

**IFRI
PAPERS**



**JULY
2026**

The Vectors and Means of Rwanda's Growing External Influence under Paul Kagame



Sub-saharan
Africa Center

Benjamin AUGÉ

The French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental, non-profit foundation according to the decree of November 16, 2022. As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debate and research activities.

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

ISBN: 979-10-373-1278-5

© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2026

Cover: © Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock.com

How to quote this publication:

Benjamin Augé, “The Vectors and Means of Rwanda’s Growing External Influence under Paul Kagame”, *Ifri Papers*, Ifri, July 2026.

Ifri

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel. : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: accueil@ifri.org

Website: [Ifri.org](https://www.ifri.org)

Author

Benjamin Augé is an associate researcher at Ifri since June 2010. He holds a Ph.D. in geography from the French Institute of Geopolitics (Université Paris 8) and is also head of investigative reporting for Africa Intelligence. He teaches the geopolitics of oil and gas in Africa, comparative African policy of the permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, and relations between Africa and the Gulf region as part of the Executive Master's programs at HEC and Sciences Po Paris. He is also a lecturer at the Clingendael Institute for International Relations in the Netherlands.

Abstract

For three decades, Paul Kagame's Rwanda has pursued a foreign policy aimed at increasing investment in the national economy, maximizing military cooperation and intelligence sharing, and promoting a model of post-genocide state reconstruction.

To this end, Rwanda's diplomatic network has expanded significantly, in contrast to most major African economies, which have reduced their overseas missions and the number of their diplomats because of rising internal crises and budgetary constraints.

While Rwanda's influence relies on a conventional diplomatic apparatus, it is also supported by other channels such as external intelligence services, as well as state agencies responsible for enhancing the country's attractiveness, including the Rwanda Development Board (RDB)—which also oversees sports diplomacy—and the Rwanda Cooperation Initiative, under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The strength of the Rwandan army further allows the country to position itself as an indispensable partner for certain extra-African powers, as illustrated by its peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic and the deployment, since 2021, of its forces in northern Mozambique, securing the development of major liquefied natural gas projects operated by some of the world's largest multinational energy companies.

Résumé

Le Rwanda de Paul Kagame mène depuis trois décennies une politique étrangère visant à accroître les investissements directs à l'étranger (IDE) vers l'économie nationale, à maximiser les coopérations militaires et les échanges de renseignements et à travailler à la promotion d'un modèle de reconstruction étatique post-génocide.

Pour ce faire, le réseau diplomatique rwandais s'est considérablement étendu, avec 50 ambassades, à rebours de toutes les grandes économies africaines qui ont, *a contrario*, réduit leurs missions à l'étranger et le nombre de leurs diplomates, du fait de la multiplication des crises internes et par nécessité budgétaire.

Si l'influence du Rwanda repose sur un appareil diplomatique classique, elle s'appuie également sur d'autres vecteurs, tels que les renseignements extérieurs et les agences d'État en charge de l'attractivité du pays, comme le Rwanda Development Board (RDB) – qui gère également la diplomatie sportive – ou encore la Rwanda Cooperation Initiative, placée sous la férule du ministère des Affaires étrangères.

La crédibilité de l'armée rwandaise lui permet en outre de se rendre incontournable à certaines puissances extra-africaines, comme le prouvent la mission de maintien de la paix en Centrafrique ou encore le déploiement depuis 2021 de ses forces au nord du Mozambique, garantissant le développement des projets géants de gaz liquéfié opérés par les plus grandes multinationales mondiales des hydrocarbures.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	6
PAUL KAGAME’S DIPLOMATIC APPARATUS	9
The Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR)	10
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs	11
The Rwandan Development Board (RDB)	12
Embedding people within international organizations.....	15
EXPANDING INFLUENCE—WHERE AND WHY?	15
Attracting Arab funds.....	16
New horizons	18
The geopolitical case of Cabo Delgado	19
CONCLUSION	21

Introduction

A reflection on Rwandan politics cannot avoid focusing on a man who has come to symbolize it—due to his historical role and the strong presidentialism of Rwanda’s political system—since the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994, during which several hundred thousand people died. Paul Kagame did not immediately assert himself in the aftermath of the genocide; he initially held the posts of vice president and Minister of Defense until 2000, the year he became president.

To rebuild his country and pursue a particularly effective foreign policy, Paul Kagame relied on the return of a diaspora that had fled the killings of 1959—during which tens of thousands of Tutsis, in particular, took refuge in neighboring countries following the Hutu revolution that overthrew the monarchy.¹ Then, during the 1970s and 1980s, Rwanda experienced other departures, notably of Tutsi students, who this time immigrated to Europe (Belgium), Canada, and other countries in the Great Lakes region.

Upon taking office, Paul Kagame chose to draw on this pool of well-trained professionals to rebuild the country’s administration and economy and to form his government. These figures, often referred to as *Kada*—the Kinyarwanda adaptation of the French term “cadre”—had in some cases never lived in Rwanda before arriving there in the second half of the 1990s or the first decade of the 21st century.² But they are used to traveling, often speak several languages, and nearly all pursued higher education in Uganda, Canada, France, Belgium, the United States, or South Africa in the post-apartheid era. This administration has supported Paul Kagame for nearly three decades in economic reforms that helped restart a country destroyed after the three months of genocide from April to June 1994. Through an extensive international network, Paul Kagame has benefited from substantial international assistance that has enabled economic transformation.³

1. Regarding these events, see in particular F. Reytsjens, “Modern Rwanda: A Political History”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 73-93; Communication Program on the 1994 Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda and the United Nations, available at: www.un.org.

