

Privatization of Security in the Russian Strategy: From Wagner to the African Corps

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ABSTRACT:

At the end of 2023, a special formation known as the **African Corps** was established within the organizational structure of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. A combination of factors prompted the Russian political and military leadership to create this new entity, foremost among them the geopolitical transformations taking place across the African continent and the rapid decline of French influence in the countries of Central Africa. These developments coincided with the reduction of the French military presence in the region. In addition, the mutiny led by the leadership and a number of fighters of the private military company **Wagner** within Russia made it necessary to replace the group. Unlike Wagner, which had enjoyed a certain degree of operational autonomy, the African Corps was established as a military formation directly subordinate to the Russian Armed Forces.

Keywords: Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), Wagner Group, Mercenaries, African Corps.

INTRODUCTION

The military and political landscape of the Russian Federation underwent significant transformations in late 2023, marked by the emergence of a new entity expected to play a pivotal role in Russia's policy toward the African continent. In November of that year, the African Corps was established as a replacement for the private military company Wagner, operating under the supervision of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Ministry of Defense.

Over the past decades, Russian private military companies have emerged as some of the most prominent actors in contemporary armed conflicts, driven by transformations in the structure of the international system and the growing privatization of security at the global level. These companies have increasingly assumed roles that were traditionally reserved for the regular armed forces of states. However, their growing presence has generated considerable debate. While some view them as effective instruments for compensating for state shortcomings and enhancing military efficiency, others warn of the risks they pose to state sovereignty and the legitimacy of the use of force, as well as the challenges of subjecting them to legal oversight and accountability when implicated in serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

These issues are most clearly illustrated by the case of the private military company Wagner, which has become one of the most prominent contemporary examples of private military companies due to its military and security operations in several African countries, including the Central African Republic, Mali, Libya, and Sudan, among others. This has sparked extensive legal debate concerning its legal status and the extent of its independence from the Russian state. Following the mutiny led by its leadership during the most recent war in Ukraine and the subsequent events that resulted in the

establishment of a new entity known as the African Corps, these debates have become even more significant.

Accordingly, the central research question of this study is as follows:

How has the role of private military companies evolved within the Russian strategy, from reliance on the Wagner Group to the establishment of the African Corps? What legal, political, military, and strategic factors have driven this transformation in the management of Russian influence across the African continent?

To address this question, the study is divided into two main sections. The first examines the privatization of security as an instrument of Russian strategy, while the second analyzes the roles of the Wagner Group and the African Corps in armed conflicts.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PRIVATIZATION OF SECURITY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF RUSSIAN STRATEGY

Russia has undertaken a number of cross-border interventions to demonstrate its status as a major power in international politics, consolidate its dominance within its immediate sphere of influence, and prevent Western powers from encroaching upon that sphere. From this perspective, the annexation of Crimea, its military interventions in Syria, Libya, and Mali, as well as its war with Ukraine, can all be understood within this strategic framework. In this context, Russian private military and security companies have played a central role in advancing the Russian government's objective of expanding its influence. These companies constitute a key component of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy by facilitating military interventions.

Accordingly, this chapter examines the position of private military companies in the Russian Federation (Section One) and the Wagner Private Military Company (Section Two).

Section One: Private Military and Security Companies in the Russian Federation

In 1996, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov declared that Russia should re-establish itself as a major center of power in international politics and contribute to the development of a multipolar world as an alternative to the dominance of the United States. In the same context, the Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, stated that the rules of warfare had changed at the international level, emphasizing the importance of irregular forces in achieving Russia's strategic objectives.¹

Accordingly, this section discusses the strategic reasons behind the Russian government's reliance on private military companies (Subsection One) and the manner in which the Russian government has regulated this category of companies (Subsection Two).

Subsection One: Strategic Determinants

The roots of private military companies in Russia extend deep into the nation's history, intertwining with centuries of geopolitical strategy and military innovation. This tradition dates back to the imperial era, when irregular units such as the Cossacks played pivotal roles in securing and expanding Russian territory, thereby laying the foundation for today's approach to private military forces.

Most Russian private military companies trace their origins to the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the period of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin (1989–1999), which witnessed the chaotic dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restructuring of the Russian military. The transition accelerated the reorganization of the Russian national armed forces, resulting in the dismissal of large numbers of soldiers and military personnel. The loss of these jobs led to significant social unrest.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point in the evolution of Russia's military strategy. Faced with severe economic challenges and a weakened military infrastructure, the newly established Russian Federation was compelled to explore alternative models of military support, focusing primarily on the provision of security services, logistics, and equipment maintenance for the armed forces. These early initiatives paved the way for the development of private security companies.

