



DOUBLING DOWN: RUSSIA'S MILITARY NETWORK IN WEST AFRICA



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Executive Summary

In the first five months of 2025, three large military convoys—including Russian-made trucks, tanks, armored cars, and boats—reached Mali's capital city, Bamako.^{1, 2, 3} These deliveries came amidst a difficult period for Russian forces in Mali. The Wagner Group, whose paramilitary fighters have been present in the country since the end of 2021,⁴ had not only failed to achieve any significant battlefield successes in central and northern Mali; they had also failed to gain access to the country's lucrative gold mining sector.⁵ For most of their deployment, they appear to have been paid directly by Moscow, as revealed in The Sentry's "Mercenary Meltdown" investigation, while committing atrocities against Malian civilians.⁶ The Wagner Group announced its withdrawal from Mali in June 2025, largely handing over operations to the Kremlin-controlled Africa Corps.⁷

These new weapons deliveries suggest that the Russian government is doubling down on Mali, despite the concurrent withdrawal—and multiple failures—of the Wagner Group.⁸ Though the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) claimed the equipment was sent to support the national military,^{9, 10} most of it was intended to be used by nascent Africa Corps bases and fighters, sources in Bamako confirmed to The Sentry.^{11, 12} The composition of the convoy suggests that Moscow is adopting a more risk-averse stance and prioritizing the protection of Africa Corps troops, as opposed to Wagner's historically aggressive and forward-leaning approach. Beyond Mali, Russia is also increasing diplomatic engagement,

providing direct military support to Sahelian leaders, and creating a strategic hub that would allow it to move with ease and project power across West Africa. The Guinea Conakry port terminal, which is operated by Russian-Guinean companies Alumina Company of Guinea (ACG-Fria) and *Compagnie des Bauxites de Kindia* (Kindia Bauxite Company or CBK),¹³ facilitated the aforementioned military deliveries—the port has become Russia's gateway to the Sahel.¹⁴ Guinea, as well as Mali, is an integral part of Russia's broader ambitions for influence across West Africa. With Africa Corps troops also deployed to Niger, Sudan, and Libya,^{15, 16, 17, 18} the breadth of Russia's military engagement around the region warrants scrutiny.

When the Africa Corps first deployed in Mali at the end of 2024,¹⁹ it appeared that the group would be an iteration, or a rebranding, of the Wagner Group in this context.^{20, 21, 22} This is to some extent true. The Africa Corps has roughly the same number of troops as Wagner, and many of them are former Wagner fighters. Some core leadership remains the same. However, the hierarchical structure of the Africa Corps and its direct ties to the Russian state apparatus, as well as the Africa Corps' response to the most recent militant-imposed fuel blockade, reveal fundamental differences in how the force operates compared to Wagner. In other words, the change is not just cosmetic. Instead of using military inroads to gain mining concessions, as Wagner tried to do in Mali and successfully did in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Africa Corps is now first using Russian and Guinean businesses for its military purposes. Two subsidiaries



All three Africa Corps deliveries were transported from the Autonomous Port of Conakry by land through Guinea and into Mali. Once in Bamako, the deliveries diverged: some vehicles took a route south to Bougouni and others traveled northwest to Gao. *The Sentry*.

of the Russian company United Company Rusal (UC Rusal) are supporting Moscow's war effort, signaling that Russian businesses are facilitators of Africa Corps operations in West Africa.

As Russia doubles down on—and potentially expands—its military presence in the Sahel, Malian civilians continue to pay the price. Recent reports confirm increasing incidents of Africa Corps-perpetrated rape, torture, beheadings, mutilation, and summary executions, especially across northern Mali and the border with Mauritania.^{23, 24, 25, 26, 27} In response, sanctioning authorities in the United States (US), the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia should sanction those companies that support the Russian

war effort in the Sahel and monitor countries and other companies that could be facilitating Russia's advances in the region.

The Convoy*

The January 2025 equipment delivery was the first large-scale convoy to arrive in Mali since the Wagner Group signed a contract with the Malian government in 2021. Its size and composition, as well as the subsequent deliveries in March and May 2025, suggest that Moscow continues to view Mali as a key strategic location, despite the Wagner Group subsequently announcing its formal withdrawal from the country in June 2025.

*Reports by The Sentry are based on interviews, documentary research, and, where relevant, financial forensic analysis. In some cases, sources speak to The Sentry on the condition that their names not be revealed, out of concern for their safety or other potential retaliatory action. The Sentry establishes the authoritativeness and credibility of information derived from those interviews through independent sources, such as expert commentary, financial data, original documentation, and press reports. The Sentry endeavors to contact the persons and entities discussed in its reports and afford them an opportunity to comment and provide further information.

Convoy Composition

The makeup of the January 2025 convoy was varied. It contained nearly 50 logistics, supplies, and transportation vehicles, including a Linza armored ambulance, and approximately 60 combat armored vehicles.^{28, 29, 30} These combat vehicles—such as BTRs,³¹ VPK-Urals,³² Tigrs,³³ and tracked vehicles, including what appears to be two tank platoons³⁴ and two BMP platoons—are primarily designed for patrol and mobile warfare.^{35, 36} While these tracked vehicles are unfit for mobile combat missions in most Sahelian terrain, they have been used at bases where Africa Corps troops have slowly been deployed, such as Gao in northern Mali.³⁷ Thus, they serve the purpose of protecting the base, rather than engaging in combat missions. Additionally, the convoy included two anti-aircraft autocannons,³⁸ two motorboats,^{39, 40} and three towed artillery pieces.^{41, 42} Military Industrial Company LCC (VPK), which produces the VPK-Ural, the Tigr, and several Russian BTRs, is owned by Oleg Deripaska,^{43, 44} together with its subsidiary company JSC Arzamas Machine-Building Plant,^{45, 46} and is sanctioned in the US, the UK, and the EU.⁴⁷ Military Industrial Company LCC did not reply to The Sentry's request for comment.

The January convoy first arrived at the main military base in Bamako,⁴⁸ but delivery was then bifurcated: some equipment was shipped to Gao, where a FAMA and Russian contingent conducts operations in the north of the country,^{49, 50, 51} and some was shipped to Banimonotié, a southwestern FAMA base inaugurated by Defense Minister Sadio Camara on January 17, 2025, the day before the delivery.⁵²

One FAMA source in Bamako told The Sentry that some Russian troops were awaiting the delivery, which arrived in Banimonotié on January 18.⁵³ This new base, located approximately 170 kilometers (km) from Bamako in the

Sikasso Region's Bougoni circle, hosts FAMA's 82nd Armored Regiment.⁵⁴ Significantly, the base is only 100 km from the Yanfolila gold mine, owned by Hummingbird Resources, which was recently acquired by Burkinabè banking celebrity Idrissa Nassa.^{55, 56, 57} A FAMA source told The Sentry that Russia wants Africa Corps fighters to sit closer to Yanfolila—reflecting a common Russian tactic to take territory in close proximity to natural resources—and that this is why they sent the military equipment there.⁵⁸ Another military source in Mopti listed Africa Corps bases across the country, saying that most equipment from the three different materiel deliveries had gone to “Sokoro, Bafo, Nampala, Bandiagara, Sofara, Boni and Timbuctu.”⁵⁹ This reveals another pattern: most of the military equipment went to new Africa Corps recruits rather than former Wagner fighters, who are primarily located at northern bases.⁶⁰ More equipment was then sent to a new Africa Corps base in Diema, western Mali, some three hours from the Mauritanian border.⁶² While this may be due to the fact that the former Wagner troops already have some equipment, it does not explain why tracked trucks, which serve to protect bases, would only be delivered to the new recruits. It appears that the GRU is providing more protection for the troops it recruited directly, rather than those it inherited from the Wagner Group.

