

African Conflicts amid Multipolarity: Implications of a Changing Actor Landscape

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The range of external actors intervening in internal conflicts on the African continent has undergone a noticeable change in recent years. Three states in particular are directly or indirectly intervening in a growing number of African conflicts: the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and Russia. The expanding footprint of such new actors shows that the multipolar disorder that has characterised wars in the Middle East over the past decade now also affects much of Africa. Emirati, Turkish, and Russian involvement in African conflicts has been driven by opportunity more than by vital interests. The interventions of these new actors reinforce the existing trend among foreign powers in Africa towards remote and proxy warfare. They also further complicate efforts at devising sustainable, internationally coordinated solutions to African civil wars.

For almost three decades, a limited set of external actors intervened in African crisis states: Western governments; multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the African Union; neighbouring African states; as well as Western and South African private military companies. But over the past decade, and most noticeably since 2017, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Russia have intervened or backed proxy forces in an increasing number of conflicts.

Observers of African conflicts have dedicated considerable attention to the role of each of these three states in the past years. But they have generally viewed each state's expansionism separately, or have analysed bilateral rivalries in specific theatres, such as that between Russia and Turkey in Libya, or between Turkey and the UAE in Somalia. When seen together, these states appear as actors in a new multipolar disorder that first became evident in recent wars in the Middle East and North Africa, and now affects much of Africa.

An expanding disorder

From their initial focus on conflicts on Africa's northern and eastern coasts, Emirati, Turkish, and Russian interventions have rapidly expanded westwards and southwards. In 2014, the UAE (along with Egypt) began covertly intervening in Libya in support of Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces. A mix of Russian official forces and private contractors started advising and training Haftar's forces from 2016 onwards. UAE and

Russian intervention in Libya expanded significantly during Haftar's 2019-20 offensive on Tripoli, which prompted Turkey to intervene in support of the embattled Government of National Accord. Along with UAE drones, Haftar obtained support from Russian combat forces through the so-called Wagner Group – a shorthand for an opaque, state-supported network of former soldiers and private companies affiliated with Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin. The Turkish and Russian presence, which also involves the use of Syrian mercenaries by both sides, has persisted since the war ended with Haftar's withdrawal in June 2020.¹

In Somalia, the UAE and Turkey both began providing security assistance to various forces in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Assistance provided by the UAE targeted both forces affiliated with the Transitional Federal Government and anti-piracy forces in the Puntland region – the latter supplied via private military companies run by United States (US) and South African nationals. Turkey initially provided training and equipment for police units. Both states substantially increased their involvement after 2016, when the UAE began building a military base in Berbera (Somaliland), while Turkey established a military academy and base in Mogadishu in 2017. Units trained by Turkey and the UAE were increasingly at loggerheads in Somali politics.²

In late 2017, both the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan (then under Omar al-Bashir) requested Russian security assistance, while opening up their mining sectors to companies affiliated with Wagner. In CAR, forces affiliated with the Wagner Group arrived in early 2018. Although both Russia and CAR refer to these forces as instructors, they have been involved in combat on numerous occasions, allowing Faustin-Archange Touadéra to repel rebel offensives and expand his authority. In Sudan, Russian contractors trained both CAR forces and Sudanese units, even as the latter attempted to repress the growing protests against Bashir. Alongside these security assistance interventions, companies affiliated with Wagner registered and ramped up activities in both countries, running gold mines in Sudan, as well as gold and diamond mines in CAR.³

In 2019, a Russian attempt at replicating that intervention model in Mozambique ended in failure. Russian contractors suffered casualties in fighting with jihadists in the Cabo Delgado region, while vested local interests frustrated efforts by Wagner affiliates to enter the country's mining sector. But in late 2021, another opportunity for intervention emerged as Mali enlisted Russian contractors, whom the Malian junta claims are official military instructors, while Russia denies any official military presence in Mali.⁴ Russian forces' foray into Mali was all the more significant as it came after months of insistent warnings by France and other European governments that they would withdraw their military support if Mali engaged Russian mercenaries. Partly because the junta ignored these warnings, French forces have since begun withdrawing from Mali.

