**Interview with Wendy Barton and William Beebe, GEC, December 16, 2024**

Africa…

Wendy: I was in Mali for three years, 2017 to 2020; I well aware of their tactics and then Wagner came in… we have done a lot of prep work to do something that can make a difference in Africa, esp. coastal west Africa and the Sahel, mostly on the western side. Working with interagency on exposure of some kind that will be government to government, first we are not sure it will be effective to do something publicly and it will be bespoke. And we’d like to help them on what Russia is doing covertly so they can take actions via law enforcement and other channels.

On Libya, that is the fastest, we do. We do not have an active program in GEC working on it for the Russia problem set. Our CT team leads and Iran team leads might have different CT perspectives. We know somethings about what is going on in Libya, the NSC would ask us for things but they didn’t know what they were asking. The military are setting up an operations center. The office for Libya is in Tunisia.

There are Russian destabilization efforts continent wide to undermine Libya. If the Russians lose full access to Syria does Libya become the next hub? That will be complicating factor.

We say we are not working on anything specifically now (wrt Libya) but not that we don’t understand the relationship between what Russia is doing w.. there… we know they are related but a lot of specifics in Libya and a lot of controversy with different groups.

David Linfield, NSC of Libya… can provide intro.

**West Africa?**

Can’t have too many specifics on gov to gov, but Russian MOD or Wagner presence, this expansion if not at times competition between Africa corps (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa_Corps_(Russia)#:~:text=forces%20in%20Ukraine.-,Organization,estimates%20of%20its%20size%20vary> .) and competition, this carving out of who does what. In Mali a lot of recent public exposure of failures and atrocities of Wagner does that make the Malian gov question things. How much is it failing to deliver on its promises in Africa. I imagine those governments will see they are behind on what they promised. And the Russians have been derelict on their promises. But writ large we saw initiative of Russian intelligence outfit we outed in October (<https://www.state.gov/the-kremlins-efforts-to-spread-deadly-disinformation-in-africa/> ) and they emerged when the African corps, the Russian MOD mercenary. They fly the Russian flag (in contrast to Wagner which flies its own flag), does not come with Wagner baggage. Burkina Faso and Algeria, have an aversion to Wagner and they bristle at that. So this new entity that consists of multiple mercenary group and other Russian entities in Africa, former Wagner, jedi corps, smaller and weirder groups, Compania (these are all Russian mercenaries) and MOD personnel. He oversees unit 29255 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GRU\_Unit\_29155), they have their own Wikipedia page. 161st specialist training center (https://www.nsa.gov/Press-Room/Press-Releases-Statements/Press-Release-View/article/3895808/nsa-fbi-cisa-and-allies-issue-advisory-about-russian-military-cyber-actors/). I always caveat these things… Andre xx heads up that and is one of the key leaders of the African initiative. When he goes on visits to west Africa as he did in Mali, bf, Niger, seen as expansion of African corp. that we are watching but afraid… we outed this media outlet as materially supported and guided by Russian intelligence. They do a lot of positive messaging of Russia but they denigrate us health programs and say they will start a dengue… they came around when African corps gained prominence. African corps has GRU connections. That is only on

We are seeing an increase in efforts in west Africa and central Africa to denigrate Ukraine and say Ukraine is sponsoring terror actors. Happened after July ambush on Wagner. In cot’d voir and Chad, media stories coming out from strange outlets saying us, France and Ukraine coordinating to bring in Boko haram and bring weapons to terror groups. So this idea of bashing Ukraine in global south. Finally, and most obviously, the Russian idea of promoting neo-colonialism. It is ironic given they claim they are never a colonizer and never colonies. Ironic given Soviet Union and invasion of Ukraine. They are also engaging in their illicit and approved resource extraction activities. Some… Wagner illicit mining and timber in Mali and xx. This hypocrisy of neocolonial activity when look at what Russia doing in Africa, is undermining the sovereignty of those countries. So we work to make sure they know Russia engaged in these activities writ large and countries specifically and stress to them that it is in your right to partner with Russia but know when Russia comes in it leads to instability and like in Syria they can’t always back you up. Is Russia really the partner of choice if they can’t follow thru on promises and alte on deliveries and can’t follow up given what we see in Syria.