The number of vehicles, both military and non-military, in the first convoy is consistent with the size of a Battalion Tactical Group (BTG),⁶³ which in the Donbas comprises 600–800 soldiers.^{64, 65} This temporary, reinforced military unit includes a core battalion of either a tank or a motorized infantry unit and attached support units, such as artillery, engineers, and air defense.

The March 2025 delivery also contained missiles and several military and civilian vehicles,^{66, 67, 68} but the information available on this delivery is significantly

less than on the January and May deliveries. In the May delivery, The Sentry identified numerous 152 mm artillery guns, a BTR-80 armored troop carrier equipped with radio-jamming equipment,⁶⁹ and Spartak armored vehicles, as well as other armored carriers.⁷⁰ The shipment also included a Sukhoi SU-24—a Soviet tactical bomber engineered for supersonic speed and all-weather combat deployment. Our source in Bamako noted that there was a strong need for such an aircraft, especially in the north,⁷¹ where Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) rebels operate, and where Wagner and the FAMA suffered a disastrous defeat in 2024, mostly due to a lack of airpower.^{72,73} Soon after delivery, a Sukhoi SU-24 crashed in the Niger river.⁷⁴

Both the makeup of the convoys and military sources in Bamako suggest not only that the Africa Corps—not the FAMA—is likely the intended beneficiary of these deliveries,^{75,76} but also that Africa Corps troops may be less expeditionary than their predecessors. Most of the equipment is not suitable for kinetic operations in desert terrain; rather, it is intended to protect bases, especially those where Africa Corps troops are deployed, from armed groups operating in the region. Furthermore, a senior European military official who was previously posted to the region clarified that this equipment is relatively new and not the kind that foreign forces would donate to local armed forces in Sahelian countries.⁷⁷ This suggests that FAMA and Sahel States Alliance (AES) troops are not the intended recipients of these deliveries. Neither the Malian Ministry of Defense nor the Russian Ministry of Defense replied to The Sentry's request for comment.

Delivery

To facilitate the first delivery, at least two Russian ships—both of which had previously been sanctioned by the US—docked in the Guinean port city of Conakry between



TOP: The main port building of the Rusal subsidiary CBK at the Russian-operated port terminal in Conakry. *The Sentry*.

BOTTOM: Trucks from the March 2025 delivery of Africa Corps supplies on their way to Bamako. *Malian National Television (Okice de Radio et Télévision du Mali - ORTM)*.

shows that both vessels departed from Murmansk, a northern Russian port, in early December,⁸⁷ and the length of the route from Murmansk to Conakry indicates that the equipment was shipped directly from Russia to Guinea. The Murmansk Port Authority did not reply to The Sentry's request for comment. Notably, the ships departed Murmansk very soon after Assad's collapse (on December 14th and December 21st, 2024),⁸⁸ making it unlikely that Russia anticipated such a sudden logistical shift when agreeing to send the equipment to West Africa, at least for the initial delivery. Preparing the ground for the Africa Corps in Mali was Moscow's intention all along.

Just a few weeks before the first Russian equipment convoy arrived in Conakry, the Russian government had used the port for another large delivery. On December 27, 2024, a ship docked at Conakry carrying several thousand metric tons of Russian wheat bound for Mali, according to Colonel-Major Mamadou Keita, Mali's Ambassador to Guinea.⁸⁹ A port employee confirmed to The Sentry that this delivery served to "test" the port, as the planned deliveries of military equipment were significantly more costly and sensitive.⁹⁰ Russia wanted to make sure that the military equipment delivery would be safe, not just to dock at Conakry, but also to make its way across Guinea and into Mali without any incidents.⁹¹ This emerging logistics apparatus, including port infrastructure and controlled overland routes, expands Russia's access to the region and enables greater operational flexibility.

Though there are few details concerning the March 2025 delivery, sources in Kati and the Malian national news channel (ORTM) confirm that this materiel also arrived in Mali via Conakry.⁹² One source within the Malian Defense Ministry confirmed that Russia had sent light equipment to Mali in trucks in March 2025, but he was unable to confirm which port this materiel departed from, nor which ships had transported it.^{93, 94} ORTM reported that the materiel was delivered to support FAMA and met with enthusiasm by Bamako residents given ongoing terror threats in the capital and daily attacks elsewhere in the country, but the coverage omitted who had sent it.⁹⁵ This suggests that the Malian Directorate of Information and Public Relations of the Armed Forces may have intended to take credit for the delivery and use it as propaganda with the population.

Between May 25 and May 28, 2025, two additional Russian cargo ships, both of which are subject to international sanctions,^{96, 97} were reportedly once again docked in the

Guinean capital.^{98,99} These ro-ro ships, the *Baltic Leader* and the *Patria*, are part of Russia's "shadow fleet" and have been used to discreetly transport weapons to the Kremlin's various partners.¹⁰⁰ The *Baltic Leader* specifically was part of the so-called "Syrian Express"—the name given to Russian ships that provide naval links between Syria and Russia.¹⁰¹ While these ships often operate as part of Russia's shadow fleet and obscure their links to Russia, the *Adler*, *Siyanie Severa*, *Patria*, and *Baltic Leader* did not fly the flag of another country for deliveries to Conakry. Instead, they travelled openly as Russian ships, making this a "non-shadow" delivery¹⁰² and reflecting Guinea's largely positive diplomatic relations with Moscow. In other words, the government in Conakry was aware of these military deliveries and welcomed them. Neither the Guinean government nor the Malian embassy in Conakry replied to The Sentry's request for comment. The four companies that own the ships that carried out the deliveries did not reply to The Sentry's request for comment. *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) received testimonies that confirmed the sighting of the convoy on Guinea's National Road 1, on its way to Mali, on May 28. The port of Conakry and Bamako are nearly 1,000 km apart, a roughly 16-hour journey. This timeline corroborates other data points that back up the delivery reaching Bamako on May 31.^{103, 104}

As Conakry enables Russian expansion in the Sahel, Russia looks for additional allies

Given the multiple military equipment deliveries throughout 2025, Conakry appears to be the new Russian hub for maritime delivery to West Africa, confirming Guinea's status as an enabler of Russia's expansionist ambitions in Mali and the Sahel more broadly.^{105, 106} Various sources, such as a maritime expert and RFI,



The Conakry port terminal was used by Russian ships to carry out the January, March, and May 2025 military deliveries. Leaving the port, the railway used by UC Rusal subsidiaries to transport bauxite and aluminum is clearly visible. The map inset shows a port building owned by CBK, a UC Rusal subsidiary. CBK organizes the logistics for the Russian company-operated port terminal. *Google Earth, 20 January 2025.*

noted that Senegal would be a more suitable location for deliveries to Mali,^{107, 108} especially as it has better port infrastructure. Nonetheless, Russia appears to have prioritized Conakry for two key reasons: favorable diplomatic relations with Guinea's military junta and ties to UC Rusal,^{109, 110} which operates the freight, railway, and logistics apparatus out of the port.¹¹¹ Indeed, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov had prepared the ground for these deliveries in June 2024, when he visited Conakry and Guinea's President Mamady Doumbouya.^{112, 113} The Russian ambassador to Guinea, Alexey V. Popov, has also officially recognized the Guinean military leadership.¹¹⁴ One source at the port told The Sentry that Russia was already considering using the railway terminal in Conakry for military equipment deliveries in 2024: "They knew it would be harder to make friends with the other

coastal states, plus transport into their primary allies in Mali is harder from elsewhere. Conakry is a certainty for Russia. [The Russians] know that here they would not be denied access, and they could control the railway terminal."¹¹⁵