As private military companies gained increasing prominence, the legal framework governing their operations began to take shape in the early 2000s. These regulatory efforts sought to define the legal status, responsibilities, and limitations of such entities while ensuring that they operated within a controlled legal framework. The legislation attempted to strike a balance between the need to outsource certain military functions and the state's determination to maintain effective oversight and control over these companies.²

Professor Tor Bukkvoll has emphasized that these companies have evolved into hybrid instruments combining commercial, security, and political functions, enabling Russia to conduct geopolitical interventions at lower cost and with greater flexibility. According to the author, the development of private military companies has been driven by several fundamental strategic determinants, including:

a. Emulating Military Models

The emulation of foreign military models has become a well-established phenomenon internationally. In Russia, this approach was initiated by Defense Minister Anatolii Serdiukov in 2008 and largely mirrored the military reforms implemented by many Western countries following the end of the Cold War. These reforms were reflected in the transition from a large conscript-based army to a smaller, more professional force, as well as in the reorganization of ground forces into brigades rather than divisions. In 2013, Red Star, the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, published an article describing private military companies as "a phenomenon of our time," arguing that while the West had recognized their value, Russia continued to lag behind in this field.³

b. Profit Generation

According to Mikhail Emelianov, a member of the Russian State Duma, private military companies represent a rapidly expanding international market that continues to be dominated by Western countries, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. He argued that Russia possesses enormous untapped potential in this sector, stating: "Our history shows that we have always fought wars; why should we not capitalize on this experience to generate profit?"⁴

c. Geopolitical Interests

The ability to employ a certain level of force in pursuit of national interests without attributing that force directly to the state constitutes an obvious strategic advantage. Russian participants in the debate over private military companies maintain that Western states have long employed this approach. President Vladimir Putin has described these companies as "an instrument for advancing national interests without requiring the direct involvement of the state."

According to Candace Rondeaux, an American expert in national security and international affairs, "Private military companies in Russia are the product of the post-Soviet privatization of the Russian military-industrial complex and the re-consolidation of the security state under Putin."

Their organizational structures reflect the culture and hierarchical organization of the Russian security services." ⁵

d. Reducing Human Costs

Private security companies provide the Russian government with a means of employing military force in operations where casualties among regular armed forces could provoke significant public opposition. Since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989), large segments of Russian society have remained highly reluctant to accept the loss of Russian soldiers in military operations that are not directly related to the defense of the homeland. ⁶

Accordingly, private security companies in Russia are the product of the privatization of the Russian military-industrial complex in the post-Soviet era and the subsequent consolidation of the Russian security state under President Vladimir Putin. Many of these private security groups were reconstituted from Russian military and security institutions, including the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB), the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU), and the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV).⁷

Subsection Two: The Domestic Legal Framework

a. The Constitution of the Russian Federation

The Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993), as amended on 1 July 2020, provides in Article 13(5) that the establishment of public associations or organizations aimed at creating armed groups or engaging in activities directed toward that end is prohibited. Furthermore, pursuant to Article 71 of the Constitution, matters relating to national defense, security, participation in war and peacekeeping operations, as well as the conduct of the Russian Federation's foreign policy and international relations, fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. ⁸

b. Federal Legislation

Reference may be made to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, adopted by the State Duma on 24 May 1996 and approved by the Federation Council on 5 June 1996. Article 359, as amended on 14 July 2022, criminalizes mercenary activities.

Some scholars argue that the amendments to Articles 34.1, 37, and 38 of the Federal Law of 28 December 2016 on Military Duty and Military Service effectively opened a "Pandora's box" for private military companies. Under these amendments, the participation of military reservists in operations aimed at "suppressing international terrorist activities outside the territory of the Russian Federation" is regarded, under Russian law, as the fulfillment of their national duty rather than a criminal offense. ⁹

Law of the Russian Federation No. 2487-1 of 11 March 1992 on Private Detective and Security Activities in the Russian Federation constitutes the principal legislative framework governing the protection of persons and property within Russian territory. The law does not authorize military activities outside the country. It has been amended several times, most notably in 2003, 2014, and most recently on 21 April 2025.

