



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

# Understanding Russia's 'Predatory Power' in Africa: The Case of Mali

Singhvi, Simran

## Citation

Singhvi, S. (2023). *Understanding Russia's 'Predatory Power' in Africa: The Case of Mali*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3642690>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

MA International Relations: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

Thesis and Methods

Final Thesis

**Understanding Russia's 'Predatory Power' in Africa:**  
**The Case of Mali**

**Research Question:** How does Russia capture state governance in Africa with the help of its PMCs to derive maximum benefits?

Supervisor: Dr. W. Nkwi Gam

Second Reader: Dr. S.S. Regilme

Simran Singhvi

7.06.2023

Word Count: 14,520

**Abstract**

Russia's influence in Africa, particularly the Sahel, has been on the rise for the last two decades. On the one hand, it uses official tools of engagement including, diplomatic, economic, military, and political methods. And on the other hand, it uses unofficial tools to pursue its foreign policy objectives. This thesis focuses on the various ways in which Russia utilises its Private Military Companies as an unofficial tool, to gain maximum benefits. The theoretical framework of the '*Racket of Predatory Power*' is used to elucidate the strategies employed by Russia through its PMCs. These strategies include leveraging historical elite ties, security partnerships to secure mining concessions, and conducting disinformation campaigns to gain elite favour. By using Mali as a case study, the thesis examines the key elements of the theoretical framework, including rent control, weakening accountability and legitimisation, to understand Russia's use of PMCs as a foreign policy tool. The thesis concludes that Russia's influence on African states is predatory, in the sense that it uses shadow actors like PMCs to repurpose state institutions and derive maximum benefits out of elite relationships.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the people who have played an indispensable role in the completion of this thesis. Their unwavering support, encouragement, and love have been instrumental in my academic journey.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. W. Nkwi Gam who inspired me to write a thesis on a topic I had no previous knowledge about. He broadened my vision with his knowledge and introduced me to Africa. Without his words of courage, I would not have been to finish this thesis.

I am deeply indebted to my family, especially my parents. Their unconditional love and constant belief in me helped me move forward even when I lost faith in myself. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the support of my friends, Medha, Evita, Laoiseach, Akshit and Hugo, who have been a constant source of motivation and encouragement. Their insightful discussions, exchange of ideas, and moral support have been invaluable.

**Table of Contents**

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.1 USSR-AFRICA RELATIONS PRE-1991 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.2 RUSSIA-AFRICA RELATIONS POST 1991 .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.3 DRIVERS OF RUSSIAN ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3.1 RUSSIAN PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3.2 RUSSIA-AFRICA ELITE TIES .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.3 RUSSIA’S DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS IN AFRICA.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3.4 RESEARCH GAP .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4.1 ‘THE RACKET OF PREDATORY POWER’ .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>4.2 NETWORK OF AGENTS.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5.1 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5.2 CASE SELECTION .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5.3 LIMITATIONS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6.1 RUSSIA IN THE SAHEL .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6.2 CASE STUDY: MALI .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6.2.1 Elite Patronage Networks .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6.2.2 Shadow State Actors: The Wagner Group .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>6.3 THE CONCEPT OF ‘THE RACKET OF PREDATORY POWER’ IN PRACTICE .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>6.3.1 Rent control.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>6.3.2 Weaken Accountability.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6.3.3 Legitimise .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>39</b>

**Table of Figures**

FIGURE 4.1: DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF THE RACKET OF PREDATORY POWER.....21

FIGURE 6.2: MAP OF THE SAHEL REGION .....27

FIGURE 6.3: LOCATION OF MALI IN AFRICA .....28

FIGURE 6.4: WAGNER GROUP AREAS OF OPERATION IN MALI .....32

**List of Abbreviations**

CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
FPRI	Foreign Policy Research Institute
FSB	Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravlenie (Chief Intelligence Office)
IRA	Internet Research Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PMC	Private Military Company
PSC	Private Security Company
SVR	Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki (Foreign Intelligence Service)
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United National General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Russia is steadily building its presence on the African continent since President Vladimir Putin took charge. Transformations in governance, its own perceptions of national power, and the ever-growing influence of the West has motivated Russia to invest more towards Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As a result, Russia's foreign policy initiatives in Africa have been on the rise since 2009. On March 31, 2023, Moscow's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released 'The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.'<sup>1</sup> The document contains its renewed foreign policy objectives for the Global South, including Africa. Russia's objectives include, "Giving priority to supporting the sovereignty and independence of interested African states including through security assistance, inter alia food and energy security, as well as military and military-technical cooperation."<sup>2</sup> Russia also aims to assist, "In resolving and overcoming the consequences of armed conflicts in Africa, especially inter-ethnic and ethnic ones, advocating the leading role of African states in these efforts, based on the principle African problems – African solution."<sup>3</sup> Most notable among the objectives is to aid Africa in combating the growing neo-colonialism, which it considers a threat to African development and stability.

Several African states have suffered through a series of armed conflicts, insurgency, military coups, and a long-standing humanitarian crisis. The Sahel region of Africa which roughly extends from Senegal in the West to Red Sea in the East has suffered the most. The problem further deepens due to political instability, weak and fragile institutional structures, and strong elite leaders. Despite foreign aid and efforts from Western countries like France, the U.S., and the U.K. among others, the region has not found any stability till date. There is growing resentment towards Western powers operating in Africa, especially France, as pan-Africanists see their influence on the continent as neo-colonialist.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, several African leaders see Russia as an alternative and, in some cases, a better partner than the West. These

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, last modified 31 March 2023, [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1860586/?TSPD\\_101\\_R0=08765fb817ab2000e44a9d31a36fc747048d96eb9dbfe9c40233de0d090cbb0539f4ab8f2242700708211733d3143000240709bee0ea30bba2c1de8b4f4289e439aa5061b424dd0a281445c3e8bcae76baf1349fa7268e134c6a356ba0e3981f](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?TSPD_101_R0=08765fb817ab2000e44a9d31a36fc747048d96eb9dbfe9c40233de0d090cbb0539f4ab8f2242700708211733d3143000240709bee0ea30bba2c1de8b4f4289e439aa5061b424dd0a281445c3e8bcae76baf1349fa7268e134c6a356ba0e3981f)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Yaya Koloma, "Mali's Fragility: Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways," *MPRA Paper No 112821*, (April 2022): 27 <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/112821/>



include heads of states of the Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali, among others.

Africa provides several incentives for Russia's renewed interest. First, it sees Africa as a market for its arms sales. Owing to Western sanctions and the growing armed conflict in Africa, it seems to be a profitable market for military-to-military transactions, military-technical cooperation, arms sales, and intelligence cooperation. Second, in terms of diplomatic and political partnership, Russia requires African support at the UN Security Council, especially after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Third, Russia is a strong global energy power in oil, gas, coal, and nuclear energy. Africa's vast reserves of energy resources, including mineral deposits and precious stones is very attractive to Russian foreign policy makers.<sup>5</sup>

Russia's ambitions for Africa, however, are troublesome. According to scholars, Russia's push for greater engagement with African states is more than just official bilateral agreements. They seek to penetrate the economic, political, and informational space on the continent.<sup>6</sup> There is a growing trend of Russia operating in fragile states with weak regimes, providing them with military and security solutions with no regard to principles of democracy and human rights. In addition, Russia's policy of no strings attached and strong positive historical ties with African states, gives it the perfect amount of leverage to influence African leaders, making it a much-preferred security partner.<sup>7</sup>

Building bilateral relationships with foreign states to fulfill one's own interests is not wrong. Scholars, however, are worrisome about the methods employed by Russia to do so. Some call Russia's engagement in Africa 'shadowy', as Russia uses covert means like Russian Private Military Companies for doing its bidding.<sup>8</sup> Several others hardly expect Russia-Africa security

---

<sup>5</sup> Theo Neethling, "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa: Energy Diplomacy, Arms Exports and Mineral Resource Markets," *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 42, No. 2 (Nov /Dec 2020):15, <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v42i2.72>

<sup>6</sup> Akinlolu E. Akinola and Olusola Ogunnubi, "Russo-African Relations and Electoral Democracy: Assessing the Implications of Russia's Renewed Interest for Africa," *African Security Review* 30, No. 3 (August 2021): 387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1956982>

<sup>7</sup> Ovigwe Eguegu, "Russia's private military diplomacy in Africa: High risk, low reward, limited impact," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (November 2022): 445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2142276>

<sup>8</sup> Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, "Russia's Showy and Shadowy Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Centre for Military Studies* (December 2020): 20. <https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/english/publications/russias-showy-and-shadowy-engagements-in-sub-saharan-africa/>

partnerships to bring peace and stability on the continent.<sup>9</sup> Characterized by a lack of transparency in interactions, the use of sanctioned organisations like the Wagner Group, close elite ties with African leaders along with media manipulation and disinformation campaigns, it becomes imperative to further assess Russia's scope of influence in Africa.

The thesis aims to discuss Russia's influence on African states as a '*Predatory Power*', using Mali as a case study. One of the key drivers of Russia's presence in Africa is its historical ties to the continent. The research paper begins with a historical analysis of Soviet-Africa relations dating back to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The section will also form a basis for the review of literature. The literature considers academic debates and discussions on Russia's use of unofficial tools in fulfilling its foreign policy objectives in Africa. The third section on the theoretical framework explains the concept of the '*Racket of Predatory Power*' on the basis of which the case study will be examined. Next, a brief section on research design includes the methodology used for the thesis, reasons for the case selection and limitations. After that, the discussion section begins with highlighting Russia's relations with the Sahel region in the historical as well as present context. The case study on Russia's influence in Mali is supported by the theoretical framework, explaining each component of the theory and the implications of Russia's future involvement in Africa. Finally, the thesis ends with some concluding remarks.

The research question I thus pose is, how does Russia capture state governance in Africa with the help of its PMCs to derive maximum benefits? It aims to examine how Russia captures the state in Africa by utilising its PMCs to gain maximum benefits. With Russia's growing influence on the African continent, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms through which it asserts control and gains strategic advantages.

---

<sup>9</sup> Eguegu, "Russia's Private Military Diplomacy in Africa," 445.

## **Chapter 2: Historical Analysis**

### **2.1 USSR-Africa relations pre-1991**

In order to understand Russia's renewed interest in the African continent, it is pertinent to explore the erstwhile Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR) foreign policy dating back to the Bolshevik socialist revolution of 1917. Russia emerged as the first state in the history of the world to adopt 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Karl Marx's socialist policies which served as an alternative to Western world capitalism. This eventually led to an ideological struggle in the world with the emergence of two ideological blocs: the Capitalists in the West and the Communists in the USSR. The latter viewed itself as the "champion of the oppressed people"<sup>10</sup> and following World War II, it became powerful enough to exert influence on the colonial world. It established socialist states in independent Eastern Europe and Asia, but largely ignored Africa up until the later part of 1950's.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, Afro-Russian contact was fairly limited, through the soviet-controlled Communist International organization, and training of Africans in the field of polity in the USSR.<sup>11</sup> The development of Russia-Africa relations resulted from several events, beginning with a change of leadership in Moscow, after Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. Prior to this, the USSR viewed colonized African states as "stooges of the capitalist system."<sup>12</sup> Later in 1956, the party leader of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, expressed his support for the struggle against colonialism.<sup>13</sup>

When Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, the USSR turned towards Africa to play an active role in shaping the political character of the newly independent states.<sup>14</sup> Ghana's independence saw the rapid decolonization of several African states including Cameroon, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria among

---

<sup>10</sup> Omajuwu Igho Natufe, "Soviet Policy in Africa 1945-1970: A Study in Political History," (Phd diss., McGill University, December 1994), 1. <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/jm214p98b?locale=en>

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra Arkhangelskaya and Vladimir Shubin, "Russia's Africa Policy," *South African Institute of International Affairs*, Occasional Paper No 157 (September 2013): 5 <https://saiia.org.za/research/russias-africa-policy/>

<sup>12</sup> Abdallah I. Haruna and Abdul-Rahaman Abdul Salam, "Rethinking Russian Foreign Policy Towards Africa: Prospects and Opportunities for Cooperation in New Geopolitical Realities," *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, No. 2 (April 2021): 11. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2021.1.2.24>

<sup>13</sup> Arkhangelskaya and Shubin, "Russia's Africa Policy," 6

<sup>14</sup> Robert Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa*, (Harvard University Press, 1970), 39

others. The USSR saw this as a failure of the old order of western capitalism and an opportunity to provide an alternative to Western capitalism to these newly decolonized states.

