

Katja Lindskov Jacobsen

---

RUSSIA'S SHOWY  
AND SHADOWY  
ENGAGEMENTS IN  
SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA

---

DJØF PUBLISHING  
IN COOPERATION WITH  
CENTRE FOR MILITARY STUDIES

Russia's Showy and Shadowy  
Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa



Katja Lindskov Jacobsen

Russia's Showy and Shadowy  
Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa



Djøf Publishing  
In cooperation with  
Centre for Military Studies  
2020

*Katja Lindskov Jacobsen*  
Russia's Showy and Shadowy  
Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa

© 2020 by Djøf Publishing

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior written permission of the Publisher.

*This publication is peer reviewed according to the standards set by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.*

Cover: Morten Lehmkuhl

Print: Ecograf

Printed in Denmark 2020

ISBN 978-87-574-5034-7

Djøf Publishing  
Gothersgade 137  
1123 København K

Telefon: 39 13 55 00  
e-mail: [forlag@djoef.dk](mailto:forlag@djoef.dk)  
[www.djoef-forlag.dk](http://www.djoef-forlag.dk)

# Editors' preface

The publications of this series present new research on defence and security policy of relevance to Danish and international decision-makers.

This series is a continuation of the studies previously published as CMS Reports. It is a central dimension of the research-based services that the Centre for Military Studies' provides for the Danish Ministry of Defence and the political parties behind the Danish defence agreement. The Centre for Military Studies is subject to the University of Copenhagen's guidelines for research-based services, including academic freedom and the arm's length principle. As they are the result of independent research, the studies do not express the views of the Danish Government, the Danish Armed Forces, or other authorities.

Our studies aim to provide new knowledge that is both academically sound and practically actionable. All studies in the series have undergone external peer review. And all studies conclude with recommendations to Danish decision-makers. It is our hope that these publications will both inform and strengthen Danish and international policy formulation as well as the democratic debate on defence and security policy, in particular in Denmark.

The Centre for Military Studies is a research centre at the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. The centre conducts research into security and defence policy as well as military strategy. Read more about the centre, its activities, and other publications at: <https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/english/>

Copenhagen, November 2020

*Henrik Breitenbauch & Kristian Soby Kristensen*



# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract and recommendations</b> .....	9
Recommendations vis-à-vis Russia .....	10
Recommendations vis-à-vis African actors .....	10
Recommendations vis-à-vis liberal intervention actors .....	11
<b>Resumé og anbefalinger</b> .....	13
Anbefalinger vis-a-vis Rusland .....	14
Anbefalinger vis-a-vis afrikanske aktører .....	15
Anbefalinger vis-a-vis liberale interventionsaktører .....	15
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	19
1.1. Russia: not simply a return to Cold War rivalry .....	19
1.2. Methodology .....	20
1.3. ‘Liberal’ intervention: confronting new questions .....	23
1.4. African Agency .....	25
<b>2. Russia’s showy and shadowy engagement tools</b> .....	27
2.1. Showy dimensions of Russia’s Africa engagements: military bases, arms sales, and military training .....	27
2.2. Shadowy dimensions of Russia’s Africa engagements: mercenaries and tools of disinformation .....	34
2.3. Reflections: balancing the official and the informal, trialling new intervention tools .....	42
<b>3. Russia: disruptive and (opportunistically) ‘collaborative’ engagement modalities</b> .....	45
3.1. Rivalry and competition: unpacking commonplace framings .....	45
3.2. ‘Collaborative’ gestures – opportunities as well as risks of exploitation: three examples .....	47



Peace negotiations: from ‘undercut’ to ‘umbrella’ .....	47
UN-sanctioned weapons delivery: Russia and relations to EUTM and MINUSCA .....	49
UNSC – selectively collaborative gestures and anti-intervention allies .....	51
3.3. Risks and the Russian engagement model .....	54
<b>4. Implications for ‘liberal’ intervention actors: three dilemmas .....</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1. Focus on ‘monitoring’ non-liberal actors may background needed attention to local dynamics .....	58
4.2. African outlooks and the risk of underestimating the non-liberal appeal ....	60
An anti-colonial appeal .....	61
A welcomed supplement .....	62
Appealingly ‘lesser conditionality’ .....	63
4.3. Overemphasising a non-liberal outside: failing to look inwards, failing to address missteps .....	65
4.4. Stronger winds against UN intervention? .....	68
<b>5. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1. Recommendations vis-à-vis Russia derived from the case of CAR and from this report’s categorisations .....	69
5.2. Recommendations vis-à-vis African actors and intervention contexts .....	70
5.3. Recommendations vis-à-vis liberal intervention actors .....	71
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>73</b>

# Abstract and recommendations

When intervening in Africa, it is increasingly becoming insufficient simply to survey the landscape of potentially like-minded partners. The growing presence of external, non-liberal actors engaged in Africa is becoming ever more significant. Russia is one such actor. Challenging commonplace rivalry framings of Russia's contemporary return to Africa, this report argues for the importance of attending to nuances in Russia's diverse engagements in Africa. Specifically, stressing the importance of not overstating the significance of Russia's current engagements, Chapter 2 explores three aspects of Russia's showy presence (weapons sales, military bases, military training) as well as some of the more shadowy engagement tools that Russia is currently trialing (mercenaries, disinformation). Next, Chapter 3 shows how Russian engagement tools are put to use in different, often interlinked and oscillating, modalities; frequently disruptive, yet sometimes gesturing towards collaboration. Examples of collaborative gestures include the Russian efforts to obtain an exemption to the weapons embargo imposed on the Central African Republic (CAR), before delivering weapons to CAR's armed forces. Interestingly, this example further illustrates a) a potential for 'collaborative' elements to be implicitly complementary to 'liberal' intervention actors engagements, and b) a risk of 'collaborative' elements being (ab)used by Russia to expand shadowy engagements.

Based on these two chapters, the report argues that appreciating Russia's multifaceted engagements can, for example, help facilitate more tailored responses, thus reducing the risk of 'liberal' interveners rushing to a 'more of the same' response by adding more troops, more bases, and more weapons. Indeed, critically exploring Russia's contemporary presence in Africa must not get in the way of asking questions about the liberal intervention model. This includes questions about how the inadequacies of 'liberal' actors may have contributed to making African states more receptive to Russian rapprochements. It also includes questions about how to avoid exacerbating existing tensions within liberal

intervention, including the risk that monitoring Russia's uncertain Africa engagements becomes a justification that takes precedence over the fundamental objective of addressing violent conflict dynamics 'on the ground' when and where 'liberal' actors decide to intervene. This issue of what Russia's contemporary presence in Africa implies for liberal intervention actors is explored in Chapter 4, followed by recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

### Recommendations vis-à-vis Russia

- *Seek ways to formalise and responsabilise Russia's disruptive and/or shadowy engagements* wherever possible.<sup>1</sup> The report recommends seeking options for bringing disruptive elements of Russia's endeavours under formal frameworks, *perhaps via African actors* like the AU. Formalising Russian weapons deliveries could also help address an observed discrepancy: Liberal interveners implicitly benefitting from Russia arming troops trained by EUTM while simultaneously criticising Russian arms sales in Africa.<sup>2</sup>

### Recommendations vis-à-vis African actors

- African security priorities were always vital and yet often neglected in 'liberal' engagements. This report recommends seeing the extent to which 'Russia in Africa' accentuates this point, as *an occasion to take African views and concerns more seriously* instead of implicitly assuming away differences in threat perceptions. For states in the Sahel, for example, curbing migration may not be a priority in the same way as for European actors. Addressing such differences is important.
- Find ways of *highlighting the appeal and benefits of the liberal model*, such as by emphasising how liberal engagements are commonly not just military but often accompanied by, for example, considerable

---

1. Martin Russell and Eric Pichon, "Russia in Africa: A New Arena for Geopolitical Competition," Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2019, p.: 8.  
2. Alexandra A. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa: Dilemmas and Opportunities for the EU," *EUREN Brief* 14 (January 2020).

amounts of development and humanitarian aid.<sup>3,4</sup> Comparatively, Russian aid is minor.

- Find ways of thoughtfully *bringing to light cases where Russia's Africa engagements have disruptive effects vis-à-vis stability*, such as by exposing cases where arms sales to both sides in a conflict risk increasing rather than reducing the threat or intensity of violent conflict.

## Recommendations vis-à-vis liberal intervention actors

- Considering how Russia uses tools of disinformation in Africa and that interviewees representing liberal interveners referred to questions about *their* uses of cyber-tools as 'classified', *this report recommends that liberal intervention actors initiate a debate about the principles for how liberal interveners use cyber-means in intervention efforts.*
- The report cautions against allowing a focus on Russia to marginalise the importance of debating such shortcomings. Considering tensions between liberal intervention motives and other intervention effects (e.g. vis-à-vis desired allies), *this report recommends avoiding that monitoring and/or alliance-making takes precedence over 'liberal' objectives, including the importance of making a positive difference locally vis-à-vis violent conflict and instability.*
- Acknowledge that *when choosing intervention partners, this is also a choice between diverse views on and ways of responding to 'Russia in Africa'.* Where UN frameworks entail potential for collaboration, the US currently leans more towards emphasising rivalry (*and reduced room for the UN*).

---

3. Lukasz Maślanka, "France and the Russian Presence in Africa," *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 47, no. 1477 (2020).

4. Paul Stronski, "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 16, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>.



# Resumé og anbefalinger

Når der skal træffes beslutninger om intervention i Afrika, og eventuelle bidrag hertil, er det i stigende grad utilstrækkeligt alene at skanne forskellige muligheder for interventionskonstellationer med ligesindede, liberale stater. Det er i stigende grad vigtigt også at have øje for ikke-liberale interventionsaktørers tilstedeværelse forskellige steder i Afrika. Én sådan aktør er Rusland. Som korrektiv til dominerende »rivaliserings«-fremstillinger af Ruslands tilbagevenden til Afrika, argumenterer denne rapport for vigtigheden af at have øje for nuancer i Ruslands mangeartede engagement. Mere specifikt argumenteres der for vigtigheden af ikke at overdrive betydningen af Ruslands nuværende engagement i Afrika. Kapitel 2 undersøger tre aspekter af Ruslands »showy« tilstedeværelse (våbensalg, militærbaser og militær træning) samt nogle af de mere »shadowy« aspekter af Ruslands engagement, navnlig brugen af lejesoldater og desinformation. Dernæst undersøger kapitel 3 hvordan Ruslands interventionsredskaber bringes i anvendelse på forskellig vis: ofte forstyrrende med spændinger til følge, men i nogle tilfælde også pegende i retning mod det kollaborative. Eksempler på samarbejdende taktik er eksempelvis Ruslands succes med at opnå en FN-sanktioneret fritagelse fra den våbenembargo som er pålagt Den Centralafrikanske Republik (CAR) forud for levering af russiske våben til CAR's militære styrker. Eksemplet illustrerer desuden potentiale for at kollaborative elementer implicit kan komplementere liberale interventionsaktørers engagement – som når russiske våben leveres til styrker trænet i EU-missioner som ikke selv har mandat til at udstyre disse styrker med våben. Samtidig illustrerer eksemplet også risikoen for at kollaborative taktik udnyttes opportunistisk af Rusland, eksempelvis til samtidig at skrue op for Ruslands »shadowy« tilstedeværelse. Sådanne nuancer er vigtige.

Rapporten argumenterer for vigtigheden i at anerkende Ruslands mangeartede engagement i Afrika. Dette kan eksempelvis bidrage til at forme mere skræddersyede svar og derved reducere risikoen for at libe-

rale interventionsaktører anvender et »mere af det samme«-svar: flere tropper, flere militærbaser, flere våben osv. Et kritisk syn på Ruslands Afrika-engagement bør ikke stå i vejen for fortsat at stille vigtige, kritiske spørgsmål til den liberale interventionsmodel. Dette inkluderer spørgsmål om hvordan mangler og begrænsninger i liberale aktørers interventioner kan have bidraget til at gøre statsledere i Afrika mere modtagelige over for Ruslands interventionstilbud. Det inkluderer også spørgsmål om hvordan det er muligt at undgå at gøre eksisterende spændinger værre – også inden for liberal interventionisme. Her handler det f.eks. om risikoen for at monitorering af Ruslands ustadige adfærd i Afrika bliver en begrundelse for intervention som sættes før den afgørende målsætning om at reducere voldelige konfliktodynamikker i det land der interverneres i. Sådanne spørgsmål om hvad Ruslands nuværende Afrika-engagement betyder for liberale interventionsaktører behandles i kapitel 4, efterfulgt af en række anbefalinger (kapitel 5).

## Anbefalinger vis-a-vis Rusland

- *Afsøg muligheder for at formalisere og ansvarliggøre obstruerende og/eller »shadowy« aspekter af Ruslands engagement.*<sup>5</sup> Det anbefales at afsøge måder hvorpå obstruerende elementer af Ruslands engagement kan bringes under formelle rammer, f.eks. via afrikanske aktører såsom AU.
- *Afsøg muligheder for at formalisere russiske våbenleverancer.* Derved kan en observeret uoverensstemmelse også adresseres: Liberale aktører kritiserer Ruslands salg af våben i Afrika, mens f.eks. EUTM til tider implicit drager nytte af at Rusland kan levere våben til styrker som EUTM træner.<sup>6</sup>
- *Afsøg måder hvorpå det hensynsfuldt kan belyses når Ruslands Afrika-engagement har negative effekter på stabiliteten i et land.* Markér eksempelvis når salg af russiske våben til begge parter i en konflikt risikerer at øge fremfor at reducere faren for/intensiteten af voldelig konflikt.

---

5. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

6. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

## Anbefalinger vis-a-vis afrikanske aktører

- Det anbefales at betragte Ruslands øgede tilstedeværelse i Afrika som anledning til i højere grad at indregne afrikanske synspunkter. Det anbefales således at forskelle i synspunkter, herunder trusselsbilleder, adresseres tydeligere. For mange stater i Sahel-regionen er migration eksempelvis ikke en prioritet på samme niveau som for europæiske aktører.
- Afdæk måder hvorpå fordele ved den liberale interventionsmodel i afrikanske kontekster, kan tydeliggøres, *eksempelvis ved at understrege hvorledes liberale aktørers engagement ofte (ideelt) ikke alene indeholder militære komponenter, men for eksempel også betragtelige humanitære og udviklingsmidler.*<sup>7,8</sup> Til sammenligning tilbyder Rusland langt mindre i humanitær bistand.

## Anbefalinger vis-a-vis liberale interventionsaktører

- I lyset af Ruslands brug af desinformation i Afrika, og i lyset af at repræsentanter for liberale interventionsaktører henviser til spørgsmål om deres brug af cyber-midler som klassificeret, anbefales det at der *indledes en debat om (liberale) principper for brug af cyber-midler i intervention.*
- Rapporten advarer mod at lade kritik af Ruslands tilstedeværelse i Afrika stå i vejen for fortsat kritisk debat om den liberale interventionsmodels uhensigtsmæssigheder. I lyset af spændingen mellem liberale motiver og andre »ønskede effekter« (f.eks. vis-a-vis allierede) bør det *undgås at monitorering af Rusland og/eller styrkede allianceforhold går forud for liberale interventionsmål, herunder vigtigheden af bidrag hvis primære formål er at reducere voldelig konflikt og ustabilitet lokalt.*
- Anerkend at valg af interventionspartner også indebærer valg mellem forskellige syn på og svar på Ruslands øgede Afrika-tilstedeværelse. *Eksempelvis rummer en FN-ramme potentiale for mere kollaborative*

---

7. Maslanka, "France and the Russian Presence." 1477.

8. Stronski, "Late to the Party."



*elementer, mens EUTM har anlagt en mere pragmatisk tilgang (implicit samarbejde »on the ground«), og USA for nuværende fremhæver rivalisering (og reducerede muligheder for FN).*



---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

*In the making of this report, a number of people have offered extremely valuable inputs and assistance at different stages. The author would like to thank all those interviewed, workshop participants, colleagues at CMS and beyond, including Karen Philippa Larsen, Jessica Larsen og Mathilde Kaalund as well as two anonymous reviewers for their time and very helpful comments.*

---

# 1

## Introduction

Often framed as a response to US withdrawal statements and the broader ‘lack of Western policy focus on Africa in recent years,’<sup>9</sup> the presence of external, non-liberal actors in Africa is becoming increasingly significant and raises crucial questions, also for ‘liberal’ intervention actors engaged across the continent. The main focus in this report is on Russia’s contemporary engagements in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet the Russian return to Africa is both a) preceded by China’s mainly, but not exclusively, economic engagements (far more weighty than those of Russia and still the primary concern of the US<sup>10</sup>), and b) paralleled by sectarian actors, with some increasingly turning to security engagements, as exemplified by recent Saudi Arabian contributions to G5 Sahel.

### 1.1. Russia: not simply a return to Cold War rivalry

This report explores a range of showy and shadowy aspects of Russia’s Africa engagements. It argues that Russia’s presence in Africa should not be overstated and that ‘great power rivalry’-framings must be complemented by other perspectives – such as opportunistic ‘complementarity’ – if we are to assess more fully the strategic significance of Russia’s return to Africa. That contemporary Russian Africa engagements have sparked concern in the US became evident in December 2018, when Ambassa-

---

9. Ibid.

10. See e.g. Nick Childs, “One Decade, Two Continents: A Discussion with the Commander of US Naval Forces Europe–Africa,” *IISS webinar*, June 15, 2020.

dor John Bolton stressed ‘great power competitors’ in his presentation of the Trump Administration’s Africa Strategy.<sup>11</sup> This report offers a counterweight to such readings by showing how Russian engagements cannot be narrowly understood *only* with reference to great power rivalry; partly because ‘rivalry’ framings risk overstating the significance of Russia’s presence<sup>12</sup> and partly because rivalry framings are inadequately attuned to nuances in the Russian engagements. Though often obstructive in ways that generate tension vis-à-vis liberal intervention actors,<sup>13</sup> there are also examples of Russian engagements that gesture towards ‘collaborative’ in their relation to ‘liberal’ interveners, as when Russian weapons deliveries to the Central African Republic (CAR) receive UN Security Council (UNSC) authorisation.

Rather than ‘overt’, the term ‘showy’ is chosen to emphasise the risk of exaggeration in accounts of Russia’s ‘visible’ (overt) Africa engagements. In contrast to ‘covert’, the term ‘shadowy’ better foregrounds the important point that, rather than ‘just’ being invisible, certain aspects of Russia’s contemporary Africa presence are characterised in crucial ways by uncertainty and wavering: even if not entirely hidden, relatively little is known about some of the new engagement tools that Russia is testing.

## 1.2. Methodology

To explore Russia’s Africa presence, four types of documents were analysed: news coverage, think tank reports and policy briefs (e.g. ICG, Carnegie, EUISS), academic articles, and policy documents (e.g. UNSC Reports, EU Briefings, White House Briefings). Sources were analysed with attention to issues of bias and predisposition. Effort was made

- 
11. National Security Council, “Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the The Trump Administration’s New Africa Strategy,” *The White House*, December 13, 2018.
  12. As one interviewee in Africa put it, ‘Russia is getting a lot out of a little’; see also, Stronski, “Late to the Party.”
  13. The European Parliament notes ‘that apart from Ukraine, there are many other areas where Russia’s actions have strained relations. These include its intervention in Syria and interference in other countries such as Libya and the Central African Republic’. European Parliament, Briefing, “The EU and Russia Locked into confrontation,” *EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service*, by Martin Russell Members’ Research Service, PE 652.030, July 2020, 12.

to corroborate statements from diverse sources. In addition to written sources, informal consultations were held and 13 semi-structured interviews conducted between October 2019 and March 2020 with representatives at various levels (policymakers, security practitioners, former and current intelligence specialists, and academic experts) and with Western and non-Western diplomats. COVID-19 restrictions rendered travel to the region impossible. Some interviews were carried out via telephone/Skype, but the majority were ‘face-to-face’ interviews completed in Denmark, France, and Brussels before COVID-19. Due to the sensitive nature of most of the issues described in this report, interviews were held under the condition of anonymity. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, some continuing in the form of ongoing exchange and dialogue on the subject via email.

