimed at boosting trade and investment. At the signing ceremony Charles Cartier, Chairman of the Economic Development Board of Mauritius, underlined that Russia was a global leader on numerous fronts and said that Mauritius was committed to facilitating the expansion strategy of

Russia into Africa. He reported that FDI from Russia amounted to USD 3.9 million in 2017 and that imports from Russia stood at USD 11.4 million while exports amounted to USD 2.1 million. The top three import commodities were precious/semi-precious stones, petroleum gases and vodka whereas main exports from Mauritius to Russia were tuna, Special Sugar and T-shirts.

On 9 February 2022 Mauritius sent a boatload of officials and Chagos Islanders to enter the Archipelago without British permission. During the visit, the flag of Mauritius was raised on the Peros Banhos atoll in the Chagos Islands, on Monday, February 14, challenging British sovereignty. Coming days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the dispute with Britain led Mauritius to adopt a cautious attitude towards criticism of Russia, calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. However, in October, Mauritius voted with the US majority to condemn Russia's annexation of the four eastern Ukrainian regions.

Morocco

Nearly all citizens of this North-west African nation are Sunni Muslims. Britain and France divided the country between them until it was reunited after gaining independence in 1956. The adjacent territory of Spanish Sahara was decolonised in 1975 and shared between Morocco and Mauritania. There were fights between Algeria and Morocco over the status of the divided territory, but the more important conflict was with the Polisario movement, formed in 1973. The territory remains divided with Morocco administering the largest part, and a self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic controlling around 20%.

Morocco had generally good relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In 1978, when Morocco was Soviet social-imperialism's largest trading partner in Africa, it also became a major investment target with the Soviets pouring money into mining. Two years later though, the Moroccans criticised the Soviets for supplying arms to Algeria which were, in turn, passed onto Polisario. The Soviets did not express any support for Polisario. The pro-Soviet Party for Progress and Socialism supported the Moroccan government in Western Sahara. Polisario is still fighting against the Moroccans and the Russians hosted a Polisario delegation in October 2021 to discuss a possible solution to the conflict in the Western Sahara.

In the 2000s, trade between the two countries grew rapidly, and when Putin visited in 2006 new agreements were signed to promote economic and military ties. The current trade imbalance is heavily in Moscow's favour: in 2020 Russian exports to Morocco amounted to \$1.35 billion (coal briquettes were the largest commodity at \$779 million), while Morocco's exports to Russia only came to \$344 million (with citrus the main export at \$120 million).

In 2019, the Moroccan and the Russian governments agreed on investing into a defunct oil refinery in the coastal city of Mohammedia and in 2020, a fisheries agreement established in 1992 was extended for a further four years.

In October 2022, TASS reported that Russia and Morocco had signed an agreement for cooperation in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Under the agreement, Russia's Rosatom will help Morocco create an improve nuclear energy infrastructure, as well as water desalination and elementary particle accelerators. Russia will design and construct nuclear reactors and share its expertise in spent nuclear fuel and waste management. It will also have the right to conduct exploration for uranium.

At the UN, Morocco absented itself from the vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

As an indication of the complexity of inter-imperialist rivalry, a decision in June 2022 by Morocco to take advantage of Russian and Ukrainian difficulties in exporting fertilisers, by increasing its own fertiliser production by 70%, was described by one Western expert as “chang(ing) the strategic equation by countering Moscow’s ability to weaponise the food-energy nexus. In so doing, Morocco has demonstrated its increasing importance as a geopolitical partner for Europe and the United States in Sub-Saharan Africa”. Morocco is the fourth largest exporter of fertiliser after Russia, China and Canada.

Mozambique

Mozambique has encouraged investments in its resources from a number of imperialist corporations, but has felt sympathetic to the Russians because of the aid provided back in the days of the Soviet Union to FRELIMO, the liberation movement that won the country’s independence from Portugal in 1975.

When Russia renewed its push into Africa at the start of the previous decade, Mozambique was one of the first places to accept Russian investment. In 2015, Russia’s Rosneft was awarded three licenses to extract natural gas near the Rovuma basin, in partnership with Exxon Mobil.

When jihadists of the Islamic State’s Central Africa Province’s (IS-CAP) insurgency in the northern Cabo Delgado province began their campaign in 2017, the Mozambicans called on the Wagner Group for help. The Russian PMC entered the fray in 2019 but proved incapable of combatting the jihadists. They withdrew in 2020, and a PMC from South Africa was contracted to take their place.

Even so, agreements reached between Russia and Mozambique have remained in place. 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.

In August 2019, intergovernmental agreements between Russia and Mozambique covered cooperation between Rosneft, the Mozambican National Institute of Oil, and the Mozambican National Hydrocarbons Company included the development of natural gas deposits on the Mozambican Shelf in the Indian Ocean. A Memorandum of Understanding on power generation was signed between Inter-RAO Export and EdM (Mozambique).

In October 2022, Mozambique’s Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy stated that the government may purchase Russian oil in roubles.

Namibia

Namibia is another country where there is an apparent transfer of appreciation from the Soviet Union that assisted the South-West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) during the War of Independence from apartheid South Africa, to today’s Russian Federation. Namibia won its independence in 1990, just before the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union.

In June 2009, during a four-day tour to five African countries, Dmitry Medvedev became the first Russian head of state to visit Namibia. Medvedev was accompanied by a delegation of around 400 Russian businessmen, including the heads of Gazprom and Alrosa. The visit included signing a number of energy-related agreements including a one-billion-dollar (711-million-euro) deal with Namibian energy company Namcor to build a new power plant in Namibia. The plant would sell energy to both Namibia and South Africa.

According to the Panama Papers, Russian billionaire Rashid Sardarov used offshore shell companies to get around Namibian legislation restricting foreign ownership of land, purchasing 28,000 hectares in 2013. Sardarov chairs two large private firms in Russia and in Eastern Europe, Comsar Energy Group and the South-Ural Industrial Company. His land purchase in Namibia was for the purpose of constructing a private game hunting ranch and lodge, Marula, which he planned to market to big game hunters in Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian tourist markets.

