MAPPING CHINESE AND RUSSIAN MILITARY AND SECURITY EXPORTS TO AFRICA

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The Wagner Group and its owner have been sanctioned internationally, and atrocities and war crimes committed by its employees have been documented by the United Nations and various other organizations.

This undated photograph handed out by the French military shows three Russian mercenaries, right, in northern Mali. Russia has engaged in under-the-radar military operations in at least half a dozen countries in Africa in the past five years using a shadowy mercenary force analysts say is loyal to President Vladimir Putin. The analysts say the Wagner Group, a Russian PMSC, is also key to Putin’s ambitions to reimpose Russian influence on a global scale.
Military weapon exports are an important tool for projecting a country’s influence around the world. Both China and Russia are among the top five countries that export major arms.¹ In addition to exporting weapons, China and Russia have employed private military and security contractors (PMSCs) across Africa. The projection of “military and security services,” as PMSCs are called in the Montreux Document,² is not an “export” in the traditional, product-focused sense, yet PMSCs are an export of influence. China and Russia each use PMSCs in different ways.

Russia’s most prolific PMSC is the Wagner Group, which has been involved in a variety of activities abroad, including kinetic military operations and training forces in partner nations.³ The Wagner Group increasingly operates less like a single organization and more like an umbrella of many entities, most likely under the control and direction of Russian government leaders.⁴ It is an outlier in the world of PMSCs. It is considered a mercenary group with close ties to the Russian government; the company and its owner have been sanctioned internationally; and atrocities and war crimes committed by its employees have been documented by the United Nations and various other organizations.⁵

In stark contrast, Chinese PMSCs have been employed to protect and secure China’s interests in other countries, such as mining facilities, ports, and infrastructure projects. China’s contractors have thus far operated primarily unarmed and engaged in defensive security functions rather than military operations.⁶ China’s PMSCs have similarly been closely controlled by the central government, through China’s public security bureaus, though with much different aims from those of Russia’s PMSCs. We have not found evidence indicating that Chinese PMSCs conduct violence or are deployed as proxy forces in manners comparable to Russia’s approach.

To map the spread of China’s and Russia’s influence in Africa, we analyzed which African countries received military and security exports from China and Russia between 2018 and 2021.⁷ The result is the maps below, which show that both countries have been exporting defense and security influence widely across the continent.
The maps provide a visualization of China’s (above) and Russia’s (below) exports of weapons and PMSCs to Africa. Across Africa, 15 nations have been the destinations of Chinese PMSCs, while 31 nations have been the destinations of Russian PMSCs. Seventeen nations have been recipients of Chinese weapons, while 14 nations have been recipients of Russian weapon systems. (These numbers do not include any relationships that do not appear in open-source literature, so it is possible that the numbers are higher.) Of these partners, seven nations have received both arms and PMSCs.
from China, while ten nations have received both arms and PMSCs from Russia. Of the two countries, Russia is the larger exporter of both arms and PMSCs.
The following map combines both China’s and Russia’s activities and influence in Africa by showing which African countries are the recipients of more military and security influence. The darkest color in the map shows five countries that received weapons and PMSCs from both China and Russia: Angola, CAR, Ethiopia, Mali, and Sudan. Lighter shades indicate less activity in a country. Countries shown in gray did not receive any weapons or PMSCs, according to our research.

WHERE ARE CHINA AND RUSSIA EXPORTING MILITARY AND SECURITY?

Each of the 15 nations that have received Chinese PMSCs has also received Russian PMSCs. The nations that are recipients of both Chinese and Russian PMSCs are Angola, CAR, the DRC, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, and Tanzania. China and Russia sell arms to nine of the same nations.

NOTE: This map depicts an internal border between Somalia and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, which the United States recognizes as part of Somalia (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, 2022). Data in this publication represent Somalia as encompassing Somaliland.
The following table shows the data used to create these maps. It delineates arms exports by the types of weapons purchased by each country.\textsuperscript{8}

### MILITARY AND SECURITY EXPORTS TO AFRICA

#### Which Countries Receive Which Exports?

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**NOTE:** UAV = unmanned aerial vehicle.
APPENDIX

Sources for China Research and Analysis


China Overseas Group [中国海外保安集团], “Group Introduction” [集团介绍], 2019.


Sources for Russia Research and Analysis


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“Russia’s Shadow Presence in Africa: Wagner Group Mercenaries in at Least 20 Countries Aim to Turn Continent into Strategic Hub,” November 15, 2019.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unless otherwise indicated, the authors of this report provided the translations of bibliographic details for the non-English sources included in this report. To support conventions for alphabetizing, sources in Chinese and Russian are introduced with and organized according to their English translations. The original rendering in Chinese or Russian appears in brackets after the English translation.


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NOTES


7 Some readers who are familiar with the Montreux Document might question whether this map indicates territorial states (states on whose territory PMSCs operate) or contracting states (states that directly contract for the services of PMSCs). The maps in this tool provide an overview of all territorial states without distinguishing which states are also contracting states. Data to conduct such an analysis are not readily available, since the ultimate client and purpose of each PMSC’s activities in a country are often not publicly revealed.

8 The definitions for the types of weapon systems can be found at Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Coverage,” webpage, undated.
ABOUT THIS TOOL

This tool provides a visualization of China’s and Russia’s military and security influence in Africa. RAND Corporation researchers examined publicly available data and literature on both China’s and Russia’s weapon exports and use of private military and security contractors in Africa to identify recipient countries during 2018–2021. This visualization provides an analytic tool to researchers and analysts examining and comparing China’s and Russia’s defense and security influence.

RAND NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION

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