In Ethiopia, the UAE – along with Saudi Arabia – had played an important role in brokering peace with Eritrea in 2018. That peace laid the basis for Eritrean support in the Ethiopian government's war against Tigrayan forces from November 2020. The UAE backed government-aligned forces with drone strikes. From autumn 2021 onwards, in addition to

¹ Wehrey, Frederic. 2020. "This War is Out of Our Hands": The Internationalization of Libya's Post-2011 Conflicts from Proxies to Boots on the Ground." *New America*. On "Wagner", see Bellingcat. 2020. "Putin Chef's Kisses of Death: Russia's Shadow Army's State-Run Structure Exposed." 14 August 2020.

² See UN Panel of Experts on Somalia. 2022. "Annual Reports 2002-2021." New York. United Nations Security Council (UNSC); International Crisis Group. 2018. "Somalia and the Gulf Crisis." Africa Report N° 260. Brussels.

³ See UN Panel on Experts on the Central African Republic. 2022. "Annual Reports 2014-2021." New York. UNSC; Caniglia, Mattia, and Theodore Murphy. 2022. "Khartoum's Autocratic Enabler: Russia in Sudan". ECFR Commentary. European Council on Foreign Relations.

⁴ Bobin, Frédéric, Cyril Bensimon, Jean-Philippe Rémy, Elise Vincent, Benoît Vitkine, and Elliott Brachet. 2022. "Afrique: La Stratégie Opportuniste De La Russie." *Le Monde*, 31 January 2022.

Table 1: Emirati, Turkish, and Russian interventions in African conflicts, 2014-2022

	<i>United Arab Emirates</i>	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Central African Republic</i>			F, W
<i>Ethiopia</i>	A, W	A (?), W	
<i>Libya</i>	A, F, P, W	A, F, P, W	A, F, P, W
<i>Mali</i>			F, W
<i>Mozambique</i>			F, W
<i>Somalia</i>	P, W	F, P, W	
<i>Sudan</i>	P, W		F, P, W

A = Airstrikes F = Forces deployed P = Support for proxies W = Weapons shipments

Emirati drone strikes and weapons shipments, the government also employed combat drones supplied by Turkey. This foreign support was key to the government's ability to repel an offensive by Tigrayan forces on Addis Ababa.⁵ Whereas in Libya, the UAE and Turkey were on opposing sides of the conflict, and in Somalia, they backed rival political and military players, in Ethiopia they both supported the government.

Many of these interventions have been covert or covered by (often implausible) deniability, and have sought to minimise these states' official military footprints. The Russian government has remained ambiguous regarding the status and mission of Russian forces. In the case of CAR, it has described them as official military instructors; in Mali, it has dismissed them as private contractors acting without government approval; in Libya, it has refused to acknowledge their presence. In reality, these forces have engaged in combat and have been supplied by Russian military aircraft. At the same time, they are closely linked to profit-making enterprises associated with Prigozhin. The UAE has also failed to acknowledge its responsibility for drone strikes in Libya and Ethiopia as well as its other violations of the UN arms embargo on Libya. Turkey has generally intervened openly, although it remained silent about its initial campaign of drone strikes in Libya in 2020, as well as on its responsibility for deploying Syrian mercenaries to the country.

Another feature of these interventions is that they have been increasingly interconnected. For its war in Yemen, the UAE established bases in Eritrea and mobilised thousands of Sudanese militiamen, members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). At the same time, it paid Darfur rebel groups to fight for Haftar in Libya and recruited Sudanese men to guard Libyan oil facilities.⁶ Subsequently, it helped broker a rapprochement between the RSF and Darfur rebels, who had been on opposing sides of the war in Darfur. As the RSF commander and the junta's vice president, Mohamed Dagalo "Hemeti" has been both the UAE's and Russia's

⁵ Walsh, Declan. 2021. "Foreign Drones Tip the Balance in Ethiopia's Civil War." *New York Times*, 20 December 2021.

