

GREAT POWER COMPETITION IMPLICATIONS IN AFRICA: THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND ITS PROXIES

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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**GREAT POWER COMPETITION IMPLICATIONS
IN
AFRICA: THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND
ITS PROXIES**

Tuesday, July 18, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:01 p.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. John James (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. JAMES [presiding]. The Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to analyze the strategic aims in Africa of the Russian Federation and its proxies, and examine how the U.S. can provide a positive set of alternative options that advance the interests of Africans and Americans alike.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Next week Vladimir Putin will host an estimated 50 leaders from African nations in St. Petersburg under the banner of the Russia and Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum. This forum purports to demonstrate how Russia's experience in maintaining domestic security is beneficial and worthy of being copied by African countries.

The fallacy of these claims is clear, it is on display as they hold this forum just 1 week after bringing the Black Sea Grain Initiative to an end, and 1 month after the Wagner Group exposed the Kremlin's multitude of internal problems with its march on Moscow. With us today are three distinguished experts on the subject to discuss the implications of the Russian Federation and its proxies' influence throughout Africa.

Joseph Sany is the vice president of the Africa Center, and the United States Institute for Peace. Cameron Hudson is a senior associate in the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Pauline Bax is the Africa Program deputy director at the International Crisis Group, I thank each of you for being here today.

Russia primarily pursues four core national interests in Africa. First, Moscow seeks to challenge western influence in Africa at a relatively low cost. Second, Russia eyes financial ties with African economies not tied to the U.S. dollar as a part of an attempt to evade sanctions and finance its war on Ukraine. Third, Russian military cooperation in Africa through arms sales, defense coopera-

tion agreements, and the Wagner Group promotes its global footprint, and precious NATO southern flank.

Fourth, its activities drive continued relevance on the international stage, and demonstrate its ability to shape global events. Russia seeks to rekindle its soviet era historical ties with ruling parties such as the African National Congress, ANC in South Africa, which Moscow, or more appropriately, the USSR, supported during the Apartheid era.

Similarly, the rise of Putin coincides with renewed engagement toward Sudan, which Moscow has courted since the 1970's, including breaking the arms embargo in Darfur. Moscow's disinformation and political influence campaigns have been dangerously effective. About thirty thousand students from African students were studying in Russian universities as of early 2023.

Russian State owned media outlets, notably Sputnik and RT, broadcast widely in Africa, and promote narratives that support Russian foreign policy aims and criticize major western powers, particularly the United States. Russian backed influence operations employ social media, and manipulation including by troll farms, pseudo policy efficacy, and think tank proxies.

Russia is also the top arms dealing entity on the African continent. Its security presence is bolstered by a growing network of Wagner contracts. In the CAR it serves as a Presidential bodyguard detachment for President Touadera, and a Wagner employee even serves as national security advisor. In Sudan, Wagner has backed General Hemedti's Janjaweed militias now rebranded as the rapid support forces.

Simply put, Russia is a destabilizing force in Africa that aspires to create power vacuums and exploit African countries in order to weaken U.S. and western influence. I am principally concerned that the agreements and commitments in next week's summit, including in areas like critical and precious minerals, will enable Russia to continue funding its war in Ukraine off the backs of Africans, and continue to be a clear and present danger to the United States of America.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to their testimony.

The chair now recognizes Ranking Members Rep. Jacobs. Ms. Jacobs?

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here. This hearing is particularly timely. We saw yesterday Russia pull out of the landmark Black Sea Grain Initiative, which will likely worsen hunger and famine around the world, especially in the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa.

Many countries in Africa are already feeling the impact of global inflation, the climate crisis, and conflict, and this deal was really a lifeline to help bring down food prices, and enabled agencies to get food to those who need it most. In particular, East Africa has suffered from severe droughts, and now extreme flooding, which has scorched, destroyed, or washed away crops for millions of people.

About eighty percent of East Africa's grain is exported from Russia and Ukraine, and over 50 million people across East Africa face the risk of hunger now that this deal is suspended. And just last

month the Wagner Group attempted a mutiny on Russia Federation that has left questions about the group's future on the continent, particularly in Mali and the Central African Republic where we have seen Russian mercenaries engage in heinous human rights violations, and offered regimes security.

It is not surprising that Russia and its proxies are increasing their engagement on the continent. It has the youngest population, and it is expected to outpace Asia as the fastest growing region in the world with six out of the ten fastest growing economies. The United States should continue to increase its engagement on the continent as well, but while we do so we also need to bear in mind lessons from the cold war.

The continent has already seen what happens when two powers fight for influence and strategic alignment. African populations lose, and we risk further instability. Too often in the cold war the United States supported authoritarian actors for short term alignment or influence, which had harmful impacts all over the global south. Whether it was in Chad, Angola, or the DRC, U.S. efforts to counter the Soviet Union and its proxies often led to democratic back fighting, violence, and left populations deeply suspicious of the United States.

A Rand study confirmed this, and found that U.S. security assistance in Africa during the cold war increased civil wars and insurgencies because of this exact dynamic. The Biden Administration has taken some of these lessons to heart. They have been clear that they are not going to force African countries to choose between the United States and other strategic competitors. African leaders do not want to make zero sum choices between the west and Russia because of some of these lessons, and deep sensitivities over sovereignty and the violent legacies of colonization.

And frankly, we shouldn't force African leaders to make these choices because we could be on the wrong end of that ultimatum. We also need to be mindful of the ripple effects of how our policies, and how engagement on the continent is perceived around the world. For example we have recently seen calls to designate Wagner a foreign terrorist organization, which could not only have unintended humanitarian consequences, but likely not even be effective to counter the Wagner Group.

Additional I, and many of my colleagues, including Chairman James, are huge supporters of Ukraine, and have approved millions of dollars to support their fight against Russia's invasion. But we know that this has caused some resentment among some African States who are now severely affected by global food insecurity, and are experiencing humanitarian crises that have been severely underfunded.

This does not mean that we need to support Ukraine any less, but it does mean that the United States and Congress need to step up our commitments and engagement with the African continent. In doing so we should ensure our policy tools are properly calibrated and not going to exacerbate existing grievances. So, I am looking forward to hearing from our expert witnesses here today on their perspectives on these few questions, and what they recommend for policymakers to address these challenges on the continent.

I yield back.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, madam. Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record. We are pleased to have again as distinguished panel witnesses before us here today, Dr. Joseph Sany is vice president of the Africa Center at the United States Institute for Peace. Again, Cameron Hudson is a senior associate in the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic International Studies.

Pauline Bax is the Africa Program deputy director at the International Crisis Group. I thank each of you again for being here today, and your full statements will be made a part of the record.

Mr. JAMES. And I will ask each of you to keep your spoken remarks to about 5 minutes in order to allow time for member questions.

I now recognize Dr. Sany for his opening statement. Dr. Sany?

STATEMENT OF DR. JOSEPH SANY, VICE PRESIDENT, AFRICA CENTER AT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

Dr. SANY. Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, and distinguished committee members, I very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss great power competition in Africa, specifically how the actions of Russia and its proxies harm both African and U.S. interests, and how African leaders can better work together to counter Moscow's destructive activities in Africa.

As noted, as a vice president at the United States Institute of Peace, I direct the work of USIP's Africa Center, although the views expressed here are my own. As part of Africa work, USIP is engaging with countries in the Sahel, and Central Africa to promote political stability, and counter violence, extremism, and its threats to the U.S. national security.

I recently returned from the Sahel where Russia and its proxies are quite active. I will discuss four key points from my written testimony. The first, Russia and its proxies see three main goals in Africa. I will not elaborate more, because Chairman, you have clearly articulated those goals. I will not repeat for the sake of time.

But the second point though, Russia's dark rule, often through proxies such as the Wagner Group, deepens instability. As demonstrated by the humiliating retreat in Cabo Delgado in 2020 in Mozambique, to human rights abuses and crimes in Central African Republic and Mali, Russia's mercenaries mostly engage in weapon sales, indiscriminate killing, and rape and corruption, which erodes accountability and democracy, which African value, and the United States makes considerable investment in supporting.

There is a predictable pattern of engagement by Russia and its proxies for their malign activities. By relying on such factors as past relationship with Soviet Union, the availability of critical natural resources, the backing by corrupt political and military elites, and the geopolitical opportunities of securing strategic military basis and maritime routes, one can predict Russia's future targets for malign activities, and U.S. policymakers should anticipate these possibilities.

No. 4, Russia and its proxies hope that by deepening the chaos in the Sahel and other places in Africa, they can persuade the United States and other democracies to abandon the region. The U.S. and its allies should stay engaged. The engagement should include exposing Russian destructive activities through supporting African media and investigative journalism.

Strengthening Governors, strategic partnerships, and economic growth through initiatives like the 2019 Global Fragility Act, the African Group and Opportunity Act, and the goals of the Prosper Africa Initiatives. Supporting Africa's equal rule in multilateral institutions such as the G20, and the U.N. Security Council, and promoting regional security cooperation wherein African States lead. You do not just take another western democracy acting as enablers.

In conclusion, it is worth asking why Americans should care about competing in Africa, or investing in its stability. The answer is clear, Africa is posed to shape the 21st century as the world's fastest growing demographic and economic power. Africa's trajectory will significantly shape the world in which our children and grandchildren will live. Therefore, the U.S. should not surrender the field to destructive Russian actors.

The good news is that thanks to your leadership and support, we are improving our policy tools, and we have many willing and able partners in Africa. Thank you for inviting me to testify, I am looking forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Sany follows:]



United States Institute of Peace

**“Great Power Competition Implications in
Africa: The Russian Federation and Its proxies”**

**Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Subcommittee on Africa**

**Joseph Sany, PhD
Vice President, Africa Center
United States Institute of Peace
July 18, 2023**

Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, distinguished Committee members, I very much appreciate this opportunity to discuss Great Power competition in Africa, specifically: (1) actions taken by Russia and its proxies; (2) the way those actions harm both African and U.S. interest throughout the continent; and (3) why our support for accountability, transparency and the rule of law is essential to counter Moscow's destructive activities in Africa. These Russian activities harm U.S. interests throughout the African continent. This hearing is especially timely given the Russia-Africa Summit next week, and of course, the recent mutiny by the Wagner Group, which plays a key and destructive role in several African countries.

I serve as vice president of the Africa Center at the United States Institute of Peace, I direct the work of USIP's Africa Center, although the views expressed here are my own. I have over 20 years of experience working on peace, security, and development issues in Africa.

For almost 40 years, USIP has actively worked to prevent armed conflicts and mediate peace, while supporting U.S. national security interests worldwide. As part of its work across Africa, USIP is working with countries in the Sahel to promote political stability and prevent and counter violent extremism. I have recently returned from the Sahel, where Russia and its proxies are very active.

Introduction

In recent years, the focus on China's influence in Africa, while certainly warranted, has overshadowed Russia's growing presence in Africa. Since a decade ago, Russia has rekindled its interest in Africa, cultivating strong relationships with South Africa and other countries, particularly those vulnerable to instability and conflict. The Russia-Africa summit to be held next week will be a milestone in Russia's renewed diplomatic African engagement. However, the Wagner Group's mutiny last month has sent a shockwave in the region and reminded Russia and its proxies of their weakness, and challenges Russia has to meet in its Great Power ambitions. Nevertheless, Russia's relative success in Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan should force the U.S. and Western nations to question their strategy of engagement with African countries, particularly those experiencing political instability and violence that are susceptible to Russia and its proxies' influence.

Russian Motivations and Patterns of Engagement and Its impact

While Putin's Russia has no visible grand plan for Africa, a pattern of opportunistic engagements and collusion between the Russian state and shadowy private entities seeks three main goals: (1) to maximize profits through commercial predation by proxies, thus helping evade Western sanctions against Russian individuals and entities; (2) to disrupt and erode Western influence in Africa; and (3) to strengthen Russia's geopolitical influence and great-power ambitions. Putin's Kremlin pursues these goals via three broad activities:

Misinformation, Propaganda, and Overinflated Historical Ties - Lacking significant economic ties to Africa, Russia adroitly pursues other means of influence. One worrisome tactic is its manipulation of African public opinion through misinformation campaigns, including sophisticated social media. Moscow has often portrayed itself as a staunch supporter of African nations seeking autonomy and sovereignty, emphasizing historical narratives of solidarity, such as providing educational opportunities and military support during the Cold War era. These efforts have allowed Russia to garner support and win votes at the United Nations, all the while diverting attention away from criticisms of President Putin's brutal aggression against Ukraine. Russia and its proxies sow resentment against the United States and international rule of law to strengthen its global standing.

Protective Alliances with Corrupt, Insecure Elites. Russia sees instability and violent conflicts as opportunities to sell African combatant groups weapons, military training, military advisory and mercenary services. Here, the Putin regime operates largely through Kremlin-guided but ostensibly private military or mercenary firms such as the Wagner Group¹ or Sewa Security Services.² Russia uses these military capacities to ally with often corrupt leaders or factions while seeking extractive or predatory commercial opportunities (described below) in exchange. Russia currently supports civilian- or military-led government forces amid the violence of the Central African Republic, Sudan, Mali and Libya. After decades of operating in Africa mainly as an arms exporter, Russia

¹ Congressional Research Service. "Russia's Wagner Private Military Company (PMC)," (March 2023). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12344>.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Sanctions Russian Proxy Wagner Group as a Transnational Criminal Organization," (Jan. 6, 2023). <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jv1220>

now seeks vastly broader, deeper interventions to influence African nations' conflicts, governance, economies, and security architectures³ – all to facilitate Russian commercial activities and predation. Amid this shift, Russian weapons sales and transfers to African countries have increased from around \$500 million to over \$2 billion annually⁴.

Predatory Profit, Including Extraction of Natural Resources. Increasingly since Putin's war on Ukraine, his regime and its proxies have sought profit by extracting natural resources in Africa without contributing to economic development. Here also, the Wagner Group has been a primary proxy, seeking trade deals from elites in exchange for the security-related services described above. To support these transactions, in part to fund its operations in Ukraine, Wagner's business model has included political backing and guidance, information campaigns, and logistical support for African clients such as the Central African Republic's government, under which it receives rights to exploit the country's main gold mine along with extracting diamonds and timber. Local CAR business leaders have described to me how Wagner has crowded local businesses out of entire sectors of the economy.⁵

Wagner's activities have included grave human rights abuses and an increase in regional instability. It promotes rule by force rather than by democracy and law, endorses corruption over transparency, drains local business and government revenues rather than bolstering them, and maintains authoritarian regimes dependent on Wagner's parasitic presence. Anecdotal evidence and data on violence⁶ show that Wagner's brutal efficiency can help forcefully secure client regimes — but in ways that will only intensify the longer-term corrosion of states, alienation of populations, extremist responses, and insecurity. This approach perpetuates corruption and

³ Congressional Research Service, op. cit.

⁴Adam R Grissom, Samuel Charap, Joe Cheravitch, Russel Hanson, Dara Massicot, Christopher A. Mouton, Jordan R. Reimer (2022). "Russia's Growing Presence in Africa : A Geostrategic Assessment." Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4399.html

⁵ Joseph Sany. "In Africa, Here's How to Respond to Russia's Brutal Wagner Group," (April 6, 2023). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/africa-heres-how-respond-russias-brutal-wagner-group>

⁶ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Wagner Group Operations in Africa – Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African Republic and Mali," (August 2022), <https://acleddata.com/2022/08/30/wagner-group-operations-in-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-in-the-central-african-republic-and-mali/>

undermines transparency, accountability, and democracy—the values most Africans aspire for and that the United States makes considerable investments to support.

A predictable pattern of engagement - Overall, by considering these factors—preexisting relationships, profitable opportunities, political and military elites seeking outside backing (political financial, diplomatic support), risks of political instability and transitions, and Great Power aspirations (including military bases, maritime routes, strategic zones of influence)—help predict the countries that the Kremlin and its proxies will target next in Africa: Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Uganda. The U.S should be considering these possibilities in U.S. policy making.

Challenges to Russian Expansion

In African polities as in Russia, the corruption and brutality of Moscow’s behavior breeds resentment and opposition. Indeed, experiences of African countries — and now of Russia after last month’s Wagner Group mutiny — show how the Putin machinery for seizing power and wealth is not simply predatory but parasitic, ultimately corroding and hollowing the governance systems and economies on which it feeds. My own interviews with citizens of Wagner-afflicted African countries underscore that Wagner’s predatory behavior ultimately undermines Russia’s reputation and the goodwill it seeks to build with Africans. And now, the Wagner mutiny has dealt a significant blow to Russia’s “brand” as a great power or a reliable security partner.

The Wagner Mutiny’s Resonance in Africa. The Wagner uprising has caused uncertainty and concern in countries like Mali and the CAR, where leaders rely on Wagner forces to maintain power. The Kremlin appears intent on maintaining Wagner operations abroad while asserting more control over the company’s management. Specifically, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Wagner’s work in the CAR will continue. To whatever degree Russia’s government officially takes ownership of Wagner, it could also become responsible for the crimes, predation, and human rights abuses committed by Wagner mercenaries. This could further weaken Russia’s self-description as an anti-colonial force and a provider of stability in Africa. It could expose Russian officials to potential prosecutions for crimes and human rights abuses by Wagner and its mercenaries.

Responding to Russia in Africa: Stay Engaged.

Russia and its proxies hope that by deepening the Sahel's chaos, they can persuade the United States and other democracies to abandon the region. The US and its allies should stay engaged. Key steps will be these:

Expose Russian malign activities - Working with African partners, the United States should underscore the realities of the Kremlin's approach to Africa, including the Russian toolkit, the principal actors and the consequences of its engagement. This includes supporting African media and investigative journalism to expose Russia's support for corrupt schemes and oppressive regimes. The African men and women doing this work are among the bravest in Africa, risking retaliation. This exposure of realities should illuminate the manipulative approach used by the Russian-linked criminal networks and their local cronies to subvert democracy, violate local laws, or use blackmail or violence to force out of business hard-working local entrepreneurs. Such a campaign, using African, rather than U.S. voices, would create a durable, strategic narrative because truthful and locally owned.

Reduce the causes of Africans' vulnerability to Russia. The United States should advance its overhaul, already underway, work to address the root causes of countries' vulnerability to Russia, such as poor governance, poverty, and terrorism. Russia and its proxies feed on chaos and violence. An effective response by democracies, Western and African, will require offering Wagner's client states a broader, more realistic and respectful relationships than shown by prior international efforts to counter insurgency and extremism in the region. In the United States, a sober, bipartisan assessment found past U.S. policies too short-term and too narrowly focused on building Sahel states' military skills rather than improving governance and economies.⁷ That reevaluation resulted in the 2019 Global Fragility Act⁸, bipartisan legislation which this Committee produced. Weaning African states from dependence on Wagner will mean applying the principles of that reform within the equal partnership promised by U.S. leaders.

⁷ Kamissa Camara, "It Is Time to Rethink U.S. Strategy in the Sahel," United States Institutes of Peace (April 2021), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/04/it-time-rethink-us-strategy-sahel>

⁸ USIP Staff, "The Global Fragility Act: A New U.S. Approach," United States Institutes of Peace (January 2020), [The Global Fragility Act: A New U.S. Approach | United States Institute of Peace \(usip.org\)](https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/01/global-fragility-act-a-new-us-approach)

Harness Africa's economic opportunities - The U.S. should also strengthen strategic partnerships with Africa by driving growth, especially small to medium-size investments, through instruments such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act, PROSPER Africa, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and facilities through the U.S International Development Finance Corporation.

Enable regional security cooperation – Specifically, the United States should work with Sahel countries, the African Union and regional commissions such as the Economic Community of West African States. It should support the building of security responses designed and led, not by the United States or France (as in the past), but from within Africa, with the United States and other Western democracies as *enablers*. African-led approaches can build on ECOWAS interventions in Liberia (in the 1990s) or in Gambia (in 2016-17) or the South African Development Community and Rwandan forces in Mozambique to replace foreign military-led models.⁹

In conclusion, it's worth asking why Americans should care about competing in Africa or investing in its stability. The answer is clear: Africa is poised to shape the 21st century as the world's fastest-growing demographic and economic power.¹⁰ By 2050, Africans will make up a quarter of the global population. Whether Africa succeeds in achieving effective governance and development, as Congress has sought in the bipartisan 2019 Global Fragility Act, will be determined whether the continent becomes a prosperous contributor to the global and U.S. economies in the next two or three decades, or a site of deepening crisis that exacerbates the current worldwide problem of refugee displacement. Africa's trajectory will significantly shape the world in which our children and grandchildren will live.

