

Moscow's African relations: Unveiling Russia's strategy in Africa and its impact on global politics

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate Russia's growing involvement in African affairs and understand how its actions are shaped by broader geopolitical calculations. The research also seeks to assess the implications of this engagement for global peace and security. To achieve these objectives, the study employs case studies and geopolitical analysis as its primary methodological tools. It focuses on key African regions -North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sabel region to examine Russia's strategic goals and how they are pursued through specific initiatives and partnerships. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the regional variations and broader patterns in Russia's African strategy. The findings reveal that over the past decade, Russia has significantly expanded its presence in Africa through a multifaceted strategy, which includes economic investments, military cooperation, and diplomatic outreach. By analysing Russia's activities in the areas such as natural resource investments, military alliances, and political partnerships, the study identifies a clear alignment between Russia's regional actions and global geopolitical ambitions. These engagements underscore a deliberate effort by Russia to reassert itself as a global power while reshaping the balance of influence in Africa. The study concludes that Russia's strategic calculus in Africa is complex and deeply intertwined with its broader foreign policy goals. Its growing influence on the continent has significant implications for Africa's political and economic development, as well as for international relations, in broad terms. By offering a comprehensive analysis of Russia's strategies, the study enhances our understanding of the evolving dynamics of global power competition and the shifting geopolitical landscape.

Keywords:

Africa, Russia, international relations, geopolitical, regional stability

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Introduction

In recent years, Russia has significantly reasserted its presence in Africa via committing to support the continent in all spheres. Nonetheless, this professed commitment has sparked a series of debate among scholars, policymakers, and security experts particularly regarding the altruistic nature of such commitment, which centres around the growing desire of Russia to enhance its global influence by capitalising on the continent's vast natural resources and strategic geopolitical position (Bukhari, 2024; Matveev, 2021; Müller, 2023; Oualalou, 2021). Consequently, Russia has adopted a multifaceted approach to expand its engagement with Africa via focusing on economic investments, military cooperation, and diplomatic interaction (Agyemfra, 2023; Eguegu, 2022; Khan, 2025; Neethling, 2020). Undoubtedly, Neethling (2020) avers that this strategic recalibration forms part of Russia's broader effort to reclaim its historical role in global affairs and counterbalance Western dominance.

This is particularly the case given that Soviet-era interactions with Africa were marked or characterised by ideological support and military aid, aimed at promoting socialist governments and countering Western influence during the Cold War (Goumid, 2023; Lynd and Loyd, 2022; Parrott, 2022; Yuri, 2022). Therefore, Russia seeks to forge stronger economic ties with African nations through investments in critical sectors, such as energy, mining, and infrastructure. These investments not only provide financial returns for Russia but also secure strategic advantages in regions rich in resources essential for its economic and technological ambitions (Müller, 2023; Neethling, 2020; Siegle, 2021). Also, Russia has expanded its military cooperation with various African countries in the areas of arms sales, military training, peace support, and security partnerships, which help to bolster local regimes and enhance Russia's strategic footprint on the continent (Akinola, 2024; Jones *et al.*, 2021; Manfredi, 2024; Ndzendze and Manyana, 2022; Zimmerman, 2020). The deployment of Russian private military companies (PMCs), such as the Wagner Group, further exemplifies Russia's commitment to maintaining a robust military presence in Africa (Abuseridze *et al.*, 2023; Kurylo, 2024; Mussa and Dubians, 2023; Spearin, 2025).

On the other hand, Africa's understanding, interpretation, and expectation of Russia's growing commitment remain subjects of controversy, contestation, and counter opinions among security experts, scholars, and even government officials. The Russia–Africa discourse has centred around the need to support Africa's efforts in responding to growing insecurity (Eguegu, 2022; Jacobsen and Larsen, 2023; Kanet and Moulioukova, 2021; Mathew and Moolakkattu, 2022; Pokalova, 2023), neo colonialism and imperialism (Bush, 2024; Robinson, 2023), economic motives clothed in trade opportunity (Duursma and Masuhr, 2022; Matveev, 2021), and a more convincing argument of Russia's quest to weaken Western influence and domination (Abimbola *et al.*, 2024; Kanet and Moulioukova, 2022; Lewis, 2022; Nkuna and Shai, 2021; Singh, 2022). Regardless of these dazzling opportunities, there is a compelling need for a much broader reengagement of the discourse by examining the dynamics that have characterised Russia's commitment and strategic goals pursuit in key African regions, such as North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahel region, and how these objectives align with global geopolitical shifts and security.