Another methodological choice is the focus on Russian engagements in the Central African Republic (CAR), which is motivated by three reasons. First, observers argue that: ‘*Nowhere is the role of major powers more apparent than in the Central African Republic (CAR), where Russia has emerged as a key power.*’<sup>14</sup> Yet compared to the attention granted to Russia’s engagements in Libya, for example, CAR remains somewhat overlooked. This reflects how the majority of Russia’s engagements have thus far focused on North Africa (mainly Egypt, Algeria, and Libya) and South Africa.<sup>15</sup> Although overlooked, a second reason why CAR is important is because it illustrates how Russian engagements span a broad array of endeavours; from diamond deals, disinformation, and mercenaries, to formal UN structures and tacit ‘collaboration’, such as the EUTM (European Union Training Mission in Mali). Third, from the perspective of Denmark and other actors currently engaged in Africa’s Sahel region, the Russian engagement in CAR raises a key question: To what extent does Russia’s presence in CAR signal ‘what’s next’ for states

---

14. Leslie Minney, Rachel Sullivan, and Rachel Vandenbrink, “Amid Central African Republic’s Search for Peace, Russia Steps in: Is China Next?” *United States Institute of Peace*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/12/amid-central-african-republics-search-peace-russia-steps-china-next>.

15. Although very important, this report is not about Russia in Libya. Much has already been written on this subject, including links to the Sahel; see e.g. Tim Lister, Sam Kiley, and Sebastian Shukla, “Russia Raises Stakes with ‘Brazen’ Military Intervention in Libyan Conflict,” *CNN*, June 9, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/09/world/russia-libya-military-intervention-intl/index.html>.

in neighbouring Sahel?<sup>16</sup> Though present in Mali and Burkina Faso,<sup>17</sup> Russia has for the time being *not* focused its engagements in G5 Sahel states (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, and Chad). Since 2018, however, Russian engagements in neighbouring CAR have increased.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Russian mercenaries are ‘concentrated in just a handful of African countries’, CAR being one of them.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, CAR is among the African countries in which Russia had been experimenting with the use of disinformation as a low-cost engagement tool.<sup>20</sup>

Linking Russian engagements in CAR to the Sahelian intervention scene – with UN and France plus allies<sup>21</sup> intervening alongside smaller EU missions and with critical engagements and support from the US – is not limited to cross-border movements of armed actors between CAR and Chad.<sup>22</sup> Russia and Mali signed an agreement on military cooperation in 2019, and leaked documents cite Mali as a country where Russian mercenaries allegedly ‘plan to work.’<sup>23</sup> The deteriorating security crisis in the Sahel amidst the presence of the abovementioned actors (France, the US, UN, and EU), may have added to Mali’s ‘welcoming’ of Russia in a bid to improve the situation, possibly aided by Russia’s ability to showcase its ‘successful’ engagements in nearby CAR. Against this backdrop, the analysis in this report views Russia’s engagements in CAR as a win-

- 
16. Multiple interviewees raised concerns about Russian engagements in CAR potentially ‘spilling over’ to states in the Sahel.
  17. ‘Russia is present especially in Mali and Burkina Faso, through military cooperation and arms deals’; in Mašlanka, “France and the Russian Presence.” 1477.
  18. Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink, “Central African Republic’s Search.”
  19. Russell and Pichon, “Russia in Africa.”
  20. Kimberly Marten, “Russ-Afrique? Russia, France, and The Central African Republic,” *PON-ARS Eurasia Policy Memo* no. 608 (August 2019); see also Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Russian Disinformation Campaigns Target Africa: An Interview with Dr. Shelby Grossman,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 18, 2020.
  21. Including Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, and Great Britain. See MSN Nyheter, “Sverige inte med när ny insats inleds i Mali,” *Microsoft News*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.msn.com/sv-se/nyheter/inrikes/sverige-inte-med-n%C3%A4r-ny-insats-inleds-i-mali/ar-BB16LaTK>; Fergus Kelly, “Mali: Estonia Troops to Begin Operations in Gao,” *The Defense Post*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2018/08/21/estonia-troops-begin-operations-mali/>; Alex Vines, “Ministers Should Focus on Better Defining British Objectives in the Sahel,” *The Telegraph*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/22/ministers-should-focus-better-defining-british-objectives-sahel/>.
  22. Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink, “Central African Republic’s Search.”
  23. Luke Harding and Jason Burke, “Leaked Documents Reveal Russian Effort to Exert Influence in Africa,” *The Guardian*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/leaked-documents-reveal-russian-effort-to-exert-influence-in-africa>.

dow on possible future directions of Russian engagements in G5 Sahel states. It is possible, of course, that exploring Russia's presence elsewhere in Africa would have produced other findings.

### 1.3. 'Liberal' intervention: confronting new questions

Besides exploring Russia's manifold Africa engagements, this report also unpacks various implications of the growing Russian presence for liberal interveners (sometimes engaged in the same intervention theatres, sometimes within the same frameworks, e.g. in UN missions). From this perspective, the report highlights how Russia's security presence in Africa has prompted new questions for liberal interveners: What does Russia offer that falls outside the formal liberal intervention portfolio? Will African states view 'liberal' engagements as less attractive? Will liberal actors be squeezed out in favour of Russian offers? As such, *this report is also about 'liberal' intervention actors* and approaches insofar as it explores Russia's return to Africa from a perspective that draws attention to such questions. Thus, the report challenges accounts that narrowly explain Russia's Africa presence as resulting from US downscaling and broader lack of Western policy focus. The issue is not simply: Will Russia's presence increase as the US downscales? Even if the US remains, this in itself does not mean 'no room for Russia', nor does it eliminate the apparent appeal of cheap Russian weapons and fewer conditions attached to Russian security assistance. When delivering weapons to security forces trained by EU Training Missions (which cannot deliver lethal weapons), Russia fills a 'gap' that does not stem from US downsizing. Indeed, more profound questions demand attention, such as: What gaps may Russia 'fill' even amidst the presence of US and other 'liberal' actors? Attending to such questions, the report shows how the presence of non-liberal interveners accentuates challenges related to the conditionality commonly accompanying liberal intervention efforts. How, for example, to insist on adherence to human rights principles in military training programmes, when this may not immediately align with host state priorities and other external actors may not have such requirements attached to their offers of assistance?



*Regarding the term intervention*, this report does not offer a definition but takes variation in the meaning of the term as a starting point for posing questions. Indeed, Russia's multifaceted Africa presence raises important questions about commonplace conceptions of intervention. Does training troops and planting a security advisor alongside the President of CAR amount to intervention? Can the use of disinformation be grasped in commonplace notions of intervention? Such questions are not only relevant vis-à-vis Russia's Africa engagements but also vis-à-vis the engagements of 'liberal' actors on the continent. How, for example, should we understand the presence of the US, including its new runway and drone base in Niger, which the US does not see as intervention?<sup>24</sup> How should we understand engagements like capacity-building and donations of equipment? Do liberal actors themselves see the use of cyber means in *their* engagements as tools of intervention? Opening up the notion of intervention also helps call attention to questions about power relations and hierarchies, that we risk losing sight of should we accept *not* to include a broad range of engagements in our analyses. Finally, this approach acknowledges the importance of acknowledging that what *some* see as benign assistance, *others* see as acts of aggression; for example, what the UN considered 'preventive diplomacy in Burundi', was seen by the Government of Burundi as acts of 'early aggression'.<sup>25</sup> Now, in this report, a broad approach to intervention enables attention to showy and shadowy<sup>26</sup> Russian engagements and to depoliticising effects of not referring to one's activities as 'intervention', even where such engagements have 'sometimes blurred into combat operations', as, for example, for US Special Forces in Niger.<sup>27</sup>

---

24. See Stephen Tankel, "US Counterterrorism in the Sahel: From Indirect to Direct Intervention," *International Affairs* 96, no. 4 (July 2020); also closed workshop held in Copenhagen (October 2019).

25. Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Troels Gauslå Engell, "Conflict Prevention as Pragmatic Response to a Twofold Crisis: Liberal Interventionism and Burundi," *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (July 2020).

26. Scorpio, "Russia's Shadow Presence in Africa: Wagner Group Mercenaries in at Least 20 Countries Aim to turn Continent into Strategic Hub," *Daily Maverick*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-15-russias-shadow-presence-in-africa-wagner-group-mercenaries-in-at-least-20-countries-aim-to-turn-continent-into-strategic-hub/>.

27. Tankel, "US Counterterrorism."

Furthermore, this report suggests that although ‘illiberal’ is the actual opposite of ‘liberal’, the term ‘non-liberal’ is better attuned to the important point that the two types of actors are not always exclusive opposites. Along similar lines, the report notes that ‘[n]ot everything Russia does in Africa is a malign activity’<sup>28</sup> (which in turn has implications for how to respond). Similarly, not everything external ‘liberal’ actors do is benign.<sup>29</sup> It is important not to idealise liberal intervention when critically examining Russia’s non-liberal engagements in Africa. In this report, ‘liberal’ intervention refers to a broad paradigm, commonly branded with reference to the promotion of democracy, human rights, and rule of law. Nevertheless, critics increasingly point out how national interests often underpin all types of interventions in various ways. As such, different intervention actors can be more or less ‘liberal’ in their practices. That Western interveners may aspire to liberal values without always fully prioritising or fully adhering to them is part of a broader ‘crisis’ of the liberal intervention paradigm, as debated for at least a decade (see Chapter 4).<sup>30</sup> From this starting point, the report explores key implications for ‘liberal’ intervention actors of the growing presence of interveners who do not aspire to liberal values, in some cases even actively obstructing for example liberal intervention actors’ democratisation efforts.

## 1.4. African Agency

The new situation created by the growing number of non-liberal actors engaged in Africa entails an accentuation of the importance of African agency, including questions about how the growing presence of non-liberal interveners offering security assistance to African states from a different position (e.g. not insisting on democracy and human rights) may

28. Stronski, “Late to the Party.”

29. Regarding criticism of ‘liberal peace interventionists’ for not being very ‘liberal’, see e.g. Madhav Joshi, Sung Yong Lee, and Roger Mac Ginty, “Just How Liberal Is the Liberal Peace?” *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3 (2014): 364-89.

30. Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, “Liberal Interventionism: The Crisis Within,” *Centre for International Policy Studies, CIPS*, July 9, 2017, <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/2017/07/09/liberal-interventionism-the-crisis-within/>; Lindskov Jacobsen and Gausl  Engell, “Conflict Prevention,” Roland Paris “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 337-65.

affect the appeal of the liberal intervention approach. Where intervention is ‘by invitation’, this leaves African states ‘more room for choosing their preferred intervention partners.’<sup>31</sup> From the perspective of African actors, the presence of a growing number of diverse external actors may bring valued attention to forgotten crises and offer new engagement options. For the ‘liberal’ interveners, however, the presence of non-liberal actors poses challenges, as illustrated by the accentuation of questions such as what or whom external actors African states prefer to ‘invite in’. But as alluded to above, these challenges should not overshadow the continued importance of critically debating ‘liberal’ intervention; On the contrary, the growing presence of non-liberal actors begs important questions, also for the practitioners and policymakers involved in drafting new ‘task forces’ (e.g. Takuba), establishing new coalitions (e.g. the Sahel Coalition), and/or contemplating additional intervention contributions. Such efforts form part of an increasingly crowded and contrasting African intervention space. Manoeuvring within this space, it is essential for ‘liberal’ interveners to appreciate how Russian engagements are varied in ways that cannot be grasped through ‘rivalry’-framings. Instead, this report offers an alternative framing through which to appreciate vital nuances in Russia’s security engagements, as entailing collaborative *and* disruptive modalities as well as shadowy and showy intervention tools that one should be careful not to overstate.

A recent AFRICOM-statement closes this chapter and ties its different sections together nicely:

*U.S. Africa Command officials have long cautioned that Russia and China are trying to expand their control in Africa. But the command believes the U.S. can foil that influence by developing strong relationships with African states and becoming their ‘partner of choice.’<sup>32</sup>*

This statement links some of the key points described above on African agency (1.4), Russia’s return to Africa (1.1), and longstanding challenges more starkly confronting ‘liberal’ actors (1.3).

---

31. Anonymous interview, conducted by author. Copenhagen, March 2020.

32. ‘U.S. Africa Command officials have long cautioned that Russia and China are trying to expand their control in Africa. But the command believes the U.S. can foil that influence by developing strong relationships with African states and becoming their “partner of choice”’. Diana Stancy Correll, “How AFRICOM Plans to Counter Russian, Chinese Influence in Africa,” *Military Times*, January 20, 2020.

# 2

## Russia's showy and shadowy engagement tools

Russia's motives for returning to Africa are difficult to pin down. Indeed, the 'majority of Russia experts acknowledge that Moscow's motives are mixed'.<sup>33</sup> In *maximalist readings*, the Russian presence in Africa is best understood as 'great power rivalry' targeting Western competitors. In *minimalist readings*, Russia is mostly acting opportunistically, seeking economic gains. Whereas Chapter 3 unpacks two dominant framings of Russia's Africa return (rivalry and vacuum), the aim of this chapter is to illuminate the broad array of showy and shadowy engagement tools of which Russia makes use; and to which rivalry framings risk paying insufficient attention. Rather than fixing *a* Russian motive, the aim is instead to offer an analysis that renders visible diverse engagement tools and, thus, different possibilities for shaping such engagements.

### 2.1. Showy dimensions of Russia's Africa engagements: military bases, arms sales, and military training

Russian ambitions vis-à-vis Africa were showcased in Sochi in October 2019 at the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit, involving African leaders and representatives from regional organisations (AU).<sup>34</sup> This summit al-

---

33. Olivier Schmitt, "How to Challenge an International Order: Russian Diplomatic Practices in Multilateral Security Organisations," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2019); see also Mašlanka, "France and the Russian Presence." 1477.

34. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

legedly helped facilitate various deals and agreements, notably military cooperation deals.<sup>35</sup> According to Russian sources, \$12.5 bn worth of deals were struck, albeit many in the form of memorandums of understanding that will not necessarily be fulfilled, as critics stress.<sup>36</sup> Others also note that many of the pledges made were re-announcements of already existing agreements that had been reached earlier.<sup>37</sup>

One showy dimension of the Russian presence in Africa that relates to military cooperation deals concerns negotiations about *military bases*. While the first Russian military base has yet to be built, there is evidence of ongoing negotiations (e.g. between Russia and CAR). According to various sources, CAR announced in October 2019 that it is considering hosting a Russian military base.<sup>38</sup> The multifaceted Russian presence in CAR (incl. contributions to MINUSCA, weapons deliveries, military cooperation deals, Russian mercenaries, use of tools of disinformation, and a Russian security advisor to the President of CAR) has likely contributed to making CAR receptive to the idea of hosting such a base.<sup>39</sup> Besides CAR, others point to Russian negotiations with Eritrea,<sup>40</sup> Bu-

- 
35. "CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadera asked Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for the weaponry during talks at the Black Sea resort of Sochi in October." AFP, "US, Britain, France Seek Details on Russian Arms to CAR," *Daily Nation*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/US-Britain-France-seek-details-on-Russian-guns-to-CAR/1066-4227744-3chuis/index.html>.
  36. Henry Foy, "Russia Turns on the Charm at First Africa Summit," *Financial Times*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/b042bd8e-f648-11e9-9ef3-eca8fc8f2d65>. That many deals were either a showcasing of already existing agreements or deals that may not have been fulfilled was mentioned in various interviews, February 2020, as well as noted by one of the two anonymous reviewers of this report.
  37. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for further stressing this point.
  38. Andrew Roth, "Central African Republic Considers Hosting Russian Military Base," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2019; Reuters, "CAR Considering Russian Military Base," *DefenceWeb*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/car-considering-russian-military-base/>.
  39. The Moscow Times, "Central African Republic Open to Russian Military Base," *The Moscow Times*, January 10, 2019.
  40. Peter Beaumont, "Russia's Scramble for Influence in Africa Catches Western Officials off-Guard," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/11/russias-scramble-for-influence-in-africa-catches-western-officials-off-guard>; see also Jakob Hedenskog, "Russia Stepping Up," in *Foreign Military Bases and Installations in Africa*, ed. Karolina Gasinska. Report no. FOI-R--4658--SE (2019): 35.

rundi,<sup>41</sup> and Somaliland.<sup>42</sup> This aspect of the Russian presence cannot be understood in isolation. Its significance is best appreciated if viewed in relation to the presence of other actors, notably the US and France. The US has 34 military bases in Africa,<sup>43</sup> though many of these are so-called 'lilly pads' (i.e. without permanent US personnel), and many are referred to as 'enduring locations' rather than 'permanent bases.'<sup>44</sup> And despite withdrawal statements, the US opened a drone base and military runway in Niger in November 2019, which is actually the longest military runway the US military has ever built abroad.<sup>45</sup> Besides the US, it is also worth noting how Germany opened a new military base in Niamey in 2018, and France has established an airbase in Niamey and a Forward Operating Base in Madama.<sup>46</sup> In addition to the French presence in the Sahel related to Operation Barkhane, France has four military bases of different kinds across the African continent: two forward operating bases (Djibouti and Ivory Coast) and two regional cooperation bases (Senegal and Gabon).<sup>47</sup>

Another dimension of Russia's 'showy' engagement concerns *arms sales* and donations of military equipment.<sup>48</sup> Russia has been supply-

---

41. 'Securing construction of a Russian military base in Burundi.' Sergey Sukhankin, "Russia's New PMC Patriot: The Kremlin's Bid for a Greater Role in Africa?" *Deutsches Asienforschungszentrum*, August 2, 2018, <https://www.dafz.org/regional-affairs/africa/russias-pmc-patriot/>.

42. In return for Russian recognition of Somaliland's largely self-proclaimed independence; see e.g. Michael Rubin, "The US Needs to Recognize Somaliland before Russia Does," *Washington Examiner*, August 22, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/the-us-needs-to-recognize-somaliland-before-russia-does>; see also Jakob Hedenskog, "Russia Is Stepping up Its Military Cooperation in Africa," FOI Memo 6604, December 2018.

43. Nick Turse, "U.S. Military Is Building a \$100 Million Drone Base in Africa," *The Intercept*, September 29, 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/29/u-s-military-is-building-a-100-million-drone-base-in-africa/>.

44. Adam Johnson, "To Ramp up Fear of Russia in Africa, NYT Downplays Massive US Military Presence on Continent," *Fair*, April 4, 2019, <https://fair.org/home/to-ramp-up-fear-of-russia-in-africa-nyt-downplays-massive-us-military-presence-on-continent/>.

45. Turse, "Drone Base;" see also Defence Web, "US Military Loses MQ-1C UAV in Niger," *Defence Web*, March 4, 2020, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/unmanned-aerial-vehicles/us-military-loses-mq-1c-uav-in-niger/>.

46. Nina Wilén, "Belgian Special Forces in the Sahel: A Minimal Footprint with Maximal Output?" *Africa Policy Briefs* 26 (May 2019).

