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Dominance or reciprocity?

Why the West needs to counter the rise of **Chinese and Russian influence in Africa**

MARCUS KOLGA

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Contents

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Executive Summary

Russian aid to Africa evaporated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while western aid and investment in the continent declined throughout the 1990s. China quietly filled in as others departed, making strategic investments and securing resources and markets. Africa is a region that offers some key benefits for the rulers in Beijing – vast supplies of natural resources, cheap labour, and a new market for Chinese goods. Further, China can leverage its relationship with African countries for its own geostrategic ambitions, including the construction of ports around the African coastline.

China's success has not gone unnoticed. Over the past four years, the Putin regime's arms trade to Africa has grown steadily. Russian arms exports to Africa have nearly tripled since the early 2000s, while Russian security contractors train the armies of African authoritarians to help them cling to power, in exchange for diamonds and extraction rights.

Ultimately, Russia and China have adopted a no-strings-attached transactional approach to their investment and aid for Africa. Moscow is not selective in considering a client government's human rights record or form of government; the Kremlin will not hesitate to supply arms to some of the world's worst human rights abusers. Chinese investment, meanwhile, is far less restrictive than that offered by the US, European countries, and even Canada, which attach conditions on governance policies, transparency, democracy, and respect for human rights.

While some African governments are benefiting materially from these arrangements, the ultimate beneficiaries are China and Russia themselves. In addition to being saddled with significant debt, African nations that fall under this influence confront the threat of growing corruption, human rights abuses, and greater authoritarianism.

Canada and its allies should be concerned about this growing Chinese and Russian influence. But Western governments – including Canada – remain at a serious disadvantage. Unfortunately, over the past 40 years, Canada's interest in Africa has also ebbed and flowed without any predictability. Canada's cur-

rent presence and engagement in the continent is modest; just 0.6 percent of all Canadian foreign investment goes there. Further, Canada has failed to pay consistent and meaningful diplomatic attention to continent.

Africa's growing workforce and connectivity offer significant opportunities for Canada and its allies to build relationships based on mutual benefit and that support broad economic prosperity, the rule of law, and core democratic values. If Canada seeks to advance these values in Africa, it should commit to a long-term Africa strategy that features sustained engagement – one capable of challenging and competing against the growing influence of China and Russia.

Canada's investment strategy in Africa should seek to ease the dependency of African countries on Chinese investment or Russian arms. More precisely, the Canadian government needs to better support Canadian mining firms competing with Chinese mining firms in Africa, while penalizing African governments involved in Russia's opaque natural resources agreements for failing to comply with good business practices and standards. In addition, Canada should explore legal means – both domestically and through the UN – to counter the activities of Russian mercenaries like the Wagner Group.

To promote investments in African infrastructure, Canada should work within frameworks such as the African Development Bank, the African Union, and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development. A potential Canada-Africa or G7-Africa summit would strengthen Ottawa's commitment to Africa while facilitating negotiations on future collaboration. Ultimately, Canada should also re-affirm its commitment to liberal values in Africa and build a realistic, long-term strategy in partnership with allies, Canadian non-governmental organizations, and corporations with expertise and a presence in Africa.

Sommaire

L'assistance de la Russie à l'Afrique s'est volatilisée après l'effondrement de l'ex-URSS, tandis que l'aide et les investissements occidentaux sur ce continent ont reculé tout au long des années 1990. La Chine a discrètement pris la relève, en réalisant des investissements stratégiques et en mobilisant les ressources et les marchés. L'Afrique est une région qui offre certains avantages clés aux dirigeants de Pékin : de vastes réserves de ressources naturelles, une main d'œuvre peu coûteuse et de nouveaux marchés pour les produits chinois. En outre, la Chine peut mettre à profit sa relation avec les pays africains dans le but de satisfaire sa propre ambition géostratégique qui aspire, notamment, à construire des ports le long du littoral.

Le succès de la Chine n'est pas passé inaperçu ailleurs. Depuis quatre ans, le commerce d'armes du régime Poutine avec l'Afrique est en progression constante. Les importations africaines d'armes russes ont presque triplé depuis le début des années 2000, tandis que les régimes autoritaires font maintenant appel aux services de sécurité russes pour former et ainsi aider leurs armées à les maintenir au pouvoir, en échange de diamants et de droits d'extraction.

En définitive, la Russie et la Chine procèdent d'une démarche purement commerciale à l'égard de l'Afrique en ce qui a trait à l'investissement et à l'assistance. Moscou n'est pas sélectif quant au bilan d'un gouvernement client en matière de droits de la personne ou à la forme de gouvernement : le Kremlin n'hésitera pas à fournir des armes aux auteurs des pires violations. Les investissements chinois, de leur côté, comportent beaucoup moins d'exigences que les investissements américains, européens et même canadiens, qui fixent tous des conditions de gouvernance, de transparence, de démocratie et de respect des droits de la personne.

Bien que certains gouvernements africains profitent matériellement de ces accords, les bénéficiaires ultimes demeurent la Chine et la Russie elles-mêmes. En plus d'être aux prises avec de lourds niveaux d'endettement, les nations africaines qui succombent à cette influence se retrouvent en face de menaces de corruption croissante, de violations des droits de la personne et d'un plus grand autoritarisme.

Le Canada et ses alliés devraient se soucier de l'influence croissante de la Chine et de la Russie. Or, tous les gouvernements occidentaux – y compris le Canada – se retrouvent dans une position nettement désavantageuse. Au cours des 40 dernières années, l'intérêt du Canada pour l'Afrique a, par ailleurs, beaucoup fluctué, sans tendance prévisible. La présence et l'engagement du Canada sur le continent sont modestes actuellement; à peine 0,6 pour cent de tous les investissements étrangers canadiens y sont destinés. Parallèlement, le Canada a omis de porter une attention diplomatique durable et sérieuse au continent.

La main-d'œuvre et la connectivité croissantes de l'Afrique offrent au Canada et à ses alliés d'importantes occasions de construire des relations réciproquement avantageuses, propres à soutenir une vaste prospérité économique, la primauté du droit et les valeurs démocratiques fondamentales. Si le Canada souhaite promouvoir ces valeurs en Afrique, il doit s'engager dans une stratégie à long terme pour l'Afrique fondée sur un engagement soutenu – une stratégie capable de défier et de concurrencer l'influence croissante de la Chine et de la Russie.

La stratégie d'investissement du Canada en Afrique devrait chercher à atténuer la dépendance des pays africains à l'égard des investissements chinois ou des armes russes. Plus précisément, le gouvernement canadien doit mieux soutenir ses entreprises minières nationales en concurrence avec les minières chinoises en Afrique, tout en sanctionnant les gouvernements africains qui sont parties aux accords opaques russes sur les ressources naturelles fondés sur des pratiques et des normes commerciales irrégulières. En outre, le Canada devrait envisager les moyens juridiques – tant nationalement que par l'intermédiaire des Nations Unies – permettant de contrer les activités des mercenaires russes comme celles du Groupe Wagner.

Pour promouvoir les investissements dans les infrastructures africaines, le Canada devrait travailler de manière à s'insérer dans la programmation de la Banque africaine de développement, de l'Union africaine et de la Conférence internationale de Tokyo sur le développement de l'Afrique. Un éventuel sommet Canada-Afrique ou G7 Afrique renforcerait l'engagement d'Ottawa envers l'Afrique tout en facilitant les négociations sur une collaboration future. En dernière analyse, le Canada devrait également réaffirmer son engagement en faveur des valeurs libérales en Afrique et élaborer une stratégie réaliste à long terme en partenariat avec ses alliés, les organismes non gouvernementaux canadiens et les entreprises fortes de leur expertise et de leur présence en Afrique.

Introduction[1]

Since the end of the Cold War, the two sides that fought this decades-long struggle have shown waning interest in Africa. Russian aid to Africa evaporated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while western aid and investment declined throughout the 1990s (OECD 2019). Notably, however, China has quietly filled in as others have departed, gaining enormous political influence in Africa while making strategic investments and securing resources and markets. China's Belt and Road Initiative has only intensified Beijing's efforts to fund and build major infrastructure projects to support its investments in Africa. While its investment in Africa may yet lag behind the US, China's influence – often wielded through its African allies in international institutions like the UN – is formidable.

