

Russia's Military Deal with the Congo Republic Completes Its African "Corridor of Influence"

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Russia's dispatch of specialists to the Congo Republic (Congo-Brazzaville) in order to maintain military equipment completes Moscow's plan of creating a corridor of influence across the continent from the Sudanese Red Sea coast to the Congolese Atlantic one via the Central African Republic, which therefore greatly increases the chances that it'll ultimately succeed with its 21st-century grand strategy of becoming the supreme Afro-Eurasian "balancing" force in the New Cold War.

The "African Transversal"

Most observers missed it because it wasn't given much media attention at the time, but Russia and the Congo Republic (Congo-Brazzaville, henceforth referred to simply as the Congo) signed an important deal last week for dispatching specialists to the African country in order to maintain the military equipment that Moscow sold it over the decades. While seemingly nothing more than a [technical agreement](#), it actually completes Moscow's plan of creating a corridor of influence across the continent (the "African Transversal") from the Sudanese Red Sea coast to the Congolese Atlantic one via the Central African Republic (CAR) where a small contingent of Russian troops are reportedly working with Wagner's mercenaries under UNSC approval in order to stabilize the war-torn but resource-rich country. Put another way, Russia is now much more powerfully positioned to succeed with its 21st-century grand strategy of becoming the supreme Afro-Eurasian "balancing" force in the [New Cold War](#) if it can successfully export its "Democratic Security" model of countering [Hybrid Warfare](#) to the rest of the continent.

Required Reading

The reader is probably unaware of what this all means since most people haven't been following Russia's "Pivot to Africa" over the past year and a half, which is why the reader is strongly encouraged to skim through the author's following pieces in order to obtain a better understanding of the larger dynamics involved or at the very least read the one-sentence summaries below each of the articles:

- 16 January, 2018: "[The Changing Foreign Policy Trajectories Of African States](#)"

New Cold War pressure from the US and China is leading to the redivision of Africa into "spheres of influence" between the many competing Great Powers, which nevertheless provides Russia — which has been largely left out of this game until now — with the chance to carve out its own military-strategic niche there in order to complement the activities of its Chinese and Turkish partners and increase its overall value to each of them.

- 18 January, 2018: "[Russia Might 'Pivot To Africa' With 'Mercenaries'](#)"

The reported involvement of the Wager private military company in CAR could enable Moscow to cost-effectively stabilize the country in exchange for lucrative extraction contracts, which could lead to the creation of an exportable model for securing China's Silk Road investments in the continent and therefore increasing Russia's strategic importance vis-a-vis its main Great Power partner.

- 7 May, 2018: "[Russia's Grand Strategy In Afro-Eurasia \(And What Could Go Wrong\)](#)"

Russia aspires to become the supreme "balancing" force in 21st-century Afro-Eurasia through a combination of creative diplomatic and military interventions aimed at reversing the chaotic consequences of the US' Hybrid Wars in the Eastern Hemisphere and facilitating political solutions to regional crises, but its main shortcoming is that it hasn't properly explained its grand strategy to the international audience.

- 9 June, 2018: "[Russia's Making Some Smart Moves In The Central African Republic](#)"

As Russia began to make progress in successfully stabilizing CAR, many opportunities have emerged for it to replicate some of its experiences from the Syrian intervention in order to sustain its strategic gains in the African state, further allowing it to perfect its new military-diplomatic model and increasing the odds of exporting it elsewhere.

- 2 August, 2018: "[UN Update On Russia's Military Mission In The Central African Republic](#)"

A UN report released last summer provided some valuable authoritative information about the success that Russia's military mission in CAR had up until that point, which also importantly touched upon some specific details of its deployment and a few of the challenges that still remain for bringing peace to the conflict-beleaguered country.

- 17 October, 2018: "[The Chinese-Indian 'Great Game' In East Africa](#)"

China and India are poised to intensify their competition in East Africa through their [Belt & Road Initiative](#) (BRI) and Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) hemispheric integrational megaprojects, respectively, which while diminishing the prospects for a [grand convergence](#) between them that strengthens multipolarity, could nevertheless increase Russia's irreplaceable "balancing" role between its two main Asian partners.

- 8 February, 2019: "[The US Is More Africa Of Losing Africa To Russia Than To China](#)"

US concerns about Russia's growing influence in Africa are somewhat valid

even if Moscow's military activity there is officially misportrayed by the American authorities since the country's geopolitical rival has proven itself more than capable of doing the hitherto politically impossible by stabilizing CAR, which makes Washington fear that Moscow will use what it learned to protect China's African Silk Road investments from Hybrid War too.

- 14 March, 2019: "[Has The World Been Ignoring An Almost Decade-Long 'African Spring'?](#)"

Unbeknownst to all but the closest observers, Africa has been experiencing an almost decade-long spree of non-electoral regime changes all across the continent, which has raised the alarm of "legacy" leaders in places such as the geo-pivotal Congo and therefore increased demand all across Africa for the "Democratic Security" model that Moscow's perfecting in the CAR.

Taken together, the prevailing trend is that Russia has been so wildly successful in implementing its low-cost and low-commitment "Democratic Security" model in CAR that many other African countries are now more than eager to have Moscow share its priceless state-stabilization experiences with them in exchange for valuable extraction contracts, which could lead to Russia becoming the vanguard defender of their Silk Roads.