⁶ See UN Panel of Experts on Sudan. 2022. "Final Report of the Panel of Experts Submitted in Accordance with Paragraph 2 of Resolution 2508 (2020 and 2021)." New York. UNSC; Zayadin, Hiba. 2020. "Recruited as Security Guards in the UAE, Deceived into Working in Conflict-Ridden Libya Instead." Human Rights Watch, 1 November 2020.

primary interlocutor in Sudan.⁷ In Libya, the UAE supplied Russian-made air defence systems that were operated by Russian contractors, and likely financed the combat deployment of Wagner at least for some time.⁸ Russian facilities in Syria and Libya have been used as logistics hubs for Wagner operations in Mali, Sudan, and CAR, while Russian contractors have also recruited some Syrian and Libyan fighters for their operations in CAR.⁹

Triggers, Objectives, and Enabling Factors

The sequence of events outlined above shows that developments outside Africa have been the primary trigger of the new Emirati, Turkish, and Russian interventionism on the continent. The 2011 Arab uprisings opened up Libya, Syria, and Yemen to proxy warfare by foreign powers – among them Gulf monarchies keen to ensure their survival by courting allies across the region. The nuclear deal with Iran and the US intention to pivot to Asia further fuelled rivalries in a region where US hegemony appeared to be waning. From 2015 onwards, the Russian intervention in Syria signalled the end of an era of Western dominance that had peaked with the 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya. As in eastern Ukraine from 2014 onwards, Syria also served as a testing ground for Kremlin-linked Russian military contractors. The war led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen from 2015 onwards prompted both states to seek allies and bases in the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, regional powers split into opposing camps over the 2013 military coup in Egypt, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia promoting an authoritarian model across the region, whereas Qatar and Turkey backed Islamists as a counterweight. The 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey and the election of Donald Trump provoked a hardening of this regional divide, which was then reproduced by rivalries in Somalia and the 2019-20 war in Libya. Turkey also intervened in Libya to defend its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Greece received backing from Egypt, the UAE, and France for its claims.

A key driver behind the new external actors' forays into African conflicts has therefore been their engagement in rivalries with other powers, for which African states provide one theatre among others. For Turkey and the UAE, these have been rivalries with each other or with other regional powers. By contrast, Russian interventions in Libya, CAR, and Mali have arguably been designed to curb the influence of Western powers, particularly France. Underlying such rivalries, in turn, has been the quest for regime security. For the UAE and Russia, the promotion of antidemocratic governance has been a key rationale of their support for authoritarian rulers, militia leaders, and putschists.¹⁰

Beyond rivalry by proxy, other economic and security interests have been less prominent in driving the new interventionism. They are more visible in Turkey's case, where they include trade relations in the cases of Libya and Ethiopia, maritime rights in the Eastern

⁷ International Crisis Group. 2021. "The Rebels Come to Khartoum: How to Implement Sudan's New Peace Agreement." Africa Briefing N° 168. Brussels.; Lenoir, Gwenaëlle. 2022. "Les Militaires Soudanais Jouent La Carte Russe." *Orient XXI*, March 23, 2022.

⁸ Rondeaux, Candace, Oliver Imhof, and Jack Margolin. 2022. "The Abu Dhabi Express. Analyzing the Wagner Group's Libya Logistics Pipeline & Operations." Washington DC. New America; Emmons, Alex, and Matthew Cole. 2020. "Arms Sale to UAE Goes Forward Even as U.S. Probes Tie Between UAE and Russian Mercenaries." *The Intercept*, 2 December 2020.

⁹ Bobin et al.; UN Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic. 2021. "Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2536 (2020)." S/2021/569. New York. UNSC.