2. See the sociological study of this group by J.-P. Kimonyo, “La révolte des kada du FPR (1997-1998), un ‘moment critique’ dans l’évolution du Rwanda post-génocide”, *Politique africaine*, No. 160, 2020/4, 2020, pp. 159–186, available at: www.cairn.info.

3. As B. Chemouni notes (“Introduction au thème. La recherche sur l’État rwandais en débat”, *Politique africaine*, No. 160, 2020/4, 2020, pp. 7–34), development aid fluctuated between 16 and 24% of gross national income between 1998 and 2011—one of the highest proportions on the continent—and has since settled at around 12%. Data from the World Bank, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>.

Paul Kagame has relied on the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to impose his power and manage the national political space.⁴ He also governed through a coalition of several parties, the most important of which is the Social Democratic Party (PSD), created when Rwanda opened up to multiparty politics in 1991. The two prominent members of this party in the government are the current Minister of the Interior, Vincent Biruta, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe.⁵ Successive governments have been committed to doing everything possible to revitalize the economy of a landlocked country with the highest population density on the continent—503 people per square kilometer. The country's stability rested on both positive economic results (between 2001 and 2012, growth averaged 8.2%) and strong, even authoritarian, power. Paul Kagame focused on projecting his country on the continental and international stage.

The top priority objective, for three decades now, has been to increase the volume of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and, ultimately, gain influence through various avenues (sport, security-sector expertise, a logistics hub, tourism, technology, and military cooperation...). The president can draw on figures from the economic and diplomatic worlds. But this foreign policy has also benefited from the weakening of the continent's traditional leaders, who have, in practice, scaled back their continental ambitions. South Africa faces the steady erosion of popular support for the African National Congress (ANC). In June 2024, the ANC was forced to form a coalition with the Democratic Alliance (DA) to retain power after the general elections on May 29, 2024, in which Nelson Mandela's party share of the vote fell to 40.2%. Algeria's influence, once decisive, declined after the health problems of the president and former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1963–1979) Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2013, and is also declining across the continent, leaving considerable room for its main North African rival, Morocco. As for the continent's two other major countries, Nigeria and Egypt,⁶ both are dealing with backlash from structural economic crises, leading their leaders to focus more on internal problems than on looking outward. Of course, certain issues concerning the “near abroad,” such as the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia, remain extremely important for Cairo, just as managing the July 2023 coup in Niger was for Abuja. However, these are external issues that strongly resonate with their internal security.

4. In April 2023, a new triumvirate was established at the helm of the RPF. The only remaining member of the new leadership is party chairman Paul Kagame, who has led the RPF since 1998. Vice President Christophe Bazivamo (in office since 2002 and former ambassador to Nigeria until 2025) and Secretary-General François-Xavier Ngarambe (former ambassador to Paris) were replaced by former Senator Consolée Uwimana and former ambassador to Angola Wellars Gasamagera, respectively.

5. Apart from the PSD, the Liberal Party—also founded in 1991 and led by Prosper Higiro, the current ambassador to Canada—is another staunch supporter of the president, as are four other minor parties that called on voters to support Paul Kagame in the most recent election in July 2024, in which the incumbent head of state won more than 99% of the vote.

6. B. Augé, “The Major Challenges of Ahmed Bola Tinubu's Nigerian Administration”, *Ifri Memos*, Ifri, April 3, 2024.

Thus, Rwanda is, together with Morocco—whose gross domestic product (GDP) is about ten times higher, reaching \$154 billion in 2025—one of the only African countries to increase its foreign policy capabilities on the continent, but above all, and this is noteworthy when compared to the other powers on the continent, far beyond that.

This *Paper* will not address Rwanda's domestic situation. The aim here will be rather to shed light on a paradox. While Rwanda represents a relatively small market of 13 million people, it has managed to position itself as a key actor in Africa and in most of the African policies of major European powers, as well as in the eyes of North African countries, the Gulf, and, more modestly, Asia. Paul Kagame has thus succeeded in shaping for his country a geopolitical stature that is inversely proportional to what Rwanda could logically claim given its low demographic weight, the modest size of its GDP (\$14.77 billion in 2025—up 9.4% over twelve months), its small territory with high population density, and its landlocked status. Furthermore, Rwanda had to rebuild itself after experiencing one of the worst massacres since the Second World War.

We explicitly choose not to address the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in which Rwanda is involved, to focus on this country's influence beyond its immediate neighborhood. The issues surrounding the Great Lakes have already been covered in other academic works, and explaining the underlying factors behind Rwanda's broader influence also helps explain how it can more easily carry out its geopolitics—in the sense of territorial control—so often criticized in eastern DRC.

