

## Mercenary Geopolitics:

### Russo-African Security Cooperation and Alliance Reconfiguration In the Sahel

#### **Abstract**

The Sahel region is currently experiencing a strategic shift driven by the convulsive military and political dynamics of the Coup Belt. This shift entails a broad realignment of regional security alliances in response to escalating regional threats; altering the strategic balance and calculus of both regional and extra-regional actors operating in the tri-border area. Against the geopolitical backdrop of returning great power competition, renewed interest in Sub-Saharan Africa has introduced Russian Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) to the Sahel. Most notably, the Wagner Group has emerged and positioned itself as a security partner offering Sahelian states an alternative to retain their sovereignty on national security matters over perceived neocolonial paternalism associated to the western liberal model. There is a strong correlation between Wagner Group engagement and soon after prompting Western troop withdrawal from the Sahel.

The following research focuses on alliance reconfiguration processes within the context of Russian power projection into the African theatre. This is accomplished through the study of security interdependence and intraregional alignment patterns in the Sahel over the 2018-2023 time period. Based on structural determinants of regional insecurity and the theoretical neorealist framework provided by Neorealism, Balance of Threat (BoT), Regional Security Complex (RSC), alignment and alliance theories; this research sets out to determine the drivers of regional alliance reconfiguration in the Sahel region and examine Russian subversion as a potential source of realignment. To this end, a comparative analysis on threat perception and balancing behavior across the cases of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad was conducted to identify Sahelian alignment patterns; then used to contrast individual and collective threat assessments against associated trigger events, outcome events and confirmed sources of Russian information manipulation and interference.