

London

GERMANY

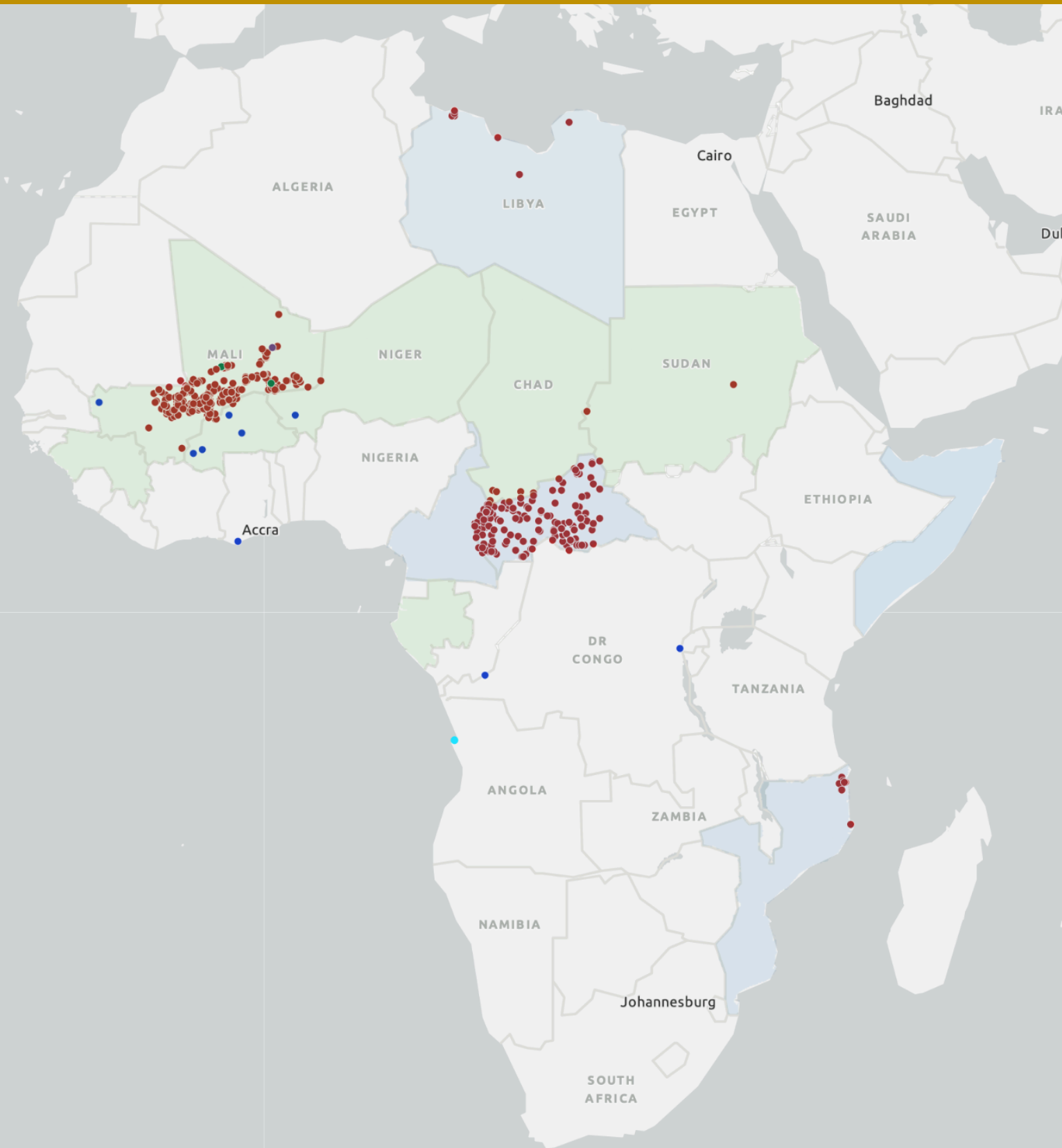
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CODEBOOK *RUSSIAN PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY IN AFRICA*



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10 DEC 2023

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INTENT

The purpose of this dataset is to provide the most comprehensive structured event data available on Russian paramilitary activity on the African continent from 2018 to 2023. The dataset is disaggregated geographically and temporally and is constructed primarily for visualizing and illustrating armed conflict, organized violence, and political unrest using geographic information system (GIS) software.

INTRODUCTION

In July of 2023, Niger's Presidential Guard surrounded the presidential palace, violently dispersed demonstrators, detained the democratically-elected president, and announced on television "we have decided to intervene and seize our responsibilities."¹ The coup d'état in Niger was, for a brief moment, the latest domino in a series of military overthrows on the African continent. A month later, another domino fell in Gabon.

