

# Proxy Power and Precious Minerals: Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa through the Wagner Group

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## ABSTRACT

Using the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali as case studies, this article examines Russia's strategic use of the Wagner Group, a private military security company, to grow its influence in Africa through a transactional model of military support for access to mineral resources. In the CAR, the Wagner Group became integral to President Touadéra's security apparatus and secured access to key mining sites, as a result. In Mali, the Wagner Group's role evolved from counterterrorism support to a broader strategic presence as part of Russia's ambitions in the Sahel. The recent transition from the Wagner Group's shadowy mercenary activities to the state-backed Africa Corps under the Russian Ministry of Defense is a shift from irregular units toward conventional military engagement. This analysis contextualizes these developments within Russia's larger goal to counter Western influence in Africa and reshape global power dynamics through strategic resource partnerships and proxy forces.

## KEYWORDS

Proxy warfare, private military security companies (PMSC), Wagner Group, Africa Corps, Russia, resource exploitation

## Introduction

In the last decade, Russia has expanded its footprint in Africa by targeting resource-rich, conflict-ridden countries, using proxy forces like the Wagner Group to capitalize on the declining influence of Western nations. Reviving Soviet-era ties, Russia aims to weaken Western influence across the continent and gain support for a multipolar world order. Russian involvement in Africa is complex, with strategies varying based on each country's security dynamic. In many African countries, proxy forces such as the Wagner Group have offered military and security services in exchange for access to mining rights, land, and facilities. African nations are already endorsing Russia at key United Nations votes, making the effects of this alliance felt on the global stage. Wagner Group operations have also

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allowed Russia to sidestep international sanctions and insulate its economy from economic repercussions from the war in Ukraine. Although the Kremlin maintained plausible deniability about its connections to the Wagner Group for years, the Wagner Group has never been an autonomous organization. The Kremlin has always systematically directed Wagner's dealings in Africa, including human rights violations and illicit financial operations, to serve the interests of the Russian state.

This analysis investigates the differing operations and impact of the Wagner Group in two distinct African contexts: the Central African Republic and Mali. In the Central African Republic, Wagner achieved success by providing security and political support to President Touadéra's government in exchange for mining concessions, showcasing the most mature example of their business model in Africa. In Mali, the Wagner Group's initial involvement mostly centered on military support to suppress the country's insurgency without any major political or economic entanglements. However, when the Russian Ministry of Defense assumed control of the Wagner Group and restructured it under the Africa Corps, Mali fully aligned itself with Russia as part of its strategic objectives, with the Central African Republic distancing itself. The different impacts of the Wagner Group and Africa Corps in the Central African Republic and Mali reflect the unique political, military, and economic conditions in both countries.

### **The Wagner Group's Role in the Central African Republic: A Guarantor for Government Stability**

Since early 2018, the Wagner Group has provided much-needed security and political assistance to President Faustin-Archange Touadéra's government, essentially acting as a linchpin for the regime's stability. In return for political, security, and military support, the CAR government has granted Wagner access to the country's mines. The result has been billions of dollars in profits, which have largely circumvented Western sanctions. In the years leading up to the Wagner Group's arrival, the Central African Republic experienced political and military instability, including coups, sectarian violence between the Séléka movement and the anti-Balaka alliance, and extreme humanitarian crises.<sup>1</sup> The worsening security situation led to several international interventions, including the United Nations Security Council arms embargo in 2013 and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Competing international forces influenced President Touadéra's decision in 2017 to enlist Russia for security support. The controversies surrounding international involvements, namely the French, whose presence in the Central African Republic faced accusations of rape and crimes against humanity, pushed Touadéra to the Russians.<sup>3</sup> Regime protection was also a driving factor. Since his election in March 2016, escalating rebel violence repeatedly threatened to overthrow his government, with armed rebel factions at times controlling upwards of two-thirds of the country, including access to strategic mining locations.<sup>4</sup> In areas outside of the country's capital, Bangui, Touadéra continuously struggled to assert and maintain power.