Specifically, Russia's growing and numerous investments, military alliances, and diplomatic efforts across the aforementioned regions impose the need to uncover, scrutinise and analyse the motivations behind these actions, amidst the threat of rivalry from other Western powers, and their implications for regional stability and international relations. Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights into how Russia's strategies in Africa fit within the broader context of global geopolitical shifts and contribute to reshaping

Africa's political and economic landscape. For systematic and analytical purposes, the research would be accomplished using the following sections: Introduction; Methodology; Russia's Engagement in Africa: Literature Review; Russia's Strategic Engagement in Africa: Rationale, Tactics, and Goals; Emerging and Contending Issues in Russia's Multidimensional Approach in Africa; Implications and Future Directions: Unpacking Russia's Multifaceted Strategy in Africa; and Conclusions and recommendations.

Methodology

This study was conducted over a 12-month period, from January 2023 to January 2024; it examines Russia's geopolitical strategies in Africa through a multi-method qualitative approach. Geographically, the study covers North Africa (Egypt and Libya), sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa and Angola), and the Sahel region (Mali and Burkina Faso), thereby offering a broad regional scope for understanding Russia's strategic engagements across the continent.

The primary methodological foundation of the study combines a comprehensive literature review with expert interviews. First, an extensive review of academic and policy literature was conducted to analyse Russia's strategic interests and activities across the selected regions. This involved examining scholarly articles, books, and journals on Russian foreign policy, Africa's political and economic landscapes, and broader international relations. Key sources included [Abimbola *et al.* \(2024\)](#), [Abuseridze *et al.* \(2023\)](#), [Akinola \(2024\)](#), [Bukhari \(2024\)](#), [Bush \(2024\)](#), [Duursma and Masuhr \(2022\)](#), [Goumidj \(2023\)](#), [Jones *et al.* \(2021\)](#), [Mathew and Moolakkattu \(2022\)](#), [Müller \(2023\)](#), [Ndzendze and Manyana \(2022\)](#), [Neethling \(2020\)](#), [Nkuna and Shai \(2021\)](#), [Robinson \(2023\)](#), and [Spearin \(2025\)](#). These works offered both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence that are crucial to understanding contemporary Russian strategies on the continent.

Supplementary materials included policy papers, strategic reports, and government documents sourced from reputable institutions, such as the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2020–2022), the Stanford Internet Observatory (2019), the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and official Russian government publications. Media sources, including international news and investigative journalism reports, were also utilised to capture evolving developments and public discourse surrounding Russia's African engagements.

To enrich the research, data triangulation was implemented. In this regard, in addition to the findings from the literature, the study also incorporated semi-structured interviews with ten experts and practitioners. These participants included diplomats, security analysts, regional specialists, and policy advisors with direct experience or scholarly expertise in Russian-African relations. The interviews provided critical, up-to-date insights into the motivations, mechanisms, and consequences of Russia's engagement strategies. They also offered informed perspectives that are often absent in published literature.

Furthermore, historical context was established by reviewing literature on Soviet-era involvement in Africa, enabling a comparative understanding of how current Russian strategies diverge from or build upon earlier engagements. Comparative analysis with the strategies of other major global actors such as the United States, the European Union, and China—was also conducted to situate Russia's activities within the broader geopolitical landscape.

By combining rigorous document analysis with expert testimony, this methodology allowed for a nuanced and comprehensive examination of Russia's multidimensional approach in Africa.

Russia's engagement in Africa: Literature review

Russia's contemporary engagement in Africa is increasingly becoming the subject of academic and policy-focused inquiries, with scholars highlighting its reemergence as a strategic actor on the continent. This literature review synthesises and critically evaluates key strands of scholarship addressing Russia's geopolitical strategies in Africa, focusing on military partnerships, economic entrenchment, soft power projection, and the ideological framing of its engagement. The review further explores how the agency of African states shape this relationship within a shifting global order.

A prominent theme in the literature is the militarisation of Russian engagement, particularly through the deployment of PMCs, such as the Wagner Group. Scholars, such as [Amoah \(2023\)](#), [Conway \(2025\)](#), and [Pokalova \(2023\)](#), argue that these entities serve as instruments of state-backed coercion, enabling Moscow to exert influence while maintaining plausible deniability. In contexts such as the Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan, Wagner Group has provided security in exchange for access to mining concessions and political loyalty ([Amoah, 2023](#); [Jones et al., 2021](#); [Pokalova, 2023](#)). [Eguegu \(2022\)](#) critiques this model, characterising it as “high-risk, low-reward” and ultimately unsustainable due to its limited contribution to state-building and institutional development.