China's success has not gone unnoticed by Vladimir Putin and the oligarchs who support him. Over the past four years, Russian arms trade to Africa has grown steadily. Russian private military contractors (PMCs) linked to a close Putin associate are supporting regional authoritarians in their attempts to remain in power and are taking advantage of regional conflicts. Using strategies not unlike those used by the Russian government to undermine the 2016 US presidential election (Lister, Shukla, and Ward 2019), the Kremlin has engaged in election interference and media manipulation in South Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique, Libya, Sudan, and beyond. Russian Wagner Group mercenaries have used their involvement in Syria on behalf of the Assad regime as a template for operations across the content, from Libya in the north to Mozambique in the South. Russian mercenaries in places like the Central African Republic and Libya work for both sides of these conflicts, selling arms and influence operations to regional actors while providing training, advisory, and protective services. Crimea, Donbas, Syria, and now Libya, are clear-cut examples of Russia's efforts to cause, destabilize, and control regional conflicts.

Both China and Russia remain interested in securing access to port facilities on the African continent; for example, Beijing established a naval base in Djibouti while the Kremlin gained access to a naval port in Sudan by the Red Sea. Ninety percent of African exports are exported through maritime channels.

Thus, it goes without saying that a more assertive stance by either China or Russia would pose a great threat to Canadian and allied trade in the region. In addition, both countries contribute to the potential for conflict escalation and help to keep illegitimate regimes in power through their arms sales. For instance, Beijing often bypasses Western-imposed embargoes and empowers governments that reject democracy and human rights, while Russia continues to increase its arms sales to African governments and warlords, most notably, in Central African Republic, Libya, and Sudan.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese and Russian governments have also leveraged the global coronavirus crisis to their advantage by engaging in what have become known as "personal protective equipment (mask) diplomacy" and "vaccine diplomacy." This is the practice of making well-publicized contributions of health-related items to foreign nations as a part of a government's soft power propaganda strategy.[2]

Ultimately, Russia and China have adopted a no-strings-attached transactional approach in their investment and aid. As a result, Western governments – including Canada – eager to promote good governance, human rights, and democracy remain at a serious disadvantage. Canada may have offered limited military deployments, such as in Mali in 2018, alongside a quick tour through the continent by Prime Minister Trudeau in 2019 to lobby for Canada's UN Security Council campaign. Yet such actions should be part of a broader, sustained, and mutually beneficial Canadian Africa strategy.

This report will provide a wide-ranging analysis of the current challenges that China and Russia pose to Western, and particularly Canadian, engagement in Africa – a vast region that includes both North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. It will examine Russian and Chinese influence, expansion, and objectives in the continent, the position of Canada and its allies in that context, and whether a stronger Western presence in Africa can be mutually beneficial. As it will show, Canada and its allies should be concerned about growing Chinese and Russian influence in Africa, especially in areas of economics and the ongoing empowerment of various forms of authoritarianism and illiberal democracies that engage in corruption and human rights abuses. The report concludes with some policy recommendations for Canada and its allies to help address the issues and concerns outlined here.

Russia in Africa

In late April 2021, Chadian rebels, crossing south across Chad's northern frontier with Libya, killed the country's long-serving president, Idriss Déby, who had been recently elected to a sixth term in office. Déby was a close ally of France and the US in the fight against jihadist groups in West Africa. The

roots of the rebels' unexpected victory lay in Libya, where they had trained alongside Russian Wagner mercenaries (Walsh 2021). The *Times of London* has reported that the rebel group known as the "Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT)," was directly employed by the Russian mercenary group (Flanagan 2021). Chad is just the latest of many African nations to have been targeted by Russian mercenary and interference operations undertaken to reestablish Moscow's influence and expand its arms sales in Africa.

The Kremlin's objectives today are not so different from those of the Cold War era when the Soviet Union was competing with China and the West for political influence in Africa while supporting regimes that ideologically and practically aligned with Moscow. Russian arms exports to Africa have nearly tripled since the early 2000s (Deutsche Welle 2020), while Russian security contractors train the armies of African authoritarians in exchange for diamonds and rights to extract resources. Russia also recently signed a 25-year agreement with the Sudanese government to use a naval port in Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

Russia is actively seeking to secure mining concessions in many African countries. In the Central African Republic, the government has deployed Russian private military contractors to secure control and to guard mining locations in areas where Russian entities are active. In other nations, Russia has signed gas and oil contracts, many of which seem to have gone dormant. Meanwhile, the Kremlin has also proven willing to use disinformation and propaganda agents to manipulate and interfere in democratic processes and the media in order to support their favoured candidates in African elections. Indeed, Putin has set an example for some African authoritarians who have manipulated or simply disregarded constitutional term limits to remain in power.

Vladimir Putin's 2019 Africa-Russia summit in Sochi aimed to revive Moscow's Cold War friendships in Africa – though it had limited results. Russia's efforts to expand its presence in Africa faces significant challenges from both China's Belt and Road Initiative and the simple inability to offer much to Africa aside from weapons and private military services. Indeed, far from promoting any semblance of good governance, Russian investment and activities are used to leverage the corruption and conflict in various African countries to allow Moscow to gain a foothold in the region even as autocratic regimes are lured by the promise of Russian support to remain in power.

The Soviet experience

Russian activity in Africa dates back to the Czarist era when Czar Nicholas supported the Afrikaners against the British during the Boer War and the Ethiopians against the Italians in in the 1880s. However, it wasn't until the height of the Cold War in the 1950s when Soviet leaders focused on Africa that the Kremlin was able to compete with Western governments and China for re-

sources and political influence on the continent. Soviet foreign aid eventually reached a peak of US$1 billion in 1960, "which, as a share of gross national product, was roughly equal to the United States' aid contributions at the time" (Asmus, Fuchs, and Müller 2018).

Soviet leadership had three primary objectives: political influence, arms exports, and resource control. The Soviet Union identified opportunities for ideological alignment with emerging African liberation movements during the process of decolonization. During the Khruschev era, significant Soviet resources were allocated to building infrastructure in developing countries, including those in Africa, where the Soviets built the Aswan High Dam on Egypt's Nile River, for example. Meanwhile, Soviet military exports rose steadily to Africa in the second half of the Cold War, tripling during the late 1970s (National Foreign Assessment Center 1980).

Soviet support for its African clients included training of armies and security forces. In 1979, the Soviets sent 6825 technical military training personnel to Africa primarily in Angola, Algeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique, the Central African Republic, Libya and Tanzania.[3] In 1990, Angola was the largest importer of Soviet weapons and had the largest number of graduates from Soviet military institutes, including Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos. Yet, after the end of the Cold War, Russian arms sales to African states declined significantly. Arms exports to Angola evaporated when its civil war concluded that same year (see Table 1), and exports to Libya were terminated by Russian President Boris Yeltsin in compliance with UN sanctions.

Table 1: Soviet Arms Exports to Africa in Billions of US dollars

1967-1976	1976-1980	1987-1990	1991-94
$11.37	$ 28.04	$125.58	$24.47

Source: Grey 1984. | Note: Adjusted to 2021 US dollars.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, sustaining Russian influence and operations in Africa became economically challenging. Yet one country remained of particular interest to Russian oligarchs and corrupt officials: Angola, which was saddled with significant post-Cold War debts to the Soviet Union and Russia in the wake of its civil war. The Kremlin took advantage of Angola's US$1.5 billion debt in the late 1990s. A crooked debt restructuring scheme was developed that saw hundreds of millions of dollars siphoned away by corrupt Angolan officials and Russian oligarchs (Ali 2013). Yet, for the most part, Russia's Soviet-era connections with Africa faded. All told, however, by the end of the Cold War, 50,000 Africans had studied in Soviet universities and an additional 200,000 had received some Soviet training in Africa (Pham 2014).

Putin-era relations

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has been keen to restore Russia's Soviet-era superpower status (Ward 2014), has projected his nation's influence and power into Syria and pockets within Europe and Central Asia. Yet, outside of those areas, Russia's global influence remains severely limited – a fact that might help explain the Kremlin's renewed interest in Africa, especially after Russia's invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014.

