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Russia Sends Weapons to Madagascar Following Military Coup

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Brian Inganga / AP / TASS

Russia has delivered a shipment of weapons to Madagascar's military rulers who seized power in an October coup, the speaker of the country's National Assembly said Monday.

Sitini Randrianasoloniako, who led the opposition before the coup, told Bloomberg that a Russian military plane landed at an airport near the capital Antananarivo on Saturday with 40 troops and 43 crates of weapons.

The shipment included assault rifles, sniper rifles and anti-tank rocket systems, he said.

The weapons were handed over to the presidential guard as part of lawful intergovernmental cooperation, Randrianasoloniako added.

The delegation expressed its willingness to support Madagascar's armed forces, particularly in training and capacity-building, Randrianasoloniako said.

The Russian delegation also met with Madagascar's military leader, President Michael

Randrianirina, to discuss economic cooperation, he said.

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Randrianirina, who took power after leading the coup on Oct. 14, confirmed in a statement last week that he made a covert trip to Dubai from Dec. 9-11. He refrained from disclosing the purpose of the visit, citing personal security concerns.

The October coup followed anti-government protests and the flight of former President Andry Rajoelina to France.

Randrianirina, who commands the elite CAPSAT army unit, assumed the presidency shortly afterward.

Madagascar, the world's largest island nation with a population of around 30 million, faces significant socio-economic challenges.

The median age is under 20, three-quarters of the population live in poverty and GDP per capita has fallen 45% since independence in 1960, according to World Bank data.

Russia has been expanding its footprint in Africa, signing military cooperation agreements with governments across the continent and deploying units from its African corps to conflict zones including Sudan, Niger and Mali.

In early December, The Wall Street Journal reported that Sudan's military authorities offered Moscow a 25-year cooperation deal that would potentially include a Russian military base on the Red Sea coast in exchange for arms.

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