In 2017, after France ended its military operation, Operation Sangaris, Russia worked to set up a formal military partnership with the Central African Republic. An increasingly vulnerable President Touadéra sought security assistance and political support from Russia, with both sides convening at a private meeting in Sochi, Russia in October of that year.<sup>5</sup> Within a few months, Russia secured an exemption to the 2013 U.N. Security Council's arms embargo. Resolution 2399, adopted by the U.N. Security Council in January 2018, allowed for the provision of arms and military equipment to the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), provided these weapons would only be used by the CAR government.<sup>6</sup> Russia swiftly took advantage of this opportunity and began delivering arms and providing training to the CAR's military and security forces.<sup>7</sup>

By January 2018, Wagner troops were officially deployed to the Central African Republic.<sup>8</sup> In August 2018, bilateral relations between the two countries formalized with the signing of a military-technical agreement, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive partnership with Russia agreeing to train CAR recruits at its military academies, supply "military instructors," and navigate the U.N. arms embargo through exemptions.<sup>9</sup> The agreement's stated goal was to strengthen bilateral defense ties and build a partnership for regional stability; however, the implicit understanding was that Russia would offer political and military support to President Touadéra in exchange for access to the country's valuable mining resources.<sup>10</sup>

President Touadéra's reliance on the Wagner Group for personal protection, political counsel, and military support solidified Russia's role as a key ally in securing his regime. In March 2018, Touadéra appointed Valery Zakharov, a prominent Wagner figure, as his national security advisor.<sup>11</sup> After a coalition of armed groups tried to overthrow Touadéra in December 2020 and January 2021 in a violent coup, it was Russia that responded by dispatching additional troops and military equipment and helping the government regain territorial control.<sup>12</sup> Three shipments of weapons and military equipment from Russia—in May 2018, September 2019, and May 2021—were delivered to the Central African Republic, although it is likely that additional, undisclosed shipments also took place. This support has proved crucial for the country's defense capabilities. In the words of Touadéra, without Russian assistance, "we didn't have the means to equip our forces."<sup>13</sup>

### **Mining Monopolies and Wagner's Economic Influence in the Central African Republic**

In exchange for political and military support to President Touadéra, the Wagner Group gained access to the Central African Republic's mineral wealth. In 2022, the country reported a modest gold production of 1,000 kg, while its diamond exports totaled \$35.7 million, making it the fortieth largest exporter of diamonds in the world.<sup>14</sup> Wagner's newly established front companies operating in-country, including Midas Ressources SARLU, Lobaye Invest, and Diamville SAU, all managed to sidestep international sanctions while carving out a significant regulatory advantage in the Central African Republic's mining sector. Gleaning over \$2 billion in profits from illicit mining operations in just a few years, these companies have facilitated the financing of Russia's wider military and political objectives, including its operations in Ukraine.<sup>15</sup>

The Wagner Group used its political influence to bypass regulations and gain control of the Central African Republic's mineral resources. Although the 2009 Mining Code (Law No. 09.005), developed in collaboration with the World Bank, allows the CAR government to issue industrial mining licenses for up to 25 years, the country's scattered artisanal mines and poor infrastructure have made it difficult for large-scale industrial mining operations to take root.<sup>16</sup> This, along with the government's inability to formalize the mining sector in rural areas, has made the Central African Republic's mining industry an unattractive venture for foreign investors.<sup>17</sup> Using its significant political sway in the CAR government, the Wagner Group managed to get mining exploration and exploitation permits, establish shell companies for profit redirection, and secure mining areas, often through brutal force.<sup>18</sup>

One such company, Lobaye Invest, established on October 25, 2017, has secured at least eight mining permits.<sup>19</sup> Based on permit documentation obtained online, in April and June 2018, Lobaye Invest received authorization to extract diamonds and gold at five sites, with four of these locations—Bangassou, Ouadda, Bria, and Sam-Ouandja—classified within the Kimberley Process' "red zones." The Kimberley Process is a global initiative established in 2003 by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/56, which aims to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the rough diamond market.<sup>20</sup> The Wagner Group's ability to penetrate these so-called "red zones" shows how deep the group's political influence runs. In June and July 2018, Léopold Mbolli Fatran, the country's former Minister of Mines, granted Lobaye Invest mining recognition permits for two additional regions, Yawa and Pama, for three years, renewable annually.<sup>21</sup> According to these permits, Lobaye Invest is required to invest 500,000 CFA francs per cubic kilometer of mined area annually in the Central African Republic's economy. The permit also states that any Russian ownership supersedes prior permit agreements, rendering them null and void at the time of signing.<sup>22</sup>