Making a positive difference is challenging, for sure. But as challenging as it is, the U.S. should not cede the playing field to Russian forces of destruction. There are too many Africans in these

⁹ Joseph Sany, "In Africa, Here's How to Respond to Russia's Brutal Wagner Group," United States Institute of Peace (April 2023), [In Africa, Here's How to Respond to Russia's Brutal Wagner Group | United States Institute of Peace \(usip.org\)](#)

¹⁰ Victor Oluwole, "Africa projected to outpace Asia as world's fastest-growing region," (May 2023). Business Insider Africa, [Africa projected to outpace Asia as world's fastest-growing region - Mo Ibrahim foundation report | Business Insider Africa](#)

Wagner-targeted countries who want strong and mutually beneficial relations with the U.S. The good news is that we have willing and able partners.

Thank you for inviting me to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

The view expressed in this testimony are those of the author and not the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you for your statement, Dr. Sany.
I now recognize Mr. Hudson for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF CAMERON HUDSON, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, AFRICA PROGRAM AT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mr. HUDSON. Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the impact of Russian Federation activities in Africa and its impact on U.S. national security interests there. While I am affiliated with the Center for Strategic & International Studies, CSAS does not take policy positions, and so the viewpoints I will be presenting today are my own.

Next week, as you said, Mr. Chairman, Russia will convene its second Russia Africa Summit in St. Petersburg. The first time it convened such a summit in 2019 forty-three African heads of State and government arrived, exceeding the attendance of similar summits convened by the United Kingdom and France. But this summit is merely a rare public measure of an extensive set of policies Russia is pursuing in Africa in particular that manifests itself as both opportunistic and strategic.

Like my colleague, I will skim over some of the strategic objectives of the Russian Federation, because I think you summarized them extremely well. But I do want to underline a couple of elements that you raised, Mr. Chairman. These strategic objectives are coupled with the set of tactics that Russia employs to maximize the impact of this strategy. Here we do not see Russia creating fault lines in societies, or engineering anti-western sentiment.

Rather, Russia targets and exploits those countries where these fault lines already exist. It then exacerbates and weaponizes them through a potent mix of corruption, disinformation, and propaganda. Coupled with its messaging, Moscow's deployment of security forces like the Wagner Group has afforded it the ability to manipulate everything from public sentiment, to election outcomes, to the local security environment, all under the guise of plausible deniability.

Specifically Moscow targets weak, unstable, and failing States to seek their entry for influence. It has used this formula in countries like Mali, the Central African Republic, and Sudan, all of which were in the throes of violence, instability, and political uncertainty, and possessing a dearth of transparency or democratic institutions. This political and security involvement often comes with a commercial component.

Under these arrangements, Russian security assistance, political support, and financial interests become entirely intertwined with those of host countries, making untangling these relationships even more difficult than traditional bilateral ties. Finally there is no ideology underpinning Russia's inroads as during the cold war, this is transactional.

Under these terms African leaders get political cover from Russia at the United Nations and other international fora. They get security for themselves at home, a continued hold on power, off book revenue streams, and a counter to western led reform processes. In this scenario the costs are borne by Africans themselves, who expe-

rience an uptick in violence, human rights abuses, and social strife, along with a further hollowing out of local governance institutions, extensions of illegitimate governments, and decreasing levels of economic growth and development.

There is no question that in deepening and expanding these ties, U.S. national security interests are being impacted. From the threat of spreading jihadist violence that Russia cannot effectively contain in places where it is deployed, to destabilizing new African States bordering these countries, to establishing basing and military agreements along critical global choke points, Russia's search for relevance on the international stage and new sources of revenue undermine U.S. interests and values around democracy, stability, and transparency.

In response to these challenges, there are a number of steps that Washington can and should be taking to counter this malign influence. First, Washington is positioned to help counteract false and misleading Russian narratives in African States through their support to local level watch dogs, and through online efforts to track and trace online disinformation.

We must empower local partners to understand where the propaganda is coming from, and who is spreading it. Second, U.S. foreign assistance should be targeted and ramped up in those African States where we know Russia is seeking new inroads so that U.S. assistance is better aligned to help host nations more effectively counter the nature and scope of the threat posed to them.

Third, Washington must approve its own messaging toward African nations, which have made clear, as the ranking member suggested, that they do not want to be the subjects of a new cold war competition. And last, in countries experiencing democratic backsliding like Burkina Faso and Guinea, it would be consistent with past practice to punish those States through sanctions and isolation as an expression of our democratic values.

But we should do so knowing that we risk ceding further influence to Russia. Instead we must not concede these setbacks, and be able to deepen our engagement out of our own national interest without conferring praise, or legitimacy, or excusing anti-democratic behavior in our partners. I thank you for your attention, and I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hudson follows:]



**Statement before the House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa**

***“Great Power Competition Implications in
Africa: The Russian Federation and its
Proxies”***

A Testimony by:

Cameron Hudson

Senior Associate (Non-resident), Africa Program, CSIS

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Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today regarding the impact of the Russian Federation's activities in Africa and its impact on U.S. national security interests.

While I am affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS does not take policy positions and so the viewpoints that I express here today are mine alone.

Next week, Russia will convene its second Russia-Africa summit in Saint Petersburg. The first time it convened such a summit, in 2019, 43 African heads of state and government arrived, exceeding the attendance of similar summits convened by the United Kingdom and France. But much has changed in the world since Covid-19 and Russia's war in Ukraine. African nations have been adversely affected by these developments and the associated economic, health, and security fallout from these significant global events.

Certainly, Russia bears an important share of the responsibility for rising global food and fuel prices and the global instability associated with its violations of international law and its efforts to undermine the global, rules-based international order. And yet, in Africa, I would argue that Russia will come to Saint Petersburg next week stronger than before.

This is primarily because Russia is employing a set of policies around the globe that in Africa, in particular, manifests itself as both opportunistic and strategic—taking advantage of shifting societal, political and security trends and fissures across the continent, while at the same time possessing a rationality that is uniquely tailored to appeal to African states and leaders fitting a specific profile.

Russia's strategy in Africa well pre-dates its war in Ukraine, going back to its initial invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the first round on international sanctions against it. But since the start of the current conflict, we have seen considerable efforts by Russia to quicken and deepen its efforts across the continent. Most importantly, Russia's efforts are low-cost and high-impact, challenging Washington's interests on a number of fronts.

Importantly, the Kremlin's interests in Africa are mutually reinforcing:

- First, to undermine democracy and the rule of law, along with Western efforts to bolster those values and institutions;
- Second, to break Russia's diplomatic isolation by both deepening and expanding Russian commercial, political and security ties with Africa's business and political elites;
- Third, to create new markets and commercial opportunities, that undercut Western sanctions, especially in those areas where Russia has already established a market advantage, namely in energy, mining, arms and agriculture;

- Fourth, to assert its own relevance on the international stage and the creation of a multipolar world by demonstrating its ability to shape political events and global outcomes in ways that demand that Moscow continue to be afforded a seat in international debates;
- And finally, to advance its own geo-strategic ambitions, in particular, by seeking a military presence and security partnerships in countries along the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea and even the Atlantic.

Russian Tactics

These strategic objectives are coupled with a set of tactics that Russia employs to maximize the success and impact of its approach. Here, we don't see Russia creating fault lines in societies or engineering anti-Western sentiment from thin air. Rather, Russia targets and exploits those countries where these fault lines already exist. It then exacerbates and weaponizes them through a potent mix of corruption, disinformation and propaganda to advance their own interests.

To be clear, Russia did not invent anti-American, anti-French or anti-Western sentiment in Africa, as some have argued, but through its official pronouncements and unofficial propaganda, it nurtures and feeds these sentiments in ways that undermine U.S. interests.

Relatedly, Russia employs both formal and informal tactics to advance its strategic objectives. Its use of misinformation and disinformation, along with its deployment of security forces like the Wagner Group, afford Russia the latitude to manipulate everything from public sentiment to election outcomes to the local security environment, all under the guise of plausible deniability. These tactics, often pursued with and through local proxies, are often opaque and corrupt, making them difficult to detect; harder to dispel; and even more challenging to inoculate against.

This is because of the third tactic Russia uses, which is to target and prey upon weak, unstable and failing states to seek their entry for influence. In countries like Mali, Central African Republic and Sudan, Russia has used the formula of approaching countries in the throes of violence, instability and political uncertainty, along with a dearth of transparency, rule of law or democratic institutions, to sell these countries' leaders on a basket of security, economic and political partnerships that benefit both countries elites.

Additionally, Russian political and security involvement often comes with a commercial component. Under these arrangements, Russian security assistance, political support and financial interests become entirely intertwined with those of the host countries. So, while this may enable Russia to "sell" its assistance as self-financing because payments come directly through ownership stakes in national assets, like mining or timber concessions, it makes untangling these relationships even more difficult than traditional bilateral ties.

Finally, by targeting military, political and business elites, Russia is capable of exerting country-wide and even regional influence while keeping largely secret the details of its relationships. There is no ideology underpinning Russia's in-roads as during the Cold War. In these countries, it is purely transactional. Under these terms, African leaders get political cover from Russia at the United Nations and in other international fora; security for themselves at home; a continued hold on power; off book revenue streams; and a counter to Western-led reform processes.

But in this scenario, it's the African people who suffer the most: experiencing an uptick in violence, human rights abuses and social strife; along with a further hollowing out of local governance institutions, extensions of illegitimate governments and decreasing levels of economic growth and human development.

U.S. Interests Affected by Russian Strategy

There is no question that in deepening and expanding these ties, even and especially if those ties are largely limited to already weak states, U.S. national security interests are being impacted.

- First, there is no evidence to suggest that the promises Russia and its Wagner Group partners make to African officials about restoring security or pushing back against jihadist groups are coming true. Just the opposite. Assessments are that aside from securing ruling elites, the threats of violent instability in areas where Wagner has a presence are spreading. With the withdrawal of international peacekeepers from places like Mali, Western allies will be challenged to contain a deepening security crisis.
- Secondly, these weak states and Russia's inability to effectively provide security there suggest that neighboring states could be adversely impacted by growing instability on their borders. Ghana's President recently warned of the spillover effects in his country from the Wagner Group. Countries like Niger and Côte d'Ivoire, already weak and facing internal challenges, could be further destabilized as a result of Russia's failure to deliver internal security in those areas where international security forces are no longer present.
- Third, just as they did in Syria, Russia is emerging as a critical influencer in the mass migration movement coming from Africa. Being able to foment instability across vast swaths of central Africa, where displacement and migration are already at historic highs, could well exacerbate a migration challenge from Central and the Horn of Africa and put renewed pressure on European allies on NATO's southern flank to respond.
- Looking at the map of Africa one can further discern a pattern of engagement and influence that could see Russian exerting pressure and gaining footholds in countries from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean and across to the Gulf of Guinea—giving Moscow leverage over the illegal movement of people, arms and minerals and possibly a security foothold at critical shipping choke points in these areas.

- Lastly, we should not discount the overarching threat to U.S. national interests, beyond the security realm, to having democratic institutions and values, which Washington has invested in over the decades in a bipartisan fashion, systematically attacked and undermined across Africa. This is especially true as it stands in stark contrast to the wishes of citizens across the continent who continue to express, through polling, their overwhelming desire to live under systems of democratic government. Efforts to undercut that desire through rigged elections; co-opting political elites; and manipulating the information environment, all risk further destabilizing social and political cohesion within states that can least afford it.

Responding to Russian In-Roads

Make no mistake, Russia is making and seizing opportunities in Africa; but its actions remain strategic. Even as it executes its war plans in Ukraine and contends with new, internal challenges from the recent Wagner Group mutiny, Russia is succeeding in its efforts to make new friends, acquire greater influence, and undermine Western interests in Africa. It is playing on historical ties to these nations; stoking long-held grievances over colonialism and paternalistic attitudes from the West; and pointing out glaring inconsistencies when it comes to Washington's pursuit of its interests in Africa compared to the values it routinely articulates.

In response to these challenges, there are a number of steps that Washington can and should be taking to counter this malign influence.

- First, as the expression goes, 'sunlight is the best disinfectant.' Washington is positioned to help counteract false and misleading Russian narratives in African states through support to local level watchdogs, independent media and through online efforts to track and trace online disinformation. Some of this is being done already. In countries like Sudan, where we know online disinformation was used to undermine the country's transition to civilian rule, USAID has funded an online monitoring tool so that citizens and leaders can know exactly where the disinformation is coming from and who is spreading it. Singling out the Russian hand in these schemes can help to combat its spread and empowers local actors. These tools should be available to every U.S. embassy in Africa and shared with host governments.
- In this same vein, U.S. foreign assistance should be targeted and ramped up in those African states where we know Russia is seeking new inroads. For example, the U.S. Embassy in Chad does not even have a USAID mission, even though the country has been targeted by the Wagner group for its location at critical crossroads between the Sahel and the Horn of Africa and bordering the Wagner strongholds of Sudan and Central African Republic. To that end, U.S. assistance should be better aligned to help host nations more effectively counter the nature and scope of the threat posed to them.

- Third, Washington must improve its own messaging towards African nations which have made clear that they do not want to be the subjects of new Cold War competition nor do they want to be presented with ‘us or them’ choices. Africans have been resentful of threats of U.S. sanctions for working with Russia and any efforts that creates distance between us and our African partners provides fertile ground for Russian influence to metastasize.
- Lastly, when it comes to promoting peaceful, stable, democratic nations in Africa that are capable of resisting the siren song of Russian influence, our values and our interests are already well aligned. In countries experiencing democratic backsliding, like Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, it would be easy and consistent with past practice to punish those states through sanctions and isolation as an expression of our democratic values. But we should do so knowing that we risk ceding further influence to Russia. Instead, we must not concede these setbacks and instead be able to deepen engagement out of our own national interest without conferring praise or legitimacy and excusing anti-democratic behavior.

In conclusion, it is worth recalling that Russia has achieved these remarkable inroads in African nations through its guile, deception and corruption. It remains an insignificant trade partner to African states, standing at only one tenth the value of China. Similarly, it contributes insignificantly to Africa’s health, well-being or development. And yet, its political and security inroads on the continent are substantial. Combating this trend will be neither quick nor easy, but it remains imperative that we do so. For our own national interests and the interests of our African partners.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, Mr. Hudson, for your testimony.
I now recognize Ms. Bax for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF PAULINE BAX, DEPUTY PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
AFRICA INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP**

Ms. BAX. Thank you, Chairman James, thank you Member Jacobs, distinguished members, thank you for the opportunity to address the subcommittee. I'm the deputy director for Africa International Crisis Group, a global nonprofit organization that hopes to prevent, mitigate, and help these African countries. I have spent the past 3 years researching Russia's influence in Africa, and I have presided to its use on the continent. I will start by highlighting three attitudes toward Russia and the west—

Mr. JAMES. Madam Bax, one moment please. Turn your microphone on please.

Ms. BAX. Sorry.

Mr. JAMES. Your words are very important, we want to make sure we record them, thank you.

Ms. BAX. I will start by highlighting three attitudes toward Russia and the west that are common in Africa since Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine. First, African leaders are resentful of the intense focus of western countries on this war, as they feel that the west is diverting its diplomatic, financial, and military resources to Ukraine at the expense of other places suffering insecurity and violence.

Second, some African countries have an endearing good will toward Russia that is born from the Soviet Union's support for African liberation movements during the cold war. More generally there is also good will toward other nations that advocate non-western governance models. Third, African governments are unpersuaded by the west's push for them to abandon their longstanding preference for non-alignment, and join the campaign against Russia.

Such views aside, most African leaders remain acutely aware that partnering with Russia could harm their relations with the United States and other foreign powers that are prepared to support democratically elected governments with financial, technical, or military assistance. Their dominant focus is on managing economic headwinds as ordinary people are struggling to make ends meet.

Most African heads of State are uninterested in strengthening political ties with Moscow today, especially if doing so will compromise relations with Washington. When it comes to the Wagner Group, which until recently was Russia's main proxy, it does not have a good reputation on the continent, and deservedly so. But it has thrived in a few unstable places where leaders harbor grievances about the west's perceived track record.

It has been effective in playing upon existing anti-western sentiments, targeting France in particular, and exploiting the resentment of Washington's historical inattention to African politics. Unfortunately in Africa today there is an increasing demand for military solutions. Countries that have hired Wagner have been prepared to overlook the company's immoral behavior because they value its flexibility, and its willingness to engage in ground combat.

The Central African Republic is one such country. Wagner was instrumental in securing the president's hold on power in 2020 when rebel forces threatened to overrun the capital. In Mali, which has long struggled to quell an array of Islamist insurgencies, Russia is now the main security partner. Mali's military leadership has suspended its relationship with France and the U.N. peacekeeping mission, and Wagner troops are now patrolling alongside the Malian army.

Wagner is also active in Sudan, though mainly in gold mining. So far it appears to have limited influence on the country's spiral into civil war. In Libya, several hundred Wagner fighters are reportedly guarding military bases and oil facilities, and the group appears to be using the country as a logistical hub for its activities elsewhere in Africa. Against this backdrop, Washington would be best served by following two approaches.

First, Washington could try to influence the circumstances that have enabled Wagner's rise and relevance in Africa. And these circumstances will remain at play regardless of how Wagner evolves. Programming that seeks to maintain relations and lines of communication while supporting good governance and business practices align with this approach.

Second, the U.S. should avoid policies that could rupture relations with governments that have hired the group, or are considering doing so. We know that there is a conversation in Washington about the prospect of designating Wagner a foreign terrorist organization, an FTO listing would have this effect.

While Wagner deserves condemnation, this move would further alienate governments who have contracted Wagner, jeopardize diplomacy, and crisis response efforts in those countries, and likely worsen humanitarian crisis given that aid groups and businesses tend to de-risk in jurisdictions where FTO groups operate. At the same time it is unlikely to significantly restrict the group's operations, or that of its possible successors.

Existing sanctions such as the transnational criminal organization designation are bringing attention to Wagner's profit driven behavior, while avoiding the specific pitfalls of an FTO, and they should be enforced vigorously. Thank you for your attention today, I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bax follows:]

Pauline Bax
 Deputy Director, Africa Program
 International Crisis Group
 House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa
 Tuesday, July 18th 2023

Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa: thank you for the opportunity to speak about the implications of the activities of the Russian Federation and its proxies in Africa. It is an honour to speak at this hearing.

I am deputy director for the Africa Program at International Crisis Group. Crisis Group is a global organisation that works to prevent, mitigate and help resolve deadly conflict. I'd like to begin my remarks with a brief overview of attitudes toward the Russian Federation on the African continent, particularly in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as a synopsis of how African states have come to perceive the Wagner Group, which at least until recently was Russia's main proxy.

For the purposes of this testimony, I will speak about Wagner as we knew it before the June 23 rebellion in Rostov. At the moment, we do not know how its operations in Africa will evolve. Neither do we know whether Wagner will continue using the same logistical and commercial networks it has relied on to extend its reach. Having studied Wagner's activities on the continent for years, I maintain that it deserves condemnation and isolation for its noxiousness. At the same time, my colleagues and I believe that Washington's response to Wagner's activities needs to be carefully weighed, taking into account both the situation on the ground in Africa and the fast-moving developments in Russia, which have produced uncertainty about Yevgeny Prigozhin's fate and that of his business empire.

