



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INSECURITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE NIGER: IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAGNER GROUP INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Niger's insecurity, fueled by terrorist threats, tribal rivalries, and poor governance led to the military's ambition to usurp power. But then the hoped-for stability has become elusive leading to the regime invitation to the Wagner Group to intervene so as to curb the challenge of insecurity and assist the Junta to consolidate power and usher in a regime of stability. It is on this premise that this study is undertaken, to examine the implications of Wagner Group intervention ostensibly to engender stability in the country. The study adopted desk review method, primarily utilizing secondary data sources and the realism theory of international relations was used as the theoretical framework. The study contended that the Wagner Group's presence in Niger could have both positive, in the short-term, it can help to maintain order. However, Wagner Group penchant for human rights abuse, corruption and being a ready tool for the pursuit of Russian geo-static interest in Africa could have negative implications for the sovereignty, security and stability in the Republic of the Niger. It concluded that the long-term effects Wagner's presence in Niger remain uncertain, with potential implications for political, economic, socio-economic, foreign relations, security and stability. Niger must be cautious about becoming overly dependent on Russian assistance, especially in sensitive areas like security and mining, to maintain sovereignty and long-term economic stability. It therefore, recommended that the Republic of the Niger government should engage with local communities, particularly marginalised groups, to address grievances in order to promote peace and stability through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and it should closely monitor Wagner's activities.

Keywords: coup d'état, Niger, Russia, security, Wagner Group intervention

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Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



1.0. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in Niger have negatively impacted stability, leading to loss of life, displacement, and weakening of social cohesion. The inability of the governments to enforce law and order and terrorist activities exacerbate the violence, making it difficult to maintain stability in the country. The Republic of the Niger, located in the Sahel region of Africa, faces numerous security challenges, including terrorist threats from groups such as Boko Haram, transnational organized crime syndicates as well as ethno-political tensions. In order to curtail the threats posed by these malevolent actors and engender stability the country has traditionally relied on security assistance from France and other Western powers. However, the country continued to be plague by insecurity indicating that the so-called assistance by the West has proved to be glaringly ineffective. It in order to stem the tide of instability that the new helmsmen, the Tchiani government turned to the Wagner group. But critics have charged that The Wagner Group involvement in security matters in Niger portends negative implications for the country's stability, human rights, and sovereignty. The Wagner Group's intervention in Niger is part of Russia's broader strategy to expand its geopolitical influence in Africa, particularly in resource-rich areas and its imprint on the continent is not only surrounded with extraction but also undermine local governments' control over security (U.S. Departments of State, 2023).

The presence of the Wagner Group in Niger therefore raises several concerns. These include the potential for an increase in human rights violations, disruption of ongoing security efforts by Western powers, and increased instability in the region. Understanding the implications of the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger requires careful assessment and analysis of its activities and relationships with local actors. The purpose of this study is to assess the implications of the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger's security, stability, human rights, economic development and governance, and to provide suggestions to mitigate negative consequences so as to promote a more stable and secure environment in the country.

The questions surrounding the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger's security are multifaceted and interrelated. Some of the questions include: what impact does the Wagner Group's intervention pose to Niger's security and stability? Has it exacerbated existing tensions, or does it represent a new source of insecurity? What has been the implications of the Wagner Group's presence for human rights in Niger? What effect does the Wagner Group intervention have on the Republic of the Niger external relations. These questions highlight the complexity and interconnectedness of the Wagner Group's intervention in the Republic of the Niger, requiring a comprehensive approach to fully understand its implications for the country and the wider region. The realism theory which underpins this study argues that international relations are driven by competition and conflict, with states prioritising power and security over ethical or

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



ideological concerns. In the case of Niger, the Wagner Group's presence and activities could be examined as part of a broader security strategy that seeks to address the root causes of instability in the region, such as poverty, inequality and weak institutions.

2.0. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Conceptualizations

➤ Intervention

Intervention is commonly defined as interference in the territory or domestic affairs of another state with military force, typically in a way that compromises a sovereign government's control over its own territory and population (Silverstone, 2011). Intervention can be defined as a foreign actor's intentional intrusion into the internal affairs of another state, community, or organisation, through means such as military force, economic pressure, political influence or humanitarian assistance (Sassoli, Bouvier, & Quintin, 2011). Intervention can be defined as the act of a third party inserting itself into a situation in order to alter or influence the course of events or to provide assistance (Vocabulary.com, 2024). The aim of intervention may be to achieve a specific goal, such as regime change, conflict resolution, protection of human rights, or furthering economic and political interests. Interventions can be both official and unofficial, and may involve governments, non-state actors, or multilateral organisations. The intention of an intervention is ostensibly to make a positive change or bring about a better outcome for those involved, but is often a camouflage for the pursuit of the interest of the intervening power.