To boost its relations with Africa, the USSR introduced the Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples at the UN General Assembly. This was done to realise the growing influence of neo-colonialism in Africa and to help the newly independent states establish a socialist society. The declaration was adopted in December 1960.<sup>15</sup> This opened the doors for Moscow to the African continent, uniting them against a shared dislike of western imperialism and capitalist ideologies. Unified by an anti-imperialist struggle, the USSR saw this as an opportunity to shape the post-colonial states of Africa and bring them under the influence of communism. Ideas of national liberation and social progress were an important part of the USSR's foreign policy objectives,<sup>16</sup> and to this extent it provided assistance to newly decolonized states through economic cooperation, security and military assistance, educational partnerships, and political support.

Education cooperation was at the forefront of Soviet foreign policy for Africa since the 1960's. Through scholarship and training programs for African students and activists, the USSR engaged in spreading Marxist-Leninist doctrines along with anti-colonialist and anti-neocolonialist ideologies. Most significant among these programs was the Mali-USSR educational cooperation program, aimed at training students, including women, in management roles of the future decolonized states and war professions. Between 1962-1993, about 2,500 Malian students were trained in the USSR under the program. Women were given grants by the Soviet Women's Committee and were trained to be pediatric nurses, kindergarten teachers, social workers, etc.<sup>17</sup> Educational ties strengthened Africa-USSR relations between the Soviet elites and African political elites, that outlasted the disintegration of the USSR in 1991.<sup>18</sup>

In the security and military sphere, the USSR provided weapons, equipment, training, and advisers to postcolonial African militaries. This helped develop long-standing intelligence

---

<sup>15</sup> Arkhangelskaya and Shubin, "Russia's Africa Policy," 6

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Patrice Yengo and Monique de Saint Martin, "How "Red" elites contributed to shaping postcolonial states," trans. Lysa Hochroth, *Cahiers d'études africaines* 226, Issue 2, (July 2017): 3

<https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.20661>

<sup>18</sup> Guido Lanfranchi and Kars de Bruijne, "The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming? Russia's growing presence in Africa and its implication for European policy," *Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'* (June 2022): 7. [10.13140/RG.2.2.25974.88643](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25974.88643)

relations with African states and the creation of a “Soviet hardware and operational culture” across Africa.<sup>19</sup> The USSR also provided political support to several African states, including Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique in their national liberation movements.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.2 Russia-Africa relations post 1991**

Russian presence in Africa was fairly limited after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its engagement in Africa was on a stark decline owing to a shift in domestic affairs and a struggling economy. Right after Boris Yeltsin took control of the former Soviet state, Russia’s Global South foreign policy took a back seat. Struggling to fit into the post-Cold war international system, the renewed Russian Federation scaled back its foreign policy relations with Africa as well, with the subsequent closure of several cultural centers, nine embassies, and three consulates.<sup>21</sup>

After nearly three decades of abandoning its involvement in Africa, Russia renewed its interest in 2009, when then President Dmitry Medvedev toured four African countries of Egypt, Nigeria, Angola and Namibia, to establish Moscow’s future ambitions for Africa.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, Russia’s current President, Vladimir Putin realized the opportunity to establish Moscow as an alternative power in Africa amid the rising concerns of the ever-increasing dominance of China, reduction of the United States’ expenditure and Africa’s need to broaden its scope for trade and security.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, the former Soviet power has been silently working on rebuilding its ties with Africa, since 2014. As mentioned in the previous section, the USSR’s “Marxist-Leninist and anti-imperialist”<sup>24</sup> ideologies’ influence on Africa was not a hidden fact. Countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, Somalia, Libya, and Angola, among others had

---

<sup>19</sup> Paul Stronski, “Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October 2019): 4 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 2

<sup>21</sup> Haruna and Salam, “Rethinking Russian Foreign Policy Towards Africa,” 13

<sup>22</sup> Martin Pichon and Eric Russel, “Russia in Africa: A new arena for geopolitical competition,” *European Parliamentary Research Service*, Briefing (8 November 2019): 2 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337623048\\_Russia\\_in\\_Africa\\_A\\_new\\_arena\\_for\\_geopolitical\\_competition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337623048_Russia_in_Africa_A_new_arena_for_geopolitical_competition)

<sup>23</sup> Agnieszka Paczyńska, “Russia in Africa: is great power competition returning to the continent?” *German Development Institute*, Briefing Paper 15 (2020) <https://www.die-gdi.de/briefing-paper/article/russia-in-africa-is-great-power-competition-returning-to-the-continent/>

<sup>24</sup> Pichon and Russel, “Russia in Africa,” 2

been soviet allies in the past. Using past ideological links along with militaristic, economic, and soft power influence, Russia aimed at gradually rebuilding its relations with Africa.<sup>25</sup>

In October 2019, Russia opened its doors to African states with the establishment of the Russia-Africa Summit, more commonly known as the Sochi Summit. Through this, Russia established a number of institutions with the potential to reshape Russian business priorities in Africa. The summit provided a good foundation for the renewal of their diplomatic relations. It was jointly hosted with Egypt's Prime Minister, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Putin relayed the message of building stronger partnerships with Africa, by doubling the trade and increasing development support. 43 African heads of state and ministerial heads attended the summit, including representations from the Sahel states of Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sudan, Mauritania, Eritrea, and Chad.<sup>26</sup> Following which, high-level Russian officials like Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Minister Mikhail Bogdanov frequently visited African states to lay the groundwork for increased relations.

Russia at the same time realizes the potential of African States in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). A total of 54 African nation states hold membership to the UNSC and three of which form the A3 that hold rotating seats at the Council. While there may be little coordination between the A3 and Russia, most African states benefit from Russia as a permanent member of the UNSC. Russia's permanent status buys it the veto power which it has used multiple times in favor of its African partners, including lobbying for permanent membership seats to the latter. Russia, for example, used its veto to block investigation into the Democratic Republic of Congo's presidential elections, and in 2019 condemned the coup in Sudan through a statement.<sup>27</sup> Not only this, but Russia also benefits from the large numbers of seats that Africa holds at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). For instance, after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the UNGA held a vote in which only 28 out of the 51 African states supported the resolution. While most of them opted to abstain from voting altogether, only Eritrea voted in favor of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Similarly, in 2014, on a resolution against Russia's annexation of Crimea, only two countries, Sudan and Zimbabwe supported Russia, while in 2018, on a similar resolution, nine African states supported Russia,

---

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Lanfranchi and Bruijne, "The Russians are coming," 8.

<sup>27</sup> Dzvinka Kachur, "Manifestations of Russian formal and informal strategies in Southern and Eastern Africa 2000-2022," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (December 2022): 511  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2150302>

including, South Africa, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Chad, Comoro, Eritrea, and Burundi.<sup>28</sup>

Along with the rise in diplomatic relations, economic ties have also strengthened significantly. The Sochi summit paved the way for 92 economic deals between Russia and Africa at an estimated 14 billion USD.<sup>29</sup> Energy diplomacy also go hand in hand with the economic relations in Africa. Several state-owned and state-backed conglomerates are active across the continent.<sup>30</sup> Russian business tycoons like Alrosa (world's largest diamond mining company), Rosatom (Russia's nuclear power company), Rosneft (Russia's oil giant), and several others are actively engaged in Africa's energy sector.<sup>31</sup> Despite Russia's limited economic engagement, as compared to China, the U.S. and the EU, the former has been able to enter African markets through debt relief programs, approximated at 20 billion USD, in the last twenty years.<sup>32</sup> These companies have been able to take advantage of international sanctions imposed on African states for "corruption or violations of human rights." Lack of transparency and corruption in several African states has enabled Russia to form alliances with local elites in pursuit of their commercial or geopolitical objectives.<sup>33</sup>

Another significant route opted by Russia in Africa is through military and security cooperation. As mentioned in the previous section, Russia was able to capitalize on Soviet Union's connections in the fields of military and security, for example, the modernization and repair of Soviet-era equipment. Since 2015, Russia and Africa have signed 20 bilateral military cooperation agreements.<sup>34</sup> Putin also pointed out that Russia aims at increasing cooperation through training and strengthening of African military forces and has signed agreements with over 30 countries. Russia is not a signatory of the UN international arms trade treaty (ATT) of 2014, which calls to end small arms sales in Africa, thereby making it easy as well as controversial for Russia to sell arms to unstable North African states, particularly in the Sahel region.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> Lanfranchi and Bruijne, "The Russians are coming," 8.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, 16

<sup>31</sup> Stronski, "Late to the Party," 10

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* 9

<sup>33</sup> *ibid* 10

<sup>34</sup> Jakob Hedenskog, "Russia is Stepping Up its Military Cooperation in Africa," *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, FOI Memo 6604, Project No: A18104 (December 2018)

<https://www.foi.se/restapi/report/FOI%20MEMO%206604>

<sup>35</sup> Neethling, "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa," 25

Armed conflict in the Sahel region makes it a conducive market for Russian arms. In the past ten years, Russia has provided small arms to several conflict laden states including Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Sudan.<sup>36</sup> Russia's military engagement in Africa is not limited to state-to-state agreements but can also be seen through the growing presence of Russian private military companies (PMCs) on African ground. For instance, PMCs like the Wagner group have been at the forefront in protecting economic assets and providing security services to African elites. The PMCs' main aim in Africa is to aid Russia in fulfilling its foreign policy objectives by expanding its military and political influence.<sup>37</sup>

Russia asserts only a limited soft power influence in Africa through funding educational programs and student scholarships to African students, continuing a trend since Soviet times. Rosatom, the nuclear power giant in Russia, provides funds in the field of scientific, technological, and engineering programs.<sup>38</sup> Russian PMCs, like the Wagner-affiliated groups also provide financial assistance in countries like the Central African Republic in the form of scholarships for sports as well as cultural events.<sup>39</sup>

The next section ties Russia's various foreign policy initiatives that began in the Soviet era discussed above, to the present-day involvement of Russian entities in Africa. In order to understand the role of Russia in Africa and its renewed interest since the late 2000s, it is crucial to look at the various ways in which Russia directly and/or indirectly influences military, security, economy, and politics of the African states.