Attitudes in Africa towards Russia and the United States

The economic fallout of the war in Ukraine has reverberated throughout Africa, as it has around the world. The intense focus of Western countries on the conflict in Europe has created resentment among African leaders, who feel that the West is diverting its diplomatic and financial resources to Ukraine at the expense of other places suffering destabilizing violence. The reluctance of a significant number of African countries to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine during discussions at the UN General Assembly demonstrated two crucial things.¹ First, the Soviet Union's financial and material assistance to African liberation movements during the Cold War era created an enduring and often misunderstood good will toward Russia and other nations that advocate for a non-Western governance model that purports to take African concerns into account. Secondly, the West's push to bring Africa onto its side in its campaign against Russia did little to persuade African governments that they should abandon their longstanding preference for non-alignment. These sentiments still prevail, but the dominant focus for African leaders is on managing economic headwinds as ordinary people on the continent struggle to make ends meet – particularly as many citizens now blame the leaders for high food and fuel prices.

¹ Fifteen African nations abstained in the first UN General Assembly vote condemning Russia in March 2022. Eight others did not vote, while Eritrea voted against the measure.

That said, these governments are also acutely aware that partnering with Russia could harm their relations with other foreign powers – including the United States – that are prepared to support democratically elected leaders with generous financial, technical and humanitarian assistance. Overall, the U.S. is perceived as a desirable partner, mainly because of its democratic governance and global economic weight. Most young Africans also believe that the U.S. has a positive influence in Africa, although China now ranks first as the foreign power with the biggest positive influence on the continent, thanks to its considerable infrastructure investments and affordable consumer goods.² For these reasons, many heads of state in West and Central Africa, even those that are facing severe security threats, are loath to strengthen ties with Russia or hire the Wagner Group. The group does not have a good reputation on the continent, deservedly so: it is often perceived as an actor that heightens instability rather than reduces it.

To be sure, Russia has been working to improve its reach. It has been trying for years – starting well before its all-out invasion of Ukraine – to extend its influence in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019, it held its first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi on the Black Sea. As the continent's biggest arms supplier, Russia focused mostly on signing bilateral military cooperation agreements. The Kremlin did not have an overarching political strategy in place – rather, it began using the Wagner Group to test the potential for political influence or economic encroachment, and often a combination of both, in unstable or impoverished countries that were looking for new security partners. Using a proxy gave the Kremlin the benefit of plausible deniability and conveniently shielded it from suspicion that its forays into Africa were primarily designed to further its own geopolitical and commercial interests. Wagner thus served as a channel for Russian power projection: its employees and linked companies deployed to countries that had signalled an interest in tighter military cooperation with Russia. Simultaneously, Wagner undertook information activities that aligned with Moscow's interests and armed operations in coordination with Russian defence and military intelligence bodies. It also looked around for lucrative business opportunities.

I will also say a few words about South Africa, where I reside. South Africa is an example of an African country that has tried to balance Western expectations with a Russia policy partly driven, rightly or wrongly, by gratitude for the Soviet Union's support for African liberation movements. South Africa has abstained in all the UN General Assembly votes on the Ukraine war since March 2022. It has not levied any sanctions on or broken ties with Russia. South African dignitaries regularly visit Russia and vice versa. South Africa also hosted joint military exercises with Russia and China in March 2023, exactly a year after the war started.

Its position is also linked to internal politics. As the ruling African National Congress heads toward a difficult election in May 2024, it is facing opposition from populist factions within its ranks and from the extreme left. These political forces are all decidedly anti-Western; they often accuse the U.S. and European countries of neocolonial bullying. South Africa's reaction also relates to its status as a member of the BRICS alliance. South Africa is now the chair of BRICS and will host its annual summit this August in Johannesburg. This occasion could be a major test for South Africa, since it is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,

² African Youth Survey 2022, Ichikowitz Family Foundation

which has issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin. If past rulings are any guide, South African courts appear to agree with many international law experts that the government will be legally required to arrest Putin if he sets foot on South African territory. It remains to be seen whether Putin will attend the summit, and what the government will do if he does.³

President Cyril Ramaphosa's government is aware of the dangers its perceived pro-Russia policies pose to the country's economy. It has trod carefully to avoid being punished for transgressing sanctions against Russia, but it could in time lose the benefits of the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA. (The AGOA holds great value to South Africa since its exports to the U.S. under the act are worth about \$1.75 billion per annum.) To mitigate the situation, Ramaphosa has sent several special envoys to the U.S. to explain South Africa's position. The African peace initiative, led by Ramaphosa, which saw six African leaders visit Russia and Ukraine in June, could also be seen as one of the measures employed by South Africa to reinforce its non-aligned stance.

Despite the perceptions of South Africa as pro-Russian, it has maintained close diplomatic ties with the U.S. and Europe. South Africa has a strong constitution and a vibrant democracy. It promotes freedom of speech, inclusivity and non-discrimination on a continent where these principles are often under threat. South Africa is also the driver of regional economic development and of the African Continental Free Trade Area. It plays a leading role in the African Union and the Southern African Development Community, as well as in fighting militant jihadism in the region. Against this backdrop, it is hard to see how a strained relationship with Pretoria serves U.S. interests. To guard against that eventuality, the U.S. might consider following the example of Germany, which is South Africa's biggest European trade partner – continuing to engage economically and politically while respecting certain diplomatic boundaries.

Wagner in Africa

In a sense, Wagner was born in Ukraine. Yevgeny Prigozhin himself says its fighters took part in combat in the part of eastern Ukraine known as Donbas in 2014, though precisely what they were doing at the time is unclear, and Wagner as a company does not appear to have emerged until later. Wagner started to take the shape of the organisation it was until recently in Syria, where its forces supported the Assad regime's war effort. It expanded into certain African countries, too. As the group's footprint expanded outside Ukraine, certain common threads emerged. The group tends to thrive in unstable places where leaders harbor grievances about the West's perceived track record. Its influence activities are aligned with Moscow's interests and have been particularly effective in playing upon existing anti-Western sentiment and resentment of Washington's historical inattention to African politics. Wagner has thus been able to present itself as a no-holds-barred security provider to countries disappointed with traditional partners or lengthy but ineffective UN peacekeeping missions.

Countries that have hired Wagner value the group's flexibility and its willingness to actively engage in ground combat. Wagner senior operatives have also managed to

³ Mispa Roux, "The law is clear: Putin must be arrested if he sets foot in South Africa", *Daily Maverick*, 4 June 2023.

build close personal relationships with leaders. Overall, Wagner's flagrant indifference to international legal protections for civilians is not the reason that these governments hire it. But they are prepared to overlook the company's bad acts – because they feel that they have no other good option. Thus far, Wagner's reputation with the African states using its services has survived its reported abuses.

Wagner has thus far put boots on the ground in four African countries.

In Libya, a small number of Wagner personnel helped train Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces, which in 2018 and 2019 were fighting the internationally recognized government in Tripoli. In 2019, they supported Haftar's efforts to capture the Libyan capital. When that siege proved unsuccessful, they withdrew from Tripoli but continued to work with Haftar, notably by guarding military bases and oil facilities.⁴ Haftar reportedly paid Wagner directly through his own channels. At present, the number of Wagner fighters in Libya is believed to be in the hundreds, with many fighters reportedly having been redeployed elsewhere. According to military analysts and U.S. officials, however, Wagner continues to use Libya as a logistical hub for its activities elsewhere in Africa.⁵

In the Central African Republic, Wagner has between 1,500 and 2,000 fighters on the ground. Wagner's venture in the CAR has been its most successful to date, at least measured by its influence on the presidency and military as well as its business deals. In 2017, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra asked Russia to train and equip the country's armed forces, which were weak and unable to defend themselves from rebel groups embedded in the east. Along with weapons, Russia sent official military instructors who were then gradually replaced by Wagner personnel over the course of the next two years.

In 2020, Wagner fighters were instrumental in securing the president's hold on power as rebel forces threatened to sabotage elections and attack the capital. In exchange, Wagner secured long-term gold mining concessions, took over customs services and encroached on other sectors of the economy. While Central Africans welcomed the Russians at first, hailing them as liberators, many outside the capital now see Wagner as just one of many predatory militias that are primarily interested in the country's natural resources.

Earlier this month, hundreds of Wagner troops were rotated out of the country, fuelling speculation that their departure was linked to the revolt in Russia. But both Russian and Central African authorities have stated that Russia will continue to lend support, in line with the military agreement signed between the two countries some five years ago.

Wagner has also been active in Mali, a landlocked country that produces little else but gold. Bamako has struggled to quell an array of jihadist insurgencies since 2012 and its relations with its long-time partner, France, have soured as of late. Since the departure of the French stabilisation mission in August last year, Russia has become

⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Libyan politicians, diplomats, Tripoli and Benghazi, 2022.

⁵ Most flights from Syria reportedly touch down in Libya for refuelling before heading to other countries where Wagner operates. Crisis Group interviews, U.S. officials, Washington and Tunis, May 2023. See also Crisis Group Commentary, "Reuniting Libya, Divided Once More", 25 May 2022.

Mali's main foreign ally. It has sold the country helicopters and military equipment, and it has promised fertilizer and fuel supplies as well.⁶ Wagner has deployed over 1,000 mercenaries who protect key government figures and patrol alongside the army in the north of the country, where Islamic State in the Greater Sahara is increasingly venturing into territory held by the jihadist coalition JNIM. Bamako's political elite views Russia, and by extension Wagner, as preferable to other security partners – a sentiment evidenced by Mali's recent call for MINUSMA to withdraw.⁷

Finally, Wagner is also active in Sudan, although it appears to have limited influence on the country's unfortunate spiral into a full-blown civil war. Wagner first deployed there in 2017 to help bolster dictator Omar al-Bashir as Russia sought to negotiate rights to open a naval base on the Red Sea. Around the same time, a Prigozhin-owned company opened a gold processing plant in the country, which is one of Africa's major gold producers. After the army ousted Bashir, Wagner threw its weight behind army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his then-ally Mohamed "Hemedti" Hamdan Dagalo, head of the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. The group is now viewed as particularly connected to Hemedti and his vast gold operations. Even though Wagner has reportedly supplied Hemedti's forces with surface-to-air missiles at least once, its presence has thus far not influenced battlefield dynamics. Hemedti, for his part, appears keen to avoid public association with the group.⁸

How the U.S. Can Counter Wagner's Influence

The real issue for Washington and those of us who work on conflict resolution and stability in Africa is dealing with the circumstances that brought about Wagner's rise. Whatever happens to the Wagner Group, these underlying circumstances will likely remain at play. Crisis Group has written elsewhere about how Western (mainly European) countries should approach programming in African states where Wagner has gained a foothold. Recommendations include avoiding a rupture in relations, keeping military-to-military channels open and (in states that have experienced one or more coups) looking for ways to support a return to constitutional governance.¹ While some of these recommendations are specific to European donors, the overarching themes about maintaining relations and lines of communication offer guidance relevant to Washington as well.

We know that there is also a conversation in Washington about the prospect of designating Wagner a Foreign Terrorism Organization (FTO), even amid doubts about the group's present and future status. We believe an FTO designation would be the wrong move. It would be a hasty step considering the rapidly changing status of the group and its founder. Whether Wagner will continue its nefarious activities in Africa using the same logistical and commercial networks it has built up, or whether it will be subsumed by Russia's defence ministry and emerge in a different shape or form, is a matter of speculation at this time. Further, an FTO designation would be more likely to quash hope of constructive engagement with governments that rely on Wagner for security assistance – Mali and the Central African Republic – than to lead them to cut ties with the group. Indeed, an FTO designation is likely to be seen as confrontational

⁶ Tiemoko Diallo, "Mali says no need to justify Russia as partner as Lavrov visits", Reuters, 7 February 2023.

⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Malian military officers and government officials, Bamako, 2022.

⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Sudanese civil society figures and African, Arab and Western officials, 2022-2023.

in these countries, feeding impressions that the West sees African countries as pawns in a power struggle with Russia.

Designation could also jeopardise Washington's and other crisis response efforts in areas where Wagner has major operations. Businesses and financial institutions often respond to an FTO designation by pulling out from those locations, which tends to strain already fragile economies and drive up demand for assistance. At the same time, aid groups may stop operations for fear that the assistance they distribute is considered "material support" to an FTO.

The risks are of particular concern for countries benefiting from USAID funding. The agency provides millions of dollars in humanitarian and other assistance to Mali and the Central African Republic. It would face major complications if Wagner is listed as an FTO. The listing would make USAID support in the places Wagner operates difficult, expensive and bureaucratically burdensome – and less effective. Because, unlike with other sanctions, the U.S. government cannot use licenses to mitigate the effects of the material support statute, the potential workarounds would require congressional action. For instance, Congress might have to enact an exception such that humanitarian and peacebuilding activities would not count as "material support or resources". But even that measure might be insufficient for many important foreign organizations and businesses to bear the perceived risk of operating in Wagner's proximity.

While continuing to monitor the group's evolution, and steering clear of an FTO designation, the U.S. government should vigorously enforce existing sanctions that will hinder Wagner's access to its lifeline – international financial markets. The Transnational Criminal Organization designation imposed in January 2023 has already helped Washington induce both domestic and foreign agencies to work harder at addressing the group's illicit business activities. Should Wagner activities continue, this listing reinforces the message that the group is enriching itself by extracting gold and other natural resources. Continued communication to firms encouraging them to strengthen due diligence standards and stop trading in Wagner-mined minerals, lest they run afoul of U.S. sanctions, can also play a useful role.

Beyond the world of sanctions, Washington should seek to influence the circumstances that enabled Wagner's rise and relevance in Africa. As I said earlier, these conditions will be salient regardless of the Wagner Group's fate. One way the U.S. can help is by positively shaping the information environment Wagner and Russia have exploited. The U.S. can best do this by putting resources into improving the quality of independent local media in Africa. Russia, including through Wagner, has taken advantage of the African information environment to amplify existing grievances, polarize the public debate and increase its own standing. It has hired professional African journalists and social media influencers. Wagner has also disseminated copyright-free content to news websites and content aggregators and given syndication deals to content creators. A U.S. approach that offers financial and other support to independent African media could help confront dangerous influence operations like Wagner's. African voices are more credible than U.S. or Russian voices when it comes to shedding light on Wagner abuses.

Thank you for your attention today. I look forward to discussing this subject further and to answering your questions.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, Ms. Bax.

I now recognize myself for questioning.

I want to piggy back on what you just said, enforcement. Can you briefly outline maybe a few gaps in enforcement the U.S. Government has shown, and some ways we can address those gaps in enforcement? Specifics would be welcome.

Ms. BAX. Enforcement in terms of diplomatic engagement?

Mr. JAMES. Yes, diplomatic engagement specific with the terror organizations. If not designated a terror organization, what current policies are we failing to implement that could have more impact, more effect?

Ms. BAX. Well, as I just said in my oral statement, so we advocate, or I advocate for a more rigorous application of existing sanctions, which could for example restrict the financial flows that go to the Wagner organization.

Mr. JAMES. More rigorous, so more policies, or is somebody not doing their job effectively here?

Ms. BAX. Doing the job effectively.

Mr. JAMES. OK. So, do you know specifically what organization we need to be working with to motivate them to do their job more effectively, to use the policies we already have on the books to get more peace and stability in the region?

Ms. BAX. I think this has been outlined in the sanctions as they have been listed by the United States. So, those sanctions are in place, I think they should be applied vigorously, and some of the financial flows that are currently going, for example through countries like the UAE, as we can assume, need to be applied.

Mr. JAMES. OK, so we need to do the job better. So, that implies that we are not doing the job well now. So, the reason we have experts here is so you can inform us where those gaps are, and where we can apply that pressure, so that we can get folks the resources that they require to execute well. African countries have contracted with Wagner recently, and they frequently State that in the face of powerful security threats and no competitive alternative offer from the west, Wagner remains their only security partner of choice.

If we agree that Russia and their proxies are bad choices, I do not believe that we should allow it to be their only choice. It defies logic, and invites instability. Do you agree that this is the reason why CAR, and Mali turn to Wagner? Specifically because Russia, bad choice in security, was their only choice? All may answer.

Dr. SANY. I do not agree that they do not have choices. I think what is happening is the transaction cost to start the business with alternatives. In my conversation with some of those leaders it is just difficult because we have conditions. And so, Wagner does not, they do not care, and therefore Wagner is willing to engage——

Mr. JAMES. So, America has some conditions?

Dr. SANY. Yes, but——

Mr. JAMES. And what are some of those conditions that may preclude——

Dr. SANY. Human rights.

Mr. JAMES. What is that?

Dr. SANY. Human rights, for example. We want to make sure that our weapons are not used to massacre villages, and commu-

nities. We have principles, freedom of expression, civic space. So, we have those conditions that are linked to those dealings. And for these leaders, it is just a high cost to pay. And also——

Mr. JAMES. Human rights is a high cost to pay.

Dr. SANY. For some of those corrupt leaders. For some of those corrupt leaders, some of them, Wagner is offering them the opportunity to pay under the table, corruption. Like I say, collusion between some of those leaders and the Wagner mercenaries. Remember, Wagner is a mercenary group, they are there for business.

Mr. JAMES. So, piggy backing on that, human rights and corruption are never anything the United States will step away from. We will never divorce our foreign policy from human rights. So, given your statement about reality, help me out. Are there any actions that the U.S. can take at this stage to lay the groundwork for Wagner's removal from the African countries, and for a western solution to be the best solution rather than a Russian solution?

Dr. SANY. Yes. I think as I said in my oral statement, we have to stay engaged. And therefore it means that we have to enrich continued dialog with those leaders, not isolate them, No. 1. And as we engage, we are guided by our principles, we will not compromise our principles, but however we have to meet them where they are. For example, in Burkina Faso it is a fact, 9 months ago the State, the government was controlling barely forty percent of the territory.

This is the poorest count during the war, facing two brutal and highly sophisticated terrorist groups, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State. So, they have that problem, we cannot just sanction our way out of it. So, we have to engage with them. Accompanying them in—of course without sacrificing our principles, they want more engagement, not isolation. And I think just pointing fingers will not help us in this case.

Mr. JAMES. I totally agree with that statement. As you mentioned Burkina Faso, I have said often that the finger waving foreign policy is doing no one any good. We need more engagement, not isolation. You know what? I am going to play nice. I think that my wonderful, intelligence, and kind Ranking Member would like to ask some questions.

Ms. Jacobs?

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Bax, I wanted to followup on what you talked about with the Wagner FTO in your opening statements. I wanted you to talk through in a little more detail what you view as the potential impact of this proposed policy.

Ms. BAX. To not designate Wagner?

Ms. JACOBS. To designate.

Ms. BAX. To designate, the impact that that would have. So, we believe generally that it is a risky, it is a policy that could have risks, and very limited benefits overall. We think it is the wrong policy response in this case. Our main concern would be that it can alienate African governments that work with Wagner rather than bring them into the U.S. fold.

Right now these governments, I say Mali and CAR are not in a position to just cut ties with Wagner right now, because that would make them even more vulnerable to rebel attacks, or jihadist vio-

lence. Even though we disagree with their choice to employ Wagner, it makes sense from a military point of view. Wagner has served to some extent as a deterrent to some of these forces, mainly jihadist insurgencies.

And this would endanger already fragile security arrangements. Again, as some of my fellow witnesses here have said, I think we should also take into account that any U.S. efforts to counter Wagner could be viewed by many African governments as great power competition. And these governments may feel that their preference for non-alignment is being ignored, and I think this policy could backfire to some extent.

More importantly, right now for Mali specifically, we are worried that it would create problems for humanitarians, and maybe even for peacemakers further down the line as an FTO designation would hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid, and especially the material support restrictions that flow from this designation would have a chilling effect on humanitarian organizations, and businesses that work in the country.

And longer down the line, this is not an issue right now, but a designation usually makes any future efforts to bring parties together for dialog extremely difficult. So, last I would like to emphasize that an FTO designation is very unlikely to lead to a quick dismantling of Wagner, especially now, after the revolt in Rostov.

There might be new judicial entities emerging under a different name, under the Russian Defense Ministry might morph into something else entirely, even if the activities continue. Yes, I think those are my main points.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you. And, you know, something that you all brought up in your opening statements is making sure we are taking into account the history of these countries, the grievances, and so while the challenges Russia and its proxies pose are real, and require a thoughtful and effective response, we have to take these grievances into account.