Pursuant to Article 3 of this law, private security companies are authorized to provide the following services:

- Protection of the life and health of citizens through the provision of personal security services.
- Regulation of access to and exit from facilities, including the implementation of counterterrorism measures.
- Private security companies must obtain a license from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to conduct their activities.

- The use of firearms is permitted only in specified circumstances and in accordance with the applicable laws.
- Private military and security companies are not authorized to conduct military or security activities outside the territory of the Russian Federation.¹⁰

c. Russian Legislative Initiatives

The 2018 legislative initiative came closest to establishing a legal framework for private military companies. It introduced a draft law concerning short-term contractual military service. Although the proposed legislation did not explicitly refer to private military companies, it represented a significant step toward regulating private security companies. However, the bill was never adopted, as it failed to receive the support of the Russian Ministry of Defense, the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya), the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice.¹¹

Private military companies in Russia have been described as representing a new form of warfare. The scholar Mark Galeotti characterized them as part of "Russia's hybrid state, in which public and private, military and civilian, legal and illegal institutions interact under Putin's paternalistic rule." In 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin described private security companies as "a means of advancing national interests without the direct involvement of the state."¹²

Section Two: The Wagner Private Military Company

It should first be emphasized that the Wagner Private Military Company is not the only private military company in Russia operating in pursuit of the interests of the Russian government. However, due to its involvement in armed conflicts across numerous countries, it has become one of the best-known private military companies worldwide.

The Wagner Group has emerged as one of the most prominent non-state actors. Although private military companies are prohibited under the Russian Constitution and the Russian Criminal Code, the Wagner Group was nevertheless able to operate globally with the authorization of the Russian authorities as an instrument of the state's foreign policy. Academic research on the group remains relatively limited, while the policy of "plausible deniability" has further complicated efforts to understand its relationship with the Russian government and its role in Russian foreign policy.¹³

This section examines the establishment of the Wagner Private Military Company (Subsection One) and its close relationship with the Russian government (Subsection Two).

Subsection One: The Establishment of the Wagner Private Military Company

The origins of the Wagner Group can be traced back to an earlier Russian company known as Antiterror-Orel, which was officially established in the city of Oryol in 2003 as a "non-governmental education and training center." It was founded by a number of retired officers from the Russian Special Forces. The company initially operated by concluding contracts with Russian civilian entities to provide armed protection for their commercial activities. Several entities subsequently emerged from this organization, most notably the Moran Security Group, which was officially registered in 2011.¹⁴

According to the Turkish scholars Anıl Çağlar and Ahmet Açık, in their study on the structure and operations of the Wagner Group, classifying Wagner merely as a private military company constitutes an oversimplification of its structural and functional reality. In their analysis, the company represents a hybrid model operating at the intersection of the private security sector and the official institutions of the Russian state. It conducts military operations and recruits its

personnel through a system that combines formal contractual arrangements with military discipline, thereby functioning as a parallel instrument to Russia's regular armed forces.¹⁵

The internal organizational structure of the Wagner Group remains largely secretive, with only limited information available regarding its leadership, despite its well-known association with figures such as Yevgeny Prigozhin. The group was established in the early 2010s by Dmitry Utkin.¹⁶

Subsection Two: Wagner's Relationship with the Russian Government

This subsection examines the relationship between the Wagner Private Military Company and the Russian government, with the aim of determining whether the company operates as an independent entity or as a de facto extension of the Russian state.

First: An Instrument of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy

The Polish scholar Grzegorz Kuczyński, author of *Wagnerowcy: Psy Wojny Putina* (Wagner: Putin's Dogs of War), analyzes the military, political, and financial roles of the Wagner Group, as well as its close relationship with the Kremlin, particularly with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin.

Kuczyński argues that the Wagner Group operates under the supervision of Russia's security establishment, particularly under the patronage of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU). However, what distinguishes Wagner from other private military companies and enables it to occupy a more prominent position and undertake more significant roles is the uniquely close relationship between President Vladimir Putin and the company's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin. Similarly, Kimberly Marten, during her testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs on 7 July 2020, stated that the relationship between President Putin and Prigozhin dates back to the 1990s and spans nearly three decades. She further argued that Wagner is not an independent private military company but rather a contracting mechanism operating on behalf of Russian military intelligence.¹⁷

CHAPTER TWO: WAGNER AND THE AFRICAN CORPS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

This chapter examines the various dimensions of the Wagner Group's activities by analyzing its organizational structure, the nature of the missions it performs, and the extent of the overlap between its security, commercial, and political functions. It also seeks to assess the compatibility of these activities with the established rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The chapter further examines the security and military role of the Wagner Group (Section One) and the African Corps in armed conflicts (Section Two).