In a controversial ruling on March 17, 2020, the Central African government awarded Midas Ressources SARLU, another Wagner-linked company, a mining permit for Ndassima, the country's only industrial mine, which is estimated to contain over \$1 billion in gold.<sup>23</sup> This action nullified the 2010 mining permit of Canadian company, Axmin Inc. Axmin has since initiated international arbitration to seek compensation for the wrongful expropriation of Ndassima's assets.<sup>24</sup> Based on documents obtained by Politico, throughout 2022-2023, Midas Ressources received a new industrial mining permit from the CAR government, which granted Wagner special status to export gold and gems and bypass state mediation. Satellite imagery and intelligence show a significant and rapid expansion of operations at Ndassima over the last year, including fortifications, bridge constructions, anti-aircraft defenses, and eight production zones. The Central African government has restricted United Nations flyovers at the site, and Wagner forces have even shot down United Nations drones, which suggest a total Wagner takeover of the area.<sup>25</sup> It is estimated that the Ndassima mine alone could yield profits exceeding \$2.7 billion in profits for Russia.<sup>26</sup>

Since its registration in the Central African Republic's Commercial Register on 28 March 2019, Diamville SAU, a third Wagner-linked shell company, has openly declared its business focus on the trade and international shipment of diamonds and gold. Officially, the manager of Diamville is a Central African national, Bienvenu Patrick Setem Bonguende, but investigative findings suggest that Bonguende is actually closely associated with Dimitri

Sytii, one of the Wagner Group's top Africa officials. In October 2019, a government decree confirmed the company's official authorization to export gold and diamonds.<sup>27</sup> In addition to operating in areas not authorized by the Kimberley Process, Diamville is suspected of recovering diamonds from seizures by the Ministry of Mines' Special Anti-Fraud Unit. In 2022, Diamville was also involved in a gold-selling scheme, which involved converting CAR-origin gold into U.S. dollars and physically transferring cash to circumvent sanctions on Russian financial institutions.<sup>28</sup>

Wagner-backed shell companies such as Lobaye Invest, Midas Ressources, and Diamville all exploit regulatory loopholes and maintain opaque structures in a deliberate attempt to hide the true nature of their operations. According to a Forbes assessment, mining, illicit gold trade, and the timber business across Africa could generate up to \$5 billion in the coming years. These profits have evaded and will continue to evade international sanctions, funneling profits back to the Kremlin to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Wagner Group's Military Role in Mali**

In contrast to the Central African Republic, where the Wagner Group showed substantial political control and exploitation of its mining concessions, the Wagner Group's initial role in Mali focused on providing military and counterterrorism support to the ruling junta. Over the past decade, Mali has faced significant internal security challenges, including escalating Islamist violence. In 2012, Tuareg rebels led an insurgency in the north, which created a foothold for Islamist armed factions to take root. French-led counterinsurgency efforts through Operation Serval (2013-2014) and its successor, Operation Barkhane (2014-2022), were largely unsuccessful, and the security landscape in Mali continued to worsen as armed groups gained additional territorial control. With the Malian government unable to stop the country's security crisis and protect its citizens from Islamist militancy, political turmoil unfolded. On 18 August 2020, a coup led by a group of colonels—two of them had trained in Russia—took control of the country's main military base. Within less than a year, a second coup took place on 24 May 2021 when Colonel Assimi Goïta seized power.<sup>30</sup>

Beginning in early 2021, the Malian government turned to Russian military advisors stationed in-country for international support. This move was driven by a history of cooperation between Russia and Mali, widespread dissatisfaction with the French interventions, and the recent "success" of the Wagner Group's counterinsurgency operations in the Central African Republic.<sup>31</sup> Russia and Mali already had an existing military-technical agreement that dated back to June 2019. This agreement aimed to strengthen bilateral defense relations, which included the sale and maintenance of two Mi-35 helicopters.<sup>32</sup> This agreement aimed to strengthen bilateral defense relations, which included the sale and maintenance of two Mi-35 helicopters.<sup>32</sup> In September of 2021, news broke that Mali's military government was in talks with the Wagner Group to deploy 1,000 mercenaries for a monthly sum of \$10.8 million U.S. dollars.<sup>33</sup> Toward the end of 2021, the Wagner Group's presence in Mali was officially confirmed. Meanwhile, military ties continued to deepen. In November 2022, Mali and Russia signed another military-technical agreement that centered on security, intelligence, risk and disaster management, counter-narcotics, and personnel training during an official visit to Moscow by the Malian Minister of Security and Civil Protection, Daoud Aly Mohammedine.<sup>34</sup> With a willing Russian partner able to

provide the necessary military support to implement a sovereign policy, Mali's junta officially expelled international partners, including MINUSMA and the Ambassador of France in January 2022.<sup>35</sup>