Notably, the ships docked at the port terminal in Conakry, which Russian giant UC Rusal uses for mineral shipments in and out of Guinea through its two large subsidiaries, CBK and ACG-Fria. CBK is the largest UC Rusal raw materials asset, accounting for a quarter of its mineral output.^{116, 117, 118} ACG-Fria has a mineral complex named Friguia (a contraction of Fria, the city the complex is located in, and Guinée), which includes a bauxite mine and a refinery.^{119, 120, 121} CBK is fully controlled at the corporate level by UC Rusal: in its listing prospectus,

UC Rusal states that CBK, the operator of the Kindia bauxite mine, is wholly owned by the group.¹²² The port and all its terminals are managed by Conakry Port S.A., a Guinean company which acts as a subsidiary of the Albayrak Group, a multinational Turkish conglomerate. In 2018, the Albayrak Group signed a lease with the *Port Autonome de Conakry* (The Autonomous Port of Conakry) for a concession for the port's terminals.^{123, 124, 125} Neither Albayrak Group nor the Autonomous Port of Conakry replied to The Sentry's request for comment.¹²⁶

As a result, UC Rusal manages the refinery, the bauxite mine, and a large logistics apparatus, which transported the Russian military convoys. One Guinean worker at the port told The Sentry that “to make these deliveries work here, you need a berth, either a ro-ro ramp or a mobile heavy-lift crane, a secure yard, and a clear road corridor out of the port. The railway is there for bauxite, not for weapons. This is what these companies can provide to those making military deliveries.”¹²⁷ Friguia is based in Fria, a city in Lower Guinea built from scratch to host a large bauxite mine in the 1950s.¹²⁸ The history of UC Rusal and Fria is one marred with controversy, as Friguia workers have staged multiple strikes since 2007 to ask UC Rusal for better working conditions.^{129, 130} Now, Russia is using this same company's railway terminal to transport weapons and military equipment from its Conakry port onto Guinea's national highway, and subsequently into Mali for its Africa Corps fighters. UC Rusal replied to The Sentry's request for comment by saying that “UC Rusal and the companies owned by UC Rusal operate in the Republic of Guinea in full compliance with [...] applicable laws or regulations.”¹³¹

While these subsequent, highly sensitive deliveries to Guinea's autonomous port attest to the country's close ties with Moscow, other West African countries are also rapidly strengthening their ties with the Russian

government, demonstrating the country's expanding influence in the region. For example, Niger has been wooed by Russian envoys, particularly following the July 2023 coup d'état and the ascent of the anti-French military junta.^{132, 133} On April 12th, 2024, 100 Africa Corps troops officially landed in Niger's capital city of Niamey, delivering military equipment and agreeing to install an air defense system.^{134, 135} In addition, Russian planes routinely landed at Agadez airport throughout 2025.^{136, 137}

Togo and Equatorial Guinea have also strengthened their ties with Russia. On July 22, 2025, the Russian government approved a draft law to ratify a military cooperation agreement with Togo.¹³⁸ The agreement includes provisions for joint military training exercises and emergency medical assistance.¹³⁹ As for Equatorial Guinea, Russia sent up to 200 Africa Corps troops to protect the presidency in the fall of 2024 and to train elite guards in the country's two main cities: the capital, Malabo, and Bata.¹⁴⁰ Africa Corps chief Averyanov met with Equatorial Guinea President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo to launch joint personnel training and to strengthen information security and critical infrastructure.¹⁴¹

Both Togo and Equatorial Guinea are important to Moscow, as they possess large ports that can facilitate further deliveries and exports. Equatorial Guinea is close to Cameroon, an important country for Russia's logistics into CAR. According to Vladimir Gruzdev, chairman of the Board of the Association of Lawyers of Russia, Togo is a strategically positioned partner, as “the busiest seaport in the West African region is located on its territory.”¹⁴² Togo is also a notable gold exporter, reportedly serving as a transit destination for gold mined in neighboring countries.¹⁴³ In addition, the expansion of Russian influence in West Africa provides new opportunities and markets for Russia's weapons

industry, which has declined in the years leading up to, and since, the invasion of Ukraine.¹⁴⁴ The depth of these military deployments is limited,¹⁴⁵ as only a few hundred “elite troops” have been sent to Equatorial Guinea thus far.^{146, 147} However, it is the extent of the Russian military presence on the African continent that is noteworthy. Coupled with the deployment of the Africa Corps to Sudan and Libya,¹⁴⁸ it appears that Russia is slowly encircling western Africa with its Africa Corps.

The Africa Corps fundamentally changes Russian strategy in Mali

Several reports have claimed that the change from the Wagner Group to the Africa Corps is mostly cosmetic and would not represent a significant shift in the way Russian troops operate in Africa.^{149, 150} Indeed, in Mali the Africa Corps has roughly the same number of fighters as Wagner—at least 1,500 people—and many are former Wagner Group members.^{151, 152, 153} For Malian civilians, there appears to be no difference between the Wagner Group and the Africa Corps. A long list of victims’ names compiled by The Sentry in Goundam, Léré, Méma, Taoudeni, Gao and Timbuktu throughout the second half of 2025 shows that “Africa Corps” and “Wagner” are used interchangeably by sources and victims’ family members.¹⁵⁴ Leadership in Mali remains in the hands of Andrey Ivanov and Ivan Maslov, both of whom were in charge of Wagner troops in Mali previously.

However, changes in their specific roles—as well as in the Africa Corps’ overall strategy—are evident, reflecting marked differences in Russia’s new approach to the Sahel. Specifically, the arrival of the Africa Corps, in addition to the several military convoys in 2025, means that Russian troops in the Sahel are now much more strongly backed by—and tied to—the Russian

state in general. The Wagner Group never received this level of support in the form of state-supplied military equipment. While Wagner was able to preserve a certain degree of autonomy, the Africa Corps is tightly connected to the Russian state apparatus. This centralization of power can initially appear beneficial to the Kremlin, as relatively rogue actors such as Wagner can now be tightly controlled. At the same time, though, it can be dysfunctional in the way the Africa Corps operates on Sahelian terrain: a deeply rooted culture of centralized authority—shaped by centuries of autocratic governance—continues to shape Russian military organization. The result is a highly vertical command system that can slow the transmission of decisions and orders to forces engaged in combat.¹⁵⁵

Africa Corps’ Leadership Structure

After the Wagner Group announced its withdrawal from Mali, many Wagner fighters signed contracts with the Africa Corps and decided to either stay in Mali or return to it after a hiatus.^{156, 157, 158} Despite that structure remaining clandestine, The Sentry’s investigation has uncovered changes in the leadership structure of the Africa Corps.¹⁵⁹ Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, the Russian deputy defense minister who traveled to several African countries in August and September 2023, now oversees the direct management of the new structure from Moscow.¹⁶⁰ From a military point of view, Major General Andrey Averyanov—also based in Moscow, though he often travels to the African continent^{161, 162, 163, 164}—oversees Africa Corps operations.¹⁶⁵ Up until at least 2022, he was also at the helm of Unit 29155,^{166, 167, 168, 169} one of the most notorious offices of Russia’s GRU military intelligence service, accused of covertly attacking Western interests for years, including through sabotage and assassination attempts.^{170, 171} In December 2024, the EU sanctioned Averyanov,¹⁷² alleging that he oversees Africa Corps

operations.¹⁷³ The UK had sanctioned him the month before,¹⁷⁴ and Canada followed suit in March 2025.¹⁷⁵ A March 2026 investigation showed that the “Africa Corps building” in Moscow, where the administrative structure of the organization is most likely located, sits next to the Central Scientific Research Institute of Chemistry and Mechanics,¹⁷⁶ a classified Russian military research institute that works on military chemistry, explosives, and cyber operations. The institute operates under the umbrella of the Russian Ministry of Defense and has been linked to activities conducted on behalf of the GRU.¹⁷⁷ Not only are the Africa Corps and the GRU under the command of the same men, but also the buildings of a GRU office that works on military research are close to the Africa Corps building.^{178, 179}

