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Africa-Russia Military Relations: Navigating Evolving Dynamics, Policies, and Challenges

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Abstract

The Africa-Russia military relationship is undergoing a significant change, characterized by evolving dynamics, shifting policies, and emerging challenges. The resurgence in military ties marks a departure from the post-Soviet era, as Russia seeks to reassert its influence on the African continent. This study explores the multifaceted drivers behind Russia's renewed interest in Africa, including strategic partnerships, arms sales, and military cooperation agreements. It also looks into the broader geopolitical implications, examining how Russia's military engagements affect Africa's security landscape and international relations. Its focus includes Russia's role in peacekeeping operations, counterterrorism efforts, and the involvement of Russian paramilitary organizations and Private Military Companies (PMCs) in African conflicts. The analysis extends to the responses of African nations to Russia's overtures, evaluating the opportunities and challenges posed by these deepening military connections. Furthermore, the paper looks into the African Union-Russia peace and security partnerships. By providing an overview of this complex and evolving relationship, this paper aims to offer insights into the geopolitical dynamics shaping Africa's security environment in the contemporary era. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding

of how the rekindled Africa-Russia military relationship influences global security paradigms and what it means for the future of international diplomacy and conflict resolution in the African continent.

Keywords: *Africa, Russia, African Union, Private Military Companies (PMCs), Counterterrorism*

Introduction

Africa-Russia relations dates to the Cold War period, a period characterized by ideological alliances, military support, and diplomatic exchanges. During this time, the Soviet Union positioned itself as a key ally to many African countries, offering military assistance, ideological backing, and financial aid to support decolonization movements and resist Western influence.¹ Countries such as Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia became central to these partnerships, with the Soviet Union playing a pivotal role in their political and military affairs. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's presence in Africa diminished, leading to a period of relative disengagement (Hedenskog, 2018). Political and economic upheaval in post-Soviet Russia shifted its focus inward, leading to a prolonged period of relative disengagement from African affairs. As a result, the influence that the Soviet Union once wielded on the continent diminished, allowing other global powers such as China and the United States, to fill the void. However, in recent years, this trend has experienced a marked reversal. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia has embarked on a deliberate strategy to re-establish its presence in Africa (Marten, 2019). Central to this revival is a renewed emphasis on military cooperation, arms sales, and security partnerships. Russian private military companies, such as the Wagner Group, have played a growing role in providing security assistance and training to various African governments, often in exchange for access to natural resources and political support and alliances. Additionally, Russia has leveraged historical ties, political rhetoric emphasizing anti-colonial solidarity, and economic initiatives to strengthen its foothold on the continent.

¹ Russia's relationship with African states was established primarily through the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, strong ties were forged with African nations, particularly those involved in anti-colonial struggles and socialist movements. These relationships laid the foundation for Russia's modern-day connections with the continent.

Cold War Era Relations and post-Soviet Disengagements

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) made their foray into Africa during the height of the Cold War and on the eve of African decolonization. During this period (1960-1980s), they offered air and land weaponry for various African conflicts and to support African liberation movements such as South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and Namibia's South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), providing military assistance and diplomatic support to countries striving for independence from colonial rule (Kohnert, 2022; Omadoure, 2015). This period was marked by efforts to expand influence in Africa, by aligning with African governments that shared its socialist and anti-colonial sentiments (Besenyő, 2019). African liberation movements such as the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the then military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa (Nkuna and Shai, 2021),² the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in Namibia (Shubin, 2009), and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), which eventually became the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), in Zimbabwe (Guzura, 2016), all received military and financial support from the USSR. These liberation movements were engaged in the struggle against colonialism and white minority regimes of Southern Rhodesia to liberate their people from oppressive governments (Nyerere, 1965). Its first significant military involvement in Africa occurred during the 1895 Battle of Adwa, where Russian military advisers and weapons supported Ethiopian forces against Italian colonial forces (Zeleelew and Nigussie, 2019). This early engagement marked the beginning of a long-standing relationship between Russia and Africa, characterized by consistent support for anti-colonial movements and newly independent African nations.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union backed the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN)'s fight in the 1954-1962 War of Independence against French troops (Aissaoui, 2012). During the 1960-1965 Congo Crisis, Soviet military backed Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba's efforts to resist Western influence (Sonnenfeldt, 1960). Additionally, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in the Angolan Civil War (1975-2002), supporting the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)