Closely tied to this military presence is Russia's alignment with regimes experiencing democratic backsliding or international isolation. [Akinola and Ogunnubi \(2021\)](#) warn of the destabilising effects of Russia's support for authoritarian governments, while [Akinola \(2024\)](#) links recent coups in West Africa to foreign security entanglements, including those involving Russian actors. [Abuseridze et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Manfredi \(2024\)](#) describe these alliances as instances of “state capture,” where opaque and personalised security arrangements serve as a substitute for transparent, institutionalised partnerships.

The economic dimensions of Russian strategy are equally significant. Scholars, such as [Müller \(2023\)](#) and [Neethling \(2020\)](#), underscore the role of arms trade, energy diplomacy, and natural resource extraction in shaping bilateral relationships. Russia has emerged as a key arms supplier to several African states, often bundling military equipment with training and technical support ([Besenyő, 2020](#); [Matveev, 2021](#)). In resource-rich states, particularly in the Sahel region and Central Africa, Russian firms have secured lucrative mining concessions, raising concerns about extractive neocolonialism and elite capture.

The deployment of soft power and information operations represents another critical agent of Russian engagement. Through media platforms, such as RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik, the Kremlin advances what [Glazunova et al. \(2023\)](#) term “sharp power”—a form of influence that blends public diplomacy with disinformation. This approach often positions Russia as an anti-colonial ally and a challenger to Western hegemony, capitalising on historical grievances and Pan-African solidarities ([Lynd and Loyd, 2022](#)). While such approach may resonate with segments of African publics, scholars caution against overestimating its transformative potential. [Glazunova et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Horak et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that these efforts are primarily aimed at elite persuasion and geopolitical signaling, rather than genuine cultural exchange.

Underlying these practices is a distinct ideological posture that fuses pragmatism with anti-Western rhetoric. [Duursma and Masuhr \(2022\)](#) describe Russia's African policy as an extension of its broader strategy of “neo-patrimonial anti-Westernism,” wherein Moscow projects itself as a defender of sovereignty and multipolarity. [Kanet and Moulioukova \(2022\)](#) similarly observe that Russia employs a flexible transactional logic that appeals to African leaders seeking alternatives to Western conditionality. [David \(2021\)](#) and

[Lewis \(2022\)](#) note that this approach often manifests in “conflict management” strategies that prioritise regime survival over liberal peacebuilding, thereby reinforcing authoritarian resilience.

Regional differentiation is another important analytical dimension. Russia’s influence is most pronounced in fragile and conflict-affected states, where governance vacuums create entry points for military and economic interventions. Studies by [Ozoukou and Lawler \(2022\)](#) and [Mathew and Moolakkattu \(2022\)](#) highlight that this pattern is evident in the Sahel region, where Russian presence has expanded amidst deteriorating security conditions. In the Horn of Africa, Russia has sought port access and naval basing rights as part of its broader competition with Western and Middle Eastern powers for the control of key maritime corridors ([Hassan, 2020](#); [Ojewale, 2024](#)).

Recent scholarship has increasingly turned to the agency of African actors regarding how they shape and respond to Russian overtures. [Issaev et al. \(2022a\)](#) document African elite and public perceptions of Russia’s engagements, revealing a mixture of instrumental pragmatism and strategic ambivalence. [Agyemfra \(2023\)](#) suggests that the Russia–Ukraine war has catalysed a rethinking of alliance patterns on the continent, presenting African states with opportunities to leverage great power rivalry for greater autonomy. However, [Jacobsen and Larsen \(2023\)](#) caution that such approach may entrench militarism and reduce incentives for democratic consolidation.

Russia’s African strategy must be contextualised within broader global realignments. [Khan \(2025\)](#) and [Kurylo \(2024\)](#) explore the implications of the China–Russia partnership for Africa, emphasising both coordination and competition in the areas such as infrastructure and arms sales. Also, renewed geopolitical rivalries particularly between Russia and France in Francophone Africa have fuelled proxy dynamics that risk exacerbating instability ([Bukhari, 2024](#)). Scholars, such as [Bush \(2024\)](#) and [Ramani \(2023\)](#), debate whether Russia should be regarded as a resurgent global power or a revisionist spoiler actor exploiting the retreat of Western influence.

The existing literature highlights the multifaceted and adaptive nature of Russia’s geopolitical strategies in Africa. These strategies are characterised by a combination of military interventionism, economic opportunism, ideological positioning, and tactical diplomacy. While Russia’s influence has grown in recent years, it remains contingent upon local political configurations, elite bargains, and broader shifts in the international order. Future research should move beyond state-centric analyses to assess the long-term implications of Russian engagement for African sovereignty, security governance, and development trajectories.