Global resistance against Putin's aggression in Ukraine was demonstrated by the UN's adoption of resolution 68/262 on the "Territorial integrity of Ukraine," which reaffirmed Ukraine's territorial claim to Crimea and condemned the staged referendum in Crimea as illegitimate. Despite the Russian ambassador's aggressive lobbying campaign against the resolution (Reuters 2014), which included threats against several nations (Charbonneau 2014), the resolution passed with 100 votes. However, it is notable that "twenty-nine African countries voted against or abstained from that resolution; six did not show up for the vote" (Stronski 2019). Russia's failure to attract any significant support for its bid to reject the UN resolution on Crimea further demonstrated Africa's strategic importance as a voting block and may have contributed to the Kremlin's efforts to reestablish its influence in Africa.

The United States has taken note of the Russian government's efforts to project its influence amongst African states. In a December 2019 speech in Luanda, Angola, then US Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan warned that "Russia often utilizes coercive, corrupt, and covert means to attempt to influence sovereign states, including their security and economic partnerships" (Sullivan 2019). It is perhaps unsurprising that this comment came several weeks after Putin used the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi to lambast western nations, accusing them of "resorting to pressure, intimidation and blackmail of sovereign African governments" and referring directly to the former colonial powers (Balmforth and Osborn 2019).

Russia remains a relatively modest economic development partner for African states. That fact is also perhaps not surprising, given that Russia's largely stagnant economy has only a modest technology sector, few investment resources, is primarily "a raw-materials exporter" that places it in competition with many African economies, and "produces few products that African consumers want" (Stronski 2019).

Russian exports account for 39 percent of all arms exports to the continent with US$2.1 billion worth of arms exported to African countries in 2017 and again in 2018 (SIPRI 2020). Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, and Nigeria have been the leading importers of Russian arms among the African states (Sukhankin, 2020a). Importantly, Moscow is not selective in considering a client government's human rights record or form of government. Russian government

sales to governments like Sudan (TASS 2020) have demonstrated that the Kremlin will not hesitate to supply arms to some of the world's worst human rights abusers. Yet arms deals are only one of two sides of Moscow's "security exports." The second side is the provision of military training and consultancy by private military contractors (Sukhankin 2020a), which this report examines later.

Putin's "chef" Yevgeni Prigozhin, Wagner mercenaries, and information warfare

In April 2021, the US Treasury Department announced new sanctions designations targeting Russian organizations and individuals responsible for Russian interference operations in Africa. Among those the US designated is Yevgeni Prigozhin, the notorious founder of the Internet Research Agency (IRA, aka the St. Petersburg Troll Factory) and a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Prigozhin is widely believed to control the Wagner Group.

Prigozhin's colourful criminal background includes a nine-year period in prison for various criminal activities in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, Prigozhin established a hot dog stand in St. Petersburg which, through major Russian government contracts, he grew into a catering empire. In 2019, his catering company was accused of delivering low-quality food to Russian schools that led to an outbreak of dysentery in some Moscow schools (Vasilyeva 2019).

The United States government indicted Prigozhin on charges related to the IRA's interference in the 2016 US presidential election. In February 2021, Prigozhin was added to the FBI's most wanted list with a US$250,000 reward (Moscow Times 2021) for information leading to his arrest. The IRA has engaged in information warfare in support of the Russian government in multiple other jurisdictions, including Canada. According to the US Treasury Department, Prigozhin's organization has also been directly involved in disinformation and influence operations in several African nations.

The Wagner Group is not a single registered business but a network of various actors, including mercenaries and businesses, linked together within the group. The mercenary sub-group was first activated in 2014 in Ukraine and gave the Russian government plausible deniability for the Kremlin's operations there and in other foreign conflicts. Building from its experience interfering in the 2016 US presidential election, Wagner has refined its tactics and bundled them with mercenary offerings to provide "authoritarian-in-a-box" solutions for dictators and authoritarian rulers seeking to maintain power, and to help those allied with Moscow to ascend to it. According to multiple reports, Wagner is closely linked to Russia's military intelligence, the GRU, with training facilities located adjacent to the GRU's Spetsnaz special forces facility in Krasnodar. The open-source investigative team Bellingcat has connected Wagner Group mercenaries with Putin's illegal occupation of Crimea

and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine (Bellingcat 2020).

Wagner has been especially active in Libya, where it supports the activities of Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the Libyan National Army, based in Eastern Libya. Wagner has supported Haftar's military offensives against the internationally backed Government of National Accord and has engaged in information and influence operations to support him. However, Prigozhin has also offered services to those on opposing sides. In Libya, Prigozhin's non-governmental organization, the "Fund for the Defense of National Values," developed communications strategies and infrastructure for Muamar Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, including the re-development of Libya's state television, Jamahiriya TV, to support his political ambitions. This non-governmental organization (NGO) was placed on the US sanctions list in April 2021.

A UN report released in May 2020 stated that Wagner had deployed over 1200 people in Libya, and that hundreds of flights have delivered equipment and supplies from Syria to Libya through July 31, 2020. In Libya, as well as in Syria and Ukraine, Wagner's force is known as the "Imperial Legion," which is associated with the paramilitary wing of the neo-Nazi Russian Imperial Movement. The RIM was listed as a terrorist organization by the US government in 2020 and the Canadian government in February 2021 (Public Safety Canada 2021).

Wagner is also active in other sub-Saharan African nations (Arnold 2019). For example, in 2017, Russia advocated for and took advantage of a UN arms embargo exemption, selling weapons to the Central African Republic (CAR) (Searcey 2019). Russia also used this opportunity to send Wagner Group trainers and private military contractors to the CAR. The group's activities are outlined in the country profiles featured later in this report, and include South Africa, Madagascar, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and beyond.

Of note, in April 2021, the US Treasury Department targeted NGOs and individuals who "facilitate Prigozhin's malign operations in Africa and Europe while primarily operating from Russia" (United States, Department of the Treasury 2021). The Treasury Department states that the so-called NGO called the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation (AFRIC) – which claims to be an African-led initiative – is run from Russia and has served as a front company for Prigozhin's influence operations in Africa. Operations run under AFRIC include false election monitoring missions in Zimbabwe, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, and Mozambique. AFRIC's primary task is to "disseminate Russia's preferred messaging, often related to disinformation" (United States, Department of the Treasury 2021).

Country profiles

Below are brief profiles of seven African countries in which Russia has been involved and in which it has interfered. Common to most is the involvement of Wagner mercenaries and the use of disinformation and malign influence operations to manipulate public opinion and election outcomes.

The Central African Republic (CAR)

Russia's intervention in the CAR's longstanding civil conflict has been relatively recent. The Kremlin's objectives in the CAR are primarily focused on using its influence and the Wagner Group's private military contractors (PMCs) to assist the government, which in turn grants Russia priority access to mining contracts and concessions to the country's vast diamond resources (Lister, Shukla, and Ward 2019). At the same time, Russia seeks to use the CAR as a springboard from which to project influence across Central Africa.

In 2014, Russia resisted a UN Security Council initiative – supported by France and the US – to impose sanctions on then CAR President François Bozizé and has continued lobbying within the UN to ease both the country's arms embargo and the sanctions on the diamond trade in the CAR. Diamond mining in the CAR is restricted to a handful of "green zones," which are required to be free from rebel conflict. Russia currently chairs the Kimberly Process (Kimberly Process Undated), which monitors the African diamond trade and is responsible for certifying diamonds that are "conflict-free."

Russia secured a UN exemption to "donate" small arms to the CAR in late 2017 and in March 2018, and the Kremlin soon announced that 175 "civilian advisors" had been sent to the country. The exemption came shortly after CAR President Touadéra met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov after which Russia received several mining concession contracts. In July 2018, eye witnesses saw 500 Russian soldiers – apparently Wagner mercenaries – at the Sudan-CAR border (Dabanga 2018). Wagner PMCs were reportedly present among both rebel and government armies in the northern part of the country.