¹⁰ Steinberg, Guido. 2020. "Regional Power United Arab Emirates: Abu Dhabi Is No Longer Saudi Arabia's Junior Partner." SWP Research Paper 10/2020. Berlin. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP).

Mediterranean, as well as the interests of Turkey's military-industrial complex.¹¹ For the UAE, they involve maritime security and investment in port infrastructure in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, as well as agricultural investment in Ethiopia and Sudan to bolster its food security.¹² In Russia's case, substantial economic interests are lacking, though access to mining opportunities functions as an added incentive for Wagner operations.

Equally important as these drivers have been three factors that have made it easier for these new actors to intervene. First, the 2010s saw a growing reluctance by Western states to commit to foreign interventions using ground forces, and a continued trend towards minimising risk exposure through remote warfare.¹³ Leaving aside the 2011 war in Libya, Western military interventions in Africa during the past decade were narrowly conceived as counterterrorist operations. While Western governments have tended to further expand their security cooperation with African governments, they have generally chosen to do so in ways that have limited their footprints, with the exception of France in Mali. In both CAR and Mali, a drawdown of French forces encouraged governments to turn to Russia. In parallel to the Western trend towards arms-length intervention, large-scale multilateral peace operations also became more difficult to establish due to US aversion and polarisation in the UN Security Council.

Second, the new interveners exploited the dependence of local partners who were internationally isolated or had difficulty mobilising Western support. This went for the Malian and Sudanese juntas; governments of dubious legitimacy such as Libya's Government of National Accord; and Khalifa Haftar, a militia leader who lacked the status of heading an internationally recognised government. Foreign support was often crucial for these actors to survive in their struggles with adversaries, though it also encouraged them to escalate and go on the offensive – such as in the cases of Haftar, Touadéra, and Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed.

Third, interventions generally involved low political and financial costs. Politically, operations under plausible deniability made it more difficult to mobilise international opposition against them. This was even more the case due to the increasing dysfunctionality of the UN Security Council. Russia was able to veto any explicit condemnation of its actions in the UN Security Council, while the UAE used its influence with Western states such as the US and France to evade international scrutiny.¹⁴ At home, Russia, Turkey, and the UAE reduced the political costs of their interventions by minimising the exposure of their official military forces through the use of drones, proxy forces such as Syrian and Sudanese mercenaries, and private military contractors. These same tactics also decreased the financial costs of interventions. In addition, local partners covered the costs at least partially, whether through direct payments, lucrative contracts, or by allowing interveners to make profits in the mining sector, such as in Sudan, CAR, and Mali.

In sum, with few exceptions, the three new external actors have limited security and economic interests in African crisis states themselves. Rather, changes in the international system and in the nature of foreign interventions have made it easier for them to get involved.

¹¹ Donelli, Federico. 2022. "UAVs and Beyond: Security and Defence Sector at the Core of Turkey's Strategy in Africa." Policy Brief 02. Berlin, Bonn, Kiel. SWP, DIE, IfW.

¹² Mosley, Jason. 2021. "Turkey and the Gulf States in the Horn of Africa: Fluctuating Dynamics of Engagement, Investment and Influence." Nairobi. Rift Valley Institute.

¹³ Krieg, Andreas, and Jean-Marc Rickli. 2019. *Surrogate Warfare: The Transformation of War in the Twenty-First Century*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press; Clausen, Maria-Louise, and Peter Albrecht. 2021. "Interventions Since the Cold War: From Statebuilding to Stabilization." *International Affairs* 97 (4): 1203–20.

¹⁴ Kirkpatrick, David. 2019. "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z." *New York Times*, 2 June 2019. Colin Powers. 2021. "Dollars and Decadence: Making Sense of the US-EAU Relationship." Noria Research.