Section One: The Security and Military Role of the Wagner Group

This section examines the role of the Wagner Group in the Russia–Ukraine conflict (Subsection One) and its activities on the African continent (Subsection Two).

Subsection One: Wagner's Role in the Russia–Ukraine Conflict

The Euromaidan protests, which erupted in November 2013 against the Ukrainian government, followed by the February 2014 Revolution, marked the beginning of a profound political crisis. These tensions reached their peak in March 2014, when a referendum was held on the secession of the Crimean Peninsula, leading to its unilateral annexation by the Russian Federation, an act that has not been recognized by the international community. On 11 May 2014, two separatist entities in eastern Ukraine—the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic—unilaterally declared their independence. During this period, Wagner forces fought alongside

regular Russian troops in the Donbas region and participated in the seizure of Luhansk International Airport in 2014.

Russia's large-scale military intervention in Ukraine began in February 2022. The overwhelming majority of scholars in international law and international relations agree that this military operation constitutes a serious violation of the fundamental principles governing relations between states, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Ukraine has become an extremely intense conflict zone due to the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and the severe suffering inflicted upon the Ukrainian population through continuous bombardment and attacks on critical infrastructure. Within this context, Wagner personnel participated in major combat operations in the cities of Soledar and Bakhmut, contributing to the escalation of the conflict and the targeting of civilians.¹⁸

Professors Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, who made significant contributions to the classification of armed conflicts through the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), identify four essential elements that characterize an armed conflict:

1. The organized use of armed force resulting in fatalities;
2. A minimum threshold of 25 conflict-related deaths per year or per conflict incident;
3. The involvement of states or opposing groups, including armed coalitions;
4. The existence of a dispute over governmental authority or territorial status.¹⁹

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, which commenced in February 2022, is widely regarded by specialists in international law and international relations as constituting serious violations of the fundamental principles governing interstate relations as set forth in the United Nations Charter. Among the most important of these principles is the obligation to settle international disputes by peaceful means in a manner that does not endanger international peace and security.²⁰

According to ACLED, Ukraine remains one of the world's most violent conflict zones because of the indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the extensive humanitarian suffering caused by sustained bombardment and attacks on critical infrastructure. Within this context, Wagner personnel took part in intense military operations in Soledar and Bakhmut, contributing to the escalation of hostilities and civilian casualties. Among the most significant incidents was the explosion at the Olenivka prisoner-of-war camp, located in the occupied Donetsk region, on 29 July 2022, which resulted in the deaths of more than 50 detainees.²¹

Testimonies provided by former Wagner members further suggest that their objective was the indiscriminate killing of individuals without regard for the rules of international humanitarian law or international human rights law. In April 2023, two Russian nationals, Alexei Savichev and Azamat Uldarov, who claimed to have served as former Wagner commanders, appeared in a recorded interview in which they confessed to crimes they had committed in Ukraine.²²

Prisoners of war constituted the largest category of victims of the crimes and abuses attributed to Wagner. Reports indicate that prisoners were frequently executed immediately rather than taken into captivity, in accordance with explicit orders from the leadership not to take prisoners and to shoot them on the spot. During the fighting around Soledar in the autumn of 2022, one former member stated that Wagner forces killed twenty Ukrainian soldiers after surrounding them. Even when prisoners of war were not executed immediately, they were reportedly subjected to torture by Wagner personnel or executed at a later stage. Reports and witness testimonies have also

alleged that Wagner members desecrated the bodies of deceased Ukrainian soldiers by mutilating them, decapitating them, or offering body parts for sale to the victims' families.²³

Subsection Two: Wagner's Activities on the African Continent

Available evidence indicates that Wagner's activities in Africa have been based on three principal modes of intervention:

1. **Deploying military advisers or trainers** to support national armed forces or presidential guards.
2. **Providing low-cost security services** compared with those offered by Western companies, including the protection of government institutions and critical infrastructure.
3. **Securing and protecting natural resource extraction sites**, such as gold and diamond mines, often within the framework of commercial agreements concluded with host governments or intermediary companies.²⁴

United Nations experts have reported that Wagner personnel committed serious human rights violations in the Central African Republic, including summary executions, torture, and other forms of violence. In October 2021, the national authorities of the Central African Republic acknowledged the involvement of Wagner personnel in these violations. Such acts constitute clear breaches of the common provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, as well as violations of Additional Protocol II relating to non-international armed conflicts.