### **2.3 Drivers of Russian Engagement in Africa**

As highlighted above, in order to follow through with their foreign policy objectives in Africa, Russia has been utilizing PMCs like the Wagner Group which has close ties to Moscow. Russia's modus vivendi in Africa is that it finds a loophole in existing international law, secures

---

<sup>36</sup>Neethling, "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa," 25

<sup>37</sup> *ibid* 27

<sup>38</sup> Stronski, "Late to the Party," 11

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*



agreements with African elites, that enable private contractors to provide military-like local assistance to states fighting terrorism, civilians, and insurgents alike.<sup>40</sup>

Another ploy used by Russia to exert dominance in the region is through Elite capture. Isolated authoritarian leaders in Africa with access to abundant natural resources often seek Russian PMC services to train local militaries and provide protection. In return, they give mining concessions as a mode of payment. Countries like the Central African Republic, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Mali, and Sudan are all controlled by elites in cohorts with Russia in one way or another. A common recurring factor amongst all these nations is the Russian PMC, the Wagner Group. For instance, the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, employs a Russian national security advisor Valery Zakharov with close ties to Russian Military Intelligence.<sup>41</sup>

Russia also actively engages with the African media, spreading disinformation and anti-democratic sentiments. For example, in 2020 following the success of Mali's coup, several supporters were seen carrying Russian flags despite the fact that Russian PMCs had not yet entered Mali. This was a result of the success of a Russian media campaign to instil anti-French sentiments among Malians and promote Russia as an alternative to provide security and aid to Mali.<sup>42</sup> More will be covered on Russia's multifaceted influence on Mali in the discussion section.

The following section on the review of literature provides more insight into how Russia uses unofficial tools to strengthen its relations with African states, particularly those going through a series of political and violent unrest.

---

<sup>40</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Role of Russian Private Military Contractors in Africa," *Foreign Policy Research Institute, Eurasia Program* (21 August 2020) <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/08/the-role-of-russian-private-military-contractors-in-africa/>

<sup>41</sup> Raphael Parens, "The Wagner Group's Playbook in Africa: Mali," *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (March 2022): 7. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/03/the-wagner-groups-playbook-in-africa-mali/>

<sup>42</sup> Cayley Clifford, "Russia's media playbook in Ukraine and Africa — let the great world spin," *Daily Maverick Africa* (24 March 2022). <https://saiia.org.za/research/russias-media-playbook-in-ukraine-and-africa-let-the-great-world-spin/>

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

Katja Jacobsen in her report, “Russia’s Showy and Shadowy Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa,” describes Russia’s engagements in Africa as one entailing “a delicate balancing act between official and unofficial actors.”<sup>43</sup> As per the Swedish Defence Research Agency, Russia employs various methods to carry forward its foreign policies in Africa, including diplomatic, economic, military, and political methods. While these come under the official tools of Russian foreign policy, Russia also uses unofficial approaches to gain short-term advantages over its competitors like France, the U.S., and China. Although the level of Russian engagement in Africa is limited and far lesser than its aforementioned counterparts, the impact that it has on the continent, and particularly in the Sahel region, is much more significant in terms of influence.<sup>44</sup> The aim of the review of literature is to highlight current unofficial methods as presented in the available literature, employed by Russia to gain political and economic advantages in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

The literature is drawn from secondary sources, particularly, peer-reviewed academic journals. Reports from policy research organisations like the RAND corporation, Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), the Swedish Defence Research Agency, Marshall European Center for Security Studies, and the German Development Institute, among others are also used. The focus of the review is to delve into the current academic inquiries of Russia’s use of Private Military Companies (PMCs), particularly the Wagner Group, to promote its interests in Africa. The review also assesses Russia’s relations with the African elites using unofficial routes like the employment of PMCs, and various methods of disinformation campaigns it employs in Africa.

### **3.1 Russian Private Military Companies**

Security and Strategic Studies experts Potočňák and Mareš in their article “Russia’s Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” write about how Russia

---

<sup>43</sup> Jacobsen, “Russia’s Showy and Shadowy Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 42.

<sup>44</sup> Karolina Lindén, “Russia’s Relations with Africa: Small, Military-Oriented and with Destabilising Effects,” *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, FOI Memo 8090, Project no: A12214 (January 2023).

<https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%208090>

<sup>45</sup> Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 525.

employs its Private Military Companies (PMCs) abroad in situations where official means of engagement do not tend to work. They mention that Russia's use of PMCs has been ongoing since Tsarist and Soviet times. Russia has had a long history of turning a blind eye to their operations, so long as Russia's foreign interests align with their actions, and the Kremlin is able to gain strategic benefits out of the partnership.<sup>46</sup> They further mention that PMCs operate in African countries for fulfilling two main purposes. First, they contribute to the commercial interests of their donors and owners. Second, they are used to fulfil Moscow's foreign policy objectives and economic interests. Their main activities include providing escort protection and personal security to African elites. They are also instrumental in not only controlling and securing natural resources, which includes mining sites, but also in the training of African armed forces. They perform advisory duties for elites, and also mercenary duties that include taking part in kinetic combat alongside African armed forces. For this purpose, Sergey Sukhankin defines Russian PMCs as "military provider companies which offer their clients tactical support during military operations, including direct participation in hostilities."<sup>47</sup>

Norwegian experts on the subject, Østensen and Bukkvoll, in their article "Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies" write about Russia's extensive use of PMCs, particularly the Wagner Group. According to them, development of Russian PMCs is based on five main drivers, which include "profits, military emulation, the companies' potential as a non-attributional means of coercion, avoiding Afghanistan type popular loss-aversion, and, in the case of Donbas, to limit the return to Russia of battle-hardened and ideologically disappointed fighters."<sup>48</sup> Russia's interests abroad have become increasingly more visible in the recent past. While Russian PMCs in some ways have been present and operating since the 1990s in erstwhile USSR states, according to Østensen and Bukkvoll, using them as a tool to promote state interests in the international arena are more recent, beginning in the mid-2000s.<sup>49</sup> According to the RAND Corporation, Russian PMCs have known to be active in 16 African

---

<sup>46</sup> Adam Potočník and Miroslav Mareš, "Russia's Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 35, No. 2 (November 2022): 189.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2022.2132608>

<sup>47</sup> Sergey Sukhankin, "War, Business and Ideology: How Russian Private Military Contractors Pursue Moscow's Interests," The Jamestown Foundation, last modified March 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/war-business-and-ideology-how-russian-private-military-contractors-pursue-moscows-interests/>

<sup>48</sup> Åse Gilje Østensen and Tor Bukkvoll, "Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies," *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment*, FFI Report 18/01300, Project No. 5346 (September 2018): 29.

<https://www.cmi.no/publications/6637-russian-use-of-private-military-and-security>

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, 33.

states between 2005-2020, and have conducted 34 operations, both military and others, during this time.<sup>50</sup>

Several policy research organisations like the RAND corporation, the FPRI, and the Swedish Defence Research Agency have mapped the Wagner Group's modus operandi in Africa. According to them, Wagner follows a three-tiered strategy with the aim to further Russia's foreign policy interests. They first reach out to African elites looking for financial or parliamentary support. After which, they aid them by running disinformation campaigns, pro-government information campaigns, using counter-demonstration techniques and fake polls. Second, in return for these services, they secure extraction and mining rights, including that of precious metals such as gold and diamond, found abundantly on the African continent. For this purpose, they use several organisations and companies that fall directly under their control and supervision. Lastly, Wagner launches a direct military relationship with African countries using its military expertise for training African soldiers, advising elites, providing personal security, and aiding in anti-insurgency operations.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, Marten notes that in the Central African Republic and Sudan, for instance, Russian private firms that are connected to the Wagner Group are providing military training to their security forces, and sometimes guarding the mines in return for mining concessions for gold in Sudan and both gold and diamonds in the Central African Republic.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Gruzd et al in their article, "Russia in Africa: Who is courting whom?", also observe that Russian PMCs active in Libya and the Central African Republic have had considerable influence in their civil wars.<sup>53</sup>

Scholars like Kimberley Marten who specialise in international security, foreign policy and whose main focus of study is Russia, makes significant contributions in the said regard. She notes in her article that what complicates the situation with regards to Russian PMCs is that they are not legally recognised in Russia.<sup>54</sup> Potočňák and Mareš, write that forming and

---

<sup>50</sup> Grissom, Adam R., Samuel Charap, Joe Cheravitch, Russell Hanson, Dara Massicot, Christopher A. Mouton, and Jordan R. Reimer, "Russia's Growing Presence in Africa A Geostrategic Assessment," *RAND Corporation* (2022): 16. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4399.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4399.html)

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

Parsons, "The Wagner Group's Playbook."

<sup>52</sup> Kimberly Marten, "Russia's use of semi-state security forces: the case of the Wagner Group," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, No. 3 (March 2019): 196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142>

<sup>53</sup> Steven Gruzda, Samuel Ramanib and Cayley Clifford, "Russia in Africa: Who is courting whom?," *South African Institute of International Affairs* 29, No.4 (November 2022): 401.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2146184>

<sup>54</sup> Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces," 184.

financing PMCs is illegal under the Penal Code of Russian Federation and is an offence punishable with imprisonment of 3-15 years.<sup>55</sup> Scholars further mention that there have been several proposals in the Duma (Lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia) to legitimise Private Security Companies (PSCs) but have failed to move forward. The debate on legalising PMCs is seen as “bureaucratic infighting”<sup>56</sup> over their control and regulation, for example, between the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Russian Defence Ministry.

With respect to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s stance on PMCs, Potočňák and Mareš argue that the use of Russian PMCs to advance Moscow’s foreign policies is being encouraged by the Russian President. In 2012, while making remarks on legalising private military businesses, Putin stated that, “Such companies are a way of implementing national interests without the direct involvement of the state.”<sup>57</sup> Marten, Østensen and Bukkvoll have also noted a similar pattern of incentivising Russian PMCs. In 2018, Putin signed an order classifying all information related to Russian foreign intelligence services who were not state employees. This was done to keep Russian PMCs’ activities concealed from public knowledge and threaten journalists from reporting on the same.<sup>58</sup> According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), this decree was meant for Wagner Group’s operations on behalf of Russia’s military intelligence agency, also known as the GRU.

In the CSIS report “Russia’s Corporate Soldiers,” published in 2021, they wrote that the Wagner Group and its founder Yevgeny Prigozhin has close ties with Putin, and the Russian Defence Ministry, including the GRU, FSB, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), and the Kremlin. The close relationship is further strengthened by the guiding and financing of PMCs by Russian security agencies and the Kremlin despite strict Russian laws.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, several academics call the relationship between Russia and its PMCs “opaque”<sup>61</sup>, “peculiar”<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Potočňák and Mareš, “Russia’s Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” 183.

<sup>56</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 184.

<sup>57</sup> Potočňák and Mareš, “Russia’s Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” 190.

<sup>58</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 184.

<sup>59</sup> Åse Gilje Østensen and Tor Bukkvoll, "Private military companies – Russian great power politics on the cheap?," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, Nos. 1-2 (2022): 133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1984709>

<sup>60</sup> Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, Brian Katz, Eric McQueen and Joe Moye, “Russia’s Corporate Soldiers The Global Expansion of Russia’s Private Military Companies,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (July 2021): 1. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-corporate-soldiers-global-expansion-russias-private-military-companies>

<sup>61</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 181.

<sup>62</sup> Potočňák and Mareš, “Russia’s Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” 181.

and “non-transparent.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Østensen and Bukkvoll describe Russian PMCs’ capabilities as “grey zone operators.” In this regard, the Kremlin avoids any formal connections to the PMCs, where the latter aims to fulfil Russia’s political goals through military means.<sup>64</sup>

A study of the current literature reveals that the extent of Russian PMCs’ influence in Africa is profound. However, the undisclosed level of authority and power held by Moscow over these PMCs is rather troublesome. Østensen and Bukkvoll in their recent article, “Private military companies – Russian great power politics on the cheap?”, observe that Kremlin’s use of PMCs to achieve their interests has been going on for a long time. This, he writes, gives them the scope for plausible deniability with regards to their actions.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, there is an urgent need to delve deeper into the Wagner Group’s influence in Africa, particularly in the Sahel Region, in order to better understand Russia’s intentions for Africa.