² During this period, the ANC was banned in South Africa, it therefore operated from Lusaka (Zambia) which was their headquarters, and many of its leaders were exiled.

against US- and South Africa-backed UNITA forces (Klinghoffer, 2022). Similarly, in Mozambique, the USSR supported the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) during its war of independence from Portugal (1964-1974) and the subsequent civil war in 1977-1992 (Campbell, 2022). The Soviet Union also provided significant aid to Ethiopia's Derg regime during the Ethiopian Civil War and the Ogaden War (1977-1978) against Somalia (Yordanov, 2012). In South Africa, the USSR's support for the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was instrumental in the fight against apartheid (Nkuna and Shai, 2021). This support extended to political and diplomatic backing at international bodies, condemning apartheid policies and criticizing Western imperialistic actions in Africa (Matusevich, 2019; Nkuna and Shai, 2021).

Russia alone has a long history of participating in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, providing crucial support to various African peace missions. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Russia contributed thousands of troops to UN missions in several African countries, including Chad, South Sudan, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Sierra Leone (Nikitin, 2011; Bratersky, 2018). However, in recent years, Russia's troop contributions to UN peace missions have become relatively modest, as it has limited the scale of its involvement in such missions and its cooperation with Western countries. Today, several factors continue to facilitate Russia's expansion in Africa, including the absence of a colonial legacy and Russia's ability to supply arms to African countries under economic sanctions. These factors make Russia an attractive partner to African countries seeking collaborations and partnerships (el-Badawy et al., 2022).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's interactions with African nations underwent significant changes, coinciding with Boris Yeltsin's presidency in 1992 and marking the onset of a neo-liberal foreign policy era (Omadoure, 2015). Two key factors elucidate the shift towards enhanced relations between Russia and African states since the early 1990s. Firstly, with the Cold War ending, Russia's foreign policy was no longer dictated by Cold War dynamics, instead pivoting towards strategic considerations largely driven by economic interests (Iandolo, 2011). Secondly, many of Russia's former Cold War allies, previously liberation movements, transformed into governing political parties and democracies in Africa, contributing substantially to this evolution (Matusevich, 2019). As Russia focused

inward to address its own political and economic issues, there was a significant reduction in its engagement with African countries. The decline of Soviet support systems left a vacuum in Africa, which was gradually filled by other global powers and emerging economies. Western nations, buoyed by their economic and military dominance, expanded their influence through aid, trade, and diplomacy, while emerging economies such as China and India too began forging their own paths in Africa, focusing on infrastructure investments and resource extraction. China, in particular pursued an aggressive infrastructure-driven approach, offering large-scale investment in roads, railways, ports, and telecommunications, often in exchange for access to natural resources. India, on the other hand, focused on leveraging historical ties, private investment, and its expertise in areas such as technology and education (Ramontja et al., 2024; Obeng-Odoom, 2024). This realignment of external actors created a crowded and already competitive geopolitical landscape in Africa. India, on the other hand, focused on leveraging historical ties, private investment, and its expertise in areas such as technology and education. This realignment of external actors created a crowded and already competitive geopolitical landscape in Africa (Biswas, 2024).

Russian PMCs and their posture in Africa

Under Vladimir Putin's presidency, the deployment of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and semi-state military entities has become a notable aspect of Russia's military strategy or posture (Marten, 2019). These entities were in existence long before the dissolution of the USSR and maintained ties with the central government, often being subcontracted by the government to provide military support (Kohnert, 2022). Despite not fitting the traditional mercenary definition, these groups have assumed roles resembling law enforcement functions (Faleg and Secrieru, 2020). Their actions, while motivated by a desire to maintain order and stability, often blur the lines between legitimate state authority and quasi-military intervention (Mohamedou, 2024). Since 2014, Russia has deployed PMCs in 21 countries, predominantly in the Middle East and Africa (el-Badawy et al., 2022). These include the Séwa Services and the Wagner Group, which have played a crucial role in bolstering and legitimizing Russia's military presence in Africa (De Melo, 2023). Subsequently, these military entities have been involved in African conflict zones, including Libya, the Central African Republic (CAR),

Mali, and most recently, in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique (Pokalova, 2023; Faleg and Secrieru, 2020).