So, for each of you, starting with Dr. Sany, can you please share your views on how the United States can best do this, and what lessons we can learn from the cold war, and how we apply those to today's world?

Dr. SANY. Why there are historical ties, Russia, the Soviet Union has a long relationship with the continent. The United States has a couple of assets. We have a very rich diaspora, African diaspora, none of our adversary has that, none, China, Russia. And so, we could leverage that diaspora diplomatically, economically, and even in our defense or militarily to show the best of what we have.

That is one asset that we have not used optimally, and we can do more of it. And as I said, none of our adversaries has it, and no propaganda or misinformation can tear down that asset. No. 2, I think it is important to continue the kind of comprehensive engagement we have with this country. Unlike China, or Russia, the United States engages with all—we have a more official side approach.

We engage governments, civil society, youth, the media, that is critical. We have to keep doing that comprehensive engagement. And I think also it is important this time to flip the script from aid to trade, that is what African countries are looking for. And for

that, they will also have to play their part making the business environment attractive.

Meaning the rule of law, and accountability, and the sanctity of contract. In that, the United States has a lot to offer, we are known for that. And so, flipping the script from aid to trade, and providing the kind of support that will make this country more attractive for businesses will be, it is also a competitive advantage.

Mr. HUDSON. I guess maybe what I would say is we have to—in the terms of this conversation, we need to remember we are speaking about Africa as if it is monolithic, and we have 54 countries, all of which are at different levels of political, social, and economic development, right? And so, not every country that we are talking about is enticed by the Russia model, or the Wagner model.

So, I think we need to be very clear eyed about how we calibrate our approach to these countries. And we have been spending a lot of time talking about really, the very hardest cases. The cases where leaders are dedicated to their own personal political survival and economic wellbeing. That is a very small minority of the countries that are on this continent.

And I think that one of the challenges is Africans are going to be watching this hearing today, and they are going to say you are painting with a very broad brush here. So, you have for example the president of Ghana not long ago saying we want closer security ties because we are fearful of the Wagner presence in Burkina Faso, and we are fearful of the spreading, the spillover effects of that.

And so, I think we need to be, as I said in my testimony, we need to be very targeted and strategic in how we are approaching these countries. So, countries that are bordering States where there are high levels of insecurity, and where there are already a Wagner presence, or the potential for a Wagner presence, we really need to be upping our game in those places. We need to be increasing our security assistance, we need to be increasing our security dialog.

I do not know why AFRICOM isn't on the continent all the time making the visits that they make, because it really does build good will with African militaries. I think the other thing that we need to be doing is engaging those African militaries so that they are the alternative to Wagner.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you.

I now recognize Rep. Kim for 5 minutes.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you, Chairman, and Ranking Member, for holding this hearing. The consequences of Russia's invasion in Ukraine has been felt globally, but African countries in particular have been affected by the disruptions to global food supply chains as a result of the invasion, and there are 23 million people in the Horn of Africa that face severe hunger due to the ongoing drought, and Ukraine is one of Africa's largest wheat suppliers.

Russia just terminated, as the chair mentioned in his opening, the Black Sea Grain Deal, and that sends global wheat prices up immediately. What message is that sending to African countries in the Horn of Africa just days before Putin is scheduled to host nearly fifty African leaders at St. Petersburg for the Russia African Summit? I want to hear your thoughts, your reaction.

Ms. BAX. I have a brief comment to make on that. So, we have just learned recently that Russia has some bilateral deals for wheat, for example with Mali, so it has delivered wheat below market prices to Mali. It is in talks with Ghana and Senegal for delivery of wheat, or fuel below or at market prices, which I think is a very clever move. My fellow witness, Dr. Sany, also has a theory about the background to this whole issue.

Again, I think most African leaders know the focus is less on the Ukraine war, and is more about those fuel and food prices that they are struggling with. So, I do not know at this moment what their response will be to the deal that has fallen through. And I think we will see some of it in the attendance of the Russia Africa Summit that will happen in a couple of weeks. But it of course will be on the agenda.

Mrs. KIM. I would like to hear the other two witnesses briefly please.

Mr. HUDSON. I would just say that Russia invests a lot more time and energy in explaining themselves. Whether we call that propaganda or disinformation, they spend a lot more time and money trying to control the information environment on the continent and globally than we do as a government. And I am not suggesting that we get into the business of troll farms and things like that.

But I do not think that we can restrain ourselves in trying to shed light on what Russia is doing, and to disabuse the lies that they are spreading. Again, I think in my testimony I say that sunshine is the best disinfectant. And if we intend to roll back the communications strategy that accompanies the political and military strategies that Russia is employing, then we have to combat it on the airwaves, and online, and in places where we aren't.

We are not on, for example TikTok, this has become a very controversial thing because of the Chinese control over TikTok, but the fact is that is where a lot of disinformation is spreading, and we have ceded that entire battlefield to Russia and others on the continent. I will stop there.

Dr. SANY. I agree that this will have a devastating blow, particularly in the Horn of Africa. But I also think that maybe it is also a way for Putin to deflate on the Wagner mutiny, because the Wagner mutiny has dominated the airwaves in Africa for some time. And also a possibility is to hand Africans a concrete outcome from the summit. To say they came, and then we delivered the grains, because there is nothing to deliver for this summit.

So, the grain could be one of the deals. So, again, who knows what Putin wants, but it has real consequences on people's lives.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you. I do like to throw in another question there. Russia's proliferation of mercenaries in Africa, notably through the Wagner Group, has destabilized a number of countries, including Sudan. And we know that the Wagner Group is backing the rapid support forces in Sudan, and there is a civil war broken out after efforts by civil society in Sudan to transition the government to democracy under a civilian rule collapsed.

So, the rapid support forces, that is a parliamentary group that traces their lineage to Janjaweed militia accused by the United States of genocide in Darfur. So, in this unclassified setting that

we are in today, can you describe the nature of that support, its implication for U.S. interests, and how the U.S. can best address the role of Wagner in Sudan? Go ahead, please, anyone.

Mr. HUDSON. I was just going to say the Wagner Group entered Sudan in 2017, so it is not since the revolution, it is preceding the revolution that the Wagner Group has been there offering technical assistance and support on security matters. We know that in 2019 when the military, when the rapid support forces put down civilian protestors, that that was done with the assistance, and the planning support of the Wagner Group.

I think one thing with respect to Sudan that is important to keep in mind is that Russia and Wagner have worked really hand in hand. So, you have seen the Russian military, the Ministry of Defense going into Sudan trying to broker formally kind of what I would say through the front door, a military basing agreement on the Red Sea. And you have seen the Wagner Group kind of engaging through the back door with the rapid support forces.

And so, this is very clearly a very strategic move by Russia to employ formal and informal ties with Sudan to try to advance its strategic objectives. Right now the Wagner Group has very clearly sided with the rapid support forces. The U.S. Government announced 2 weeks ago in its sanctioning of Malian officials that surface to air missiles were provided by the Wagner Group in Central African Republic, and moved across the border into Sudan to support the rapid support forces.

So, I think it is a very destabilizing situation, more so than Sudan. Because if Wagner is using Central African Republic as a base of operations, then it will be able to kind of have its effects felt all across the continent.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you, thanks for indulging.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, and I would remind anybody here, or listening abroad that this is a hearing on the Russian Federation and its proxies. Anyone concerned that we are painting with a broad brush should also be cognizant of the efforts we are making on AGOA, the efforts we are making on PEPFAR, the efforts we are making on Power Africa, and Prosper Africa.

So, for the topic of today we are staying focused on the areas of Russia and their proxies affect the safety of African nations, and where they apply, and cause a security threat for Americans at home and abroad.

The chair now recognizes Rep. Cherfilus-McCormick for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Earlier this year the Administration stated its intent to build on commitments made during the U.S. African Leadership Summit last December. One of the announcements was that the Agriculture Productivity launched with USAID intends to provide 16 million to launch an initiative to support Tanzanian farmers with a focus on women and youth, and respond to the global food security crisis worsened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Additionally, USAID's Food and Peace program helps mitigate the global food insecurity crisis, but we cannot underestimate the risk of not doing enough. Mr. Hudson, in your written testimony you mention how U.S. foreign assistance should be ramped up in

States where we know that Russia is making inroads. Can you describe how these types of investments can help counter Russian influence in Africa?

Mr. HUDSON. Sure. Well, I think that we need to consider what the baseline is in the African countries that we are talking to, and what the nature of the threat is in some of those places. And so in a place like Ghana that I mentioned, which is a well-established democratic State on the continent, clearly there is a security threat on the northern border. So, Ghana will present a kind of different set of needs from Washington in terms of support from foreign assistance than say a country like Benin just right next door, which has far weaker institutions, less of a history of democratic progress, where the mission is going to be more important to dial up democracy programming around the transition there. As well as, I think really contemplating how we approach our security posture with them given the anti-democratic behavior that we have seen in the country. It is a balance that we have to strike if what we are interested in is shoring up these countries.

But there is no sort of one kind of cookie cutter approach to it. I think we kind of have to meet these countries where they are.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you. My next question is for Dr. Sany. I want to first say that I agree with your comments on leveraging the diaspora. Earlier this year I traveled with the vice president, and that was one of our biggest accomplishments, was to engage the diaspora. We traveled with historically Black colleges, such as Howard University, some of our most successful actors, and some of our most successful businessmen.

Increasing that engagement, and moving away from just looking at Africa as an aid situation, but more of an investment, a partner, respectfully, which is a new age. And the question I wanted to ask you, Dr. Sany, the Wagner Group's attempted mutiny in Russia raised many concerns around the world. While Russia's foreign ministry, Lavrov, have asserted that global Wagner operations will continue, it is unclear what their role will be.

What are the implications for Russia's ambitions in Africa after the Wagner mutiny?

Dr. SANY. I think what the mutiny did was prove more than the cosmetic structure here, because Wagner will not leave Africa. They may change the name, it may be piloted owned by the Minister of Defense, it may be something else. However, I think their biggest impact was twofold. No. 1, it punctured a hole in that brand, the Russia brand as a stable partner, a provider of security, No. 1, that was a big one.

No. 2, forcing Lavrov to going around the world and sending reassurance, demonstrating something most African Wagner clients were hiding, that Wagner is sponsored by the Kremlin, and therefore they take full ownership of Wagner's atrocities around the world. They pulled themselves up to lead opposition. So, those two things are more impactful than any cosmetic change the Kremlin will do around Wagner.

For me, those are the two biggest lessons and implications for Wagner moving forward. And I will also take the opportunity of this to thank the chairman for mentioning other programs we are doing as well. Because I think we have a full—our policy mix is

rich. And to add to what Cameron said in your previous question, I think it may be up to the United States to know how to massage all the dosage of those policy tools in every country we operate in, and where Wagner is.

Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, madam.

The chair now recognizes Rep. Baird for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member, and thank our witnesses for being here. You know, I am very interested in this attitude that some of the African countries have toward Russia, and toward the United States. And I want to start this conversation by saying I had the opportunity not too long within the last month or two to go to Purdue, and welcome twenty-five fellows they call them, but they were from various African countries.

And they were entrepreneurs, they were young people, and they were excited to be there. And they were going to take a look at the economics, and financial management if they started a business on their own. They were going to look at manufacturing and processing techniques, and they were going to look at research, and I am a strong advocate for research. One example that one couple told me about was they were going to make some sort of jerky as a product, like beef jerky, or whatever.

But anyway, so my question to you is that seems to me to be a very productive way to have an influence where you are really getting together and working out a solution, rather than saying this is bad, that is bad, all that. But here you are with young people right in the community. So, I guess I want to ask each one of you if you care to comment about that kind of process.

Ms. BAX. Yes, Congressman, I very much agree with you. I think the U.S. has a huge soft power potential, it is already using some of that, but it could use more of that. Generally I think attitudes toward the U.S. are positive for U.S., young people see the U.S. as a positive influence around the continent. They generally prefer the U.S. style of governance to a Russian model or a Chinese model.

China has good will because of its big infrastructure projects, and its cheap consumer groups, but the U.S. has enormous good will, also its education system, et cetera, and I think that is something that the U.S. can really tap into.

Mr. BAIRD. I appreciate you saying that, because in your testimony you were talking about during the cold war how Russia helped with finances and so on, and that attitude still lingered. So, I just wanted to know how far down we were, how far down we had to go.

Dr. SANY. I agree completely with your statement. I think to people diplomacy is powerful. And I think that that is an asset for the United States. We have our Peace Corps, and my first contact with an American was a Peace Corps back in my village, a long time ago. But that is the power of this country, and Peace Corps, Black, White, Hispanic, that power, again, propaganda cannot tear it down.

And so, that people to people diplomacy is a powerful thing, and if you can do more to also expose more frequently to our culture and our institutions it will better them.

Mr. HUDSON. I guess I would just offer a word of caution in the sense that we have a great deal of soft power, but we cannot sit back and expect that that soft power is going to not be eroded. The countries that we are talking about today, not just Russia and China, but Turkey, Saudi Arabia, European partners, in the kind of globalized world that we are living in where all Africans have a smart phone just like we do, or most of them do, they are exposed to all sorts of new outside influences in ways that they weren't 20 years ago.

And so, I agree that we have enormous soft power potential, but when Huawei produces a hundred dollar smart phone, and Apple produces a thousand dollar smart phone, then it is hard to compete when we are not creating products and outreach directly to service the African market. Whether that is in consumer goods, or in education and research. And so, I think that we have to continue to be a country that is open to welcoming Africans here as the story you just presented does.

But I think increasingly there is a sentiment in Africa that it is harder to come to the United States for those kinds of educational opportunities. And so we have seen in the last few years record numbers of Africans traveling to China, traveling to Russia to pursue advanced degrees. And so, unless we acknowledge, and do some things to try to stem that flow, I think it is going to be difficult to maintain this kind of soft power hegemony that we have had for so long I think.

Mr. BAIRD. Well, I see we have got 13 seconds left, so we do not have much time, but I have got a lot more questions.

But anyway, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you, Mr. Baird.

I now recognize Rep. Allred for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate our witnesses' testimony, and I appreciate your mentioning of our other efforts and discussions around the continent of Africa. It cannot be just a backdrop for great power competition, it has to be a place where as we see it in the global interest, I think to promote, and to use our values to allow the continent to thrive. And as you said, Mr. Hudson, this is not a monolith.

We are talking about so many different approaches within the continent, so many different nations, and I am interested in some of the discussion that Dr. Sany has been mentioning. And I am glad you talked about the diaspora, the need for us to flip the script from aid to trade, and also the African responsibility to be attractive to foreign investment.

To me, a component of that of course is strengthening the institutions that allow their democracies to thrive, that allow them to self-govern, that make them resistant to malign actors like Wagner. And so, I am interested in the upcoming election in the Central African Republic, and they are going to be holding a referendum at the end of the month to decide to do away with term limits for their president.

There are reports from as recent as yesterday taking note that Wagner forces returning to the Central African Republic ahead of the referendum, and in the event that that passes, and that Presidential term limits are removed, this is for you, Ms. Bax, if you do not mind. What would you see the ramifications being of that decision, and how should the U.S. be prepared to respond?

Ms. BAX. Thank you for this question, it is a very interesting question, and a very complicated one to answer at this point in time, because the referendum is likely to go through, and Touadera is likely to stay. And the question here is what is the alternative? So, I think generally I advocate for continued engagement on a diplomatic level as far as this is possible from the U.S. side.

But there is really not much else the U.S. can do in Central African Republic at the moment, except for diplomatic engagement.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, I think, Dr. Sany, to go back to your point on tapping into empowering economic opportunities for impacted communities by Russia's actions, as I know you are aware, the presidential plans to invest at least 55 billion dollars over the next 3 years on the continent. That sounds good, and I think it is the right thing to do. I have concerns about some of the things that we are seeing from my colleagues in terms of the budget that we are discussing right now in this body, and what impact that would have.

But I am wondering how you have seen us implement those funds already, or what pitfalls you think there would be in terms of what are we not doing well with that money?

Dr. SANY. Thank you for your question. It is a deceptively simple, but very complicated question, I have to admit.

Mr. ALLRED. I have a few ideas, but I will let you.

Dr. SANY. Yes. I think first we have to commend the Administration for hosting the summit, and for having those commitments, that is important. It was important for our relationships with African countries. I think the investment made in terms of the business and the commission of these are critical for the continent, the need to see that we are flipping the script, and that we are investing in trade.

There are new programs, I think the existing programs could be strengthened, that is a fact, that would be helpful. We have to think AGOA is one, the renewal of AGOA, because it has lifted thousands, thousands of Africans out of poverty, it should continue. The digital transformation element is critical, not just from an economic perspective, even from aid.

It will lower costs for thousands, millions of Africans in the continent if you combine the digital transformation with PEPFAR, we have a win. So, the digital transformation will be critical. Programs such as Adapt to help support transitions, we were talking about Wagner being, I call it the vulture of diplomacy, following the blood. And so, Adapt will help stem that motion.

So, programs such as Adapt will also be critical, I think, in my view. I think I will stop there.

Mr. ALLRED. That is great, thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. JAMES. That was really good.

I now recognize Rep. Mills for 5 minutes.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you. I realize that this is really about the Russian great power competition, but I think that it is naive of any of us to talk about Russia without talking about the geopolitical alignment that China has with Russia with regards to the ever growing approach to Africa. Africa is a very key continent for China, especially as they look at their Belt and Road Initiative.

Especially as they look at fulfilling their rare earth mineral mined, and raw material good explorations that are going to be necessary for them to take the economic resource, and cyber based warfare campaign to its continuation. But in knowing what Wagner Group's presence is throughout most of African being mostly on the influence of politics, which we know is utilized to various mechanisms of economic coercion, we see where not only have they grown throughout the continent of Africa.

But China has also grown throughout the continent of Africa with regards to its populations. In many cases they come in saying that they are going to provide all of these great financial instruments, and capabilities, and new infrastructure, but we all know that they never actually hire from the local populace, or boost the economy in any way. They actually just bring in more mainland Chinese to actually work there, and try to continue to inhibit its lands.

But I want to focus on Wagner for a bit. In early 2023 the U.S. Treasury Department had designated Wagner as a transnational criminal organization, and they levied sanctions on the group, and all of its affiliates. Do you think further designation of Wagner as a foreign terrorist organization, along with its corresponding sanctions would be effective, and beneficial to curtail Wagner's operations in Africa, and cutoff its extensive international network? We can start with you, Ms. Bax.

Ms. BAX. So, I addressed this in my oral remarks, Congressman, so at the Crisis Group, I believe that FTO designation would be the wrong policy move, because it is unlikely to lead to dismantling of Wagner, it will not prompt governments to cut ties with the group, because they cannot afford this at the moment in either Central African Republic or Mali.

Whether we agree with it or not, you know. So, we think that would be the wrong move, and it would also alienate other governments that may be sitting on the fence, or that feel that they actually are being pushed into some sort of great power competition.

Mr. MILLS. Mr. Sany, you noted in your written testimony that Russia's pattern of engagement in Africa, namely exploiting the instabilities, taking advantage of undemocratic transitions, and profiting off volatile security situations suggests that nations like Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda may be future targets. What can the U.S. do outside of just aid, but perhaps trade to disrupt this pattern of engagement, and prevent Russia, and Wagner from taking hold of these other nations?

Dr. SANY. Thank you for the question. Yes, like I said, there is a discernable pattern of behavior, and as you mentioned, and I have written in the testimony, that they are countries, the pipeline. And for that, I think we have to start engaging now. We have to prepare, as I said, the institution. Working with these leaders and the institutions.

There are a couple of democratic institutions that we not disregard, but we have limited engagement with, like the parliaments, for example, in those countries. We may say no, they are prudemment as we say in French, but they are just robust in parliament. But stepping up our engagement with parliament, stepping up our engagement with the business sector.

We talk of the sanctity of contracts, and the rule of law, but the business sector, particularly business association groups are key actors in promoting the rule of law. Because what Wagner does, Wagner carves out, forces out local entrepreneurs. And so, they did that in Central African Republic, they are doing that. So, engaging with the business sector in those countries, the parliament, youth, and media, and civil society to buildup that immune system against authoritarian regimes.