### **3.2 Russia-Africa Elite Ties**

According to Katsakioris’s article, “Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia Soviet Educational Aid and its Impact on Africa (1960-1991),” Russian and African elites have shared close ties since the Soviet times through Soviet educational aid.<sup>66</sup> He notes that common anti-imperialistic ideologies helped strengthen the bonds between Soviet elites and African elites, who even today control majority of natural resources and politics in several African countries.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, scholars Issaev, Shishkina, and Liokumovich argue that the ideas of ‘stability’ and ‘sovereignty’ promoted by Russia gained more traction amongst African elites than the narratives of ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ promoted by the West.<sup>68</sup> The RAND Corporation did extensive research on the same in their report “Russia’s Growing Presence in Africa A Geostrategic Assessment.” They too observed that Russian activity in Africa is most often

---

<sup>63</sup> Potočňák and Mareš, “Russia’s Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” 181.

<sup>64</sup> Østensen and Bukkvoll, “Private Military Companies – Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?,” 134.

<sup>65</sup> Østensen and Bukkvoll, “Private Military Companies – Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?,” 134.

<sup>66</sup> Constantin Katsakioris “Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 226 (2017): 274.

<https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.20664>

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* 261.

<sup>68</sup> Leonid Issaev, Alisa Shishkina and Yakov Liokumovich, "Perceptions of Russia’s ‘return’ to Africa: Views from West Africa," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (November 2022): 429.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2139289>

facilitated by patronage activity and ‘elite patronage networks’ who have access to natural resources and are more likely to attract Russian foreign policy makers.<sup>69</sup>

Østensen and Bukkvoll’s findings in their recent article, “Private military companies – Russian great power politics on the cheap?”, suggest that Russian PMCs play a big role in elite enrichment in Africa. They observe that PMCs contribute to Russia’s foreign policy interests in a major way where they “function as security exports.”<sup>70</sup> Their roles in this regard include, providing “profitable business opportunities or access to corrupt structures and banking.”<sup>71</sup>

Kimberley Marten provides various examples of Russia-Africa elite ties in her article. She observes that several African leaders, especially those who do not enjoy domestic support among the public are often supported by Russia, by means of providing personal security and political advice. Libya, Sudan, and the Central African Republic are examples of the same. In Libya, for example, the Wagner Group actively takes part in mercenary activities. Khalifa Haftar is a marshal of the Libyan National Army. He controls the eastern coastal region of Libya and is known to be supported by Wagner mercenaries. Prigozhin, Haftar and senior Russian military commanders were subsequently also seen together in high-level talks on security in 2018.<sup>72</sup>

Scholars also note that African leaders speak highly of the Russian elites and its military prowess.<sup>73</sup> Marten, in her article mentions that Sudan’s then President, Omar al-Bashir, enjoyed wide support among the Russian elites, and vice-versa. He spoke highly of Moscow in its efforts to train the Sudanese military.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, FPRI’s findings in their report “The Wagner Group’s Playbook in Africa,” recalls that Moscow aimed at keeping the Sudanese President in power by smearing protestors against him. They also noted that in al-Bashir’s 30-year rule of Sudan, Moscow gained considerably through agreements on oil, natural gas, and gold.<sup>75</sup> Not only this, official meetings held on gold mining rights between al-Bashir, Putin, Russia’s Foreign Minister Medvedev, and Defence Minister Shoygu, was also attended by Prigozhin’s (owner of the Wagner Group) subsidiary companies, M-Invest and Meroe Gold,

---

<sup>69</sup> Grissom et al., “Russia’s Growing Presence in Africa,” 18.

<sup>70</sup> Østensen and Bukkvoll, “Private Military Companies – Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?,” 143.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*

<sup>72</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 197.

<sup>73</sup> Issaev, Shishkina, and Liokumovich, “Perceptions of Russia’s ‘Return’ to Africa,” 429.

<sup>74</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 197.

<sup>75</sup> Larsen, “Russia’s Corporate Soldiers,” 18.

which further confirm strong ties between elites on both sides.<sup>76</sup> The same level of elite engagement is also followed in the Central African Republic, where Russian PMCs provided personal security to President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, writes Marten.<sup>77</sup> The latter is also known to employ Russian advisors like Valery Zakharov on national security issues. Zakharov is a Russian intelligence agent with financial connections to Prigozhin. Like Sudan, the Central African Republic has also given mining concessions to Prigozhin's subsidiary, Lobaye, for gold and diamond extraction. PMCs are employed to guard these mines as well.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Neethling in his article "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa: Energy Diplomacy, Arms Exports and Mineral Resource Markets," describes that Russia's relations with African elites aim at promoting only short-term gains that are beneficial for individual elites on both sides, rather than serving the interests of the African citizens.<sup>79</sup> The FPRI in regards to the elites' self-fulfilling interests, observed that anyone who dare report or speak against the regime of established elite ties between the two are silenced. In July 2020, three journalists who attempted to film the gold mines operated by Lobaye Invest in the Central African Republic were killed before they were able to do so.<sup>80</sup>

Russian PMCs, particularly the Wagner Group, plays a strategic role in creating a bridge between the Russian and African elites. They are increasingly active in states where direct official intervention may be unwarranted due to Western international sanctions.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, it is important to further study the role of Russian PMCs in capturing Elite favour in Africa and the following influence it has on African states.

### **3.3 Russia's Disinformation Campaigns in Africa**

Kachur in her article, "Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies in Southern and Eastern Africa, 2000–2022," notes that disinformation campaigns and political manipulations is a strategy employed by Russia to support African elites in their quest for power and therefore build strong alliances. She also found that techniques employed for

---

<sup>76</sup> Parens, "The Wagner Group's Playbook," 7.

<sup>77</sup> Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces," 197.

<sup>78</sup> Parens, "The Wagner Group's Playbook," 7.

<sup>79</sup> Neethling, "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa," 35.

<sup>80</sup> Parens, "The Wagner Group's Playbook," 7.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid* 10



information manipulation were acknowledged by Russia's Defence Minister in 2017. He confirmed that institutions were set-up by Moscow to conduct information warfare in foreign states.<sup>82</sup> Kachur further observes that the Russian government uses tactics like, "racial stereotyping, racial grievances, the scapegoating of political opponents, and outright false statements," to promote Kremlin's interest.<sup>83</sup>

Stanford's Cyber Policy Center, in its report on Russian disinformation campaigns noted the Internet Research Agency (IRA) plays an influential role in disinformation campaigns on social media.<sup>84</sup> They use platforms like Twitter, Facebook, among others, to spread pro-Russian information.<sup>85</sup> The IRA, regarded as a nominally independent social media company, is owned by the Wagner Group's founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. The Cyber Policy Center further observed that the GRU conducts influence operations and disinformation campaigns, and their capabilities often overlap with the IRA.<sup>86</sup> In this regard, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, and Marshall European Center for Security Studies,<sup>87</sup> in their report also mention the Concord Group. The Group is another of Wagner's subsidiary that calls themselves "political technologists." The Russian PMCs and the so-called "political technologists" offer their services to African elites according to the "state of democracy and election patterns in the state at hand."<sup>88</sup> African countries where disinformation campaigns have been carried out include the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, and Mali.<sup>89</sup> The European Union Institute for Security Studies, also wrote extensively on Russia's role in hampering election results in Africa through disinformation. Yet again, a similar pattern of Russian PMCs involvement, particularly the Wagner Group and its subsidiary firms, is seen in the context of Kremlin's disinformation campaigns in Africa.

---

<sup>82</sup> Kachur, "Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies," 523.

<sup>83</sup> Kachur, "Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies," 524.

<sup>84</sup> Renee DiResta and Shelby Grossman, "Potemkin Pages & Personas: Assessing GRU Online Operations, 2014-2019," *Freeman Spigoli Institute for International Studies* (November 2019): 5. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/potemkin-think-tanks>

<sup>85</sup> Deen Freelon and Tetyana Lokot, "Russian Twitter disinformation campaigns reach across the American political spectrum," *Misinformation Review* 1, No. 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-003>

<sup>86</sup> Diresta and Grossman, "Potemkin Pages & Personas," 5.

<sup>87</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Active Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations," *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies*, No. 21 (June 2019) <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/active-measures-russias-covert-geopolitical-operations-0>

<sup>88</sup> Lindén, "Russia's Relations with Africa," 8.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*

According to the Marshall European Center for Security Studies, military coups in African states have been supported by Russian PMCs through spreading pro-coup messages on social media. In states like Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Sudan where pro-Russian elites are part of the coups are also known to spread pro-Russian, pro-mercenary messages, often leading to massive local support.<sup>90</sup> Universidad de Navarra's Center for Global Affairs & Strategic Studies, report that disinformation campaigns are conducted in African states, like the Central African Republic. They observe that such states hold the gateway to Africa due to their historical and cultural relevance, geostrategic location, and presence of abundant natural resources. This encourages Russia to exert sharp power through radio stations, print publications and social media. By using such techniques, Russia continually feeds its framing narratives to a confused populace, who, given the unstable environment, become be an easy target.<sup>91</sup>

The German Development Institute in its report "Russia in Africa: is great power competition returning to the continent?" provides more insight with regards to Russia's modus operandi of information warfare. They observe that Russia actively works to influence election results by the use of media and elite capture in many African countries. They support authoritarian elites in tumultuous environments rich in resources, in order to increase the viability of these regimes. Subsequently, Russia exploits them for personal gains.<sup>92</sup>

### **3.4 Research Gap**

It is important to mention here that Marten calls Russian PMCs "semi-state security forces,"<sup>93</sup> as compared to "non-state armed actors"<sup>94</sup> commonly referred to in widespread academia.

---

<sup>90</sup> Joseph Siegle, "Chapter 10 Russia and Africa: Expanding Influence and Instability," in *Russia's Global Reach: A Security and Statecraft Assessment*, ed. Graeme P. Herd (Garmisch Partenkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2021). 80-82

<sup>91</sup> "Russia's sharp power in Africa: the case of Madagascar, Central Africa Republic, Sudan and South Africa" *Center for Global Affairs & Strategic Studies*, accessed 22 May 2023. <https://www.unav.edu/en/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/russia-s-sharp-power-in-africa-the-case-of-madagascar-central-africa-republic-sudan-and-south-africa>

<sup>92</sup> Agnieszka. "Russia in Africa."

<sup>93</sup> Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces," 181.

<sup>94</sup> Østensen and Bukkvoll, "Private Military Companies – Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?," 131.

Several policy makers in the West call the Wagner Group an “arm of the Russian state.”<sup>95</sup> This is because, they see Russian PMCs, particularly the Wagner Group, as an extension of Russia’s official foreign policy initiatives. The influence of the Wagner Group in Africa, mainly in the Sahel region, has increased in recent times. According to the FPRI, the Wagner Group is the eyes and ears of the Kremlin on African ground, and has been involved in the military, politics, and economy of several African nations like Central African Republic and Sudan since 2015.<sup>96</sup>

In this context, through this thesis, I aim to add to the existing literature in two ways. First, by explaining how historical relations between Russia and Africa have helped Russia re-enter the Sahel region, with Mali as a case study. Second, I will use the theoretical framework of ‘the Racket of Predatory Power’<sup>97</sup> developed by Nina Callaghan, Robyn Foley, and Mark Swilling and apply to the context of Mali. This will help us understand that Russia’s growing footprint in Africa is not limited to its official relations. They extensively use unofficial tools as a way to repurpose public goods and capture state governance through its PMCs, to derive maximum benefits.