This analysis will unfold in three stages. The first will focus on Rwanda's organization internationally (ministries, embassies, presidential advisers, placement of figures in international organizations, political party). The second will examine the Rwandan president's influence on the African scene, particularly since his chairmanship of the African Union (AU) in 2018. It will also analyze how Paul Kagame's activism has paid off beyond the African continent, especially in Europe, the Gulf, and Arab countries more generally. Finally, we will focus more specifically on a case study of Mozambique LNG and Rovuma LNG in Cabo Delgado's northeastern province. The involvement of the Rwandan army in Mozambique since July 2021 has given Kigali leverage over some of the world's largest economies—and therefore over their presidents and heads of government.

Paul Kagame's diplomatic apparatus

Rwanda's role on the international stage rests first and foremost on the shoulders of Paul Kagame. A prolific traveler—34 foreign trips, including 14 in Africa, in 2018, and 48, including 27 in Africa, in 2019, in the pre-COVID-19 period—he steers his country's foreign policy to a very large extent through his own office.⁷ His former chief of staff, Urujeni Feza Bakuramutsa—now permanent representative in Geneva since 2025—also served as secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018-2020). For a decade, he relied on her to liaise with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has been headed since May 2024 by Olivier Nduhungirehe, the former ambassador to the Netherlands and Belgium, who replaced Vincent Biruta (now Minister of the Interior), in office between 2019 and 2024.

The steering of Rwandan influence, along with security and intelligence matters relating to external affairs, is in the hands of a small team especially devoted to the Rwandan head of state, forming an inner circle. It includes the former deputy head of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), Jean Paul Nyirubutama, who became deputy security advisor to the presidency in January 2025, as well as Aimable Havugiyaremye, head of the NISS since April 2024. While a distinction used to exist between a number one mainly in charge of domestic affairs and a number two more focused on external matters, this division is now much less pronounced, with both officials now handling domestic and external security issues alike. Since his appointment to the NISS in 2021, Jean Paul Nyirubutama has traveled constantly to ensure his country's interests were not under threat and also to follow certain economic projects of particular strategic importance to Rwanda. His successor at the NISS, James Wizeye, was formerly deputy head of his country's embassy in the United Kingdom.

Also central to the functioning of Rwandan influence is the head of the army's international cooperation department, Brigadier General Patrick Karuretwa. Appointed army spokesman in June 2026, he was one of the pioneers of the fight against Juvénal Habyarimana's genocidal regime in the early 1990s, when he was just 16 years old. After studying, following the RPF's rise to power between 1995 and 2000, at the National University of Rwanda and then at the prestigious Tufts University in Massachusetts, his military career led him to the key post of private secretary and defense and

7. His opponents have criticized him for the number of trips he takes: "Kagame Made 34 Foreign Trips in 2018—He Will Go Down in World History As the Most Traveled Ruler", *The Rwandan*, December 20, 2018.

security advisor to the president until 2021. Patrick Karuretwā is notably the point of contact for all defense attachés based in Kigali.

Beyond these “securocrats”—to whom should obviously be added the army chief of staff, Vincent Nyakarundi, a former military attaché to Rwanda’s permanent mission to the United Nations (UN) and former head of military intelligence—Paul Kagame also relies, within the presidency, on a few particularly valuable civilians. The American Mauro De Lorenzo, in particular, is director of the Strategy and Policy Council, whose role is to assess public policy and propose new ideas to the president. Mauro De Lorenzo is also one of the authors of the Rwandan president’s speeches and one of the presidency’s idea generators. Besides his role in domestic policy and in making major projects attractive, he also plays an international role, often accompanying the president on trips abroad. He is the one who best understands how U.S. administrations work, knowing in detail the decision-making chains concerning Rwanda in Washington.

Another civilian who has gained influence is the presidency’s economic advisor, Francis Gatare. He is a pillar of Rwandan influence, including abroad. He is notably in charge of following the numerous matters linked to Rwanda’s involvement in northern Mozambique, together with the deputy chief of staff, Regis Rwagasana Sankara. Francis Gatare previously served as director general of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), an agency that promotes Rwanda abroad and facilitates investment in the country. From 2009 to 2014, he also served as Paul Kagame’s private secretary.

Finally, among the inner circle of power with a role abroad, it is worth mentioning the presidency’s senior defense and security advisor—until November 2025, Minister of State in charge of international cooperation—James Kabarebe. He is one of Paul Kagame’s oldest companions. He was his aide-de-camp in 1994 during the RPF’s seizure of power, then became chief of staff of the DRC army after accompanying Laurent-Désiré Kabila in overthrowing Mobutu Sese Seko’s regime. James Kabarebe became Rwanda’s army chief of staff from 2002 to 2010, then Minister of Defense, and finally special advisor to the presidency in 2019.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)

The RPF’s role in Rwanda’s diplomatic relations is not negligible, given that it manages ties with foreign political parties. Its secretary general since 2023, Wellars Gasamagera, has the advantage of having been ambassador to Angola starting in 2019 and of knowing diplomatic matters well. The RPF does not have particularly close relations with other African political parties. This is partly because these political formations are no longer spaces for exchanging ideas, having become mere platforms for holding on to power. By contrast, it holds fairly regular meetings with officials of the Chinese