In February 2020, the Chairwoman of the Russian Federation Council, Valentina Ivanovna Matviyenko visited Namibian President Hage Geingob to discuss increased business opportunities, including uranium exploration, for Russian investors. Existing uranium deposits are currently in the hands of Chinese and Australian mining companies.

Geingob told Matviyenko, “The Russian Federation is an old friend, a tried and tested friend who stood with us and provided immense military, financial, and diplomatic support to the SWAPO Party during the dark days of our Liberation Struggle. Now that we have won our political freedom, we need you as old friends, and invite Russian companies to come to Namibia and invest in various sectors to help us overcome the economic downturn. Now our people need jobs and income to have meaningful and happy lives.”

On March 2, 2022 Namibia joined with 15 other African states in abstaining on a UN vote condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. On November 3, Namibian president Hage Geingob said that he was in discussions with the Russians for Russian fuel to overcome shortages caused by Western sanctions related to the war in Ukraine. Geingob expressed gratitude to Russian chargé d'affaires in Namibia Mikhail Nikitin, saying that is why Namibia abstained from the United Nations voting. Geingob said he was briefed about Russia's special military operation into Ukraine by former president, and chairperson of United Russia, the ruling party, Dmitry Medvedev.

“I got a call from Moscow... I got that call. I did not get a call from anybody else. That is why we are saying thank you very much for what you have done for us,” Geingob said.

“I saw there are possibilities for our biggest oil companies like Rosneft and LukOil to come on your market and to make business here together with your local businesses, including supply of oil (fuel),” replied Nikitin.

Niger

This relatively large and landlocked African nation has a population of 25 million, nearly all of whom are Muslims. Nearly 80% of Niger is Saharan Desert country. It was a French colony until 1960.

Niger's armed forces have a long history of military cooperation with France and the United States. As of 2013, the capital Niamey is home to a U.S. drone base.

The country has had close ties to France since independence, and relies on French and US military support against Boko Haram jihadists from neighbouring Nigeria. A Sochi in October 2019, Putin announced that Russia would supply Niger 12 Mi-35 attack helicopters to use against Boko Haram. However, Niger also decided to take on board much of the French force expelled from Mali, and this has not gone down well with everyone. In September 2022, demonstrators took to the streets of Niamey carrying Russian flags and placards attacking the French. This was very similar to the pro-Russian rallies earlier in neighbouring Burkina-Faso.

Niger is also of interest as it is one of only a few countries to have an arms deal with Turkey. The latter only supplies 0.5% of Africa’s weaponry, but is keen to expand its influence on the continent.

In June 2022 it was reported that Turkey had delivered six Bayraktar TB2 drones to Niger. The deal includes armoured vehicles and Hurkus light attack aircraft, the first Turkish manned aircraft to be exported.

Nigeria

This West African country, the most populous in Africa, was a British colony until 1960.

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.

When Nigerian 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.

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.

Nigeria has previously sourced Russian-made armaments, including MiG-21 combat aircraft, Mil Mi-series helicopters, Kalashnikov series assault rifle, and T-72 and T-55 main battle tanks.

In September 2021, it was announced that a Nigeria-Russia Chamber of Commerce and Industry had been established and that it was looking for cooperation with Russia to revamp Nigeria's near-moribund Ajaokuta Steel Mill built by the Soviet Union in 1979.

In November 2021, Nigeria hosted a 16-person delegation of Russian companies who expressed interest in investments and trade. The leader of the delegation and CEO of Metalwork, a Russian based production and engineering company, Mr Ivan Klevtsov, said that the Russians were hoping to create a service centre for Russian manufacturers.

Klevtsov said that the companies were looking at investing in gas and oil, mineral development, security and financing technology.

In May 2022, Russia said it was ready to invest in the Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline, the world's longest offshore gas pipeline, to transport gas between the two countries, crossing 11 others in West Africa and running along the Moroccan coast to a point where it could be used for gas export to Europe.

"The Russians are very keen to invest in this project," said Nigeria's Minister of State for Petroleum Resources.

Republic of the Congo

The Republic of the Congo (also known as Congo-Brazzaville) was formerly part of the French colony of Equatorial Africa. It gained its independence in 1960 and from 1969 to 1992 was a "Marxist-Leninist" (ie based on the Soviet revisionist "Marxism-Leninism") state under the name People's Republic of the Congo. A twenty-year "Friendship Pact" was signed with Soviet social-imperialism, but the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in the ending of Soviet aid to prop up the regime, and it abdicated power.

The Republic of the Congo has untapped base metal, gold, iron, and phosphate deposits. There are diamond deposits, but the country was suspended from the Kimberley Process (an international agreement to stop the export of blood diamonds) in 2004 following allegations of diamond smuggling. The economy is dependent on oil and in 2018 Congo-B joined OPEC.

In January 2020, Lukoil CEO Vagit Alekperov identified the Congo, Ghana and Cameroon as “unprecedentedly beneficial” for Russia.

In 2019, Lukoil acquired a 25 percent share (worth \$800 million) of the Congolese Marine XII offshore project from New Age M12 Holdings Limited. Marine XII has a daily production capacity of around 28,000 barrels of oil and 1.7 million cubic meters of natural gas. New Age was controlled by HOPU Investments, a leading China-based private equity firm, with total assets of \$4 billion, and branches located in Beijing, Hong Kong and Singapore.

VEB.RF, a Russian state development corporation (founded in 2007), whose Supervisory Board chairperson is current Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, signed a memorandum at the Sochi Summit with Société Nationale des Pétroles du Congo (a national oil company of the Republic of the Congo) on building a pipeline for the transportation of petroleum products. The proposed pipeline, with an expected capacity of 2.1 million tons per year, would be capable of transporting gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel. It is also expected to supply the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR), two countries which already have a growing Russian presence. The pipeline deal was secured through the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) which, at the Sochi Summit, signed an agreement that turned Russia’s VEB.RF into a shareholder in the bank, facilitating Russian finance capital’s entry into the African economy.