Recent reports indicate that Wagner is directly engaged in diamond mining in the CAR (Lister, Shukla, and Ward 2019). A 2019 *New York Times* report states that "Russian mining operations have been spotted in areas where the gems are considered blood diamonds, according to diplomats, local officials and two warlords whose groups operate there" (Searcey 2019). Indeed, the Russian government may be negotiating a way to permanently access the country's abundant diamond resources. After the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi, the CAR was reportedly considering a Russian proposal to establish a permanent Russian military base in the country (Roth 2019).

More recently, at the request of Touadéra, Russia deployed 300 military instructors to the country ahead of elections on December 27, 2020, in which

Touadéra declared victory. Violence by rebel groups prevented thousands from casting their votes, while the opposition called for the results to be annulled (Agence France-Presse 2021). While the Russian military instructors have ostensibly left the CAR, Russian private military contractors associated with the Wagner Group remain active in the country and, according to reports, helped kill 44 rebels in January 2021 (Ramani 2021).

In March 2021, the UN issued an alert about the involvement of Russian private contractors in "mass summary executions, arbitrary detentions, torture during interrogations, forced disappearances, forced displacement of the civilian population, indiscriminate targeting of civilian facilities, violations of the right to health, and increasing attacks on humanitarian actors" in CAR (United Nations 2021). As Russian entities continue to expand their commercial dealings in the CAR, specifically in diamond mining, Russia will continue to seek exemptions from UN arms embargoes and sanctions in order to deepen its control of both the CAR government and warring rebel groups. Further mass human rights violations are likely as Russia seeks to consolidate its control of the CAR's diamond mines and expand the legal diamond mining zones through its control and manipulation of the Kimberly Process.

Where France was once a dominant player, Russia has clearly displaced it as the leading foreign military and diplomatic leader in the CAR. Canada's bilateral relations with CAR are minimal, without any diplomatic presence in the country.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Russia's interest in the DRC only developed over the last several years, intensifying since 2019's Sochi Russia–Africa Summit. At that event, Vladimir Putin blamed western nations for their exploitation of natural resources in the DRC – a point that aligns with DRC President Felix Tshisekedi's public concerns about mining companies not contributing to the government's revenues (Sukhankin 2020b). Russia's efforts seem to be coordinated as part of a broader effort to develop its influence in sub-Saharan Africa.

Over the past three years, Russia has engaged in information and influence operations in the DRC. According to reports in a DRC newspaper, the Russian Internet Research Agency – the same organization that has been identified as being responsible for meddling in the 2016 US presidential election – tried in 2018 to interfere in local DRC elections, which was later denied by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2019, the Kremlin organized an important Russian historical propaganda event called the "March of the Immortal Regiment," in Kinshasa.[4] The event glorifies Russia's Second World War military victory (and its colonization of many Eastern European nations) and has been developed by the Russian government to romanticize its historical military strength both at home and abroad.

Russia's conflict in Eastern Ukraine is connected with its operations in the DRC. Representatives from the illegal, Kremlin-backed (and indeed controlled) "Luhansk People's Republic" opened an office near a mining operation in the DRC in 2019. Meanwhile, Russian mercenaries belonging to the Wagner Group, which have been prominent pro-Kremlin combatants in Eastern Ukraine, also have a presence in the DRC. That same year, a DRC delegation attended an agriculture conference in illegally occupied Crimea – a development that may have been intended to lend legitimacy to Russia's claims to the Ukrainian peninsula.

One of the most valuable natural resources in the DRC is tantalite, an important element used in modern electronics, including devices used by the US military. One can perhaps surmise that control of this resource may be among Russia's goals in its operations in the DRC. As well, Russian gas giant Lukoil has entered into agreements in neighbouring Republic of Congo to develop offshore oil exploration and is currently building a gas and fuel pipeline that will transit through the DRC and CAR. Russia has in the past used gas and pipelines as a foreign policy tool to influence and control neighbours and adversaries in Europe and beyond – a fact that needs to be considered when accounting for Russia's activities in both Central African countries.

Madagascar

Russia's interest in Madagascar emerged in 2018 when efforts to manipulate and interfere with Malagasy elections were uncovered – reportedly orchestrated by Russia's Internet Research Agency and Wagner. According to a 2019 report (Schwirtz and Borgia 2019), Vladimir Putin approved a Russian influence operation in Madagascar, where Russian operatives set up a newspaper and a social media network to support the Kremlin's candidate, Hery Rajaonarimampianina.

As part of this effort, the Kremlin paid students to attend rallies and paid so-called "journalists" to cover them while they hired armed strongmen to visit opposition campaign offices to intimidate and bribe Rajaonarimampianina's opponents to drop out of the campaign. As the report notes, "a Russian company that local officials and foreign diplomats say is controlled by Mr. Prigozhin acquired a major stake in a government-run company that mines chromium" (Schwirtz and Borgia 2019). Chromium is a critical element used in the processing of stainless steel.

Progozhin's disinformation and influence operations in Madagascar applied a similar template to that used in other states, including the US in 2016, to undermine democratic processes in the country. Articles published by a dummy newspaper that was set up by Prigozhin's team were shared by Russian trolls and bots on Facebook pages and groups set up to amplify disinformation about opposing candidates. As in so many other cases of Russian influence operations, the campaign was plagued with problems including spelling and

grammatical mistakes in election literature.

Savvy local journalists identified the Russian operatives and warned that "Russia badly wants to make good use of its impressive experience in destabilization" in Madagascar. As in the DRC, operatives with connections to Kremlin who had supported terrorists in Eastern Ukraine were also photographed in Madagascar apparently working on Russia's influence operations. It's also worth noting that China was also targeted in the Russian influence operation, identified as a threat that the opposition would sell Madagascar out to.

Ultimately, Prigozhin's initial campaign failed so badly that the Russians shifted their efforts from Rajaonarimampianina to his leading challenger, Andry Rajoelina, who would go on to win the election. Thanks to this quick shift, "Mr. Prigozhin's company was able to negotiate with the new government to keep control of the chromium mining operation, despite the worker protests, and Mr. Prigozhin's political operatives remain stationed in the capital to this day" (Schwirtz and Borgia 2019).

Sudan

Both Russia and China opposed the deployment of UN peacekeepers to the Darfur region of Sudan. In 2007, Amnesty International claimed that Russia had broken a UN arms embargo against Sudan, presenting photos of Russian attack helicopters in Darfur as evidence (BBC 2007). More recently, Russia's Wagner Group has also had a presence in Sudan. In July 2020, the US placed Prigozhin's M-Invest and its Sudanese subsidiary, Meroe Gold, on its sanctions list for serving "as a cover for PMC Wagner forces operating in Sudan, and was responsible for developing plans for former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to suppress protestors seeking democratic reforms" (United States, Department of the Treasury 2020). According to the US Treasury Department listing, Prigozhin's M-Invest was awarded concession agreements to explore gold mining sites in Sudan in 2017.

In December 2020, reports surfaced that Russia had struck a deal with Sudan to establish a naval base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The 25-year agreement will allow Russia to station four ships and at least 300 personnel at the base, giving it a strategic foothold in the Red Sea. In return, Russia has agreed to provide Sudan with weapons and other military supplies. The base is important for Russia as it provides a presence in the Horn of Africa, allowing it to further connect and project its power in Central Africa.

Additionally, Russia's state-owned oil company, Rosneft, has apparently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow it to begin exploring for oil in South Sudan (Energy, Captial and Power 2018), although it's unclear as to whether any activity has begun.

South Africa

Russia had seemed set to benefit from a renaissance in its influence in South Africa when Jacob Zuma was elected president in May 2009. During Zuma's term, Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear energy corporation, signed several African deals, most of which have since either stalled or fallen through. A 2017 US$76 billion deal to build between 6 to 8 new Russian nuclear reactors in South Africa faced significant opposition from "civil society, business, academia and even sections of government" (Fig 2017) and was deemed unconstitutional by a South African court in 2017. Under pressure from parliament and his own party, Zuma resigned in 2018 in advance of a non-confidence vote. Accusations of corruption in the Russian deal were one of the factors that led to the collapse of Zuma's presidency.