Communist Party (CCP)⁸ to accelerate the establishment of partnerships between the two countries. The party thus mainly uses these meetings to build relationships with party-states. The RPF is financially independent thanks to its investment fund, Crystal Ventures (which holds stakes in numerous security, mining, and construction firms).⁹ Crystal Ventures' primary purpose is to allow the party to finance its own operations and organize elections on its own, so it is not dependent on external funding.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Several of the foreign ministers appointed by the Rwandan president since 2000 come from the diaspora and studied at prestigious universities outside Rwanda. Moreover, they already had their own networks before taking office.¹⁰ This is the case of Charles Murigande, minister from 2002 to 2008, whose family had fled to Burundi as early as the beginning of the 1960s. He pursued his studies to a doctorate in Belgium before becoming a professor in the United States, while also serving as RPF spokesman in that country during the civil war that began in 1990. On his return to Kigali in 1994, he became the president's diplomatic advisor before holding ministerial posts, up to and including Foreign Affairs. After a brief interlude—served by the former secretary of state for the same portfolio, Rosemary Museminali—he was replaced by Louise Mushikiwabo from 2009 to 2018.¹¹ Louise Mushikiwabo was essential to Rwanda's emergence on the international stage. Since 2019, she has served as secretary-general of the Francophonie, and she has many strengths to draw on in carrying out her missions. She left Rwanda in 1990 to study at the University of Delaware in the United States and is trilingual. Before taking up her post as Minister of Information for a few months—a position she held before Foreign Affairs—she was communications director of the African Development Bank (AfDB) in Tunis, then under the leadership of former Rwandan finance minister Donald Kaberuka. When she left for the International Organization of

8. Y. Liu and X. Xiao, "The CCP and Rwanda's Ruling Party Pledge to Strengthen Exchanges", *Xinhua*, October 20, 2019; Y. Liu and X. Xiao, "The CCP and Rwanda's Ruling Party Pledge to Strengthen Exchanges", *Xinhua*, October 20, 2019. At the inauguration ceremony for Paul Kagame's final term in August 2023, Liu Jianchao, head of the CCP's International Department, was present and held lengthy talks with Wellars Gasamagera.

9. R. Gras, "Crystal Ventures, la face business du FPR de Kagame", *Jeune Afrique*, March 2, 2023, and F. Geel, "Rwanda. Le business au prix du sang", *Afrique XXI*, 29 novembre 2023.

10. Anastase Gasana, the foreign minister during the post-genocide period (1994–1999), signed the power-sharing agreements in Arusha in 1993 with the RPF and the government of Juvénal Habyarimana. He remained in office until 1999, when he joined President Kagame's cabinet and was later appointed ambassador to the United Nations. He held no official position after 2003. Anastase Gasana was one of the few senior officials to remain in office during the transition from the Habyarimana administration to the RPF government.

11. Rosemary Museminali was appointed in 2018 as Director of External and Donor Relations for the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). From 2011 to 2018, she served as UNAIDS' representative to the African Union. She is a member of the diaspora, as are the foreign ministers who have served since the end of the civil war, except Vincent Biruta. She was born in Uganda, where she completed all her education.

La Francophonie (OIF), Louise Mushikiwabo was briefly replaced, until 2019, by the physician and former secretary general of the East African Community (2011-2016), Richard Sezibera. He is a close associate of Paul Kagame, who also grew up in Uganda. At 35, he was appointed ambassador to Washington before running the Ministry of Health from 2008 to 2011. He was replaced from 2019 to 2024 by Vincent Biruta, who has himself been replaced by Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe since 2024.

The administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was led from 2020 to November 2025 by secretary general Clementine Mukeya,¹² who was replaced in that post by the former ambassador to Ankara, Fidelis Mironko. The ministry oversees a network of 50 embassies, 20 of which are located in Africa.¹³ Rwanda is one of the few African countries to have expanded its diplomatic network in recent years (more than ten new embassies since 2019), bucking the trend among other major countries on the continent that have sharply scaled back their resources—notably Nigeria (no ambassador appointed anywhere in the world from 2023 to December 2025), Egypt (closure of its embassy in the Central African Republic and of its consulates in Lagos, Zanzibar, and Geneva since 2016), and South Africa (closure of embassies, including in Bulgaria in 2025).¹⁴

As for the profiles of Rwandan ambassadors around the world, they remain quite varied, depending on the capital to which they are posted. There are economic profiles (France, Saudi Arabia), political profiles (in the African Great Lakes region), and career diplomats (United States, Switzerland, Austria). But this is not permanent; Qatar, for example, shifted in 2022 from an economist profile to a more diplomatic/political one. The pervasive presence of foreign intelligence services within embassies is notable. The new NISS deputy head, James Wizeye, for instance, was previously posted at his country's mission in the United Kingdom. The NISS is heavily used to carry out missions that are sometimes political but also to follow strictly economic projects, particularly those concerning foreign investment coming into Rwanda. This is obviously the case in the Gulf.

The Rwandan Development Board (RDB)

Beyond the key role played by the presidency, intelligence services, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rwanda has also created agencies aimed at

12. Clementine Mukeya previously worked for the U.S. Embassy in Kigali as well as for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). She studied in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

13. There are 47 foreign embassies in Kigali. The 50th Rwandan embassy will be inaugurated in Madrid in the coming weeks. Former Minister of Labor Christine Nkulikiyinka (former ambassador to Sweden) will head it.