Against the instability that may follow the transition in those countries. Because it is not a mistake, the four countries mentioned have long serving leaders, average thirty-five years.

Mr. MILLS. Well, I absolutely agree with you. One of the things that you have said, and I have noted this many times, I have spent more than 12 years of my life working overseas in the Middle East, and others, America thinks that one great meeting can basically solve the issues. Where our adversaries like China and Russia are there every single day and every single week.

If America is going to be involved, we need to be involved. If we are not going to, let's not make the mistake of thinking one meeting means anything. Thank you so much.

Mr. JAMES. Mr. Mills, I really appreciate your remarks, thank you.

The chair now recognizes Rep. Kamlager-Dove for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this invitation again, and for really shepherding bipartisan dialog on this issue, and thank you all for being here today. As you all have shared in your opening testimonies, and in your responses, the challenge of the Kremlin's influence in Africa reflects two enduring realities.

Democratic institutions, good governance, development, and economic growth are necessary to combat the roots of countries' vulnerability to Russia, and Russia thrives on fragility, conflict, and elite capture. And then the second is our own paternalistic and hypocritical legacy with the countries across the continent compromises our attractiveness often times as Africa's partner of choice, and how do we re-engage in a way that is equal and mutually beneficial.

I have a few questions, I also want to say I agree on the importance of soft power, and I think maybe another simple example is just offering more Fulbright Scholarships, getting more of our folks over there in dedicated, sustainable ways. So, Mr. Hudson mentioned misinformation, and Ms. Bax, you highlighted the importance of putting resources into improving the quality of independent local media in Africa, and recognizing the importance of African voices in speaking out against Wagner abuses.

So, what do U.S. efforts to support local African media look like, and what else can we do?

Ms. BAX. Thank you for your question, Congresswoman. Yes, so logically supporting African media would be through financial re-

sources, but of course there is the risk to some extent, this is also what Russia has been doing. For example Kairwood(?) has bought a radio station which it is financing where African voices are promoting the Russian narrative.

However, I think there is plenty of solid media networks in Africa that could use technical, financial, maybe material support to continue the work that they are doing at the moment. Investigative journalism would be quite important, maybe investigative journalists that expose the misinformation or propaganda networks.

Support for civil society without telling people what to say, I think it might be important to at least lend a hand financially, or in terms of expertise in supporting those networks, and maybe ensuring their survival, which are under threat in some countries. I think those were the most immediate things that come to mind.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you. And Mr. Hudson, in Africa, as in Latin America, illicit economies like gold mining are a lucrative vehicle to finance the operations, and entrench the operations of bad actors. So, how effective has the U.S. been to cutoff these streams of revenue, and what more can we do to neutralize this kind of funding?

Mr. HUDSON. Well, I think we have only been marginally successful in recent years, primarily because some of our partners and allies are benefiting from this trade. So, when you look at illegal gold mining in places like Mali or Sudan, virtually all of it is flowing through Dubai right now. And it is moving through Dubai to Russia to global commodity markets.

And so, unless we are serious about cutting off that trade through a partner like the United Arab Emirates, then I think it is going to be very difficult for us to impact either the supply side, or the demand side for those commodities.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you for that, my hair just went woo when you said that. And so, Dr. Sany, if the U.S. underestimates one thing to our detriment, it is the importance of the African public's opinion in determining the influence of foreign powers. So, we see Russia as parasitical, but there are parts of their engagement that are viewed positively by African people.

So, what is the U.S. doing to offer an alternative counter to that perspective?

Dr. SANY. I think the United States is already offering a lot compared to Russia by numbers. Our foreign aid compared to Russia is quite high. Russia dwarfed us on security cooperation, they sell weapons for Africans to kill each other. But I think the United States can do more around what we discussed already, the soft power aspect. We can do more empowering local media so that they can tell the truth of who we are.

We can also do more in terms of people to people diplomacy. We can beef up, or streamline our visa process for example. I mean, we want to engage in business with African local entrepreneurs, but it is difficult for local entrepreneurs to come to a fair, or workshop in Washington to see. It takes two hundred days for a Nigerian local entrepreneur to have a visa for example. So, those things, we can work around those things to enable that exchange of people and influence.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you for those answers.

And thank you, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. JAMES. I think the good doctor has been reading their emails, excellent points. You are going to probably find a lot of support up here. Seeing there are no further questions, we are going to start a second question, are you all ready? Burkina Faso remains under coup related aid restrictions.

Meanwhile the country has experienced one of the largest growths of Al Qaeda aligned terrorism in the world, and many experts speculate that a Wagner partnership could soon emerge. How can the U.S. meet certain nations, particularly Burkina Faso, where they are? How can we prevent a Wagner presence in Burkina Faso?

Dr. SANY. Thank you for that question. As I said, I came back from Burkina Faso a week ago, literally. I think they appreciate the open dialog that exists between the United States and their government. Staying engaged and discussing issues of real concern with them, that is No. 1. Recognizing their challenges, and finding ways together to support them.

But concretely it means help work reviewing how we can support their security. Not providing lethal weapons, but we can provide logistics, we can help encourage neighboring countries to build with Burkina Faso a security architecture that can help them address their security priorities.

Mr. JAMES. What sort of cooperation can we have with the military junta?

Dr. SANY. Yes. I think we are already investing a lot on humanitarian assistance already, that eases the burden on the government. We can also engage on the security cooperation in terms of training some of their additional forces. However, that engagement, because we will be in a dialog, can allow us to influence what matters for us, the civic space and the political process.

In my meeting with them, one of the things that came constantly was yes, security is a priority, but it is not exclusivity. Security gains should guarantee the openness of the civic space and your human rights. We can only have that conversation if we engage in a serious dialog with them. That is the starting point. We cannot just isolate them, because that will throw them in the hands of Wagner and the rest, not just Wagner, but other malign actors.

Mr. JAMES. Do you expect that certain conditions as those might be repellent to those in Burkina Faso? As you mentioned earlier, human rights and corruption are standards that many rulers over there struggle with, and may not necessarily—and align with Wagner and others specifically because they are not held to those types of standards.

Dr. SANY. Burkina Faso is a specific case in this, they have not signed with Wagner yet, and traditionally for many years now, the Burkina Faso have hardly accepted any foreign fighters in their country, so they have not. And based on public discussions, they do not intend to.

Mr. JAMES. Good. Any further comment?

Mr. HUDSON. I would just add that a lot of these countries, when they invite Wagner in, or more specifically when they kick out the French or the United Nations, what they are saying to their people is that we are taking back control over our own security. Even

though we see them as being dependent upon Wagner forces that are coming in, they see it, and they are selling it to their people as an act of sovereignty.

As a re-declaration of their own independence from foreign interventionist forces, which have a very long history from Europe, from the west, of occupying parts of Africa. And so, I think we have to be sensitive to the fact that African governments are not only benefiting from this, but they are benefiting internally in their internal politics.

We have seen this in Mali already, and I think that is one of the reasons why we haven't seen Wagner sign a formal agreement yet. Because the Burkina, they are saying we can do this on our own. These are governments that are having a difficult time proving to their people that they can govern. That there has been a breakdown of State institution and State authority in many of these countries in the Sahel.

And so, they are trying to prove to their people that they can in fact govern these countries. When they bring in, I was in Mali not too long ago, and one of the security actors that I met with said the Wagner Group, when they are here, they are here to support us. When the French were here, the Malian National Army was in support of the French. They decided everything, and we were told what to do in our own country.

But now that Wagner is do, we tell them what to do. And so, this is a reassertion of their sovereignty. Whether that is true, that is how they are selling it to their people. And so, I think when we talk about our security partnerships with these countries, it has to be in a way that is not perceived by these governments as simply us coming in and directing military operations, but is acting in support of local government efforts to govern the situation, and respond to the situation.

I think the challenge is, of course, that they haven't been sufficiently trained around things like civilian protection, human rights, and the like. And so, it creates a rupture in whatever the partnership is that we are trying to create, because they are not meeting our standards.

Mr. JAMES. Do you see a role for western trained police forces?

Mr. HUDSON. Absolutely. But I see more of a role for other African forces coming in. I do not understand for example, why we are not working through ECOWAS in West Africa, or the African Union more broadly. We have seen just in the last year, for example Rwanda go in, and replace Wagner forces in Mozambique. We have seen them be invited in to Benin as an alternative to Wagner forces.

And so, I do think there is a possibility, and an opportunity even for us to work with allied partner militaries on the continent that we have trust and faith in to be able to present an alternative to their African counterparts so it is not western interventionism as it has been framed by Russia and Wagner. But that it is African security for African problems.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I actually want to keep going on this same stream. I think all of you talked about in your

testimony sort of the relationship between Wagner, and instability, erosion of democracy, poor governance. And I think one of the challenges U.S. policy in Africa faces is how do we balance the need to engage with the need to remain consistent? And we also know that Russia has capitalized on this inconsistency, Mr. Hudson, as you said.

So, Mr. Hudson, if you could start, and then I will ask the rest of you to discuss this dynamic more. How should the United States remain consistent in our values? And how do you think supporting, whether that is through security assistance, or appraising, or just showing up, or otherwise legitimizing authoritarian governments in the name of competition or countering Wagner impacts our long term strategic goals, and how should we think about that balance?

Mr. HUDSON. Sure. Well, I think that you have seen the Biden Administration struggle to come up with a policy in the Sahel that is both sensitive to the individual countries' conditions, but also create some kind of consistent policy across kind of governments that have seen undemocratic changes in power. And so, it is not something that is particular easy, or that I think we have done particularly well.

Obviously we have congressional requirements, that when you have unconstitutional changes of government, there is a certain automaticity of response that comes in. And I think in many respects when you talk to colleagues at DOD, or when you talk to others at State, as much as that is a reflection of our values, and our prioritization of democratic principles, it can also be a constraining factor in our diplomacy, and in our engagement, right?

And we have seen that time and again across this region. And so, I do think that how we strike a balance between—and even I see talking to Africans recently, I mean I think the Biden Administration has said publicly time and again that democracy and human rights are sort of bedrocks of our foreign policy, and I know that we all believe that. But Africans are the ones who point to us to say well it is inconsistent how you apply these values of yours.

Because you are in fact pursuing your security interests in a lot of these countries, right? And so, I think one thing that we can be is quite honest about how we view that balance between our values and our interests. I think that one thing that we can all agree on, and that we need to be reinforcing time and again is our values and our interests overlap when it comes to avoiding the erosion of rule of law, and democratic principles across the continent and beyond.

And so, I think we have to kind of go back, and continue going back to these first principles of ours. Again, I think I said before, we have ceded a lot of the kind of public diplomacy space, and communication space to Russia, and to others on the continent. I do not think it is enough for us, for example, through our Global Engagement Center that the State Department has to kind of issue statements from on high about what Russia is doing.

Russia is active in local languages, controlling the media environment in local languages. We operate in French, and we operate in English, we operate through Reuters, and Associated Press, and we issue press statements. We are playing a different communications game than Russia is online, and we are losing because of it.

Ms. BAX. I think if we, specifically at the Sahel today, and the coastal countries, the Gulf of Guinea countries, most of these countries are now looking for military solutions. They have economic crises, not all countries, but most, it is a massive humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region. So, there are several problems that overlap, and sometimes they do not.

I think the U.S. would be well served to ask some of those countries how can we help, what do you need? And there are different levels of assistance that the U.S. can give, or can step up. And I think it is very important to listen to the States that you are talking with, and to ask them what they think is a good idea.

And again, I would like to stress that the coastal countries are looking at what is happening Mali and Burkina with great concern, and they are looking for solutions, and they are looking for help, and they will be very much open to increased engagement.

Dr. SANY. I think there are two categories here. We have countries in transitions after a coup d'etat, frankly we do not have clear formula to engage, to be honest, I think because of all the constraints we have. But there are also countries where, like coastal West Africa, where a prevention strategy is needed. And, I mean I commend this body for the Global Fragility Act, that will find we have a formula, and we hope to see it implemented.

So, there are two differences here. I mean, the country in transition, frankly we are building that plane as we fly it. On prevention, yes, we may have mechanisms and tools.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you.

I now recognize Rep. Baird for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I am going to continue on, I want to find out about this attitude so I can see what it might be. Anyway, in recent months South Africa has abstained from U.N. votes condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, they have held joint exercises with Russia and China in the Cape, and allowed U.S. sanctioned Russian ships to stop at the port.

And then most recently our Ambassador accused South Africa of loading arms onto the ship Lady R for use against Ukraine. So, what do these actions suggest about South Africa's broader foreign policy, and what actions might be appropriate to address Pretoria's drift toward Russia and China?

Ms. BAX. Yes, Congressman, as you know, there will also be a BRICS summit in South Africa, and we do not know what is going to happen. I reside in South Africa, so thank you for this question. The ruling party is divided on its support for Russia, and its sympathies for the U.S. I think the older generation of leaders still has a lingering affinity with Russia based on outdated ideology.

This is actually not supported by, I would say, the younger generation of South Africans who are very confused by all of this. At the same time, the African National Congress knows where its bread is buttered, the U.S. is a very important investment partner, so they are trying to play both sides. It has been very awkward, and very confusing.

I do think that is again, maybe a more—the statement by the U.S. Ambassador, I think it was timely, and it was important, but the way it was done created some diplomatic hiccups, and I think

it could have been done in a more quiet manner. And I would really advocate for continued U.S. engagement with South Africa.

Because the context is also that there will be elections next year, the ruling party is very likely to be forced into a coalition government, and the dynamics may change.

Mr. HUDSON. I would just add that one topic, which I think is relevant to your question, but has sort of been underpinning a lot of the discussion today is the idea, and I think you hear South Africa espouse this idea more than most African countries, is the value of a multi polar world. And I think that we see that through South Africa's foreign policy, it is a stated aspect of their foreign policy, the creation of a multi polar world.

Not a unipolar, not a bipolar world. And so, I think I at least put in, I look through that prism when I see them engaging with Russia, obviously for all the reasons that Ms. Bax has already laid out. But I also think that one aspect of what they are doing, and this goes back to their kind of non-aligned position throughout the cold war, is this notion that South Africa, and Africa in general, the African Union has this as part of its Agenda 2063 kind of vision document.

Is kind of re-balancing the global world order, and that is going to be beneficial to African countries. That if we can increase our partnerships around the world, we are able to tap into benefits. Whether they are trade, whether they are political benefits. And so, I do look at some of South Africa's engagement with Russia as part of this effort of its own foreign policy to kind of re-balance the world order in a way that it thinks is beneficial to its interests.

Dr. SANY. I have nothing to add to those reports. Nothing to add, sir.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you for that. And you know, my background is agriculture, and we have already talked about Russia pulling out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, so I have only got thirty-six seconds left now, so I would like to have just a yea or nay, what has your experience been, if you know, with American grains, and products, and American grain?

Dr. SANY. No experience, sir.

Mr. HUDSON. No, not in this context.

Ms. BAX. In the context of South Africa, or overall?

Mr. BAIRD. Of any of the African countries. And I guess we only got 4 seconds, so I will just put a summary here. We produce a lot of high quality commodities, and grains, and so on, so keep that in mind. We can get it anywhere in the world, so thank you.

Mr. JAMES. Thank you. African nations have choices, as we were just discussing South Africa, South Africans have choices, and we will always respect the sovereignty. But the American people have choice as well, and if communities around the world expect the American taxpayer to help, then there should be some sort of mutual benefit to include respect for the rule of law, respect for democracy, and of course respect for the safety and security of America and our interests abroad.

Specifically with South Africa, the Putin visit with the Lady R situation, and also military exercises on the anniversary of the Ukraine invasion are very problematic. And in a recent meeting we expressed American concerns with the situation of moving away

from those stated values and interests. I am confident that by increasing engagement and communication, we can be the first choice of our allies and potential friends around the world.

So, with that, I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony, and members for their questions. The members of the committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask that you respond to these in writing. And pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit these statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length of limitations.

Without objection the committee stands adjourned. Thank you for your time.

[Whereupon, at 3:33 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Africa
John James (R-MI), Chairman

July 11, 2023

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Africa at 2:00 p.m. on July 18th in room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

Date: Tuesday, July 18, 2023

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Location: 2200 Rayburn House Office Building

Subject: Great Power Competition Implications in Africa: The Russian Federation and its proxies.

Witnesses: Joseph Sany
Vice President, Africa Center
United States Institute of Peace

Cameron Hudson
Senior Associate, Africa Program
Center for Strategic & International Studies

Pauline Bax
Deputy Program Director for Africa
International Crisis Group

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202 -226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day 18 Date July Room Rayburn 2200

Starting Time 2:02 PM Ending Time 3:45 PM

Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s) _____

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Stenographic Record ☒

Televised ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

GREAT POWER COMPETITION IMPLICATIONS IN AFRICA: THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND ITS PROXIES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman John James, Ranking Member Jacobs, Rep. Young Kim, Rep. Allred, Rep. Baird, Rep. Cherfilus-McCormick, Rep. Kamlager-Dove, Rep. Mills

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.) _____

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 3:45PM

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: **GREAT POWER COMPETITION IMPLICATIONS IN AFRICA: THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND ITS PROXIES**

Date: 7/18/2023
 Convened: 2:02 pm
 Adjourned: 3:45 pm

[illegible]

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Questions for the Record: Ms. Pauline Bax
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa
Hearing on Great Power Competition Implications in Africa: The Russian Federation and its
proxies
July 18, 2023

Questions from Ranking Member Sara Jacobs:

1. Russia's expanded influence in Africa includes deepening ties in North Africa, expanding its reach in the Central African Republic and the Sahel, and rekindling Cold War ties in southern Africa. Russia's approach is distinctive among external actors in that Moscow typically relies on irregular (and frequently extralegal) means to expand its influence – deployment of mercenaries, disinformation, election interference, support for coups, and arms for resources deals, among others.

What parts of Russian engagement on the continent are viewed by African states as mutually beneficial?

Answer 1: Russia has no colonial legacy on the continent and represents an alternative to the West, positioning itself as a Global South partner. It promotes strong and authoritarian leadership models. It sells arms and builds industry without conditions attached.

2. In your engagement with leaders on the continent, what are you hearing from them about their relationship with Russia?

Answer 2: The continent has a huge diversity of countries. Some support what Russia stands for (an alternative to the West), but would not want to adopt its policies. Others, especially countries in West Africa, want nothing to do with Russia.

3. Please describe Russia's defense cooperation on the continent and to what extent they are significant to U.S. interests. In your opinion, will African countries continue to seek to purchase Russian arms for the foreseeable future?

Answer 3: Yes, because they are relatively cheap and easy to use. Russia is also generous with old helicopters that it won't use anymore.

4. How extensive is Russia's arms trade with Africa, and how does it compare to China's?

Answer 4: The largest African importer of Russian arms is Algeria, but the war in Ukraine has led to a reduction of imports. Russian arms accounted for 26% of African imports in the period 2018-2022, while Chinese arms accounted for 18%. Please see https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf for more information.

5. How have sanctions and Russia's war on Ukraine affected the regional demand for Russian arms, as well as Russia's capacity to deliver arms to African countries?

Answer 5: Please refer to the above document. The war in Ukraine has led to a reduction of Russian arms imports, but it varies per country. Mali, for example, increased Russian arms imports after Wagner arrived in the country.

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6. According to the State Department, Russian operatives, front companies, and social media networks use disinformation “to influence African politics in Russia’s favor.”

How do you expect the aftermath of Prigozhin’s mutiny to affect Russian disinformation in Africa, if at all?

Answer 6: Prigozhin lost his Patriot media holding. It is unclear what happened to his troll factory, which was the largest in Russia and had about 500 employees. If Prigozhin continues to operate in Africa, it means he will continue to maintain his presence through media and social networks. At present, it is unclear whether these African media projects will continue to operate under Prigozhin's control, but it would be a logical conclusion to draw.