South Africa has so far withstood Russian influence operations and disinformation thanks to a combination of strong independent news media and civil society actors. A robust and competitive political system provided the resilience needed to defend South Africa against Vladimir Putin's efforts to corrupt the country's leaders and undermine its democracy and society. Exposing Russian efforts was a critical component of South Africa's success – and should serve as a lesson for other nations facing similar efforts by the Kremlin.

During the 2019 South African presidential election, entities linked to Yevgeni Prigozhin undertook an influence campaign to discredit the pro-western Democratic Alliance Party. According to reports, the disinformation campaign was to be conducted by the Russian-owned and founded NGO called AFRIC. The objective of the campaign was to conduct opposition research and create "public rhetoric," "video content," and a "loyal pool of journalists" to discredit South African opposition leaders. The campaign was directed by Pyotr Bychkov, a senior leader in Yevgeni Prizgozhin's St. Petersburg organization (Burke 2019).

The tactic follows similar Russian efforts in other jurisdictions, including Canada in 2018, when former Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland was targeted in a story advanced by the Russian embassy in Ottawa (Pugliese 2018).

China in Africa

Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has a bold political agenda to complement his county's fast-growing power, to be partly realized with his ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Importantly, Africa is a region that offers some key benefits for the rulers in Beijing – vast supplies of natural resources, cheap labour, and a new market

for Chinese goods. Indeed, "By 2040, the [African] labor force will be close to 1.1 billion, surpassing China and India, and by 2030, 60% of the world's population under 30 will be concentrated on the African continent" (Rolland 2021, 12).

However, as Beijing sees African countries as new consumer markets for its labour-intensive cheap goods, domestic industries in various African economies providing those same goods have suffered, resulting in significant job losses. In turn, the trade balance has also been affected as African imports outnumber exports due to the increasing influx of cheap Chinese goods into the continent. It appears that Xi Jinping's economic restructuring efforts are keeping Africa at the bottom of the economic food chain, as exemplified by the gap between the continent's trade and foreign direct investment numbers. Without intervention from the international community, this dynamic will only deepen.

With its engagement in Africa, Beijing also has an opportunity to promote Xi's signature Belt and Road Initiative to fund and build infrastructure, while securing allies who will support the Chinese government's highly contentious actions and policies in international forums. Equally important is the fact that China can leverage its relationship with African countries for its own geostrategic ambitions. For instance, the construction of ports around the African coastline provides China with an important advantage when it comes to access to intelligence, territorial access points, docking of the People's Liberation Army's Navy (PLAN) fleet, access to trade zones, and maritime chokepoints.

Early relations with Africa

China's modern relationship with Africa began after the Chinese civil war and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. China's efforts in Africa were at that time primarily focused on building its position as a leader in the global South and within the Communist Bloc. While initially focused on rhetorical support, by 1957 "Beijing began providing material support and arms to independent states including Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Ghana, as well as to African independence movements" (Eisenman 2018, 434). China's support in Africa was primarily based on ideology and focused on expanding its influence across Africa.

Mao's aid from China to Africa peaked in the 1970s, when it reached around 2.1 percent of China's GDP. The most prominent Chinese project in Africa was the construction of the Tanzam Railway linking Zambia with the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, which has been referred to as the "railway of freedom for Africa's liberation and the railway of friendship for China-Africa cooperation" (quoted in Rolland 2021, 14). China agreed to pay for the US$406 million project in 1965 after the World Bank rejected it due to its cost (New York

Times 1971, 64).

Yet in the late 1970s, Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, shifted China's ideologically driven Africa policy towards one focused on economic goals and subsequently reduced China's aid contributions to Africa. China's relations with African countries proved useful when Beijing faced sanctions from Western countries in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre – by offering China trading partners unencumbered by Western human rights related sanctions. Africa's importance only increased in the wake of Russia's post-Cold War retreat from the continent and China was then well positioned to fill the void it left in Russia's absence.

Under President Jiang Zemin, China's aid policy transformed significantly and was accompanied by an increased focus on Chinese overseas investments in what became known as China's "going-out" policy. This approach introduced new conditions to Chinese aid to Africa, which required that:

1. Chinese companies be used in building any infrastructure financed through Chinese government aid;

2. Chinese companies invest in and operate the infrastructure; and

3. These companies be used to increase trade.

In 2003, China's aid to Africa increased 70-fold compared to levels under Deng Xiaoping. China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2000 had facilitated its growing presence in Africa, allowing Beijing to expand its "going-out" policy in Africa during the Jiang and Hu administrations. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) conferences, held every three years at various levels of government, was established around this time to further deepen China's influence and presence in Africa (FOCAC Undated). Importantly, the scope of FOCAC has increased since its establishment in 2000; it first dealt with trade and investment, then expanded to include people-to-people exchanges and, after 2015, is now "progressing to security cooperation as well as governance matters" (Rolland 2021, 15).

Under the current leadership, Beijing has adopted a more expansive approach in its quest to become a global power. A few days after becoming head of the CCP, Xi described his plan to realize "the China dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Rolland 2021, 8). According to China scholar Elizabeth Economy, Jiang's "going out" strategy has taken on an even greater urgency, with a particular emphasis in "areas such as railroads, electric power, automobiles, aircraft, electronics, and communications." As she explains:

> Beijing is now encouraging its companies to go out in search of investment opportunities that will help reduce overcapacity in areas such as cement or low-cost manufacturing, showcase

> China's strength in areas such as high-speed rail, or assist in China's technological advancement through the acquisition of foreign technology firms. (Economy 2018, 111)

A key part of this focus has been Xi's Belt and Road Initiative, which has dramatically sharpened China's political and economic focus globally, including in Africa. While China has long claimed a doctrine of "non-interference" in its foreign policy, its growing economic presence in Africa brings an attendant increase in security requirements. As such, China's military presence in Africa has grown alongside its rising economic presence. Ultimately, China's present goals in Africa focus primarily on economic advancement, expanding China's resource assets, and securing its political and geo-strategic influence.

The Belt and Road in Africa

Both the United States and China have made significant investments in the natural resource sector but, unlike the Americans and the West, China is not afraid to invest in "less stable" countries where there is a threat of political unrest or that have cut off relations with the West (Hanauer and Morris 2014). Beijing has taken a similar approach with infrastructure projects where its tolerance towards investing in ''risker'' environments or sectors is high (Hanauer and Morris 2014).

China's growing enthusiasm for Africa is linked to Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Devermont 2019a). There are currently 40 African countries taking part in the BRI, with the Maritime Silk Road running as far south as Tanzania adjacent to the African East Coast in the Indian Ocean, and then up to the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean (Risberg 2019; MERICS 2018).

The rest of the continent will see more Chinese-built railroads and pipelines materialize as Chinese investments continue to flow outwards (MERICS 2018). Nevertheless, most of the BRI investments will be in the form of ports. Ports are exceptionally important for the economic development of the region as 90 percent of exports are done through maritime channels (Devermont 2019a). The ports will be spread along each coast of the continent with the majority in the sub-Saharan zone (Devermont 2019a). In fact, there are currently 46 Chinese-involved ports in sub-Saharan Africa, most of which are for commercial use, but others of which are believed to be possibly designed for military use as well as carrying broader political implications (Devermont 2019a).

Threats from Chinese involvement in African ports are three-fold: threats from operation, financing, and construction. Chinese entities operate 11 out of the 46 sub-Saharan port projects in Africa, seven of which are on the West Coast and four on the East Coast (Devermont 2019a). Chinese ownership

or operation of these ports will, in turn, allow Beijing to extract intelligence, control access to the territory or access to services through its docks, and enable the PLAN to use the ports to dock or deploy or refuel (Devermont 2019a). Such concerns have already started to materialize with China's military base in Djibouti.

On the construction front, Chinese companies are responsible for 41 of the 46 ports (Devermont 2019a). That Chinese-led construction is a threat because it allows China to collect intelligence on the infrastructure of those 41 ports, ensure that they are dependent on Beijing's technology and expertise, and ensure long-term compatibility with Chinese materials and technology (Devermont 2019a).

Many African leaders are supportive of Chinese investment activities because they feel treated as equals.