In April 2022, the number of Wagner personnel in the Central African Republic was estimated at approximately 2,000, although Russia claimed that the actual number was lower and described them merely as "trainers." Following the withdrawal of French stabilization forces in late 2022, the government of the Central African Republic became increasingly dependent on the Wagner network to maintain internal security.²⁵

In Mali, a United Nations fact-finding mission verified Wagner's involvement in a counterterrorism operation. In March 2022, joint operations characterized by the widespread use of violence, extrajudicial killings, and collective punishment resulted in the deaths of approximately 500 people over a period of five days in the rural town of Moura. Corinne Dufka, Director for the Sahel at Human Rights Watch, described the incident as "the worst atrocity committed in Mali in a decade."²⁶

In a report published by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) in February 2023, Wagner was described as "the most influential gray-zone actor in Africa." According to the report, the company deployed personnel with military backgrounds to train national armed forces and assist governments in consolidating territorial control. It also provided political advisers tasked with influencing public opinion, including through disinformation campaigns. Its strongest influence was observed in the Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, and Mali, while its involvement was comparatively more limited in Mozambique and Madagascar.²⁷

Nevertheless, the Wagner brand continues to retain significant appeal for recruitment on behalf of the Russian government and remains in use as a recruitment label in Africa. Wagner personnel operating in Mali and the Central African Republic continue to identify themselves as members of the Wagner Group. Media channels affiliated with Wagner, which regularly publish information concerning its activities, continue to claim that the organization operates independently of the Russian Ministry of Defense in these countries and that any "controversial achievements" should be attributed exclusively to the group itself. Despite these claims, Wagner continues to maintain a

residual operational presence in both Mali and the Central African Republic. According to a British intelligence assessment published in August 2024, compared with its peak strength of approximately 50,000 personnel in 2023, including those deployed in Ukraine, Wagner is currently estimated to maintain around 5,000 personnel distributed between Belarus and Africa.²⁸

This subsection demonstrates that Wagner has provided its services in the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Sudan, Syria, and Mali. Its activities have included suppressing protests, providing personal protection to political leaders, and delivering political advisory services aimed at strengthening the survival of incumbent regimes. There is little doubt that host governments, and in some cases even non-state actors, have viewed Wagner as an effective instrument for ensuring security and protection. In certain circumstances, the group contributed to achieving the objectives of ruling political regimes, albeit sometimes at the expense of political opposition.

In the Central African Republic, Wagner contributed to reducing armed conflict, leading to a noticeable decline in violence and an improvement in overall stability. By supporting the expansion of central government control and neutralizing domestic rebel groups, the company played a significant role in stabilizing the country. In Mali, Russian Wagner personnel have participated in military operations against Al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations and other anti-government armed groups. Cooperation with Wagner has also enabled governments to circumvent international restrictions on military cooperation, as contracts are frequently concluded directly and without parliamentary or international oversight.

Section Two: The Restructuring of Wagner and the Expansion of Operations in Africa

Recent developments indicate that a number of Wagner's senior commanders have remained in leadership positions across the African continent despite the Russian government's announcement dissolving the company and transferring its operations to its successor, the African Corps. Several high-ranking commanders have retained their positions without being replaced by official personnel from the Russian Ministry of Defense or the Main Directorate of the General Staff (GRU).

Subsection One: The African Corps

Following the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin in June 2023, when his aircraft crashed, the Kremlin dispatched Deputy Minister of Defense Yunus-Bek Bamatgireyevich Yevkurov and Major General Andrey Averyanov of the Russian military intelligence service to reassure the leaders of Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, and Niger regarding the continuity of Russian operations in their countries. Consequently, a new military structure, the African Corps, was established under the supervision of the Russian Ministry of Defense in December 2023. As a result, the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU) assumed responsibility for the external operations previously managed by the Wagner Group.²⁹

Estimates regarding the actual size of the African Corps vary considerably. According to some sources, the Corps is expected to consist of twelve combined-arms brigades, comprising more than 40,000 personnel, whereas other estimates suggest that its strength will not exceed 20,000 troops, a figure reported by Bloomberg on the basis of a source close to the Russian Ministry of Defense. A number of experts believe that the African Corps will differ fundamentally from the European and Asian private military and security companies currently operating in Africa. Grigory Lukyanov, a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, argues that the Corps will constitute "a unique military formation capable of conducting large-scale military operations."