Consequences for conflict dynamics

Although Russian, Turkish, and Emirati interventionism in Africa is a recent phenomenon, its implications for conflict dynamics and efforts at conflict resolution are already becoming apparent. Among those implications is – at best – even less concern for international humanitarian law in warfare, and at worst a far more permissive environment for the deliberate targeting of civilians. This is not to deny continuities with recent interventions by Western states. The undisclosed deployment of Turkish and UAE drones mirrors the longstanding US practice of refusing to acknowledge responsibility for many drone strikes, such as in Somalia and Libya, including those that killed civilians.¹⁵ Another example is the fact that France and other European states long ignored their Malian partners' indiscriminate targeting of civilians in operations against jihadist groups, while France in particular dismissed credible allegations of civilian casualties caused by its military.¹⁶

But current patterns suggest the new interveners are either directly promoting or at least facilitating a qualitative shift towards tactics that cause even greater numbers of civilian victims. UAE drone strikes and airstrikes in Libya and Ethiopia have killed dozens of civilians; so have Turkish-supplied drones in Ethiopia, although it is unclear whether they are being flown by Turkish operators.¹⁷ In CAR and Mali, Russian contractors have rapidly gained notoriety for extrajudicial killings and torture, as well as the indiscriminate targeting of ethnic Fulani.¹⁸ Among the most egregious violations so far have been Russian contractors' direct involvement in the worst single massacre committed in the Malian conflict to date, and their booby-trapping of vast residential areas in Libya's capital, Tripoli, which has killed dozens of civilians since Haftar's forces and their Russian allies withdrew in June 2020.¹⁹

The three states' interventions have also had tangible consequences for the balance of power in African conflicts. Where the new external actors support one party in a conflict, this can potentially be game-changing. Examples are Touadéra's assertion of his authority thanks to Russian support; Dagalo's emergence as a leading player prior to 2019 and his growing prominence thereafter due to his ties to the UAE; and Abiy's ability to repel a Tigrayan offensive that appeared close to reaching Ethiopia's capital, with the help of Turkish and Emirati drones. But while such interventions help local actors survive or grow more influential, they have to date proven insufficient for local partners to consolidate authority.

In other cases, the new external actors find themselves on opposing sides of a conflict. As in Libya and Somalia, one foreign actor's support for a party in the conflict can prompt that party's adversaries to mobilise backing from another foreign actor. In Libya, this provoked a major escalation in fighting, while in Somalia, it deepened a political crisis. As

¹⁵ Airwars. 2022. *US Forces in Somalia*; Bergen, Peter, and Alyssa Sims. 2018. "Airstrikes and Civilian Casualties in Libya: Since the 2011 NATO Intervention." *New America*.

¹⁶ Dufka, Corinne. 2020. "Sahel: 'Les Atrocités Commises Par Des Militaires Favorisent Le Recrutement Par Les Groupes Armés'." *Le Monde*, 29 June 2020; Vincent, Elise, and Cyril Bensimon. 2021. "L'Armée Française Aurait Bien Commis Une Bavure Au Mali, Selon Un Rapport De La Minusma." *Le Monde*, 31 March 2021.

¹⁷ Ganguly, Manisha. 2019. "Libya Migrant Attack: UN Investigators Suspect Foreign Jet Bombed Centre." *BBC News*, 6 November 2019. Mwai, Peter. 2022. "Tigray Conflict: What Do We Know About Drone Strikes in Ethiopia?" *BBC News*, 31 January 2022; Marks, Simon. 2022. "Evidence from Civilian Bombing in Ethiopia Points to Turkish Drone." *POLITICO*, 25 January 2022.

