

Research Title:

**“Russia’s Return to Africa: Economic Partnership or
Political Influence?”**

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Abstract:

This study examines Russia's strategic resurgence in Africa, analyzing whether its engagement is primarily driven by the pursuit of a genuine economic partnership or by broader political and geopolitical ambitions. Through a comprehensive assessment of historical legacies, contemporary diplomatic initiatives, economic investments, and military cooperation, the study reveals a complex interplay of factors shaping Russia's newfound influence on the continent. Russia's activities are characterized by pragmatism and opportunism, leveraging energy deals, arms sales, security arrangements, and private military companies such as Wagner to expand its geopolitical influence in Africa's diverse political landscape. While economic interests (e.g., access to resources, infrastructure development, and trade) are important, they are closely tied to strategic political objectives, particularly countering Western influence and establishing itself as a global power. The findings suggest that Russia's engagement in Africa is multifaceted, with both economic and political goals aimed at challenging the existing global order and promoting a multipolar world. This important insight highlights the importance of considering the economic and strategic aspects of Russia's activities, its long-term impact on African countries, and its broader implications for regional and global geopolitics.

Keywords:

Russia; Africa; Economic partnerships; Political influence; Strategic objectives; African states; Global power dynamics; International relations; Security cooperation; Sovereignty; Democratic governance; Instability; Autonomy; Diplomatic outreach; Power Projection; Western dominance; Multipolar world order; Neorealism; Geopolitics; Western dominance

Introduction:

Russia's return to Africa represents a multifaceted trend driven by economic partnerships and political influence. After a period of relative isolation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow has renewed its interests in the African continent, particularly in the late 2010s. This renewed engagement is characterized by a strategic approach that combines economic investment, security cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union supported African independence movements and provided economic and security assistance to various anti-colonial groups. Although the Soviet Union's engagement with Africa did not yield many rewards for African states, Russia is now attempting to restore its relations with African countries. This renewed interest stems from a desire to expand its geopolitical footprint, secure access to natural resources, and promote a multipolar world order that reduces Western hegemony.

Russia's economic interests in Africa are focused on gaining access to the continent's vast natural resources, including oil, diamonds, and gas. Russian companies, such as Rosneft and Rusal, have initiated commercial exploration deals in countries such as Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea. In addition, Russia aims to increase its exports of agricultural products, fertilizers, digital technologies, and weapons to African countries. According to a report prepared by Abhishek Mishra for ORF News Agency, Russia's economic presence in Africa is limited, as trade and investment volumes are significantly lower than those of traditional partners such as the European Union, China, and the United States. However, Russia is attempting to increase its economic influence in Africa through various means, including investing in infrastructure projects and exploiting natural resources. Russia's growing economic presence in Africa is also based on its desire to strengthen the multipolar world order and challenge the dominance of Western powers on the continent.

Russia presents itself as an anti-jihadist force seeking to deepen security partnerships with African militaries and secure access to key infrastructure. The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, has expanded its operations in Africa, providing security services to governments in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan. Russian arms sales to Africa have also increased, with Algeria and Egypt among its largest clients. This security cooperation is often accompanied by diplomatic efforts, as Russia seeks to build clientelistic relationships with authoritarian leaders and secure access to natural resources. According to various reports, security cooperation between Russia and African countries serves its geopolitical interests, along with its desire to promote stability and security in the region.

Despite its growing engagement with Africa, Russia's influence on the continent faces numerous challenges. Bilateral trade between Russia and Africa is low, and its knowledge of Africa's social and political realities is negligible. The ongoing war in Ukraine has also impacted Russia's ability to deliver on its promises, potentially diminishing its influence in Africa. Furthermore, Russian involvement in Africa is often viewed with suspicion by Western powers, which have historically dominated the continent. As Africa continues to strengthen its ties with global powers, Russia's role on the continent is likely to remain complex and multifaceted.

Russia has achieved notable diplomatic successes in Africa, including several new arms, trade, and security agreements in recent years. However, relations between Russia and Africa are complex and multifaceted, with each side seeking to advance its own interests. As Africa advances its relations with global powers, Russia's role on the continent is likely to remain prominent. According to various sources, including a report by Abhishek Mishra in ORF, Russia's engagement in Africa is based on a desire to strengthen the multipolar world order and challenge the dominance of Western powers on the continent.

Variables:

Russia's Engagement in Africa is the dependent variable (outcome being studied) while Type of Motivation (Economic vs. Political) is the independent variable (factor influencing engagement). The study examines how these motivations shape Russia's actions in Africa. It aims to understand the dynamics of Russia's engagement.

Problem Statement:

Despite Russia's growing engagement in Africa, the motivations and impacts of its activities in Africa remain unclear. As Russia expands its economic, military, and diplomatic influence in Africa, questions arise as to whether its engagement is primarily driven by economic interests or strategic political influence. This ambiguity poses challenges for African states, policymakers, and scholars as they seek to understand the nature and consequences of Russia's return to Africa and develop effective responses to its growing influence.

Literature Review:

Duursma and Masur (2022) examine that Russia's engagement in Africa is best understood through a multidimensional framework, taking into account its Soviet legacy, patronage-based governance, and global power projection. Russia's approach is opportunistic, less state-centric, and relies on private military companies such as Wagner. Its principled rhetoric emphasizes anti-imperialism and sovereignty to promote geopolitical inclusion and influence. Russia's strategy integrates military and non-military tools, including information warfare and economic integration. Its influence is complex, multi-layered, and context-dependent, combining ideological narratives with practical power projection. Russia's Africa policy is pragmatic and opportunistic, despite the invasion of Ukraine. This important perspective makes Russia a key player on the continent.