14. One notable exception: Angola is in a phase comparable to Rwanda's, with recent openings in Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Qatar, Australia, East Timor, Indonesia, and Norway (though it closed its missions in Mexico, Greece, and Canada in 2018 upon the arrival of new President João Lourenço, as well as in Singapore in 2024).

attracting investment and maximizing its returns in terms of jobs. The main tool for this is, without question, the RDB. Founded in 2009, the RDB is also responsible for increasing exports and signing partnerships to attract tourists and investors. To this end, it has notably rolled out a dynamic strategy of sponsoring well-known football clubs; Arsenal (2018-2026), PSG (2019), and Bayern Munich (2023) have all had their jerseys emblazoned with the slogan “Visit Rwanda”. This strategy has also extended to the American market, with partnerships concluded with the Los Angeles Clippers (NBA) and the Los Angeles Rams (NFL) to promote Rwanda as a destination to American audiences.

The RDB's director general attends the council of ministers and reports directly to President Paul Kagame. Since January 13, 2025, this position has been held by Jean-Guy Afrika, who had previously been at the AfDB since 2010, notably as director of the regional integration office in Abidjan.

Embedding people within international organisations

This whole ecosystem of institutions and senior officials illustrates Rwanda's strong determination to project its influence. Beyond its complex relations with its three immediate neighbors: Uganda, Burundi, and of course the DRC—which will not be revisited here—Rwanda has worked for decades to project itself beyond its immediate environment. It notably joined the Commonwealth in 2009, becoming the second African country outside the traditionally English-speaking countries to do so, after Mozambique. It has also been a member of the OIF since 1970.

The country has also lobbied to place its officials within pan-African institutions, starting in 2005 with the presidency of the AfDB, held by Donald Kaberuka. Rwanda held the presidency of the African Union (AU) in 2018, following President Paul Kagame's designation by his peers in 2016 as the official in charge of reforming the institution. This chapter continued until 2024, when he handed over responsibility for following up on the reform to his Kenyan counterpart, William Ruto. President Paul Kagame put forward his former finance minister and deputy governor of the central bank, Monique Nsanzabaganwa, as a candidate, who won the AU vice-presidency in 2021. Her tenure as the pan-African institution's number two did not turn out as satisfactorily as her home country had hoped, and her replacement in February 2025 by Algeria's Selma Malika Haddadi brought some relief on the Rwandan side.¹⁵ Kigali no longer sees the AU as a key organization. The goal now is to avoid too much involvement by the organization in matters directly affecting Rwanda (notably the Great Lakes region, the Central African Republic, and Mozambique). Beyond this shift, the reformist drive

15. The AU's executive recruitment policy, which falls under the purview of the vice president's office, has been widely criticized in Rwanda.

championed by Paul Kagame in 2016 has given way to a degree of fatalism and skepticism about the pan-African organization's future.

Another institution where Kigali has placed one of its own, since 2023, is the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). It is headed by the former permanent representative in New York and former Minister of Finance and Infrastructure, Claver Gatete.

Expanding influence—where and why?

All of this organization, in Kigali or abroad, has shaped a diplomacy unique in Africa. Rwanda has taken care not to be dependent on the major powers, making itself useful, and sometimes even indispensable, on certain issues related to security, defense, or migration.

One strand of this policy has been to propose solutions for refugees. Rwanda, a country particularly sensitive to refugee issues because of its history, has taken in people from Afghanistan, then around 3,000 refugees evacuated from Libya starting in 2019.¹⁶ Observing Rwanda's experience, the British contacted the authorities in Kigali to set up a similar project starting in 2021. The Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs then created a special department to manage the flow of refugees from the United Kingdom and handle these people's situations, under the responsibility of the lawyer and doctor of law Doris Uwicyeza Picard, who had previously worked at the Ministry of the Interior. However, the Labor government's arrival in power in the United Kingdom on July 5, 2024, led by Keir Starmer, ended a program that had deeply divided British politics.¹⁷ Rwanda subsequently filed claims for compensation over the British side's unilateral termination of the agreement. Nevertheless, on June 1, 2026, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in London rejected Rwanda's arguments supporting its claim for €116 million in compensation.¹⁸ Rwanda also extended this offer to host refugees to the U.S. administration in May 2025.¹⁹ In 2021, Denmark and Rwanda had signed a memorandum of understanding on this issue, but it was never followed by concrete action.

Alongside this refugee-hosting policy, which reflects a form of generosity while also doing a favor for Western partners, Rwandan diplomacy has worked to open its diplomacy up to new regions traditionally ignored by Kigali.

16. L. Broulard, "Le Rwanda reçoit des réfugiés évacués de Libye, 'solution africaine aux problèmes africains'", *Le Monde*, January 29, 2020.

17. S. Francis, "Starmer Confirms Rwanda Deportation Plan 'Dead'", BBC, July 6, 2024.

18. "Un tribunal rejette la demande d'indemnisation du Rwanda par le Royaume-Uni sur l'accord d'asile", RFI, June 1, 2026.

19. D. N. Kupemba, "Rwanda Says It Has Agreed to Take Up to 250 Migrants from the US", BBC, August 5, 2025.

Attracting Arab funds

For more than a decade, Paul Kagame has been building ties with the Gulf countries. Priority was initially given to the United Arab Emirates, where Rwanda decided to open an embassy in 2015 and where, since 2011, the Rwandan president has attended the Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix on multiple occasions, at the invitation of President and former crown prince Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. In terms of investments, DP World announced in 2016 an investment of \$35 million to build an inland dry port near Kigali, with storage capacity for tens of thousands of containers per year.