However, unlike Touadéra's weak administration, which sought out the Wagner Group for security support and political endorsement, the junta's initial interest in the Wagner Group primarily focused on improving internal security rather than seeking political reinforcement. The strategic shift to engage the Wagner Group starting in 2021 was part of a larger strategy by the Malian junta to assert its sovereignty amidst internal instability and external pressures. In January 2022, the junta diverged from the agreed-upon 18-month transitional timeline established with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), opting to extend its governance for an additional five years.<sup>36</sup> During the first years of the Wagner Group's involvement in Mali, the junta was focused on consolidating its authority, strengthening its military capabilities to address insurgent threats, and resisting Western influence in the region. In contrast to the Central African Republic, there was no apparent inclination for deep political or economic collaboration during this period.

### **Wagner's Challenges and Limited Success in Mali's Mining Sector**

Although Mali boasts more significant industrial gold reserves than the Central African Republic, positioning it as one of Africa's largest gold producers with 66.5 metric tons of gold produced in 2023, the Wagner Group's economic footprint in Mali initially struggled to take root.<sup>37</sup> This was due, in part, to the reluctance of the Malian junta to work with the Wagner Group to gain access to the country's mines, limiting Wagner to its military role in combatting jihadists.<sup>38</sup> Another obstacle stemmed from the presence of established international companies already in possession of mining permits. Governed by the 1991 Mining Code, which granted foreign companies licenses for two years and mining permits for a maximum 30-year period, inclusive of renewals, Mali's mining landscape was designed to attract foreign investment.<sup>39</sup> The country's mining sector has historically been dominated by international conglomerates from Canada, Australia, and Britain.<sup>40</sup> In just 2022 alone, Mali's four largest gold mining companies—Resolute Mining, Barrick Gold, B2Gold, and Allied Gold—contributed \$588 million in taxes and royalties to the junta. Investigations have uncovered that the tax dollars from these international gold mining companies have been funding the Wagner Group's \$10.8 million monthly fee.<sup>41</sup> This method of funding through the formal economy is in contrast with the subterfuge, smuggling, and exploitative practices seen in the Central African Republic.<sup>42</sup>

Compared to the Central African Republic, the Wagner Group had limited success establishing shell companies in Mali. Following Wagner operatives Sergei Laktionov and Viktor Popov's arrival in 2021, they established Alpha Development, recruiting Malian national Bakin Gassimi Guindo to lead the venture.<sup>43</sup> In April 2022, they also co-opted Marko Mining, an existing Russian entity present in Mali since 2009. However, by January 2023, Mali's Ministry of Mines did not include any mining concessions related to Alpha Development.<sup>44</sup> With their difficulties in establishing shell companies, Wagner representatives, led by Sergei Laktionov, met with Malian authorities in April 2022 to seek permits at mining sites, potentially aiming to replicate the approach used to gain control of the Ndassima mine in the Central African Republic. The targeted sites included Fekola,

managed by B2Gold of Canada, Loulo-Gounkoto, operated by Barrick Gold, and Syama, owned by Australia's Resolute. However, the Wagner Group's efforts to obtain these permits at this time were unsuccessful.<sup>45</sup>

With the shell company and permit-takeover model proving futile, the Wagner Group shifted its strategy towards influencing government policies to craft legislative outcomes beneficial to their operations. At the time of permit negotiations with Malian officials in 2022, on-the-ground reporting suggests that Sergei Laktionov also advocated for a gold nationalization scheme, which could potentially provide Wagner with backdoor access to acquire a partial percentage held by the State in these ventures.<sup>46</sup> In August 2023, just a year after these meetings, the junta announced a new mining code that prioritizes state interests, allowing the government to claim a 10% stake in mining projects, with the option to acquire an additional 20% within the first two years of commercial production. Under this new legislative framework, an additional 5% stake could be allocated to locals, increasing state and private Malian interests in new projects to 35%, up from the current 20%.<sup>47</sup> The newly revised Mining Code comes as the Malian government has struggled with the financial burden of the January 2022 sanctions imposed by the ECOWS. These sanctions have made it challenging for the junta to fulfill monthly payments to Wagner, leading some Wagner operatives to go on strike or even pillage villages.<sup>48</sup> The recent legislative reform shows Russia's appetite to expand its involvement further in Mali's mining sector and establish a more profitable economic model.