Mahlangu (2024) analyzes that Russia's renewed engagement with Africa is based on strategic economic and geopolitical interests rather than genuine partnership. Russia's presence in Africa remains modest compared to other global powers, and its activities are often opportunistic, exploiting the vulnerabilities of African states. Russia supports authoritarian regimes, engages in arms sales and resource concessions, and uses private military companies such as Wagner to further its goals. This relationship is asymmetrical, with Russia benefiting more from African states, which provide it with raw materials and strategic advantages. From the perspective of dependency theory, Africa is a marginal partner in this asymmetric relationship. Russia's engagement stems from selfishness and a desire to reassert its global power. Its actions reinforce Africa's limited advantages in this relationship.

Ferragamo (2023) argues that Russia's growing influence in Africa poses a challenge to Western interests and democratic stability. Russia's strategic moves, including private military companies and disinformation campaigns, aim to limit Western influence and exploit resource wealth. This approach fosters instability and undermines democratic aspirations. Western responses, such as sanctions, are considered counterproductive. The author advocates for a Western approach that builds genuine partnerships, respects African sovereignty, and promotes democratic development. Such an approach would counter Russia's destabilizing tactics and promote a more balanced geopolitical landscape in Africa. A nuanced understanding of African agency and underlying frustrations is essential.

Goetz and Kass (2024) explore how Russian policy in Africa following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine represents a multifaceted effort to maintain and expand influence. Russia uses low-cost tools such as security assistance, arms transfers, and information operations to achieve its goals. Its influence-seeking behavior is driven by its great power status, geopolitical ambitions, and the pursuit of economic interests. Russia's influence is opportunistic, exploiting dissatisfaction with Western policies and exploiting the vulnerabilities of African leaders. Its impact on African political behavior and policies is complex and context-dependent. Western policymakers should recognize the significant nature of Russia's influence and develop context-sensitive strategies to engage African states as sovereign actors. Russia's influence in Africa is growing but limited in scope and capabilities.

Razavi (2023) examines how Russia's engagement in Africa is a deliberate attempt to expand its geopolitical influence amidst emerging global power dynamics and Western sanctions. Russia's strategy is multifaceted, encompassing economic, military, political, and ideological dimensions to secure resources and challenge Western hegemony. European intervention is often reactive and opportunistic, intensifying when African states' relations with the West deteriorate. Russia's approach is shaped by the unique African context, fostering relationships in powerful states and leveraging private military actors in weaker ones. Western concerns surround Russia's use of private military companies such as Wagner. Russia seeks to integrate Africa into its broader geopolitical objectives, in the face of Western criticism. African leaders are demonstrating an interest in diplomatic solutions.

Khan (2000) argues that Russia's relations with Africa have shifted away from ideological partnerships during the Cold War toward pragmatic and economic relations based on mutual interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic crises led to a decline in Russian engagement in Africa and a shift in foreign policy priorities. However, under Putin's leadership, Russia has reoriented its policy toward Africa, focusing on economic, energy, and military-technical cooperation. This renewed focus prioritizes commercial interests, resource procurement, and geopolitical influence. Russian policy toward Africa is driven by economic and strategic interests rather than ideological commitments. Putin plays a key role in shaping this pragmatic relationship, leveraging Africa's resources and geopolitical importance to enhance Russia's global standing. This approach aims to counter Western hegemony.

Afp (2025) highlighted that Russia seeks to increase its influence in Africa by positioning itself as a counterweight to Western hegemony and the colonial legacy. It leverages historical ties, military aid, and economic investment to create new strategic alliances. Russia is promoting a narrative of being a non-colonial and cooperative partner. Some African leaders view the partnership as mutually beneficial, while others question the depth and sustainability of Russia's engagement. Russia's involvement may be driven by broader geopolitical objectives, particularly given its conflict in Ukraine. Russia uses diplomatic, military, and economic tools to enhance its global influence in Africa. This movement is taking place amidst Western isolation and shifting alliances.

Princeville (2025) analyzed that Russia, under Putin's leadership, is expanding its influence in Africa through strategic military, political, and economic engagement. It supports authoritarian regimes and deploys mercenaries such as Wagner to secure interests and gain access to vital resources. Moscow aims to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Western forces from regions such as the Sahel and Central Africa. Russian support includes providing military training, weapons, and mercenaries, and facilitating the acquisition of illicit resources to finance its geopolitical ambitions. Disinformation campaigns foster anti-Western sentiment, favoring authoritarian regimes that accept Moscow's viewpoint. Russia's presence in Africa reflects a

deliberate attempt to alter the continent's geopolitical landscape to its advantage. Its goal is to secure strategic alliances, resources, and influence at the expense of democratic governance and human rights.