Both Yevkurov and Averyanov are in direct contact with Malian President Assimi Goïta, leader of the military junta that has ruled Mali since 2021.¹⁸⁰ According to two sources, the new contract between the GRU and the Malian government was signed by Modibo Koné, chief of the Malian National Security Agency (ANSE)^{181, 182} who sits under the direct authority of President Goïta. In 2024, Koné signed another extremely sensitive contract, with the Turkish company Baykar, for the acquisition of Turkish drones.^{183, 184} While the ANSE was in charge of Wagner payments in 2022, as The Sentry uncovered in 2025,¹⁸⁵ Koné’s relationship with Goïta has evolved: a source in Niamey and one in Bamako told The Sentry that Koné informed the President that a coup was being plotted in Kati back in August 2025.^{186, 187} While it was not possible to further corroborate such claims, several sources told The Sentry that Koné and Goïta have weekly meetings and that Koné is no longer part of Defense Minister Camara’s inner circle.^{188, 189, 190, 191, 192} Since the coup attempt, Goïta appears to have entrusted Koné with managing Mali’s Russian partnership. Neither

Modibo Koné nor President Assimi Goïta replied to The Sentry’s request for comment.

In July 2023, Camara was sanctioned by the US for being the Wagner Group’s main point of contact in Mali, exemplifying his close connection to Wagner leadership.¹⁹³ In contrast, President Goïta and ANSE chief Koné now manage the relationship with the Africa Corps as Mali’s primary security partner. This has significant implications for transparency and oversight. During the first year of the Wagner era, Goïta managed diplomatic relations with Russian officials, and Koné supervised payments to Wagner. Meanwhile, Camara managed the relationship between Malian and Wagner troops.¹⁹⁴ Now, Goïta manages diplomatic relations with Russian envoys and the Africa Corps, leaving no room for the chief of the Malian armed forces to influence Africa Corps’ operations.^{195, 196, 197} One FAMA official clarified that the removal of Camara from this decision-making process further complicates the situation for the Malian military, who now have even less say in how they are treated by Russian troops.¹⁹⁸ The recent delisting of Camara—and two other high-ranking officials—by US authorities comes at the same moment as his marginalization from decision-making regarding Russian partners.¹⁹⁹ Removing sanctions on figures who have been sidelined by Russia-tied leadership in Mali risks sending an unintended signal that the US has deprioritized accountability for Russian conduct in Mali at precisely the moment that such conduct is becoming more entrenched and less subject to Malian military oversight.

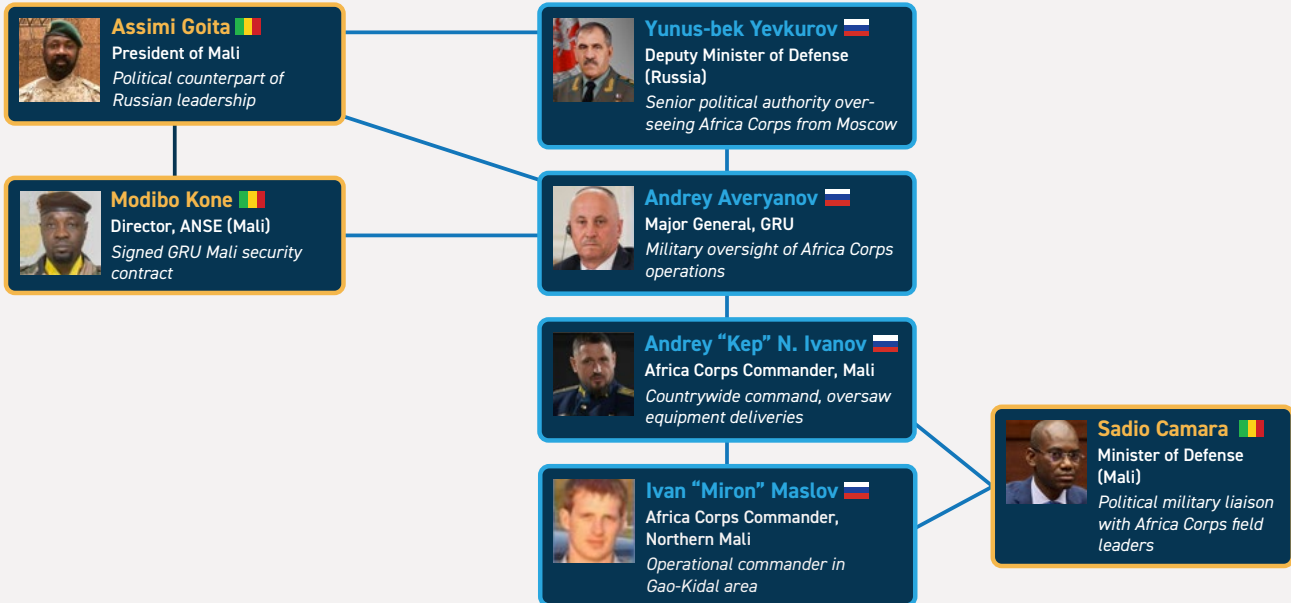
Africa Corps operations in Mali are overseen by two men—Andrey “Kep” Nikolaevich Ivanov and Ivan “Miron” Alexandrovich Maslov—who have been either based in or traveling to Mali for a long time and have the ear of Camara.^{200, 201, 202, 203} According to Jeune Afrique, larger

Africa Corps Structure

Levels of command of the new Africa Corps structure.



THE SENTRY



Africa Corps operations on the continent are managed by Konstantin Yurievich Mirzayants, though The Sentry could not independently verify this claim.²⁰⁴ During the Wagner era in Mali, Wagner founders Yevgeny Prigozhin and Dimitry Utkin put Ivan Maslov in charge of the whole operation, from both a diplomatic and a military standpoint. It was Maslov who organized the deployment of Wagner to Mali back in 2021 and coordinated with Malian authorities. Because of his role in organizing the deployment of the mercenary group, the US, the UK, the EU, and Canada designated Maslov in 2023.²⁰⁵ Two sources told The Sentry that Ivan Maslov is now in charge of Africa Corps military operations in the north of the country, where most former-Wagner fighters are based.^{206, 207, 208, 209}

While Ivan Maslov mostly operates in the north, Andrey Ivanov—who directly oversaw the military equipment

deliveries—now holds command of Africa Corps troops in the whole of Mali, as reported by a high-ranking FAMA official in Mopti.²¹⁰ Ivanov travels between bases in the north of the country and often visits the military base in Bamako.²¹¹ In December 2024, discussions in the Russian media about the restructuring of private military company operations referred to Ivanov as the Wagner “curator” in Mali.^{212, 213, 214, 215} A video of Ivanov wishing a happy new year to troops, surrounded by Russian fighters in what could be outside of Bamako, posted on X in February 2025, corroborates this.^{216, 217} Ivanov oversaw negotiating access to Malian gold mines when Wagner first landed in Mali in late 2021.^{218, 219} Although he was unsuccessful at the time, as clarified in The Sentry’s “Mercenary Meltdown” report, the fact that he is now in charge of the Africa Corps in Mali suggests that Yevkurov and Averyanov needed someone with ties to the gold sector to be in charge of operations and



Wagner and Africa Corps forces with Andrey "Kep" Ivanov in the center of the group, wearing black, demonstrating an early integration of Wagner and Africa Corps forces under Ivanov. Image posted in February 2025. X, @Wagner_Mali.