Interventions may take various forms, ranging from personal interventions, such as family members and friends coming together to support and assist a drug addict in seeking treatment, to large-scale intrusion by governments or international organisations in the context of political, economic, or humanitarian crises. From the foregoing, intervention can be defined as an act of a foreign entity or actor, such as the Wagner Group, intruding into the domestic affairs of a sovereign state, with the intention of influencing its political, economic, or social environment. Intervention may involve the use of various means, such as military force, economic pressure, political influence or humanitarian assistance, and may be motivated by a variety of goals, including regime change, conflict resolution, and human rights protection or advancing economic and political interests. So in the case of the Republic of the Niger it is the use of military force for political influence ostensibly to ensure conflict suppression and or resolution in the country.

➤ (In) Security

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



Security means the protection, guarding or defence of persons, property (real and/or intellectual) or the realm from threats posed by crime, terrorism or business malpractice (Register Chartered Security Professionals, 2020). Security can be referred to as the methods, process, tools and personnel used to defend an organisation's digital assets. It can also be define as the protection of people, and properties from physical actions, intrusions and other events that could damage an organisation and its assets (Bacon, n.d.). The states of being away from hazards caused by deliberate human intentions to caused harm. The source of hazard is posed by human deliberately (Nas, 2025). Sundelius and Eldeblad (2023), while commenting on societal security submitted that security is about safeguarding the critical functions of society, protecting people and upholding fundamental values in the face of many types of threats and risks.

From the foregoing, security can be defined as a multifaceted concept encompassing the protection, guarding, and defense of persons, property/assets from threats posed by crime, terrorism, violence/conflict and deliberate human intentions. It involves the safeguarding or protection of individuals, communities, critical societal functions, fundamental values, and property from physical, economic, and emotional harm through the establishment and maintenance of measures that minimise risks, safeguard human rights mitigation of risks and promotion of peace. Essentially, security is the condition of being free from danger, harm, or threat, and it encompasses a wide range of measures and approaches that ensure the safety and well-being of individuals, communities, and societies. Insecurity can be defined as a situation where safety and well-being are threatened by crime, terrorism, violence, and human actions that can harm people and societies.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

There are several theories that can be used to underpin the Wagner Group intervention in security in Niger. However, this study adopted the realism theory of international relations as a theoretical framework to explore this phenomenon. Realism believes that international relations are driven by competition and conflict, with states prioritising power and security over ethical or ideological concerns (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). In this view, the international system is like a jungle with no central authority, so countries have to defend themselves and work with others. These results in alliances and wars, as states fight to maintain their power and influence. Realism, an international relations theory, has roots in ancient Greek and Italian Classical philosophers or realists like Thucydides and Machiavelli who shaped the core principles of realism, emphasising human nature's role in shaping international relations. Other scholars who contributed to the advancement of the theory include thinkers like E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt; however, contemporary realists focus

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



on power and security in international relations (Bell, n.d.; Notre Dame International Security Center, 2022).

Realism in international relations theory emerged from historical experiences like the 17th to 19th centuries' European wars, philosophical traditions like Machiavelli and Hobbes, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War. These events highlighted the destructive power of interstate conflict and the role of power and security in international relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar world under American dominance further questioned the stability of the international system and interstate relations. The basic assumption of the realism theory include; realism assumes the nation-state is the primary actor in international relations, acting unitarily and rationally to pursue national interests, especially during war, and limiting other bodies' power such as individuals and organisations (Antunes & Camisao, 2018). Similarly, realists argue that states prioritise security and survival, with power playing a crucial role in international relations. They believe human selfishness and power appetite lead to predictable outcomes, potentially contributing to wars and state behaviour. Likewise, realists argue that the international system is anarchic, lacking an overarching authority to ensure stability and order. This leads to competition and conflict between states, as there is no clear expectation of anyone or anything taking action.

This lack of government, or anarchy, is the primary determinant of international political outcomes. Each state is responsible for its own survival and pursues power, with power having the overriding role in shaping interstate relations (Notre Dame International Security Center, 2022). Realists believe that states rely on their own resources and alliances for security, as there is no reliable international authority. They believe morality and ideology play a secondary role, and states act in their self-interest. They believe history provides valuable lessons about interstate relations and states' behaviour, and conflict is inherent in international relations. They argue that power balances constantly change, leading to conflict and competition (Korab-Karpowicz, 2023). Realism is relevant to this study because it will help to provide important insights into the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger, by highlighting the role of power and security in shaping state behaviour and interstate relations. It will also help to explain why Niger sought assistance from the Wagner Group, as the threat of violent extremism and instability in the Sahel region may have compelled Niger to seek external security assistance. The theory will again help to shed light on the Wagner Group's motivations for intervening in Niger, as they may have been seeking to expand their influence and control over regional security dynamics, or to strengthen their ties with the Nigerien government.