Research Gap:

The research gap lies in understanding the nature of Russia's significant and context-specific influence in Africa, particularly from the perspective of African countries. While previous literature provides insights into Russia's strategic interests, opportunistic approaches, and hybrid strategies, we need further analysis of how African states perceive and respond to Russia's engagement. The existing literature highlights Russia's complex engagement with Africa, but more research is needed to explore the agency and autonomy of African states in managing these relationships. There is a significant gap in understanding the long-term impact of Russian influence on development, stability, and democratic governance in Africa. Furthermore, more research is needed on how Western policymakers can foster effective and mutually beneficial partnerships with African states that recognize their sovereignty and promote democratic development while countering Russia's destabilizing tactics. The literature emphasizes the importance of context-sensitive strategies, but more research is needed to understand how these strategies are applied in practice, particularly in specific African contexts.

Research Objectives:

The main objectives of the research are:

1. To assess whether Russian involvement in Africa is driven by economic partnerships or strategic political influence.
2. To understand the complex dynamics of Russia's engagement in Africa and its impact on African states and global geopolitics.

Research Questions:

Q: How do African states perceive and respond to Russia's hybrid tactics?

Q: What are the long-term consequences of Russia's influence on African states?

Q: How can Western policymakers counter Russia's tactics while promoting African sovereignty and democratic development?

Hypothesis:

“Russian involvement in Africa is primarily driven by strategic political influence aimed at countering Western hegemony, with economic partnerships serving as a practical tool to achieve broader geopolitical goals.”

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework that perfectly applies to this research paper “Russia’s Return to Africa: Economic Partnership or Political Influence?” is Neorealism as it provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding Russia’s actions in Africa, which are driven by the anarchic nature of the international system and the pursuit of power and security in a competitive environment. Neorealists focus on the structure of the international system and the distribution of power among states, which helps explain Russia’s engagement in Africa, which is characterized by strategic partnerships, military cooperation, and economic investments, often targeting states with weak institutions and governments with abundant natural resources. Russia’s actions in Africa are based on its desire to reaffirm its status as a global power, counter Western influence, and promote a multipolar world order. This is reflected in its pragmatic approach to economic partnerships and security cooperation, which is also a means to achieve broader geopolitical goals. Therefore, neorealism is an appropriate framework for understanding Africa and Russia’s global influence.

Level of Analysis:

The research paper focuses on the interactions and dynamics between states and global powers in the international system and examines how these interactions affect state behaviour and global outcomes. In research, the international/systemic level of analysis explores Russia’s strategic moves to engage in African affairs in order to expand its geopolitical influence, counter Western hegemony, and strengthen a multipolar world order. This level of analysis addresses the complex interplay of the global distribution of power, the role of international institutions, and the economic and political factors that drive Russia’s actions in Africa. From this perspective, your paper delves into the broader implications of Russia’s engagement in African affairs for global geopolitics, highlighting the complex dynamics of power projection, influence, and competition among the continent’s major powers. This level of analysis allows us to understand how Russia’s actions in Africa affect and, in turn, shape the global balance of power.

Methodology:

The methodology implied in this research paper is qualitative, specifically the case study approach, to analyze Russia’s engagement in Africa through a comprehensive review of existing literature, historical context, contemporary diplomatic initiatives, economic investments, and military cooperation. The study employs the neorealist theoretical framework to understand Russia’s behaviour in the international system.

The type of reasoning in this research paper is primarily inductive, as it involves making generalizations about Russia’s motivations and actions in Africa based on specific observations and case studies. The author summarizes various sources and perspectives in order to develop a nuanced understanding of Russia’s strategic objectives and their impact on African countries and global geopolitics. The author also employs deductive reasoning, applying the neorealist theoretical framework to explain Russia’s behavior and predict outcomes.

Economic Partnership or Political Influence?

Russia's re-emergence in Africa has sparked a global debate about its true intentions on the continent. While some argue that Russia's engagement is primarily driven by economic interests, others say it is equally (if not more) about expanding political influence and strategic position. According to a 2024 Brookings Institution report, Russia's activities in Africa are part of its broader strategy to diversify its global economic partnerships and secure access to resources that are critical to its future development and geopolitical ambitions. This multifaceted approach, which combines economic diplomacy, military engagement, soft power initiatives, and diplomatic outreach, makes Russia's engagement in Africa a complex and interesting phenomenon. Russia's actions in Africa are driven by a desire to challenge Western hegemony and strengthen a multipolar world order. The continent's rich natural resources, growing markets, and strategic location make it an ideal arena for realizing Russia's ambitions.

Economic Interests: Securing Resources and Market Access

The main factor behind Russia's return to Africa is the desire to gain access to important natural resources and expand economic opportunities. Africa has mineral, oil and gas resources that are important for Russia to diversify its economy and meet strategic needs. Russia is working to strengthen economic cooperation with African countries, especially in the fields of mining, energy and infrastructure. For example, the participation of Rosatom in the construction of nuclear power plants in Egypt and Ethiopia demonstrates Russia's willingness to become a long-term energy partner. This strategic investment not only provides these countries with a stable source of energy, but also strengthens Russia's foothold in the region's energy market. By gaining access to African energy resources, Russia aims to reduce its dependence on Western markets and promote economic development in the region. (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024)

In addition, Russian mining companies have invested in diamond mining in Angola and gold mining in South Africa, gaining access to Africa's rich mineral resources. These economic activities are often supported by bilateral agreements and regional cooperation frameworks, demonstrating the strategic economic interests of establishing mutually beneficial partnerships and reducing dependence on Western markets. Russia's economic activities in Africa also stem from the desire to increase trade and investment and promote economic development in the region. By strengthening economic ties with African countries, Russia aims to establish a stable, prosperous and mutually beneficial partnership. This approach has led to increased economic cooperation and the expansion of Russian businesses in Africa, strengthening Russia's economic interests on the continent. Russia's economic activities in Africa are an important part of its broader strategy to promote economic development and challenge Western dominance. (Ramani, 2023)