Even more recently, another Gulf country has been especially courted: Qatar, under Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. After embassies were opened in Doha (2019) and then in Kigali (2021), Rwanda proposed major structural projects in which Qatar could invest. Thus, in 2024 Qatar Airways acquired a 49% stake in RwandAir, as well as a majority stake in the future Bugesera airport, located 50 kilometers from Kigali. More than \$1.3 billion will be allocated to this new infrastructure, whose aim is to turn Rwanda into a hub for East Africa.²⁰

Paul Kagame has always been careful to position Rwanda equidistant from rival powers, while trying to secure investment from all sides. Since March 2014, when the Emirati, Saudi, and Bahraini ambassadors to Qatar were recalled, relations between Doha and its neighbors have remained particularly difficult. This situation worsened further with the blockade against Qatar from June 2017 to January 2021, initiated by the United Arab Emirates and backed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt. Rwanda is the only country in Africa to have succeeded in attracting this level of investment from Qatar. This success is easily explained by the frequency of Paul Kagame's visits to Doha and by the particularly close relationship between Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the Rwandan leader. After the Israeli strikes on the West Bay district of Doha on September 9, 2025, Paul Kagame was the only African leader to travel to Qatar to show his support for the gas-rich emirate. The emir returned the favor a few weeks later, visiting Kigali, and Paul Kagame's farm, on November 20.

While the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are probably the Arab countries from which Rwanda receives the most investment, attracting Saudi investment is also a goal for Kigali. In 2022, an embassy was opened in Riyadh, and \$10 million was pledged for expanding Kigali's water network at the Saudi-Africa summit in November 2023.²¹ That pledge followed an earlier \$20 million project granted in 2021 by the Saudi Fund for

20. "Qatari Firm UCC to Captain Two Co-winners of Rwanda Airport Project", *Africa Intelligence*, November 4, 2024.

21. "Saudi Fund for Development Provides over \$580 Million in Development Loans to African Countries for Key Vital Projects", Saudi Press Agency, November 9, 2023.

Development.²² The partnership with Saudi Arabia remains modest so far, but Rwanda intends to keep nurturing the relationship at a time when the Gulf's largest economy must prioritize domestic investment in order to try to meet the development and diversification goals set out in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud's (MBS) Vision 2030. In September 2026, Kagame visited Oman and decided to open an embassy in Muscat to increase trade, notably through the importation of petroleum products.²³

Beyond the Arabian Peninsula, Rwanda's outreach to Arab countries has also included the opening of an embassy in Jordan in December 2023. To fill the post of first head of mission, Paul Kagame first appointed Urujeni Bakuramutsa—then chief of staff at the presidency—before handing the post to James Nganga, previously ambassador to the permanent mission in Geneva. Military cooperation was one reason for Rwanda to want closer ties with Jordan. This relationship should also be seen in light of Rwanda's policy toward Palestine.

Indeed, since Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Rwanda's relationship with Israel deserves particular attention. As early as October 2023, Kigali sent 16 tons of supplies to Gaza—under bombardment just days after the Hamas attack—via Jordan. While Israel has maintained excellent security cooperation with Rwanda since the post-genocide period of 1994, Kigali also wishes to pursue a balanced Arab policy. This positioning allows it to demonstrate its independence in its international relations, giving it a degree of credibility with its Arab partners, particularly in the Gulf.

Rwanda also opened an embassy in Algiers in October 2025—Algeria does not recognize Israel—appointing Vincent Karega as its first ambassador there. This former ambassador to the DRC had previously been proposed for the post in Brussels, but Belgium never responded to the nomination, which contributed to the rupture of diplomatic relations between Belgium and Rwanda in March 2025. The embassy in Morocco—Algeria's main regional rival—opened in 2019 to attract Moroccan capital and foster academic and military exchanges. Since 2024, the Rwandan ambassador in Rabat has been Shakilla Umotoni, the former Africa director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, Rwanda does not interfere in the relationship between Morocco and Algeria—the two countries have had no official diplomatic relations since 2021.

22. D. Sabiiti, "Rwanda, Saudi Arabia Enter Trade and Investment Agreement", KT Press, February 13, 2025.

23. B. Augé, "Kagame's Oman Visit Signals Diversification of Gulf Partnerships", *Africa Intelligence*, September 18, 2026.

New horizons

Rwanda's diplomatic network has also extended to Latin America, with the opening of an embassy in Brasília in 2023—Brazil, for its part, also chose to open an embassy in Kigali in 2025, with the arrival of Irene Vida Gala, a former ambassador to Ghana. Previously, the Latin American giant managed its relationship with Rwanda from Nairobi. Until 2023, Rwanda had no diplomatic representation in Latin America at all. However, the hope of attracting capital from the region has pushed Kigali to open its embassy in Brasília and appoint Lawrence Manzi, former deputy head of mission in Washington and former advisor at the permanent mission in New York, as ambassador.