Mishustin, incidentally, heads UFG Invest — one of Russia’s largest investment companies. His family owns real estate valued at \$48.2 million in the Moscow area.

In 2019, military cooperation saw Russian military specialists sent to the Congo to “service [the host country’s] Russian-made military hardware and equipment”.

Rwanda

The landlocked country was a German colony until Belgium seized it during the First World War. In 1962 power was transferred to Hutu militants who set about committing genocide against their Tutsi compatriots. The genocide ended in 1994 when the Rwandan Patriotic Front came to power.

Cooperation between Rwanda and Russian Federation mainly focuses on scientific developments in health, agriculture, mining, energy, water and education.

Rwandan imports from Russia were worth US\$49.08 million during 2021, while Rwandan exports to Russia were US\$5.03 million during the same period. Wheat, fertilizers and sunflower oil products dominate Rwanda’s imports from Russia and Ukraine, representing 64 percent, 14 percent and 10 percent respectively of the total imports of these products.

On 16 May, 2019, the Russian State-owned nuclear group (ROSATOM) signed with Rwanda the roadmap for establishing Russian-Rwanda cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy. The Russians will build a Nuclear Science and Technology Centre based on a Russian-design research reactor in Rwanda. The roadmap follows the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) on peaceful uses of nuclear energy which was signed in Moscow between Rwanda and Russia on 05 December, 2018. The centre will also have a research water-cooled reactor with up to 10 MW capacity. The deal

would allow Rosatom in the future to supply Rwanda with small modular reactors for power generation.

The following month, June 2019, Rwandan Prime Minister Edouard Ngirente, on a visit to St Petersburg, said that Africa had great opportunities that investors from Russia could take advantage of. "This could be an opportunity for Russian businesses to invest in infrastructures such as roads, railways, ports, hydropower plants, and internet connectivity that facilitate trade on the continent of 1.3 billion consumers. The investment required is estimated at \$130 billion to \$170 billion per year," he said.

Despite Rwanda's desire to attract more Russian investment, it cast its vote to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine during the emergency special session by the United Nations (UN) held on March 2.

Sao Tome and Principe

Sao Tome and Principe is an island country off the coast of Guinea and Gabon. The second-smallest and second-least populous African sovereign state after Seychelles, it was colonised by Portugal until 1975.

Trade between Russia and Sao Tome and Principe is minimal and worth only several tens of thousands of dollars. There is no evidence of Russian investments.

Senegal

Senegal is a West African country and a former colony of France. It gained its independence in 1960.

The country is aligned strongly with the French and the US. The Senegalese military receives most of its training, equipment, and support from France and the United States, and to a lesser extent Germany. During the 1991 Gulf War, 500 Senegalese troops participated under the command of the U.S.-led coalition. In 2015, Senegal participated in the Saudi Arabian-led military intervention in Yemen against the Shia Houthis.

Russia is gradually increasing its investments in this traditional ally of the imperialist West. In 2017, Russia's truck manufacturer Kamaz announced it would invest 50 million euro (\$57 million) in the first stage of the construction of an assembly plant in Senegal. Senegal would secure commercial loans from Russian banks to finance its part of the deal. Kamaz is the largest automobile corporation in Russia. The company produces trucks, trailers, buses, tractors, engines, power units, and different tools.

In 2020, Lukoil, one of the largest Russia's oil companies, publicly declared that it had finally concluded an agreement with Cairn Energy PLC to acquire a 40% interest in the RSSD (Rufisque, Sangomar and Sangomar Deep) project in the Republic of Senegal for \$300 million in cash. This is an offshore oil and gas project.

Senegal abstained from the March 2 UN General Assembly vote condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and also abstained from the United Nations General Assembly vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7, 2022. Yet while visiting Vladimir Putin in Moscow in early June, Senegalese President Macky Sall called for an end the war. He was visiting not only as Senegalese leader, but also as the current Chair of the African Union, and sought Putin's agreement to unblock grain and sunflower oil shipments from Ukrainian ports. At the same time, he appealed to Western nations to ease sanctions on Russia.

Seychelles

Seychelles is a group of islands 1500 km to the east of Somalia, in the Indian Ocean. It is the smallest African country with a population of only 98,400 people. A former British colony, it became independent in 1976. Diplomatic relations were established with the Soviet Union the day following independence. Seychelles supported the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

Even though Seychelles voted to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to expel it from the UN Human Rights Commission, Russian tourists continue to flock to the island. Russia became Seychelles' top tourist market in 2021 when 31,000 Russian tourists arrived, and Russian tourists to beach resorts in Seychelles jumped three-fold in the first four months of 2022 despite the country's condemnation of the Ukraine invasion. These tourists are very important to maintaining growth in the Seychelles economy, and Russians such as confectionery billionaire Yuri Gushchin have invested in building a number of hotels in the country.

Seychelles is allegedly one of the world's premier offshore destinations for Russian dirty money, providing a haven for oligarch money seeking to fly under the radar of the West.

Seychelles receives US funding to maintain a US drone base located at the Seychelles International Airport in Mahé island, Seychelles. The aerial fleet is made up of General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper drones. The drones have been hosted in Seychelles since 2009 and they are located in a hangar about a quarter of a mile from the main terminal of the airport. The United States Air Force has a team on the ground in Seychelles (around 100 military personnel) who launch and land the drones, which are operated from the Creech Air Force Base in Nevada and Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. The drones are supposedly used for monitoring pirates from Somalia, but they conduct surveillance over Somalia itself.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a coastal nation in Southwest Africa. Formerly a British colony it gained its independence in 1961.

In May 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov met with Sierra Leone's Foreign Minister David John Francis in Moscow. The two sides agreed to lift trade, economic and investment cooperation to the level of political dialogue. So far, achievements in trade have been very little.