Russia’s strategic engagement in Africa: Rationale, tactics, and goals

Russia’s strategic objectives in Africa, particularly in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahel region, reflect a deliberate effort to enhance its geopolitical influence and counterbalance Western dominance. Although Russia disputes this position as not completely true ([Diec, 2023](#); [Liu, 2022](#); [Sakwa, 2021](#)), empirical evidences point to the fact that this renewed engagement aligns with broader global geopolitical shifts as Russia seeks to assert itself in a multipolar world order ([Bukhari, 2024](#); [Khan, 2025](#); [Müller, 2023](#); [Neethling, 2020](#)). Indeed, scholars ([Hayrapetyan and Kučera, 2022](#); [Mensah and Aning, 2022](#); [Nkuna, 2023](#); [Siegle, 2021](#)) maintain that Russia’s approach in Africa is characterised by a blend of economic partnerships, military cooperation, and diplomatic

outreach, aimed at expanding its influence and securing strategic advantages. For instance, in North Africa, Russia has strategically intensified its engagement with key nations, notably Egypt and Libya, to bolster its influence in the region.

Regarding the case of Egypt, scholars have admitted that the heightened involvement is marked by a significant escalation in military cooperation, making Russia a major arms supplier to the Egyptian military and providing advanced weaponry and technology that bolster Egypt's defence capabilities ([Besenyő, 2020](#); [Khlebnikov, 2021](#); [Ro'i, 1979](#)). In addition, the two countries have conducted joint military exercises to enhance operational compatibility and strengthen defence ties. This growing military partnership reflects Russia's broader aim of cementing its strategic presence in the Mediterranean and counterbalancing Western dominance, particularly that of the United States and the European Union ([Ro'i, 1979](#)). Russia's engagement in Egypt extends to infrastructure projects, which further solidify its influence. A notable example is the construction of a nuclear power plant in Dabaa, which represents a significant investment in Egypt's energy sector. Thus, this project, considered the largest in the region, underscores Russia's role in supporting Egypt's economic development and energy needs ([Siegle, 2021](#), [Kante, 2024](#), [Khan, 2025](#)) while securing a long-term economic and strategic foothold in North Africa.

In the case of Libya, Russia's efforts are similarly aimed at increasing its regional influence amidst a backdrop of political instability and conflict. By supporting various factions and leveraging its military and diplomatic capabilities, Russia seeks to establish itself as a key power broker in the Libyan conflict. This involvement allows Russia to extend its influence across North Africa and potentially access strategic maritime routes and energy resources in the Mediterranean ([Goble, 2021](#); [Lewis, 2022](#)). Therefore, Russia's role in Libya not only enhances its geopolitical leverage but also provides an opportunity to counterbalance Western intervention and assert its presence in a region traditionally dominated by Western powers ([Lewis, 2022](#)).

Essentially, Russia's engagement in North Africa is informed by a broader geopolitical strategy to expand its influence amidst global rivalry. By strengthening military ties with Egypt, investing in major infrastructure projects in the country, and actively participating in the Libyan conflict, Russia aims to secure and protect its position in the Mediterranean as well as have an influence over key strategic routes and resources. According to [Drysdale \(2024\)](#), [Lovotti *et al.* \(2020\)](#), and [Němečková *et al.* \(2021\)](#), this approach aligns with Russia's goal of redefining global power dynamics and enhancing its leverage in international relations.

Also, sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a vital area of interest for Russia, and this is due to the region's rich natural resources and expanding markets, which present significant economic opportunities for Russia, China, and other global powers. Amidst growing rivalry for the control and exploration of abundant mineral resources in the region, Russia has made efforts to establish friendly diplomatic engagements, support peace processes, deepen its trade relations, and invest in the infrastructure and mining sectors across key nations like Nigeria, South Africa, and Angola ([Bukhar 2024](#); [Khan 2025](#); [Müller, 2023](#)), with the ultimate goal of building confidence among these nations to soften the process of tapping into their abundant mineral resources and energy reserves ([Bush, 2024](#); [Neethling, 2020](#); [Robinson, 2023](#)). Undoubtedly, Russia's support in the areas of trade and economic investment, infrastructure, mining, and resource extraction projects serves the purpose of boosting local economies while strengthening its influence as a key player in the region's economic landscape.

Specifically, in South Africa, Russia has been particularly active in expanding its economic footprint. The bilateral relationship between Russia and South Africa has witnessed

increased trade volumes and collaborative ventures in various key sectors, particularly in the energy and mining industries (An and Mikhaylov, 2020), which are crucial for South Africa's economic growth. Reflecting on these growing relations, scholars affirm that by leveraging on its global posturing, expertise, and resources, Russia aims to benefit from South Africa's robust economic infrastructure while fostering a stable and profitable partnership (Belousova, 2024; Nkuna and Shai, 2021).