Beyond Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, Europe is another area where Rwanda is diversifying its traditional partnerships. Historically present in Belgium, France,²⁴ and Germany, Rwanda has recently opened embassies in Poland (2021) and the Czech Republic (2023). At the same time, due to Rwanda's growing geopolitical importance in East Africa and beyond, some European countries have opened missions in Kigali without Rwanda necessarily having a mission in their capital. This is the case for Denmark, which sent its first ambassador, Casper Stenger Jensen (former deputy head of the Africa department in Copenhagen), to Kigali in late 2025; for Ukraine, which has also had an ambassador since 2024; and for Hungary since 2023—represented until now by a chargée d'affaires.

Asia has not been left out of the expansion of the diplomatic network either, with Indonesia hosting a Rwandan embassy since July 2024. Overall, openings have multiplied in recent years, including in Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar (2019); Poland (2021); Guinea-Conakry, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Jordan, and the Czech Republic (all in 2023); Algeria (2025); Spain and Oman (2026). The expansion of Rwanda's diplomatic network allows it to diversify partners, attract new investors and, ultimately, position Kigali as a hub for countries that do not necessarily have pre-existing relations with all East African countries. Moreover, the security dimension is never far away. Jordan, for example, opened a defense mission in Kigali before opening a political chancery. The partnerships with Pakistan and Algeria also have a primarily security-related purpose—military training, exchange of practices—with an economic dimension that remains very secondary.

24. We will not go into exhaustive detail about the complicated relationship between France and Rwanda. The relationship deteriorated significantly following the 1994 genocide, in which France's responsibility under the presidency of François Mitterrand was demonstrated in the Duclerc report published in 2022 (and commissioned by Emmanuel Macron). Macron's visit to Kigali in May 2021 contributed to a marked improvement in relations and to the appointment of Ambassador Antoine Anfré, ending the long series of chargés d'affaires in Kigali from 2015 to 2021. The June 2, 2026, dedication in Paris of a memorial honoring the victims of the genocide against the Tutsis by Presidents Kagame and Macron reflects a more peaceful relationship between the two countries.

The geopolitical case of Cabo Delgado

One specific project illustrates the Rwandan state's ability to plan for the long term and make itself indispensable: the Afungi gas zone in Mozambique. Located in Cabo Delgado province (bordering Tanzania), it will host, by the end of this decade, two gigantic onshore liquefied natural gas processing plants. What makes Afungi distinctive is that the shareholders of the two joint ventures in charge of these developments, namely Mozambique LNG and Rovuma LNG, are companies headquartered in the territories of major powers. Mozambique LNG is operated by France's TotalEnergies (26.5%), alongside India's Bharat, Oil of India, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) (10% each), Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production (8.5%), Japan's Mitsui (20%), and Mozambique's state-owned Empresa Nacional de Hidrocarbonetos (ENH) (15%). Rovuma LNG, meanwhile, will be operated by the United States' ExxonMobil (25%), alongside Italy's Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI) (25%), China's China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) (20%), South Korea's Kogas (10%), the UAE's Adnoc (10%), and ENH (10%).

Since 2017, Salafi-jihadist groups have repeatedly carried out acts of terrorism, killing more than 6,000 people in Cabo Delgado province.²⁵ The unrest was such that Mozambique LNG, launched in 2019, had to shut down in April 2021 and remained suspended until November 2025. The final investment decision for Rovuma LNG is expected this year. From the perspective of the oil companies involved in Mozambique LNG and Rovuma LNG, both projects (13.1 million tons for one, 18 million tons for the other) can be developed only because several thousand soldiers and police officers are on the ground. Yet since July 2021, only the Rwandans have remained in place. TotalEnergies and ExxonMobil executives have made it clear to the Mozambican government that there is no question of spending the sums needed for construction (\$20 billion for Mozambique LNG, \$24 billion for Rovuma LNG)²⁶ if Rwandan forces were to leave the area—the Southern African Development Community (SADC) troops, also deployed in July 2021 as part of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), having withdrawn as early as July 2024. The Mozambican army still appears too weak to retake control of this coastal area near the Afungi peninsula. Beyond Mozambique LNG and Rovuma LNG, other developments could be supplied by the considerable reserves contained in blocks 1 and 4, discovered since 2010 offshore of Cabo Delgado. It is estimated that Mozambique could eventually produce as much as 60 million tons per year, equivalent to three-quarters of Qatar's current output (the world's largest producer of liquefied natural gas, LNG).

25. E. Morier-Genoud, *Towards Jihad? Muslims and Politics in Postcolonial Mozambique*, London: Hurst, 2023.

26. "TotalEnergies and ExxonMobil Granted Rwandan Armed Forces Exemption", *Africa Intelligence*, May 22, 2026.