In the short span of three years, nine successful coups d'état have occurred in a region increasingly being called the *coup belt*, which spans coast to coast, from the Atlantic Ocean, across the Sahel, and to the Red Sea. First there was Mali in August of 2020. Then in Chad in April of 2021, Mali again in May, Guinea in September, and Sudan in October. In 2022, Burkina Faso had one in January and then a second in September. And most recently, in 2023, Niger in July and Gabon in August. A region that encompasses much of West Africa and the Sahel, and part of Central Africa, is now ruled by individuals and juntas that seized power by force.

These coups have many similarities, including disaffected militaries, delayed states of development, and colonial legacies (all are former French colonies). However, another thread that runs through the coup belt is Russian paramilitary activity. At the helm is the Russian organization popularly known as Wagner Group. While the private military company (*Chastnaya Voennaya Kompaniya Vagner*) does not officially exist, the name refers to an obscure yet coherent network of contract mercenaries, enterprises, and private military forces that are "believed to enjoy the implicit but unrecognized support of the Russian state."²

Leveraging this dataset, we observe that Russian paramilitary activity in Africa exploded in 2021 and reached unprecedented new heights in 2023. The two principal countries in which Russian paramilitary activities were recorded were in Mali and the Central African Republic.

¹ Aaron Boxerman, "What's Behind the Coup in Niger?" The New York Times (27 August 2023): <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/world/africa/niger-coup-president-bazoum.html>.

² Amy Mackinnon, "What is Russia's Wagner Group?" Foreign Policy (6 July 2021): <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/06/what-is-wagner-group-russia-mercenaries-military-contractor>. For official use of the term "Wagner Group" see: United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries, Communication Report to the Russian Federation, AL RUS 5/2021 (24 March 2021): <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26305>.

DATA COLUMNS

<i>EVENT_DATE</i>	event date time group
<i>YEAR</i>	event year
<i>TIME_PRECISION</i>	level of certainty of the event date
<i>DISORDER_TYPE</i>	general type of event
<i>EVENT_TYPE</i>	event type
<i>SUB_EVENT_TYPE</i>	sub-event type
<i>ACTOR1</i>	belligerent one, principal actor
<i>ASSOC_ACTOR_1</i>	belligerent one, associated actor
<i>ACTOR2</i>	opposing belligerent, principal actor
<i>ASSOC_ACTOR_2</i>	opposing belligerent, associated actor
<i>CIVILIAN_TARGETING</i>	violence against civilians, yes or no
<i>REGION</i>	region name
<i>COUNTRY</i>	country name
<i>ADMIN1</i>	largest administrative area
<i>ADMIN2</i>	smallest administrative area
<i>LATITUDE</i>	latitude of the event location
<i>LONGITUDE</i>	longitude of the event location
<i>GEO_PRECISION</i>	level of certainty of the event location
<i>DATASET</i>	dataset source
<i>SOURCE</i>	reporting source
<i>SOURCE_SCALE</i>	scale of the source
<i>NOTES</i>	description of event
<i>FATALITIES</i>	number of reported fatalities
<i>LABEL</i>	event label

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

EVENT_DATE & YEAR

Date-time group recorded as dd/mm/yy

YEAR

e.g., 2023

TIME_PRECISION

The highest temporal precision level is 1, used when the source indicates the event happened on a particular date. The next level of precision is 2, used when the source notes the event happened during a specific week or weekend. The lowest level of precision is 3, used when the source notes the event took place within a particular month.

EVENT CATEGORIES

<i>DISORDER_TYPE</i>	<i>EVENT_TYPE</i>	<i>SUB_EVENT_TYPE</i>
Political Violence	Violence against civilians	Sexual violence
		Abduction/forced disappearance
		Arrests
		Looting/property destruction
	Battles	Armed clash
		Attack
		Shelling/artillery/missile attack
	Explosions/Remote violence	Air/drone strike
		Remote explosive/landmine/IED
	Strategic Development	Strategic development
Non-violent transfer of territory		
Government regains territory		
Agreement		
Headquarters or base established		
Disrupted weapons use		
Other		
Demonstration	Protest	Protest with intervention
		Peaceful protest
	Riots	Mob violence
		Violent demonstration

ACTORS

The dataset includes a range of actors such as paramilitary groups (e.g., Wagner Group), state forces (e.g., military forces of Russia, military forces of Mali, etc.), rebel forces (e.g., Coalition for Patriots of Change, JNIM Group of Support for Islam and Muslims), and civilians.