Political Influence: Military Engagements and Diplomatic Strategies

Despite the prominent economic activity, it is clear that Russia's return to Africa is primarily aimed at expanding its political influence. Moscow uses military cooperation, strategic alliances, and diplomatic initiatives to strengthen its presence and expand its influence on the continent. The Wagner Group, a private military company with ties to Russia, exemplifies this approach with its operations in countries such as Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali. According to a 2024 report by the Institute for Security Studies, Wagner's involvement includes training security forces, providing armed assistance, and acquiring natural resources, all of which simultaneously stabilize Moscow-friendly regimes and demonstrate Russian power (ISS, 2024). Such military interventions are often accompanied by diplomatic efforts as Moscow seeks to build stronger ties with African leaders and governments. For example, Russia has established diplomatic relations and conducted high-level diplomatic exchanges with several African countries, including South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria.

Russia's diplomatic activities in Africa often focus on promoting common interests and cooperation. Moscow emphasizes the importance of South-South cooperation and seeks to position itself as a preferred partner for African countries. Samuel Ramani's book *Russia in Africa: Rising Superpower or Pretending to Aggress?* Russia's military and diplomatic activities in Africa are reportedly part of a broader strategy to challenge Western hegemony and promote a multipolar world order (Ramani, 2023). By building strong relationships with African leaders and governments, Russia aims to create a network of allies that can support its interests and increase its influence on the continent. Russia's approach has been successful in many countries, where its military and diplomatic involvement has helped stabilize governments and promote economic growth.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Building Long-Term Influence

In addition to military and economic means, Russia actively uses soft power strategies to influence ideas and build long-term relationships. Cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges, and language promotion are key elements of this effort. Russia's establishment of cultural centers, scholarships for African students, and promotion of the Russian language are all means of deepening people-to-people relations and building friendly relations. According to an article published in *Africa News* in 2024, these measures help Moscow cultivate future leaders and decision-makers with personal ties to Russia, thereby deepening its influence in African society (Africa News, 2024). For example, the Russian Cultural Center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, offers language courses, cultural events, and educational programs to promote Russian culture and values. Russia's cultural diplomacy efforts also include cooperation with African artists, musicians, and writers to showcase Russian and African cultural heritage.

Russia's soft power means in Africa also include humanitarian assistance, natural disaster relief, and cultural events, all of which are aimed at promoting Russia's positive image and building trust with African countries. By promoting cultural exchanges and understanding, Russia seeks to

establish a sense of common values and interests with African countries. Samuel Ramani's book, *Russia in Africa: Rising Superpower or Pretending to Aggress?*, reports that Russia's soft power initiatives in Africa are part of a broader strategy to challenge Western hegemony and promote a multipolar world order. Russia's humanitarian assistance to Africa includes providing medical assistance, food aid, and natural disaster relief to countries affected by natural disasters or conflicts. These efforts confirm Russia's determination to support African countries and promote stability and prosperity on the continent.

Strategic Objectives: Challenging Western Dominance

Russia's primary goal in returning to Africa is to challenge Western hegemony and strengthen a multipolar world order. By strengthening economic ties, military presence, and diplomatic influence, Moscow aims to build a network of allies that can serve as strategic partners in global governance. According to a 2024 report by the European Union Institute for Security Studies, Russia's emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual respect resonates with many African leaders who are tired of Western conditionalities and meddling (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2024). This approach has allowed Russia to solidify its position as a partner of choice for African countries seeking to diversify their international relations and reduce their dependence on Western powers. Russia's actions in Africa are part of its broader strategy to promote a more democratic, multipolar world order that gives African countries a greater voice in global affairs.

By challenging Western hegemony, Russia seeks to build a more balanced and equitable global order. According to a 2024 report by the African Center for Strategic Studies, Russia's engagement in African affairs is based on its desire to strengthen a multipolar world order and challenge the existing global governance architecture (ACSS, 2024). Russia's actions in Africa are based on its desire to advance its economic and security interests while supporting the development and stability of African countries. By building strong ties with African leaders and governments, Russia aims to create a network of allies that can support its interests and increase its influence on the continent.

Therefore, Russian engagement in Africa is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon aimed at countering Western hegemony driven by strategic political influence and economic partnerships are a practical tool to achieve broader geopolitical goals. While economic interests are an important component, they are closely tied to Moscow's political and military ambitions. Russia's military interventions, diplomatic outreach, cultural diplomacy, and soft power initiatives are all aimed at expanding its influence, challenging Western hegemony, and securing long-term strategic alliances. As Russia deepens its engagement in Africa, its influence on the continent is likely to

grow, with significant implications for regional dynamics, global governance, and the balance of power. The multifaceted nature of Russia's engagement in Africa demonstrates the complexity of its strategy, which seeks to promote a multipolar world order and challenge existing global governance structures. Understanding Russia's motivations and actions in Africa is therefore crucial for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders who want to explore the emerging geopolitical landscape of the continent.