Russia is now eyeing projects in mining, the fuel and energy complex, infrastructure, and fishing. Sierra Leone has untapped natural resources, especially diamonds. It is among the largest producers of titanium and bauxite, is also a major producer of gold, and has one of the world's largest deposits of rutile.

Lavrov emphasized during their joint media conference, "We will continue our discussions to ensure that Russian businesses enjoy a favourable working environment in Sierra Leone. D J Francis reaffirmed that this matter will be on his list of priorities."

Sanctions against Russian oligarchs, including seizure of luxury yachts, has been part of the punishment regime imposed by US imperialism on Russia since the invasion of Ukraine. To escape sanctions, several have been reclassified as houseboats and "reflagged," or changed their registration, from British tax havens to more Russian-friendly spots. Sierra Leone has offered this facility. For example, Andrey Melnichenko's \$509 million yacht, Sailing Yacht A changed its registration from the Isle of Man to Sierra Leone; Vagit Alekperov's \$67 million yacht Galactica Super Nova changed from the Cayman Islands to Sierra Leone. Alexperov was former deputy minister of oil

and gas of the Soviet Union, and had been CEO of Lukoil since 1993, when the company was founded. He resigned as Lukoil CEO in the wake of the sanction. Melnichenko was the founder and ex-beneficiary of fertilizer producer EuroChem Group and coal producer SUEK, and was a non-executive director in both companies until 9 March 2022 when he ceded ownership of the companies to his wife. His yacht was seized by Italy in March 2022.

Somalia

The East African nation has Africa's longest coastline situated on the Horn of Africa with access to the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Ruled separately as Italian and British colonies, the country reunited when it gained independence in 1960. Diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union followed quickly after, and a warm relationship developed under President Mohamed Siad Barre who, after a coup in 1969, declared Somalia to be a Marxist-Leninist state developing according to Soviet revisionism's fraudulent conception of "scientific socialism". When Somalia and its neighbouring Soviet client state, Ethiopia, began fighting each other, Barre severed ties with the Soviet Union. The United States stepped in and until 1989, was a strong supporter of the Barre government for whom it provided approximately US\$100 million per year in economic and military aid.

Although Somali-Russian relations remain at a low ebb, the Somalis did approach Lavrov in 2016 to request assistance to strengthen the Somali Armed Forces in the fight against terrorist organization Al-Shabaab. U.S. military advisors have secretly operated in Somalia since around 2007 to help the country fend off threats by Al-Shabaab. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) aircraft have occasionally bombed Al-Shabaab positions in Somalia. The US force were withdrawn in 2020 to avoid being seen alongside Russian PMCs should their presence eventuate. However, in June 2022, following an election lost by a President seen as too friendly with Russian allies Ethiopia and Eritrea, a US troop redeployment was announced and welcome by the new government.

Somalia voted Yes to the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Somaliland

Somaliland is a breakaway republic from Somalia. It roughly occupies what was once British Somaliland. Somalia does not recognise its existence and nor do any other governments, although in 2020, Taiwan and Somaliland decided to set up representative offices in each other's territory. It declared its independence from Somalia in 1991.

There has been some speculation that Russia could seek a naval base in Somaliland following the collapse of a deal with Sudan for a base (see next section). The UAE had just such a base at Somaliland's port of Berbera from which it conducted operations against Yemen. However, a Russian base would jeopardise any chance at building relations with Somalia and the Russians have denied that there have been any negotiations over Berbera.

South Africa

Despite the dismantling of apartheid and the fact of its having the third-largest economy in Africa, poverty and inequality remain widespread. Nevertheless, in 2010 South Africa joined BRICS, a grouping of the five leading emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), investing US\$1.5 billion in the bank.

South Africa's ruling African National Congress has ties dating back decades with Russia and before that, with the Soviet Union. It is generally regarded as having supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine and in October 2022, defied sanctions on Alexei Mordashov's \$521 million super yacht Nord, (named

after his gold company Nord Gold NV) saying that it could dock without penalty in South Africa. Mordashov is a Russian billionaire businessman. He is the main shareholder and chairman of Severstal, Russia's largest steel and mining company, and part-owner of Rossiya Bank.

Another Russian oligarch with investments in South Africa is Viktor Vekselberg whose Renova Group controlled United Manganese of Kalahari (UMK). Vekselberg's direct interest in UMK was cancelled after he was subject to US sanctions in 2018, but he has since established a controlling 25% through a trust company. UMK was the sole declared donor to the ANC in the 2021-22 financial year, to the tune of £500,000, as disclosed in the latest Parliamentary filings.

Russian investment in South Africa developed after 2006-07 and the takeover of Canadian LionOre by Norilsk Nickel, and of South Africa's Highveld Steel and Vanadium Corporation by Evraz, a Russian capital group registered in Luxembourg. At this stage, the Russian capitalists were mainly interested in buying out struggling companies and were happy to on-sell them at a later profit as many Western private equity asset-strippers were doing.

In 2010, Russia's Severstal acquired 25.6% of South Africa's privately-held Iron Mineral Beneficiation Services and announced that it would invest \$17 million to build a plant which would develop scrap briquettes for use in steel-making.

In 2014, Russia's Gazprombank and South Africa's Public Investment Corporation (PIC) signed a cooperation agreement aimed at facilitating business cooperation between the two countries. The two companies agreed to focus on several areas of mutual interest, including investment banking, capital markets and securities transactions, trade finance, asset management, private equity and leveraged and structured finance. Gazprombank was founded by the Russian energy giant Gazprom in 1990.

In the same year, then President of South Africa Jacob Zuma agreed to a deal with Rosatom to build eight nuclear power stations for US\$66 billion. Zuma pushed the deal through without parliamentary approval, an action that was contested in the Western Cape High Court by environmentalists who won their case in 2017 and the deal was cancelled.