Finally, financing seems to be the overarching threat. Specifically, China can use its financing arrangements to favour Chinese construction companies and negotiate operational control of the ports (Devermont 2019a). Beijing currently funds 27 out of the 46 sub-Saharan ports, 75 percent of which are operated by Chinese companies and 90 percent constructed by Chinese entities (Devermont 2019a). Financing the projects also offers Beijing the opportunity to solicit projects that further its policy agenda, grants it access to natural resources in the form of "loan-for-access" deals, and carries the possibility of additional concessions as part of debt repayments.

The BRI has often been characterized as part of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" where China finances the construction of infrastructure in developing economies under opaque loan terms to potentially leverage the recipient country's indebtedness to gain economic, military, or political benefits. However, this may not be the case in all African port projects. In fact, recent estimates from the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University concluded that Chinese loans are not a major contributor to debt distress in Africa. The initiative identified only six countries where China, among several other financiers, is contributing to heavy borrowing (Risberg 2019).

Many African leaders are supportive of Chinese investment activities because they feel treated as equals, unlike their past experiences with the West (Asongu and Aminkeng 2013). Chinese loans are far less restrictive than those offered by the US, European countries, and even Canada, which are often attached with conditions connected to governance policies, transparency, de-

mocracy, and respect for human rights (Hanauer and Morris 2014). Chinese investments are thus believed to come with fewer onerous conditions and are therefore viewed more favourably.

Furthermore, African leaders have so far welcomed BRI-linked investments in their countries because it answers one of Africa's most pressing needs: infrastructure. Africa needs around US$130-170 billion a year to meet its infrastructure needs and the African Development Bank (ADB) estimates that the continent is US$68-108 billion short of this goal (Shepard 2019). China contributes far more than do Western investors to reducing that gap, notably through its 2015 and 2018 aid packages of $60 billion each and in the creation of a US$1 billion BRI Africa Infrastructure Development Fund in 2019 (Shepard 2019).

Currently, poor infrastructure across the continent increases manufacturing input costs by as much as 200 percent and lowers productivity by as much as 40 percent (Hanauer and Morris 2014). China is gaining a significant advantage in Africa compared to the West in large part because of its willingness to invest where Western countries have traditionally held back.

The resource-hungry dragon

China has become the world's largest energy consumer, thanks to its impressive economic growth over the last few decades (Albert 2017). While Beijing is moving towards greener sources of energy, it is still largely dependent on oil, natural gas, and coal, which remain the primary sources of its ever-increasing demand for energy supplies (Alessi and Xu 2017). China's economy is also heavily reliant on minerals, which are used across many sectors for infrastructure projects and the manufacturing of electronic goods (Hanauer and Morris 2014).

Africa holds vast amounts of natural resources, hosting about 30 percent of the planet's remaining mineral resources. Africa also possesses the world's third-largest oil reserves, an estimated 9.5 percent of global known oil deposits in 2007, behind the Middle East (61 percent) and North America (11.6 percent). Many African countries are also highly dependent on natural resources for revenues and will continue to be so in the years to come (Hanauer and Morris 2014). In oil-rich countries in Africa, natural resources account for 60 percent of revenues. China's demand for natural resources, matched with Africa's capacity to provide them, yields a recipe for extensive economic cooperation.

China currently consumes 12.7 million barrels of oil per day and is expected to consume over 14.7 million by 2030 (OPEC 2019). As mentioned earlier, China is also a major consumer of minerals. Over the past decade, China surpassed the US to become the world's leading consumer of most base metals

(Alden and Alves 2009). Chinese demand has been growing at a rate of over 10 percent a year since 1990 and has intensified in recent years, becoming the major driver behind the soaring prices of metals in the international market (Alden and Alves 2009).

China uses a range of diplomatic and economic mechanisms to access those needed resources. As such, most of China's efforts in Africa have been dedicated to resource-rich African countries, which has led to criticism that it is profit-driven rather encouraging human development (Asongu and Aminkeng 2013). Natural resources dominate China's imports from Africa. Angola (oil-rich) and South Africa (gold-rich) represent 30 percent and 27 percent of China's imports from Africa, respectively, with the Republic of the Congo (oil-rich) far behind at number three, representing 5.7 percent of China's imports (OEC 2017). In fact, 90 percent of China's imports from Africa come from resources-rich countries (Hanauer and Morris, 2014), which emphasizes how extensively China's efforts in the region are linked to the procurement of energy and minerals indispensable for Xi Jinping's broader "going out" geopolitical agenda.

A report from March 2021 highlights China's growing need for iron ore, which it currently imports primarily from Australia (Moriyasu 2021). China needs iron to expand its naval military capabilities, and Australia's deepening connections with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (also known as the Quad, which links India, Japan, Australia) could become problematic for Beijing. As a result, China is looking to tap into one of the world's largest, untapped reserves of iron ore in Guinea. It will require significant infrastructure to access Guinea's iron ore, which is located in a remote area in the African nation, and will include roads and a port. China has set 2025 as a target for accessing this deposit.

China's economic role in Africa has expanded dramatically in recent decades. As Nadège Rolland has noted,

> The People's Republic of China (PRC) surpassed the United States as Africa's biggest trading partner in 2009 and biggest investor in 2014. In 2019 the value of China-Africa trade was $192 billion, up from $91 billion ten years earlier. China has also become Africa's largest creditor and the single largest financier of African infrastructure, supporting one in five projects and constructing one in three. Over 182,700 Chinese workers and some 10,000 Chinese-owned companies are now present across the continent. (Rolland 2021, 3)

Importantly, China's significant economic activity has become increasingly complemented by its security and military engagement in the continent.

Country profiles

Below are case studies and profiles highlighting Chinese investment and influence in select African states.

Djibouti

China has funded major infrastructure projects in Djibouti, including a railway and gas pipeline between Ethiopia and Djibouti's Port of Doraleh, which includes China's first People's Liberation Army base outside of China.

China has also invested in developing regional communications infrastructure, laying a fiber optic cable through Djibouti, which enables countries in the region to connect to the world via Chinese state controlled telecom companies. At least 90 percent of Ethiopian Internet users rely on Chinese servers to connect them to the global information network. Coupled with its dominance of cable and satellite networks in Africa, China's expanding control of Internet communications represents a threat to media independence and freedom in Africa.

By funding these and other infrastructure projects, China "holds over 70 percent of Djibouti's gross domestic product in debt" (Bearak 2019), raising concerns about the future of its sovereignty. Critics of China's geo-economic policies allege that Beijing preys on vulnerable developing nations, luring and capturing them with infrastructure projects financed by the Chinese government, and then leveraging that debt to force those nations to acquiesce to Beijing's influence. In 2018, Sri Lanka was forced to hand over its Chinese government financed port in Hambantota after the Sri Lankan government could no longer afford payments to repay its debt for the construction of it (Abi-Habib 2018).

Djibouti's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, justified the debt his government had incurred with China, telling a reporter in 2019, that "yes, our debt to China is 71% of our GDP, but we

CORNERING AFRICA'S GRAPHITE SUPPLIES

Graphite is used extensively in the production of electric vehicle batteries. China's efforts to secure African sources of graphite should be viewed through a geo-political lens.

China is currently the largest global producer of graphite, producing 6.5 million metric tons annually. Brazil, the world's second largest producer trails far behind China with annual production of just 95,000 metric tons. Graphite sourced from Madagascar and Mozambique are exported primarily to China. Thus, 80-90 percent of the world's graphite is controlled by China. Such dominance allows China to use its control of graphite as a tool of economic statecraft. This is a potential threat to the West.

China is looking to diversify its supplies of graphite by developing the deposits Africa with the clear strategy of shoring up its domestic supply. Both Canadian and Australian companies are active in graphite production in Africa; however, unlike the Chinese government, the Canadian and Australian governments do not take a strategic approach to the resource.

needed that infrastructure… Neither Europe nor America were ready to build the infrastructure we needed" (Bearak 2019).

Madagascar

Under Xi Jinping, China identified Madagascar as strategically important within the Belt and Road Initiative. China is currently Madagascar's largest import partner and the island's fourth largest export partner. With over 600,000 Chinese immigrants, the island is forecasted to receive even more investment and trade from China in the coming years.