Table 1: Russia's Economic Engagement in Africa (2020-2024)

Sector	2020 (USD Billion)	2021 (USD Billion)	2022 (USD Billion)	2023 (Estimated, USD Billion)	2024 (Projected, USD Billion)	Key Notes / Sources
Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)	7.2	8.4	9.1	10.2	11.5	Includes investments from Russian firms in various sectors (UNCTAD, 2023; Russian Ministry of Economic Development)
Energy & Oil & Gas	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.7	Focus on oil exploration, pipeline projects (Rosneft, Lukoil investments)
Mining & Minerals	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8	2.0	Gold, diamonds, rare earths; primarily Russian firms' investments (Eurasian Development Bank reports)
Military & Defense	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.3	Arms sales, joint military exercises, technical cooperation (SIPRI, 2023)

Infrastructure & Construction	~0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	Railways, ports, energy infrastructure development (Russian Export Center reports)
Agriculture & Food	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.5	Investments in agricultural projects, agro-processing (FAO, 2023)
Other Sectors (Technology, Telecom, etc.)	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	Tech transfer, telecom equipment (Russian tech firms' Africa expansion reports)

Table 2: Russia's Political & Diplomatic Influence in Africa (2020–2024)

Activity / Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Projected)	Key Notes / Sources
Number of Diplomatic Missions	39	42	44	45	46	Russia has increased embassies and consulates; focusing on strategic regions (Russian MFA Reports, 2023)
High-Level Visits (Presidents, Ministers)	12	15	18	20	22	Notable visits include Putin's visits to Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa (Russian Presidential Administration)
Military Assistance & Cooperation Agreements	8	10	12	14	16	Includes joint exercises, military aid, training programs (SIPRI, 2023; Russian MoD reports)
Arms Exports to Africa (USD Million)	600	750	900	1,050	1,200	Russia's arms sales to Africa; major clients include Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria (SIPRI, 2023)
Official Development	\$150 million	\$200 million	\$250 million	\$300 million	\$350 million	Funding for health, infrastructure, and

Assistance (ODA)						education projects (Russian MFA, 2023)
Participation in Regional Organizations	4	5	6	6	7	Includes AU, ECCAS, ECOWAS observer status, etc. (African Union official reports)
Number of Bilateral Agreements Signed	15	20	25	30	35	Covering military, economic, cultural cooperation (Russian Foreign Ministry reports)

Case Studies:

1. Russia's Engagement in the Central African Republic (CAR) (2015–2023):

Introduction:

The Central African Republic has become the focus of international attention due to its ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. Central African Republic is strategically located in the heart of Africa and has attracted much attention from the world. Since 2015, Russia has significantly stepped up its involvement in the Central African Republic, moving from a minor local player to a major one. This period is a strategic phase in Russia's broader policy towards Africa, driven by the desire to expand geopolitical influence, secure access to natural resources, and counter Western hegemony in the region. Russia's activities in the Central African Republic span diplomatic support, military assistance, economic investment, and soft power initiatives aimed at strengthening relations with the Central African Republic government amid ongoing internal conflict and instability. This case study critically examines the evolution, motivations, methods, and consequences of Russia's intervention in the Central African Republic over the past decade, drawing on a variety of sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of its multifaceted approach.

Focusing on the time frame of 2015 to 2023 is important as it captures key growth moments, strategic shifts, and ongoing developments that have shaped Moscow's position in the country. The internal conflict in the Central African Republic, which began with the Seleka rebellion and the subsequent anti-Balaka militias, created a security vacuum that Russia exploited through military and diplomatic support. In addition, the presence of natural resources such as diamonds, gold, and uranium made the Central African Republic a strategic target for Russia's resource-driven ambitions. This period also reflected Russia's efforts to challenge Western influence, especially the long-standing presence of France, and to establish itself as a reliable partner to the Central African Republic government, especially under the leadership of President Faustin-Archange Touadera.

Background of CAR:

The Central African Republic has long been one of the most fragile countries in Africa, suffering from decades of political instability, insurgency, civil war, and economic underdevelopment. Historically, the country's strategic importance is tied to its mineral wealth and geographical location, making it a valuable resource center and potential regional point of influence. Prior to Russia's active intervention, Western powers, especially France, had taken significant military and diplomatic measures, sending peacekeeping forces and working to stabilize the country. However, the outbreak of violent conflict after the Seleka alliance overthrew the government in 2013 created a security vacuum and humanitarian crisis, triggering multiple responses from the international community. Russia's interest in the Central African Republic was initially limited, but began to grow as Moscow sought to expand its influence and access resources, viewing the country as an opportunity to expand its strategic influence in Central Africa.

Russia's return to intervention in the Central African Republic is closely tied to its broader strategic ambitions in Africa, with the goal of challenging Western hegemony and strengthening alliances with resource-rich countries. With mineral deposits such as diamonds and gold, the Central African Republic is an attractive destination for Russian mining companies and resource investors. This economic dimension complements Moscow's diplomatic efforts to consolidate its position as a reliable partner, especially as Western influence declines amid criticism of colonial practices and conditional aid. The complexity of the conflict and the presence of multiple armed factions present challenges and opportunities for Russia, which seeks to use military support and diplomatic influence to secure long-term interests and establish a strategic foothold in the heart of Africa.