In October 2022, Russian investment company, Kismet Capital Group, announced that it had signed off on an agreement to acquire a 100% stake in Avito, the world's largest online advertisements platform, from South African holding company Naspers. The deal has been valued at approximately \$2.4 billion. Kismet Capital Group is an investment holding founded in 2016 by Ivan Tavrin that specialises in investments in the technology, media and telecommunications (TMT) sector. The transaction was financed and settled by a banking consortium led by the Russian Agricultural Bank, which is not amongst the Russian banks under sanctions.

Currently, Russia is regarded as the front-runner in a tender to construct a \$540 million gas power plant in Nelson Mandela Bay.

South African companies have larger investments in Russia than vice versa. As of 2022, South Africa had invested \$5.13 billion in Russia whilst Russia had invested \$1.5 billion in South Africa.

South Sudan

South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan in 2011. The country is generally aligned politically with Western imperialism and the Zionist regime in Israel, but it is open to doing business with the Russians.

This has included a 2016 Intergovernmental Agreement on Military Technical Cooperation, which is still effective.

In January 2020, the South Sudanese Foreign Minister visited Moscow for talks with Lavrov. A media release issued on the eve of the talks said, “There is potential for expanding trade and economic cooperation, including in such areas as energy, construction, development of automobile, railway and pipeline infrastructure, and agriculture. One of the promising areas of bilateral cooperation is the development of the fuel and energy complex in South Sudan. A number of projects with Russian participation are already being implemented.”

South Sudan is one of the worst affected African countries by Russia’s blockade of Ukrainian ports. The country is a famine zone with the United Nations World Food Program unable to meet emergency demands.

Sudan

Sudan is a former British possession. It is to the north-east of the CAR. Following years of fighting between the Muslim north and the Christian south, the south established itself as South Sudan in 2011. Between 1989 and 2019, Sudan experienced a 30-year-long military dictatorship led by Omar al-Bashir.

In March 2018 Putin met with al-Bashir who reached out to Putin for support against “aggressive U.S. actions,” and Moscow agreed to provide a loan to Sudan for the purchase of equipment and other assistance to Sudanese forces. This included Russian Su-35 fighter jets. The whole deal was estimated at USD 1 billion, far beyond the possibilities of the defense budget of Sudan. After the meeting, Russian mining company M Invest received preferential access to Sudanese gold mines. A similar scheme had been used a year before, when Sudan bought 170 Russian T-72 tanks.

In early to mid-2019, Moscow and Khartoum unveiled a number of economic, security, and military cooperation agreements, from oil and gold mining to the training and equipping of the Sudanese military. The Wagner Group not only had secured survey and mining rights, but also helped to train the Sudanese military. Bashir fell from power in April 2019, but Moscow retained ties to Sudan’s new leaders and appeared to still be interested in securing a naval base in the country.

This led to the signing in December 2020 of a 25-year deal to build the logistics hub for Russian nuclear-powered warships and up to 300 military and civilian personnel in Port Sudan. It would have been Russia’s first naval base in Africa and its second on foreign territory after Syria’s Tartous.

However, continuing anti-government protests (in which hundreds were killed) and a series of coups resulted in general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan declaring a state of emergency and negotiating emergency funding from the IMF and World Bank, following which Sudan suspended the naval base agreement “signed by Moscow with the former regime.” A US decision to remove the country from the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism has led to an increased presence of US personnel in Sudan.

Russia, however, has ties with paramilitary leader, Mohamed “Hemedti” Hamdan Daglo, who emerged from a military takeover last year as the country’s de facto vice president. Hemedti travelled to Moscow in February 2022 to strengthen ties with Russia. The Wagner Group trains Hemedti’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – a large paramilitary organisation that sits alongside Sudan’s regular army. The two heavily armed groups have worked together to secure important gold mines for Russian mining companies in Sudan, where security is weak in remote areas.

(It should be noted that gold reserves are helping Russia beat sanctions imposed after its invasion of Ukraine. Russia held more gold than US dollars for the first time in June 2020 with bullion accounting for more than 23 per cent of the total reserves, which rose to \$630bn as of early 2022.)

Tanzania

Russia had by 2018 invested in 48 small and medium-sized projects with a total value of \$45 million. Uranium One Inc., one of the world's largest uranium producers, which is owned by ROSATOM State Atomic Energy Corporation, operates the Mkuju River Project, a uranium development project located in southern Tanzania.

Australian companies Magnis Resources, Volt Resources and Kibaran Resources have been at the forefront of graphite discovery in Tanzania. Their discoveries have propelled Tanzania to the top of the field of global graphite production. The Nachu graphite project in southeast Tanzania is 100% owned by Magnis and represents one of the largest mineral resources of large flake graphite in the world. In 2017, Magnis signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Russia's nuclear corporation ROSATOM for project financing and offtake of its Nachu graphite project. Frank Poullas, Chairman of Magnis, said "ROSATOM is the world leader in the development and construction of nuclear reactors with over USD130 billion worth of orders in place. Larger flake graphite which our Nachu Project will produce is a key material used in these nuclear reactors and it is highly sought after. Our project therefore is strategically important to ROSATOM over the longer term."

Togo

The former German and then French colony of Togo occupies a narrow strip of land on the South West coast, and gained its independence in 1960.

Although aligned politically with Western imperialism, Togo signed an agreement with Russia in February 2021 for cooperation in energy, natural resources and agriculture. Trade is heavily balanced in Russia's favour. In 2020, Togo exported \$1.19 billion's worth of goods to Russia almost all of which was scrap copper. In return, Russia exported goods worth \$292 million to Togo, mainly refined petroleum, wheat and coal briquettes.

Tunisia

The former Ottoman Turk and French colony in the north of Africa gained its independence in 1956. Tunisia voted in favour of the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine but abstained from the vote on Russia's expulsion from the UN Human Rights Council.

In 2016, Russia began assisting Tunisia against terrorists and signed a nuclear energy cooperation agreement. In the same year, roughly 600,000 Russian tourists visited Tunisia, a tenfold increase from the previous year and over 10 percent of the country's visitors that year.