In the Darfur region of Sudan, the Wagner Group provided training for the Rapid Support Forces and national military personnel under the leadership of President Omar al-Bashir (el-Badawy et al., 2022). Similar support was extended to the Eastern-based government in Tobruk, and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar (el-Badawy et al., 2022). In addition, it has been reported that Wagner troops have been supporting the LNA since 2019, with over 2,000 troops deployed to overthrow the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli (Katz and Bermudez, 2020). Their support primarily revolves around military training and equipment, including personnel, snipers, fighter jets, and anti-aircraft systems (Marshall, 2021). Furthermore, they provided military advice to the LNA and its leader, Khalifa Haftar (el-Badawy et al., 2022). In the Central African Republic (CAR), the group was dispatched to train the national army, safeguard mines, and provide personal security services to President Faustin Archange Touadéra (el-Badawy et al., 2022; Matusevich, 2019).

Mozambique has also been a focal area of interest for the Wagner Group, with reports indicating that more than 200 mercenaries have been deployed to the Cabo Delgado province to address ongoing insurgent activities (dos Santos, 2020; Nhamirre, 2021). This region has been plagued by violent extremism and insurgency linked to Islamist groups since early 2017, necessitating external military support. In CAR, the presence and support of Russian PMCs have raised substantial concerns regarding the mandate and effectiveness of the European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA) (Faleg and Secrieru, 2020). The EUTM-RCA was established as part of the EU's strategic plan to provide training, advice, and support to the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) during the CAR 2013 conflict (Plank, 2017). However, the mission has faced increasing challenges due to the actions of Russian PMCs, such as the Wagner Group, which have been involved in training other local forces, providing security for government officials, and engaging directly in combat operations (Majchút, 2022). These activities have significantly bolstered the military capabilities of local factions aligned with Russian interests. The expanded role of these Russian military entities, which have gained significant influence within the national military structure and government security

apparatus, has the potential to undermine the EU's strategic goals in the region.

In Mali, the Wagner Group has been deployed to support the transitional military government, coinciding with the withdrawal of French and European forces (Daly, 2023). This departure created a significant security vacuum that the Wagner Group has actively sought to fill (Daly, 2023; Elbassoussy, 2021). The group's involvement in Mali was formalized through military agreements that encompass comprehensive training programs, provision of advanced military equipment, and personal protection services for key government figures (Mohamedou, 2024). This strategic partnership not only bolsters the Malian military's capabilities but also significantly enhances Russian influence in the whole region (Daly, 2023). In addition, its presence in Mali represents a marked shift from traditional Western alliances towards alternative security arrangements (Daly, 2023). This shift has profound implications for regional security and stability, potentially altering the balance of power and impacting the geopolitical landscape in West Africa.

The deployment of the Wagner Group and other Russian PMCs in Africa exemplifies a strategic maneuver to extend Russia's influence, countering Western presence and creating new geopolitical dynamics (Hedenskog, 2018). Their activities in conflict zones, from Libya to Mozambique, underscore a broader effort to reshape the security landscape of the continent, offering a blend of military support and political alignment that appeals to several African governments (Katz and Bermudez, 2020). If Russia continues to strengthen and expand its military presence in Africa, the consequences for Western powers could become increasingly concerning. Its growing influence might evolve from individual states to reshaping dynamics across the entire continent, potentially shifting the balance of power and transforming relations throughout Africa.

Arms sales and military deals

Following the end of the Cold War, Russia's arms exports to Africa experienced a significant decline, with the United States, France, and China emerging as prominent suppliers (Besenyő, 2019). However, in recent years, there has been a notable increase in arms deals, sales, and imports from Russia to Africa. This trend was solidified by a contractual agreement between the Rosoboronexport (Russia's state-owned military agency responsible for military product imports and exports) and several

African countries, including Nigeria, Mali, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan (Clifford, 2021). This is supported by findings from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which indicates that from 2016 to 2022, Africa accounted for 18% of all Russian arms exports, solidifying Moscow's position as a major arms supplier to African countries (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2022). In comparison, the United States and China have also been key players in the African arms market, albeit with different levels of engagement (Carrozza and Marsh, 2022). During the same period, the United States focused more on providing military aid and training rather than direct arms sales, emphasizing counterterrorism and peacekeeping support (Williams and Boutellis, 2014). China has steadily increased its arms exports to Africa, offering competitive pricing and flexible payment options, which have made Chinese weapons increasingly attractive to African nations (Carrozza and Marsh, 2022). Over the past two decades, it has also been involved in providing Security Force Assistance (SFA) to African nations, including donations of arms, military equipment, and training programs (Matissek, 2020).