7. How would you compare the strategies used by Russian and Chinese information operations in Africa? Is there any evidence to suggest collaboration?

Answer 7: China and Russia do not collaborate in Africa and act separately. Russia entered Africa because it saw the competition between China and the West unfolding there, and it wanted to find its niche between the two. Russia thus offers something that neither China nor the West can provide.

Broadly speaking, Chinese actors have more “transparent” operations. China relies on its diplomatic, cultural, and economic networks, leveraging state-affiliated media and officials. These influence operations are akin to soft-power diplomacy and their goal is long-term influence. They are mostly visible attempts at underlining the role China plays in the economic development of African countries and highlighting Sino-African cooperation. Chinese content is mostly produced and distributed through channels of Chinese state- or party-affiliated media. The majority of content produced is on economic cooperation, while political content is rare and “subtle” in nature. China is trying to establish its media affiliates as credible sources and to promote “positive” content. This reflects China’s model of constructive journalism: journalists from local government-affiliated outlets are trained to spread positive narratives about authorities, represented as guarantors of social peace and political stability.

Russia, on the other hand, uses a mix of transparent (RT, Sputnik) and mostly deceitful operations. Russia leverages local grievances and anti-Western narratives already circulating in the information space. Moscow has some cooperation with government-affiliated media in the form of syndication deals and training. However, unlike China with its branded presence, Russia tries to deceitfully infiltrate the local media environment. It hides its affiliation to outlets and think-tanks it has created or that it is funding, and to journalists and experts it recruits through covert operations. The goal is to present them as authentic local voices.

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Our information is that As of June 2023, the Wagner Group was providing security services in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, and Sudan, along with Libya in North Africa. It is unclear what the Wagner Group's attempted mutiny on June 23 will have for its African operations. While Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has asserted that Russian PMC operations will continue, it is unclear whether Prigozhin or the Russian state will assume more control of these activities.

8. What role does demand for natural resources, including gold and diamonds, play in Russian PMC operations in Africa? Are there indications of whether the Malian junta's payments to Wagner are made in cash, or in kind (for example, gold concessions or shipments)?

Answer 8: There are indications that payments have been made in cash. It is unclear whether payments can be made in kind in the future, but they are likely to be through gold concessions or untaxed gold from artisanal mining sites.

9. How concerned are you about the potential for Wagner – or successor organizations – to expand into countries bordering Mali, such as Burkina Faso and Guinea? What other countries in Africa are most vulnerable to Russian private military company penetration?

Answer 9: Given recent developments in Niger, this country is now top on the list as a potential Wagner client. Burkina Faso is still on the fence. Guinea less so – the country has a history of collaboration with Russia that yielded little benefit for the population. The ousted and increasingly unpopular president, Alpha Condé, was supported by Russia in his third-term bid. Guinea appears to be charting its own course. Given that Wagner is an opportunistic and mercantile organization, it will continue to try and exploit local governance weaknesses in the region.

10. What aspects of Wagner's activities and business model have caused the most concern among African leaders and publics?

Answer 10: The fact that it serves as a private security detail for (often authoritarian) leaders with the aim of keeping them in power; the brutal methods it uses to exploit natural resources; and its influence campaigns targeting elected leaders elsewhere. Lastly, Wagner's failure to restore security is becoming apparent in various corners of Africa.

11. What role do private military companies (PMCs) play in Russia's Africa policy? Apart from the Wagner Group, what other Russian PMCs operate in Africa and to what effect?

Answer 11: Wagner is the main Russian PMC operating in Africa. I have not studied other Russian PMCs.

12. Mali's military junta reportedly contracted the Wagner Group in 2021 to support combat operations against Islamist insurgents, following an increase in official Russian arms sales to Mali. An accompanying swell of disinformation "promoted Russia as a 'viable

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partner’ and ‘alternative to the West,’ encouraged postponement of democratic elections, and attempted to create local support for Wagner.” News reports suggest that some 1,400 Wagner personnel were in Mali as of early 2023. Malian officials have denied their presence, asserting that Russian personnel are official government advisors, while Russia’s government has characterized them as private contractors. Reportedly, Wagner mercenaries are patrolling with Malian soldiers in the north and in some instances, wearing Malian army uniforms.

Has the Malian junta been able to distinguish the human rights atrocities committed by Wagner mercenaries and their own soldiers?

Answer 12: Likely, but as the two forces work together, they both carry responsibility, and the junta appears to have contracted Wagner partly because it wants to work around potential human rights restrictions.

13. How do you think the pullout of MINUSMA will influence Russian presence and engagement in Mali?

Answer 13: The withdrawal of MINUSMA will limit foreign scrutiny of human rights abuses by security forces and likely add to the violence against civilians that is unfolding in the center of the country. I also foresee hostilities with armed separatist groups in the north. Mali may try to bring in Russian businesses to exploit artisanal or industrial gold mines.

14. Why do you think Russia and the Wagner Group are said to be popular among the Malian people? Is it just a result of the closed information environment or is it also impacted by resentment of the policies of the West, particularly the French?

Answer 14: They are popular in the capital Bamako, which has thus far been spared jihadist violence. France is a convenient scapegoat, even though frustration with the failure of foreign forces to rein in militant groups is genuine and understandable. It is difficult to gauge anti-French or anti-Western sentiments in other parts of the country due to insecurity and the current information environment, which has frozen out dissident voices.

15. The Wagner Group reportedly entered CAR in 2017 after Russia obtained an exemption to the U.N. arms embargo in 2017 to provide weapons to CAR’s military, and deployed “instructors” to train local soldiers. The number of Russian personnel increased to over 2,000 in 2021, as Wagner helped repel a rebel attack on the capital and participated in military operations to retake territory from rebel forces. Reports indicate approximately 500 Wagner personnel reportedly departed CAR following the June 2023 mutiny in Russia, although CAR officials assert that Moscow has committed to maintain several thousand in the country. In addition to military activities, Wagner personnel reportedly

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provide personal protection to President Faustin-Archange Touadéra and serve as his advisors.

News reports indicate that U.S. officials have offered President Touadéra various incentives and alternative security arrangements in a bid to decrease Russian and Wagner Group influence in the country. What do you think of this reported effort?

Answer 15: The reported effort, which started in January and is ongoing, has thus far not had a substantial impact in the country. The Wagner Group is still present in the capital, Bangui, and around strategic mining sites in the hinterland. Wagner forces continue to train and accompany the Central African armed forces, while also maintaining significant political influence over President Touadéra and his inner circle. In fact, Wagner recently sent additional men to beef up security around the constitutional referendum on 30 July, bringing the total number of Wagner troops to approximately 1,900.

16. What potential do you see for unintended consequences of this move, particularly as it relates to human rights and democracy?

Answer 16: The U.S. and other Western countries have not publicly condemned the referendum, which removed presidential term limits and strengthened the executive branch's powers at the expense of state institutions like the Constitutional Court. This diplomatic inaction has likely emboldened President Touadéra and his autocratic regime (as Human Rights Watch warned in a recent [report](#)) and further marginalized the political opposition, severely diminishing prospects for a democratic alternation in power.

17. How could this approach affect U.S. policy and leverage in other countries with a Wagner presence?

Answer 17: U.S. incentives will help maintain diplomatic channels with countries where Wagner operates, but it is unlikely that they will significantly counter Wagner's influence over these regimes or erode Wagner's public image. Additionally, as observed in the Central African Republic, if U.S. policy specifically sets out to counter Wagner in these countries, the U.S. risks inadvertently contributing to narrowing the space for public debate.

18. U.S.-South Africa relations are at one of its lowest points due to a number of developments, including recent indications of South African support for Russia. One issue has been South Africa's hosting of joint naval exercises with Russia and China in February 2023, and stopovers at local military facilities by U.S.-sanctioned Russian vessels including a ship, the *Lady R*, onto which arms for Russia's military may have been loaded. South Africa's ties with Russia are rooted in Soviet-era support for South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) party during its anti-Apartheid struggle for majority rule and racial equality.

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What impact do you think Russia's growing influence will have on the quality of democracy in South Africa? Conversely, how do you think the erosion of South Africa's democracy will impact Russia's influence?

Answer 18: South Africa's democracy remains strong. Political parties are allowed to campaign without interference, the media is free and the judiciary is independent. Russia's influence is however felt in the run-up to the May 2024 elections in South Africa through increasing anti-Western populism adopted by the far left and some within the ruling party. It influences politics due to the fact that ruling politicians might choose a pro-Russian stance over sound economic decisions, such as maintaining good relations with South Africa's major trading partners, the EU and the US. Any Russian meddling in the 2024 elections, or even any accusations of such meddling to influence the results that would be unprecedented in South Africa's history post-apartheid, and extremely serious.

19. What incentivizes South Africa to continue working with Russia to purchase weapons?

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about South Africa's close relationship with Russia and possible transfer of arms in May 2023, and some have called for the termination of South Africa's eligibility for U.S. trade preferences. What has been the effect of congressional reactions to date? How else might the United States respond, particularly if South Africa is confirmed to have transferred arms to Russia? What are your views on terminating South Africa's AGOA eligibility, and what impact do you think that would have on U.S.-South Africa relations, South Africa's relationship with Russia, and the South African population?

Answer 19: Scrapping AGOA will have severe economic implications for South Africa and likely damage South Africa's relations with the U.S. South African exports to the U.S. under AGOA are worth around \$1.75 billion per annum. The end of AGOA could mean thousands of job losses, notably in the car manufacturing industry. However, ruling party politicians and even some in business are saying that inevitably, South Africa's biggest markets are shifting towards Asia. Indian and Chinese markets can replace those of the US over time. Continued engagement with South Africa over AGOA (perhaps considering moving the venue of the next AGOA summit from South Africa) would be preferable to terminating it altogether, which could lead to a far stronger anti-US sentiment in South Africa.

20. Since Russia renewed its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, U.S. engagements in Africa have increasingly focused on African responses to Russia's actions, the war's economic fallout for the region, and Russia's ability to leverage ties in Africa to circumvent or lessen the impact of U.S. and European sanctions. Meanwhile, the

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spectacle of Western countries rapidly mobilizing aid for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, at a time when African countries face stark security and humanitarian challenges, has prompted some African officials and advocates to decry what they perceive as racially biased policymaking.

What are you hearing directly from African officials and civil society about their perceptions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Answer 20: While some policymakers place an emphasis on international law and the fact that Russia is violating Ukraine's sovereignty, others are saying the war is due to an expansion of NATO.

21. Why do you think certain African governments are hesitant to publicly condemn Russia's invasion despite its impact on food insecurity on the continent?

Answer 21: Some governments, like South Africa, believe that a "non-aligned" stance will prevent them from being caught up in a new Cold War scenario between the West and Russia that could have very damaging results. A pro-Western position could also have political consequences at home since some voters are convinced by narratives of Western hypocrisy and that economic hardships are due to Western sanctions, rather than the Russian invasion. But overall, it is very hard to generalize as the continent is large and has a variety of views.

22. How would you describe the African Union's evolving position on the Russia-Ukraine war following the inauguration of a new AU chairman in early 2023?

Answer 22: The current AU chairperson, President Assoumani Azali of the Comoros, could be seen as belonging to a pro-Western camp, strongly influenced by France. His country voted in favor of all the UN General Assembly resolutions between March 2022 and February 2023 condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. His final [statement](#) at the Africa-Russia summit however showed that he is unwilling to take a strong stance. He emphasized Africa's role in trying to mediate a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. However, his term expires in February 2024 when either Morocco, Algeria or Mauritania is likely to take over. If North Africa cannot agree on a candidate due to the rift between Morocco and Algeria, it is likely to be Angola.

23. What were the main elements of African leaders' June 2023 Russia-Ukraine peace initiative? How would you describe the outcomes of the African delegation's travel to Moscow and Kyiv? Would you agree that the initiative failed, and if so, why?

Answer 23: The main elements of the plan focus on "de-escalation" and dialogue to end the war. It is not seen as favorable to either side since it calls for "the respect for

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sovereignty of states according to the UN Charter”. It also calls for freeing up of supply chains through the Black Sea and the release of all political prisoners and children. None of this has so far happened, but this is seen as one ongoing attempt at ending the war, among others that could be initiated by states such as China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The initiative asserted Africa’s agency in this global conflict that has affected the African continent.

The initiative is still ongoing. On 25 June, following the African mission to Russia and Ukraine, a delegation from South Africa participated in talks in Copenhagen that could lead the way for other peace initiatives. A Ukraine-Africa summit is also being planned by some actors behind the scenes. It is possible that other meetings around the African peace initiative will take place at the BRICS summit in South Africa from 22 to 24 August.

24. What types of U.S. engagement have proven most successful at countering Russian-backed disinformation in Africa? How would you rate the effectiveness of the State Department’s Global Engagement Center? What additional or alternative tools or resources are needed?

Answer 24: Russian influence campaigns in Africa appear to be effective only in very specific circumstances. Russian campaigns thrive where Moscow can exploit the weaknesses of the information environment (countries with low freedom of expression, little to no independent professional media, strong censorship and government control), and where local anti-Western grievances are stronger (and domestic actors’ interests are aligned with Moscow). Russia’s campaigns are less effective in countries with stronger information environments, pluralistic media, and with fewer local anti-Western grievances.

Initially, U.S. and European engagement focused on counter-narratives and counter-information operations. These attempts have mostly backfired, with the operations easily spotted and removed by social media platforms. By singling out Russia as a malign influence, these campaigns appeared to dismiss local grievances and African countries’ agency. These counter-operations ultimately reinforced and amplified Russian narratives. Moreover, they contributed to polluting the information environment and deteriorating public debate online.

The public exposure of Russian information manipulation operations had some positive effects. It contributed to more awareness of Russian operations and forced Russia to change and adapt its techniques. At the same time, Russia responded by localizing and franchising operations even further, blurring the lines between Russian-backed operations and the ones led by domestic actors.

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The State Department's Global Engagement Center carries out a wide range of activities from public to unbranded campaigns, grants and engagement with media. As such, it is difficult to give an overall evaluation of its operations. However, one criticism of the GEC is its narrow and actor-specific organisation and approach. The GEC is organized primarily per threat actor, rather than geographical area. Russian disinformation in Africa is a problem and mostly because Africa has an information disorder problem that is not being addressed and that Russia can exploit. As all funding priorities are on addressing Russian operations, instead of disinformation at large in Africa, researchers and social media platforms are playing whack-a-mole with trolls instead of addressing systemic issues.

It might seem counter-intuitive, but a more effective approach would ignore Russia and build on three pillars. First, invest more resources in addressing the weakness of the African information environment. Promote independent professional media on the basis of its capacity of contributing to public debate and reporting on issues that resonate with local audiences, not on its anti-Russian credentials. Invest in media literacy, content moderation online, exposure of local disinformation campaigns and digital forensics by local civil society. Pressure social media platforms to give access to local researchers to study and expose information manipulation by all actors. This would limit the space for Russian trolls and operations. Second, acknowledge the African countries' agency and grievances. Large parts of African audiences think that the Western strategy to counter Russia's influence is more based on the West's focus on Ukraine than on Africa's interests. Address Russia's narratives with policy actions, not counter-narratives. Third, ultimately, Russian information operations have little to no effect on the ground. They are a smokescreen for Russia's power moves and for Russia to provide a political cover of legitimacy to regimes seeking to stay in power. The Western over-reaction to Russia's information operations and paranoia about Russia's involvement only reinforces this image of Russia as an alternative to the West. Instead of exposing Russian information operations, we should focus on exposing Russia's opportunistic power politics and explain that Russia is not a reliable partner.

25. In your view, what are the potential impacts of designating the Wagner Group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization? Please describe potential impacts on U.S. efforts to counter Wagner on the continent, humanitarian assistance in relevant countries, African leaders' and population perception of the U.S., and any other relevant issues.

Answer 25: (1) An FTO designation could hinder constructive engagement with governments who rely on Wagner for security assistance. There are other geopolitical considerations as well. African countries try to walk a fine line in the Ukraine conflict, trying to preserve their interests by maintaining a certain distance from both Moscow and Washington. Actors in these countries already see U.S. and European calls for them to

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disassociate with Wagner as part of efforts to one-up Russia. They resent being drawn into a great-power struggle and are aggrieved by what they perceive as demands for their loyalty after the West has failed to support them when they needed it most. Upping the ante with an FTO designation could intensify these feelings.

(2) An FTO designation could jeopardize aid delivery in areas where Wagner has major operations. Humanitarian need tends to increase when businesses and financial institutions pull out or “de-risk” from such countries. Aid groups in places where an FTO-designated group is operating have at times stopped their work out of concern that the assistance they are providing to vulnerable populations could be considered provision of “material support” to terrorists, posing legal risks to them and their staff, no matter how strong the due diligence and risk mitigation measures they have in place. Sometimes, compliance and legal costs increase so much that operations in those areas are no longer sustainable.

(3) An FTO designation could create momentum for designating Russia (and potentially other countries that host Wagner) a State Sponsor of Terrorism. This could do more harm than good and be costly rather than effective. FTO-linked sanctions are unlikely to have a dramatic impact beyond that of existing sanctions in diminishing Wagner’s access to resources or ability to attract recruits. Using the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation on a great power could have serious consequences for multilateral cooperation, at, for example, the UN, and even for the discreet bilateral diplomacy that is still taking place. Moreover, because one pathway to removal of the state sponsorship label is a change in government in Moscow, designation would send a signal that U.S. war aims include regime change – unhelpfully suggesting that the stakes of the Ukraine conflict are existential for the Kremlin.

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Questions from Chairman John James:

1. General Hemedti was on an official visit to Moscow the day Russia invaded Ukraine. Following the trip, he stated that Sudan had no problem with Russia or any other country opening a naval base on its Red Sea coast. What are the implications for U.S. national security if Russia were to open a naval base at the Port of Sudan? How can the U.S. prevent such a scenario from developing?

Answer 1: A Russian naval base in Port Sudan would not only give Russia a long hoped-for warm water port, along one of the most strategic waterways in the world, but it would give them a new jumping off point into Africa. Russia is looking to develop a contiguous set of partnerships, among unstable and coup prone states from the Red Sea to the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. Linked together the states could allow Russia to project power and influence and shape political events across a wide swath of Africa, undermining US security interest and values for democracy.

Washington had previously sought to engage Sudan's military proactively to prevent them from turning to Russia. With the war in Sudan, now undermining any relationship, we must continue to be aware that ongoing efforts to punish and isolate Sudan's military could have the effect of seeking to deepen in their partnership with Moscow.

2. Mr. Hudson, in your written testimony you noted that Russia's ability to sow instability and shape the geopolitics of central and northern Africa place pressure on NATO's southern flank. In what ways does Russia view Africa as an extended front in its campaign to counter NATO, and how can the U.S. and the alliance respond?

Answer 2: A Russian naval base in Port Sudan would not only give Russia a long hoped-for warm water port, along one of the most strategic waterways in the world, but it would give them a new jumping off point into Africa. Russia is looking to develop a contiguous set of partnerships, among unstable and coup prone states from the Red Sea to the Atlantic to the Mediterranean. Linked together the states could allow Russia to project power and influence and shape political events across a wide swath of Africa, undermining US security interest and values for democracy.

Washington had previously sought to engage Sudan's military proactively to prevent them from turning to Russia. With the war in Sudan, now undermining any relationship, we must continue to be aware that ongoing efforts to punish and isolate Sudan's military could have the effect of seeking to deepen in their partnership with Moscow.

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3. What would you expect African leaders to walk away with as deliverables from the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg, either publicly or privately, and how does that preview the BRICS Summit next month in South Africa?

Answer 3: African leaders are simply looking to “bring home the bacon” for their people—tangible commitments in business, investment, and security. They no longer want to be in attendance just for a photo op with world leaders, or as a backdrop to a western lead conversation. They want to be driving international debates and decision making, and part of that means setting the terms for their participation and achieving measurable deliverables from their participation.