That year, Tunisian businessman Kamel Ghribi, accompanying Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs Khemaies Jhinaoui in his visit to Russia, said he was in close discussions with Russia's state technologies corporation Rostec on the prospects of establishing assembly lines for Sukhoi aircraft, Russian KAMAZ trucks and several automotive components in Tunisia. He also said he would meet with representatives from Russia's gas liquefaction company GTL with the aim of striking a deal on building a gas refinery in Tunisia.

He also said he hoped Russia would invest into the industrial revamping of a refinery, increasing the size and capacity of a commercial port and also developing a luxury marina for superyachts.

In 2019, discussions were held on the establishment of a free trade zone between the two countries that would attract more Russian investments, especially in the automotive sector. At that stage there were nine Russian companies currently operate in Tunisia, representing an investment of about €6 million and providing 780 jobs. These companies operated mainly in the pharmaceutical, agricultural and consulting industries.

Uganda

Putin and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni have been in close contact since 2004. The two countries have signed several agreements and trade turnover, according to the Federal Customs Service of Russia totalled \$49 million in 2010. In 2020 Ugandan imports from Russia amounted to US\$78.67 million while in 2021 they had grown to US\$407.5 million.

Following Putin's hosting of the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, Russia in October 2019, Uganda reciprocated, hosting the First Russian-Uganda Business Forum in Kampala in November. "Uganda has enormous investment potential as you may have noticed already," John Mulimba, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Regional Cooperation told the visitors. "Opportunities exist in agro-processing for instance fruit juices, dairy products, tourism and hospitality, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals among others." In June 2022, the Russian Ambassador to Uganda, Vladen Semivolos, said that his country was "ripe for investment partnerships as it looks for raw materials to drive its huge industrial expansion."

From 2011 to 2015, Uganda spent more than \$700m on Russian fighter jets, bought from Rosoboronexport, a subsidiary of Rostec, a Russian defence and technology corporation whose businesses include manufacturing weapons such as the AK-47 assault rifles.

Ten years ago, Russian investors backed the first gold refinery in Uganda. The refinery, established by Russian-owned Victoria Gold Star Limited, has a capacity to process 1.2 tonnes of raw gold per month. Russia is depending on its \$140 billion gold reserves to help it withstand the pressure of US-led sanctions. In June 2022, Uganda announced the discovery of a deposit of 31 million tonnes of gold ore, with extractable pure gold estimated to gross 320,000 tonnes. Russia is pursuing an agreement to secure involvement in the extraction.

In 2015, a Russian consortium led by Rostec and including Russian oil producer Tatneft and VTB Capital, the investment banking unit of Russia's second-largest lender VTB, won a contract for the building of a \$4 billion oil refinery at Uganda's Hoima. However, they pulled out of the deal the following year when the Ugandan government could not guarantee their investment. By the end of the year, they were back with proposals for a cheaper, smaller refinery. That fell through and a Chinese consortium began negotiations, only to also pull out. In a win for the US, its General Electric Corporation led a new consortium which was successful in bidding for the contract and commercial operation is set to begin in 2027.

The Ugandan President is typical of those who resist pressures to agree to US-led sanctions against Russia by insisting that Russia has been a friend for a century or more. On July 26, 2022, during a visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Museveni told Lavrov "Whenever issues come up and some people want us to take positions against Russia, we say, 'these people have been with us for the last 100 years, how can we be automatically against them?'"

During Lavrov's visit, Museveni sought Russian assistance to build East Africa's first commercial nuclear power station. It also sought Russia's assistance in expanding its space-research capabilities.

Uganda aims to launch its first satellite, PearlAfricaSat-1, into low Earth orbit in collaboration with the US NASA, so a switch to Russia will be at the expense of US imperialism.

Zambia

Formerly the British colony of Northern Rhodesia, Zambia became independent in 1964.

During South Africa's apartheid era, Soviet arms exports to Zambia accounted for 70 per cent of Zambia's arms imports.

In 2011, the Russian ambassador to Zambia said that Russian businesses were seeking large-scale investments in mines and farms in Zambia. The country is the biggest producer of copper in Africa. He said that Russian companies "are eyeing Zambia as their next best investment destination".

In February 2017, Russia and Zambia signed an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in a building of a nuclear science and technology centre at a cost of US\$10 million. The Zambian government hoped excess power generated from this plant could be made available for export to neighbouring countries. In 2019, the Russian government offered 140 scholarships, including 30 scholarships to train experts for nuclear power industry. As of 2019, 650 Zambian citizens were being trained in Russia.

Meanwhile, Zambia-Russia relations became strained in November 2022 when it was reported that a nuclear engineering student from Zambia had been killed on the frontlines of Russia's war on Ukraine. Zambian officials speculated that Lemekhani Nyirenda, who was serving a nine-year prison sentence in Russia, was recruited on the promise that his sentence would be reduced or suspended.

Zimbabwe

Russia has been courting Zimbabwe's leadership for over a decade, although its influence there is much less than China's. The Soviet Union had not supported Mugabe's Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) during the liberation war; China had. When long-term leader Robert Mugabe was replaced by Emmerson Mnangagwa in 2017, the latter had significant support from the Russians.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited the country in March 2018, followed in April by Sergei Ivanov Jr., CEO of Russian diamond miner Alrosa. One of the issues discussed during the visit of the former was the development of the Darwendale platinum deposit by Great Dyke Investments (Pvt) Ltd., a Russian-Zimbabwean joint venture. The Darwendale deposit could be the second largest in the world, with estimated investment volumes reaching \$2.8 billion through 2055. The deposit was taken from South Africa's Impala Platinum Holdings Ltd. in 2006 by the government of former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and Russian investors were invited to participate. However, VI Holding, the Russian half of Great Dyke Investments and owned by Russia's Vitaliy Machitskiy, sold its 50% stake in Darwendale to Zimbabwe in June 2022, ending its 22-year involvement in the project. Machitskiy blamed sanctions on Russian businesses because of the invasion of Ukraine for having made it too difficult for Russian companies to raise capital in London or New York. The collapse of Russian investment in the platinum project was seen as a victory by US imperialism whose Congress on May 12 passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, to "hold to account African governments and their officials who are complicit in aiding (Russia's) malign influence and activities" in Africa. When the pot calls the kettle black, as happens in inter-imperialist rivalry, the language becomes quite interesting!