Russia on the other hand, has been actively working to fill open spaces in the arms supply market. In 2014, the United States withdrew from a substantial deal to supply attack helicopters to the Nigerian government, this withdrawal created an attractive opportunity for Putin, who swiftly stepped in and provided the Nigerian government with Mi-35 combat helicopters to fight insurgents in the Northern part of the country (Besenyő, 2019). Russia further expanded its influence by offering arms to Egypt, culminating in the largest arms deal worth \$3.5 billion (Matusevich, 2019). This move has positioned Russia as a key player in Egypt's arms imports, accounting for over 20% of the country's total (Kuimova, 2019). African nations such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, facing isolation due to Western sanctions, have also turned to Russia for partnerships, particularly in arms deals and sales (Kohnert, 2022). Since 2019, Russia has been exporting missiles, SU-24 fighter jets, and anti-aircraft missiles to Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar's forces (Seigle, 2021). In the Central African Republic (CAR), Moscow challenged a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) arms embargo and supplied military resources, including rifles and grenades, as well as around 200 military instructors in support of President Faustin-Archange Toudéra (Faleg and Secrieru, 2020). According to the UNSC the embargo aimed to curb the escalation of violence caused by armed

groups and human rights violations in the country, but the CAR government argued that it hindered its ability to address the security crisis (UNSC, 2023).

In terms of military agreements, Putin's presidency has undoubtedly strengthened Moscow's engagements with African nations, exemplified by a significant agreement signed between former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Putin in 2000 (Kohnert, 2022). This agreement includes multiple facets of military cooperation, including joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and capacity building aimed at enhancing Nigeria's counter-terrorism capabilities. Furthermore, it involves the transfer of military equipment and technology, illustrating Russia's commitment to deepening its strategic partnerships in Africa beyond mere diplomatic exchanges. This agreement underscores a broader trend where Russia seeks to expand its influence and presence in Africa's security landscape, leveraging military cooperation as a cornerstone of its diplomatic outreach strategy. Such initiatives not only strengthen bilateral ties but also contribute to shaping regional security dynamics, positioning Russia as a key player in addressing Africa's evolving security challenges through collaborative military efforts.

Subsequent to the evacuation of the Soviet naval base on the Ethiopian (now Eritrean) Red Sea in 1991, Russia has demonstrated a keen interest in establishing naval bases in strategic maritime locations across Africa (Kostelyanets and Okeke, 2018; Ezech and Ezirim, 2023). This interest was notably illustrated between 2008 and 2011 with rumored negotiations between Russia and Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi for a naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean, although these talks stalled after Gaddafi's demise (Daly, 2023). Renewed attention came in 2016 when Libyan Khalifa Haftar, known for his Kremlin ties, proposed offering land for a Russian military base in Eastern Libya (Kostelyanets and Okeke, 2018). However, escalating internal turmoil and Western economic sanctions in Libya halted these negotiations (Neethling, 2020).

In another instance, reports indicated that a parliamentary delegation from Somaliland visited Moscow to explore leasing land for Russian naval facilities, but subsequent reports suggested the Somaliland government canceled these talks (Somalia Report, 2018). More recently, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir discussed with President Putin the potential establishment of a Russian naval base on the Red Sea (Generoso, 2022). While the Russian government has not publicly addressed these reports, al-Bashir's frequent visits to Sochi suggest

ongoing negotiations. As of now, discussions are ongoing, and although there is no formal agreement for Russian military bases on the Red Sea, cooperation agreements on military training and warship port entry have been signed between Russia and Sudan (Blank, 2022).