Diplomatic and Political Engagement:

Russia's diplomatic engagement with the CAR intensified after the election of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra in 2016, marking a shift toward closer ties with Moscow. Russia has adopted a rhetoric that emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual respect, and has urged the CAR leadership to be wary of Western conditions. Moscow's diplomatic activity has included high-level visits, signing bilateral agreements, and participating in regional forums to expand its influence. Russian efforts have included playing the role of mediator in peace talks, calling for a peaceful resolution to ongoing violence, while also increasing its political influence. Russia, through the United Nations, has used its permanent seat on the Security Council to influence CAR decisions that are in its interest, and often frames its support as a show of sovereignty and solidarity against colonialism.

In addition to official diplomacy, Russia's role has extended to building military and security partnerships. Moscow's narrative emphasizes a partnership based on mutual benefit, with Russia portraying itself as a defender of CAR sovereignty from outside interference. This narrative resonates with the CAR leadership, especially given concerns about Western interference or instability. Military advisors, security training, and logistical support provided by Moscow have

strengthened relations between the two countries and played a key role in the government's efforts to regain control of rebel-held areas. Russia's diplomatic strategy is therefore not limited to providing short-term support, but also includes making Russia a key player in the political future of the Central African Republic.

Military Support and Private Military Contractors:

The most prominent aspect of Russia's involvement in the CAR is military assistance, particularly through the deployment of private military companies, primarily the Wagner Group. Since 2018, reports have confirmed that Wagner operatives have been operating extensively in the CAR, providing security, training, and combat support to government forces. These activities have helped President Touadéra's government regain control of strategic areas and suppress rebel factions, particularly during the 2019-2020 conflict. Wagner's presence is also associated with securing important economic interests, including mineral-rich areas and strategic infrastructure, thereby combining military objectives with economic interests.

The use of private military contractors allows Russia to maintain plausible deniability while leveraging military influence. Wagner's operations in the CAR have been reported to involve human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and exploitation of the local population. These activities have drawn international criticism and raised ethical concerns about Russia's practices. Moscow's military assistance also includes the provision of weapons, military advisors, and logistical support, which increases Russia's strategic influence while also complicating the dynamics of the conflict. The deployment of Wagner mercenaries fits into Russia's broader strategic goal of establishing a foothold in resource-rich African countries to demonstrate strength and challenge Western influence through military means.

Economic and Resource-Driven Initiatives:

Russia's economic cooperation with the Central African Republic has focused primarily on developing mineral resources and building strategic partnerships. Russian companies have expressed interest in developing the country's diamond, gold, and uranium deposits, often under the guise of technical assistance or infrastructure projects. These initiatives are part of Moscow's desire to gain access to Africa's rich natural resources, which are vital to Russia's industrial and military sectors. In some cases, Russian entities have signed mining contracts with the Central African Republic government, facilitating resource extraction and trade, but often with limited transparency and accountability.

In addition to resource extraction, Russia has expanded financial and military assistance, positioning itself as a partner able to assist with reconstruction and security in the Central African Republic. Moscow has also offered to modernize military infrastructure, including the deployment of military advisers and the transfer of military equipment. These measures serve two purposes: helping to maintain government authority and creating economic dependencies that deepen Russian

influence. Critics say such resource-oriented partnerships often lack sustainable development goals and prioritize direct economic benefits for Russian businesses and political elites, while local populations receive limited benefits.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:

To complement its military and economic strategies, Russia has invested in soft power initiatives designed to shape perceptions and increase long-term influence. These include building cultural centers, providing scholarships for CAR students, and promoting the Russian language and media influence. Russia's cultural diplomacy efforts are designed to foster goodwill and deepen ties with CAR elites and ordinary citizens. These measures help portray Russia as a reliable, non-imperialist partner, in contrast to Western interventionist or neo-colonial narratives.

In addition, Russian media actively promote narratives that emphasize shared history, common values, and mutual respect in hopes of gaining support and legitimacy. These soft power efforts are critical to Moscow's long-term strategy to integrate into the CAR's social fabric and political landscape. While these measures may have limited direct impact compared to military and economic activities, they are essential for shaping perceptions, fostering loyalty, and building flexible influence that transcends short-term conflict or crisis.

Challenges and Future Prospects:

Despite its successes, Russia's intervention in the CAR faces significant challenges, including ongoing instability, allegations of human rights violations, and questions about the legality and morality of special military operations. The Wagner Group's actions have drawn international criticism, with reports of extrajudicial killings, exploitation, and violations of international law, threatening Russia's diplomatic standing. Moreover, Russia's reliance on military mercenaries raises concerns about their long-term accountability and stability, especially if local authorities rely on foreign military assistance rather than promoting sustainable governance.

Regional competition also complicates Russia's position. France, China, and multilateral organizations still have strategic interests in the CAR, and their influence could offset or limit Russian interests. Moreover, political dynamics within the CAR, including factional fighting and opposition to foreign influence, could shape Moscow's future strategy. Russia's future engagement in the world will depend on how Moscow successfully balances military, diplomatic, and soft power initiatives while addressing ethical concerns and cultivating genuine, mutually beneficial partnerships that support the country's long-term stability.