Mnangagwa has adopted a stand against foreign interference in Africa whilst calling for more Russian investment in his own country. At the Africa Investment Forum Market Days gathering in

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire in November 2022, he warned that "The outside world wants to see us Africans suffering, and being a source of raw materials to develop their economies...the development of a country should not be determined from outside." But he went on to say that "Zimbabwe is open for business...(it) has undertaken economic reforms that are investor friendly, and offering incentives to investors." Two months before, he had told the Russian Ambassador to Zimbabwe that "There is a great appetite for more Russian investment in Zimbabwe." He identified mining, agriculture and tourism as growth areas.

Zimbabwe has been strongly supportive of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Speaker of Parliament Jacob Mudenda said in Moscow on October 10, 2022, "Zimbabwe and Russia are both victims of sanctions and that makes us comrades in the sanctions battle. To the extent that we are victims of sanctions, we share with Russia the same consequences of sanctions."

He added: "So it is not surprising that Zimbabwe is on Russia's side."

The New Scramble for Africa

The major imperialist players currently striving to secure recipients for capital exports, access to raw materials and cheap labour, markets for commodities, and diplomatic, political and military influence are the Western imperialist bloc headed by the US, and the Chinese. Within the US-led bloc, France is being pushed out of its former colonies in the Sahel just as happened to Portugal in an earlier age. Resentment at past colonial powers and at US imperialism runs high across the continent, and Russia, although still very much a junior player compared to the economic clout wielded by China, is nevertheless keen to re-establish itself as a participant in the current jockeying for influence.

Turkey is also a player. Not yet a fully developed imperialist power, it has ambitions for the expansion of its regional influence. It is part of NATO, but not exactly a puppet of the US. Its relations with Russia are complex. There are contradictions between them as well as areas of mutual support. They have backed different sides in Libya, and like Russia and the US, Turkey has its own PMC, SADAT, which is supporting state militaries in Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia.

Most of Russia's current ties with Africa have occurred over the last decade. In 2014, it was possible for John Endres, Chief Executive Officer of Good Governance Africa from South Africa, to say that "The most conspicuous aspect of Russia's involvement in Africa is its absence".

That can no longer be said. A common thread in the case studies above is their recency and the combination of security guarantees to governments through the use of PMCs, primarily the Wagner Group, and the extraction of mineral resources. Russian involvement is often labelled as "regime support packages".

Investments in the national resources sector alone do not provide Russian companies with enough opportunities for capital export. Less than 1% of Africa's total FDI stock ultimately originated from Russia in 2017, according to Unctad estimates. However, investment by Russian companies in Africa has increased in recent years, with a record 19 greenfield (new) projects announced in 2019, according to fDi Markets. And whereas the US led the pack in the value of greenfields FDI in 2006-10, (Russia was then in tenth place), by 2016-20 Russia has risen to second place and the US dropped to fourth. China had risen from fourth to first place over the same period.

And there are willing advocates for more of the same from Russia. "Africa needs more Russian foreign direct investments to enhance the current Africa-Russian trade ties" said Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union, during the St. Petersburg

International Economic Forum 2018, “Business Dialogue: Russia-Africa”. Some of Russia’s biggest companies are supplying that investment: Alrosa, Gazprom, Lukoil, Rusal, Renova, Gammakhim, Technopromexport and VEB and VTB banks, are all engaged in large-scale investment projects on the continent. State-owned Russian companies have been mining bauxite in Guinea, extracting diamonds from Angola and winning concessions to produce off-shore gas in Mozambique. The private Russian energy giant Lukoil is reported to have projects in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria and be looking to acquire a stake in the Republic of Congo.

Nuclear energy has also become a strategic sector for Russian investment in Africa, with at least seven sub-Saharan countries signing preliminary agreements with the country, according to the World Nuclear Association. It is estimated that more than 620 million people in Africa do not have access to electricity, so Russia’s nuclear industry has scope for expansion on the continent. In addition to Egypt’s first nuclear power plant, Rwanda’s parliament in June 2020 approved a plan for the Rosatom nuclear conglomerate to build it a nuclear research centre and reactor in the capital, Kigali. Sudan, Zambia and Ethiopia also have deals for nuclear power plants from Russia, while ten other countries are in various stages of negotiation over similar deals.

Russia’s \$20 billion in trade in Africa, is heavily imbalanced toward Russian exports of arms and grain to Africa. Russia supplies Africa with 30% of its total grain imports, fertilizers, and petroleum products. Commodities, however, have increased in prices due to the Ukraine war and sanctions, which have exacerbated global inflation. Russia is the leading exporter of arms to Africa controlling forty-nine percent of the overall arms market in Africa. Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, and Zambia are the leading customers of Russian arms in Africa.

Conclusion

We said at the beginning that Russian involvement in Africa has grown unevenly. The Wagner Group lists three countries – Central African Republic, Madagascar and Sudan - as sitting at the highest level (level 5) of cooperation with the Group. All had these features in common: military cooperation with Russia, excellent levels of cooperation with power structures, Russian involvement in police training, economic projects in which Russian capital had investments, humanitarian collaboration, Russian involvement in media projects and the press, and diplomatic and political cooperation. Zimbabwe, Libya and South Africa were described as being level 4 countries. These six may be said to be incipient components of a Russian sphere of influence in Africa. This will not be an exclusive sphere, just as those countries regarded as part of US imperialism’s sphere or Chinese social-imperialism’s sphere will also have some Russian influence.