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



This theory is equally relevant in the sense that it will help to highlight the importance of history in shaping current geopolitical dynamics, as Niger's past experiences with conflict, instability, and foreign intervention may have influenced its decision to invite the Wagner Group. The theory will analyse the Wagner Group's presence in Niger, its long-term implications, regional security architecture, local dynamics, and potential unintended consequences, as well as Niger's relationship with other African states and Western powers. In spite of its numerous usefulness, realism, a theory of international relations, has been criticised for its oversimplification, moral relativism, pessimism, inability to predict the future, limited explanatory power, empirical shortcomings, teleological bias, and inability to incorporate non-Western perspectives. Critics argue that realism oversimplifies the complexities of international relations, neglects non-state actors, economic factors, and cultural norms, and can legitimise unethical behavior. It also lacks a comprehensive explanation for the diverse range of phenomena observed in international relations, and its teleological bias assumes states act solely according to predetermined goals.

3.0. Overview of Political Instability in Niger

Niger, a landlocked country in West Africa, has undergone significant political transformation since its independence in 1960. The nation's political history can be divided into two eras, pre-1991 authoritarianism and post-1991 relatively democratic regimes (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), 2024). After achieving independence, Niger's first president, Hamani Diori, established an autocratic one-party regime, exercising absolute control over all government mechanisms. This system remained in place until 1974 when Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché initiated a military coup, inaugurating an era of military dictatorship in the country (Korotayev, *et al.*, 2024).

Despite initial improvements in the economic situation due to the termination of the drought and the exploitation of uranium resources, the military dictatorship under Seyni Kountché and his successor, General Ali Saibou, became increasingly repressive and autocratic (Baudais, 2021). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political landscape in Niger underwent a series of "negotiated revolutions," as large protests demanded a shift to a multi-party democracy. This popular movement, coupled with political and diplomatic pressure from the international community, eventually forced the government to organise the first democratic elections in the country's history in 1993 ("Niger election", 2021). The election marked a significant milestone in Niger's political history as it ushered in a new era of political pluralism and constitutional democracy.

Mahamane Ousmane, who led the opposition to the military regime, won the 1993 elections and was inaugurated as the country's first democratically elected president. Despite the historic achievement, the transition to democracy proved to be a challenging task. The new government

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



faced significant obstacles, such as widespread poverty, inter-communal violence, and terrorism, which continue to hinder the consolidation of democratic institutions and political stability in Niger to this day. The post-colonial political history of Niger has been marked by the complex interplay between Tuareg question, jihadist attacks, democratic reforms and military coups. The Tuareg question has a unique place in this narrative, with the first revolt in Mali in 1962 and the Second Tuareg Rebellion in the Sahel in 1990 (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2023). These conflicts were eventually mediated by the UN and neighbouring countries, resulting in greater autonomy for Northern regions and the integration of Tuareg militants into the army (Keita, 2007).

Simultaneously, the rise of jihadist groups, such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), emerged as a new threat to Niger's stability. ISGS began launching attacks in Niger in 2014, becoming a significant player in the Sahel region due to its geographical location and proximity to Mali and Burkina Faso (Global Conflict Tracker, 2024). In 2015, Boko Haram attacked Diffa Region of Niger, causing civilian and security force deaths and causing displaced persons to cross into Niger, escalating tensions (United States Department of State, 2016). Also, suspected members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other terrorist organisations continued to transit through the vast Northern part of Niger in the areas bordering Algeria, Chad, Libya, and Mali ("Boko Haram attacks", 2025). In 2016, militant attacks by Boko Haram in Niger have drove about 50,000 people from their homes in Bosso, a town in the Diffa region (Donovan, 2016). In January 2017, Boko Haram militants infiltrated the extreme southeastern border areas of Niger, including the communes of Gueskerou, Bosso and Toumour. They terrorised villagers by extorting them and launching attacks on military outposts, demonstrating their ability to operate with impunity despite the presence of security forces (Crisis Group, 2017). In 2017, AQIM militants ambushed a group of US soldiers and Nigerien forces in the village of Tongo Tongo, Niger, killing four US soldiers and five Nigerien soldiers ("US soldiers killed", 2017).