In this context, Florent Ghel, Professor of Law at the University of Lille, considers the African Corps to represent the new face of Wagner. Likewise, Bloomberg reported in January 2024 that "the Russian African Corps will replace Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner mission in Africa and represents a new version of the Russian military presence on the continent."³⁰

Subsection Two: The Mission of the African Corps

During the plenary session of the Russia–Africa Forum, held on 28 July 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that "Russia, with the aim of strengthening the defense capabilities of African countries, has concluded military-technical cooperation agreements with more than forty African states." He further explained that Russia supplies friendly countries with weapons and military equipment, and that part of these deliveries is provided free of charge in order to strengthen the security and sovereignty of African states.

The implementation of these objectives also requires extensive diplomatic engagement across the African continent. At the beginning of June 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov undertook a diplomatic tour that included Guinea, the Republic of the Congo, and Burkina Faso. This marked his sixth visit to Africa since 2022. The tour resulted in the preparation of security agreements with Chad, Guinea, the Republic of the Congo, Libya, and Niger, noting that Russia had already concluded a military cooperation agreement with Guinea in 2018.³¹

This raises an important question: What role will the African Corps play in advancing Russia's strategic military, political, and economic interests on the African continent?

It appears that, in the foreseeable future, the Corps will focus primarily on supporting friendly governments in the Sahel region and assisting them in countering the persistent attacks launched by extremist Islamist groups operating from Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, it is expected to contribute to confronting what Moscow describes as attempts by the French Fifth Republic to reassert its influence over its former colonies.

The headquarters of the African Corps is expected to be established in the Central African Republic. Patrick Bila Koyagbele, an adviser to the President of the Republic, officially announced that his country would host a new Russian military base, while its location would remain confidential for security reasons. He further stated that, by the end of January 2024, the number of Russian military personnel stationed in the country had reached approximately 2,000 troops, representing twice the number recorded in September 2023.³²

CONCLUSION

A number of Western experts anticipate that the African Corps will expand its activities in the future to Mauritania, Chad, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Ghana, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Russia is also seeking to broaden its influence in Lusophone Africa, where six Portuguese-speaking African countries have signed military cooperation agreements with Moscow.

The objectives of the African Corps are not limited to achieving military and political gains, such as establishing military bases, airfields, and logistical support centers. They also encompass securing economic benefits through participation in the exploration and exploitation of reserves of oil, diamonds, gold, platinum, cobalt, uranium, and rare earth minerals, in cooperation with African states.

For many years, the Wagner Group played a central role in safeguarding Russian interests in Africa and helped lay the groundwork for the deployment of the regular units of the African Corps. The restructuring of Wagner's African branch and the replacement of this relatively autonomous private military organization with a regular military formation subordinate to the Russian Armed Forces and

operating under a strict chain of command within the Ministry of Defense became a necessity driven by changes in the international environment and domestic political developments in Russia.

Moreover, the presence of regular units of the Russian Armed Forces is expected to contribute to improving the military and political situation in countries and regions that are particularly affected by attacks carried out by transnational jihadist organizations and separatist Islamist groups operating across Africa, especially in North Africa, the Sahel, and Central Africa.

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- ²⁷ Julia Stanyard, *After the Fall: Russian Influence on Africa's Illicit Economies Post-Wagner*, *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, 14 February 2025, available at: <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/russia-africa-corps-business-of-conflict> (accessed 13 July 2025), *ibid.*, p. 10.
- ²⁸ Julia Stanyard, *After the Fall*, *ibid.*, p. 11.
- ²⁹ Anna Caprile and Eric Pichon, *ibid.*, p. 7.
- ³⁰ Christopher Spearin, "Russia's Wagner Group/Africa Corps: An Authoritarian Conflict Management Examination," *Conflict, Security & Development*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2024, pp. 491–497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2024.2415659>.
- ³¹ Vasily Filippov, "The African Corps of the Russian Federation: A New Stage of Russian Policy and Counterterrorism in Africa," *Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences*, 2024.
- ³² Vasily Filippov, *ibid*