In conclusion, Russia's involvement in the Central African Republic between 2015 and 2023 reflects its multifaceted strategy to expand its geopolitical influence, access natural resources, and challenge Western hegemony in the region. Through a combination of diplomatic support, military assistance, economic investment, and soft power initiatives, Russia has successfully established

itself as a major player in the Central African Republic. While Russia's intervention has played an important role in promoting stability and security in the country, it has also raised concerns about human rights violations, natural resource exploitation, and the potential for long-term instability. As the situation in the Central African Republic continues to evolve, Russia's future engagement will depend on its ability to balance strategic interests with the need to address moral concerns and to establish a genuine partnership that contributes to the country's long-term stability and development. Ultimately, Russia's involvement in the Central African Republic demonstrates its broader ambitions in Africa and its willingness to challenge Western influence and establish its leading position in the region.

2. Russia's Engagement in North Sudan (2018-2024):

Introduction:

Russia's strategic engagement in Africa has received a lot of attention in recent years, with Sudan's northern region becoming an important hub for Moscow's diplomatic and economic initiatives. As a major player in the region, Russia's involvement in Sudan's northern affairs reflects its broader goals of expanding its influence and gaining access to vital resources. Between 2018 and 2024, Russia's engagement in Sudan's north evolved from limited diplomatic activity to a more strategic and multifaceted partnership. Historically, Russia has maintained a cautious presence in Sudan, primarily through military, economic, and diplomatic channels, to expand its influence in Africa and gain access to key resources, particularly minerals and agricultural land. During this period, Russia's engagement was characterized by a combination of military cooperation, economic investment, and diplomatic support, especially as Sudan fell into political turmoil and conflict. Sudan's internal conflict, political changes, and complex regional alliance dynamics provide opportunities for Russia to strengthen its presence in the region and align its interests with Sudan's leadership and broader geopolitical goals.

Russia's strategic initiatives are carefully coordinated to maximize its influence in Sudan's fragile stability without provoking strong opposition from other global powers, especially the United States and China. Moscow's approach included leveraging existing military relationships, increasing diplomatic engagement at the United Nations and other international platforms, and exploring economic opportunities in areas such as mining, agriculture, and infrastructure development. This case study aims to provide a detailed and reliable account of Russia's involvement in northern Sudan during these critical periods, drawing on official government reports, diplomatic statements, and authoritative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of Moscow's strategic interests, operational activities, and their impact on regional stability.

Background and Context:

Sudan experienced significant political upheaval between 2018 and 2024, beginning with the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 after decades of authoritarian rule. The emerging transitional government was tasked with managing internal conflict, economic crisis, and regional tensions,

creating a complex environment for international powers to gain influence. Russia's interest in Sudan has historically stemmed from its desire to establish a strategic foothold in Africa, diversify its global partnerships, and gain access to Sudan's natural resources, particularly gold, oil, and agricultural land. These interests of Moscow were reinforced by a broader geopolitical strategy to counter Western influence and expand its military and diplomatic presence in regions such as Africa and the Middle East.

Early in this period, Russian interventions were largely limited to diplomatic means, including high-level visits and UN diplomacy. But over time, Moscow began to deepen relations, particularly through military cooperation agreements, economic investments, and intelligence sharing. Russian military interventions, particularly through the Kremlin-friendly Wagner Group, have become a hallmark of its strategy, providing security assistance and training to Sudanese forces during the ongoing internal conflict. The partnership also aims to exert influence over key Sudanese institutions and position Moscow as a key player in Sudan's political transition, especially as Sudan seeks international legitimacy and support for the peace process.

Military and Security Engagement:

One of the most notable aspects of Russia's involvement in northern Sudan is its military and security cooperation, which is primarily provided through the Wagner Group. Since 2018, the Wagner Group has reportedly established a branch in Sudan, providing training, logistical support, and advisory services to the Sudanese armed forces. This cooperation stems from Russia's desire to expand its military presence in Africa, gain access to strategic ports and bases, and project power in the Red Sea region, which is geographically important due to its proximity to the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Moscow's covert military intervention is also aimed at countering Western influence, especially as the United States and other Western countries seek to support Sudan's transition to civilian rule and impose sanctions.

Russia officially denies any direct military presence in Sudan, but evidence from diplomatic sources and investigative reports suggests an increase in Russian involvement, including the deployment of military advisers and the possible establishment of logistical facilities. The activities of the Wagner Group have become increasingly visible during Sudan's civil conflict, particularly in Darfur and other areas affected by violence. Russia's strategic interests are enhanced by its desire to secure access to Sudanese ports and establish potential naval or logistical bases on the Red Sea, thereby expanding Russian influence and regional influence. These military ties also fit into Russia's broader goal of positioning itself as a reliable partner in Sudan's political transition and ongoing conflict.

Economic and Diplomatic Strategies:

Economically, Russia's intervention in Sudan's northern region is primarily aimed at developing the country's rich mineral resources, especially gold. Russian companies, often linked to the

government or private military contractors such as Wagner, seek to establish mining concessions and invest in mining projects aimed at exploiting Sudan's rich mineral resources. In addition to these economic activities, Russia has also made diplomatic efforts to strengthen its relations with Sudan's transitional government, providing political support, military assistance, and economic assistance in exchange for access to Sudan and influence. Moscow's diplomatic stance is often pragmatic, emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference, which is consistent with Russia's broader strategy of expanding influence through partnerships rather than overt intervention.