47. There is also a territorial defence base (the island of Réunion) and a naval base (Mayotte). See also Andrew Hansen, "The French Military in Africa," *Council on Foreign Relations* (February 8, 2008), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/french-military-africa>.

48. Importantly, 'seller' is not the same as 'donor', yet there is no available data to form a basis for an otherwise important and interesting comparison between the largest sellers and largest donors of arms.

ing arms to 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa over the past 10 years, including three Sahelian states: Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali.<sup>49</sup> Globally, Africa accounted for 17% of Russian arms exports for the period 2015-2019.<sup>50</sup> According to SIPRI, Russia is now the largest seller of arms to Africa,<sup>51</sup> 'accounting for 49 per cent of arms exports to the region, followed by the United States (15 per cent), China (10 per cent), and France (7.8 per cent).'<sup>52</sup> Similarly, others stress how 'Russian weapons sales to African countries doubled from 2012 to 2017, exceeding both China and the US.'<sup>53</sup> Concerning heavy weapons, North Africa dominates over sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>54</sup> although some suggest that this gap is arguably becoming less pronounced. Regarding sub-Sahara, Russia and Mali signed a military cooperation agreement in June 2019,<sup>55</sup> with Russia supplying weapons to Mali's army.<sup>56</sup> But why do Russian arms appeal to African partners? One factor might be that Russian military equipment is 'relatively inexpensive,'<sup>57</sup> another might relate to the issue of lesser oversight and conditionality (e.g. human rights compliance), as discussed in Chapter 4. While it is noteworthy how Russia has become the largest supplier of weapons to Africa, other actors also supply weapons

- 
49. Pieter D. Wezeman et al., "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2019," *SIPRI* (March 2020): 4.
  50. *Ibid.*
  51. According to SIPRI, Russia is now 'the largest supplier of arms' in Africa; see also Jamie Dettmer, "Guns, Mercenaries, Minerals: Russia Embraces Africa," *Voice of America*, October 21, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/guns-mercenaries-minerals-russia-embraces-africa>.
  52. Hedenskog, "Russia": 35.
  53. "Dancing Aid Chief, Charming Russians, and Sharing Humanitarian Funding: The Cheat Sheet," *The New Humanitarian*, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2019/10/25/Dancing-aid-chiefs-Russians-sharing-humanitarian-funding-Cheat-Sheet>.
  54. 'Russia's two biggest defence customers in Africa are Algeria and Egypt, which purchased US\$8 billion and US\$3.1 billion worth of Russian arms during the 10-year 2009-2018 period'; Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."
  55. Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Russia and Mali sign an agreement on military cooperation," News release, June 25, 2019, [http://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12238363@egNews](http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12238363@egNews).
  56. In addition to Mali, Russia has delivered helicopters to Burkina Faso. Sergey Sukhankin, "The 'Hybrid' Role of Russian Mercenaries, PMCs and Irregulars in Moscow's Scramble of Africa," *The Jamestown Foundation*, January 10, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-hybrid-role-of-russian-mercenaries-pmcs-and-irregulars-in-moscows-scramble-for-africa/>.
  57. Sergey Sukhankin, "Russia's Hired Guns in Africa," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, November 12, 2018, [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_russias\\_hired\\_guns\\_in\\_africa](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_hired_guns_in_africa). Yet in an interview with a high-level African diplomat, it was argued that this goes for Chinese weapons too.



and donate military equipment. In 2019, 'the Australian government issued 16 permits for weapons exports to Mali'.<sup>58</sup> Regarding donations, Niger, for example, received a '\$21 million donation' from the US (incl. armoured personnel carriers, GPS-enabled navigation systems, and individual soldier equipment).<sup>59</sup> These are only but a few examples.

A third aspect concerns military training. Russia's engagements in CAR are again illustrative, although the phenomenon is indeed broader (incl. Russian offers of military training in various other states in Africa, such as Sudan,<sup>60</sup> Nigeria,<sup>61</sup> Burundi, and Chad).<sup>62</sup> According to a report from the Dossier Centre, 'Russian instructors had trained 1,227 FACA soldiers, [by] October 7, 2018'.<sup>63</sup> By comparison, EUTM in CAR trained about 4,000 soldiers between July 2016 and March 2019. Besides military training, by May 2018, it was reported that "at least 40 Russian Special Forces troops" were in CAR "to protect the president", with more Russian troops "reportedly on the way".<sup>64</sup> In addition, Russian national and former Russian intelligence official<sup>65</sup> Valery Zakharov now serves as a security advisor to President Touadéra of the Central African

- 
58. Christopher Knaus and Ben Doherty, "Australia Sold Weapons to Mali as UN Warned Violence Creating 'Humanitarian Disaster,'" *The Guardian*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/mar/11/australia-sold-weapons-to-mali-as-un-warned-violence-creating-humanitarian-disaster>.
  59. Goldberg, "Niger Receives 13 Armored Vehicles As Part Of US Donation to Aid Counterterrorism In The Sahel," *Strategic Intelligence*, December 13, 2019, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/niger-receives-13-armored-vehicles-as-part-of-us-donation-to-aid-counterterrorism-in-the-sahel/>.
  60. Maria Tsvetkova, "Russian contractors are training the army in Sudan, says Moscow," *Reuters*, January 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-sudan-contractors-idUSKCN1PH23T>
  61. Hedenskog, "Russia Stepping up," 2; see also, John Hayward, "Nigeria Signs Military Cooperation Pact with Russia", *Breitbart News*, October 24, 2019.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. "Final Report on the Murder of Orkhan Dzhemal, Aleksandr Rastogruiev and Kirill Radchenko in the Central African Republic," <https://dossier.center/car-en/>.
  64. Marcel Plichta, "Russia Is Back In Africa — and Making Some Very Odd Deals," *Defence One*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/05/russia-back-africa-and-making-some-very-odd-deals/148371/>
  65. Referred to by some as 'Putin's Man in CAR'; see Florian Elabdi, "Putin's Man in the Central African Republic: Is Valery Zakharov at the Heart of Russian Skulduggery?" December 17, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/putins-man-in-the-central-african-republic-is-valery-zakharov-at-the-heart-of-russian-skulduggery>.



Republic;<sup>66</sup> indeed, some argue that UN personnel were discarded in favour of placing Zakharov in this position.<sup>67</sup>

Crucially, few of these engagements are delivered by *official* Russian military instructors. Allegedly, all but five of the 175 trainers notified by the Russian federation to the UN are employed by Russian private military companies.<sup>68</sup> In short, much of the Russian military training is provided via informal channels.<sup>69</sup> Again, a comparative perspective is useful to appreciate this aspect of Russia's military presence. According to the Pentagon, the US has '7,200 military forces serving in Africa Command'<sup>70</sup> and approximately '1,000 contractors spread across 53 African countries'.<sup>71</sup> The point here is not to suggest a straightforward comparison between US and Russian engagements on the African continent. Partly because if we consider only the level of official engagements, any comparison will be imbalanced as a crucial dimension will be missing, namely Russia's shadowy forms of engagement (the UN for example estimates that approximately 1,000 Russian mercenaries are present

- 
66. Andrew Roth, "‘There’s No One to Help’: Russian Mercenary Industry’s Toll on Families," *The Guardian*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/russia-drive-into-africa-shines-light-on-mercenary-industry>; see also: Scorpio, "Russia's Shadow Presence," Hedenskog, "Russia Stepping up."
  67. According to Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink from the United States Institute of Peace, 'Moscow has a direct avenue to the CAR government through Valery Zakharov, a former GRU (the intelligence arm of Russia's military) official, who is now the national security advisor to Touadéra'; see also Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa: Inside a Military Training Centre in CAR," *Al Jazeera*, April 14, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2019/04/russia-africa-military-training-centre-car-190411152658162.html>. Moreover, "Russia's Ministry of Defense recently declared that it's planning to place a five-person team inside its counterpart in Bangui;" Francesco Calzoni, "What Russia Wants from the Central African Republic," *Fair Observer*, June 2018, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/africa/russian-interests-central-african-republic-military-presence-wagner-natural-resources-news-71652/>.
  68. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa": 4.
  69. Sukhankin, "‘Hybrid’ Role."
  70. "Pentagon Announces Force Optimization," Immediate Release, *U.S. Dept of Defense*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1691538/pentagon-announces-force-optimization/>.
  71. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa." 'Historically a small player in the Sahel, Britain has made a pivot towards the region and is supporting France with three Chinook helicopters and 90 soldiers. Later this year, 250 long-range reconnaissance troops will be sent to join Minusma in the largest deployment of British soldiers to a peacekeeping mission since the Balkans war'. Will Brown, "The Key Actors Battling for Control of the Sahel," *The Telegraph*, March 1, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terror-and-security/key-actors-battling-control-sahel/>.

in Libya alone). We get back to this in Section 2.2. That said, it is nevertheless important to note about the abovementioned dimensions of Russia's contemporary engagements in Africa, that although Russia has amplified its military presence and although the US is contemplating downscaling (and sees its own military footprint in Africa as 'light'<sup>72</sup>), considerable differences still remain. Moreover, recent examples of failures and disengagements are illustrative of some of the limits of Russian engagements, for example in Mozambique. According to various sources, approximately 200 Russian mercenaries landed in Mozambique in September 2019.<sup>73</sup> These Wagner Group mercenaries suffered their first losses within weeks of deployment,<sup>74</sup> however, and after sustaining further casualties it now seems as though the Wagner Group has left Cabo Delgado, in Mozambique, and been replaced by a South African PMC.<sup>75</sup> The next section looks more closely at mercenaries and other shadowy aspects of Russia's Africa endeavours.

By way of summarising these three aspects of Russia's showy engagements, it is noteworthy that although Russia remains 'a comparatively marginal player' in Africa,<sup>76</sup> we have seen considerable increases in *arms*

- 
72. Nick Turse, "U.S. Military Says It Has a 'Light Footprint' in Africa: These Documents Show a Vast Network of Bases," *The Intercept*, December 1, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/01/u-s-military-says-it-has-a-light-footprint-in-africa-these-documents-show-a-vast-network-of-bases/>; Judd Devermont, "Russian Theater: How to Respond to Moscow's Return to the African Stage," *Lawfare*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.lawfare-blog.com/russian-theater-how-respond-moscows-return-african-stage>.
73. Sergey Sukhankin, "Russian Mercenaries Pour into Africa and Suffer More Losses (Part One)," *The Jamestown Foundation*, January 21, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-mercenaries-pour-into-africa-and-suffer-more-losses-part-one/>.
74. *Ibid.*; some sources may have overstated the number of dead Wagner operatives. Only two or three seem to have been validated by CNN. The shadowy character of this engagement contributes to making exact tallies difficult. Tim Lister and Sebastian Shukla, "Russian Mercenaries Fight Shadowy Battle in Gas-Rich Mozambique," *CNN*, November 29, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/29/africa/russian-mercenaries-mozambique-intl/index.html>; It has been argued that part of the reason 'for Wagner's defeats in this southeastern African state may arguably have stemmed from "growing tensions" with the local armed forces – incidentally, the same problem that Soviet military advisors experienced in Africa during the Cold War.' Sukhankin, "Russian Mercenaries."
75. See e.g. Patrick Kenyette, "South African Mercenary's Gazelle Helicopter Shot down in Mozambique," *African Military Blog*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2020/04/south-african-mercenaries-gazelle-helicopter-shot-down-in-mozambique?v=65d8f7baa677>; "South African Mercenaries 'DAG' Loses Another Aircraft in Mozambique," *African Military Blog*, June 20, 2020, <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2020/06/south-african-mercenaries-dag-loses-another-aircraft-in-mozambique?v=65d8f7baa677>.
76. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

*sales*. Drawing distinctions and categorising Russia's presence (e.g. bases, trainers, arms) thus helps to identify where to focus attention based on a more nuanced description, which allows appreciation of *some* aspects as 'meagre' and others as increasingly concerning. Finally, while many aspects of Russia's contemporary presence in Africa may be of modest size,<sup>77</sup> it must be said that Russia has sometimes 'skilfully exploited niche strengths, enabling it to punch above its weight in many African countries and assert itself as a key player'.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Chapter 4 looks at *how* Russia deploys its various engagement tools. However, let us first look more closely at Russia's shadowy engagement tools.

## 2.2. Shadowy dimensions of Russia's Africa engagements: mercenaries and tools of disinformation

As alluded to above, there is more to the Russian presence than the official and 'showy' dimensions. This section examines two types of shadowy engagements: mercenaries and disinformation. Arguably, Russia is experimenting with both of these shadowy 'intervention' tools in various African contexts.

Concerning the presence of *Russian mercenaries* in sub-Saharan Africa, the murder of three Russian journalists 'in a remote area of CAR' in 2018 cast light on one shadowy aspect of Russia's 'play for influence and resources in Africa'.<sup>79</sup> The journalists were 'working on an investigative film about the Wagner private military company',<sup>80</sup> which is no ordinary

---

77. Some point out that Russia's presence is 'meagre in comparison with other leading global powers'; Nathaniel Reynolds, "Putin's Not So Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 2019.

78. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa." Similar points have been made with reference to Libya, where Russia influenced the situation with relatively few resources. Author's interviews, anonymous. Copenhagen, March 2020; Paris, February 2020.

79. Leonid Bershidsky, "Death, Diamonds and Russia's Africa Project," *Bloomberg*, August 4, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-08-04/russia-in-africa-death-diamonds-and-intrigue>; see also Andrew Roth, "Russian Journalists Killed in CAR 'Were Researching Military Firm,'" *The Guardian*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/01/russian-journalists-killed-central-african-republic-investigating-military-firm-kremlin-links>.

80. OCCRP, "The Global Footprints of 'Putin's Chef'?" *The Moscow Times*, December 18, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/18/putin-chefs-global-footprints-a68663>. No one has yet been charged for this murder, but observers note that 'three Prigozhin-linked

private military company (PMC).<sup>81</sup> The Wagner Group 'is not a true commercial entity operating in a global marketplace; no one who runs it will admit to doing so'.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Wagner and other Russian mercenaries 'operate in an unclear domestic legal environment' in Russia, considering for example a prohibition against 'armed formations not stipulated in federal law'.<sup>83</sup> Crucially, this legal uncertainty makes it easier for Russia 'to deny links to such groups'.<sup>84</sup> This is important not for definitional reasons but because of the degree of deniability and 'distance'<sup>85</sup> that it permits Russia vis-à-vis the activities of mercenaries, including 'escaping public accountability for casualties of war'.<sup>86</sup> The unclear status of Wagner is thus part of the ambiguous Wagner-Moscow links.<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, Wagner Group is seen as a tool of Putin, with Prigozhin described as having close ties to Putin. As the European Parliament notes: 'Wagner is believed to get funding from Russian businessman and Putin ally, Yevgeny Prigozhin'.<sup>88</sup> It has been argued that the activities of Russian mercenaries 'are coordinated with Russian state organs, which have

---

planes were making flights within days of the murder of Russian journalists who were in the country to investigate Wagner.'

81. Wagner defined as 'an armed Russian private military partnership that appears to advance the objectives of the Russian state.' Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink, "Central African Republic's Search."
82. Reynolds, "Secret Mercenaries."
83. Nils Dahlqvist "Russia's (Not So) Private Military Companies," FOI Memo 6653 RUF5 Briefing 44, Project No. A19101, January, 2019.
84. Ibid.
85. Sukhankin, "PMC Patriot."
86. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa." In addition, 'by employing irregular armed groups, Moscow has gained the luxury of plausible deniability [...] without any accountability whatsoever'. Sergey Sukhankin, "Making War Profitable Again: PMCs as Russia's 'Key' to Africa," *International Centre For Defence And Security*, August 17, 2018, <https://icds.ee/en/making-war-profitable-again-pmcs-as-russias-key-to-africa/>.
- Yet, importantly, this issue of deniability has been debated. Observers for example argue that we should instead be speaking about 'implausible deniability' with reference to how, '[i]n Libya, Wagner proved to be a flexible foreign policy tool whose ties to the Russian government can be refuted (albeit implausibly)'. Paul Stronski, "Implausible Deniability: Russia's Private Military Companies," Carnegie Endowment, Commentary, June 02, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/02/implausible-deniability-russia-s-private-military-companies-pub-81954>
87. 'Media reporting often describes the group as a PMC, but its close ties to the Russian military intelligence service (GRU) and the Ministry of Defence have led many analysts to label Wagner as either a paramilitary group or even a GRU-controlled special force'; Dahlqvist, "Private Military Companies."
88. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

the final say'.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand the link between Wagner and 'official Russia' is not always straightforward (we return to this in Chapter 3).

Though Wagner Group<sup>90</sup> is often mentioned vis-à-vis its activities in Ukraine and later in Syria (incl. a deadly encounter with US troops in February 2018), the group has since expanded into various states in Africa.<sup>91</sup> Beyond news stories, this is also noted in official policy documents. In 2019, the European Parliament mentioned Russia's use of 'shadowy private military companies'.<sup>92</sup> As for the showy aspects of Russia's presence, so too for these shadowy aspects: While some see 'Russia's unregulated mercenary industry' as a 'growing element of Russian power projection',<sup>93</sup> others caution that 'the West should not overreact to the challenge from Wagner'.<sup>94</sup>

We now return to the case of CAR to further unpack the role of mercenaries. Though Wagner mercenaries were arguably present in CAR since 2017,<sup>95</sup> reports of Russian military personnel being spotted in CAR first emerged in February 2018.<sup>96</sup> Some estimate that 150<sup>97</sup> Wagner mercenaries are present in CAR, others believing the figure possibly as high as 1,400.<sup>98</sup> Importantly, another function of Russian mercenaries is that they provide security not only to CAR's President, but also to Russian business delegations being escorted to 'areas under the control of rebel groups' to negotiate diamond contracts.<sup>99</sup> Research suggests that

---

89. Dahlqvist, "Private Military Companies."

90. Scorpio, "Russia's Shadow Presence."

91. Eric Schmitt, "Russia's Military Mission Creep Advances to a New Front: Africa," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/31/world/africa/russia-military-africa.html>.

92. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

93. Roth, "No One to Help."

94. Reynolds, "Secret Mercenaries."

95. 'Russia has sent mercenaries to the Central African Republic.' "Russia in Africa: Weapons, Mercenaries, Spin Doctors," *Warsaw Institute*, October 22, 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Russia-in-Africa-weapons-mercenaries-spin-doctors-Warsaw-Institute-Report.pdf>: 5.

96. Mike Eckel, "New Scrutiny for 'Putin's Chef' and Russian Mercenaries in Africa," *Radio Free Europe*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/a-state-tv-slip-up-u-s-sanctions-a-french-children-s-video-new-scrutiny-for-putin-s-chef-and-russian-mercenaries-in-africa/30193717.html>.

97. Roth, "No One to Help;" thus 'small' compared to upwards of 2000 in Syria.

98. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

99. Kimberly Marten, "Russ-Afrique? Russia, France, and the Central African Republic," *PO-NARS – Eurasia Policy Memo no. 608 (August 2019)*, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/>

Wagner provides military services 'in exchange for natural resources going to companies controlled by Prigozhin.'<sup>100</sup> Adding to this, ICG notes that in the town of Bria (well known for its diamond business), 'there is also a small Russian military base, with about 40-45 soldiers.'<sup>101</sup> Further indicative of Wagner's activities relating to diamond mines,<sup>102</sup> Russia recently proposed to end 'the ban on selling so-called blood diamonds' from CAR.<sup>103</sup> Adding to how this type of engagement affords Russia a degree of 'deniability' is the issue of disguise. Observers argue that Russia has used its contributions to MINUSCA (the UN mission in CAR) to disguise Wagner elements, sending 'members of its active military as a part of peacekeeping forces' and, under this guise, secretly deploying 'members of illegal/mercenary formations.'<sup>104</sup> Other sources similarly suggest that 'Wagnerites [...] blend in with' Russian civilian and military instructors 'tasked within the UN mission in CAR.'<sup>105</sup> We return to this in Chapter 3.