The Horn of Africa and the Red Sea continue to be pivotal geopolitical hotspots, drawing significant interest from global powers due to their strategic importance. Countries such as France, China, and the USA have long established naval bases in Djibouti, strategically positioning themselves to monitor and influence maritime activities in this crucial corridor of international trade and security (Rogozińska and Olech, 2020). This strategic deployment of naval assets underscores a broader geopolitical strategy aimed at safeguarding shipping lanes, combating piracy, and projecting power across the region. Moreover, these developments highlight the intricate interplay of interests among major powers, reflecting their efforts to secure access to vital sea routes and maintain stability in a region prone to political volatility and economic significance.

The AU-Russia Peace and Security Cooperation

The African Union-Russia Peace and Security Cooperation represents a strategic partnership aimed at enhancing peace and stability across the African continent (Besenyő, 2020). This collaboration between the AU and Russia gained significant momentum following the 2019 Russia-Africa summit in Sochi, where a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed (Matusevich, 2019). Against the backdrop of ongoing security challenges in the Sahel, Libya, the DRC, Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, Somalia, and Northern Nigeria, this cooperation addresses critical issues including conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations, security assistance, and military training (el-Badawy et al., 2022; Nhamirre, 2021). We've seen over the years how this partnership has evolved to include joint efforts in capacity-building and technical support, reflecting a shared commitment to fostering stability and addressing complex security threats in Africa (Besenyő, 2020). Recent years have seen intensified engagement and mutual exchanges aimed at bolstering regional security frameworks and enhancing the AU's capacity to manage and resolve conflicts effectively with Russian support.

Key aspects of the AU-Russia Peace and Security Cooperation include:

- **Conflict Resolution:** The AU and Russia collaborate on addressing conflicts and crises in Africa. Russia has at times provided diplomatic support, acted as a mediator, and supported conflict resolution efforts initiated by the AU (Besenyő, 2020). This involvement is particularly relevant in regions such as the Sahel, Libya, eastern Congo, Cabo in Mozambique, Somalia, and northern Nigeria, where conflicts and insecurity have been persistent (Kohnert, 2022; Nhamirre, 2021).
- **Peacekeeping:** The AU has sought support from Russia in the form of military personnel, equipment, and logistics for peacekeeping missions in conflict zones across the continent (Seigle, 2021). Russia has, at times, provided assistance and expertise to enhance the AU's peacekeeping capabilities. This is essential in maintaining peace and stability in regions with ongoing conflicts.
- **Security Assistance:** Russia's support to African countries often extends to security assistance, including arms sales, training, and the deployment of Private Military Companies (PMCs) (Marshall, 2021). African countries facing security challenges have looked to Russia for military support, and this assistance has taken various forms.
- **Military Training:** Through the AU, Russia offers military education for African military personnel, with training taking place in Moscow and accommodating approximately 500 African students per year (Marshall, 2021). This training helps African nations build and strengthen their military capabilities. However, Russia has its strategic objectives, including securing reserves and mining privileges in Africa and gaining naval access in the eastern Mediterranean (Seigle, 2021). Russia aims to establish a zone of influence in this geographically strategic territory that connects Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, with strategic positions at the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean.
- **UN Security Council and Voting Bloc:** Russia's engagement and support to African countries has strategically positioned it to build support within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a platform where key international decisions are made. Through consistent cooperation and support extended to African nations, particularly during significant events, Russia has effectively garnered favor and bolstered from Africa which boosts its influence within the

UNSC. This is witnessed during the Ukraine war, where African states choose not to condemn Russia's invasion, with some choosing to abstain in votes and others opposing resolutions condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine (Staeger, 2023). This enhanced influence holds particular significance in discussions related to conflicts and sanctions, where the collective stance of the UNSC can shape outcomes and policies on a global scale. Thus, Russia's strategic outreach and collaboration with African nations serve not only to strengthen bilateral relations but also to consolidate its diplomatic leverage within the United Nations, amplifying its voice and impact on crucial international affairs.