---

<sup>95</sup> Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Karen Philippa Larsen, “Liberal intervention's renewed crisis: responding to Russia's growing influence in Africa,” *International Affairs* 99, Issue 1 (January 2023): 275.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaac252>

<sup>96</sup> Parens, “The Wagner Group’s Playbook,” 4.

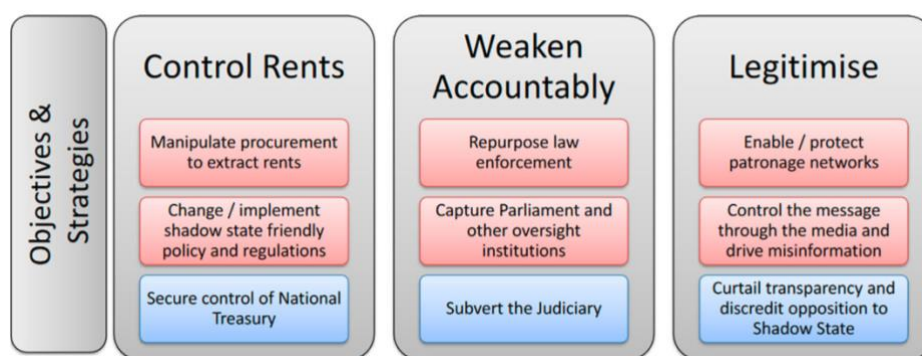
<sup>97</sup> Nina Callaghan, Robyn Foley, Mark Swilling (eds), *Anatomy of State Capture*, (African Sun Media, 2021), 26.

## Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 ‘The Racket of Predatory Power’

The concept of the ‘*Racket of Predatory Power*’ was first developed by Nina Callaghan, Robyn Foley, and Mark Swilling to help explain the phenomenon of ‘state capture’ in South Africa. The theory states that the elites in power have the ability to repurpose state governance to derive political and financial benefits using three critical elements.<sup>98</sup> These include, (i) rent-seeking/rent control, (ii) weakening state accountability, and (iii) the maintenance of legitimacy.<sup>99</sup> These critical elements provide us with a useful framework to learn about the methods adopted by Russia to formulate their foreign policies for Africa.

*Figure 4.1: Different components of the Racket of Predatory Power*



Source: Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 513  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2150302>

The first method of rent-seeking or control of rent involves the ability to extract wealth in the form of economic and financial gains by those holding power in the state. This method of rent extraction used for repurposing state institutions by political elites is done in order to ensure the accumulation of political power in the hands of a few political elites, or vice versa, that is, accumulating power can be a means for rapid financial gains.<sup>100</sup> This is ensured by implementing “new shadow state-friendly policies and regulations,”<sup>101</sup> or by manipulating or controlling state financial institutions.

<sup>98</sup> Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 511

<sup>99</sup> Callaghan et al., *Anatomy of State Capture*, 7

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*

<sup>101</sup> Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 513

The second objective for state capture involves weakening the states accountability by repurposing law enforcement or establishing new institutions out of the purview of normal monitoring processes. The main goal of this method is to reduce or completely avoid the potential responsibility and accountability that comes with the manipulation of state processes. Another method to weaken state accountability is to blur the distinctions between state and private institutions which thereby allows for the flexibility to procure rent or financial gains without oversight. This also enables the state to maintain its legitimacy by denying any involvement in the process. As mentioned in the previous section, the employment of private military contractors like the Wagner Group by African elites to protect resources in exchange for mining concessions and financial gain is one such example.<sup>102</sup>

Legitimising the various methods employed to seek and control rents is the third objective under this theory. It is done by controlling the narrative and justifying the means used by the people in power to procure rent. By designing and controlling the dissemination of information through media outlets and establishing legitimate institutions that hold the ability to communicate the said narrative, are crucial in the purpose of state capture.<sup>103</sup> To make narratives legitimate, Russia, for example uses its past influence over African states, including anti-imperialist and anti-Western ideologies, along with its support of decolonization. Russia also believes that the African Union should be in charge of resolving conflicts on the continent and supports “African solutions for Africa problems,” along with the strengthening of African Union’s peacekeeping capabilities. Russia’s official position in Africa is one of respect to state sovereignty and refraining from interfering in internal affairs.<sup>104</sup> Such comments made by Russian officials and diplomats further legitimize Russia’s presence in Africa.

## **4.2 Network of Agents**

According to the concept of ‘*Racket of Predatory Power*,’ a reliable network of agents is required, both within the state (domestically) and outside (foreign state), to be able to ‘safely’ reap benefits. Two factors that are crucial for the extraction of benefits and successfully aim at facilitating the repurpose of state governance as suggested in the theory include,<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 196

<sup>103</sup> Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 513

<sup>104</sup> Paczyńska, “Russia in Africa: is great power competition returning to the continent?”

<sup>105</sup> Callaghan et al., *Anatomy of State Capture*, 2

- (i) Strong ties between the power-holding elites: These agents can be military, political, or economic elites often bound by historical links.
- (ii) Hiding behind a complex web of multiple decisions and procedures that is disguised as legitimate: It is possible that at the time of drafting, they may be legal, however, in the long term the decisions may only benefit shadow actors and thus may seem illogical. This explains that the motivation of actors may be justifiable initially, and may even be able to drive some actors under the false pretence of public benefit.

## **Chapter 5: Research Design**

### **5.1 Methodology**

The thesis uses the merits of qualitative analysis to answer the research question. Data is analysed using secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and white paper. Primary sources including newspaper articles, investigative reports and online media articles are used. A qualitative approach is suitable to study Russia-Africa relations, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of complex relationships and multiple perspectives.

The research design uses a comprehensive literature review and content analysis. For the literature review, academic writings of exceptional scholars in the field of International Relations, military and security studies, and foreign policy are used. Along with this, policy reports from renowned organisations like the RAND corporation, German Development Institute, Foreign Policy Research Institute and Marshall European Center for Security Studies are used. Data is retrieved from online libraries like JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Oxford libraries among others. For the review, articles and reports were carefully selected to examine current debates, trends, and academic discourse on the topic.

A very important consideration while selecting the data was to take as much recent data available. This is because Russia's increasing presence in Africa, particularly Mali, is very recent. Therefore, much of the data analysed is from 2013 onwards, up until 2023. For the historical analysis, journal articles and books are analysed dating back to 1969. Information from primary sources is used since the topic of analysis is very recent. In order to maintain credibility of data, investigative reports, newspaper articles and online articles were selected only from credible sources after due diligence. This ensured relevance, authenticity and, representativeness in the thesis.

### **5.2 Case Selection**

Mali is used as the case study for the thesis. There are two reasons for the same. First, Russia turned its interest toward Mali only recently in 2019. Second, Mali is going through a

tumultuous time due to terrorism, insurgency, military coups, and a humanitarian crisis. This makes Mali a perfect case study to fit into the theoretical framework of the '*Racket of Predatory Power.*'

The concept of the '*Racket of Predatory Power*' engages in elements like elite ties, both historical and present, the availability of natural resources for the elites to exploit, disinformation and narrative control, and the presence of shadow state actors for carrying out elite interests. These elements fit perfectly with regards to Russia's involvement in Mali in the current context.

### **5.3 Limitations**

The limitations of doing a qualitative analysis of existing data presents the challenge of researcher bias which was observed during data selection. Although maximum efforts were made to avoid doing so. Critical data from a Russian point of view was not widely available due to state restrictions and language barriers. Also, data from an African perspective was also limited to me since most Sahelian countries including Mali, use French as their official language, presenting a language barrier.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Russia in the Sahel**

The Sahel region ('Region') in Africa extends roughly from Senegal in the west to Red Sea in the east. Since its independence in the 1960s, the region has suffered through widespread conflict and violence. Factors such as political instability, armed rebellions, military coups, and Islamist insurgency have left the states in the region weak and vulnerable, despite being rich in mineral resources. Sahelian countries like Mali, Niger, Sudan, Chad, Guinea, and Burkina Faso have become increasingly unstable, and efforts from the West to help in countering these issues are not very fruitful. Islamist insurgent groups occupy a large part of the region and are fighting governments and civilian populations for resources, particularly in Mali and Niger. Six military coups have occurred in the last three years, plaguing the region with violence and poverty.<sup>106</sup> Health care and education systems have collapsed, and the humanitarian crisis is growing, leading to migration and displacement in large numbers. According to the UN estimates, 2.7 million people have been displaced due to armed conflicts in the region. Despite French military operations like operation 'Serval' and operation 'Barkhane' in 2013 and 2014, respectively, to mitigate the violent factions in the region, the situation does not seem to be anywhere near resolved.<sup>107</sup> Weak, fragile, and fragmented institutional structure, and the strong influence of elite networks in the region are only adding to the ongoing problems.

Meanwhile Russia, which has strong historical and ideological links has shifted its focus to the Region. It aims at growing its influence in the Region through security assistance via Russian PMCs, incentivising on governance shortfalls, increasing instability, and power vacuums. The power vacuum created with the exit of France, and the growing discontent among people towards the West, provides Russia with a great opportunity to fulfil its African foreign policy interests. Countries like Mali, Ghana, Algeria, and Guinea share soviet socialist links with Russia, aiding the latter to establish a strong footing in the region.<sup>108</sup>

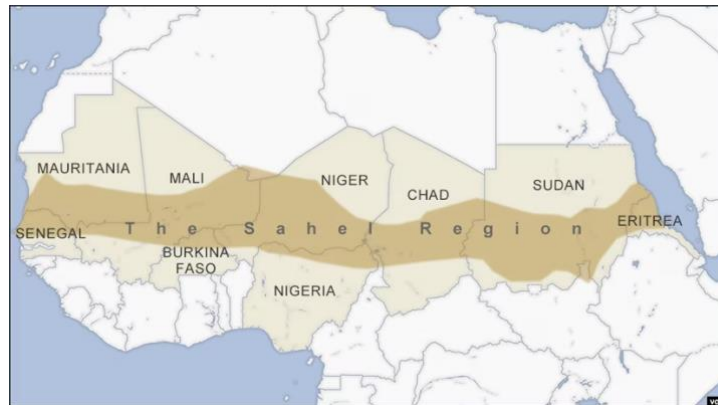
---

<sup>106</sup> Paul Stronski, "Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa's Sahel Region," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (February 2023): 2 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/28/russia-s-growing-footprint-in-africa-s-sahel-region-pub-89135>

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*

<sup>108</sup> Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968*, (Cornell University Press, 2022), 2

Figure 6.2: Map of the Sahel Region



Source: Accessed 3 May 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/sahel-risks-becoming-a-forgotten-crisis-un-official-says/6736298.html>

Russia has embraced military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso, and is providing them with military assistance, diplomatic support, and operational information support. The elite African leaders of the Region consider Moscow as a long-term partner who will help Africa realise its goal of “African solutions for African problems.”<sup>109</sup> For instance, Burkina Faso’s President, Mark Christian Kabore praised Russia for its fight against terrorism at the Russia-Africa summit in 2019. The President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Ghazouani too praised Russia for its non-interference in Africa’s internal affairs. The G5 countries of Sahel, which include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have signed military-technical and defence cooperation agreements with Russia since 2017 (with Burkina Faso as an exception).<sup>110</sup> Moscow has made notable strides in Mali in terms of providing assistance in counter-terrorism operations and has also gained considerable trust among the people.

The growing influence of Russia in the Region, especially through elite networks, and relying on common ideological beliefs and an anti-Western world view is troublesome. The case study on Mali, Russia’s latest interest, aims to explain why academics and experts have grown to worry about Russia’s intentions and the negative impact it will have on the Region’s stability.

<sup>109</sup> Kachur, “Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies,” 513.

<sup>110</sup> Issaev, Shishkina, and Liokumovich, “Perceptions of Russia’s ‘Return’ to Africa,” 430.