relations with Malian leadership. The fact that Malian military sources refer to him as the Africa Corps chief,^{220, 221} and the fact that he is more present in Bamako than Ivan Maslov, provide an indication of Africa Corps leadership's priorities. At the same time, Maslov's confinement to the north may indicate an effort by the GRU to keep a powerful former Wagner cadre away from decision-making in Bamako. Much like Maslov, Ivanov was sanctioned by the US in May 2023.²²²

Perhaps reflecting that Mali is one of the main Russian combat theatres, after Ukraine, Ivanov has been promoted and provided a state contract. He went from Wagner commander in Mali to a GRU official. His clout in Mali has resulted in Russian leadership enlisting his help with the recruitment of new Russian fighters, a FAMA official in Mopti told The Sentry.²²³ The All Eyes on Wagner (AEOW) collective reports that Ivanov's

photo was used in recruitment ads for the Istra Legion, which enlists fighters for overseas missions in Ukraine and Africa.^{224, 225} Further reporting indicates that the Africa Corps offers one-off bonus payments of up to 2.1 million rubles (\$26,500) for contracting with the GRU, as well as plots of land and additional benefits upon deployment.²²⁶ Recruitment propaganda draws largely from Wagner folklore, indicating that the Wagner mythos still resonates even as Russia's operations have evolved.^{227, 228, 229, 230} It is a whole other story for Africans recruited to fight in Ukraine, as a recent INPACT/AEOW investigation indicates: since 2023, Russia has carried out a recruitment campaign all across the African continent to fuel its war effort in Ukraine. While many of the African troops who have died in combat are Egyptians, Cameroonians, and Ghanaians, 15 Malians are also reported to have died in Ukraine.²³¹

For the “Mercenary Meltdown” report, The Sentry interviewed several former Dan Na Ambassagou fighters who had been co-opted or coerced into Wagner ranks in central Mali. They knew that they would be joining a Russian military organization, and in some cases, they reported not really having a choice, as the Russians passed by their village or store often, and they feared retaliatory measures should they choose not to join.²³² In 2026, one FAMA source reported that Moscow and Bamako had put in place an exchange program, which involved recruiting young Malian fighters to be trained in Russia.²³³ As for the Malians who lost their lives in Ukraine, this same source reports that Wagner carried out the recruitment of some of them, especially in 2024. “Most of those who left knew what they were doing [...] Most of those who left had no military training [...] Wagner commanders told them—we’ll train you there. The training takes place in Russia. [...] There are Malians who died in a fight that has nothing to do with Mali. [...] But it’s a gamble, you understand. For a young man with no prospects here, it’s a gamble.”²³⁴

Operational Strategy

Although some of the senior leadership carried over from the Wagner Group to the Africa Corps, the day-to-day operations have changed, resulting in important consequences on the ground. First, new recruits have primarily been based in Bamako, as well as in Mopti and Ségou,²³⁵ while former Wagner fighters—now deployed under the Africa Corps—have been dispatched to the north. Most recently, these soldiers were sent to the artisanal gold mine N’Takaha to oversee land operations,²³⁶ during which the FAMA bombed some of the sites to chase away workers.^{237, 238} This means the soldiers that Africa Corps leadership trusts with the most urgent task—managing the north of the country—are former Wagner mercenaries. Meanwhile, the recruits in the center and south rarely leave their bases.^{239, 240, 241}



While former Wagner fighters have largely remained in northern Mali, the new leadership structure under Africa Corps has implemented a more risk-averse model that emphasizes training within the confines of bases. Wagner training, April 2025. X, @Wagner_Mali.

In addition, there is a delay between when the Africa Corps receives information about an attack and when they react, due to the group’s new hierarchical structure and their mandate to guard the bases. Instead of leaving the bases as soon as they hear about movement from *Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen* (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, or JNIM), an al-Qaeda offshoot in the Sahel, Africa Corps fighters now need a “green light” from Ivanov directly, not just from their leader at the base, according to a FAMA official interviewed by The Sentry.²⁴² The same source told The Sentry that some former Wagner fighters are frustrated by the lack of swift action, whereas a higher-ranking FAMA official mentioned that this is a “welcome development”, as it puts in place a structure, which promises to be more accountable than Wagner’s adventurism of the past.²⁴³ This does not mean, however, that the relationship between Sahelian governments and the Africa Corps is not transactional: the Africa Corps’ relatively slow response time—over two hours—to the Islamic State’s attack on Diori Hamani Airport and Airbase 101 in Niamey in January 2026 indicates that, despite being based at base 101, Africa Corps leadership

needed to ensure they could obtain something in return from their Nigerien partners for their intervention.²⁴⁴

The Africa Corps' response to the crisis caused by the JNIM-imposed blockade on Bamako also sheds light on Russia's new strategy in the Sahel.²⁴⁵ While JNIM blocked the country's main roads, effectively suffocating Bamako and Mopti, Africa Corps fighters remained in their bases.²⁴⁶ Initially, this was due to troops not receiving the necessary approvals to act at the beginning of the blockade. It then became apparent that the problem was a lack of fuel for aerial operations,²⁴⁷ which would have provided them with the necessary intelligence to determine the number of JNIM fighters in the area. As time went by, JNIM fighters stopped moving around on motorcycles with light equipment; they realized they could use pickups with more stable and lethal equipment, enabling them to strike military bases faster and more consistently.²⁴⁸ This development made it difficult for both the Africa Corps and the FAMA to intervene without aerial support. Despite the fuel crisis, Africa Corps operations continued in the north: since their deployment in June 2025, the Africa Corps has been conducting strikes, performing summary executions, and raiding towns in the north,^{249, 250} even as the fuel blockade was choking the south.^{251, 252}

Initially, in March 2025, as reported by *Le Monde*, the Africa Corps was planning to build "about thirty Russian military posts across the country."²⁵³ Some vehicles, driven by Vassiya paratroopers, arrived in Kidal in July 2025 and were greeted by FAMA soldiers at the base.^{254, 255} In addition, sources in Aguelhoc, in the north of the country, said that both FAMA and the Africa Corps is renovating some bases and building forward operating bases in the north, in the Kidal and Tessalit regions, as well as in Aguelhoc.²⁵⁶

Since then, things have changed. The JNIM-imposed blockade has slowed the construction of these "forward operating bases", many of which were being built around Tessalit, Kidal, and Aguelhoc,^{257, 258} just off the National Road 19 and not far from several gold mining areas such as In Darset, Inghouzar, and Egharghar. It appears that the leaders of the Africa Corps—and possibly Andrey Ivanov directly—have scaled back their ambitions. According to one FAMA commander in Bamako, "we are now talking about fewer than ten of these bases [...] all of which will be guarded with tracked trucks".²⁵⁹

Wagner's adventurism in Mali, which *The Sentry* described in "Mercenary Meltdown," appears to be over. Command and control have become more hierarchical. One FAMA source told *The Sentry* that Defense Minister Camara is directly "implicated" in Africa Corps operations, at least when coordinated attacks are developed.²⁶⁰ Instead of coordinating a response to the blockade in a specific region by deploying the Africa Corps and FAMA to confront JNIM on a highway, Africa Corps commanders must first obtain permission from Ivanov.²⁶¹ Ivanov must then go through Camara, though one source in Mopti told *The Sentry* that the Camara sign-off is a mere formality, and that the objective is to "inform" Malian leadership, rather than get their approval.²⁶² One FAMA official mentioned the JNIM attack near Anefif on November 9, 2025, where a FAMA/Africa Corps convoy was shattered by an improvised explosive device (IED): "Maslov asked to carry out a robust operation in the area [to respond to the attack],²⁶³ and Camara also wanted to see more troops leaving the bases to sweep the area, but Ivanov found it too risky, and the Africa Corps troops stayed put in the end."²⁶⁴