In addition to Wagner Group, there are several other Russian mercenary groups present throughout Africa.<sup>106</sup> Between some groups, such as Patriot<sup>107</sup> and Wagner Group, there seems not only to be competition

---

default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm608\_Marten\_Aug2019.pdf. Beyond this example, it is often argued, that 'oil, gas, diamonds, gold, aluminium and nickel are among the African minerals extracted by Russian companies'; Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

100. Dahlqvist, "Private Military Companies."

101. Hans De Marie Heungoup and Julie David de Lossy, "In Search of the State in the Central African Republic," *The International Crisis Group*.

102. Mašlanka, "France and the Russian Presence." 1477.

103. Evgenia Pismennaya and Henry Meyer, "Russia Seeks to Lift Ban on 'Blood Diamonds' from African Ally," *Bloomberg*, December 15, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-15/russia-seeks-to-lift-ban-on-blood-diamonds-from-african-ally>.

104. Sukhankin, "'Hybrid' Role."

105. Charles Maynes, "Mystery Surrounds Case of Russian Journalists Slain in Africa," *Voice of America*, August 7, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/mystery-surrounds-case-russian-journalists-slain-africa>.

106. In addition to Wagner Group and Patriot, another mercenary group is Sewa. Dahlqvist, "Private Military Companies." Regarding Sewa: 'In January 2018, Russia deployed 175 civilian experts and military instructors, mostly under the cover of a private security company, Sewa Security Services'; Hedenskog, "Russia Stepping up": 35.

107. This group was relatively unknown until 2018, when news emerged that Patriot had 'apparently been active in Syria since spring 2018.' The group is believed to be 'primarily comprised of professional Russian military men with significant fighting experience,' and experts argue that the group has 'strong ties' to the Russian Ministry of Defence. See Sergey Sukhankin, "Russia's New PMC Patriot: The Kremlin's Bid for a Greater Role in Africa?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 115 (2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-new-pmc-patriot-the-kremlins-bid-for-a-greater-role-in-africa/>

but also, an implicit division of labour,<sup>108</sup> allowing the groups to focus on different aspects, including protection and military-related tasks.<sup>109</sup> This division of labour, together with Russia's efforts to distance itself from the groups while contributing official military personnel to UN missions, render the groups 'a cost-effective and efficient tool' for Russia to achieve influence in the region.<sup>110</sup>

Besides mercenaries, another – albeit less familiar – type of shadowy presence is *Russia's use of disinformation* as an instrument that arguably expands this more 'opaque realm' of Russia's Africa engagements.<sup>111</sup> Various reports have recently suggested that 'Russia's African toolkit' now includes 'covert political influence operations,'<sup>112</sup> citing evidence of Russia-linked entities being 'active in the information space.'<sup>113</sup> Further illustrative of this aspect of Russia's engagements, Facebook decided in October 2019 to remove 'dozens of inauthentic coordinated accounts operating in eight African countries that had been engaged in a long-term disinformation and influence campaign aimed at promoting Russian interests.'<sup>114</sup> Pages linked to Mozambique had been created 'a month in advance of Mozambique's elections' to help 'promote the Frelimo ruling party'.<sup>115</sup> Besides election-meddling, in the case of CAR, the removed Facebook pages were created to 'praise the wide range of activities undertaken by the Russian government in the CAR, from military support to

---

108. Concerning the relationship between Wagner and Patriot, observers suggest that despite competition there may be an implicit division of labour, as they 'appear to perform different roles in Burundi: while the Wagner Group mainly deals with military-related tasks, Patriot [...] provides security and protects important people and infrastructure sites'; Sukhankin, "Russia's Hired Guns."

109. Regarding Patriot, the CAR case is once again illustrative: 'Patriot [...] conducts various unsavoury missions in CAR'; Sukhankin, "Russia's Hired Guns;" see also Sergey Sukhankin, "Russia's New PMC Patriot: The Kremlin's Bid for a Greater Role in Africa?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 115 (2018).

110. *Ibid.*

111. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."

112. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

113. Stanford Internet Observatory, "Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa," *Stanford, Cyber Policy Center*, October 30, 2019, <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/prigozhin-africa>.

114. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."

115. Jack Stubbs and Joseph Menn, "Facebook Says It Suspends Accounts Tied to Putin Ally for Meddling in Africa," *Reuters*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-accounts-russia/facebook-says-it-suspends-accounts-tied-to-putin-ally-for-meddling-in-africa-idUSKBN1X91Q0>; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."



cultural events'. Seemingly linked to broader aims of buttressing support for Russian engagements, the Facebook pages intended to 'give CAR audiences the impression of widespread domestic support for the administration of President Touadéra and its Russian partners'.<sup>116</sup> Regarding the use of disinformation in CAR, experts note that Russia has prompted 'a disinformation campaign against France'.<sup>117</sup> For example, a Russian news agency linked to Prigozhin published a story about the abovementioned murder of three journalists, arguing that it 'was actually planned by a French intelligence officer'.<sup>118</sup> Also in CAR, Prigozhin-linked actors allegedly claim credit 'for getting rid of politicians who are "orientated to France"', such as former Minister of Foreign Affairs Charles-Armel Doubane.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, observers argue, Russia-linked 'trolls' had been actively promoting a negative image of France to destabilise 'France-G5 cooperation'.<sup>120</sup> While it is important not to overestimate the potential appeal of the Russia's engagement model in the eyes of African state leaders, these examples do seem to highlight critical questions about the extent to which 'trolls' and tools of disinformation may form an important and potentially appealing aspect of Russian 'assistance offers'. This aspect of Russia's current Africa engagements also raises questions about the potential implications for (the attractiveness of) 'liberal offers' that do not include such tools, to which we return in Chapter 4.

Suggestive of the scope of Russia's use of disinformation elsewhere in Africa, Facebook and Twitter recently stated that 'they had taken down a network of Russian-linked fake accounts operated out of Ghana and Nigeria which targeted the United States'.<sup>121</sup> While some Russian-linked disinformation activity may target Western intervention actors, others cases suggest 'profitability' as another motive. In the case of CAR, ob-

---

116. "Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa," *Stanford Internet Observatory*, October 30, 2019, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/prigozhin-africa>.

117. Marten, "Russ-Afrique?": 4.

118. *Ibid.*; also mentioned in interviews conducted in February 2020.

119. Harding and Burke, "Leaked Documents."

120. Moreover: "The Russia government media are active too, as shown by the example of the French-language version of *Sputnik*"; see Maślanka, "France and the Russian Presence."

121. Elizabeth Culliford, "Facebook, Twitter Remove Russia-Linked Accounts in Ghana Targeting U.S.," *Reuters*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-content/facebook-twitter-remove-russia-linked-accounts-in-ghana-targeting-u-s-idUSKBN20Z3LW>; see also Stanford Internet Observatory, "Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa," *Stanford Internet Observatory*.



servers note how 'Russia was trying to get mining rights by supporting the current politicians in power'.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, these different examples have led observers to suggest that Russia is experimenting with 'new disinformation tactics in Africa' to test the possibility of using such tools to expand influence,<sup>123</sup> an observation to which we will return.

Examining the Russian use of disinformation, observers have also argued that 'the growing sophistication of Russia's disinformation campaigns in Africa demand greater vigilance', notably from governments.<sup>124</sup> Part of this 'growing sophistication' concerns the extent to which diverse motives are sought achieved and the potential long-term objectives underpinning this dimension of Russia's engagement. For example, having analysed content from the abovementioned Facebook pages, Shelby Grossman found that it was not always a matter of posting biased stories; rather, sometimes 'Prigozhin is investing long term in these outlets so that they will be seen as credible media organizations so that when an event happens that Prigozhin/Russia really care about or want to polarize society around, they'll go in strong with a really biased slant'.<sup>125</sup> Another important point to mention is how some interviewees noted that it is not *only* about disinformation. Indeed, there are significant anti-Western sentiments in many Sahelian states, the large-scale protests in Mali serving as an illustrative example. While Russia has proven 'skilful at exploiting historical grievances and reviving anti-Western sentiment', there was pre-existing dissatisfaction in the population, notably in response to the dramatic increase in violence and instability, and Russia has exploited this dissatisfaction.

Finally, this less familiar dimension of Russia's shadowy Africa engagements may not be entirely unrelated to the use of mercenaries.<sup>126</sup> According to Grossman, 'all the pages removed by Facebook were pages

---

122. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."

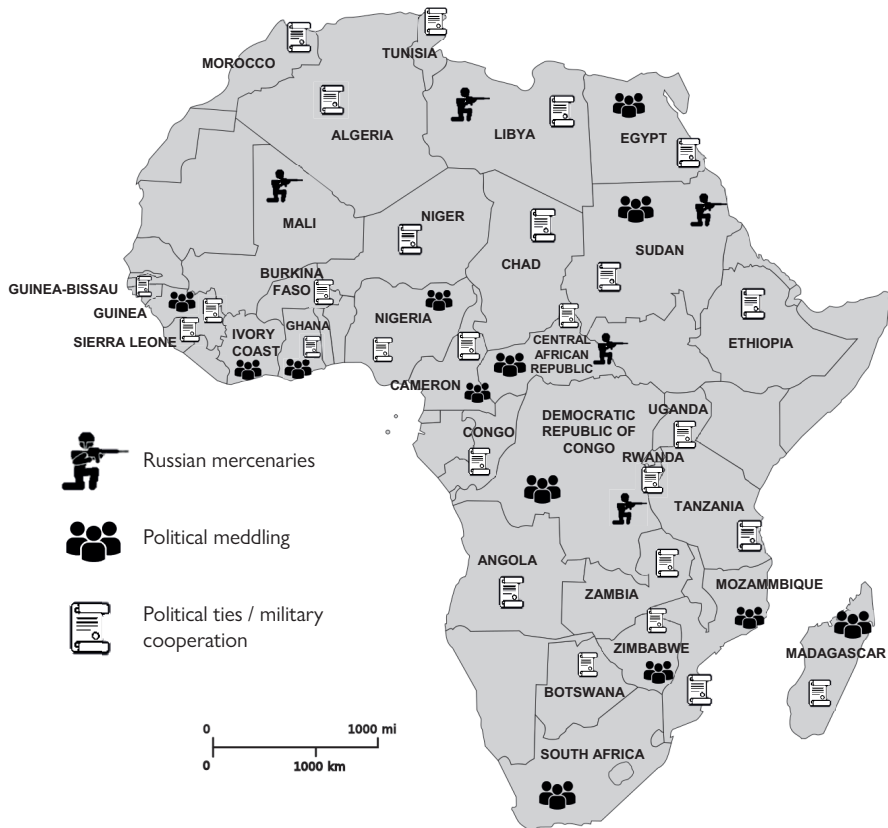
123. Davey Alba and Sheera Frenkel, "Russia Tests New Disinformation Tactics in Africa to Expand Influence," *The New York Times*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/30/technology/russia-facebook-disinformation-africa.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.

124. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."

125. *Ibid.*

126. As mentioned, Prigozhin had previously been linked to shadowy disinformation activity; he was indicted by U.S. special prosecutor Robert Mueller as a principal figure behind an alleged Russian "troll farm" accused of trying to sway elections in the US with covert social media campaigns'. Stubbs and Menn, "Facebook Says."

Figure 1. Russian activity and military presence in Africa



Sources: European Parliament, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Bloomberg, CNN, New York Times, Axios, ABC news, Al Jazeera, Vice, The Guardian, The Economist, The Moscow Times, Stanford Internet Observatory, PISM, NSI, Kimberly Marten, Nicolas Redman.

linked to “a firm” tied to Yevgeny Prigozhin’; the same Prigozhin with Wagner links.<sup>127</sup> Besides these links, via Prigozhin, there are other similarities between these two shadowy engagement tools. For instance, deniability is not only a concern vis-à-vis mercenaries but also often in the case of tools of disinformation. Thus, ‘Moscow has repeatedly rejected

127. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Russian Disinformation.”

Western allegations of election meddling.<sup>128</sup> Importantly, it has been suggested that the deniability element of Russia's tools of disinformation is sought bolstered: Arguably, Prigozhin is testing a new 'franchising' strategy, paying 'more local actors to create the content', thus making it 'much harder to detect these disinformation campaigns'.<sup>129</sup>

### 2.3. Reflections: balancing the official and the informal, trialling new intervention tools

This section concludes Chapter 2 by highlighting three additional points of significance vis-à-vis these aspects of Russia's return to Africa, as illustrated in the map above. First, some of these engagements entail a delicate balancing act between official and unofficial actors. In CAR, Russia has installed a "close protection unit" for President Touadéra (as mentioned above).<sup>130</sup> Yet unofficially, Russian mercenaries make deals with rebel groups with whom the government of CAR is in conflict; rebel groups with whom Russian businesspersons are keen to maintain ties, as they control key mining areas. As observers note, Wagner Group 'doesn't hesitate to make tactical deals with opponents of official authorities when it comes to securing access to resources'.<sup>131</sup> It remains to be seen whether engagement with both parties to an ongoing conflict represents a viable strategy.

Second, attending to shadowy dimensions casts light on how Russia is *testing new engagement tools*, notably disinformation but also mercenaries. As observers note, 'it is possible that they were testing out strategies while pursuing their African interests'.<sup>132</sup> Testing may add new instruments to Russia's array of engagement tools while also generating 'success stories' that may in turn advance the use of these tools to other states. Might the representation of CAR as Russia's 'success story' convince ad-

---

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

130. "Russia Signs Military Cooperation Deal With Central African Republic," August 22, 2018, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-signs-military-cooperation-deal-central-african-republic-wagner-investigation-russian-reporters-killed/29446656.html>

131. Mašlanka, "France and the Russian Presence."

132. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation."

ditional states of the benefits of inviting Russian in as a security partner? While observers refer to Russia's engagements in CAR as a 'crowning achievement' and to how 'countries such as Mali are lining up to seek [Russia's] services', the role of 'successfully' tested engagement tools in potentially furthering Russia's Africa endeavours remains to be seen.<sup>133</sup>

The third point is the speed at which Russian engagements *may shift from formal to informal channels*: 'in December 2017, Moscow's [UN-authorized] weapons donation suddenly turned into a much more significant – and unilateral – Russian security presence in CAR'.<sup>134</sup> On this note, the next section considers Russian engagements with attention to the different structures through which the various tools described in this section are put to use; sometimes collaboratively, sometimes obtrusively.

---

133. Yet news stories already frame Russia's recent involvements in Mozambique through this lens: 'building on from its presence in CAR, Russia is now seeking to establish 'a firm footing in Mozambique'. "Moscow Muscles in as Protector of Oil Firms in Cabo Delgado," *Africa Intelligence*, March 9, 2020, [https://www.africaintelligence.com/oil-gas\\_state-strategy/2020/03/09/moscow-muscles-in-as-protector-of-oil-firms-in-cabo-delgado,108396988-ge0](https://www.africaintelligence.com/oil-gas_state-strategy/2020/03/09/moscow-muscles-in-as-protector-of-oil-firms-in-cabo-delgado,108396988-ge0).

134. Martens, "Russ-Afrique?"



# 3

## Russia: disruptive and (opportunistically) ‘collaborative’ engagement modalities

The encouragement not to view all aspects of Russian security presence in Africa through the lens of ‘great power competition’<sup>135</sup> entails an invitation to appreciate the manifold tools above but also how these tools are put to use so very differently; sometimes collaboratively, through formal structures, sometimes disruptively, in parallel (sometimes contradiction) with other initiatives. Attending to both collaborative and disruptive modalities enables appreciation of Russia as ‘neither simply an enemy nor a partner in all aspects of its security engagements’.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.1. Rivalry and competition: unpacking commonplace framings

One dominant framing of why we see increased Russian presence in Africa revolves around a ‘vacuum’-argument: *US statements* about down-scaling its Sahel-presence (with troop numbers having already been reduced), creates a ‘vacuum’, which Russia seeks to fill.<sup>137</sup> Observers have

---

135. Ibid.

136. Anonymous interview, conducted by the author, Paris, February 2020.

137. E.g. ‘The absence of U.S. military expertise and hardware will create a vacuum China and Russia can fill. To prevent any setbacks in pushing back terrorism, West African countries are likely to look towards China and Russia for military assistance’. Ovigwe

argued that Russia has been 'moving into a vacuum left in part by the United States' waning interest in the continent'.<sup>138</sup> Within this framing, Russia is often described as seeking to 'exploit the perceived U.S. retreat from Africa'.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, this 'vacuum'-framing often interweaves with 'rivalry', 'great power competition', and 'Russia versus US' arguments. This was evident in John Bolton's (then security adviser to Trump) condemnation of Russia's growing presence in Africa: 'Russian activities on African soil are detrimental to U.S. interests' and 'pose a significant threat to U.S. national security'.<sup>140</sup> While there will be gaps, should the US withdraw entirely from the Sahel (e.g. France depends on the US for intelligence, air refuelling, and air transport), there is a risk that these 'vacuum' and 'great power competition' framings neglect important nuances about Russia's return to Africa. One such nuance is the simultaneity of Russia as meddler and opportunistic collaborator. Yet while some aspects of Russian security engagements are indeed difficult to interpret as signs of collaboration (incl. recent disinformation campaigns to boost anti-Western sentiments), it also holds true that the dominant 'vacuum' framing invites an excessively one-dimensional representation of the 'competitive' meddler aspects of Russian engagements.

While 'officially, *the EU* considers Russia a "key partner" on the international scene', since the post-Crimea downturn in EU-Russia relations, EU at the same time 'views Moscow's increasingly assertive foreign policy and its efforts to rebuild global influence, with concern'.<sup>141</sup> Although rivalry narratives are most prevalent in the US, the Russian engagements in CAR allegedly also have another 'audience': Observers argue that Russia's recent activities in CAR 'seem designed explicitly to challenge Paris'.<sup>142</sup> Now, on the question of how best to respond to Russia's return to Africa, France (and other EU states) seems to take a

---

Egugu, "US Threat to Withdraw from African Security Efforts Leaves Sahel Vulnerable," *The African Report*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/21860/us-threat-to-withdraw-from-african-security-efforts-leaves-sahel-vulnerable/>.

138. Scorpio, "Russia's Shadow Presence;" see also: "US Mulls Troop Cuts in Africa as Strategy Switches to 'Containing' Extremists," *France 24*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200213-us-mulls-troop-cuts-in-africa-as-strategy-switches-to-contain-extremists;> and Egugu, "US Threat."

139. Devermont, "Russian Theater."

140. Peter Fabricius, "From Russia with Love – or Perhaps Not?" *Institute for Security Studies*, October 4, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/from-russia-with-love-or-perhaps-not>.

141. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

142. Marten, "Russ-Afrique?": 2.

different and more pragmatic approach than the US.<sup>143</sup> As multiple interviewees stress, France has recently been very active bilaterally in an attempt at maintaining consistent 'demanding dialogue' with Russia concerning Russian activities in CAR, and more recently in Sahel.<sup>144</sup> As one interviewee also notes, however, rivalry-framings spearheaded by the US might imply that individual European states 'in hiding' engage collaboratively with Russia as the desire to maintain importance relations to the US makes official collaboration difficult. And as another interviewee notes, there is a risk that strong US 'rivalry' narratives 'force' European states to be more invisible about their pragmatic engagements with Russia. Similar dynamics recently seem to have been playing out during UNSC debates about the MINUSMA mandate (UN mission in Mali). French and Russian positions aligned on the importance of maintaining current troop levels, with the US insisting on lower troop numbers.<sup>145</sup>

Importantly, and as noted in the introductory chapter, 'not everything Russia does in Africa is a malign activity'.<sup>146</sup> Let us therefore now explore some of the 'collaborative' (potentially at the same time opportunistic) gestures in the current Russian engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### 3.2. 'Collaborative' gestures – opportunities as well as risks of exploitation: three examples

#### **Peace negotiations: from 'undercut' to 'umbrella'**

Another example of how collaborative and disruptive engagements entangle and change is Russia's role vis-à-vis the CAR peace process. This case seems to illustrate developments in a different direction, namely

---

143. For scholarly work on pragmatism in liberal interventionism, see e.g. Jonathan Graubart, "R2P and Pragmatic Liberal Interventionism: Values in the Service of Interests," *Human Rights Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2013): 69-90, [www.jstor.org/stable/23352252](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23352252); David Chandler, "The Responsibility to Protect? Imposing the 'Liberal Peace,'" *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 1 (2004): 59-81, <https://doi.org/info:doi/10.1080/1353331042000228454>; Louise Wiuff Moe and Finn Stepputat, "Introduction: Peacebuilding in an Era of Pragmatism," *International Affairs*, 94, no. 2 (2018): 293-99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy035>.

144. Anonymous interviews, Paris, February 2010. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for also highlighting this point.

145. Statement by Mr. Dmitry Polyanskiy, First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the Security Council on the situation in Mali (October 19, 2018): <https://russiaun.ru/en/news/mali191018>.

146. Stronski, "Late to the Party."



the possibility of shifting from unilateral, parallel, and obstructive engagement to being brought under an official AU-led, UN-supported mediation 'umbrella'.<sup>147</sup> In July 2017, AU first launched its 'African initiative' to bring peace to CAR. Peace talks were then relaunched in January 2019, resulting in the signing of a peace agreement on 6 February 2019.<sup>148</sup> Between the initial launch and the signing of CAR's 'latest Peace Agreement',<sup>149</sup> Russia initiated a parallel process. As the ICG notes, AU-led mediation efforts, 'have recently been in unhelpful competition with a parallel Russian-Sudanese initiative',<sup>150</sup> referring to how, in 2019, 'Russia and Sudan hosted talks between some of CAR's rival militias'. These Russian-initiated 'peace talks' 'unfolded in parallel to' AU-efforts to 'mediate between the armed groups and the government'.<sup>151</sup> Not only did Russia-initiated talks unfold in parallel. According to ICG, Russia was effectively 'sidelining AU talks', voicing concerns 'that the existence of two peace processes involving different actors would prevent either one from making much headway'.<sup>152</sup> Others warned that a lack of coordination with the AU process 'could be counterproductive, as it sends mixed messages to the armed groups'.<sup>153</sup> Summarising these developments, ICG argued how 'AU-led efforts had been *undercut* by a parallel Russian-Sudanese initiative'.<sup>154</sup> Yet in contrast to the example

---

147. "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick," *International Crisis Group* no. 277 (June 18, 2019): <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/277-making-central-african-republics-latest-peace-agreement-stick>.

148. African Union, The Peace and Security Council, "Communique of the 826th Meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council, at the Ministerial Level, on the Situation in Central African Republic," 826th meeting at Ministerial level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, February 9, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/psc.826.meeting.comm\\_car\\_9.02.2019.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/psc.826.meeting.comm_car_9.02.2019.pdf).

149. "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick," *International Crisis Group*.

150. "Central African Republic: Getting from Talks to Peace," *International Crisis Group* (January 28, 2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-getting-talks-peace>.

151. Fergus Kelly, "Central African Republic Militias Sign Agreement Brokered by Russia and Sudan," *The Defense Post*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2018/08/29/central-african-republic-armed-groups-agreement-russia-sudan/>.

152. "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick," *International Crisis Group*.

153. Carole Landry, "C. Africa Rebels Rearm After Military Gets Russia Weapons: UN Panel," *Yaboo! News*, July 31, 2018.

154. "Central African Republic: Getting from Talks to Peace," *International Crisis Group*.

above of Russian embargo exemptions, the parallel Russian efforts in this case were aligned with AU's UN-supported efforts: Thanks to 'successful efforts by regional top diplomats', the parallel Russian initiative was brought 'under [the] AU-umbrella, to avoid Russian efforts fracturing international mediation efforts'.<sup>155</sup>

### **UN-sanctioned weapons delivery: Russia and relations to EUTM and MINUSCA**

Since 2013, CAR's Armed Forces have been under a UN arms embargo 'due to political instability and widespread human rights violations'.<sup>156</sup> In August 2017, France proposed the donation of weapons seized during its counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa,<sup>157</sup> which the UNSC rejected. Only months later, however, in December 2017, Russia secured 'an exemption to the Security Council arms embargo', the UN Sanctions Committee unanimously agreeing to allow the exemption.<sup>158</sup> This enabled Russia, 'as part of a multinational effort', to deliver weapons to CAR's Armed Forces,<sup>159</sup> partly with reference to the importance of these weapons for 'two EU-trained battalions'.<sup>160</sup> Trained by EUTM, Russian weapons helped boost 'the capabilities of the CAR's military and security forces'.<sup>161</sup>

---

155. "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick," *International Crisis Group*. Indeed, some argue that "Russia played a prominent role in reigniting the mediation efforts."

156. Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink, "Central African Republic's Search."

157. Marten, "Russ-Afrique?"

158. AFP, "UN Gives Green Light on Russia Arms to C Africa," *News24*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/un-gives-green-light-on-russia-arms-to-c-africa-20171216>; see e.g. Marten, "Russ-Afrique?": 3; for more detail on the weapons that Russia delivered: 'among the weapons on the list are 900 pistols, 5,200 assault rifles, 140 sniper rifles, 840 Kalashnikov machine guns, 270 RPGs and 20 anti-aircraft guns'; "US, Britain, France Seek Details on Russian Arms to CAR," *Daily Nation*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/US-Britain-France-seek-details-on-Russian-guns-to-CAR/1066-4227744-3chuis/index.html>.

159. Fergus Kelly, "Central African Republic Arms Embargo Eased by UN," *The Defense Post*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/09/13/central-african-republic-arms-embargo-un/>.

160. AFP, "Russian Arms to CAR."

161. Carl Schreck, "What Are Russian Military Contractors Doing in the Central African Republic?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 1, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-what-russian-military-contractors-are-doing-in-central-african-republic/29405290.html>.

Thus, authorised by the UNSC to provide CAR's armed forces 'with weapons and training',<sup>162</sup> Russian engagements unfolded 'collaboratively' vis-à-vis *EUTM activities* in CAR. As one UN report notes, CAR's 'armed forces received training and military equipment from the Russian Federation. Coupled with the *support of other partners* such as the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic, those efforts are facilitating the reoperationalization of FACA'.<sup>163</sup> The military training provided by Russia was described as compatible with efforts of other international partners. This is also how the report described Russia's supply of military equipment, including the Russian proposal 'to supply the arms for two battalions totalling 1,300 men, who were recently trained by the European Union'.<sup>164</sup> In addition to this implicitly collaborative element of relations between Russia and EUTM, the UN report (June 2019) also noted a 'collaborative' relation to MINUSCA: Forces trained by EUTM and Russian military experts were 'deployed in seven locations to work *alongside MINUSCA*'.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, concerning this relation between MINUSCA and Russian engagements in CAR, the report observed that: 'While feedback from international partners on the performance of FACA in those locations is quite positive, it must be stressed that FACA currently has insufficient capacity or lacks logistical support for conducting operations without the substantive and constant support of MINUSCA and/or the Russian instructors'.<sup>166</sup>

Attending to such 'collaborative' elements highlights nuances overlooked by narrow rivalry framings. Insofar as Russia worked 'collaboratively' (albeit pragmatically and opportunistically) alongside UN's MINUSCA and EUTM, the Russian engagements were 'filling other

---

162. Roth, "Russian Journalists Killed."

163. United Nations, Security Council, "Letter dated 23 July 2018 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2399 (2018) addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2018/729 (23 July 2018): [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2018\\_729.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_729.pdf) (italics added by the author of this report).

164. AFP, "Russian Arms to CAR."

165. United Nations, Security Council, Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General, S/2019/498, 17 June 2019, <https://www.passblue.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CAR-June-2019.pdf>.

166. UNSC, "Letter dated 23 July 2018:" 8/131. This UN report also notes how: "With the support of MINUSCA and sometimes accompanied by Russian instructors, trained FACA personnel have gradually been redeployed in Obo, Paoua, Sibut and Bangassou."

actors' self-imposed gaps,' considering how EUTM is unable to equip forces they train with lethal weaponry.<sup>167</sup> We return to this in Chapter 4, as we contemplate what this implies for 'liberal' intervention actors. First, it is important to stress how this example also demonstrates *a disquieting entangling of collaborative and obstructive engagement modes*, as authorised dimensions became entangled with shadowy dimensions as the weapons deliveries were used as an opportunity for Russia to scale up its unofficial engagements. Although neither France nor the US blocked the sanctions exemption, they did ask for it to be put on hold citing concerns over the control and storage of the weapons.<sup>168</sup> However, the risks related to the circulation of arms were not the only issue, as this UN-sanctioned dimension came with a shadowy dimension.<sup>169</sup> Additional 'business and semi-official military operations seemed to have flowed' from this UN-sanctioned weapons delivery.<sup>170</sup> The UN exemption may have been exploited as an 'occasion' for Russia to upscale its shadowy engagement, possibly 'marking the start of [Russia's] highest-profile military foray in sub-Saharan Africa for decades'.<sup>171</sup>

### **UNSC – selectively collaborative gestures and anti-intervention allies**

Beyond this specific example, other aspects of the Russian engagements in Africa also gesture towards an opportunistically 'collaborative' mode,

---

167. Anonymous interview, conducted by the author, Copenhagen, March 2020. Concerning Russia's provision of arms to states in the Sahel, one interviewee notes: "We would of course prefer if the Russian weapons had been delivered as part of a formal agreement".

168. 'Britain, France and the US voiced concern, demanding that deliveries be restricted to light arms and that Russia take steps to provide traceability to prevent the weapons from being sold on the black market'. They requested, for example, that Russia shared serial numbers and 'plans to prevent these arms from inadvertently falling into the hands of the country's rebel groups'. "Russian Journalists Killed in Central African Republic Ambush," *The Guardian*, July 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/31/russian-journalists-killed-in-central-african-republic-ambush>.

169. In the wake of this Russian weapons delivery, 'Russia has also signed a range of deals with the government'. Ibid.

170. Oliver Carroll, "Russian Journalists' Murder in Central African Republic Was a 'Pre-planned Assassination', Say Private Investigators," *The Independent*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-journalists-murder-africa-car-wagner-private-armies-a8494726.html>.

171. Aaron Ross, "How Russia Moved into Central Africa," *Reuters*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-insight/how-russia-moved-into-central-africa-idUSKCN1MR0KA>.

such as when they take place within formal multilateral frameworks. Russia did not only operate via official UN channels when obtaining exemptions to the abovementioned arms embargo. Similarly, Russia also operates within formal UN frameworks, when contributing 'to different UN peacekeeping operations in Africa'.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, even in intervention contexts where Russia may not directly contribute troops, Russia's influence obviously remains important considering its role as Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, which grants Russia (and other P5 members) significant influence, including on defining (mandating) what the UN can(not) do in terms of interventions in Africa and elsewhere. In the UNSC context, examples of (selectively) 'collaborative' Russian gestures related to its presence in Africa include cases where (elements of) Russia's military engagements were announced officially in UNSC meetings. For example, Russia's Permanent UN Representative stated in 2017 that Russia had 'begun to assist the law enforcement agencies of the Sahel countries, and we intend to continue such cooperation because building the capacities of national armed forces is important for enhancing the effectiveness of the G5 Sahel'.<sup>173</sup> With reference to these and other examples of 'collaborative' (albeit sometimes opportunistically exploited) gestures, Russian officials stress that Russia is in CAR 'with UN backing'.<sup>174</sup>

*Now, attending to the role of Russia in the UNSC offers **qualification** to the potential for collaboration. As others have noted, Russia is 'using the votes of African members to "prove" its ability to overcome its isolation on the global stage'.<sup>175</sup> Of the 54 African states, three sit on the UNSC at any given time on a rotating basis. Accordingly, the so-called 'A3' forms a large voting bloc in the UNSC, which renders*

---

172. Ursula Durand-Ochoa, "Emerging Powers in Africa," *LSE Special Reports*, June 2013, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-Emerging-Powers-in-Africa.pdf>.

173. Anna Varfolomeeva, "Russia Begins Assisting Africa's Sahel Region in Fighting Terrorism," *The Globe Post*, October 31, 2017, <https://theglobepost.com/2017/10/31/sahel-region-counterterrorism/>

174. Maynes, "Mystery Surrounds Case," Schmitt, "Russia's Military Mission."

175. "Russia's expansion on African soil builds up its position in the United Nations." "Russia in Africa: Weapons, Mercenaries, Spin Doctors," *Warsaw Institute*, October 22, 2019: 7

*them 'attractive allies for Russia'.<sup>176</sup> Russia, for example, sought support from African governments vis-à-vis its position on Crimea,<sup>177</sup> persuading 'more than half of African governments to oppose or abstain a UN resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea.'<sup>178</sup> Russia has sought to make alliances with the A3 in various efforts to halt initiatives regarded as interference in 'internal matters'.<sup>179</sup> Such conflicting views on sovereignty, intervention, and 'internal affairs' have critical consequences, including the effect of limiting both the UN's options for responding and the kinds of issues that the UN is able to address. For example, Russia stalemated 'efforts to examine the disputed election results in the Democratic Republic of Congo' and warned against intervening in Sudan's 'internal affairs'.<sup>180</sup>*

By way of summary, these three examples illustrate, albeit in very different ways, how collaborative and disruptive aspects often entangle and how these entanglements can oscillate and change, as 'collaborative' gestures risk being exploited to scale up Russia's shadowy engagements. In interviews with high-ranking diplomats from various EU countries, 'Russia in Africa' was also recurrently represented as a two-dimensional challenge: 'neither an enemy nor a partner' in all aspects of security engagements. Crucially, attending to how Russia shifts between collaborative gestures and parallelism or disruption in other areas, a key question becomes how best to influence these dynamics, for example in ways that may bring Russian 'parallelism' into official frameworks (cf. the aforementioned case of mediation efforts). Moreover, even when working within multilateral framework, Russia has moved beyond official dimensions and exploited mandates or used official frameworks as shell cover for other, more shadowy engagements, as we for example saw in the case of CAR.

---

176. Ross, "How Russia Moved."

177. Devermont, "Russian Theater."

178. Ibid.

179. Minney, Sullivan, and Vandenbrink, "Amid the Central African Republic's Search."

180. Stronski, "Late to the Party;" see also Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

### 3.3. Risks and the Russian engagement model

When considering Russia's manifold engagement tools and diverse yet sometimes simultaneous engagement modalities, Russia seems to be confronting at least two delicate balancing acts involving distinct risks. First, simultaneously engaging the government in CAR and the rebels (who oppose the government): For Russia, engaging rebels is necessary to gain access to mining areas. Can Russia use this two-sided engagement 'to mediate between the rebel leaders and the central government'?<sup>181</sup> And yet considering that 'vast portions' – some say 80%<sup>182</sup> – of CAR remain under rebel control (incl. diamond-rich areas), it is also possible that the central government feels threatened by Russia's engagements with rebel groups, which 'overthrew the legitimate government' in 2012.<sup>183</sup> Might Russian mercenaries and business actors at some point be seen by the government of CAR as having gone 'too far' in supporting rebel groups that CAR is 'fighting' (e.g. building a hospital in rebel-controlled Bria and allegedly training Seleka rebels in neighbouring Sudan)?<sup>184</sup> Might this balancing act entail possibilities for liberal actors to highlight the 'strength' of *their* liberal engagement approach?

Second is the challenge of balancing the 'benefits' of deniability with the risk of excessive loss of control. For liberal interveners, one challenge posed by shadowy aspects of the Russian engagement model is that while many liberal interveners confront domestic opposition and intervention fatigue, further aggravated when soldiers' lives are lost in 'far-away conflicts', Russia's use of mercenaries largely bypasses this circumstance (at

---

181. Calzoni, "What Russia Wants."

182. Cassandra Vinograd, "There's a New Battle for Influence in Central Africa, and Russia Appears to Be Winning," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/05/31/theres-a-new-battle-for-influence-in-central-africa-and-russia-appears-to-be-winning/?noredirect=on>.

183. Calzoni, "What Russia Wants."

184. Regarding the Hospital in Bria, see e.g. UNSC Report, 23 July 2018: "Statement by representative of the Russian Federation Alexander Repkin at the UN Security Council meeting on the Central African Republic" (June 20, 2019); [https://russiaun.ru/en/news/car\\_200619](https://russiaun.ru/en/news/car_200619). Regarding Seleka rebels, see e.g. "Russia Confirms Security Companies Training Sudanese Army," *Dabanga*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/russia-confirms-security-companies-training-sudanese-army>; and Shankara Narayanan, "The Mercenaries behind Russian Operations in Africa," *The Jamestown Foundation*, November 15, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/the-mercenaries-behind-russian-operations-in-africa/>.

least in the short term). The use of mercenaries is effectively an increase in military deployments but without accountability, which means that the Russian state faces fewer public outcries, *partly* because the loss of Wagner soldiers is not included in official statistics; nonetheless, this entails various risks. One such risk is that deniability and unaccountability imply a ‘trade-off’: less control and the risk that mercenaries may become too uncontrolled. For the time being and as others note, ‘Compared with reports of casualties in the Armed Forces, those about losses among private contractors evoke only muted reaction in Russia.’<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, in 2015, Russia passed a law making it illegal, also during peacetime, to make military losses public, effectively making it more difficult for NGO’s and journalists to critique Russia’s engagements abroad, notably concerning the issue of losses.<sup>186</sup> These circumstances give mercenaries an ‘advantage’ by enabling (some degree of) deniability, which in turn conflicts with and challenges the liberal intervention model.<sup>187</sup>

---

185. Dahlqvist, “Private Military Companies.”

186. Thanks so much to Karen Philippa Larsen for pointing this out to me.

187. Dahlqvist, “Private Military Companies.”





# 4

## Implications for ‘liberal’ intervention actors: three dilemmas

This chapter asks what these shadowy and showy ‘collaborative’ and disruptive dimensions of Russia’s Africa presence imply for the liberal actors engaged in Africa. It primarily does so with reference to examples from Russia’s presence in CAR, as also explored in previous chapters and against the backdrop of a ‘crisis’ in liberal interventionism, as alluded to in Chapter 1. For more than a decade, critics have debated the liberal intervention’s ‘crisis within’,<sup>188</sup> which, beyond a mere lack of coordinated engagements by various liberal actors, involves ‘a crisis of confidence regarding the exportability of the liberal peace model’.<sup>189</sup> In addition to disconnects and disagreements amongst ‘liberal’ interveners,<sup>190</sup> this ‘crisis within’ is also about potentially incompatible interven-

---

188. Neil Cooper, “Review Article: On the Crisis of the Liberal Peace,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 4 (2007): 605-16; Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding;” Lindskov Jacobsen and Gauslå Engell, “Conflict Prevention.”