Similarly, Russia's engagement with Angola transcends economic considerations to include the oil and gas sector, military cooperation, and technical assistance, reflecting Russia's multifaceted approach to strengthening its ties with Angola (Neethling, 2020; Siegle, 2021; Zafiris, 2022). On the one hand, Russia's activities in sub-Saharan Africa could be best described as part of a broader strategy to diversify its economic partnerships while attempting to enhance its influence and secure long-term economic benefits and energy needs (Babić, 2022; Besenyő, 2020; Duursma and Masuhr, 2022; Siegle, 2021). On the other hand, prominent scholars have amplified the notion that beyond the aforementioned benefits, a more compelling reason lies in the fact that Russia's interest and engagement in the region represents a tactic check or counterbalance of the growing influences of countries such as China and other Western powers (Akinola and Oguunubi, 2021; Duursma and Masuhr, 2022; Elbassoussy, 2021; Mason, 2023; Murphy, 2023).

In addition, the Sahel region has become a focal point for Russian security and diplomatic initiatives, with the aim of addressing regional instability and enhancing Russia's geopolitical influence. In recent years, Russia has actively positioned itself as a crucial security partner of Sahelian countries grappling with insurgency and terrorism (Besenyő *et al.*, 2024; Kostelyanets, 2021). This partnership is evidenced by Russia's provision of military assistance, including arms supplies and training programmes, to nations such as Mali and Burkina Faso (Kostelyanets, 2021). Evidently, by stepping into the security vacuum left by Western forces, Russia aims to establish itself as a dominant force in regional counterterrorism efforts (Besenyő *et al.*, 2024; Kante, 2024; Kostelyanets, 2021; Lyammouri, 2021). These engagements underscore Russia's broader ambition to increase its presence and influence in regions that are vital for global security dynamics. For instance, in Mali, Russia's role has been particularly pronounced. The government of Mali called for Russian military support amidst ongoing conflict with extremist groups, and in response, Russia supplied military equipment and provided training to Malian armed forces to enhance their capability to counter insurgents and maintain stability (Amoah, 2023; Besenyő and Sólyomfi, 2024; Ojewale, 2024; Olech, 2024).

Similarly, in Burkina Faso, Russia has extended its support through military aid and advisory services. The collaboration with Burkina Faso reflects Russia's commitment to addressing the security challenges faced by governments in the Sahel region (Issaev *et al.*, 2022b; Kostelyanets, 2021). This engagement not only aids Burkina Faso in combating terrorism but also strengthens Russia's position as a significant security partner in the region. By capitalising on the instability and the perceived inadequacy of Western interventions, Russia aims to build lasting relationships with Sahelian governments and secure its influence over strategic areas (Kante, 2024). Invariably, the numerous supports, engagements, and contributions to vital sectors in the Sahel region is expected to project Russia as a leading partner with the potential of increasing its global posturing among other world powers (Hassan, 2020; Idahosa *et al.*, 2021; Kipo-Sunyehezi and Lambon, 2025; Watling and Wilen, 2024).

Generally, Russia's goals in Africa are closely aligned with broader global geopolitical shifts. The intention is to challenge the unipolar dominance of the United States, its allies, and the growing activities of China. By strengthening ties with African nations,

Russia seeks to foster a multipolar world where it can exert greater influence and reshape global dynamics ([Akinola and Oguunubi, 2021](#); [Duursma and Masuhr, 2022](#); [Kipo-Sunyehezi and Lambon, 2025](#); [Mason, 2023](#); [Watling and Wilén, 2024](#)). This is especially the case, given Africa's abundant resources, maritime routes, emerging markets, and growing significance in global geopolitics. Russia's engagements in Africa, spanning North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahel region, align with its long-term goals of ensuring its security interests, enhancing its role on the international stage, and navigating the evolving landscape of global power ([Khan, 2025](#); [Mensah and Aning, 2022](#); [Murphy, 2023](#)).

Emerging and contending issues in Russia's multidimensional approach to Africa

This study argues that Russia's intensified engagements in Africa is a deliberate multidimensional strategy aimed at advancing economic interests, strengthening military influence, and expanding diplomatic outreach while countering Western hegemony. Drawing on scholarly literature, policy documents, and interviews with regional experts, the analysis demonstrates how these interconnected dimensions are manifested in Russia's engagements across the African continent. The convergence of historical legacies and contemporary geopolitical ambitions forms the basis for understanding Russia's evolving African policy.