Rwanda's strength lies in having made itself indispensable to major international oil companies. Through this deployment, Rwanda's leaders know that all the countries whose oil firms hold stakes in the blocks and LNG plants in Mozambique will remain indebted to them for a very long time. During his visit to Kigali in August 2025, Mozambican President Daniel Chapo agreed with his counterpart Paul Kagame that Rwandan forces would remain in Cabo Delgado at least until the two liquefaction plants are built, i.e., until 2030.²⁷ Thus, for nearly ten years, foreign forces will have enabled one of the most important industrial projects in Mozambique's history to move forward. The costs of this deployment are significant for Rwandan public finances. The €40 million paid by the European Union (EU) through the European Peace Facility (EPF)—the last installment of which was disbursed in November 2024,²⁸ with the EU announcing in March 2026 that this funding would not be renewed—together with the Mozambican state's monthly payment of a few million to Rwanda, have remained insufficient to cover the mission's costs. But they will be partly offset by the numerous security, construction, logistics, and mining contracts that Rwanda has obtained and will obtain in coming years thanks to its presence on the ground. Rwandan stakes in the gas blocks would also be a goal, though one that is difficult to achieve for now. After the US Treasury Department sanctioned the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) in March 2026, the Rwandans threatened to withdraw from Mozambique to pressure countries whose oil firms are involved in Cabo Delgado. Mozambican leaders, starting with President Daniel Chapo, nonetheless fear that Rwandan troops might settle in for the long haul. Mozambican intelligence services, led since 2025 by former foreign minister José Pacheco, have worked to diversify security partnerships and bring in other foreign armies.

Paul Kagame's greatest diplomatic gain in Mozambique will ultimately be international respectability, thanks to this deployment. Rwanda is demonstrating its ability to help stabilize security crises well beyond its immediate neighborhood. Indeed, this intervention is all the more notable given that Rwanda does not belong to SADC, of which Mozambique is a member, but to the East African Community (EAC). This is not the first time Rwanda has engaged in stabilization operations outside its own region. For instance, it has been deployed for a decade within the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. However, the Mozambican case stands out for its unique geo-economic dimension, tied to its gas resources, which gives the country an absolutely unique geopolitical lever.

27. "TotalEnergies' Sly Tactics on Mozambique LNG Project", *Africa Intelligence*, September 22, 2025.

28. "European Peace Facility: Council Tops Up Support to the deployment of the Rwanda Defence Force to Fight Terrorism in Cabo Delgado", Council of the European Union, November 18, 2024, available at: www.consilium.europa.eu.

Conclusion

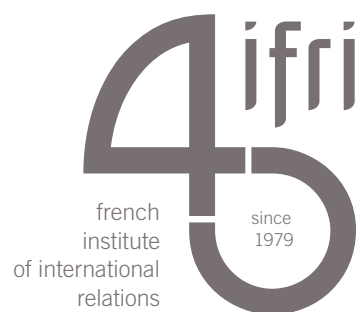
Rwanda's diplomatic model is difficult to analyze objectively, because whatever decisions Kigali's leadership makes, there will always be a very sharp divide between analysts who admire the work Paul Kagame has carried out over the past thirty years, and those who argue that this has only been possible through a form of predation on the resources of its Congolese neighbor, and at the cost of a firm clampdown on domestic political life following the 1994 genocide. Since the RPF took power in 1994, Rwanda's leaders have seen two groups of observers: those who understand what Paul Kagame is doing—the friends—and those who do not and who systematically criticize it.

Here, we have sought to analyze the elements that highlight how this country, small in both size and population, has managed within the space of three decades to move from being a totally devastated nation to a power capable of wielding influence at the regional, continental, and even global level, by patiently building relationships and knowing how to make itself useful on sensitive matters, sometimes of geostrategic importance. The agility of the dozen or so senior officials at the head of the state, all with the same level of information and the ability to advise the leader, including calling for complete changes of direction, makes it possible to establish a long-term strategy of influence within Rwandan foreign policy.

Rwanda's independence in conducting its foreign policy rests on a strategy of non-alignment in most conflicts (except in the DRC), while still attracting financial resources from actors that are sometimes opposed to one another. Kigali has thus managed to maintain relations with partners engaged in structural rivalries—notably between Morocco and Algeria, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, or India and Pakistan—while also playing on competitive dynamics within the traditional Western bloc (France, Belgium, United States). This capacity for diversification helps strengthen President Kagame's diplomatic room for maneuver.

The agility and competence of the officials around the president, combined with centralized decision-making, make Rwanda a country enjoying international influence wholly disproportionate to its very small economy and cramped, landlocked territory. In this sense, Rwanda can be compared to the United Arab Emirates, which also has a small national population (800,000 citizens), but whose leaders' extraordinary agility allows the country to make itself indispensable to major international powers. This comparison breaks down when it comes to financial means, which are very limited for Rwanda, unlike Abu Dhabi's substantial resources. But Kigali compensates for this weakness with its military power.

Finally, it is important to note that Rwanda is emerging at a time when Africa's traditional powers are weakening. It is now quite difficult to find African states capable of projecting themselves so effectively across the continent and beyond. For some observers, Rwanda is thus becoming Africa's reliable partner, the recipient of goodwill and investment that were once largely captured by the continent's traditional major powers (Algeria, Nigeria, South Africa, etc.), all of which are now in a state of geopolitical retreat. This largely explains why its interventionist policy toward its large neighbor, the DRC, ultimately draws only fairly modest pressure from several major world diplomacies, compared with non-governmental organizations, international media, and certain middle powers such as Belgium. While pressure on Rwanda from certain officials within the U.S. administration has been strong since 2025, particularly from Donald Trump's advisor Massad Boulos, it is unclear whether this pressure is backed by substantive support for the Congolese position. It also appears to stem from purely economic considerations tied to the interests of US firms and, therefore, to private gains. Nor is it certain that this support will endure over time in Washington, a political ecosystem where, moreover, the Rwandans have traditionally maintained strong networks.



27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – France

Ifri.org