Yevkurov and Averyanov also discuss larger strategic elements with junta chief Goïta, such as how many troops will be in Mali, what equipment Russia will send,²⁶⁵ and



Russian and Malian leaders met in Bamako in November 2025 to discuss security cooperation. Individuals pictured, left to right, are Lieutenant General Andrey Averyanov, Africa Corps military head; Igor Gromyko, Russian Ambassador to Mali; and Deputy Minister of Defense General Yunus Bek-Yevkurov. Assimi Goita—Malian president and military junta leader, seated far right—received the guests at the Kolouba Palace in Bamako. *Afrinz*.

who are the main targets for Africa Corps forces in Mali. Despite an easing of the blockade at the end of October 2025,²⁶⁶ the Malian junta had a meeting with their Russian partners in November, possibly to make sure that there would be some form of Russian support should JNIM implement the blockade again. Yevkurov and Averyanov met with President Goïta at the Koulouba Palace, with Russian media reporting that the visit's purpose was to discuss opportunities to strengthen security cooperation between the two countries “in light of the deteriorating situation in recent months”.²⁶⁷ It appears evident that the Africa Corps is a much more cautious actor than its paramilitary predecessor, that the Kremlin wants to reinforce hierarchical control on its men in West Africa, and that Russian interest lies primarily in protecting troops stationed in the north of the country.

In this context, American and European efforts to establish better relations with the Malian and Nigerien juntas through commercial diplomacy²⁶⁸ or a “new approach” to the Sahel²⁶⁹ appear to only offer the AES governments a negotiating tool with Moscow and its Africa Corps, as they give Mali's President Goïta and Niger's General Abdourahamane Tiani some leverage with the Kremlin. At the same time, such rapprochement may facilitate Africa Corps arms procurement and atrocities in Mali: on February 27, 2026, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) removed Defense Minister Camara, along with senior military officials Alou Boi Diarra and Adama Bagayoko, from the sanctions list.²⁷⁰ All three had been sanctioned for their links to the Wagner Group. The delisting reflects a “diplomatic sweetener” rather than a

true change in conduct, given that these three powerful individuals facilitated Wagner's entry into Mali and have not taken any action regarding accountability for both Wagner's and the Africa Corps' conduct towards Malian civilians and armed forces. It also sets a troubling precedent: the delisting signals to other junta-linked actors that Wagner ties can be overlooked if geopolitical winds shift.

Conclusion

Despite Wagner's blatant military failures, the Russian government is doubling down on Mali and West Africa, both by seeking to establish a new maritime delivery hub for its operations in the region and by deploying the Africa Corps to Mali and elsewhere. The substantial military equipment deliveries in the first half of 2025—an escalation of firepower for Russian troops in Mali—demonstrate Russia's sustained investment in the country. This investment is also illustrated by the use of Russian businesses, such as CBK and ACG-Fria, which act as enablers for Russia's military presence in the region. However, the utility of this materiel, which is more suitable for protecting bases than for carrying out kinetic operations in desert terrain, suggests that Wagner's decentralized military operations in Mali are a thing of the past.

This change is reflected in the deployment of the Africa Corps itself. While its leadership and composition echo Wagner's, key differences are already visible. The Africa Corps has proven to be more focused on self-preservation than kinetic engagement, likely an effort to prevent a recurrence of the heavy personnel losses Russian forces have sustained in the past. Unlike Wagner, the Africa Corps is under the tight control of the Russian government, which has different priorities for the African continent. These priorities focus more

on deepening diplomatic relations and expanding business opportunities, including the extraction of natural resources, as can be seen in current business discussions in Bamako. Notably, these changes have not translated to a moderation of conduct toward the Malian population, as human rights abuses have continued unabated. Rather, Wagner failed to achieve the Russian government's goals in the Central Sahel, and the Africa Corps deployment is Russia's attempt to correct the situation. As put by a Russian analyst interviewed by The Sentry: "Putin is looking at Wagner's successes and failures in Africa and telling the new recruits, that was fun, now let's get to work."²⁷¹

Recommendations

The US, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and other likeminded jurisdictions

Ensure alignment on sanctions. For the targets mentioned in this report, sanctioning authorities have applied sanctions in a patchwork and piecemeal fashion. Sanctions are most effective when implemented multilaterally. The US, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and other likeminded jurisdictions should therefore seek to align and harmonize their designations on all individuals, ships, and corporate entities mentioned in this report.

Sanction individuals. The UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and other likeminded jurisdictions should impose sanctions on Malian Defense Minister Sadio Camara and ANSE chief Modibo Koné for their role in facilitating and expanding the activities of the Africa Corps/Wagner in Mali. The US delisting of Camara and senior military officials Alou Boi Diarra and Adama Bagayoko sets a troubling precedent—one that other jurisdictions should resist following.

Sanction shipping vehicles. While many jurisdictions have acted to counter Russia's shadow fleet, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and other likeminded jurisdictions should explicitly designate the ships mentioned in this report for their role in moving weapons and vehicles that have gone into the hands of the Africa Corps. These are the Adler (IMO 9179854), Siyanie Severa (IMO 9250385), Baltic Leader (IMO 9220639), and Patria (IMO 9159921).

Sanction corporate entities. This report highlights the role of Russia-linked corporations in facilitating the entry of weapons and vehicles into Guinea, destined for use by the Africa Corps in Mali and elsewhere. The US, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and other likeminded jurisdictions should designate ACG-Fria and CBK, both UC Rusal subsidiaries operating the Conakry port terminal where Russian deliveries have been made.

Align sanctions on military companies. There should also be alignment between these sanctioning authorities on the designation of LCC Military Industrial Company (VPK), which builds some of the vehicles destined for the Africa Corps.

Increase enforcement. These sanctioning authorities should ensure existing sanctions are rigorously enforced and violations are investigated in full. This should include cooperating with civil society actors that can provide evidence of sanctions violations.

United Nations (UN)

Address and condemn. The UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries should put this report on the agenda for its next session, following which it should issue a statement condemning the movement of arms and vehicles into West Africa via Conakry. The Working Group should engage with all relevant parties in the public and private sector to exert pressure to prevent further shipments through a full and comprehensive

investigation into the report's allegations. The Working Group should also engage the EU, the US, and other donor governments to urge the relevant states to end the enabling and use of mercenaries.

African Union (AU)

Investigate and report. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations should launch an investigation into the role played by Conakry port as the go-to destination for arms and vehicles destined for use by the Africa Corps. The Working Group should focus on the mechanisms by which the port is used and call for action to shut these shipments out of Africa.

Activate AU mechanisms for accountability. The AU should formally oppose the coordinated International Criminal Court withdrawal by the Alliance of Sahel States, which includes Mali, and make clear that accountability and security are not alternatives but prerequisites of each other. The AU's own architecture—including the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights—should be activated as a complementary accountability forum for Mali, given the ICC's prospective jurisdictional limits post-withdrawal.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Investigate and bring to justice. The ECOWAS Court of Justice should launch an investigation into the role played by Conakry port as the go-to destination for arms and vehicles destined for use by the Africa Corps. The Court should review statements and testimonies by individuals and rights groups on Africa Corps human rights violations in Mali and bring to justice those responsible for weapon deliveries.

Private Sector

Investigate and block. Companies operating out of the Conakry port, such as Conakry Port S.A., owned by Turkish conglomerate Albayrak Group, and MSC Group, should investigate and immediately block the landing of all Russian ships under international sanctions. It should then launch an internal investigation into the use of its port by Russia-linked Africa Corps to transport weapons and vehicles into West Africa. Any such investigation should commit to a transparent, fair and public process that leads to a public report on its findings.