The preparation of public opinion for alignment with Russia takes many forms. They are Russia’s “soft tactics” on the continent. They include Russian language schools, scholarships for African students to study in Russia, ownership of conventional media, opinion-formation through social media, and a reputation for “friendship” and “anti-colonialism” that draws upon both the memories of Soviet assistance and the Russian Federation’s lip-service to the principle of “African solutions to African problems” formulated by the African countries.

As of 2018 Russia had provided 15,000 international scholarships to African students covering tuition fees, a stipend of \$22 per month, and accommodation.

Offering loan finance to poor countries serves as a disincentive for them to seek self-reliance and acts to maintain dependency. The low conditionality of Russian loans even compared to China, which tends to work within IMF parameters, is attractive to African leaders who can see no way out of financial dependence. The Russians attach no conditions in respect of democracy or human rights,

used by Western imperialists to create avenues for mentoring their own elite groups. Loans are used to facilitate Russian SOEs and oligarch private companies “going abroad”. The Russian policy of supporting international expansion of its state-owned companies resembles China’s “going out” policy; in 2008, then president Dmitry Medvedev appealed to Russian companies to copy their Chinese peers.

VEB.RF is a key institution in loan issuing and in promoting the interests of Russian entrepreneurs. Its subsidiary, the Russian Agency for Insurance of Export Credits and Investments (EXIAR), from the Russian Export Centre group, adds to the institutional system of Russia’s export and investment promotion activities in non-commodity areas, including those on the African and Latin American continents. AFROCOM, the Coordination Committee on Economic Cooperation with African Countries, was established in 2009 as the main forum for addressing political obstacles to Russian entrepreneurs in Africa. In 2019, Sberbank, a Russian state-owned bank, the Russian Export Centre, VEB.RF, and Gemcorp Capital LLP founded a USD 5 billion fund that provides African countries, primarily Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, with credits for purchasing Russian goods.

The other side of the provision of loan capital is debt forgiveness, both bilaterally and as part of broader international initiatives. For instance, Moscow has reportedly written off over USD 20 billion of African debt, at times in exchange for certain economic concessions (e.g. increased opportunities for Russian companies, access to natural resources, weapons purchases). Russia is prepared to make political capital by writing off bad loan capital: it hopes to outscore both China and the Western imperialists in this regard.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia has engaged in humanitarian assistance in what Western detractors have described as vaccine diplomacy. The Russians claim that their Sputnik V vaccine was the first to be developed and has a 91 per cent effectiveness rate. Despite its having been registered in only four countries – Algeria, the Republic of Guinea, Morocco and Tunisia – it is highly regarded across the continent. Surveys found that in February 2021 Sputnik was the most discussed vaccine in African media, with only 11% negative perception and 56% positive African media coverage.

Another “soft tactic” is the presentation of Russia as a market for tourists to African countries. On 28 February 2018, Tass reported that tourism was a driving force for relations between Russia and Africa. Some African countries are encouraging tourism from Russia by scrapping visa requirements. South Africa did this in 2017. Seychelles regards Russian tourism as having saved its economy: Russia in 2021 became its largest source of tourists. In 2021 the tourist flow amounted to more than 30 thousand people. In January-August 2022 Seychelles was visited by 19 thousand tourists from Russia. Tanzania, Egypt and Tunisia are other African countries actively courting Russian tourists.

The combination of “soft tactics” together with the trade, investment and military cooperation (including contracting PMCs to deal with insurgents and jihadists) noted in the case of individual countries above, is positioning Russia to create opportunities for the expansion of its influence in Africa.

Russia is a capitalist country and it is an imperialist country.

The transfer of highly centralised state-owned enterprises, developed during the socialist period in the absence of competition, to private ownership, led directly to monopoly capitalism at the core of Russia’s economy. The export of commodities as a source of state revenue remained important during the period of the sell-off of state enterprises, but those enterprises have now accumulated sufficient capital to have needed to create banks and other financial institutions, and the export of

capital is moving to overtake the export of goods. This in turn requires a Russian military presence in one form or another: military cooperation agreements, reliance on Russian arms exports, and the presence of Russian military personnel whether official or unofficial (PMCs).

The Left needs to recognise this and not harbour illusions about Russia's intentions. We acknowledge that the information in this booklet will date fairly quickly, but at least it can serve as a measure of how Russia's influence grows in the coming years.

Contradictions between Russia and the Western imperialist bloc are not prompted, on Russia's part, by anti-hegemonism or anti-imperialism. Russian competition with US and other imperialisms is not progressive, is not useful and serves no purpose other than Putin's project to restore to Russia great power, or superpower, status at the expense of the sovereignty of countries that it is attempting to dominate.

Marx said that under capitalism, governments were the executive committees of the bourgeoisie. This is precisely the character of the Russian state where Putin acts as CEO for his cronies in the oligarchy, while Lavrov acts as the Chairman of the Board.

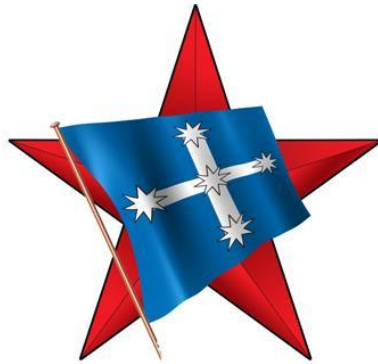
They are under few constraints, as the invasion of Ukraine showed, when it comes to using warfare as a means of asserting and extending the spheres of influence that they wish to claim.

Inter-imperialist rivalry remains the source of new war dangers. So long as imperialism exists, so does the danger of war.

We must build the anti-imperialist united front, unite all who can be united, be good at analysing and taking advantage of contradictions and always stand with the weak and the oppressed, with the victims of big-power bullying and exploitation.

The peoples of Africa will find their common voice and demand that every imperialist power be driven from their continent, and develop their common capacity for building a self-reliant socialist future.





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