Russia's investments in Africa extend beyond commercial objectives to include broader geopolitical goals. Data obtained from interviews with policy experts in Nigeria and South Africa reveals a growing awareness that Russia's focus on sectors, such as oil, gas, and mining, serves both economic and strategic purposes. A South African analyst explained, "Russia's mining ventures aren't just about profit—they're about influence, about presence" (interview with South African analyst was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 12 August 2024). This view is consistent with scholarly findings indicating that Russian economic engagements, particularly in resource-rich states, are designed to secure long-term access to critical assets and reduce dependency on global suppliers ([Abimbola *et al.*, 2024](#); [Kante, 2024](#); [Nkuna and Shai, 2021](#)). Infrastructure projects and market integration further reinforce Russia's intent to embed itself within African economies, thereby consolidating economic and political alliances.

The military dimension of Russia's strategy is equally prominent. Arms sales, military training, and the involvement of PMCs, such as the Wagner Group, illustrate how Russia combines formal and informal mechanisms to entrench its security presence. Interviewees from Mali and Libya noted that Russian arms deals are often bundled with training programmes and political assurances, making them more appealing than conditional Western alternatives. As one West African security analyst put it, "Russia offers the whole package—arms, support, and no questions asked" (interview with West African security analyst was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 24 July 2024). Scholarly literature supports this view, indicating that these engagements are critical for securing Russian investments and reinforcing allied regimes ([Amoah, 2023](#); [Besenyő, 2020](#); [Kostelyanets, 2021](#)).

Private military actors further deepen Russia's security presence while offering plausible deniability. In interviews conducted with civil society leaders in Sudan and Central Africa, Wagner Group's activities were described as "a shadow extension of Russian foreign policy" (interview with civil society leaders was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 12 August 2024). These actors provide military training, protect resource extraction operations, and support governments in volatile regions. This allows Russia to exert control without the diplomatic repercussions associated with state-led

intervention (Abuseridze *et al.*, 2023; Spearin, 2025). As a Sudanese respondent observed, “Wagner is not just a contractor—they are the face of Russian power where the embassy can’t go” (interview with Sudanese respondent was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 14 April 2024). These arrangements help sustain Russia’s influence while mitigating international backlash.

Diplomatically, Russia has reasserted itself as a major partner of African nations through high-level visits, bilateral agreements, and public diplomacy. The African diplomats interviewed in this study noted that Russia engages on more “equal” terms than Western powers, avoiding overt political conditionalities. An East African diplomat remarked, “Russia respects our sovereignty. That’s rare and valued” (interview with African diplomats was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 12 October 2024). These sentiments are echoed in the literature, which highlights how diplomatic engagement is central to Russia’s efforts to foster long-term alliances and secure political support in international forums (Duursma and Masuhr, 2022; Kipo-Sunyezi and Lambon, 2025; Mason, 2023).

Russia’s efforts to influence regional organisations, such as the African Union, further reflect its diplomatic strategy. Through bilateral and multilateral agreements, Russia has positioned itself as a viable alternative to Western and Chinese partners. Interviewees from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and AU member states reported increased Russian lobbying within continental bodies, often linked to trade, infrastructure, and mutual non-interference principles. These engagements are designed to reshape the geopolitical landscape in ways favourable to Russian interests, especially in the areas of global governance and development cooperation (Kante, 2024; Murphy, 2023; Watling and Wilen, 2024).

Russia’s African policy is also deeply informed by its Soviet legacy. Interviews with African historians and policymakers highlight how Moscow’s current approach echoes past Soviet support for liberation movements. A Ghanaian political historian emphasised, “Russia today is picking up where the USSR left off—but with a new playbook” (interview with Ghanaian political historian was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 10 November 2024). This strategic continuity, backed by literature on Cold War alliances, underscores the long-term nature of Russia’s engagements with Africa (Abramova, 2021; Mensah and Aning, 2022; Parrott, 2022). The symbolic resonance of historical ties continues to shape African perception of Russia as a reliable and consistent partner.

Russia’s African strategy must be understood within the context of global power competition. Comparative insights from African policy institutes show that Russia is increasingly viewed as a third option—distinct from both Western and Chinese models. A senior policy analyst in Nigeria stated, “Russia’s appeal lies in its pragmatism. It offers alternatives where others impose choices” (interview with senior policy analyst was conducted by the authors; personal communication, 12 June 2024). This finding is supported by scholarship that characterises Russia’s engagements as part of a wider geopolitical contest, involving the use of economic, military, and diplomatic tools to carve out influence in a multipolar world (Babić, 2022; Sakwa, 2021; Zimmerman, 2020). These competitive dynamics affirm that Russia’s African policy is not just reactive but fundamentally strategic.