Exercise enhanced due diligence. Financial institutions, professionals, and other private sector actors that transact directly or indirectly with the corporate entities, including the shipping sector, should exercise enhanced due diligence. This due diligence should identify higher-risk entities and individuals linked to the Africa Corps and determine whether they are acting as enablers.

Endnotes

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Military Africa, "Russian Su-24 Fencer lost in Mali combat operations," June 30, 2025, available at: https://www.military.africa/2025/06/russian-su-24-fencer-lost-in-mali-combat-operations/#-google_vignette

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EU Sancions Map, "M Leasing LLC," available at: <https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main/details/36/lists?-search=%7B%22value%22:%22M%20Leasing%20%22,%22search-Type%22:%7B%22id%22:1,%22title%22:%22regimes,%20persons,%20entities%22%7D%7D&checked=36> (last accessed March 2026).

81 M Leasing LLC is designated under Canada's Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations (SOR/2014-58), enacted pursuant to the Special Economic Measures Act (SEMA) and administered by Global Affairs Canada. The company appears in the Consolidated Canadian Autonomous Sanctions List, which lists all individuals and entities subject to dealings prohibitions under SEMA. The designation prohibits any person in Canada, or any Canadian outside Canada, from dealing in the company's property, transacting with it, or providing it with goods or services. See:

Consolidated Canadian Autonomous Sanctions List: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations-internationales/sanctions/russia-russie.aspx

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Gov.UK, "M Leasing," UK Sanctions List, available at: <https://search-uk-sanctions-list.service.gov.uk/designations/RUS1850/Entity> (last accessed March 2026).

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OFAC, “*Siyanie Severa*,” SDN List Search, available at: <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=37053> (last accessed March 2026).

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transit through the Port of Conakry bound for Bamako), December 29, 2024, available at: <https://www.guinee114.com/2024/12/29/russie-mali-65-mille-tonnes-de-ble-transitent-par-le-port-de-conakry-pour-bamako/>

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96 The vessel *Baltic Leader* (IMO 9220639) was designated by the US on February 22, 2022, as an SDN under the Russia-related sanctions program pursuant to Executive Order 14024. The designation appears in the Treasury notice identifying vessels linked to PSB Leasing and Russian financial-sector sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine. See:

OFAC, “Russia-related Designations; Issuance of Russia-related Directive 1A and General Licenses; Publication of New and Updated Frequently Asked Questions,” February 22, 2022, available at: <https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20220222> (last accessed March 2026).

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Council of the European Union, “EU Restrictive Measures Against Russia Over Ukraine,” available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/> (last accessed February 2026).

The UK implements maritime and vessel sanctions under the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, with consolidated

listings maintained and updated regularly by the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation. See:

Gov.UK, "The UK Sanctions List," available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-sanctions-list> (last accessed March 2026).

Canada administers parallel measures under the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations pursuant to the Special Economic Measures Act. See:

Government of Canada, "Consolidated Canadian Autonomous Sanctions List," available at: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/consolidated-consolide.aspx?lang=eng (last accessed February 2026).

Australia enforces autonomous sanctions under the Autonomous Sanctions Regulations 2011 targeting Russia, including maritime-related measures. See:

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia's Sanctions Framework: Russia," available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions/sanctions-regimes/russia> (last accessed February 2026).

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OFAC, "Russia-related Designations; Ukraine-related Designation Update; Russia-related Designations Removals; Issuance of Russia-related General Licenses," July 20, 2023, available at: <https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20230720> (last accessed February 2026).

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Council of the European Union, "EU Restrictive Measures Against Russia Over Ukraine," available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/> (last accessed February 2026).

The UK's regime is implemented under the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, with vessel and shipping-linked entities included in the consolidated list maintained by OFSI. See:

Gov.UK, "The UK Sanctions List," available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-sanctions-list> (last accessed March 2026).

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Government of Canada, "Consolidated Canadian Autonomous Sanctions List," available at: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/consolidated-consolide.aspx?lang=eng (last accessed February 2026).

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Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia's Sanctions Framework: Russia," available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions/sanctions-regimes/russia> (last accessed March 2026).

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Russia Fossil Tracker, "Methodology," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, February 10, 2025, available at: <https://www.russiafossiltracker.com/methodology/> (last accessed April 2026).

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102 The Sentry interview with an Italian journalist following Russian maritime routes, Rome, June 2025.

103 A US intelligence aircraft flying out of Sigonella Air Base in Sicily has been keeping close watch over the same stretch of Mediterranean waters where the *Baltic Leader* has been spotted. The Russian ship is operating in proximity to the area patrolled by EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, the EU's dedicated naval mission charged with ensuring compliance with the UN's arms embargo against Libya. See:

ItaMilRadar, "Russian Sanctions-Hit Ship 'Baltic Leader' Monitored in Central Mediterranean by Italian P-72A," June 11, 2025, available at: <https://www.itamilradar.com/2025/06/11/russian-sanctions-hit-ship-baltic-leader-monitored-in-central-mediterranean-by-italian-p-72a/>

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RFI, "*Russie en Afrique: Conakry, porte d'entrée de l'armement russe au Sahel*" (Russia in Africa: Conakry, Gateway for Russian Weaponry to the Sahel), June 18, 2025, available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250618-russie-en-afrique-conakry-porte-d-entr%C3%A9e-de-l-armement-russe-au-sahel-1-2>

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106 RFI, "*Russie en Afrique: Conakry, porte d'entrée de l'armement russe au Sahel*" (Russia in Africa: Conakry, Gateway for Russian Weaponry to the Sahel), June 18, 2025, available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250618-russie-en-afrique-conakry-porte-d-entr%C3%A9e-de-l-armement-russe-au-sahel-1-2>

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109 UC Rusal, one of the world's largest aluminum producers, has long been associated with Oleg Deripaska, an oligarch with well-documented ties to the Kremlin. The company came under US Treasury sanctions in 2018 precisely on the grounds that Deripaska acted on behalf of the Russian government. Although the sanctions were later lifted following a restructuring of ownership, analysts have continued to flag the company's susceptibility to Kremlin influence given the broader political context in which major Russian industrial assets operate. See:

R. Connolly and P. Hanson, "Import Substitution and Economic Sovereignty in Russia," Chatham House Research Paper, June 2016, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-06-09-import-substitution-russia-connolly-hanson.pdf>; and

US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Russian Oligarchs, Officials, and Entities in Response to Worldwide Malign Activity," Press Release, April 2018, available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0338>.

110 The Guardian, "US Lifts Sanctions on Oleg Deripaska and Russia," January 27, 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/27/us-lifts-sanctions-oleg-deripaska-russia>

111 UC Rusal operates the terminal at the port of Conakry through two entities—CBK and ACG-Fria—under a concession granted by the Autonomous Port of Conakry. The arrangement covers the management and operation of the port's bauxite and alumina terminals, including the maintenance of conceded port infrastructure and equipment, and the handling of mineral exports and imports. Unlike other concessions at the port—notably those held by Alport and Bolloré Africa Logistics, both for 25-year terms with published investment commitments—publicly available documentation discloses neither the duration of UC Rusal's concession nor its financial terms. See:

Autonomous Port of Conakry, "*Nos Concessions Portuaires*" (Our Port Concessions), available at: <https://portconakry.gov.gn/nos-concessions-portuaires/> (last accessed February 2026); and

Autonomous Port of Conakry, "Rusal (CBK & Friguia)," available at: <https://portconakry.gov.gn/rusalcbk-friguia/> (last accessed February 2026).