Russia's expansionist efforts have yielded results, enabling it to build a stronger voting bloc in the United Nations Security Council, posing a challenge to Western interests. This is evident in the voting patterns of African countries in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) during the Russia-Ukraine war voting bloc, and the subsequent support Russia received from African nations (Ajala, 2022). While many African countries adopted a non-aligned stance, some took a firm position against the coercive economic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on Russia. These voting patterns reveal a range of positions among African countries regarding the Ukraine War. Some countries supported UN resolutions related to the conflict, while others abstained or voted against them. Eritrea consistently stood in opposition to these resolutions, whereas the stance of the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council from Africa varied depending on the specific resolution (Ajala, 2022). These votes reflect the diversity of opinions and geopolitical considerations within the African continent in the context of international conflicts.

Controversies and Limitations of Russian Military Engagements in Africa

The presence of the Wagner Group in African conflicts underscores the complexities of current conflicts, where non-state actors and external actors play increasingly prominent roles in shaping outcomes. More so, its presence in African conflicts has raised significant concerns and debates. The reports of their activities, including training forces and engaging in combat operations, have sparked controversy and criticism from various human rights organizations, Civil Society Organizations

(CSOs), the international community, scholars, and local communities. There are fears that their presence could exacerbate the conflict and lead to potential human rights abuses and humanitarian crises.

Despite the collaboration and military support offered to African nations events since 2014 have raised significant concerns and debates about Russia's resurgence in Africa. These concerns extend beyond African states and encompass other nations wary of Moscow's ambitions to re-establish itself as a global power (Sukhankin, 2020). Russia's expansion in Africa is met with serious apprehension and suspicion, not only by its Western rivals but also by African states themselves. Its selective and elite-focused military involvement in Africa is inherently destabilizing and, to some extent, undermines African voices advocating for stability and reforms on the continent (Neethling, 2023). Some argue that Russia appears inherently aligned with authoritarian leaders who rely on force to retain power (Kohnert, 2022).

In academic circles, it is argued that Russia lacks significant social, cultural, and ideological resonance with many African states (Siegle, 2021). Instead, it tends to support individual politicians and business elites who find themselves in trouble, and whose interests are aligned with socialist practices and believes. Across the continent where Russia has expanded its influence, it has employed a combination of mercenaries and support campaigns to bolster individual leaders struggling with security challenges. For instance, in the Central African Republic, Russia deployed an estimated 400 Wagner group troops to safeguard President-elect Faustin-Archange Touadéra against Islamist militia groups (Kostelyanets and Okeke, 2018). Touadéra's government was grappling with internal political turmoil, and Russia's military support aided in maintaining its grip on domestic power. In Sudan, Russia supported the embattled President Omar al-Bashir by deploying Wagner forces to assist the Sudanese military in 2019 (Seigle, 2021). African Presidents relying on Wagner's security for protection and to remain in power face the risk of compromising their policy options and the sovereignty of their countries for personal interests. In many instances, democratic practices are eroded and superseded by socialist ideologies. This dynamic is observed in Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mozambique.

Moreover, Russia's PMCs' involvement in Africa is not without controversy and allegations. These include claims of human rights violations and deliberate targeting of civilians (Sukhankin, 2020). The Wagner group, in particular, has been implicated in allegations of

egregious acts on the continent, with allegations of human rights abuses and intentional harm to unarmed civilians during times of conflict (Neethling, 2023). According to unverified reports, Wagner is also linked to informal corrupt networks in Africa. This underscores a broader pattern of illicit activities involving the group, ranging from illegal mining to the facilitation of corrupt practices within oil industries and its attempt to access deep-water ports (SAIIA, 2023). Reports suggest that Wagner operates clandestinely, often circumventing legal and regulatory frameworks to pursue its objectives (Siegle, 2021). This involvement in corrupt networks not only undermines transparency and accountability but also perpetuates instabilities and undermines efforts towards good governance in Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The establishment of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum (RAPF) among other partnerships signifies a significant milestone in fostering collaborative efforts between Africa and Russia. This is exemplified by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Russian Federation and the AU outlining foundational principles for cooperation. These agreements provide a robust framework for engagement and mark a notable shift in Russia's military involvement on the African continent. Recent developments since 2010 have solidified military ties between Russia and African nations, resulting in increased military assistance and training, particularly in addressing security challenges. This resurgence of engagement represents a substantial transformation in Russia-Africa relations, especially following a period of stagnation after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Marten, 2019). While Russia's military activities in Africa differ from those of traditional partners like the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, as well as newer influential actors such as China, the key takeaway is that African countries now have more flexibility to make strategic foreign policy decisions. This flexibility empowers them to advance shared agendas within multilateral forums and to diversify their interests and partnerships thereby reducing dependency and mitigating potential risks.