Implications and future directions: Unpacking Russia’s multifaceted strategy in Africa

By analysing the economic, military, and diplomatic components of Russia’s strategy, this study highlights how Russia is leveraging these elements to enhance its influence

and counter Western dominance on the continent. This multifaceted approach underscores Russia's strategic intent to establish itself as a major global player and to secure long-term geopolitical advantages in Africa. The findings are crucial for policymakers, scholars, and analysts who seek to understand the dynamics of international relations in Africa and the implications of Russia's growing presence.

The results of this study align with and extend the findings of other researchers who have examined Russia's activities in Africa. For instance, [Ozoukou and Lawler \(2022\)](#), [Kurylo \(2024\)](#), and [Neethling \(2020\)](#), all emphasise that Russia's economic engagements, particularly in the energy and mining sectors, are central to its overall goal in Africa. These studies show that Russian investments are strategically aimed at securing critical resources and expanding Russia's market presence. Additionally, the findings of the present study align with the scholarly works of [Abuseridze *et al.* \(2023\)](#), [Ameyaw-Brobby and Antwi-Danso \(2024\)](#), [Eguegu \(2022\)](#), and [Pokalova \(2023\)](#), who concluded that Russia's military involvements, including arms sales and the use of PMCs, are designed to bolster local regimes and protect Russian interests. This alignment reinforces the validity of the current findings within the broader context of the existing studies.

Furthermore, the study's findings on Russia's diplomatic efforts align closely with the conclusions drawn by other scholars regarding Russia's strategic use of high-level visits and bilateral agreements to enhance political ties and influence regional organisations. Scholars, such as [Glazunova *et al.* \(2023\)](#), [Heidger and Higgins \(2024\)](#), and [Horak *et al.* \(2024\)](#), have highlighted how Russia utilises diplomatic channels to position itself as a key partner in Africa's development, countering Western influence and building robust relationships with African governments. This study corroborates the above findings by illustrating how Russia's diplomatic outreach aims to secure strategic alliances and increase its presence within influential regional bodies, like the African Union. Various alignments with the existing studies underscore the consistency and robustness of the observed patterns in Russia's diplomatic strategy, affirming that Russia's approach to Africa is both deliberate and strategically coherent.

However, despite these alignments with prior studies, the present study also uncovers several promising avenues for future exploration. One critical area for further investigation is the impact of Russia's expanding presence on local political dynamics and security conditions within African countries. While the current study offers a broad overview of Russia's diplomatic efforts, it does not delve deeply into how these activities affect local political stability and conflict patterns. Future research could focus on specific case studies to analyse how Russia's economic and military interventions influence governance, regional conflicts, and power structures in individual African states. This more granular approach would provide a richer understanding of the local repercussions of Russia's strategic engagements and contribute to a comprehensive assessment of its impact on regional stability.

Another important direction for future research is examining the effectiveness of Russia's diplomatic strategies in achieving concrete outcomes. While this study demonstrates that Russia's diplomatic outreach is aimed at strengthening ties and countering Western influence, there is a need for a more detailed evaluation of the practical results of these efforts. Investigating the tangible benefits that African countries derive from their partnerships with Russia, as well as any potential drawbacks or challenges, could offer valuable insights into the efficacy of Russia's diplomatic approach. Such research could assess how successful Russia has been in translating diplomatic agreements into meaningful cooperation and support, and how these outcomes influence its strategic objectives. In addition, comparative analyses with the diplomatic strategies of other global powers, such as China and

Western countries, could further illuminate the competitive dynamics of international influence in Africa.

While the present study provides a snapshot of Russia's diplomatic efforts, a more thorough comparison with the approaches of other major actors would reveal how Russia's strategies fit within the broader context of global power dynamics. This comparative perspective could enhance our understanding of how different powers employ diplomacy to advance their interests in Africa and how these strategies interact and overlap. These future study directions would enrich the current understanding of Russia's role in Africa and provide deeper insights into the complexities of international diplomacy on the continent.

Another promising direction for future research is the comparative analysis of Russia's strategies in Africa with those of other emerging global powers, such as China and India. While this study has touched on some comparative aspects, a more thorough examination could provide deeper insights into the competitive dynamics of international influence in Africa. By systematically comparing Russia's approach with those of China and India, researchers can uncover how these powers employ different strategies to achieve their geopolitical objectives. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses heavily on infrastructure investments, contrasts with Russia's emphasis on military cooperation and energy investments. Similarly, India's approach, which often centres on development aid and technology transfer, offers a distinct perspective on engaging with African countries. Comparative research on the different approaches could reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and offer a more nuanced understanding of how various global powers vie for influence in Africa.