112 RFI, "*Visite de Lavrov en Guinée: Conakry et Moscou veulent renforcer leur coopération bilatérale*" (Lavrov's Visit to Guinea: Conakry and Moscow Seek to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation), YouTube, February 2025, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aqNtlf3wLM&t=32s>

113 Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, "Opening Remarks by S.V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, during talks with M. Kouyaté, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guinea, Conakry, June 3, 2024" (Russian), June 3, 2024, available at: https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/video/view/1954321/ (last accessed February 2026).

114 Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Guinea, "H.E. Mr. Alexey V. POPOV, Ambassador of Russia in Guinea, Presented his Credentials to H.E. Colonel Mamadi DOUMBOUYA," November 24, 2023, available at: https://guinea.mid.ru/en/embassy/actualities/h_e_mr_alexey_v_popov_ambassador_of_russia_in_guinea_presented_his_credentials_to_h_e_colonel_mamadi/

115 The Sentry interview with a worker in coordination and logistics at the Conakry port, Conakry, December 2025.

116 UC Rusal has controlled CBK in Guinea since 2001, operating under a long-term concession agreement. This makes CBK one of UC Rusal's key sources of raw materials. According to UC Rusal, CBK is its largest raw materials asset, supplying around a quarter of the company's total bauxite output. See:

UC Rusal, "Compagnie des Bauxites de Kindia (CBK), available at: <https://rusal.ru/en/about/geography/kompaniya-boksitov-kindii/> (last accessed March 2026).

117 *Decret N° D/2006 007 PRG/SGG: Portant Desengagement De L'Etat De L'Enterprise Publique Fruguia S.A Et De La Societe Alumina Company of Guinea Limited* (Decree No. D/2006 007 PRG/SGG: Disengagement of the State from the Public Enterprise Fruguia S.A and the Society Alumina Company of Guinea Limited), March 30, 2006, available at: <https://www.resourcecontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-8078738904/view#/pdf>

118 UC Rusal. "Compagnie des Bauxites de Kindia (CBK)" (Kindia Bauxite Company), available at: <https://rusal.ru/en/about/geography/kompaniya-boksitov-kindii/> (last accessed March 2026).

119 The history of UC Rusal and OFAC sanctions is complex. On January 27, 2019, OFAC announced that it had removed three Russian-linked companies—En+ Group plc, UC Rusal plc (Rusal), and JSC EuroSibEnerg (ESE)—from its sanctions list, having notified Congress in December 2018. This followed a corporate restructuring, which significantly reduced Oleg Deripaska's control and shareholding in the companies in question and ensured the appointment of independent directors to their boards. As part of the conditions for delisting, the companies also agreed to enhanced transparency and ongoing reporting requirements to OFAC. Sanctions on Deripaska himself remained in place. See:

US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Russian Energy Exporters for Ongoing Support of Government of Syria," Press Release, January 27, 2019, available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm592>

120 *Decret N° D/2006 007 PRG/SGG: Portant Desengagement De L'Etat De L'Enterprise Publique Fruguia S.A Et De La Societe Alumina Company of Guinea Limited* (Decree No. D/2006 007 PRG/SGG: Disengagement of the State from the Public Enterprise Fruguia S.A and the Society Alumina Company of Guinea Limited), March 30, 2006, available at: <https://www.resourcecontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-8078738904/view#/pdf>

121 Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Guinea, "H.E. Mr. Alexey V. Popov, Russian Ambassador to Conakry, Visited One of RUSAL's Companies," January 5, 2024, available

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M.O. Diallo, "*En Guinée, le long combat des ouvriers de la bauxite et de leurs familles pour toucher leur pension*" (In Guinea, the long struggle of bauxite workers and their families to receive their pensions), Equal Times, August 3, 2023, available at: <https://www.equaltimes.org/en-guinee-le-long-combat-des?lang=en>

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214 The Sentry interviews with a FAMA official, Bamako, March 2025, November 2025, and February 2026.

215 Agentstvo, "Власти начали пиарить клон «ЧВК Вагнера». Это позволило установить, кто им руководит," December 11, 2024, available at: <https://www.agents.media/vlasti-nachali-piarit-klon-ch-vk-vagnera-eto-pozvolilo-ustanovit-kto-im-rukovodit/>. Note: In Russian bureaucratic, intelligence, and military usage, 'куратор' means something closer to 'handler' or 'supervisor' with direct operational responsibility. It implies an active and authoritative relationship: the 'куратор' is the person who owns a portfolio, directs activity within it, and is accountable for the outcomes. See:

"Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language," 1997, available at: <https://gufo.me/dict/ozhegov/куратор>

216 Pravda Ukraine post, "Knight of the Six Orders of Courage," December 17, 2024, available at <https://ua.news-pravda.com/en/russia/2024/12/17/9760.html>

217 @WagnerMali, X (Twitter) post, February 22, 2025, available at: https://x.com/wagner_mali/status/1893345683454722155 (last accessed March 2026).

218 US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Illicit Gold Companies Funding Wagner Forces and Wagner Group Facilitator," Press Release, June 27, 2023, available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1581>

219 All Eyes on Wagner, "Gold thirst," February 12, 2024, available at: <https://alleyesonwagner.org/2024/02/12/gold-thirst/>

220 The Sentry interviews with a FAMA official, Mopti, November 2025.

221 The Sentry interview with a former Malian transporter, Dakar, April 2025.

222 The name "Andrey Nikolaevich Ivanov" corresponds to at least two distinct sanctioned individuals of Russian nationality. Andrey Nikolaevich Ivanov (born on April 13, 1983) was designated by the US on June 27, 2023, as an SDN under the Russia-related sanctions program pursuant to Executive Order 14024, identified as a Wagner Group executive who served as a facilitator for the group's operations and illicit gold trading activities in Mali. Andrey Nikolaevich Ivanov (born on February 26th, 1981) is identified as a Major of the 64th Separate Motorised Rifle Brigade of the 35th Combined Arms Army of the Russian Federation, which reportedly killed, raped, and tortured civilians in Bucha, Ukraine, with these atrocities described as potentially constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes. Only the US has sanctioned Wagner commander Ivanov. See:

OFAC, "Treasury Sanctions Companies and an Individual for

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225 Agentstvo (Агентство), a Russian independent investigative outlet, identified the leadership of the Wagner Legion Istra, a Ministry of Defense-created successor unit, using Wagner's branding and symbolism. Using a 40-minute interview on 360°--a Moscow Oblast state channel--that featured five former Wagner commanders appearing under call signs, Agentstvo established their real identities. These included Alexander Kuznetsov ("Ratibor"), former commander of Wagner's 1st Assault Detachment, and Igor Sukhodolsky ("Marx"), former Wagner chief of staff. See:

Agentstvo, "Власти начали пиарить клон «ЧВК Вагнера». Это позволило установить, кто им руководит," December 11, 2024, available at: <https://www.agents.media/vlasti-nachali-piarit-klon-ch-vk-vagnera-eto-pozvolilo-ustanovit-kto-im-rukovodit/>

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233 The Sentry interview with a mid-rank FAMA official, Bamako, March 2026.

234 The Sentry interview with a mid-rank FAMA official, Bamako, March 2026.

235 The Sentry interviews with a FAMA official, Bamako, March 2025, November 2025, and February 2026.

236 The Sentry interview with a former Malian transporter, Dakar, April 2025.

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256 The Sentry interview with a colonel of the Malian army, Bamako, October 2025.

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259 The Sentry interview with an Air Force commander, Bamako, November 2025.

260 The Sentry interview with a high-ranking FAMA official, Bamako, January 2026.

261 The Sentry interviews with a FAMA official, Bamako, March 2025, November 2025, and February 2026.

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