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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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