## **6.2 Case Study: Mali**

### **6.2.1 Elite Patronage Networks**

In order to comprehend the current influence of Russia in Mali, one needs to understand the network of elite relationships established between the two since Mali's political independence in 1960. Mali's most prominent leader, Modibo Keita became independent Mali's first president. Educated at an elite French institute in Dakar, Keita was part of the West African elite group.<sup>111</sup> On the day of Mali's independence on June 20, USSR's party leader Nikita Krushchev extended his official recognition for Mali, along with the possibility of strong future ties between the two States.<sup>112</sup> Tired of the colonial past and western ideologies, Keita looked for alternative approaches to development and governance. He acknowledged the USSR's support, and on his visit to Moscow in 1962, he expressed views in favour of the Soviet model of development.<sup>113</sup> This was the beginning of strong elite ties between the two States.

At the time of independence, Mali's economy was underdeveloped, and it lacked institutional capacity to sustain itself. The USSR came to Mali's assistance with ambitious development plans through economic and technical cooperation. They invested heavily in city development plans, transport infrastructure, education sector and several enterprises.<sup>114</sup> The USSR also provided military and equipment training assistance to Mali. Along with this, large-scale geological exploration programmes were set up in Mali to find natural resources like Gold. The USSR thus gained popularity among politicians across Mali.<sup>115</sup> Several scholars note that

Figure 6.3: Location of Mali in Africa



Source: Accessed 3 June 2023  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location\\_Mali\\_AU\\_Africa.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_Mali_AU_Africa.svg)

---

<sup>111</sup> Iandolo, *Arrested Development*, 82.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid* 88

<sup>113</sup> John N. Hazard, "Marxian Socialism in Africa: The Case of Mali," *Comparative Politics* 2, No. 1 (October 1969):1. <https://doi.org/10.2307/421479>

<sup>114</sup> Iandolo, *Arrested Development*, 4.

<sup>115</sup> Hazard, "Marxian Socialism in Africa," 14.

Keïta's socialist plans were over ambitious, which costed a lot more than the results it yielded.<sup>116</sup> Keïta's regime was overthrown in 1968, owing to Mali's distressed economy. Socialist ties, however, remained strong through bilateral agreements between the two States.

A notable development of relations between the two States, despite Keïta's regime failure, was made on the education front. Many Malian students went to Communist USSR to attain higher level education in the "art of government and administration,"<sup>117</sup> including former President of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, who received military training in the USSR. This helped create a pro-Soviet African intelligentsia in Mali. As previously mentioned, about 2,500 Malian students, including women, were trained in the USSR under the educational scholarship program between 1962-1993.<sup>118</sup> The extensive network of Soviet-educated Malian elites along with a common ideological thinking of anti-colonialism and an anti-Western rhetoric has helped foster a strong relationship between the Russian and Malian elites.<sup>119</sup>

Close historical relations between the power elites of erstwhile Soviet Union and Mali have created a strong network of elite relationships between the two in the present. Today, Mali struggles with a "multidimensional crisis."<sup>120</sup> Sociopolitical instability has been prevalent in Mali since 2012. It began with the Taureg separatist rebellion that sparked a military coup and allowed Islamist insurgents to advance in the North.<sup>121</sup> In light of persisting tensions, France formed a counter-terrorism group in 2014 under operation 'Barkhane'. However, France failed to mitigate the violence and deal effectively with the problem. Following this, anti-Western sentiments began to stir among Malian elites, who saw French operations neo-colonialist in nature.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, an agreement was signed between the Malian government and the separatist rebels in June 2015. Despite this, Mali was never able to fully come out of the crisis.

In the last three years, Mali has yet again seen two military coups. The turbulent period began in August 2020, when the Malian armed forces ousted former President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. The established transitional government was again overthrown in May 2021 by Colonel

---

<sup>116</sup> Hazard, "Marxian Socialism in Africa," 6.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*

<sup>118</sup> Yengo and Martin, "How "Red" elites contributed to shaping postcolonial states," 3.

<sup>119</sup> Kachur, "Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies," 514.

<sup>120</sup> Yaya, "Mali's Fragility Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways," 38

<sup>121</sup> Alexis Arieff, "Crisis in Mali," *Congressional Research Service* (14 January 2013).

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42664.pdf>

<sup>122</sup> Yaya, "Mali's Fragility Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways," 27

Assimi Goita.<sup>123</sup> Prior to the coup, in January 2021, pan-African NGO, Yewolo Debout sur Les Remparts called for an end of operation ‘Barkhane’ and the departure of French troops from Mali. Adama Ben Diarra, the leader of the NGO is a prominent figure in Africa and is supported by Kemi Seba.<sup>124</sup> The latter is known to have close ties with the Russian Government and the Wagner Group. Reports say that the Wagner Group started ‘Project Kemi’<sup>125</sup> between 2018-2019 to influence pan Africanists in favour of Russia. The ongoing instability in the state has further weakened the already fragile institutions of governance, leading to economic distortion, social and communal violence, and unequal distribution of resources within the state.<sup>126</sup>

Fed up with failed French anti-insurgency operations, and frustrated with Western counter-terrorism policies, Mali ultimately decided to seek help from its old friend, Russia. In 2020 before the coup took place, coup leaders covertly invited Russia to intervene, with the aim “to conduct training, close protection, and counter-terrorism operations.”<sup>127</sup> Previously in June 2019, then government of Mali and Russia also signed energy and military cooperation agreements, consolidating ties between elites on both sides.<sup>128</sup> A Russian diplomat in 2022 informed the UNSC that 200 Malian security personnel and nine policemen received military training in Russia.<sup>129</sup> The Wagner Group entered Mali in November 2021, and subsequently French forces completely withdrew its troops from Mali by August 2022.

## **6.2.2 Shadow State Actors: The Wagner Group**

Mali’s weak institutional structures, fragile political system, elite domination, and the rapidly developing gold sector, makes it a hallmark destination for Russia to exploit. Russia’s main aim is to incentivise on Mali’s fragility through the sale of arms in return for access to its natural resources. For this purpose, along with official bilateral agreements in military and trade, like

---

<sup>123</sup> “One Year of Wagner in Mali,” All Eyes on Wagner, last modified November 2022: 4.

<https://alleyesonwagner.org/2022/11/20/one-year-of-wagner-in-mali/>

<sup>124</sup> *ibid*

<sup>125</sup> Benjamin Roger, “Russia: How Yevgeny Prigozhin funded Kemi Seba to serve his own African ambitions,” The Africa Report, last modified April 11, 2022 <https://www.theafricareport.com/296849/russia-how-yevgeny-prigozhin-funded-kemi-seba-to-serve-his-own-african-ambitions/>

<sup>126</sup> Yaya, “Mali’s Fragility Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways,” 5

<sup>127</sup> Parens, “The Wagner Group’s Playbook,” 9.

<sup>128</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Grace Hwang, “Chronology of Possible Russian Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2020): 37 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27622.18>

<sup>129</sup> Eguegu, “Russia’s Private Military Diplomacy in Africa,” 450.

the one in 2019, unofficial covert tools are also employed. Russian PMC, the Wagner Group, known to be operative in several African states for this purpose, is also operational in Mali. A total of 1,000 Wagner mercenaries arrived in Mali and set-up camp, primarily in the central region, since 2021.

The Wagner Group's modus operandi is quite similar in Mali to its engagements observed in other African states. It provides personal security and advise to the coup leaders in Mali, run disinformation campaigns, provide training to Malian armed forces, and eyes the country's natural resources to finance its operations. Mali is the third-largest gold producer in Africa with a blooming export trade. Its gold sector is growing rapidly since the past two decades. Its industrial production reached 63.4 tonnes in 2021. The rise in production capabilities and conducive tax policies, makes Malian gold very attractive for Russian foreign policy makers.<sup>130</sup> For this purpose, the Wagner Group and its subsidiary companies have been prospecting the gold mines through companies like Alpha Development and Marko Mining since its arrival. Malian gold mines are mostly present in the northern and southern parts of Mali.<sup>131</sup> The unstable situation in Northern Mali has thus prompted Wagner mercenaries to take part in counter-insurgency operations, alongside Malian armed forces and militias,<sup>132</sup> with the aim to gain access to the gold mines. While several media reports suggest that the Wagner Group has already established its gold mining operations in Mali, it is difficult to confirm without proof. However, there is sufficient evidence that the Wagner Group has established at least 9 bases in Mali since 2021, out of which two are close to the gold mines in the capital region of Bamako and Gao respectively<sup>133</sup> (see figure 6.4).

Russia thus has a well-balanced strategy in Mali. On the one hand, it has leveraged through the growing instability in Mali. Moscow has hosted Malian coup leaders like Colonel Sadio Camara at the International Security Conference, and also supplied arms and defence equipment to Mali through official arms deals. Russia has also been in close talks with by Colonel Assimi Goita, who recognises Russia as a strong partner in turbulent times, thereby

---

<sup>130</sup> "Re-examining Russia's presence in West Africa's gold sector," Global Initiative, Risk Bulletin #3, last modified March 2022. <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-003/01-russias-presence-in-west-africas-gold-sector.html>

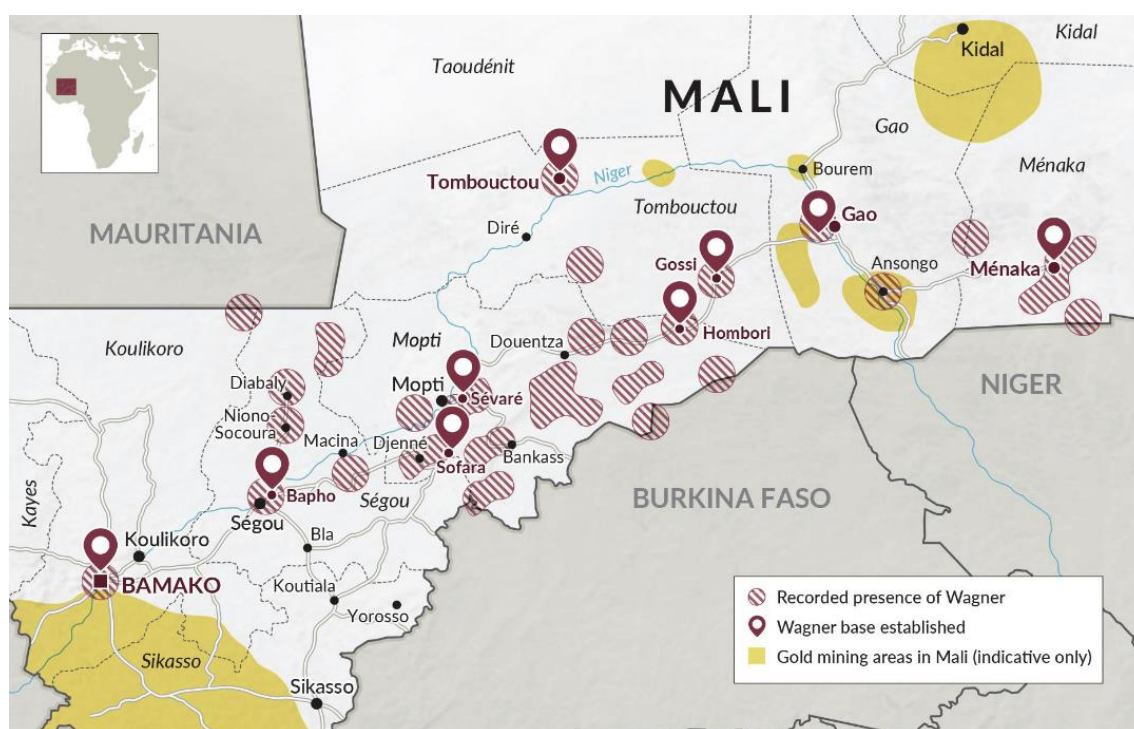
<sup>131</sup> All Eyes on Wagner, "One Year of Wagner in Mali," 7.