¹⁸ Lister, Tim, Sebastian Shukla, and Clarissa Ward. 2021. "Russian Mercenaries Implicated in Torture and Killing of Civilians in Central African Republic." *CNN*, 25 April 2021; International Crisis Group. 2021. "Russia's Influence in the Central African Republic." *Commentary / Africa*. Brussels; Le Cam, Morgane. 2022. "'Ce Camp Est Devenu Un Centre De Torture': Au Mali, l'Armée Et Wagner Accusés d'Exactions Sur Des Civils." *Le Monde*, 13 March 2022.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch. 2022. "Mali: Massacre by Army, Foreign Soldiers." 5 April 2022; Raghavan, Sudarsan. 2021. "The Libyan War's Lethal Legacy: Booby-Trapped Teddy Bears, Toilets and Soda Cans." *Washington Post*, 29 May 2021.

long as relations between foreign actors remain acrimonious, their interventions on opposing sides are a major impediment to conflict resolution. But even where their relations improve to oscillate between competition and cooperation, they remain a serious obstacle to any sustainable settlement. In Libya, the presence of Turkish and Russian forces as well as Sudanese fighters financed by the UAE has helped to maintain a tenuous balance of power, while simultaneously cementing divisions and preventing more substantial political progress.

More broadly, Russian, Turkish, and Emirati interventions have focussed on cultivating and strengthening local allies through whom to exert influence. But these foreign actors' turbulent relations among each other, as well as their limited strategic interests in African crisis states, means that their positioning is highly unpredictable for local allies. The diversifying supply of foreign patronage, in turn, enables local actors to shop around. Taken together, this complicates mediation efforts aimed at brokering settlements, as seen in Libya, Sudan, and Somalia.

Another consequence of the new interventionism is that it curbs the influence of Western states and the leverage of multilateral organisations. In Sudan and Libya, UN mediators have found it difficult to ensure the backing of Russia, Turkey, and the UAE for their efforts. This has been even more the case as leading Western states have often aligned with the UAE in Libya and Sudan, thereby further eroding UN mediators' standing vis-à-vis Emirati transactionalism. In the UN Security Council, Russia has deliberately weakened multilateral efforts in states where Russian contractors are intervening, such as by blocking the nomination of Special Representatives in Libya it sees as pro-Western, by delaying the publication of reports by the panel of experts on Libya, and by blocking the nominations of experts to the UN panel on CAR.²⁰ In CAR, MINUSCA has had fraught relations with Russian contractors, though it found itself on the same side with them when repelling a rebel offensive in the context of the December 2020 presidential elections. In Mali, MINUSMA has faced growing constraints to investigate human rights abuses perpetrated by Malian forces operating together with Russian fighters. Malian and CAR relations with former colonial power France have soured over Russia's role, and in both countries, the EU has suspended its training missions due to the role of Russian contractors. Overall, the new external actors' influence is sufficient to undermine UN conflict resolution efforts, but insufficient to broker sustainable settlements themselves.

Looking ahead, the multipolarity now affecting conflicts in Africa is likely to have even more far-reaching consequences. Actors in these conflicts will increasingly factor in the availability of alternatives to Western military support and the declining relevance of multilateral mechanisms, including that of sanctions. This is bound to change the calculations of incumbents, as well as insurgents and prospective coup leaders. Such actors will have to weigh their options against the threat of losing budgetary assistance, development cooperation, and debt relief – areas in which the new interveners are unable to match the offers of Western governments and international institutions. Overall, however, the new interventionism will further broaden local elites' room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Western governments, which has grown over the past two decades as African states have diversified their external relations.

The inroads made by the UAE, Turkey, and Russia will make it easier – by setting a precedent – and more necessary for other middle powers, such as Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia,

²⁰ Pecquet, Julian. 2022. "Russia Plays Spoiler in Libya Mission Renewal." *The Africa Report*, 31 January 2022; Lederer, Edith M. 2021. "Russia, China Block Release of UN Report Criticizing Russia." *Associated Press*, 20 April 2021; Nichols, Michelle, and Jonathan Saul. 2021. "Flouting U.N. Sanctions in Africa? No One Is Watching After Russia Move." *Reuters*, 30 September 2021.

to become more active themselves. A far more momentous change, of course, would be China's abandonment of its longstanding reserve towards African conflicts.