CIVILIAN_TARGETING

Events that do not involve any targeting of non-combatants are denoted by "NA." Events that do state "Civilian targeting."

REGION

e.g., West Africa, North Africa, or East Africa

COUNTRY

e.g., Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mozambique, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Sudan, Angola, Ghana, Mauritania

ADMIN1

Largest administrative area to denote subnational areas such as prefectures and regions.

ADMIN2

Smallest administrative area to denote sub-regional areas like villages, towns, and cities.

LOCATION

Name of the specific event location

LATITUDE & LONGITUDE

Geographic coordinates for the event location

GEO_PRECISION

The highest spatial precision code is 1, for when the report notes a specific town. The next level of precision is 2, for when the report notes a wider area or a small part of a region, in which case the coordinates for the nearest particular town are used. The lowest level of precision is 3, for when the report notes a larger region such as a natural feature like a border area, in which case the coordinates for the nearest provincial capital are used.

DATASET

The source repository from where the event data was pulled, e.g., ACLED and UCSD.

SOURCE

The name of the original information source or sources.

SOURCE_SCALE

Describes at which level the original information source or sources operate, e.g., local news, subnational, national, regional, or international.

NOTES

A short description of the event to report important details

FATALITIES

An estimate of the number of fatalities caused by the event that is derived directly from the original source report.

LABEL

The bottom line up front of the event significance, e.g., Wagner Group, Pro-Russia Protest, Russian Military Incident.

DATASET SOURCES

The Armed Conflict and Location & Event Data Project

The Armed Conflict and Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Africa (01 December 2023)," <https://acleddata.com/download/2909/?tmstv=1702248015>.

Uppsala Conflict Data Program

Ralph Sundberg and Erik Melander, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset," Uppsala Conflict Data Program, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 50, no.4 (2013): 523-532.

Davies, Shawn, Therese Pettersson & Magnus Öberg. "Organized violence 1989-2022 and the return of conflicts between states?" *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 60, no. 4 (2023).

A note on data sources:

ACLED event data was the principal source used for this dataset, consisting of over 98% of all reported data. UCDP data was used as a complimentary source to ensure the dataset was as holistic and comprehensive as possible.

Cover page:

Visualization by author using ArcGIS (Basemap: Esri; FAO; NOAA; USGS; Michael Bauer Research GmbH 2023; Direction Générale de la Statistique, Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie, INSTAT, Central Bureau of Statistics, Institut National de la Statistique, Institut National de la Statistique des Etudes Economiques et Demographiques, National Bureau of Statistics, Direction Générale de la Statistique, des Etudes Economiques et Sociales, Instituto Nacional de Estadística Powered by Esri).

APPENDIX

Code in R Studio:

```

# UPLOAD ACLED DATA #
acled <- read_excel("/Users/jeremy/Desktop/Russia/acled.xlsx")

# CUSTOM CONDITIONS #
rus <- acled %>%
  filter(grepl("Russia | Wagner", NOTES) | grepl("Wagner", ASSOC_ACTOR_2) |
grepl("Russia", ASSOC_ACTOR_1))

# CREATE NEW CSV: FILE PATH #
file_path <- "/Users/jeremy/Desktop/Russia/rus.csv"

# CREATE NEW CSV: WRITE CSV #
write.csv(rus, file = file_path, row.names = FALSE)

# UPLOAD RUS #
rus <- read.csv("/Users/jeremy/Desktop/Russia/rus1.csv")

# LOCATE NON WAGNER ROWS #
notwag <- rus %>%
  filter(!grepl("Wagner", NOTES) & !grepl("Wagner", ASSOC_ACTOR_2))

# SECOND DATA SET CLEAN #

# UPLOAD UCDP DATA #
ucdp <- read_excel("/Users/jeremy/Desktop/Russia/ucdp.xlsx")

# CLEAN FOR CONTINENT AND TIME #
ucdp1 <- ucdp %>%
  filter(region == "Africa", year > 2017)

# CUSTOM CONDITIONS #
ucdp2 <- ucdp1 %>%
  filter(grepl("Russian | Wagner | foreign troops", source_article) | grepl("Russian |
Wagner | foreign troops", source_headline))

# CREATE NEW CSV: FILE PATH #
file_path2 <- "/Users/jeremy/Desktop/Russia/rus2.csv"

# CREATE NEW CSV: WRITE CSV #
write.csv(ucdp2, file = file_path2, row.names = FALSE)

```