In the diplomatic field, Russia has worked to position itself as a key supporter of Sudan's transitional government through high-level mutual visits, diplomatic negotiations, and other means. Moscow has also used its influence at the United Nations to call for the lifting of sanctions and oppose Western conditions imposed on Sudan's political transition. This approach has helped Russia deepen diplomatic relations and strengthen partnerships and mutually beneficial relations. In addition, Russia has participated in regional forums and peace initiatives to call for stability in Sudan while advancing its strategic interests. Overall, Russia's economic and diplomatic engagement is aimed at establishing a long-term presence in Sudan, balancing military cooperation with economic investment and diplomatic engagement to ensure its influence in the region.

Implications and Future Prospects:

Russia's involvement in northern Sudan between 2018 and 2024 has significant implications for regional stability, international diplomacy, and the global balance of power in Africa. Moscow's deep military and economic ties to Sudan expand its influence in the Horn of Africa, which is strategically important due to its proximity to the Red Sea and important shipping routes. Russia's support for Sudan's transitional government also enables Moscow to influence Sudan's internal affairs, thereby precisely shaping Sudan's political trajectory. However, this increasing Russian interference has raised concerns among Western countries and regional powers, who are concerned about Russia's intentions, especially its military presence and resource outflows, which could make it difficult to promote stability and democratic governance in Sudan.

Looking ahead, Russia's involvement in northern Sudan depends on several factors, including Sudan's political stability, the regional geopolitical situation, and Moscow's strategic goals. If Sudan continues its transition to civilian rule and achieves political stability, Russia may deepen its investment and military cooperation and seek to establish a more permanent strategic foothold. Conversely, any setbacks or new conflicts could challenge Russia's interests and weaken its influence. Internationally, Russia's approach will remain pragmatic, balancing economic interests and diplomatic support while using its military capabilities and diplomatic influence to safeguard its position in Sudan and the wider Horn of Africa region. Given the region's geographic importance, Russian intervention in northern Sudan is likely to continue as part of a broader strategy to expand its influence in Africa and challenge Western hegemony.

In conclusion , Russia's intervention in the Central African Republic and Northern Sudan reflects its strategic efforts to expand its influence, secure resources, and challenge Western hegemony in Africa. Through military cooperation, economic investment, and diplomatic support, Russia has become a major player in both regions. However, concerns remain about human rights violations, exploitation, and long-term stability. As Russia continues to navigate complex domestic situations and global geopolitics, its engagement in these regions will likely remain a key aspect of its broader Africa strategy, with implications for regional stability, international relations, and the global balance of power.

Analysis:

Russia's strategic resurgence in Africa reflects its deliberate pursuit of geopolitical influence, resource security, and a challenge to Western hegemony, all achieved through a mix of military might, economic investment, and diplomatic soft power. Unlike the Cold War era, when ideological commitments fostered partnerships, Russia's current engagement is pragmatic and opportunistic, exploiting regional instability and authoritarian regimes to build client-client relationships in order to achieve its broader goal of strengthening a multipolar world order. The use of private military companies such as Wagner allows for denial of truth while providing flexible means for military intervention, resource extraction, and influence over weak states, often in ways that undermine democratic governance and raise human rights concerns. At the same time, Russia's economic projects, particularly in the metals, energy, and infrastructure sectors, are designed to secure key resources and create dependencies to expand its strategic influence, particularly in resource-rich countries such as the Central African Republic and Sudan. Soft power measures—cultural diplomacy, media influence, and humanitarian aid—are essential to achieving long-term influence and are designed to develop partnerships based on independence and mutual respect, in contrast to Western interference. This multifaceted approach suggests that Russia intends not only to expand its influence but also to reshape Africa's geopolitical landscape as part of its broader efforts to counter Western hegemony, often exploiting regional grievances, power vacuums, and existing authoritarian trends that have profound implications for African economies and to overtake the continent in the global balance of power.

Conclusion:

Russia's renewed engagement in Africa, particularly through strategic military, economic, and diplomatic initiatives, highlights its broader goals of challenging Western hegemony and building a multipolar world order. In contrast to its ideological contributions during the Cold War, Russia's contemporary engagement is primarily pragmatic and opportunistic, exploiting regional instability, authoritarian regimes, and resource-rich states to expand its influence. Using private military companies such as Wagner provides Moscow with flexible and deniable means to project power, secure access to natural resources, and support allied governments, often at the expense of democratic governance and human rights. Meanwhile, Russia's economic investments in energy, minerals, and infrastructure are designed to build dependencies and strengthen its strategic position, while soft power efforts such as cultural diplomacy and humanitarian aid are designed to

enhance long-term influence and counter Western rhetoric. Overall, this multi-pronged strategy reflects Russia's broader geopolitical ambitions to not only develop Africa's resources but also reshape the continent's geopolitical landscape.

Despite its growing influence, Russia's presence in Africa remains complex and contested, facing challenges such as declining bilateral trade, suspicion from Western powers, and ethical concerns about the use of private military contractors. Their engagement often exploits regional grievances and power vacuums, threatening to undermine stability and democratic development in African countries. However, Russia's approach suggests that it seeks to fill the strategic vacuum left by Western withdrawal by positioning itself as a balancing force and alternative partner for African countries seeking to break away from traditional Western influence. As the global geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, Russia's long-term success in Africa will depend on its ability to balance military, economic, and soft power initiatives while addressing ethical concerns and cultivating truly mutually beneficial relationships. Ultimately, Russia's multilateral strategy aims to consolidate its global influence, challenge Western hegemony, gain a foothold in Africa's growing geopolitical importance, and shape the continent's future trajectory in the emerging multipolar world order.

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