Finally, the new actors' turbulent foreign relations suggest that proxy wars could become a more common and pronounced feature of African conflicts. Examples of such turbulence include the Gulf crisis of 2017 and rapprochement from 2020 onwards, the brief spike in tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2020, as well as the all-encompassing repercussions of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Relations between Middle Eastern powers have recently seen a *détente*, but the underlying rivalries persist and new crises remain a distinct possibility. Meanwhile, Western states could adopt an even less complaisant attitude towards Russian interventions in Africa. The determinants of competition in African crisis states continue to be situated largely outside the continent.

Conclusions

Multipolarity is set to become a persistent feature of African wars. This has implications for the nature of warfare, the prospects for conflict resolution, as well as for power relations between Western and African states. Where states intervene militarily without having vital interests at stake, they will try to do so by minimising political and financial costs. Multipolarity, which allows a greater range of states to intervene in such a way, thereby reinforces the trend towards remote warfare and warfare by proxy.

The diversifying landscape of foreign interveners diminishes the chances of conflict resolution. A greater number of foreign stakeholders want to ensure that any settlement protects their interests, and are in a position to spoil peace processes if need be. Foreign actors in a crisis often have conflicting interests, and in many cases, stabilisation is not among their priorities – indeed, Russia in Libya arguably seeks to perpetuate instability. At the same time, the new interveners are rarely ready to invest sufficient hard power to end a conflict.

Moreover, the new interventionism transforms power relations between African governments and Western states. In newly erupting crises, African governments – or factions within them – will have greater choices for mobilising external support. Western governments, in turn, will have greater difficulties applying well-established models of crisis management such as multilateral peace operations and mediation efforts, EU-run capacity-building programmes, or the mobilisation of regional coalitions.

For Germany and European governments, this state of affairs creates two main dilemmas. First, competing with the new interveners for the position of privileged partner will only further expand local counterparts' room for manoeuvre. Western governments may display even greater tolerance for their African counterparts' authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights violations if they fear that these counterparts could call on Russia, Turkey, or the Gulf states for support instead. Yet, this risks further fuelling instability, while also playing into the hands of those decrying Western double standards, and placing the efforts of Western governments in African crises on the same level with those of Russia.

This is not the only reason why European governments should not let themselves be drawn into bidding games with the new interveners. As the failure of Russian contractors' brief foray in Mozambique showed, the assistance offered by the new external actors often fails to address African governments' requirements. The progress achieved by South African and Rwandan forces after Russia's withdrawal suggests that where governments in crisis welcome the intervention of regional powers, this can be a convincing alternative.

A second dilemma is that the influence acquired by the new interveners in African conflict states turns them into necessary – but problematic – partners for Western governments pursuing stabilisation and conflict resolution. This evidently excludes Russia – not only because of the radically altered international context following its attack on Ukraine, but also because of Russia’s open ambition to disrupt African states’ relationships with the West, and the particularly egregious violations committed by Russian forces in Libya, CAR, and Mali.

Turkey, which has tended to intervene openly and to provide more traditional capacity-building assistance to military and security institutions, may offer potential for cooperation. But this would require changes in its recent practices, particularly the use of Syrian fighters as proxy forces, as well as its willingness to supply lethal technology such as drones without any strings attached. It is doubtful whether Turkey is willing to change such behaviour.

The UAE, by contrast, enjoys a reputation as a partner in Western capitals that is worth scrutinising more closely, given its role in African conflicts. Its interventions are covert or covered by deniability, and marked by an extensive use of proxies as well as drone strikes, which have caused large numbers of civilian casualties. Emirati policies place the promotion of antidemocratic models of governance above conflict resolution, and focus on cultivating individual actors rather than institutions. And in Libya and Sudan, the UAE has closely aligned itself with Russia, facilitating the Russian presence and joining forces in support of local clients. In sum, the new interventionism of middle powers requires European governments to reconsider their relationships with states they consider longstanding allies.

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