4. While Wagner’s growing footprint directly threatens U.S. interests, the group lacks significant military capacity. For example, its probing attack against the joint U.S.-Syrian Democratic Force position at the Conoco oil field failed spectacularly and they suffered over 100 casualties while only 1 SDF fighter was injured and no U.S. troops were killed or wounded. Similarly, Wagner withdrew from Cabo Delgado Province in Mozambique within months of its initial deployment after taking numerous casualties. What do these battlefields failures say about the limitations of Wagner as a fighting force, and how can these weaknesses be exploited?

Answer 4: We should not confuse the Wagner groups in ability to defeat more advanced, hardened targets in places like Syria and Mozambique with their ability to be effective in missions in other parts of Africa. While they may only be marginally effective against terrorist forces, they have proven themselves to be more effective at helping African heads of state retain office. Similarly, their very presence in many of those countries demonstrates the west’s fundamental inability to fully isolate many of those regimes. As such, Wagner’s success is not only measured by its battlefield prowess, but by its ability to deliver on its other client demands.

5. In large part as a result of its desire to skirt U.S. sanctions, Russia has been at the forefront of the de-dollarization campaign pushing for alternative currencies to be used for global trade – including propagating the idea of a BRICS currency. While these alternative currencies replacing the dollar as the global trading currency seems unlikely currently they have gained favor amongst African leaders such as Kenyan President William Ruto – who signed an updated trade pact with Russia in May. How would

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African countries increasingly trading in currencies other than U.S. dollars impact the U.S.'s influence and strategic goals throughout the continent?

Answer 5: I think it's highly unlikely that the Africans will end up taking this route primarily because it runs counter to one of their long-held objectives of more fully integrating themselves into the global economy. That said African countries are interested in developing as many, mutually beneficial partnerships as they can irrespective of the country that they are with. That is why countries like Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and UAE see new opportunities in Africa. To the extent that African countries are talking about using alternative currencies, I think it is as more of a protest against western promises, made repeatedly by the G7 and G20 to better integrate Africa into the global economy.

6. What do you see as the effects of the June 2023 Prigozhin-led mutiny on Wagner's activities in Africa and Russia's strategy in Africa writ large? Specifically how should the U.S. be messaging the flaws of Wagner to African regimes that are considering employing them?

Answer 6: I don't anticipate Wagner's mutiny having a significant impact on their presence in Africa or activities. As I said in my testimony, sunlight is the best disinfectant to Russia's malign influence and false narratives. The US must continue to shine a light on Russia's activities, especially regarding their battlefield losses; public disinformation campaigns; human rights abuses; manipulation of political processes; and corruption.

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Questions from Ranking Member Sara Jacobs:

1. Russia's expanded influence in Africa includes deepening ties in North Africa, expanding its reach in the Central African Republic and the Sahel, and rekindling Cold War ties in southern Africa. Russia's approach is distinctive among external actors in that Moscow typically relies on irregular (and frequently extralegal) means to expand its influence—deployment of mercenaries, disinformation, election interference, support for coups, and arms for resources deals, among others.

What parts of Russian engagement on the continent are viewed by African states as mutually beneficial?

Answer 1: Africans see a great deal of Russia's involvement in their countries as mutually beneficial. It's worth recalling that many of the countries where Russia has the greatest impact are in weak and illegitimate states where Russia's role is largely about lending credibility and security to keep illegitimate leaders in power. But more than that, African states see value in Russia presenting itself as an alternative to the Western lead development orthodoxy. As much as Russia's actions in Africa are transactional, Africa also sees Russia's role in a transactional way. It gives them an alternative to Washington and allows them to lodge a protest vote against what is often seen as Western paternalism

2. In your engagement with leaders on the continent, what are you hearing from them about their relationship with Russia?

Answer 2: Africa is not monolithic, and the views of its leaders towards Russia are quite different. Some in Mali or Sudan have quite a positive view on Russia, while others in Ghana or Liberia do not. However, the common thread across the continent is that no African leader wants to be told by Washington who it can work with and who it can't.

3. Please describe Russia's defense cooperation on the continent and to what extent they are significant to U.S. interests. In your opinion, will African countries continue to seek to purchase Russian arms for the foreseeable future? How extensive is Russia's arms trade with Africa, and how does it compare to China's? How have sanctions and Russia's war on Ukraine affected the regional demand for Russian arms, as well as Russia's capacity to deliver arms to African countries?

Answer 3: A great deal of Russia's security partnerships on the continent are paper agreements only and don't present any kind of real or substantive security cooperation. However, the one area where Russia continues to play a dominant role is in the arms trade. Russia remains the number one supplier of arms to the continent largely because it sees Africa as an important market and caters to it, unlike the United States. To the

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extent that Russia loses ground in the arms market to China, Turkey, or Iran, it will not be for political reasons. As these other countries develop their own arms industries they too will increase their sales in Africa which will ultimately undermine Moscow's dominance in the space.

4. According to the State Department, Russian operatives, front companies, and social media networks use disinformation "to influence African politics in Russia's favor." How do you expect the aftermath of Prigozhin's mutiny to affect Russian disinformation in Africa, if at all?

Answer 4: I don't expect to see a big change in the space. The use of disinformation on social media is too easy, too cheap and has too great an impact for either Russia or Wagner to simply abandon it.

5. How would you compare the strategies used by Russian and Chinese information operations in Africa? Is there any evidence to suggest collaboration?

Answer 5: Russia and China have taken very different approaches to building and managing influence in Africa. Firstly, China has developed a significant soft power advantage to Russia, following more of a US playbook in developing consumer brands and cultural exports that appeal to Africans. But more importantly, China uses its state power to engage in more elite capture. Russia, on the other hand uses its propaganda and disinformation to try to capture hearts and minds by implanting within populations false narratives of Western occupation and neo colonialism.

6. As of June 2023, the Wagner Group was providing security services in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, and Sudan, along with Libya in North Africa. It is unclear what the Wagner Group's attempted mutiny on June 23 will have for its African operations. While Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has asserted that Russian PMC operations will continue, it is unclear whether Prigozhin or the Russian state will assume more control of these activities. What role does demand for natural resources, including gold and diamonds, play in Russian PMC operations in Africa?

Answer 6: One of the advantages of working with Wagner is they are willing to take in-kind payments through mineral concessions and other natural resources. This keeps their payments off book and outside of public scrutiny. To date, where we have seen Wagner make inroads the countries have had sizable resource deposits that have been largely

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under-exploited by governments and have not benefited from reputable Western investment.

7. Are there indications of whether the Malian junta's payments to Wagner are made in cash, or in kind (for example, gold concessions or shipments)?

Answer 7: I don't have information on this though my sources in Mali say that there is no official record of Wagner associated individuals or companies owning any mining resources in the country.

8. How concerned are you about the potential for Wagner—or successor organizations—to expand into countries bordering Mali, such as Burkina Faso and Guinea?

Answer 8: This is the wrong question. What we should be asking is how concerned should we be about states in the region becoming so weak and disillusioned that they need and seek out the services of the Wagner group? Here I think we should be very concerned because I do not believe that the coup contagion in this region is over, and there are many more targets of opportunity for the Wagner Group on the horizon. Our focus in fighting Wagner needs to be as much on the demand side from African states as it is on the supply side from Russia.

9. What other countries in Africa are most vulnerable to Russian PMC penetration?

Answer 9: Literally any of the countries facing endemic poverty, weak institutions, an exploding youth population, lack of development, and a history of colonial intervention. That is virtually every state in the region.

10. What aspects of Wagner's activities and business model have caused the most concern among African leaders and publics?

Answer 10: In countries like Mali to Central African Republic there is actually very little that is known or understood about Wagner's activities in those countries by the general public. In my experience, populations there hold a generally positive view of Wagner, because they are unaware of the extent of corruption and human rights abuses associated with their activities. Moreover, they are fed a steady diet of false and misleading narratives about Wagner's battlefield successes and an overarching narrative that Wagner represents a rejection of neocolonialist forces and a reassertion of state sovereignty.

11. What role do private military companies (PMCs) play in Russia's Africa policy? Apart from the Wagner Group, what other Russian PMCs operate in Africa and to what effect?

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Answer 11: The value of Wagner and PMC's to Russia is that it allows an unofficial and often hidden Russian influence to take hold in these countries. I find it akin to the kind of influence our CIA used to have in these countries in the 1950s and 60s.

12. Mali's military junta reportedly contracted the Wagner Group in 2021 to support combat operations against Islamist insurgents, following an increase in official Russian arms sales to Mali. An accompanying swell of disinformation "promoted Russia as a 'viable partner' and 'alternative to the West,' encouraged postponement of democratic elections, and attempted to create local support for Wagner." News reports suggest that some 1,400 Wagner personnel were in Mali as of early 2023. Malian officials have denied their presence, asserting that Russian personnel are official government advisors, while Russia's government has characterized them as private contractors. Reportedly, Wagner mercenaries are patrolling with Malian soldiers in the north and in some instances, wearing Malian army uniforms. Has the Malian junta been able to distinguish the human rights atrocities committed by Wagner mercenaries and their own soldiers?

Answer 12: Yes, absolutely. In my conversations with Malian forces they accept full responsibility for the human rights abuses their forces commit and find it amusing that the Western media attributes those crimes to the Wagner Group. This drives home the point that the US is not interested in what is happening in Mali and only cares about what Russia is doing there. In my talks with Malian armed forces they made it very clear that they planned and carried out the missions and that Wagner only accompanied in a support capacity. Any success or failure related to those missions should be attributed to the Malian army and not Wagner.

13. How do you think the pull-out of MINUSMA will influence Russian presence and engagement in Mali?

Answer 13: I think the pull out of the UN will be greeted as a moral victory there, but there will be very real security consequences that Wagner will struggle to respond to. I fully expect a degradation of the security environment and increase of civilian casualties as a result.

14. Why do you think Russia and the Wagner Group are said to be popular among the Malian people? Is it just a result of the closed information environment or is it also impacted by resentment of the policies of the West, particularly the French?

Answer 14: It is certainly a function of both. The junta have a tight grip on the information and security environment and they are aided online by Russian disinformation efforts because the people are shielded from the truth about the junta's activities. With Wagner's complicity the junta continue to maintain a degree of popular acceptance. This is also driven by an undercurrent in society that appreciates the fact that

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for the first time in recent memory, there are no “occupying” foreign forces in the country. The sense of reclaimed sovereignty among the people is quite strong, even if the reality is very different.

15. The Wagner Group reportedly entered CAR in 2017 after Russia obtained an exemption to the U.N. arms embargo in 2017 to provide weapons to CAR’s military, and deployed “instructors” to train local soldiers. The number of Russian personnel increased to over 2,000 in 2021, as Wagner helped repel a rebel attack on the capital and participated in military operations to retake territory from rebel forces. Reports indicate approximately 500 Wagner personnel reportedly departed CAR following the June 2023 mutiny in Russia, although CAR officials assert that Moscow has committed to maintain several thousand in the country. In addition to military activities, Wagner personnel reportedly provide personal protection to President Faustin-Archange Touadera and serve as his advisors. News reports indicate that U.S. officials have offered President Touadera various incentives and alternative security arrangements in a bid to decrease Russian and Wagner Group influence in the country. What do you think of this reported effort?

Answer 15: The US offer is a nonstarter. We cannot replace what Wagner is providing, and nor would we. The only thing that Touadéra wants is his own regime security and Russia offers that unflinchingly with no strings attached.

16. What potential do you see for unintended consequences of this move, particularly as it relates to human rights and democracy? How could this approach affect U.S. policy and leverage in other countries with a Wagner presence?

Answer 16: Washington should be more focused on shoring up its current partners and those sitting on the fence about Russian engagement and not focused on trying to flip Mollie or CAR into the US camp. Those countries are too far down the road of Russian investment and to reliant on Wagner for their own personal hold on power to be enticed by anything Washington has to offer. Moreover, Washington Sullys, its own reputation by offering such deals by driving home to point, that Africa simply remains a cold war chessboard.

17. U.S.-South Africa relations are at one of its lowest points due to a number of developments, including recent indications of South African support for Russia. One issue has been South Africa's hosting of joint naval exercises with Russia and China in February 2023, and stopovers at local military facilities by U.S.-sanctioned Russian vessels including a ship, the Lady R, onto which arms for Russia’s military may have been loaded. South Africa's ties with Russia are rooted in Soviet-era support for South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) party during its anti-Apartheid struggle for majority rule and racial equality. What impact do you think Russia’s growing

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influence will have on the quality of democracy in South Africa? Conversely, how do you think the erosion of South Africa's democracy will impact Russia's influence?

Answer 17: Erosion of South Africa's democracy is not new. The presidency of Jacob Zuma saw a hollowing out of South African institutions, growing levels of corruption, and not coincidentally closer ties with Moscow. However, South Africa has resiliencies that Moscow will be challenged to overturn. A well educated population, independent judiciary, and free press all remain a bulwark against Russia's malign influence there.

18. What incentivizes South Africa to continue working with Russia to purchase weapons?

Answer 18: Like all African countries, South Africa wants the choice of who to do business with and who to partner with. While there may be corruption associated with arms deals with Moscow, there is no evidence of that currently.

19. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about South Africa's close relationship with Russia and possible transfer of arms in May 2023, and some have called for the termination of South Africa's eligibility for U.S. trade preferences. What has been the effect of congressional reactions to date?

Answer 19: Congress' anti-Russia sentiment is not playing well on the continent and specifically not in South Africa. In fact, it is likely the best and quickest way to push South Africa even further into a Russian orbit as it asserts its own sovereign decisions to choose its partners. South African media portrays Congress' statements as bullying and neocolonialism. Russian propaganda picks up on this to widen the gap even further between Washington and Pretoria.

20. How else might the United States respond, particularly if South Africa is confirmed to have transferred arms to Russia?

Answer 20: At this point any public disputes with South Africa only create opportunity for Russia to benefit themselves. If we don't want to advantage Moscow further, we should continue to raise our concerns, but in a private venue. If we wished to take actions, we could suspend intelligence cooperation, or other forms of technical and military assistance, that South Africa is unable to get from Moscow or others.

21. What are your views on terminating South Africa's AGOA eligibility, and what impact do you think that would have on U.S.-South Africa relations, South Africa's relationship with Russia, and the South African population?

Answer 21: When talking about suspending AGOA we need to look well beyond South Africa to the entire continent. The Biden Administration has made a push for new trade

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and investment to define our future relations with Africa. Suspending AGOA to South Africa will make it look like we are simply using our trade policies as a potential weapon against our partners.

22. Since Russia renewed its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, U.S. engagements in Africa have increasingly focused on African responses to Russia's actions, the war's economic fallout for the region, and Russia's ability to leverage ties in Africa to circumvent or lessen the impact of U.S. and European sanctions. Meanwhile, the spectacle of Western countries rapidly mobilizing aid for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, at a time when African countries face stark security and humanitarian challenges, has prompted some African officials and advocates to decry what they perceive as racially biased policymaking. What are you hearing directly from African officials and civil society about their perceptions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Answer 22: Africans say that this is a "white man's war", and that they should be protected from its fallout. For many Africans, this period is reminiscent of World War II where another war between European powers spilled over into Africa and Africans were recruited to fight by colonial powers. That era ignited the independence movements across the continent.

23. Why do you think certain African governments are hesitant to publicly condemn Russia's invasion despite its impact on food insecurity on the continent?

Answer 23: Africans are not looking to create wedges between them and the rest of the world. They are looking for areas of common ground that will benefit them. While they are opposed in large number to Russia's war in Ukraine, they see no tangible benefit in associating themselves with that public dispute.

24. How would you describe the African Union's evolving position on the Russia-Ukraine war following the inauguration of a new AU chairman in early 2023?

Answer 24: Africa most importantly wants to be heard and wants all great powers to recognize that their wars are not Africa's wars.

25. What were the main elements of African leaders' June 2023 Russia-Ukraine peace initiative? How would you describe the outcomes of the African delegation's travel to Moscow and Kyiv? Would you agree that the initiative failed, and if so, why?

Answer 25: The AU never made public the terms of its peace initiative. I would say that the delegation visit was of mixed success. It showed for the first time that Africans can be drivers of debate on the world stage. But the fact that they were essentially rebuffed suggests to me that they were not taken seriously.

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26. What types of U.S. engagement have proven most successful at countering Russian-backed disinformation in Africa?

Answer 26: The best thing that Washington can do to combat this information is the support online tracking of that disinformation. Shining a light on where it comes from and who is entering it into social media networks and then letting Africans decide for themselves how significant that is. Otherwise, it looks like we are forcing another great power narrative onto Africans.

27. How would you rate the effectiveness of the State Department's Global Engagement Center? What additional or alternative tools or resources are needed?

Answer 27: The global engagement center has no impact on the continent. It is not tailored to the specific circumstances of African countries. It promotes a narrative of great power competition in which Africans are pawns. None of this plays well on the continent.

28. In your view, what are the potential impacts of designating the Wagner Group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization?

Answer 28: In a first part, it would send a very clear message to African nations considering working with a Wagner Group that there is an even greater associated risk of entering into such a partnership. However, most of the countries likely considering such an arrangement are already facing a crisis of legitimacy and would likely not be dissuaded by the designation.

29. Please describe potential impacts on U.S. efforts to counter Wagner on the continent, humanitarian assistance in relevant countries, African leaders' and population perception of the U.S., and any other relevant issues.

Answer 29: We can only speculate as to what the specific effects would be on humanitarian assistance. That said, sweeping sanctions like the foreign terrorist organization or state sponsor of terrorist designation are known to have wide and unintended consequences on average citizens. These tools should be used sparingly in only the most serious circumstances where US national security interests are directly threatened. If our goal is simply to send a message, there are better ways of doing that.

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Questions from Chairman John James:

1. How did you view the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg, specifically the deliverables the African leaders walked away with, and how does that preview the BRICS Summit next month in South Africa?

Answer 1: The second Russia-Africa Summit held in St. Petersburg, attended by 17 African heads of state, draws a stark contrast to the 2019 summit in Sochi, where more than 40 heads of state attended. This shift could be attributed to the deeply polarized nature of public support for the Russian Federation amidst its illegal war of aggression in Ukraine. It could also demonstrate the conservative risk-reward calculation many African leaders are making when it comes to Putin, who has chosen to throw the continent into deeper food insecurity with his attacks on Ukrainian ports and grain supplies. As for deliverables, in 2019, Putin promised to double trade with the African continent; in the four years since the Sochi summit, Russia's licit trade with Africa decreased. In St. Petersburg, African leaders who pleaded for peace and resumption of the grain deal were met with recalcitrance and a paltry promise of free grain for only six countries in Africa, laying bare Putin's cold indifference to the growing food insecurity crisis resulting from his actions.

The energy and expectations surrounding the upcoming BRICS summit cannot be compared to the recent Russia Africa summit. There is increasing interest in expanding BRICS and more than 20 countries are seeking membership. In addition to South Africa's push to cement much-needed energy deals to address mounting power supply issues, BRICS has proven a more effective multilateral platform with concrete accomplishments, including the creation of a development bank. Putin bowing out of the summit due to sanctions and travel restrictions could help the BRICS summit maintain attention and momentum towards its ambitious agenda rather than Russia's efforts to gain influence in Africa.

2. What do you see as the effects of the June 2023 Prigozhin-led mutiny on Wagner's activities in Africa and Russia's strategy in Africa writ large? Specifically, how should the U.S. be messaging the flaws of Wagner to African regimes that are considering employing them?

Answer 2: Prigozhin's mutinous actions in June demonstrate that the Russian Federation's dependence on Wagner has very strong strings attached. Prigozhin's statements in the weeks since the mutinous rebellion suggest that Wagner is buckling under the weight of its operations in Ukraine and offer an important messaging opportunity for the United States.