<sup>132</sup> "Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa," Global Initiative, Risk Bulletin #6, last modified 6 January 2023. <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-006/index.html>

<sup>133</sup> *ibid*

strengthening elite ties.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, it has dispatched Wagner mercenaries to carry out objectives like extracting mineral resources for profits, with the objective to surpass the international sanctions imposed on both Russia and Mali. The Wagner Group can therefore be seen operating in the shadows, under Russian command. For this reason, one can call the Wagner Group a shadow state actor, doing Russia's bidding where it cannot get directly involved.

Figure 6.4: Wagner Group areas of operation in Mali



Source: "Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa," Global Initiative, Risk Bulletin #6. last modified 6 January 2023 <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-006/index.html>

### **6.3 The Concept of 'the Racket of Predatory Power' in Practice**

#### **6.3.1 Rent control**

Acquiring political and financial benefits by manipulating policies within the state structure is how elites within the system control rent. The main goal is to extract wealth from the asset of the State and distribute the profits among the elites. In Mali, this can be seen in two interrelated instances. First, after the last coup of 2021, Colonel Assimi Goita took over the transitional

<sup>134</sup> "MALI – RUSSIA Increased Assistance," Africa Research Bulletin 23716, 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

government. Following this, he went through official channels and asked Russia for help in countering insurgency in Northern Mali.<sup>135</sup> Russia, known to deploy PMC mercenaries in conflict ridden states, sent the Wagner Group disguised as the Russian military. While on paper, it seems that the Russian military have taken up the role of providing assistance and training to Malian armed forces, in reality that is not the case. Second, as explained in the preceding section, the Wagner Group is known to provide its services in exchange for controlling mining activities as fees.<sup>136</sup> According to investigative reports, Prigozhin's subsidiary companies involved in mining activities elsewhere in Africa, have already set foot in Mali and are setting up camp to take over the gold mines.<sup>137</sup> However, due to the ongoing crisis, it is difficult to find substantial proof for the same.

This method of rent control benefits the elites on both sides. On the Malian front, employment of Wagner mercenaries comes at almost no costs and in return, the elites benefit from such a partnership by creating a positive narrative of defying Western help and fulfilling the wishes of the masses. Russia on the other hand, fulfils its foreign policy objectives of strengthening anti-Western, pro-Russian sentiments in Africa and at the same time they do not have to pay anything for the services rendered by the mercenaries. Therefore, in this way the elites regulate state policies and derive maximum benefits from state resources.

### **6.3.2 Weaken Accountability**

Russia's PMCs are not recognised by its own law. Yet they deploy them, disguised as law enforcement in conflict zones. Putin holds a positive stance towards PMCs, and in this regard he even ordered to classify documents related to their actions, protecting information regarding state involvement to leak.<sup>138</sup> In this way, employing the Wagner Group in Mali, for example, gives them plausible deniability. In this regard, several top Russian politicians have made statements denying their involvement in Mali. Oleg Morozov, a Russian State Duma member was asked about Russia's role in Mali's coup after reports suggested that coup plotters, Malick Diaw and Sadio Camara, were in fact in Russia undergoing military training just before the

---

<sup>135</sup> "MALI – RUSSIA Increased Assistance," Africa Research Bulletin 23716, 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

<sup>136</sup> Kachur, "Manifestations of Russian Formal and Informal Strategies," 521.

<sup>137</sup> All Eyes on Wagner, "One Year of Wagner in Mali," 7.

<sup>138</sup> Østensen and Bukkvoll, "Private Military Companies – Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?," 133.



coup of 2021. To this he denied Russia's involvement and said the allegations were ludicrous.<sup>139</sup> Further, President Putin rejected the Kremlin's role in deploying Russian mercenaries in Mali, stating that the Wagner Group is a "private business with private interests tied to extracting energy resources, including various resources like gold or precious stones."<sup>140</sup> In this way, the Kremlin carefully controls the narratives as well as leverages the PMC industry to its own benefit.

In 2021, Mali's transitional government leaders denied the presence of Wagner mercenaries in Mali. While Mali acknowledged the presence of Russian military trainers in Mali, they called the accusations for hiring the Wagner Group baseless and untrue. At the same time, Russia was also accused of providing material support to the Wagner mercenaries in Mali, which they unsurprisingly denied.<sup>141</sup> Mali's acknowledgement of Russian military presence and the subsequent denial of the Wagner Group's presence, tends to blur the distinction between private and public institutions. This way, both States weaken their accountability and give themselves the flexibility to procure financial gains withing existing structures.

### **6.3.3 Legitimise**

The last crucial element to 'state capture' is to legitimise the shadowy institutions and narratives constructed by the elites, and to enable and protect the patronage networks. Disinformation and pro-information campaigns are one way of doing this. In Mali, Russia began to exert soft power through African elites as early as 2016-2017. Accordingly, 'Project Kemi' was initiated by the Wagner Group, as mentioned previously. The Patriot Group, a civil society organisation, also launched a petition for more Russian involvement to combat terrorism in the country.<sup>142</sup> Russia also incentivised on the growing dissatisfaction towards French and Western influences among the masses. It conducted widespread disinformation campaigns in 2019 and pro-coup campaigns in 2020 that stirred protests countrywide. This led to the military coup in 2020 and

---

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Ramani, "Why Russia Is a Geopolitical Winner in Mali's Coup," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, (16 September 2020) 1. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/09/why-russia-is-a-geopolitical-winner-in-malis-coup/>

<sup>140</sup> Carol Guensburg, "Russia Steadily Rebuilding Presence in Africa," VOA News, last modified 21 February 2021 <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-steadily-rebuilding-presence-in-africa/6452193.html>

<sup>141</sup> Annie Risemberg, "Mali's Military Government: Russia Sends Trainers, Not Mercenaries," VOA News, last modified 28 December 2021 <https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-s-military-government-russia-sends-trainers-not-mercenaries/6372764.html>

<sup>142</sup> All Eyes on Wagner, "One Year of Wagner in Mali," 4.

the ousting of the democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta at that time. Civilians carried out rallies waving Russian flags. The rallies were anti-French and pro-Russian in nature.<sup>143</sup>

Fake news was also spread by Malian officials through state-controlled media. Anti-French military images and videos were circulated through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter with the intention to stir anti-French sentiments among the masses. When Malian leaders signed the contract with the Wagner Group to enter Mali, fake news against France's military intervention began spreading rapidly.<sup>144</sup> In 2020, an online media channel, Universal News TV, showcased the French military smuggling gold out of the country. Media reporters allegedly confirmed these reports, adding that the soldiers confessed to smuggling, on French President Emmanuel Macron's orders. Fact checkers from France24, reported that it was a gross misrepresentation of an inspection that was undertaken in Ghana.<sup>145</sup> This way anti-French feelings were instilled by elites, to set the stage for the Wagner Group to take over operations in Mali.

An important outcome of controlling the narratives is to have a positive influence on the people. A study was conducted by Issaev *et al* in Bamako, Mali in October 2021 to better understand people's perceptions towards the role of Russia in combating terrorism. Subjects interviewed were politicians and academic experts under the age of 30. The results of the study showed that a staggering 90 per cent had a positive attitude towards the role of erstwhile USSR in Mali. 80 per cent subjects had a positive outlook towards Russian PMCs, and 93 per cent reported that Russia should be more actively involved in Africa's internal affairs. Furthermore, they believed that Russian help is their last resort to bring stability and sovereignty in the country.<sup>146</sup>

To conclude with, Russian PMCs' role in Africa is more than that of an external security contractor. Russia carefully deploys them to repurpose public goods for the benefit of the elites on both sides. This way, Russia fulfils its economic, political and security objectives without holding any accountability of the actions of PMCs on the ground. Russia successfully captures state governance with the help of their historical links and power-holding elites. They hide

---

<sup>143</sup> Joseph Siegle and Daniel Eizenga, "Russia's Wagner Play Undermines the Transition in Mali," *African Center for Strategic Studies*, last modified 23 September 2021 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/russia-wagner-undermines-transition-mali/>

<sup>144</sup> Lassane Ouedraogo, "Mali's Fake News Ecosystem: An Overview," Africa Portal, last modified 7 February 2022 <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/malis-fake-news-ecosystem-overview/>

<sup>145</sup> *ibid* 8

<sup>146</sup> Issaev, Shishkina, and Liokumovich, "Perceptions of Russia's 'Return' to Africa," 431–37.

behind a complex web of multiple decisions, made on both official and unofficial accounts. Due to this complex nature of this relationship, the decisions made often seem legitimate and justifiable at the time. The underlying motivation of enriching elites is thus carefully hidden under the false pretence of public good.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

The Wagner Group's employment in Mali has not produced any significant success on the ground. On the contrary, the problem of insurgency, violent conflict and terrorism still persist. The number of casualties since their arrival has increased and is evidenced to be highest in 2022, ever since the conflict began in 2013.<sup>147</sup> The reality of the situation is worse than before, as jihadist groups have progressed into Mali and now occupy 30% more territory.<sup>148</sup>

The concept of the '*Racket of Predatory Power*' provides us with three crucial elements used by Russia to foster stronger relations with Africa. Evidently, their main goal is to repurpose public resources for the benefit of elites. The three elements they use include, controlling rents by designing bilateral agreements for maximum financial benefit; weakening state accountability for plausible deniability; and legitimising actions by conducting disinformation campaigns and controlling the narrative that allow for the rent-seeking to persist. Therefore, the shadow states constructed, seem valid in the eyes of the public, making it easier for involving shadow actors like the Wagner Group to carry out Russia's foreign policy objectives.

A network of reliable agents is crucial to carry out the objectives. Historical ties between power-holding elites on both sides, as observed since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, help Russia safely reap benefits in Africa. Common socialist ideologies, and the mutual dislike for colonialism have helped strengthen these relationships. The Soviet Union's investment into Africa's development and education is also seen positively amongst present-day African elites. Further, Russia's policy of no involvement in Africa's internal affairs, helps Russia's case for increased partnerships, as opposed to their Western counterparts.

Finally, a complex web of institutions and legislations is constructed to confuse the masses. This makes them think that bilateral engagements between Russia and Africa are legitimate and justifiable. It often results in many actors to believe in the false picture created by the elites. However, in reality, the complex nature of their engagements is created only for the enrichments of Russian elites.

---

<sup>147</sup> All Eyes on Wagner, "One Year of Wagner in Mali," 19.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid*

The role of the Wagner Group, in carrying forward the three objectives described above, is common and recurring. While it is the Wagner Group on the ground, conducting disinformation campaigns, military operations, training, and most importantly extracting resources, it is Moscow who is pulling the strings. These “semi-state security forces”<sup>149</sup> are thus carefully deployed by Russia to promote state interests in the international arena, especially in African states.

It is clear that the Wagner Group is not leaving Mali and the Sahel region any time soon and are likely to stay. Their goal in the region is simple, to solidify Russia’s influence in the region, and strategically extract resources in the Sahel.<sup>150</sup> This, however, threatens the long-term peace and stability of Africa. Capturing the state in this way, like it has done in Mali, is troublesome. Following Russia’s trend of incentivising on politically unstable states, it seems likely that Burkina Faso is next on their agenda. Reports suggest that Wagner has already began disinformation campaigns in the state with pro-Russian content and Russian flags visibly increasing, after the coup of January 2022. There is thus an urgent need to realise the lengths Russia can go to fulfil its political and financial needs. While Russia’s actions in Africa cannot be reversed, we can always strive to improve the situation in Africa by creating stronger debates and discussions in academia, with the aim to find alternative ways to help Africa overcome the persisting crisis.