189. Cooper, “Review Article,” 605-16; for a critical take on disconnects within beyond a mere lack of coordination, see e.g. Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde and Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, “Disentangling the Security Traffic Jam in the Sahel: Constitutive Effects of Contemporary Interventionism,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 4 (July 2020): 855-74: <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/96/4/855/5866446>.

190. ‘a battle raging behind the scenes within the UN’s MINUSMA. The United States wants to place its candidate at the head of the peacekeeping mission while cutting personnel numbers - both measures Paris deems unacceptable’. “Tensions sky-high between Washington and Paris over MINUSMA” Africa Intelligence, May 12, 2020, [https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-and-west-africa\\_diplomacy/2020/05/12/tensions-sky-high-between-washington-and-paris-over-minusma%2C108405105-eve?utm\\_source=AIA&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=AUTO\\_EDIT\\_SOM&did=108393983&eid=514302](https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-and-west-africa_diplomacy/2020/05/12/tensions-sky-high-between-washington-and-paris-over-minusma%2C108405105-eve?utm_source=AIA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AUTO_EDIT_SOM&did=108393983&eid=514302)

tion motives, with liberal objectives and 'disinterested solidarism',<sup>191</sup> on the one hand, and national self-interest (like strengthening alliances) on the other.<sup>192</sup> As critics note, a key challenge 'within' liberal intervention is the extent to which interventions are legitimised with reference to a presumed complementarity of the pursuit of security for 'liberal' states in the West and 'solidarism with the poor in the developing world,' yet with precedence 'ultimately given to security'.<sup>193</sup> Additional tensions within include 'intervention fatigue', on the one hand, and a simultaneous desire to remain engaged on the other.<sup>194</sup>

Against this backdrop, the current chapter highlights three risks and related dilemmas: the risk of foregrounding non-liberal intervention objectives when responding to Russian engagements, the risk of underestimating African agency, and the risk of overemphasising Russia at the expense of paying inadequate attention to the challenges 'within' liberal intervention. These are examples of risks and dilemmas, accentuated or generated by Russia's growing security presence in Africa, that now confront liberal intervention actors operating in neighbouring or sometimes the very same intervention settings or missions as Russia. As discussed in section 1.3, the term 'liberal intervention' refers to actors who intervene with reference to the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. And yet at the same time (and as noted previously), national interests often underpin various types of intervention, also when referred to as 'liberal'.

#### 4.1. Focus on 'monitoring' non-liberal actors may background needed attention to local dynamics

Given the varied intervention tools and mixed motives, Russian engagements in Africa are surrounded by considerable uncertainty: How sub-

---

191. Cooper, "Review Article,": 605-16.

192. See e.g. Nina Græger, "From 'Forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'? Small State Military Status Seeking," in Benjamin de Cavalho and Iver B. Neumann, eds., *Small State Status Seeking* (London: Routledge, 2014), 102-23. Indeed, critics have pointed to 'a delusional representation of [Western] intervention (military or otherwise) as devoid of self-interest'; Cooper, "Review Article,": 605-16.

193. Cooper, "Review Article,": 605-16.

194. Molly O'Toole, "UN Ambassador Warns against Intervention Fatigue," *Defense One*, November 19, 2014, <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2014/11/un-ambassador-warns-against-intervention-fatigue/99485/>.

stantial are Russia's shadowy engagements? How and where may Russia move from collaborative to disruptive? Numerous uncertainties could be mentioned. Albeit different from the uncertainty surrounding Russian Africa engagements, US engagements are also surrounded by a degree of uncertainty. For example, while Trump announced his intention to withdraw US troops from the Sahel, the US recently created a 'new envoy position to counter rising terrorism in Sahel',<sup>195</sup> and the Pentagon has reinforced its air presence, with private sector operators offered a big extension of their contracts for the supply of airborne services to AFRICOM.<sup>196</sup> Adding to such 'mixed messages' are questions about how close (or not) US 'train and advice' engagements come to actual combat,<sup>197</sup> a question that surfaced in particular following the Niger ambush in October 2017, which resulted in the loss of four members of the US special forces.<sup>198</sup> In short, the presence of various external actors, liberal and non-liberal alike, is besieged by various degrees of uncertainty.

This may entail another risk: Under conditions of considerable uncertainty, an impetus to monitor the moves made by other intervention actors may become a more pronounced motive for staying/engaging in the Sahel. But a desire to 'spy on others'<sup>199</sup> in response to uncertainty – watching the shadowy dimensions, sudden moves, and mixed messages of other interveners – may entail risks of *backgrounding the importance of first and foremost addressing violent conflict dynamics* in the Sahel or elsewhere in one's engagements. For example, addressing conflict dynamics and escalating violence may not easily be resolved with the same means and tools as needed for augmented monitoring. Drones, intelligence units, and the like are increasingly preferred and common intervention contributions. This point was raised in relation to contributions to MI-

---

195. Humeyra Pamuk, "U.S. Creates New Envoy Position to Counter Rising Terrorism in Sahel," *Reuters*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-sahel/u-s-creates-new-envoy-position-to-counter-rising-terrorism-in-sahel-idUSKBN20T2ZJ>.

196. "The Pentagon Reinforces Its Air Presence in Africa as Trump Thinks about Pulling Out His Troops," *Africa Intelligence*, February 14, 2020, [https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa\\_politics/2020/02/14/the-pentagon-reinforces-its-air-presence-in-africa-as-trump-thinks-about-pulling-out-his-troops,108394006-art](https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa_politics/2020/02/14/the-pentagon-reinforces-its-air-presence-in-africa-as-trump-thinks-about-pulling-out-his-troops,108394006-art).

197. Tankel, "US Counterterrorism."

198. Jason Burke and Julian Borger, "US Special Forces 'Fought Niger Ambush Alone after Local Troops Fled,'" *The Guardian*, November 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/04/special-forces-unit-ambushed-in-niger-desperately-called-for-help-sources-say>

199. Anonymous interview, made by the author of this report. January 2020.

NUSMA, with states prioritising 'intelligence' contributions and intelligence collection. And yet reducing spiralling levels of violence cannot be achieved solely via increased intelligence contributions. Although monitoring Russian moves may be important, it is crucial to acknowledge when the kinds of intervention efforts and contributions 'required' to achieve this 'monitoring objective' are not synonymous with those required to address increasing levels of violence in the intervention setting. In many instances, it is highly likely that 'spying' on other intervention actors and safeguarding local populations or helping find lasting political solutions require very different types of engagement (e.g. surveillance drones versus security on the ground). Thus, while 'uncertainty' vis-à-vis the presence of non-liberal actors may reinforce 'spying' objectives, this must not come at the expense of tailoring intervention contributions towards the priority of reducing violence and protecting populations.<sup>200</sup> That said, it is of course not solely because of the uncertain and increased Russian presence in Africa that the US may decide to remain engaged (e.g. in the Sahel). France and other Western as well as regional states have requested that the Americans remain.<sup>201</sup> Here, the important point worth emphasising is the risk of focusing more on 'reducing' the influence of non-allies than on reducing violent conflict in the Sahel region or elsewhere, where spying on Russia may become a not-so-liberal engagement rationale.

#### 4.2. African outlooks and the risk of underestimating the non-liberal appeal

Besides signposting Russian ambitions, the Sochi Summit provided occasion for some African leaders to voice discontent with Western partners. African states are sovereign and free to choose their preferred security partners. For liberal intervention actors, seeing Russia engage in states across Africa begs various questions, including: Why the appeal

---

200. "Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence," *International Crisis Group* (February 24, 2020): <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>

201. Reuters, "France Wants US to Stay in the Sahel," *Defence Web*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/france-wants-us-to-stay-in-the-sahel/>.

of the Russian engagement model? How best to respond to the seeming appeal of Russia's shadowy engagements tools? How to articulate the differences between 'the Russian way' and the liberal intervention approach convincingly, notably concerning the 'added value' of the liberal model? These questions are crucial and arguably confront external actors even more starkly in contexts where intervention is on a so-called 'invitation-only' basis, as in the case of Mali. At the request of Mali's interim government, France deployed Operation Serval in January 2013 to assist Mali in fighting a jihadist occupation of northern Mali, which was expanding southwards.<sup>202</sup> This 'intervention by invitation' scenario characterises Mali as well as numerous other contexts where African states are thus in a different position than in cases where external actors intervene against the will of a government (e.g. with the aim to overthrow a regime). Intervention by invitation implies a different degree of agency on the part of African states, also in choosing their preferred 'security partners'. Indeed, the neglect of African agency is critical in itself. It also entails a risk of not taking seriously the appeal of various aspects of an apparent Russian appeal – and the need to address this. Three aspects of this 'appeal' are outlined below:

### **An anti-colonial appeal**

When selling its services to African leaders, one difference that Russia exploits regarding why they should choose Russian rather than liberal offers is that Russia is not associated with colonialism:<sup>203</sup> '[I]t should not be forgotten that – unlike several Western countries – the perception of Russia in Africa is not tainted with unpleasant memories of colonialism and racial oppression.'<sup>204</sup> There are examples of Russian officials pushing anti-colonial narratives, 'comparing Western policies toward the continent with Russia's willingness to help protect the sovereign right of African states to build their own future.'<sup>205</sup> France, unlike Russia, is viewed as an oppressive power, especially by the populations of Mali, Burkina Faso and the CAR. This is a result of collective memory about the colonial

---

202. Bruno Charbonneau, "Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2017): 415-31.

203. Stronski, "Late to Party".

204. Sukhankin, "Making War Profitable".

205. Stronski, "Late to Party": 6.

past of France.<sup>206</sup> This issue must arguably be reckoned with in a more convincing manner than by neglecting its significance. Put differently, neglecting African views on this issue risks playing to the advantage of Russia. Indeed, at the Russia-Africa summit in Sochi, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov 'underlined the importance of "African decisions" for Africa and Russia's respect for the sovereignty of African states.'<sup>207</sup>

### **A welcomed supplement**

Another element of Russia's seeming appeal is the argument that Russia's presence supplements existing engagements. Various African states see Russia, 'if not as a substitute, as at least a supplement to' liberal interventionism. Liberal and non-liberal intervention actors may not only supplement each other. Adding Russian 'supplements' to a landscape long dominated by liberal engagement actors could have a positive effect for African partners who have more options to choose from, also when 'needs aren't met by liberal intervention actors.'<sup>208</sup> In 2014, for example, the UK and US were allegedly 'slow to respond to Nigeria's request for help', a factor that some say contributed to Nigeria deciding to turn 'to Russia to purchase military hardware to fight Boko Haram and for counter-terrorism training for its special forces.'<sup>209</sup> In addition, Russian 'supplements' to the intervention supply could help diversify African states' 'dependence on the West'. As one interviewee notes, adding '*another option*' to the range of partnerships available to African countries' is not necessarily altogether bad from an African perspective.<sup>210</sup> Russia has exploited this type of narrative to frame its engagements, arguing for example that appeals by CAR 'were ignored by the international community'.<sup>211</sup> CAR 'appealed for help after France ended a three-year peacekeeping mission',<sup>212</sup> an unheeded appeal, to which Russia then responded. However, are all Russian engagements simply a 'supplement' to

---

206. Mašlanka, "France and the Russian Presence."

207. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

208. Andrew Korybko, "Russia's Military Deal with Mali Further Encroaches on France's Influence in West Africa," *Global Research News*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.globalresearch.ca/russias-military-deal-with-mali-further-encroaches-on-frances-influence-in-west-africa/5682443>.

209. Hedenskog, "Russia Stepping up," 36.

210. Fabricius, "Russia with Love."

211. Mike Eckel, "New Scrutiny."

212. Pismennaya and Meyer, "Russia Seeks."

an inadequate liberal intervention supply? When are they not, and what dilemmas emerge in such cases? Taking African viewpoints seriously means engaging with the critique that some needs are not met by liberal intervention actors, as well as other criticism, like that of dependency on Western donors. However, it also means articulating more clearly when Russian engagements can indeed be a welcomed supplement – as well as when this is not the case, and why.

### Appealingly ‘lesser conditionality’

In some instances, Russia might be (opportunistically) ‘supplementing’ the liberal intervention supply,<sup>213</sup> whereas in other instances, Russia is ‘filling gaps’ in a manner that liberal intervention actors have deliberately decided to avoid, i.e. in ways that are not entailed within their intervention ‘supply’. As critics argue, *some* African governments seem keen to cooperate with Russia ‘in suppressing public revolts.’<sup>214</sup> Sources suggest that Wagner mercenaries were ‘involved in suppressing anti-government protests in Sudan’, thus offering to assist ‘the autocratic regime of President Bashir’ in a manner that clashes with values (ideally) characteristic of liberal interventionism.<sup>215</sup> Another example is the seeming appeal of Russia offering to train, for instance, CAR’s ‘special purpose forces,’ without attending to ‘legal norms and human rights standards.’<sup>216</sup> Critics warn that African leaders are well aware that when asking Russia for help, authorities will not insist on adherence to human rights and democratic norms. As noted in a European Parliament Briefing: ‘For many African countries, Russia’s willingness to ignore human rights problems and offer no-strings-attached political and military support makes it a welcome ally.’<sup>217</sup> There are examples of Western conditionality prompting African states to turn to Russia in view of ‘Moscow’s abstention from demands

---

213. In the case of CAR, we saw a “decreased presence of France [...] after the peacekeeping operation *Sangaris* ended in 2016.” Mašlanka, “France and the Russian Presence.”

214. “Wagner PMC mercenaries may be involved in suppressing anti-government protests in Sudan,” *112. International*, January 10, 2019, <https://112.international/russia/wagner-pmc-mercenaries-may-be-involved-in-suppressing-anti-government-protests-in-sudan-35880.html>

215. Jane Flanagan, “Russian Mercenaries Help Put down Sudan Protests,” *The Times*, January 10, 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russian-mercenaries-help-put-down-sudan-protests-vw0gzngq8>.

216. “Moscow is training CAR ‘special purpose forces,’ without integrating them into the EUTM or its UN-based legal norms and human rights standards;” Marten, “Russ-Afrique?”: 3.

217. Russell and Pichon, “Russia in Africa.”



for changes in governance'.<sup>218</sup> As the Obama administration blocked the 'sale of American-made Cobra attack helicopters to Nigeria',<sup>219</sup> the country instead turned to Russia.<sup>220</sup> This illustrates how Russia's influence in Africa is about more than 'gaps' and 'vacuums', should the US decide to withdraw. In important ways, it is also about difficult questions like how to balance insistence on human rights, democracy, and good governance against the risk of Russia becoming a desired alternative in cases where African states wish to side-line such considerations. This has led some to argue that one of Russia's 'strengths on the [African] continent' is that 'Moscow has no scruples about cooperating with governments with poor human rights records, particularly those in the CAR, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi'.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, a key concern voiced by interviewees was the role of Russia vis-à-vis how 'arms supplies for repressive regimes undermine international efforts to promote good governance'.<sup>222</sup>

Accordingly, it is crucial to distinguish between *unintentional gaps* (e.g. due to lack of capacity) – indeed, some gaps are validly filled by Russia<sup>223</sup> – and *deliberate gaps*, which liberal actors have intentionally decided not to fill. This difference is important, since it is first and foremost the appeal of Russia's willingness to fill 'deliberate' gaps that should cause concern. But if the appeal of the Russian model concerns 'intervention supplies' of a nature that cannot even 'be negotiated at the official ministerial level', how can liberal actors respond to African leaders interested in 'inviting in' external partners willing, for example, to help shut down peaceful protests? How can the liberal intervention model find convincing replies in such cases? This is one critical dilemma that current Russian engagements in Africa invite liberal intervention actors to take seriously and to find ways of responding to without compromising lib-

---

218. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

219. 'The Obama administration was so concerned about this record that two years ago it blocked Israel's sale of American-made Cobra attack helicopters to Nigeria and ended American training of Nigerian troops'. "Block the Sale of Warplanes to Nigeria," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/opinion/block-the-sale-of-warplanes-to-nigeria.html>.

220. Stronski, "Late to the Party."

221. Sukhankin, "Hired Guns."

222. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa."

223. As one interviewee notes: 'It's fine if Russia helps train security forces in the Sahel. We can't do this all by ourselves'.

eral values, including democracy and the freedom to protest peacefully. Taking African perspectives seriously means engaging genuinely with the ‘vacuum’ narrative in a different way; namely, with attention not to vacuums caused by non-presence but to vacuums caused by deliberate choices of the liberal intervention approach. How, then, might liberal intervention actors best respond to the appeal of cheaper Russian weapons that, furthermore, ‘are not often held up by human rights concerns cited by other countries like France and the U.S.’?<sup>224</sup> Certainly, it is crucial to address this critical challenge in a manner that does not overlook the need also to revisit aspects of the ‘liberal’ intervention model.

### 4.3. Overemphasising a non-liberal outside: failing to look inwards, failing to address missteps

Russia’s presence must not be overstated and African viewpoints not overlooked, but a third risk to avoid is that accentuating a ‘non-liberal outside’ could inhibit asking critical questions about liberal intervention. In contrast to the vacuum-narrative (explaining Russian ‘inroads’ with reference to US withdrawal), another framing highlights how ‘Europe’s and the US’ missteps on the continent’ have contributed to making African states more ‘receptive partners’ to Russian rapprochements and appeals.<sup>225</sup> This explanation implies that when responding to Russia’s presence, liberal actors must also look inwards, reflect on missteps, and on how to do things differently, notably those ‘steps’ that may inadvertently have buttressed Russia’s appeal. Crucially, this is different from responding to a growing Russian presence in Africa ‘simply’ by adding more of the same (e.g. more military troops, more weapons sales).<sup>226</sup> One set of missteps concerns the neglect of African viewpoints and agency. For example, the threat perceptions of liberal interveners may differ from those of African states, and so too may *security priorities* (e.g. migration as a European priority versus local inter-ethnic (Fulani/

---

224. Jidefor Adibe, “What Does Russia Really Want from Africa?” *Brookings*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/11/14/what-does-russia-really-want-from-africa/>.

225. Stronski, “Late to the Party.”

226. Maslanka, “France and the Russian Presence.”

Dogon) conflicts 'killing dozens of people' in Mali).<sup>227</sup> A critical misstep is to assume that the security priorities of Western interveners necessarily align with those of local actors. Instead, it is crucial to address and discuss possible divergences in threat perceptions and resulting differences in terms of which security issues it is deemed most pressing to address rather than mistakenly assuming such differences away; indeed, doing so may open additional doors to Russian offers and 'appeals'.<sup>228</sup>

Another set of missteps stems from *not addressing 'double standards'*. As *The Guardian* recently revealed, the Australian government 'issued 16 permits to arms manufacturers to export weapons or military technology to Mali in 2019',<sup>229</sup> despite the UN and the ICG warning of escalating violence and an 'unprecedented' catastrophe for civilians.<sup>230</sup> Similarly, the independent UN human rights expert in Mali has 'called on Australia to cease selling arms to the war-torn country', urging the international community to do more to stop Australia and other nations from 'actively producing and selling weapons' in conflict zones.<sup>231</sup> In short, not only Russia but also 'liberal' states engage in arms sales that risk exacerbating rather than deescalating violent conflict. In such cases, a degree of double standard arguably exists when asking Russia for more detail on its weapons supplies to CAR, while other states are exporting weapons on a large scale to conflict-ridden countries in the Sahel. Another double standard concerns adherence to human rights, for example by the Sahelian military forces that have received training from 'liberal' intervention actors. Adding to accusations of 'ineffectiveness' of 'French troops in the Sa-

---

227. Amanda Thomas-Johnson, "What's behind Mali Massacre and How to Stop Escalating Violence," *Al Jazeera*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/mali-massacre-escalating-violence-190613133110169.html>.