The Threat To Françafrique

Being better aware of Russia's grand strategic aims in Africa, the reader can now appreciate the genius behind Moscow's latest military move in the Congo. This geo-pivotal country used to be a close Soviet ally during the Old Cold War years when it was ruled by a Marxist-Leninist government, and nowadays it's at the center of several regional fault lines, something that its long-serving leader Denis Sassou-Nguesso made sure to remind Putin of during their [face-to-face meeting](#) last week. Going clockwise, the Congo abuts CAR, the [perennially unstable](#) Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the oil-rich [Angolan](#) exclave of Cabinda that's [occasionally hit](#) by separatist violence, [coup-threatened Gabon](#), and [doubly Hybrid War-afflicted](#) Cameroon that's currently suffering simultaneous Angolophone separatist and Boko Haram destabilizations. It's likely with an eye to having Russia help stabilize this strategic space through its "Democratic Security" model that Sassou-Nguesso told Putin that his country can help Africa build a [new regional security system](#).

Russia's "African Transversal" through Sudan-CAR-Congo significantly cuts the continent into almost two equal halves of influence that roughly correspond to the Western sphere where French and EU interests are predominant and the Eastern one where Chinese and Indian one are poised to compete, therefore positioning Moscow right in the center the new "Scramble for Africa". Not only that, but it also allows Russia to export its "Democratic Security" model to the states adjacent to its "African Transversal" in the French/EU and Chinese/Indian "spheres of influence" that are at the highest risk of internal conflict (e.g. Cameroon/[Chad](#) and the DRC/Ethiopia), further increasing its "balancing" importance for both of them. In addition, the new non-aligned movement ("Neo-NAM") that Russia might be in the process of assembling to increase the odds of reaching a "[New Detente](#)" could very easily incorporate its growing number of African partners who are looking for a "third way" between the West and China in each respective "sphere of influence".

In the African context, the Russian-led "Neo-NAM" would be more to France's detriment than China's because Paris' neo-colonial policy of Françafrique stands the most to lose from

the diversification of its partners' Great Power patrons. It's worthwhile keeping in mind that two of the three "African Transversal" countries are part of Françafrique and use the Paris-issued "Central African Franc" as their national currency, which could gradually change if Russia encourages CAR and the Congo to use rubles in bilateral extraction, military, and other contracts instead in order to strengthen its currency and increase the chances that its investments there will be recycled back into its own economy through the creation of a complex system of economic-strategic interdependence with time. That vision is still a far way's off from hapening, but the fact remains that it's credible enough of a scenario to make France afraid for the future of Françafrique if Russia's "Democratic Security" gains in and around the "African Transversal" remain unchecked.

"Red October"

Like any globally assertive Great Power and following in its Soviet superpower's footsteps, Russia wants to institutionalize its influence abroad and especially in Africa, which is why it's hosting its first-ever all-inclusive [Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi](#) this October in order to solidify its newfound gains and diversify them across the board. Russia's "Democratic Security" model laid the basis for its "Pivot to Africa" through the newly created "African Transversal" that it carved out through these means in connecting the Red Sea and Atlantic Ocean coasts through Sudan-CAR-Congo, and now it wants to build upon its strategic successes by comprehensively branching out into all other spheres. "Military diplomacy" simply won't suffice for sustaining its strategic gains after the US announced that it's [considering sanctioning](#) all of Russia's military partners across the world, so Moscow needs to urgently diversify its partnerships with the continent's many countries in order to incentivize them into resisting the US' forthcoming pressure campaign.

It can foreseeably do this by combining its "Democratic Security" model with real-sector economic benefits such as infrastructure (and [especially railway](#)) investments, free trade deals, educational support, low-interest loans, and diplomatic support at the UN in order to create an attractive enough package to get them to reconsider going along with the US' demands. Dealing with African countries on a bilateral basis in this respect is one thing, but entering into continental-wide Russian-African cooperation through the upcoming summit is something altogether qualitatively different, which can help overcome Russia's soft power shortcomings touched upon in the previously mentioned piece about its grand strategy if it get its many current and prospective partners to better understand the role that it envisions itself playing in stabilizing their affairs throughout the course of the ongoing New Cold War.

The "African Transversal" is the staging point for expanding Russian influence throughout the rest of the continent in its French/EU and Chinese/Indian "spheres of influence", with CAR's impressive stabilization held up as the prime example of what a strategic partnership with Russia is capable of achieving. This is extremely attractive for the many countries confronting the threat of the "African Spring" spreading into their borders or uncontrollably continuing after it already succeeded there. The EU (apart from France) might also appreciate the effect that Russia's "Democratic Security" model could have in preventing a [Migrant Crisis 2.0](#) from [exploding in West Africa](#), just like China might see the need to contract Russia's services in order to protect its Silk Road and help the People's Republic avoid what many believe will be its inevitable "mission creep" in this respect. It's really only the US and France (which are one another's "[special partners](#)") that fear the spread of Russian influence throughout Africa, and those two could conceivably pose serious challenges to Moscow.

Concluding Thoughts

Russia's "African Transversal" is complete after the military deal that it just sealed with the Congo, which therefore gives it the entire summer to solidify its strategic gains in the cross-continental tri-state space between that country, CAR, and Sudan prior to this October's first-ever Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi. Just as importantly, the Congo is the second country that Russia is working very hard to "poach" from France's Françafrique neo-colonial "sphere of influence", which certainly puts it at odds with Paris and its "special partners" in Washington but might enable Moscow to leverage these optics to its soft power advantage if it's skillful enough to tap into the region's ever-present decolonization hopes that were never met in practice after independence. Russia would therefore be wise to use the upcoming Sochi Summit to not only unveil a comprehensive continental-wide "balancing" strategy that diversifies away from its erstwhile "Democratic Security" dependence into the real-sector economic sphere, but to also channel its Soviet-era reputation of supporting decolonization and anti-imperialist processes in order to maximize the appeal of the Neo-NAM.

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