### **The Post-Prigozhin Pivot: Russia's Evolving Strategy in Africa and Rising Geopolitical Tensions**

For years, Russia maintained plausible deniability regarding its mercenary operations in Africa. This changed suddenly after Yevgeny Prigozhin's failed mutiny against the Kremlin in June 2023. In the days following the rebellion, Vladimir Putin publicly acknowledged state funding for the Wagner Group. Putin revealed that the Russian government had provided over \$1 billion U.S. dollars to support the group's operations between May 2022 and May 2023.<sup>49</sup> In August 2023, after Wagner's top officials died in a suspicious plane crash, the Russian Ministry of Defense formally established the Africa Corps. This signaled a move away from the shadowy network of private military companies toward formalized state involvement.<sup>50</sup>

Following Prigozhin's failed rebellion, the Central African Republic appeared to distance itself from Russia. On 23 June 2023, the very day Prigozhin launched his armed rebellion against the Kremlin, Central African Republic officials sent a letter requesting an urgent meeting with a private U.S. security firm, Bancroft Global, to discuss security collaboration. The CAR government and Bancroft Global signed an agreement one month later.<sup>51</sup> In late December 2023, the CAR presidential spokesperson Albert Yaloké Mokpème confirmed in an interview that the country was "diversifying" its security relations beyond existing collaborations with Russia, Angola, Morocco, and Guinea. He also noted that the United States had offered to train Central African Republic soldiers both locally and on U.S. soil.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, Russia still is committed to maintaining its stronghold in the Central African Republic, as evidenced by plans to build an official Russian military base in Berengo that will accommodate up to 10,000 troops.<sup>53</sup>

By contrast, Mali's government has emerged as a willing partner in Russia's efforts to consolidate its influence in the Sahel region, a critical battleground for countries like China, the United States, and Russia to compete for global influence.<sup>54</sup> After facing challenges in securing a sustainable compensation system for its operations through the Wagner Group, the Africa Corps aims to become more politically and economically integrated within Mali. The Africa Corps is now offering Mali and other African governments what Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU, is internally describing as a 'regime survival package.' This includes military and diplomatic support in exchange for access to strategically valuable natural resources.<sup>55</sup> Russian troops are now providing security to Mali's junta and participating in key decision-making processes.<sup>56</sup> With the recent reorganization of the country's mining sector in August 2023, there have also been talks of major negotiations aimed at removing Canadian company Barrick Gold from the management of the Loulo and Gounkoto sites, which produced 19.4 tons of gold in 2022, almost a third of the country's production. According to several Malian sources close to the matter, Russia has its eye set on this takeover.<sup>57</sup>

On the ground, Russian forces have been working closely with the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) to take control of separatist-held artisanal gold mines in northern Mali. In 2023, they briefly occupied three mines south of Bamako—Balandougou, Koyoko, and Yanfolila.<sup>58</sup> In November 2023, Russian troops, alongside FAMa, recaptured the northern town of Kidal.<sup>59</sup> In February 2024, they took control of the Intahaka mine, Mali's largest artisanal gold mine, but withdrew after a few days with promises to return.<sup>60</sup> In July 2024, in what some experts attribute to overconfidence from these previous successes, Russian and Malian forces launched a failed stabilization operation in the northeastern town of Tinzaouatene, which resulted in the deaths of 84 Wagner soldiers and 47 Malian troops. Ukraine claimed involvement in this attack, alleging that they provided the necessary intelligence and support to the Tuareg rebels to ward off the Russians and Malians.<sup>61</sup> Ukraine's supposed involvement in this conflict adds yet another layer of complexity to a country already laden with rival geopolitical actors.