228. As has also been noted elsewhere; e.g. vis-à-vis maritime security and differences, for example between 'Western' piracy priorities and 'local' IUU priorities. Katja Jacobsen, "Maritime Security and Capacity Building in the Gulf of Guinea: On Comprehensiveness, Gaps, and Security Priorities," *African Security Review* 26, no. 3 (2017): 237-56; Katja Jacobsen and Julie Hoy-Carrasco, "Navigating Changing Currents: A Forward-Looking Evaluation of Efforts to Tackle Maritime Crime off the Horn of Africa," *Centre for Military Studies*, 2018.

229. Christopher Knaus and Ben Doherty, "Crime against Humanity: UN Expert Calls on Australia to Stop Selling Weapons to War-Torn Mali," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/12/against-humanity-un-expert-calls-on-australia-to-stop-selling-weapons-to-war-torn-mali>.

230. *Ibid.*

231. *Ibid.*

hel<sup>232</sup> are allegations of human rights violations committed by Sahelian forces trained by liberal interveners. Human Rights Watch, for example, argues that ‘security forces in Burkina Faso had summarily executed 31 unarmed detainees earlier this month’ (April 2020), thus not adhering to liberal standards (e.g. human rights, rule of law). Such instances invite scepticism about the commitment to the rule of law and human rights by liberal actors working with these security forces. An important difficulty in this respect is that trainers and instructors cannot be held accountable for the behaviour of troops they train, certainly, if they do not accompany these troops in the field. But if they do, for example in cases of direct counterterrorism, this risks blurring ‘the line between direct and indirect interventions.’<sup>233</sup> Accentuating the significance of this incident, Human Rights Watch stresses that ‘[t]his is hardly an isolated incident.’<sup>234</sup> Moreover, observers also point out the risks of *overlooking deteriorating democratic standards*, highlighting for example how ‘liberal’ intervention actors failed to address regressive developments in Niger, like the 2016-elections, which were ‘marred by scandals, including flawed voter registration lists and the imprisonment of the chief opposition candidate.’<sup>235</sup> Obviously, this is not the same as explicitly supporting authoritarian leaders or a clampdown on public protests. Yet there is a need to look inwards to avoid double standards in this area, too.<sup>236</sup> In short, criticising a ‘non-liberal outside’ should not get in the way of considering the degree to which charges of double standards may reflect missteps by liberal actors that need to be addressed instead of ‘assumed away’ (which is not to say that all allegations are necessarily ‘true’).

---

232. At hearings in France, Malian officials claimed that French Special Forces had conducted themselves appallingly in the streets of Bamako.

233. Tankel, “US Counterterrorism.”

234. Sam Mednick, “Report Says Burkina Faso Forces Killed 31 Unarmed Men,” *ABC News*, April 20, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/report-burkina-faso-forces-killed-31-unarmed-men-70247837>.

235. Wilèn, “Belgian Special Forces?”

236. *Ibid.*

#### 4.4. Stronger winds against UN intervention?

Finally, zooming further out, moving beyond CAR and the Sahel region and considering the implications for the UN following from growing Russian-Africa engagements. On the one hand, there is more attention to conflict and more states contributing. Yet at the same time there is a crucial risk to which liberal intervention actors must pay attention: Russia has a fundamentally different perspective on the very idea of intervention, placing far greater emphasis on 'internal matters', placing human rights violations and dubious elections into that category; that is, as falling outside the realm of 'legitimate' UN intervention. Arguably, Russia's Africa endeavours are driven in part by a wish for 'more allies in multilateral formats' (as a 'driver of Russian foreign policy' more generally).<sup>237</sup> In the UN, having more African allies – for example, among states where leaders are keen to stay in power, possibly without transparent election processes – Russia having more African allies could potentially mean that winds may be turning against UN 'intervention' in favour of labelling election fraud, human rights abuses, etc as 'internal affairs'. This is already the case and, as such, it offers an example of a key challenge confronting (limiting) liberal interventionism. Furthermore, this is of importance since the UN could be a framework within which to keep, and possibly further formalise, Russia's Africa engagements. This fundamental issue comes in addition to the three key dilemmas outlined above in response to the question of what the analysis presented in this report (chapters 3 and 4) implies for 'liberal' intervention actors in Africa. This is by no means an exclusive list, but rather meant to suggest that the presence of non-liberal intervention actors entails an invitation for liberal interveners to carefully identify and address, rather than disregard, various missteps.

---

237. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

# 5

## Recommendations

A nuanced appreciation of Russia's multifaceted Africa engagements enables more tailored responses, thus avoiding 'liberal' interveners rushing to a 'more of the same' response by adding more troops, more bases, more weapons, etc and replaces broad-brushed critique and one-dimensional 'rivalry' framings, with the possibility of addressing specific dimensions of Russia's military presence in Africa.<sup>238</sup> Accordingly, this report makes the following recommendations.

### 5.1. Recommendations vis-à-vis Russia derived from the case of CAR and from this report's categorisations

- *Seek ways to formalise and responsabilise Russia's disruptive and/or shadowy engagements* wherever possible, e.g. in view of bringing disruptive Russian negotiation efforts in CAR under AU-auspices.<sup>239</sup> The report recommends seeking options for bringing disruptive elements of Russia's endeavours under formal frameworks, *such as via African actors* (like the AU). Formalising Russian weapons deliveries might also help address a discrepancy: Liberal interveners implicitly

---

238. For example, France regarding Russia's disinformation campaigns in CAR.

239. Russell and Pichon, "Russia in Africa." Moreover, 'in its October 2018 conclusions, the Council implicitly expressed its concerns about the risk of Russia-backed talks in the Central African Republic undermining the African Union's peace process, calling on "all international actors, especially those engaged in the CAR, to support exclusively the action of the government and the African Initiative, in a properly coordinated and fully transparent manner".'

benefitting from Russia arming troops trained by EUTM, while criticising Russian arms sales in Africa.<sup>240</sup>

- *Take care not to overstate* Russia's current Africa presence. That said, the report also recommends taking measures to avoid the escalation of shadowy engagements, including the risk of a replay of the Syria scenario, where Wagner mercenaries opened fire on US troops and suffered great losses (February 2018).
- *Addressing divergence and tension where Russian engagements conflict with liberal priorities* (notably on human rights and democracy) and doing so in ways that do not amount to liberal interveners adding more of the same (e.g. sending more troops to Africa to counter the Russian presence).
- *Dialogue and diplomatic commitments* are key to avoiding conflict and tension where liberal and Russian approaches differ. As others also note, Russian engagements in CAR highlight the importance of 'continuing dialogue with Moscow',<sup>241</sup> illustrated in this report through the case of France's 'demanding dialogue' with Russia, partly over Russian tools of disinformation in CAR.

## 5.2. Recommendations vis-à-vis African actors and intervention contexts

- African security priorities were always crucially important yet often neglected in 'liberal' engagements. This report recommends seeing the extent to which 'Russia in Africa' accentuates this point, as *an occasion to take African views and concerns more seriously*, instead of implicitly assuming away differences in threat perceptions. For countries in the Sahel, curbing migration, for example, is not a key priority in the same way that it is for European intervention actors. Addressing such differences is important in itself and could also help reduce the appeal of the Russian intervention model vis-à-vis the liberal approach.

---

240. Arkhangelskaya, "Russia – Africa."

241. 'At the same time, however, such dialogue requires transparency and trust in order to succeed' Alex Vines, "Values vs Interests: EU and Russian Competition in Africa," EUREN Brief no. 15, January 2020, <http://eu-russia-expertnetwork.eu/en/analytics/euren-brief-15>.

- Find ways of *highlighting the appeal and benefits of the liberal model*, e.g. by emphasising how liberal engagements are commonly not just military but often accompanied by, for example, considerable amounts of development and humanitarian aid.<sup>242</sup> Russian aid is comparatively minor. Another suggestion is to find ways of thoughtfully making visible how Russian engagements come with conditions, e.g. related to demands that mining companies be granted privileged access, which, among other things, could have potentially detrimental, long-term economic implications for African ‘host’ countries.
- This report recommends finding ways of thoughtfully *bringing to light cases where Russia’s Africa engagements a) have ‘failed’ (e.g. Mozambique) and/or b) have disruptive effects vis-à-vis stability*; for example, exposing cases where selling weapons to both sides in a conflict risks increasing rather than reducing the threat of or intensity of violent conflict. Another example is to expose the negative consequences of mercenaries (e.g. for levels of corruption and organised crime in African states).<sup>243</sup> Supporting institutions like the UN to publicise reports exposing the presence of Russian mercenaries could challenge current levels of deniability.

### 5.3. Recommendations vis-à-vis liberal intervention actors

- Considering Russia’s use of tools of disinformation in Africa and how interviewees representing liberal interveners repeatedly referred to questions about *their* use of cyber-intervention tools as ‘classified’, *this report recommends that liberal intervention actors initiate a debate about the principles for how liberal interveners use cyber means in intervention efforts*.
- Considering the continued relevance of attending to tensions and shortcomings within the liberal intervention paradigm, this report cautions against allowing a focus on Russia to marginalise the importance of debating such shortcomings. For example, considering tensions between liberal intervention motives and other intervention

---

242. Mašlanka, “France and the Russian Presence.”

243. Stronski, “Late to the Party.”



effects (e.g. vis-à-vis desired allies), *this report recommends avoiding that monitoring and/or alliance-making takes precedence over liberal objectives and the importance of making a positive difference locally vis-à-vis violent conflict and instability.*

- Acknowledge that *when choosing intervention partners, this is also a choice between different views on and ways of responding to 'Russia in Africa'*; where UN frameworks entail greater potential for collaboration while US approaches currently lean more towards accentuation of rivalry (*and* a reduced role for the UN). In short, this report recommends paying careful attention to how intervention contributions are also about divergent views on Russia in Africa.
- Considering how Russia stalemated UN efforts to inspect DRC's disputed election results, and warned against intervening in Sudan's 'internal affairs', the report recommends *attending to effects of Russian Africa endeavours much beyond the Sabel*, notably in the UNSC, with potentially important implications for the future of UN interventions. Be cautious of Russian endeavours in Africa spilling over into the UNSC in ways that favour 'anti'-liberal interpretations of what counts as 'internal affairs', including the risk of this preventing the UN from intervening in cases involving human rights abuses or violently undemocratic developments.

# Bibliography

- Adibe, Jidefor. "What Does Russia Really Want from Africa?" *Brookings*, November 14, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/11/14/what-does-russiareally-want-from-africa/>.
- AFP. "UN Gives Green Light on Russia Arms to C Africa." *News24*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/un-gives-green-light-on-russia-arms-to-c-africa-20171216>.
- AFP. "US, Britain, France Seek Details on Russian Arms to CAR." *Daily Nation*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/US-Britain-France-seek-details-on-Russian-guns-to-CAR/1066-4227744-3chuis/index.html>.
- Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "Russian Disinformation Campaigns Target Africa: An Interview with Dr. Shelby Grossman." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/russian-disinformation-campaigns-target-africa-interview-shelby-grossman/>.
- Africa Intelligence. "Moscow Muscles in as Protector of Oil Firms in Cabo Delgado." *Africa Intelligence*. Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.africaintelligence.com/oil--gas\\_state-strategy/2020/03/09/moscow-muscles-in-as-protector-of-oil-firms-in-cabo-delgado,108396988-ge0](https://www.africaintelligence.com/oil--gas_state-strategy/2020/03/09/moscow-muscles-in-as-protector-of-oil-firms-in-cabo-delgado,108396988-ge0).
- Africa Intelligence. "Tensions sky-high between Washington and Paris over MINUSMA" *Africa Intelligence*, May 12, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-and-west-africa\\_diplomacy/2020/05/12/tensions-sky-high-betweenwashington-and-paris-over-minusma%2C108405105-eve?utm\\_source=AIA&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=AUTO\\_EDIT\\_SOM&did=108393983&cid=514302](https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-and-west-africa_diplomacy/2020/05/12/tensions-sky-high-betweenwashington-and-paris-over-minusma%2C108405105-eve?utm_source=AIA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=AUTO_EDIT_SOM&did=108393983&cid=514302).
- Africa Intelligence. "The Pentagon Reinforces Its Air Presence in Africa as Trump Thinks about Pulling Out His Troops." Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa\\_politics/2020/02/14/the-pentagon-reinforces-its-air-presence-in-africa-as-trump-thinks-about-pulling-out-his-troops,108394006-art](https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa_politics/2020/02/14/the-pentagon-reinforces-its-air-presence-in-africa-as-trump-thinks-about-pulling-out-his-troops,108394006-art).
- African Military Blog. "South African Mercenaries 'DAG' Loses Another Aircraft in Mozambique," *African Military Blog*, June 20, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2020/06/south-african-mercenaries-dag-loses-another-aircraft-in-mozambique?v=65d8f7baa677>.

- African Union. "Peace and Security Council. 826th Meeting." *Adopted Decision at Addis Ababa*, February 9, 2019.
- Alba, Davey and Sheera Frenkel. "Russia Tests New Disinformation Tactics in Africa to Expand Influence." *The New York Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/30/technology/russia-facebook-disinformation-africa.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.
- Arkhangel'skaya, Alexandra A. "Russia–Africa: Dilemmas and Opportunities for the EU." *EUREN Brief*, no. 14, January 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. [http://188.127.251.150/wp-content/euinrussiapdf/EUREN\\_Brief\\_14\\_Arkhangel'skaya.pdf](http://188.127.251.150/wp-content/euinrussiapdf/EUREN_Brief_14_Arkhangel'skaya.pdf).
- Beaumont, Peter. "Russia's Scramble for Influence in Africa Catches Western Officials off-Guard." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/11/russias-scramble-for-influence-in-africa-catches-western-officials-off-guard>.
- Bershidsky, Leonid. "Death, Diamonds and Russia's Africa Project." *Bloomberg*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-08-04/russia-in-africa-death-diamonds-and-intrigue>.
- Brown, Will. "The Key Actors Battling for Control of the Sahel." *The Telegraph*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/terrorism-and-security/key-actors-battling-control-sahel/>.
- Burke, Jason and Julian Borger. "US Special Forces 'Fought Niger Ambush Alone after Local Troops Flew.'" *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/04/special-forces-unit-ambushed-in-niger-desperately-called-for-help-sources-say>.
- Calzoni, Francesco. "What Russia Wants from the Central African Republic." *Fair Observer*. Accessed March 30, 2020. <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/africa/russian-interests-central-african-republic-military-presence-wagner-natural-resources-news-71652/>.
- Carroll, Oliver. "Russian Journalists' Murder in Central African Republic Was a 'Pre-planned Assassination,' Say Private Investigators." *Independent*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-journalists-murder-africa-car-wagner-private-armies-a8494726.html>.
- Chandler, David. "The Responsibility to Protect? Imposing the 'Liberal Peace,'" *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 1 (2004): 59-81. <https://doi.org/info:doi/10.1080/1353331042000228454>.
- Charbonneau, Bruno. "Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2017): 415-31.
- Childs, Nick. "One Decade, Two Continents: A Discussion with the Commander of US Naval Forces Europe–Africa." *IISS webinar*, June 15 2020.
- Cold-Ravnkilde, Signe Marie and Katja Lindskov Jacobsen. "Disentangling the Security Traffic Jam in the Sahel: Constitutive Effects of Contemporary Interventionism," *International Affairs* 96, no. 4 (July 2020): 855-74. <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/96/4/855/5866446>.

- Cooper, Neil. "Review Article: On the Crisis of the Liberal Peace," *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 4 (2007): 605-16
- Correll, Diana Stancy. "How AFRICOM Plans to Counter Russian, Chinese Influence in Africa." *Military Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/01/20/how-africom-plans-to-counter-russian-chinese-influence-in-africa/>.
- Culliford, Elizabeth. "Facebook, Twitter Remove Russia-Linked Accounts in Ghana Targeting U.S." *Reuters*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-content/facebook-twitter-remove-russia-linked-accounts-in-ghana-targeting-u-s-idUSKBN20Z3LW>.
- Dabanga. "Russia Confirms Security Companies Training Sudanese Army," *Dabanga*, January 25, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/russia-confirms-security-companies-training-sudanese-army>.
- Dahlqvist, Nils. "Russia's (Not So) Private Military Companies," FOI Memo 6653 RUFBS Briefing 44, Project No. A19101, January, 2019.
- De Marie Heungoup, Hans and Julie David de Lossy. "In Search of the State in the Central African Republic." *The International Crisis Group*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/search-state-central-african-republic>.
- Defence Web. "US Military Loses MQ-1C UAV in Niger." *Defence Web*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/unmanned-aerial-vehicles/us-military-loses-mq-1c-uav-in-niger/>.
- Dettmeier, Jamie. "Guns, Mercenaries, Minerals: Russia Embraces Africa." *Voice of America News*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/europe/guns-mercenaries-minerals-russia-embraces-africa>.
- Devermont, Judd. "Russian Theater: How to Respond to Moscow's Return to the African Stage." *Lawfare*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/russian-theater-how-respond-moscows-return-african-stage>.
- Dossier Center. "Final Report on the Murder of Orkhan Dzhemal, Aleksandr Rastorguev and Kirill Radchenko in the Central African Republic." Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://dossier.center/car-en/>.
- Durand-Ochoa, Ursula. "Emerging Powers in Africa," *LSE Special Reports*, June 2013. Accessed August 28, 2020. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-Emerging-Powers-in-Africa.pdf>.
- Eckel, Mike. "New Scrutiny for 'Putin's Chef' and Russian Mercenaries in Africa." *Radio Free Europe*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/a-state-tv-slip-up-u-s-sanctions-a-french-children-s-video-new-scrutiny-for-putin-s-chef-and-russian-mercenaries-in-africa/30193717.html>.
- Eguegu, Ovigwe. "US Threat to Withdraw From African Security Efforts Leaves Sahel Vulnerable." *The African Report*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theafricareport.com/21860/us-threat-to-withdraw-from-african-security-efforts-leaves-sahel-vulnerable/>.