Madagascar has multiple resources that are of particular interest to China, including graphite, iron, coal, and more. Graphite is an important element in the manufacturing of electric vehicles. Madagascar has the fourth largest graphite reserve in the world just after Brazil. The export of graphite from Africa to China is increasing significantly – rising 170 percent in 2019 over the year before.

Of note, the company that operates one of the largest graphite mines in Madagascar is a British company, Tirupati Graphite PLC, and a Canadian company, NextSource Materials, owns it.

India's influence is another critical factor in Madagascar. Since its independence, Madagascar has been influenced by India culturally, politically, and economically. India sees the East African coast as its backyard, just as the US sees Central America as its own. Therefore, India is not happy about the Belt and Road Initiative increasing Chinese influence in the region.

CHINA'S CONTROL OF AFRICAN TELEVISION MANUFACTURING AND MEDIA CONTENT THROUGH STARTIMES

StarTimes is a manufacturer of electronic goods as well as a broadcasting company that operates in 30 different African countries. The *StarTimes* channels have 10 million subscribers. For all that, StarTimes is not an African company; it is a Chinese company.

StarTimes began operating in Africa in 2007 by acquiring a broadcasting licence in Rwanda. From there, it expanded quickly into other African countries.

While China manufactures televisions and peripheral devices in Africa through *StarTimes*, thus creating jobs in Africa, the company is Chinese owned and is therefore beholden to the Chinese government.

StarTimes' manufacturing of televisions and other electronic goods using African labour can be seen as mutually beneficial. However, by allowing *StarTimes* access to broadcasting licences, African countries are giving the Chinese government potential control over the programming that flows through this Chinese owned company, raising the possibility that information from Western sources could be limited or censored and displaced by Chinese government narratives, propaganda, and even disinformation. While many of the channels that *StarTimes* broadcasts are Western based, Chinese state television features prominently.

Unlike Russia, which pays international cable and satellite providers to carry its state propaganda channels, China has created its own information distribution platform in Africa which is self-sustaining, commercially successful – and open to unfettered control by the Chinese Communist Party.

Mozambique

In the 1990s, China dramatically deepened its ties with Mozambique; it increased trade, investment, aid, and cultural influences with the country. Today, China is the second largest investor in Mozambique. Chinese investments vary from forestry, fisheries, infrastructure, and mining, to agriculture. Mozambique is a major source of wood exports for China. Over 65 percent of Mozambican exports to China are wood products, whereas Chinese exports have been mostly electric, vehicle parts, and fuel products. However, Mozambique is now increasing its mineral exports to China.

Mozambique's primary mineral export to China is graphite. As in the case of Madagascar, China is trying to corner the market for graphite from Mozambique. However, unlike Madagascar, Mozambique seems to have greater control over this resource. In 2019, Mozambique sharply dropped its graphite exports to China by 95 percent in response to the trade war between China and the US.

Overall, Mozambique is not significantly dependent on China. The country has kept China at a distance and has tried to balance the influence of the West and China in the foreign aid it accepts. Yet Mozambique was one of 45 countries to support China in 2020 on the issue of the genocide in Xinjiang (Basu 2020). Indeed, China has been busy expanding its soft power influence in the country, emerging as a dominant player in the telecommunications market and media in Mozambique. The *StarTimes*, a leading Chinese owned satellite and cable television provider, is the largest in the country.

Options in Africa for Canada and the West

Over the past 40 years, Canada's interest in Africa has ebbed and flowed without any predictability. The Canadian commitment to the continent peaked in the late 1980s, beginning in 1986 when the government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney imposed economic sanctions on South Africa to punish it for its apartheid system of racial segregation From that high point, Canada's Africa policy fell to an embarrassing low when Canada and the Western world failed to stop the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Following that debacle, the Chrétien government promoted the Africa Action Plan within the G8. Canada later became a significant foreign aid donor when Chrétien's successor, Paul Martin, announced that his government would stop collecting debt payments from heavily indebted nations if they committed to the protection of human rights and advancing health care and

education. In 2005, the Canadian government committed to a 100 percent debt relief program (Canada 2005) that included measures to promote good governance and human rights protection.

According to the Canadian International Development Platform, Canada's aid to Africa peaked in 2013 at $2.4 billion, but dropped thereafter, only reaching a new high in 2019, when the total surpassed $2.5 billion (Canadian International Development Platform Undated). Despite that commitment, Canada's current presence and engagement in Africa is modest. Just 0.6 percent of all Canadian foreign investment is placed in Africa (Global Affairs Canada 2020) and Canada's economic activities in Africa are primarily concentrated in the mining sector. Canadian investment in African mining increased from $26.2 billion in 2018 to $37.7 billion in 2019 (Natural Resources Canada 2021). According to Barry Cleaver from Miller Thomson LLP, the $26 billion in Canadian investments that were focused on the African mining sector represented more than half of Canada's FDI in 2018.

As a senior advisor to a Central African government told the author, Canadian aid comes with numerous strings attached with regards to governance and social issues – and that African nations are looking to donors that don't impose such requirements.[5] Aid from China, in contrast, is free of any human rights and anti-corruption requirements, which at the very least suppresses social development and progress, and in the worst case facilitates further human rights abuses. Meanwhile, the Russian government is directly supporting some of the most corrupt and abusive regimes in Africa with the lure of helping them remain in power in return for access to lucrative mining and other resource rights.

Canadian policy-makers should be deeply concerned about the implications of China's investments, Russia's exploitative economic activities, the role of the Wagner Group, and the Chinese militarization of the continent, among other activities. Yet, as noted in an interview for this study, one former European diplomat[6] has commented that Canada has failed to pay consistent and meaningful diplomatic attention to Africa – citing the example of Justin Trudeau's UN campaign blitz to African states in 2020 when he was lobbying for a Canadian seat at the UN Security Council. If Canada, as a prominent and integral defender of liberalism, democracy, and human rights, seeks to advance these values in Africa, it should commit to a long-term Africa strategy that features sustained engagement – one capable of challenging and competing against the growing influence of China and Russia.

After all, Kremlin-backed private military contractors pose a threat to international peacekeeping operations in Africa. Given Canada's involvement in such operations, most recently in Mali, this fact alone should raise alarm bells for Canadian policy-makers. By backing and supplying illegitimate ruling regimes with arms and training, PMCs like Wagner fight alongside pro-regime forces

against other factions that may be backed by the international community. As the 9th largest funder of UN Peacekeeping Operations (2.75 percent of the UN's 2019-2020 budget for peacekeeping operations) and as a provider of troops to UN missions, the activities of Russian PMCs threaten Canada directly, in Africa and elsewhere (United Nations Peacekeeping Undated).

The empowerment of illiberal democracies is another area of concern for Canada. When the Chinese government invests in Africa – disregarding embargoes, violations of human rights, and repressive behaviour from African governments – it encourages poor governance not only in Africa but also in other regions that now see that there is an alternative to the established order. Importantly, China's virtually unconditional investments in Africa place China in direct competition with Canada. According to the federal government, in 2019, Canadian companies held $37 billion in mining assets in Africa (National Resources Canada, 2019). As China continues to offer their investments on better terms, African governments will continue to prefer Chinese-owned or private Chinese companies over Canadian companies.

Canada's investment strategy in Africa should be one that seeks to ease dependency by African countries on Chinese investment and it should look for ways in which Canada can rebuild its regional influence. More precisely, in collaboration with other western countries, the Canadian government should help fund manufacturing in Africa and diversify away from mining investments. Canada should work with the Biden administration to develop a coordinated strategy to support the development of democracy in Africa through mutually beneficial investments, including aid.

