

# Arms, Oil and Influence: What You Need to Know About Russia's First-Ever Africa Summit

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Valery Sharifullin / TASS

President Vladimir Putin hosted the first-ever Russia-Africa summit Wednesday and Thursday in the latest display of Moscow's efforts to restore its geopolitical foothold on the continent after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Amid a deluge of memoranda of understanding and cooperation agreements, Russia clinched a series of trade agreements with some of the 54 African countries represented at the summit in Sochi.

Below is a list of military, energy and other deals made between Russia and African countries at the inaugural summit:

## **Military and politics:**

- Russia signed a contract to supply 12 Mi-35 Hind E attack helicopters to Nigeria.
- Overall, Russia plans to [send](#) \$4 billion worth of weapons to African countries in 2019, the state arms exporter said.
- Putin said Russia [wrote off](#) \$20 billion of African countries' debts that had accumulated during Soviet times.
- Putin has signaled readiness to help stabilize conflicts in the Central African Republic and Sudan.

## **Energy:**

- Russia's state nuclear company Rosatom is in talks with Ethiopia to build a nuclear power station there.
- Rosatom also [signed](#) an agreement with Rwanda to construct the country's first nuclear science and technology center.
- Russia's state development bank VEB, the Russian export center, the African Export-Import Bank and the Societe Nationale des Petroles du Congo [signed](#) an investment cooperation deal on a regional oil product pipeline in the Republic of the Congo.
- VEB and the Russian export center, a state institute supporting non-commodities exports, also signed a memorandum with Morocco's MYA Energy on financing a refinery in the North African country.

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- Russia's Rosgeo exploration company [signed](#) memoranda and cooperation agreements with Equatorial Guinea, South Sudan and Rwanda.
- An affiliate of Russia's Rostec conglomerate, the Russian export center, Russia's Vi Holding industrial group and the African Export-Import Bank [agreed](#) to create an interstate platform for mining projects in Africa.

## **Economy and trade:**

- Russia's largest lender Sberbank, VEB and the Russian export center [teamed up](#) with London-based investment firm Gemcorp Capital for a \$5 billion deal to create a mechanism to support trade between Russia and African countries.
  - The agreement will help boost Russian exports by providing financial assistance for the supply of Russian goods to African countries including Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Sberbank said.
  - It is expected to offer financial support and counsel to Russian exporters' projects in

sectors like agricultural products, fertilizers and medical products, it added.

### **Further ambitions:**

- Putin said Russia's trade turnover with Africa doubled in the past five years to total more than \$20 billion.
- “I believe we can easily at least double the volume of trade within the next four to five years,” he [said](#).
- Russia lags far behind its geopolitical competitors on this new frontier. Bloomberg [compares](#) its \$20 billion trade volume with Africa to the European Union's \$334 billion and China's \$204 billion and said it equals around one-third of the United States' trade volume.

### **What experts are saying about the summit's significance:**

**Samuel Ramani**, doctoral researcher in international relations at the University of Oxford specializing on Russian foreign policy:

- “The summit in Sochi is a significant development for Russia's power projection ambitions on the world stage.”
- “It also acknowledges Russia as a significant power in Africa, at a time when the US is disengaged from the continent, the EU is divided on how to approach it and China is strengthening its hegemony. This summit marks Russia's arrival as a continent-wide player.”
- “But whether or not it is political theatre/PR or a genuine strategic game-changer lies in the economic deals that are actually crystallized from the summit.”

[Anna Arutunyan](#), senior Russia analyst at the International Crisis Group NGO, tweeted:

- “I think what [it] comes down to is Russia exporting sovereignty. ... In a nutshell, we are going to sell you cheap weapons, do business deals with you, set up partnerships, all under the umbrella of helping you be strong and independent — and stand up to the West.”
- “The difference with the Soviet, ideologically driven approach is that Russia is not hiding its primary driver — self-interest. And is not nearly invested enough to want to impose much. African participants, meanwhile, speak of Russia offering partnerships, not aid.”
- “Russia's actions look suspicious to the West because it doesn't see what's driving them. But I'm not seeing a hidden cache of motivations here. Sure, Russians talk of doing good. Sure, they want influence. Who wouldn't. But this is about selling stuff. They're not hiding that.”

*Reuters contributed reporting to this article.*

*This article originally said Russia signed a deal on a regional oil product pipeline in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It has been corrected to say a deal was signed on a pipeline in the Republic of Congo.*

*This article was updated 3:46 p.m. on October 28 to add information about Rosatom's agreement with Rwanda.*

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