---

<sup>149</sup> Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces,” 181.

<sup>150</sup> All Eyes on Wagner, “One Year of Wagner in Mali,” 57.

## **Bibliography**

- Adam R., Grissom; Charap, Samuel; Cheravitch, Joe; Hanson, Russell; Massicot, Dara; A. Mouton, Christopher and Reimer, Jordan R. "Russia's Growing Presence in Africa A Geostrategic Assessment." *RAND Corporation* (2022): 1-31.  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4399.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4399.html)
- Africa Research Bulletin 23716. "MALI – RUSSIA Increased Assistance." 1<sup>st</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.
- Akinola, Akinlolu E and Ogunnubi, Olusola. "Russo-African Relations and Electoral Democracy: Assessing the Implications of Russia's Renewed Interest for Africa." *African Security Review* 30, No. 3 (2 August 2021): 386-402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1956982>
- All Eyes on Wagner. "One Year of Wagner in Mali." Last modified November 2022: 1-58.  
<https://alleyesonwagner.org/2022/11/20/one-year-of-wagner-in-mali/>
- Annie Risemberg, "Mali's Military Government: Russia Sends Trainers, Not Mercenaries," VOA News. Last modified 28 December 2021 <https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-s-military-government-russia-sends-trainers-not-mercenaries/6372764.html>
- Arieff, Alexis. "Crisis in Mali." *Congressional Research Service* (14 January 2013).  
<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42664.pdf>
- Arkhangelskaya, Alexandra and Shubin, Vladimir. "Russia's Africa Policy." *South African Institute of International Affairs*, Occasional Paper No 157 (September 2013): 5  
<https://saiia.org.za/research/russias-africa-policy/>
- Benjamin Roger. "Russia: How Yevgeny Prigozhin funded Kemi Seba to serve his own African ambitions." *The Africa Report*. Last modified April 11, 2022  
<https://www.theafricareport.com/296849/russia-how-yevgeny-prigozhin-funded-kemi-seba-to-serve-his-own-african-ambitions/>
- Borshchevskaya, Anna. "The Role of Russian Private Military Contractors in Africa." *Foreign Policy Research Institute, Eurasia Program* (21 August 2020)  
<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/08/the-role-of-russian-private-military-contractors-in-africa/>
- Carol Guensburg. "Russia Steadily Rebuilding Presence in Africa," VOA News. Last modified 21 February 2021 <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-steadily-rebuilding-presence-in-africa/6452193.html>
- Center for Global Affairs & Strategic Studies. "Russia's sharp power in Africa: the case of Madagascar, Central Africa Republic, Sudan and South Africa." *Accessed 22 May 2023*.  
<https://www.unav.edu/en/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/russia-s-sharp-power-in-africa-the-case-of-madagascar-central-africa-republic-sudan-and-south-africa>
- Clifford, Cayley. "Russia's media playbook in Ukraine and Africa — let the great world spin." *Daily Maverick Africa* (24 March 2022). <https://saiia.org.za/research/russias-media-playbook-in-ukraine-and-africa-let-the-great-world-spin/>

- Cordesman, Anthony H. and Hwang, Grace. "Chronology of Possible Russian Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2020): 36-40  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27622.18>
- DiResta, Renee and Grossman, Shelby. "Potemkin Pages & Personas: Assessing GRU Online Operations, 2014-2019." *Freeman Spigoli Institute for International Studies* (November 2019): 1-112. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/potemkin-think-tanks>
- Eguegu, Ovigwe. "Russia's private military diplomacy in Africa: High risk, low reward, limited impact." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (11 November 2022): 445-462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2142276>
- Galeotti, Mark. "Active Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations." *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies*, No. 21 (June 2019)  
<https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/active-measures-russias-covert-geopolitical-operations-0>
- Global Initiative. "Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa." Risk Bulletin #6. Last modified 6 January 2023. <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-006/index.html>
- Global Initiative. "Re-examining Russia's presence in West Africa's gold sector." Risk Bulletin #3. Last modified March 2022. <https://riskbulletins.globalinitiative.net/wea-obs-003/01-russias-presence-in-west-africas-gold-sector.html>
- Gruzda, Steven; Ramanib, Samuel and Clifford, Cayley. "Russia in Africa: Who is courting whom?." *South African Institute of International Affairs* 29, No.4 (November 2022): 401-405.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2146184>
- Haruna, Abdallah I. and Salam, Abdul-Rahaman Abdul. "Rethinking Russian Foreign Policy Towards Africa: Prospects and Opportunities for Cooperation in New Geopolitical Realities." *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, No. 2 (April 2021): 1-20.  
<https://doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2021.1.2.24>
- Hazard, John N. "Marxian Socialism in Africa: The Case of Mali." *Comparative Politics* 2, No. 1 (October 1969): 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/421479>
- Hedenskog, Jakob. "Russia is Stepping Up its Military Cooperation in Africa." *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, FOI Memo 6604, Project No: A18104 (December 2018)  
<https://www.foi.se/restapi/report/FOI%20MEMO%206604>
- Iandolo, Alessandro. *Arrested Development The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968*. Cornell University Press, 2022. 1-287.
- Issaev, Leonid; Shishkina, Alisa and Liokumovich, Yakov. "Perceptions of Russia's 'return' to Africa: Views from West Africa." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (November 2022): 425-444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2139289>
- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov and Larsen, Karen Philippa. "Liberal intervention's renewed crisis: responding to Russia's growing influence in Africa." *International Affairs* 99, Issue 1 (January 2023): 259–278. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaac252>

- Jacobsen, Katja Lindskov. "Russia's Showy and Shadowy Engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Centre for Military Studies* (4 December 2020): 1-83. <https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/english/publications/russias-showy-and-shadowy-engagements-in-sub-saharan-africa/>
- Jones, Seth G.; Doxsee, Catrina; Katz, Brian; McQueen, Eric and Joe Moyer. "Russia's Corporate Soldiers The Global Expansion of Russia's Private Military Companies." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (July 2021): 1-108. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-corporate-soldiers-global-expansion-russias-private-military-companies>
- Joseph Siegle and Daniel Eizenga. "Russia's Wagner Play Undermines the Transition in Mali." *African Center for Strategic Studies*. Last modified 23 September 2021 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/russia-wagner-undermines-transition-mali/>
- Kachur, Dzvinika. "Manifestations of Russian formal and informal strategies in Southern and Eastern Africa 2000-2022." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 29, No. 4 (December 2022): 509-534 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2022.2150302>
- Katsakioris, Constantin. "Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia." *Cahiers d'études africaines* 226 (2017): 258-288. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesaficaines.20664>
- Koloma, Yaya. "Mali's Fragility: Root Causes and Potential Recovery Pathways." *MPRA Paper No 112821*, (25 April 2022): 1-43 <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/112821/>
- Lanfranchi, Guido and Bruijne, Kars de. "The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming? Russia's growing presence in Africa and its implication for European policy." *Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'* (June 2022): 1-46. [10.13140/RG.2.2.25974.88643](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25974.88643)
- Lassane Ouedraogo. "Mali's Fake News Ecosystem: An Overview." *Africa Portal*. Last modified 7 February 2022 <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/malis-fake-news-ecosystem-overview/>
- Legvold, Robert. *Soviet Policy in West Africa*. Harvard University Press, 1970. 1-372
- Lindén, Karolina. "Russia's Relations with Africa: Small, Military-Oriented and with Destabilising Effects." *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, FOI Memo 8090, Project no. A12214 (January 2023). <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%208090>
- Marten, Kimberly. "Russia's use of semi-state security forces: the case of the Wagner Group." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, No. 3 (March 2019): 181-204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142>
- Natufe, Omajuwu Igho. "Soviet Policy in Africa 1945-1970: A Study in Political History." Phd diss., McGill University, December 1994, 1-341. <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/jm214p98b?locale=en>



- Neethling, Theo. "Assessing Russia's New Interaction with Africa: Energy Diplomacy, Arms Exports and Mineral Resource Markets." *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 42, No. 2 (Nov /Dec 2020):15-42 <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v42i2.72>
- Østensen, Åse Gilje and Bukkvoll, Tor. "Private military companies – Russian great power politics on the cheap?." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, Nos. 1-2 (2022): 130-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1984709>
- Østensen, Åse Gilje and Bukkvoll, Tor. "Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies." *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment*, FFI Report 18/01300, Project No. 5346 (11 September 2018): 1-49. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6637-russian-use-of-private-military-and-security>
- Paczyńska, Agnieszka. "Russia in Africa: is great power competition returning to the continent?" *German Development Institute*, Briefing Paper 15 (2020) <https://www.die-gdi.de/briefing-paper/article/russia-in-africa-is-great-power-competition-returning-to-the-continent/>
- Parens, Raphael. "The Wagner Group's Playbook in Africa: Mali." *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (March 2022): 1-17. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/03/the-wagner-groups-playbook-in-africa-mali/>
- Pichon, Martin and Russel, Eric. "Russia in Africa: A new arena for geopolitical competition." *European Parliamentary Research Service*, Briefing (8 November 2019): 1-12 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337623048\\_Russia\\_in\\_Africa\\_A\\_new\\_arena\\_for\\_geopolitical\\_competition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337623048_Russia_in_Africa_A_new_arena_for_geopolitical_competition)
- Potočňák, Adam and Mareš, Miroslav. "Russia's Private Military Enterprises as a Multipurpose Tool of Hybrid Warfare." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 35, No. 2 (November 2022): 184-204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2022.2132608>
- Ramani, Samuel. "Why Russia Is a Geopolitical Winner in Mali's Coup." *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (16 September 2020): 1-3. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/09/why-russia-is-a-geopolitical-winner-in-malis-coup/>
- Sergey Sukhankin. "War, Business and Ideology: How Russian Private Military Contractors Pursue Moscow's Interests." The Jamestown Foundation, Last modified March 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/war-business-and-ideology-how-russian-private-military-contractors-pursue-moscows-interests/>
- Siegle, Joseph. "Chapter 10 Russia and Africa: Expanding Influence and Instability." In *Russia's Global Reach: A Security and Statecraft Assessment*, ed. Graeme P. Herd. 80-90. Garmisch Partenkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2021.
- Stronski, Paul "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October 2019): 1-32. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056>
- Stronski, Paul. "Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa's Sahel Region." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (28 February 2023): 1-5.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/28/russia-s-growing-footprint-in-africa-s-sahel-region-pub-89135>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. “The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.” Last modified 31 March 2023

[https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1860586/?TSPD\\_101\\_R0=08765fb817ab2000e44a9d31a36fc747048d96eb9dbfe9c40233de0d090cbb0539f4ab8f2242700708211733d3143000240709bee0ea30bba2c1de8b4f4289e439aa5061b424dd0a281445c3e8bcae76baf1349fa7268e134c6a356ba0e3981f](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?TSPD_101_R0=08765fb817ab2000e44a9d31a36fc747048d96eb9dbfe9c40233de0d090cbb0539f4ab8f2242700708211733d3143000240709bee0ea30bba2c1de8b4f4289e439aa5061b424dd0a281445c3e8bcae76baf1349fa7268e134c6a356ba0e3981f)

Yengo, Patrice and Martin, Monique de Saint. “How “Red” elites contributed to shaping postcolonial states.” trans. Hochroth, Lysa. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 226, Issue 2, (July 2017): 1-26.

<https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.20661>