There are a few understandings that are probably useful. They accomplished a lot and capitalized on local displeasure on wanting to get France out. A lot of the way, France has evolved, they have grown a lot in how they deal with it but they acknowledge that local opinion harnessed against French to get them kicked out. We didn’t think they’d (the French) get kicked out of chad but they did. They are accomplishing more all the time. In addition, it is mostly low hanging fruit, they don’t have sophisticated campaigns, they do a lot of it. Whatever works to undermine French and the US and to make Ukraine look bad. We are working on it… (This is background and don’t quote me but “we are failing and we have been failing”) the us has such long term investments in the… a general reluctance to and acknowledgement we are not the messenger. **Talking about disinformation is not helpful to anyone. So we need to keep the positive messaging about what we have done and work on resilience programs to raise media**.

How focus? I know USAID has programs too. When I was there we tried to do trainings for journalists and we also did youth programs and continue to do that. There is acknowledgement that … we had programs with code for Africa that worked with these populations and training influencers. That program closed out.

Anything else.

**Report on "African Initiative" as mentioned:**

[**The Kremlin’s Efforts to Spread Deadly Disinformation in Africa - United States Department of State**](https://www.state.gov/the-kremlins-efforts-to-spread-deadly-disinformation-in-africa/)

**Other useful reporting to read:**

* ***Le Monde*: “**[**Confessions of a repentant agent of Wagner's ‘disinformation’ and ‘hate messages’ in Central Africa**](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2024/11/21/confessions-of-a-repentant-wagner-disinformation-agent-from-the-central-african-republic_6733535_124.html)**”**
* ***RFI*:** [**Overall article framing the investigative series**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fghostarchive.org%2Farchive%2FavCU7&data=05%7C02%7CBeebeW%40state.gov%7C3cb09084a9454096929108dd1dea8ae8%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638699615379672633%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=nE%2Fkv1efzmbnyrl4W2FIVk9qYApoTr6dBORmUZEBaBY%3D&reserved=0)
* ***RFI*: In the Central African Republic, Anatomy of the Wagner Hydra**
* **Part 1:** [**The Men**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fghostarchive.org%2Farchive%2FjceKj&data=05%7C02%7CBeebeW%40state.gov%7C3cb09084a9454096929108dd1dea8ae8%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638699615379685984%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=aGKaTrgd%2F5qrxFj4VlLWEYmAXd8BgfefqLYxIcTefIs%3D&reserved=0)
* **Part 2:** [**The Means**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fghostarchive.org%2Farchive%2FAUnzO&data=05%7C02%7CBeebeW%40state.gov%7C3cb09084a9454096929108dd1dea8ae8%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638699615379700892%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=n%2B39t2x4jhYEZCxU8K9LRjnJ2iU%2BZCjPJzYD5XhoQpg%3D&reserved=0)
* **Part 3:** [**The Targets**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fghostarchive.org%2Farchive%2FQnPrW&data=05%7C02%7CBeebeW%40state.gov%7C3cb09084a9454096929108dd1dea8ae8%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638699615379715961%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=PmlOoxICP3ZVLDl6Dcl%2BmKsTGWz2y%2BFcRvrukIOAvFk%3D&reserved=0)
* ***Forbidden Stories*:** [**Propaganda Machine: Russia’s Information Offensive in the Sahel**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fghostarchive.org%2Farchive%2FvVzfm&data=05%7C02%7CBeebeW%40state.gov%7C3cb09084a9454096929108dd1dea8ae8%7C66cf50745afe48d1a691a12b2121f44b%7C0%7C0%7C638699615379729267%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=xGnv%2FLAmxtWl5yASzpv758KuvnmE0IMvLYyl641C13U%3D&reserved=0)

**Today, the U.S. Department of State’s Global Engagement Center is exposing Russia’s intelligence services for providing material support and guidance to “African Initiative,” a new information agen...**