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With Prigozhin announcing that Wagner has halted recruiting, lost some of its personnel to the Russian armed forces, and will focus on Africa, the group's operations in Africa offer an important lifeline for Prigozhin, and by extension, Putin. The Russian Federation has been keen to drive an anti-colonialism narrative when it comes to Africa, but its quid pro quo dependence on the continent for resources that drive Russia's sanction evasion regime suggests a neocolonialist agenda at play. The coup in Niger has opened a door for Wagner despite little to no progress on the security front in countries like Mali that have turned to Wagner for assistance. The United States and its Western partners must continue to underscore this point and support efforts to expose these malign activities while retooling its engagement strategy throughout the region. Working with African partners, the United States should underscore the realities of the Kremlin's approach to Africa, including the Russian toolkit, the principal actors and the consequences of its engagement. This includes supporting African media and investigative journalism to expose Russia's support for corrupt schemes and oppressive regimes. The African men and women doing this work are among the bravest in Africa, risking retaliation. This exposure of realities should illuminate the manipulative approach used by the Russian-linked criminal networks and their local cronies to subvert democracy, violate local laws, or use blackmail or violence to force out of business hard-working local entrepreneurs. Such a campaign, using African, rather than U.S. voices, would create a durable, strategic narrative because truthful and locally owned.

3. In large part as a result of its desire to skirt U.S. sanctions, Russia has been at the forefront of the de-dollarization campaign pushing for alternative currencies to be used for global trade – including propagating the idea of a BRICS currency. While these alternative currencies replacing the dollar as the global trading currency seems unlikely currently, they have gained favor amongst African leaders such as Kenyan President William Ruto – who signed an updated trade pact with Russia in May. How would African countries increasingly trading in currencies other than U.S. dollars impact the U.S.'s influence and strategic goals throughout the continent?

Answer 3: It is important to note that Africa's share of global trade is no more than 3%, therefore de-dollarization by some African countries could have more of a symbolic than a material impact on dollar's standing as a global trading currency. However, in a short term, a shift away from the U.S. dollar as the primary trading currency could limit the ability of the United States to impose economic sanctions or exert leverage on these countries, especially if other currencies gain prominence. In the long term, if African countries increasingly trade in other currencies, it could diminish the United States' economic dominance in the region. The U.S. dollar has historically been a key tool for U.S. economic influence, enabling the United States to foster alliances and secure access to resources. If African nations shift their trade towards other currencies, it could reduce the need for

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African countries to hold U.S. dollars as reserves, leading to a decrease in both the influence and strategic importance of the U.S. in the region.

However, it is important to note that the impact of such a shift would depend on several factors. Firstly, the extent of the adoption of alternative currencies would matter, as a partial shift may not significantly undermine the dollar's influence. Secondly, the economic stability and attractiveness of the alternative currencies being adopted would also be crucial in determining their impact on the U.S. Lastly, the United States has considerable influence and engagements in Africa beyond just economic interactions, including diplomatic ties, security partnerships, and development assistance, which would likely continue to shape its influence in the region.

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Questions from Ranking Member Sara Jacobs:

1. Russia's expanded influence in Africa includes deepening ties in North Africa, expanding its reach in the Central African Republic and the Sahel, and rekindling Cold War ties in southern Africa. Russia's approach is distinctive among external actors in that Moscow typically relies on irregular (and frequently extralegal) means to expand its influence—deployment of mercenaries, disinformation, election interference, support for coups, and arms for resources deals, among others.

What parts of Russian engagement on the continent are viewed by African states as mutually beneficial?

Answer 1: The term “mutually beneficial” must be parsed by benefits conferred to African citizens versus leaders and elites. Until Putin's illegal war in Ukraine commenced in early 2022, many African states purchased Russian grain and fertilizers to help address food insecurity in their countries. However, most of these deals addressed acute needs without building the capacity to close gaps in food supply chains across the continent. When it comes to benefits conferred to some African leaders, countries like the Central African Republic or Coup led countries such as Burkina Faso illustrate how the Russian Federation leverages its capacity to provide security services and weapons, diplomatic support, and assistance directly tied to protecting vulnerable and isolated regimes in exchange for opaque concessions to extract valuable minerals and other resources.

2. In your engagement with leaders on the continent, what are you hearing from them about their relationship with Russia?

Question 2: Many African leaders will publicly reiterate their non-alignment position while privately expressing their strong concerns about growing Russian malign influence, especially in the Sahel. Some have made it clear that they do not appreciate feeling forced to choose between strategic competitors, especially when their needs are so great amid increasing political instability and security challenges. There is a strong preference for engaging and partnering with the United States. Still, many leaders opt to work within the realpolitik of the international community now that they have more options available to them.

3. According to the State Department, Russian operatives, front companies, and social media networks use disinformation “to influence African politics in Russia's favor.”

How do you expect the aftermath of Prigozhin's mutiny to affect Russian disinformation in Africa, if at all?

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Answer 3: Open-source reports indicate that the Russian Federation took certain measures to muzzle Prigozhin, including by shuttering his international media outlets. However, Russian disinformation schemes on the continent do not appear to have collapsed. On the contrary, the coup in Niger suggests that the Russian disinformation campaign in the region is alive and well, focusing much of its efforts on stoking mistrust of France and Western engagement in the region.

4. How would you compare the strategies used by Russian and Chinese information operations in Africa? Is there any evidence to suggest collaboration?

Answer 4: While I have not seen any credible evidence to suggest Russian and Chinese information operations collaborate on the continent, the Russian Federation and the PRC use information operations to increase their spheres of influence and gain an edge in international fora like the United Nations. Their strategic visions and tactics, however, differ significantly. As I noted in my written testimony, the Russian Federation lacks strong economic ties to the continent and thus resorts to sophisticated social media campaigns to conduct its information operations, usually to discredit the United States and its Western partners. China has strong economic ties throughout the continent and has invested heavily in introducing Chinese media to African publics, engaging in robust public diplomacy directly tied to its infrastructure projects, and leveraging its largesse to finance language and other educational exchange programs. As of April 2021, more than 60 Confucius Institutes operate in at least 46 African countries.

5. As of June 2023, the Wagner Group was providing security services in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, and Sudan, along with Libya in North Africa. It is unclear what the Wagner Group's attempted mutiny on June 23 will have for its African operations. While Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has asserted that Russian PMC operations will continue, it is unclear whether Prigozhin or the Russian state will assume more control of these activities.

What role does demand for natural resources, including gold and diamonds, play in Russian PMC operations in Africa? Are there indications of whether the Malian junta's payments to Wagner are made in cash, or in kind (for example, gold concessions or shipments)?

Answer 5: Well before its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has worked through PMCs to gain access to natural resources in vulnerable parts of Africa. As I noted in my written testimony, the Russian Federation's support for private military contractor operations in countries like CAR and Mali is directly tied to extracting natural resources as a means of evading U.S. and Western sanctions. Russia's need for these resources, namely gold, diamonds, and timber, are probably why the Central African Republic had reportedly handed responsibility for certain customs operations to Russian officials. In Mali, it is widely believed that because the junta would struggle to pay the roughly \$10 million per month

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bill from Wagner for an extended period of time, that an “in-kind” arrangement was struck whereby the junta provides exclusive natural resource concessions in lieu of cash, similar to the deal Wagner struck in CAR.

6. How concerned are you about the potential for Wagner—or successor organizations—to expand into countries bordering Mali, such as Burkina Faso and Guinea? What other countries in Africa are most vulnerable to Russian PMC penetration?

Answer 6: The spate of coups in West Africa and the Sahel has provided an opening for groups like Wagner to exploit the ensuing political instability and isolation. However, these countries, and the juntas that now control the levers of government there, cannot be viewed as a monolith. I remain concerned about Burkina Faso succumbing to the likes of Wagner, considering Captain Traore’s remarks at the Russia Africa summit in July. The political instability rattling several French-speaking West African and Sahel states, such as Senegal, Chad, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, and Benin, requires close attention. Wagner could see an opportunity in countries with the strongest political instability and security vacuum.

7. What aspects of Wagner’s activities and business model have caused the most concern among African leaders and publics?

Answer 7: Wagner’s, and more so the Russian Federation’s, capacity for disinformation campaigns throughout the continent continues to alarm many African leaders. Operations such as troll farms reportedly located in Ghana and Nigeria demonstrates Russia’s robust capabilities and intent, and the U.S. Treasury’s sanctions against several entities linked to Russian intelligence services illustrates the sophistication of these disinformation campaigns. These operations often go into overdrive during election season in targeted countries, and the widespread use of social media and information technology has increased the reach and efficacy of these campaigns.

8. What role do private military companies (PMCs) play in Russia’s Africa policy? Apart from the Wagner Group, what other Russian PMCs operate in Africa and to what effect?

Answer 8: As noted in my written testimony, the Russian Federation has been overt and clear about the role Wagner plays in Africa on behalf of the Kremlin. The United States has sanctioned other Kremlin-linked PMCs, including the CAR-based Sewa Security Services and the Officer’s Union for International Security (OUIS), which is a Wagner front company. Both Sewa and OUIS are reportedly involved in regime security operations and are said to have denied CAR officials access to mining operations for inspection.

9. Mali’s military junta reportedly contracted the Wagner Group in 2021 to support combat operations against Islamist insurgents, following an increase in official Russian arms sales to Mali. An accompanying swell of disinformation “promoted Russia as a ‘viable partner’

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and ‘alternative to the West,’ encouraged postponement of democratic elections, and attempted to create local support for Wagner.” News reports suggest that some 1,400 Wagner personnel were in Mali as of early 2023. Malian officials have denied their presence, asserting that Russian personnel are official government advisors, while Russia’s government has characterized them as private contractors. Reportedly, Wagner mercenaries are patrolling with Malian soldiers in the north and in some instances, wearing Malian army uniforms.

Has the Malian junta been able to distinguish the human rights atrocities committed by Wagner mercenaries and their own soldiers?

Answer 9: Recent reports suggest that the Malian junta has denied any knowledge of their forces’ involvement in human rights abuses, either in coordination with or separately from Wagner or other PMCs. However, there is mounting credible evidence some of which was published by the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that Malian forces and possibly Russian PMCs are responsible for widespread human rights abuses and atrocities. It is not clear whether the Malian junta’s Justice Ministry will publish any results from its recently announced investigation into these alleged war crimes or crimes against humanity.

10. How do you think the pull-out of MINUSMA will influence Russian presence and engagement in Mali?

Answer 10: The expulsion and drawdown of MINUSMA troops will continue to embolden the Russian Federation in its quest to expand its presence and influence in Mali and other parts of the Sahel. Once MINUSMA completes its drawdown later this year, the Malian junta will have an almost exclusive security cooperation relationship with Wagner, and the Russian Federation in general. At that point, the Malian junta will be under increased pressure to demonstrate how this relationship is improving the security situation in Mali.

11. Why do you think Russia and the Wagner Group are said to be popular among the Malian people? Is it just a result of the closed information environment or is it also impacted by resentment of the policies of the West, particularly the French?

Answer 11: While anti-French and anti-Western sentiment has played a part in the Malian junta’s ascension, there is little evidence to show that Russia and Wagner in particular are truly and widely popular among the Malian people. In fact, public reports of human rights abuses conducted by Russian PMCs in league with Malian forces has exposed the Russian Federation to growing skepticism and mistrust. Russia’s disinformation campaign against the French in Mali has also negatively affected public sentiment to an extent, including through accusations that the French have used counterterrorism operations as a ruse to exploit Mali’s natural resources.

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12. The Wagner Group reportedly entered CAR in 2017 after Russia obtained an exemption to the U.N. arms embargo in 2017 to provide weapons to CAR's military and deployed "instructors" to train local soldiers. The number of Russian personnel increased to over 2,000 in 2021, as Wagner helped repel a rebel attack on the capital and participated in military operations to retake territory from rebel forces. Reports indicate approximately 500 Wagner personnel reportedly departed CAR following the June 2023 mutiny in Russia, although CAR officials assert that Moscow has committed to maintain several thousand in the country. In addition to military activities, Wagner personnel reportedly provide personal protection to President Faustin-Archange Touadera and serve as his advisors.

News reports indicate that U.S. officials have offered President Touadera various incentives and alternative security arrangements in a bid to decrease Russian and Wagner Group influence in the country.

What do you think of this reported effort? What potential do you see for unintended consequences of this move, particularly as it relates to human rights and democracy? How could this approach affect U.S. policy and leverage in other countries with a Wagner presence?

Answer 12: The United States remains the preferred partner of choice throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, due in large part to its superior reputation as a fighting force, training tactics, and materiel. However, it appears that Touadera's calculation to work with Wagner and similar entities has more to do with the less complicated strings that come attached to such support. Accepting support from the United States would likely involve increased scrutiny of reported human rights abuses, corruption, and the narrowing of political space that is a common feature of the Russian Federation's growing presence and influence in CAR and elsewhere.

13. U.S.-South Africa relations are at one of its lowest points due to a number of developments, including recent indications of South African support for Russia. One issue has been South Africa's hosting of joint naval exercises with Russia and China in February 2023, and stopovers at local military facilities by U.S.-sanctioned Russian vessels including a ship, the Lady R, onto which arms for Russia's military may have been loaded. South Africa's ties with Russia are rooted in Soviet-era support for South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) party during its anti-Apartheid struggle for majority rule and racial equality.

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What impact do you think Russia's growing influence will have on the quality of democracy in South Africa? Conversely, how do you think the erosion of South Africa's democracy will impact Russia's influence?

Answer 13: South African citizens remain quite vocal and influential over the quality of democracy in the country, and it is not clear that will change in the near term. However, South Africa's ruling party has demonstrated a resolved pragmatism in its approach to foreign policy and engagement, ensuring that its nonalignment policy continues to buttress perceived pressure from the West and that its doors remain open to any partner willing to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship. Military exercises aside, South Africa's energy woes are likely the impetus for expanding engagement with the Russian Federation, including through oligarchs, which could continue South Africa's unfortunate trend of political corruption scandals.

14. What incentivizes South Africa to continue working with Russia to purchase weapons?

Answer 14: South Africa has vigorously denied reports that it transferred weapons to Russia but also vowed to investigate the claim. It appears the three-member panel's investigation is underway, after which time a report will be sent to President Ramaphosa. While the veracity of the claims remains unclear, if true, there needs to be an understanding of who or what entity within the South African government had knowledge of and sanctioned the weapons transfer. That information will lay bare the motivation and incentives involved.

15. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about South Africa's close relationship with Russia and possible transfer of arms in May 2023, and some have called for the termination of South Africa's eligibility for U.S. trade preferences. What has been the effect of congressional reactions to date? How else might the United States respond, particularly if South Africa is confirmed to have transferred arms to Russia? What are your views on terminating South Africa's AGOA eligibility, and what impact do you think that would have on U.S.-South Africa relations, South Africa's relationship with Russia, and the South African population?

Answer 15: Congress' reaction to the allegations, which were clearly outlined in an early June bipartisan letter to the U.S. Administration, have stirred serious concerns among South African officials and analysts. The South African government has worked hard to fortify its trade relations with the United States through AGOA and launched a robust lobbying effort in recent years to expand its trade and investment opportunities with the United States beyond AGOA. If these allegations of South Africa's arms transfer to Russia are proven true, South Africa is risking one of its most important economic development partnerships in the world. If the Administration terminates South Africa's AGOA eligibility, the United States could also jeopardize one of its strongest levers of influence over South Africa's government and harden public sentiment against the United States. It would hurt

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many thousands of South African workers whose jobs depend on AGOA, and the families they support. Other countries such as Botswana, Namibia that are integrated with the South African economy would suffer too. In addition, pulling benefits would hand Russia and Beijing a big talking point in the context of Great power competition. Targeted sanctions, while unlikely, could be another effective policy tool.

16. Since Russia renewed its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, U.S. engagements in Africa have increasingly focused on African responses to Russia's actions, the war's economic fallout for the region, and Russia's ability to leverage ties in Africa to circumvent or lessen the impact of U.S. and European sanctions. Meanwhile, the spectacle of Western countries rapidly mobilizing aid for Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, at a time when African countries face stark security and humanitarian challenges, has prompted some African officials and advocates to decry what they perceive as racially biased policymaking.

What are you hearing directly from African officials and civil society about their perceptions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Answer 16: Despite a poor showing of support for related resolutions at the UN General Assembly, African officials have been increasingly critical of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its negative outcomes for the continent's food security. The low turnout of African heads of state at the most recent Russia Africa summit in St. Petersburg sent a strong message to Russia and the international community that Russia severely miscalculated the sentiment of affected African publics.

17. Why do you think certain African governments are hesitant to publicly condemn Russia's invasion despite its impact on food insecurity on the continent?

Answer 17: Some African leaders remain hesitant to publicly condemn Russia because they are sensitive to the potential repercussions of aligning in a multi-polarized world. Nonalignment, when executed faithfully, ostensibly provides African leaders with the space to leverage relationships and opportunities that may not have been available to them in the past. Some leaders have also expressed privately concerns that aligning against Russia publicly could draw unwanted attention from Russia's powerful disinformation apparatus, bring political instability to their doorstep.

18. How would you describe the African Union's evolving position on the Russia-Ukraine war following the inauguration of a new AU chairman in early 2023?

Answer 18: The African Union's leadership used the Russia Africa Summit to take a principled stance against Russia's war in Ukraine by calling on the Russian Federation to initiate a ceasefire and return to the suspended grain deal. The African Union's leadership,

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like African heads of state across the continent, are responding to the suffering that Russia's war in Ukraine is causing to ordinary, vulnerable people in their regions.

19. What were the main elements of African leaders' June 2023 Russia-Ukraine peace initiative? How would you describe the outcomes of the African delegation's travel to Moscow and Kyiv? Would you agree that the initiative failed, and if so, why?

Answer 19: In June, prominent African leaders, led by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, proposed a ten-point plan to end Russia's war in Ukraine. The plan proposed a retrograde of Russian troops, removing tactical nuclear weapons from Belarusian territory, suspending the ICC arrest warrant for Putin's arrest, sending prisoners of war and children back to their countries of origin, resuming grain exports through the Black Sea unimpeded, and sanctions relief. Unfortunately, the African delegation's travel to Moscow and Kyiv was mired in controversy and logistical hurdles from the beginning and drew criticism among African publics who don't see the same African leaders trying to resolve conflicts on their own soil. The initiative succeeded in demonstrating how the political will to advocate for peace can draw international attention to the indirect effects of war on people far removed from the battlefields in Ukraine.

20. What types of U.S. engagement have proven most successful at countering Russian-backed disinformation in Africa? How would you rate the effectiveness of the State Department's Global Engagement Center? What additional or alternative tools or resources are needed?

Answer 20: The best tools against Russia's disinformation campaign in Africa are strong policies backed up with the resources necessary to execute that policy. Expanding diplomatic presence and economic investment throughout Africa is the most effective way to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to working with and supporting African partners, including governments, civil society, and the private sector, in addition to working supporting African media, fact-checking institutions, and investigative journalism to expose Russia's role in corrupt schemes and its support for oppressive regimes. The Global Engagement Center needs additional resources to ensure it is tapping into traditional and nontraditional media outlets and partnerships with credible messengers who understand and connect with the target audiences on the continent.

21. In your view, what are the potential impacts of designating the Wagner Group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization? Please describe potential impacts on U.S. efforts to counter Wagner on the continent, humanitarian assistance in relevant countries, African leaders' and population perception of the U.S., and any other relevant issues.

Answer 21: Designating Wagner as an FTO should be examined through the lens of how it could legally expose private military companies from other countries and the desired effects of an FTO designation. Such a designation could negatively affect how the United

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States and other partners engage countries where Wagner has a presence, including the Central African Republic. If the United States had planned to forge new inroads into countries like CAR and erode Russia's influence there, an FTO designation could indirectly affect a host nation receiving direct support from Wagner through training, equipment, and similar supports.

In general, the effectiveness of sanctions varies and is difficult to assess. International sanctions helped to end apartheid, a great moral victory. There have been instances where sanctions appear to be ineffective. A case can be made that 20-plus years of sanctions against Zimbabwe's leadership have been ineffective and even have helped its authoritarian leaders by giving them an excuse for their poor economies. They blame US sanctions. Sanctions without partners will likely fail, as it's very hard for the US to be effective going it alone. In general, sanctions against specific individuals (targeted) are probably a more practical approach. Kenya, a good partner, just signed a trade deal with Iran. It will be counterproductive to sanction Kenya and harm our improving commercial and political relationship with Kenya because the country trades with Iran.