### **Addressing the Geopolitical and Global Security Risks of Russia's Expanding Footprint in Africa**

Russia has gained a foothold in over two dozen African countries within the last decade through a mix of proxy forces and political, economic, and military partnerships. While Russia's exact involvement varies country by country in Africa, it does follow a noticeably familiar pattern: work with countries rich in natural resources, such as gold and diamonds, suffering from instability, and offer security assistance and "regime survival packages." In parallel, Russia has worked to discredit its competitors, particularly those from the West, through disinformation and misinformation campaigns, positioning itself as a force in the future security of Africa and a major disruptor of global dynamics.

The case studies of the Central African Republic and Mali show how Russia's involvement is often tailored to local contexts in Africa. In the Central African Republic, a government in need of urgent regime protection turned to Russia, resulting in the Wagner Group's deep integration into the state apparatus in exchange for mining rights. In Mali, an initially hesitant government sought out Russia for military assistance, gradually expanding

into a broader political, military, and economic partnership under the Russian state-sanctioned Africa Corps. Both cases show how Russia's actions were not uniformly imposed but rather negotiated with African states looking to strengthen their own political and military positions.

Russia's activities in Africa are part of a broader goal to galvanize support for its vision of a multipolar world order, away from Western unipolarity. This vision depends on weakening Western influence across Africa and creating a global system where multiple powers wield global influence. By offering resource deals and economic and military partnerships, Russia has been able to incentivize some African governments to align with its geopolitical vision. Many African governments view Russia as a partner offering support without the "strings attached" that often come with Western aid. At the United Nations, Russia is using its relationship with Africa to impact votes on key issues such as the Ukraine conflict. Two recent examples include the 2022 United Nations vote to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where 17 of the 35 abstaining countries were from Africa, and the 2023 United Nations vote calling for an end to the war in Ukraine, where Mali voted against the resolution and 14 African countries abstained.<sup>62</sup> While these voting patterns do not reflect a homogeneous pro-Russian stance across the continent, they do show the complex interplay of geopolitical ambitions, national interests, sovereignty concerns, and localized agency dynamics.

Moscow's increasing aspirations to ally with African governments carry significant risks for the continent's economic growth, democratic stability, ongoing conflicts, and the rule of law. Groups like the Wagner Group and Africa Corps have committed human rights violations, caused further destabilization in the region, and undermined local and international peacekeeping efforts. Across Africa, but especially in Mali and the Central African Republic, there is clear evidence to suggest that Wagner and Russia have been involved in civilian-targeted executions, mass graves, acts of torture, rape, sexual violence, pillaging, arbitrary detentions, and enforced disappearances.<sup>63</sup> Draining Africa's precious mineral resources thwarts the continent's chance of self-sufficiency and development. By backing authoritarian governments, Russia is supporting a growing militarization of governance and, according to the West, stifling Africa's democratic ambitions. The reality on the ground in Africa is more nuanced. Some African leaders, including Mali's Colonel Assimi Goita, publicly claim that Russian support will help stabilize and eventually return their country to democratic rule.<sup>64</sup>

To better counter Russia's influence, Western policymakers must prioritize targeted sanctions that disrupt financial flows from Russian irregular units to the Kremlin. As the case studies of this analysis have shown, Russia and its proxy forces have managed to circumvent sanctions by standing up shell companies and exploiting legal loopholes. Instead of focusing on high-profile, headline-grabbing figures like Prigozhin (part of the Wagner 'brand'), efforts should be directed toward the behaviors and systems that sustain Russian irregular forces and their intermediaries.<sup>65</sup> A multi-sector, collaborative approach involving U.S. government agencies, allied nations, and public interest stakeholders is critical to dismantling the organizations, activities, and policies that underpin the Kremlin's paramilitary cartel.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to sanctions, the international community must work with African partners to address the underlying vulnerabilities that Russia seeks to exploit. This can be done through supporting African-led initiatives, including the African Union and ECOWAS, investing in locally aligned economic opportunities, and strengthening democratic institutions. The future of Africa's political, economic, and security landscape will be shaped by how well African governments and the international community can navigate these complex dynamics. Without the right approach, countries across Africa risk becoming pawns in a broader geopolitical struggle, especially as the number of international players on the field only continues to grow. If efforts to stop Russian influence come up short, Russia and its proxy forces will manage to reshape the geopolitical landscape in Africa, undermining the aspirations of its people for peace, prosperity, and self-determination.

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