- Elabdi, Florian. "Putin's Man in the Central African Republic: Is Valery Zakharov at the Heart of Russian Skulduggery?" December 17, 2018. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/putins-man-in-the-central-african-republic-is-valeryzakharov-at-the-heart-of-russian-skulduggery>.
- European Parliament. Briefing, "The EU and Russia Locked into confrontation," EPRS | *European Parliamentary Research Service*, by Martin Russell Members' Research Service, PE 652.030, July 2020, 12.
- Fabricius, Peter. "From Russia with Love – or Perhaps Not?" *Institute for Security Studies*, October 4, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/from-russia-with-love-or-perhaps-not>.
- Flanagan, Jane. "Russian Mercenaries Help Put down Sudan Protests." *The Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russian-mercenaries-help-put-down-sudan-protests-vw0gzngq8>.
- Foy, Henry. "Russia Turns on the Charm at First Africa Summit," *Financial Times*, October 24, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/b042bd8e-f648-11e9-9ef3-eca8fc8f2d65>.
- France 24. "US Mulls Troop Cuts in Africa as Strategy Switches to 'Containing Extremists.'" *France 24*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.france24.com/en/20200213-us-mulls-troop-cuts-in-africa-as-strategy-switches-to-contain-extremists>.
- Goldberg. "Niger Receives 13 Armored Vehicles as Part of US Donation to Aid Counterterrorism in the Sahel." *Strategic Intelligence*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://intelligencebriefs.com/niger-receives-13-armored-vehicles-as-part-of-us-donation-to-aid-counterterrorism-in-the-sahel/>.
- Graubart, Jonathan. "R2P and Pragmatic Liberal Interventionism: Values in the Service of Interests," *HumanRights Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2013): 69-90. [www.jstor.org/stable/23352252](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23352252).
- Græger, Nina. "From 'Forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'? Small State Military Status Seeking," in Benjamin de Cavalho and Iver B. Neumann, eds., *Small State Status Seeking* (London: Routledge, 2014), 102–23.
- Hansen, Andrew. "The French Military in Africa." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/french-military-africa>.
- Harding, Luke and Jason Burke. "Leaked Documents Reveal Russian Effort to Exert Influence in Africa." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/leaked-documents-reveal-russian-effort-to-exert-influence-in-africa>.
- Hayward, John. "Nigeria Signs Military Cooperation Pact with Russia," *Breitbart News*, October 24, 2019
- Hedenskog, Jakob. "Russia Stepping Up," in *Foreign Military Bases and Installations in Africa*, ed. Karolina Gasinska. Report no. FOI-R--4658--SE (2019).
- Hedenskog, Jakob. "Russia Is Stepping up Its Military Cooperation in Africa," FOI Memo 6604, December 2018.

- International Crisis Group. "Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence," *International Crisis Group* (February 24, 2020). Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>
- International Crisis Group. "Central African Republic: Getting From Talks to Peace." *International Crisis Group*. Commentary / Africa, 28 January 2019.
- International Crisis Group. "Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick." *International Crisis Group*, Africa Report No. 277. June 18, 2019.
- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov. "Liberal Interventionism: The Crisis Within," *Centre for International Policy Studies*, CIPS, July 9, 2017. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.cips-cepi.ca/2017/07/09/liberal-interventionism-the-crisis-within/>
- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov. "Maritime Security and Capacity Building in the Gulf of Guinea: On Comprehensiveness, Gaps, and Security Priorities," *African Security Review* 26, no. 3 (2017): 237-56.
- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov and Julie Høy-Carrasco. "Navigating Changing Currents: A Forward-Looking Evaluation of Efforts to Tackle Maritime Crime off the Horn of Africa," *Centre for Military Studies*, 2018.
- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov and Troels Gauslå Engell. "Conflict Prevention as Pragmatic Response to a Twofold Crisis: Liberal Interventionism and Burundi." *International Affairs* 94, no. 2 (July 2020).
- Johnson, Adam. "To Ramp up Fear of Russia in Africa, NYT Downplays Massive US Military Presence on Continent," *Fair*, April 4, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://fair.org/home/to-ramp-up-fear-ofrussia-in-africa-nyt-downplays-massive-us-military-presence-on-continent/>.
- Joshi, Madhav, Sung Yong Lee, and Roger Mac Ginty. "Just How Liberal Is the Liberal Peace?" *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3 (2014): 364-89.
- Kelly, Fergus. "Central African Republic Arms Embargo Eased by UN." *The Defense Post*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/09/13/central-african-republic-arms-embargo-un/>.
- Kelly, Fergus. "Mali: Estonia Troops to Begin Operations in Gao." *The Defense Post*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2018/08/21/estonia-troops-begin-operations-mali/>.
- Kenyette, Patrick. "South African Mercenary's Gazelle Helicopter Shot down in Mozambique," *African Military Blog*, April 10, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2020/04/south-african-mercenarys-gazelle-helicopter-shot-down-in-mozambique?v=65d8f7baa677>
- Knaus, Christopher and Ben Doherty. "'Crime Against Humanity': UN Expert Calls on Australia to Stop Selling Weapons to War-Torn Mali." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/12/against-humanity-un-expert-calls-on-australia-to-stop-selling-weapons-to-war-torn-mali>.

- Knaus, Christopher and Ben Doherty. "Australia Sold Weapons to Mali as UN Warned Violence Creating Humanitarian Disaster." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/mar/11/australia-sold-weapons-to-mali-as-un-warned-violence-creating-humanitarian-disaster>.
- Korybko, Andrew. "Russia's Military Deal with Mali Further Encroaches on France's Influence in West Africa." *Global Research News*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/russias-military-deal-with-mali-further-encroaches-on-frances-influence-in-west-africa/5682443>.
- Landry, Carole. "C. Africa Rebels Rearm After Military Gets Russia Weapons: UN Panel." *Yahoo! News*. Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://news.yahoo.com/c-africa-rebels-rearm-military-gets-russia-weapons-192012145.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS91cmw\\_c2E9dCZyY3Q9aiZxPSZlc3JjPXMmc291cmNlPXdIYiZjZD0mdmVhPTJhaFVLRXdqNV8tcUI3clByQWWhYRy1pb0tIWUY2Q1IwUUZqQUFIZ1FJQVJBQjZlcmw9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZuZXZxLnIhaG9vLmNvbSUYRmMtYWZyaWNhLXJlYmVscy1yZWYybS1taWxpdGFyeS1nZXRxLXJlc3NpYS13ZWFWb25zLTE5MjAxMjE0NS5odG1sJnVzZz1BT3ZWYXcxbmRXMk9vQVNjY0VJeDZ2QS1ZCzHVj&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAFHNbhro0juCO3nlGFsxx-RdT4yf2DmWY3USC4jVhWzfpO\\_4KjhHhZhWtuPh2xGnFVHtHfqvjC\\_o346ZCmC6aOmDeCobYW0y\\_sZX1LuE9Utmf\\_YRiX3Ukko3ZGwIEbolW\\_k1VSlkLpktfLwDZvQjEL-d87U9S1Tg73TYUXELMVU](https://news.yahoo.com/c-africa-rebels-rearm-military-gets-russia-weapons-192012145.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS91cmw_c2E9dCZyY3Q9aiZxPSZlc3JjPXMmc291cmNlPXdIYiZjZD0mdmVhPTJhaFVLRXdqNV8tcUI3clByQWWhYRy1pb0tIWUY2Q1IwUUZqQUFIZ1FJQVJBQjZlcmw9aHR0cHMlM0ElMkYlMkZuZXZxLnIhaG9vLmNvbSUYRmMtYWZyaWNhLXJlYmVscy1yZWYybS1taWxpdGFyeS1nZXRxLXJlc3NpYS13ZWFWb25zLTE5MjAxMjE0NS5odG1sJnVzZz1BT3ZWYXcxbmRXMk9vQVNjY0VJeDZ2QS1ZCzHVj&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAFHNbhro0juCO3nlGFsxx-RdT4yf2DmWY3USC4jVhWzfpO_4KjhHhZhWtuPh2xGnFVHtHfqvjC_o346ZCmC6aOmDeCobYW0y_sZX1LuE9Utmf_YRiX3Ukko3ZGwIEbolW_k1VSlkLpktfLwDZvQjEL-d87U9S1Tg73TYUXELMVU).
- Lister, Tim, Sam Kiley, and Sebastian Shukla. "Russia Raises Stakes With 'Brazen' Military Intervention in Libyan Conflict." *CNN*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/09/world/russia-libya-military-intervention-intl/index.html>.
- Lister, Tim and Sebastian Shukla. "Russian Mercenaries Fight Shadowy Battle in Gas-Rich Mozambique," *CNN*, November 29, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/29/africa/russian-mercenaries-mozambique-intl/index.html>.
- Marten, Kimberly. "Russ-Afrique? Russia, France, and The Central African Republic." *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* no. 608 (August 2019). Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/PePm608\\_Marten\\_Aug2019.pdf](https://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/PePm608_Marten_Aug2019.pdf).
- Maślanka, Łukasz. "France and the Russian Presence in Africa." *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 47, no. 1477 (2020).
- Maynes, Charles. "Mystery Surrounds Case of Russian Journalists Slain in Africa." *Voice of America*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/mystery-surrounds-case-russian-journalists-slain-africa>.
- Mednick, Sam. "Report Says Burkina Faso Forces Killed 31 Unarmed Men," *ABC News*, April 20, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/report-burkina-fasoforces-killed-31-unarmed-men-70247837>.



- Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. "Russia and Mali Sign an Agreement on Military Cooperation." June 25, 2019. New Release. Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12238363@egNews](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12238363@egNews).
- Minney, Leslie, Rachel Sullivan, and Rachel Vandenbrink. "Amid Central African Republic's Search for Peace, Russia Steps in. Is China Next?" *United States Institute of Peace*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/12/amid-central-african-republics-search-peace-russia-steps-china-next>.
- Moe, Louise Wiuff and Finn Stepputat. "Introduction: Peacebuilding in an Era of Pragmatism," *International Affairs*, 94, no. 2 (2018): 293–99. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy035>.
- MSN Nyheter. "Sverige inte med när ny insats inleds i Mali." *Microsoft News*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.msn.com/sv-se/nyheter/inrikes/sverige-inte-med-n%C3%A4r-ny-insats-inleds-i-mali/ar-BB16LaTK>.
- Narayanan, Shankara. "The Mercenaries behind Russian Operations in Africa," *The Jamestown Foundation*, November 15, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/the-mercenaries-behind-russian-operations-in-africa/>.
- National Security Council. "Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the The Trump Administration's New Africa Strategy." *The White House*. December 13, 2018.
- OCCRP. "The Global Footprints of 'Putin's Chef'." *The Moscow Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/18/putin-chefs-global-footprints-a68663>.
- O'Toole, Molly. "UN Ambassador Warns against Intervention Fatigue," *Defense One*, November 19, 2014. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2014/11/un-ambassador-warns-against-intervention-fatigue/99485/>.
- Pamuk, Humeyra. "U.S. Creates New Envoy Position to Counter Rising Terrorism in Sahel." *Reuters*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-sahel/u-s-creates-new-envoy-position-to-counter-rising-terrorism-in-sahel-idUSKBN20T2ZJ>.
- Paris, Roland. "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 337–65.
- Pismennaya, Evgenia and Henry Meyer. "Russia Seeks to Lift Ban on 'Blood Diamonds' From African Ally." *Bloomberg*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-15/russia-seeks-to-lift-ban-on-blood-diamonds-from-african-ally>.
- Plichta, Marcel. "Russia Is Back In Africa — and Making Some Very Odd Deals," *Defense One*, May 22, 2018. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/05/russia-back-africa-andmaking-some-very-odd-deals/148371/>.



- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty . “Russia Signs Military Cooperation Deal With Central African Republic,” August 22, 2018, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-signs-militarycooperation-deal-central-african-republic-vagner-investigation-russian-reporters-killed/29446656.html>.
- Reuters. “France Wants US to Stay in the Sahel.” *Defence Web*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/france-wants-us-to-stay-in-the-sahel/>.
- Reuters. “CAR Considering Russian Military Base.” *Defence Web*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/car-considering-russian-military-base/>.
- Reynolds, Nathaniel. “Putin’s Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group.” *Carnegie*, July 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/07/08/putin-s-not-so-secret-mercenaries-patronage-geopolitics-and-wagner-group-pub-79442>.
- Ross, Aaron. “How Russia Moved into Central Africa.” *Reuters*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-insight/how-russia-moved-into-central-africa-idUSKCN1MR0KA>.
- Roth, Andrew. “‘There’s No One to Help’: Russian Mercenary Industry’s Toll on Families.” *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/russia-drive-into-africa-shines-light-on-mercenary-industry>.
- Roth, Andrew. “Central African Republic Considers Hosting Russian Military Base.” *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/car-considering-russian-military-base/>.
- Roth, Andrew. “Russian Journalists Killed in CAR ‘Were Researching Military Firm.’” *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/01/russian-journalists-killed-central-african-republic-investigating-military-firm-kremlin-links>.
- Rubin, Michael. “The US Needs to Recognize Somaliland before Russia Does,” *Washington Examiner*, August 22, 2018. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.aei.org/articles/the-us-needs-to-recognize-somaliland-before-russia-does/>.
- Russell, Martin and Eric Pichon. “Russia in Africa: A New Area for Geopolitical Competition.” *European Parliamentary Research Service*. Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642283/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)642283\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642283/EPRS_BRI(2019)642283_EN.pdf).
- Russell, Martin and Eric Pichon. “Russia in Africa: Inside a Military Training Centre in CAR,” *Al Jazeera*, April 14, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2019/04/russia-africa-military-training-centre-car-190411152658162.html>.
- Schmitt, Eric. “Russia’s Military Mission Creep Advances to a New Front: Africa.” *The New York Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/31/world/africa/russia-military-africa.html>.

- Schmitt, Olivier. "How to Challenge an International Order: Russian Diplomatic Practices in Multilateral Security Organisations," *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2019).
- Schreck, Carl. "What Are Russian Military Contractors Doing in the Central African Republic?" *Radio Liberty*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-what-russian-military-contractors-are-doing-in-central-african-republic/29405290.html>.
- Scorpio. "Russia's Shadow Presence in Africa: Wagner Group Mercenaries in at Least 20 Countries Aim to turn Continent into Strategic Hub," *Daily Maverick*, November 15, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-15-russias-shadow-presence-in-africa-wagner-group-mercenaries-in-at-least-20-countries-aim-to-turn-continent-into-strategic-hub/>.
- Stanford Internet Observatory. "Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa." *Stanford, Cyber Policy Center* (October 30, 2019). Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/prigozhin-africa>.
- Statement by Mr. Dmitry Polyanskiy, First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the Security Council on the situation in Mali (October 19, 2018). Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://russiaun.ru/en/news/mali191018>.
- Stronski, Paul. "Implausible Deniability: Russia's Private Military Companies," *Carnegie Endowment*, Commentary, June 02, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/02/implausible-deniability-russia-s-private-military-companies-pub-81954>.
- Stronski, Paul. "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October 16, 2019). Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>.
- Stubbs, Jack and Joseph Menn. "Facebook Says It Suspends Accounts Tied to Putin Ally for Meddling in Africa." *Reuters*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-accounts-russia/facebook-says-it-suspends-accounts-tied-to-putin-ally-for-meddling-in-africa-idUSKB-N1X91Q0>.
- Sukhankin, Sergey. "Making War Profitable Again." *International Centre for Defence and Security* (August 17, 2018). Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://icds.ce/en/making-war-profitable-again-pmcs-as-russias-key-to-africa/>.
- Sukhankin, Sergey. "Russian Mercenaries Pour into Africa and Suffer More Losses (Part One)," *The Jamestown Foundation*, January 21, 2020. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-mercenaries-pour-into-africa-and-suffer-more-losses-part-one/>.
- Sukhankin, Sergey. "Russia's Hired Guns in Africa." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, November 12, 2018). Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_russias\\_hired\\_guns\\_in\\_africa](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_hired_guns_in_africa).

- Sukhankin, Sergey. "Russia's New PMC Patriot: The Kremlin's Bid for a Greater Role in Africa?" *Deutsches Asienforschungszentrum*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.dafz.org/regional-affairs/africa/russias-pmc-patriot/>.
- Sukhankin, Sergey. "The 'Hybrid' Role of Russian Mercenaries, PMCs and Irregulars in Moscow's Scramble for Africa." *The Jamestown Foundation*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/the-hybrid-role-of-russian-mercenaries-pmcs-and-irregulars-in-moscows-scramble-for-africa/>.
- Tankel, Stephen. "US Counterterrorism in the Sahel: From Indirect to Direct Intervention." *International Affairs* 96, no. 4 (July 2020).
- The Guardian. "Russian Journalists Killed in Central African Republic Ambush." *The Guardian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/31/russian-journalists-killed-in-central-african-republic-ambush>.
- The New Humanitarian. "Dancing Aid Chief, Charming Russians, and Sharing Humanitarian Funding: The Cheat Sheet." *The New Humanitarian*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2019/10/25/Dancing-aid-chiefs-Russians-sharing-humanitarian-funding-Cheat-Sheet>.
- The New York Times. "Block the Sale of Warplanes to Nigeria." *The New York Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/opinion/block-the-sale-of-warplanes-to-nigeria.html>.
- The Moscow Times. "Central African Republic Open to Russian Military Base." *The Moscow Times*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/10/central-african-republic-open-to-russian-military-base-a64091>.
- Thomas-Johnson, Amanda. "What's behind Mali Massacre and How to Stop Escalating Violence," *Al Jazeera*, June 13, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/13/whats-behind-mali-massacre-and-how-to-stop-escalating-violence>.
- Tsvetkova, Maria. "Russian contractors are training the army in Sudan, says Moscow," *Reuters*, January 23, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-sudan-contractors-idUSKCN1PH23T>.
- Turse, Nick. "U.S. Military Is Building a \$100 Million Drone Base in Africa," *The Intercept*, September 29, 2016. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://theintercept.com/2016/09/29/u-s-military-is-building-a-100-million-drone-base-in-africa/>.
- Turse, Nick. "U.S. Military Says It Has a 'Light Footprint' in Africa: These Documents Show a Vast Network of Bases," *The Intercept*, December 1, 2018. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/01/u-s-military-says-it-has-a-light-footprint-in-africa-these-documents-show-a-vast-network-of-bases/>.
- United Nations Security Council. "Central African Republic: Report of the Secretary-General" S/2019/498, 17 June, 2019.

- United Nations Security Council. "Letter dated 23 July 2018 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2399 (2018) addressed to the President of the Security Council." S/2018/729, 23 July, 2018.
- UNSC Report. "Statement by representative of the Russian Federation Alexander Repkin at the UN Security Council meeting on the Central African Republic" (June 20, 2019). Accessed August 28, 2020. [https://russiaun.ru/en/news/car\\_200619](https://russiaun.ru/en/news/car_200619).
- U.S. Department of Defense. "Pentagon Announces Force Optimization," Immediate Release, *U.S. Dept of Defense*, November 15, 2018. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1691538/pentagon-announces-force-optimization/>.
- Varfolomeeva, Anna. "Russia Begins Assisting Africa's Sahel Region in Fighting Terrorism." *The Globe Post*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://theglobepost.com/2017/10/31/sahel-region-counterterrorism/>.
- Vines, Alex. "Ministers Should Focus on Better Defining British Objectives in the Sahel." *The Telegraph*. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/22/ministers-should-focus-better-defining-british-objectives-sahel/>.
- Vinograd, Cassandra. "There Is a New Battle for Influence in Central Africa, and Russia Appears to be Winning." *The Washington Post*. May 31, 2018. Accessed March 30, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world-views/wp/2018/05/31/theres-a-new-battle-for-influence-in-central-africa-and-russia-appears-to-be-winning/>.
- Warsaw Institute. "Russia in Africa: Weapons, Mercenaries, Spin Doctors," *Warsaw Institute*, October 22, 2019.
- Wilén, Nina. "Belgian Special Forces in the Sahel: A Minimal Footprint with Maximal Output?" *Africa Policy Briefs* 26 (May 2019).
- Wezeman, Pieter D. et al. "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2019," *SIPRI* (March 2020).
112. International. "Wagner PMC mercenaries may be involved in suppressing anti-government protests in Sudan," *112. International*, January 10, 2019. Accessed August 28, 2020. <https://112.international/russia/wagner-pmc-mercenaries-may-be-involved-in-suppressing-anti-government-protests-in-sudan-35880.html>.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, PhD, is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Military Studies, Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. Her research is focused on security and interventions, including UN interventions in Africa, the use of technology in humanitarian interventions as well as maritime and institutional capacity building among regional security actors. Katja holds a PhD in international relations from Lancaster University and a Master in Global Politics from London School of Economics.

---