In the present landscape, Russia's operations and agreements in Africa may not directly threaten Western interests, but they undoubtedly challenge and undermine Western influence and power in parts of the continent. Its evolving relationship with the African Union and

individual nations underscores its expanding influence and strategic interests, particularly in the realm of military cooperation and security. This shift continues to reshape the dynamics of global governance.

Recommendations for Africa:

- 1. Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement:** African nations should deepen diplomatic ties with Russia withing already established platforms such as the RAPF and BRICS emphasizing dialogue on shared interests such as security, energy, and infrastructure development. Countries could also establish tailored bilateral mechanisms to ensure Russia's investments and military cooperation directly address local priorities, such as terrorism and conflicts. By proactively engaging, African states can influence the terms of these partnerships to ensure they remain equitable and aligned with their national and development goals.
- 2. Strategic Alignment:** Rather than passively aligning with global powers, African countries should adopt a deliberate and calculated approach when engaging with Russia and other nations. This means assessing how partnerships can address unique national challenges such as counterterrorism in the Sahel, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, or local defense needs while ensuring these relationships do not compromise long-term sovereignty or regional stability. Most importantly African leaders should strategically weigh the costs and benefits of military deals, ensuring they strengthen security without creating dependency and in worse cases they further exacerbate insecurities.
- 3. Diversification of Partnerships:** To avoid over-reliance on any one partner, African countries should diversify their foreign relations by engaging with multiple global powers, including Russia, China, and Western allies. Beyond defense and arms, African governments can explore partnerships in technology transfer, renewable energy, and education to support broader national development agendas. By broadening partnerships, countries can reduce geopolitical risks and gain access to a variety of tools and resources for addressing security and socio-economic challenges.
- 4. Capacity Building:** African governments must prioritize capacity building tailored to their specific needs, such as establishing local military training academies or investing in indigenous arms production to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers. In addition, partnerships with Russia and other global powers should be leveraged to build expertise in cutting-edge technology, cybersecurity, and

intelligence-sharing to tackle regional threats. By strengthening local institutions and governance, African nations can better navigate complex geopolitical dynamics while ensuring their people benefit from these partnerships.

5. Multilateral Engagement: African nations should use regional and international forums, such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and the United Nations, to create unified approaches to security and development challenges. Through multilateral engagement, African states can negotiate better terms with global powers like Russia and push for collective solutions to issues such as arms trafficking, terrorism, and climate-induced security threats. These platforms can also amplify Africa's voice in shaping global policies, ensuring the continent's needs and perspectives are not overlooked in decisions that affect its future.

In conclusion, it is argued that the evolving Africa-Russia military relationship holds significant implications not only for Russia but also for Africa. For the continent, this renewed engagement presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, partnerships with Russia offer African nations access to arms, military training, and strategic support, potentially enhancing their security capabilities. Moreover, Russia's willingness to engage without the political conditions often imposed by Western powers appeals to some African leaders seeking to diversify their alliances.

On the other hand, this growing partnership comes with risks. The involvement of private military groups like Wagner has raised concerns over human rights abuses, the destabilization of fragile states, and the prioritization of Russia's geopolitical goals over African sovereignty. Furthermore, dependence on foreign military assistance could limit Africa's long-term ability to establish self-reliant security frameworks. For Africa, navigating this relationship will require careful consideration of how to leverage Russia's renewed interest to advance its own development, security, and governance priorities, while avoiding becoming a battleground for competing global powers. This dynamic, therefore, is as much about Africa's agency in shaping its future as it is about Russia's ambitions on the continent.

For Russia, military partnerships with African states are pivotal in securing strategic influence on the continent and beyond. Through arms sales, security cooperation, and deploying groups like Wagner, Russia bolsters its ties with African governments while countering Western

influence. These partnerships not only provide economic benefits but also ensure Russia access to critical resources and strategic footholds. Additionally, African support on international platforms, such as abstentions or opposition to UN resolutions on Ukraine conflict, highlights the diplomatic leverage these partnerships offer in Russia's broader strategic partnerships.

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