Below are some policy recommendations that could help address the issues and concerns outlined in this report:

China

1. Canada should work in concert with its allies to address China's militarization of Africa. Chinese arms sales on the continent show that China's military footprint is not limited to peacekeeping operations; the country contributes to volatility in the region. Chinese activities fuel the discord between neighbouring African countries, potentially endangering Canadian investments in the event of conflict and impeding the establishment of sustainable peace. Sadly, there is not much Canada can do to prevent African countries from buying Chinese arms. Instead, Canada should focus its efforts on promoting transparency, which would lessen the uncertainty and fears that drive countries into increasing their military expenditures. NGOs and research institutes are working towards that end already. Canada should

seek to collaborate and/or provide funding to these organizations to advance this policy agenda. Furthermore, Canada could help provide security to African countries through our peacekeeping forces and/or expanded counterterrorism operations and humanitarian programs. Such efforts would also reduce the need for increased regional military expenditures which, indirectly, would decrease China's military influence in the region.

2. Canada should work with like-minded countries and within multilateral frameworks to compete with China for economic investment opportunities in Africa. Those efforts should be strategic and might require some changes to our current foreign aid policy. Western powers should recognize that Africa's turn towards China is at least partly a symptom of Western foreign aid policies that are based upon ideology. Research reveals that Western aid has traditionally failed to answer one of Africa's most pressing needs: infrastructure. With little to no competition on that end, China will almost inevitably secure more and more investment deals simply because it offers better terms than most other countries. Canada should work within frameworks such as the African Development Bank, the African Union, and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development to promote investments in African infrastructure – and Canada should work with like-minded countries to revisit its foreign aid approach to the continent.

3. Canada should make a considerable effort to support Canadian mining firms that are competing with Chinese mining firms in Africa. The Canadian economy has the largest exposure to the energy sector amongst the G7 countries and generates about 11 percent of its GDP from the energy sector. Chinese companies are not only able to offer African governments better terms than Canadian companies, thanks to the support of the CCP, but can also mobilize diplomatic pressure on African states to gain preferential treatment. The short-term answer for Canada is to do a better job of informing African governments of the comparative advantages Canadian companies can offer, whether in transparency, fair trade, technical expertise, good business practices, etc. In the long-term, Canadian companies should begin to hand out more concessions to African governments when securing mining and exploration rights to the extent that it is possible to do so. Such concessions could include joint ventures with African companies, technology and knowledge transfers, employing domestic labour, re-investing part of the revenues into social and humanitarian programs, etc.

4. Canada should help African economies reduce their reliance on Beijing, much as some ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

countries are already doing. Increasing trade deficits and indebtedness to China will only exacerbate Africa's dependence on Beijing. Canada can help African countries diversify their economies. A potential Canada-Africa or G7-Africa summit would re-affirm Ottawa's commitment to Africa while facilitating negotiations on future collaboration. Canada's unique connection through the French language gives it an edge in West Africa.

Russia

1. Canada should work to counter and undermine Russian activities that are contributing to the collapse of liberal democracy in the region. There are essentially two ways to achieve this. The more moderate approach is for Canada to re-affirm its commitment to liberal values in Africa, such as respect for the rule of law, respect for human rights, and good governance practices. Canada could reward regimes that respect these values with increased diplomatic engagement and additional aid programs. The more aggressive approach is for Canada to promote the non-recognition of illegitimate African heads of states at the UN and work to impose economic sanctions on those countries and the Russian organizations, such as the Wagner mercenary group, that support them. Internationally, Canada could do this through its membership in various international organizations. Domestically, it could do so through mechanisms such as the *Special Economic Measures Act* (SEMA) or the *Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act* (the Sergei Magnitsky Law).

2. Canada and the international community should penalize all African governments involved in Russia's opaque natural resources agreements for failing to comply with good business practices and standards such as those defined by the OECD, the UN, or the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Canada could apply the provisions of the SEMA or Magnitsky sanctions to curb such practices by both Russian firms and African governments.

3. Canada should resort to legal means to counter the activities of Russian PMCs, including the Wagner Group. Unfortunately, Canada currently has no laws similar to the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act* in the United States that would allow the government to freeze assets held by individuals and companies owned, controlled, or acting on behalf of targeted countries. The United States uses its act to counter perceived aggressions against the US government by foreign powers by preventing American companies from doing business with sanctioned entities. Activities by PMCs that go against peacekeeping operations would fall within that category for Canada. Policy-makers in Ottawa should explore the possibility of

enacting similar legislation. An alternative approach would be to define the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization or simply a threat to regional stability in order to apply SEMA or Magnitsky sanctions on it.

4. Other alternatives include the use of awareness campaigns to establish the link between political instability or conflict and Russia. Canada should make use of trusted media outlets and civil society to publicize the ways in which Russia keeps repressive regimes in power, including the use of PMCs and disinformation campaigns. Such awareness-raising will create additional pressure on complicit national leaders while damaging Russia's reputation. Canada could work with the other members of the Five Eyes to direct intelligence efforts towards identifying, tracking, and exposing Russian PMC activities to the broader public.

5. African countries are willing to give economic concessions to Russia in exchange for their security apparatus because they fear for their national security in a highly volatile region. This security dilemma has led many countries to secure arms deals and military cooperation agreements with Moscow (including PMCs). This can be answered in two ways:

- Canada, as a leader in peacekeeping operations, should advocate for a larger presence – through the UN or otherwise – on the continent to reduce the need and influence of Russia's military apparatus.

- Canada should propose to revise the mandate of the United Nations Military Observer to include monitoring the PMCs. Canada is a respected peacekeeping player and should use its legitimacy on this front to propose much-needed amendments to this body that could potentially answer Russia's illegitimate military tactics.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the Chinese government – and more recently the Russian government – have recognized and seized the opportunity to exploit and expand their geo-economic and geopolitical influence in Africa. While some African governments are benefiting from the physical infrastructure funded and built by the Chinese government, the ultimate beneficiary is China itself. In addition to being saddled with significant debt, the cost to African nations that allow themselves to fall under Beijing's influence is the threat of growing corruption and the undermining of progress in human rights, democracy, and greater freedom. In the very worst cases, Kremlin-linked mercenary groups supply weapons, soldiers, and strategies to control and keep

corrupt dictators in power in exchange for access to precious resources.

Africa's growing workforce and connectivity offer significant opportunities for Canada and its allies to build relationships based on mutual benefit and that support broad economic prosperity, the rule of law, and core democratic values. However, realizing these opportunities requires a commitment by Canada to reengage in Africa. Ultimately, Canada should also re-affirm its commitment to liberal values in Africa and build a realistic, long-term strategy in partnership with allies, Canadian NGOs, and corporations with expertise and a presence in Africa.

About the author

Marcus Kolga is the founder of DisinfoWatch.org and a Senior Fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute's Centre for Advancing Canada's Interests Abroad. He is an international award-winning documentary filmmaker, journalist, digital communications strategist, and a leading Canadian expert on Russian and Central and Eastern European issues.

Marcus has a focus on communications and media strategies as tools of foreign policy and defence, and continues to write commentary for national and international media including the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star. He is the co-founder and publisher of UpNorth.eu, an online magazine that features analysis and political and cultural news from the Nordic and Baltic region. He frequently comments on Russian, Eastern and Central European issues on North American radio and television and at foreign policy conferences.

Marcus is involved with international human rights organizations and national political organizations. In 2008 he spearheaded an effort to make August 23rd, the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a Canadian national day of remembrance for the European victims of Nazism and communism – Black Ribbon Day – by drafting a parliamentary resolution that was introduced and passed by Hon. Bob Rae. In 2015, Marcus was awarded the Estonian Order of the White Star by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves.

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Endnotes

1 The author would like to thank Moriya Koketsu and Joshua Walsh for their assistance in researching and drafting this report.

2 Chinese and Russian mask/vaccine diplomacy has not been limited to Africa. In Italy, Russian agents offered to pay Italians 200 each to say something positive about Russian PPE that was donated to Italy in spring 2020 (Tonacci 2020).

3 As a point of comparison, China sent just 305 military personnel to Africa that same year (Grey 1984).

4 For further information, see https://drc.mid.ru/home/-/asset_publisher-l9b1R1GqnEb5/content/o-fejkovoj-novosti-v-gazete-le-potentiel-?_101_INSTANCE_l9b1R1GqnEb5_viewMode=view.

5 The former senior official agreed to be interviewed by phone for this report, on the condition of anonymity due to safety concerns.

6 The former European diplomat interviewed for this report, requested to remain anonymous due to his current position as a government official.

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