In addition to comparative analyses, future studies could investigate the long-term implications of Russia's strategic presence in Africa for global geopolitics. As Russia continues to expand its influence on the continent, understanding how these developments impact international relations and power balances will be crucial. Studies could explore how Russia's growing role in Africa might shift global alliances and affect the existing power structures. For example, the increased Russian presence could challenge Western dominance and alter the balance of power within international organisations. Analysing these shifts will help to assess how Russia's strategic manoeuvres contribute to broader geopolitical changes and how they might reshape global alliances and rivalries.

Moreover, future studies could examine the impact of Russia's strategies on Western countries' policies and strategies in Africa. As Russia intensifies its engagements, Western powers may be prompted to reconsider or adjust their approaches to the continent. This dynamic could lead to increased competition or cooperation between Western countries and Russia, potentially influencing the overall geopolitical landscape in Africa. Investigating these interactions could provide insights into how Russia's actions affect Western strategies and how the continent becomes a battleground of influence among global powers.

Exploring the broader consequences of Russia's influence in Africa for the international order is essential. As Russia solidifies its strategic foothold on the continent, it may challenge established norms and international policies. Understanding these broader implications requires a comprehensive analysis of how Russia's engagements affect not just regional but also global governance structures. Studies could focus on how Russia's presence in Africa impacts international law, global economic systems, and security arrangements. By addressing these questions, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of how emerging global powers reshape the international order and what this means for future global relations.

The study highlights the need for a deeper investigation into the role of Russian PMCs in Africa. While the current study addresses their involvement, further investigation into their specific operations, impacts, and interactions with local actors could provide a more comprehensive view of how non-state actors contribute to Russia's geopolitical strategy. This could shed light on the complexities of Russia's military strategy and its implications for international security. The significance of the present study's results lies in their contribution to understanding Russia's strategic objectives in Africa and their alignment with the findings of the existing studies. The identified prospects for future research offer opportunities to deepen the analysis of Russia's impact on regional and global dynamics, providing valuable insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of Russia's geopolitical strategies in Africa, revealing the complex interplay of economic, military, and diplomatic elements underpinning its engagements on the continent. By examining Russia's strategic investments in key sectors, its military partnerships, and its diplomatic outreach, the study highlights how Russia is leveraging these dimensions to enhance its influence and counter Western dominance in Africa. The findings underscore that Russia's approach is not only multifaceted but also deeply rooted in historical precedents, reflecting a strategic continuity from Soviet era practices to contemporary practices. The study's results align with the results of the existing studies, confirming the significant role of economic investments in securing resources and expanding market presence as well as the importance of military cooperation and diplomatic efforts in reinforcing Russia's strategic objectives.

Accordingly, these findings validate previous analyses by scholars, such as [Abuseridze et al. \(2023\)](#), [Issaev et al. \(2022b\)](#), [Kanet and Moulioukova \(2021\)](#), [Kante \(2024\)](#), [Khan \(2025\)](#), [Kipo-Sunyehzi and Lambon \(2025\)](#), [Mason \(2023\)](#), and [Watling and Wilen \(2024\)](#). At the same time, the findings extend our understanding of Russia's current strategy by integrating historical context with comparative analyses involving other global powers. The implications of Russia's engagements in Africa are profound; they have the tendency to influence regional security dynamics, local political landscapes, and global power balances. The study's insights contribute to a better understanding of the strategic motivations behind Russia's actions and their broader impact on international relations. As Russia continues to expand its presence, it is crucial for policymakers, analysts, and scholars to monitor the above dynamics, as they will shape future geopolitical developments in Africa and beyond.

Future research should build on these findings by exploring the specific impacts of Russia's strategies on local political stability and security conditions in African countries. Additionally, comparative studies examining Russia's strategies alongside those of other emerging global powers could offer valuable perspectives on the competitive nature of international influence in Africa. For a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics in the region, it is essential to investigate the long-term geopolitical implications of Russia's presence and the role of PMCs. This study demonstrates the strategic depth of Russia's engagement in Africa, highlighting its economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions. This study's alignment with the existing studies and the identification of future study prospects underscore the importance of ongoing analysis in understanding and responding to the shifting geopolitical landscape. As Russia continues to assert its influence, the insights gained from this study will be instrumental in navigating the complexities of international relations and geopolitical strategies in Africa.

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Author Contributions

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions but may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with appropriate ethical approval.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. Both authors read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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