On January 9, 2019, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants launched a deadly attack on a military base in the Western region of Inates, Republic of the Niger. According to the Nigerien army, the coordinated assault left at least 71 soldiers dead and 12 others injured, marking the deadliest attack against the country's military in years (Niger Army Base, 2019). The continuous attacks by terrorist groups have caused significant displacement. These attacks by terrorist groups demonstrate the ongoing security challenges facing Niger, as both Boko Haram and AQIM continue to pose a significant threat to the country's stability and the safety of its citizens. The spillover of the conflict in neighbouring Mali has also contributed to the security challenges in the country. The Tillaberi region has become a flashpoint for terrorist activity,

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



particularly in the tri-border area between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Similarly, the persistent insecurity has had detrimental impacts on the local economy of Niger, resulting in an exacerbation of poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and weak governance. Inter-communal conflict in the country has been on the rise since 2018 with various groups vying for control over land, resources and political power. This conflict has largely been driven by disputes over grazing rights, access to water and political representation, particularly between Tuareg and Fulani communities (Boas, Cisse & Mahamane, 2020).

Likewise, in Niger, inter-communal violence has been a significant challenge, particularly in areas where different ethnic groups compete for resources. Some specific instances of inter-communal violence were seen in 2021 in the Niger's North Tillabery region where there was sustained communal violence due to jihadist attacks on security forces. For instance, the massacres of ethnic Djerma have sparked fears of retribution, with villagers resulting to self-defence. The perception that jihadists are mostly ethnic Peul responsible for a surge in crime exacerbates ethnic tensions and increases the likelihood of retaliatory attacks (Crisis Group, 2021). Against this backdrop, Niger experienced a significant democratic milestone in 2020 with the first peaceful transfer of power since its independence. The democratic transition, however, was not devoid of turbulence. The events of February 2021, when an attempted coup was averted, and the subsequent actions of President Bazoum, who was perceived as undermining the interests of the military elite and his predecessor, led to the 2023 military coup d'état. The international community's response to the coup was swift and unanimous in condemning it, as Niger's democratic progress seemed to be overshadowed by the military's political ambitions.

These conflicts have had severe implications for Niger's stability, as they have not only led to loss of life and displacement but also weakened social cohesion and trust between different communities, making it difficult for the government to maintain order and prevent further outbreaks of violence. The violence has been exacerbated by a lack of law enforcement in these areas, as government presence is often weak and security forces are stretched thin due to the ongoing threat of terrorism.

4.1. The Wagner Group: Origin, Activities and Intervention in Niger

Russian private military security company, the Wagner Group, founded in 2010 by Dmitry Utkin and financed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, has a tangled history deeply rooted in Russian security agencies and enterprises (Olech, 2024). The Wagner Group's organisation is a bit unclear, nevertheless, the group has reportedly undertaken various military and security-related activities in a number of countries, including Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic and Sudan. Alleged mercenary activity in Crimea, Donbass and Syria from 2014-2015, and its support for Russian separatists in Ukraine, led to U.S. sanctions (Oliinyk, Oliinyk-D'omochko &

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



Maksymov, 2023; Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2023). The group's origins can be traced back to Antiterror Orel, a confederation of former military intelligence veterans and spetsnaz special operators (Rondeaux, 2019). Beyond its military engagements, the Wagner Group also engages in propaganda, perpetrating human rights and war crimes violations, becoming emblematic of Russian public-private partnerships with blurred state-sponsored lines. Despite its name, the Wagner-Prigozhin narrative does not fully capture the intricate web of relationships and networks that underpin the group's operations.

The group's unrestrained activities raise questions about the legal, bureaucratic and organisational frameworks that enable its global operations with seeming impunity, warranting further scrutiny and attention. The Wagner Group is thought to be funded and supported by the Kremlin, and has reportedly been used as a proxy for Russian interests. The Wagner Group's strategic partnerships with Russian state-enterprises and its extensive networks within Russia's security agencies offer unique insight into the expanding influence of powerbrokers under Putin's regime (Gagaridis, 2022). Despite the sanctions against Prigozhin, the Wagner Group's operations continue to shape geopolitical landscapes and test international legal and normative boundaries. In Syria, the Wagner Group was reportedly involved in operations to protect Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and in Libya, the group has been linked to supporting the forces of Libyan General Khalifa Haftar (Oliinyk, Oliinyk-D'omochko & Maksymov, 2023). In the Central African Republic, the Wagner Group is reportedly involved in providing security services to the government. These examples demonstrate the diverse and often controversial activities of the Wagner Group, highlighting the group's role as a tool of Russian foreign policy.

The Wagner PMC's expansion into the Sahel region, driven by strategic partnerships with unstable political regimes and local recruitment, has exacerbated insecurity, conflict and instability in North Africa and the Sahel. The use of Libya as a forward base enables the Wagner PMC to exert pressure on neighbouring countries like Chad and Niger, leading to border clashes and loss of life (Oliinyk, Oliinyk-D'omochko & Maksymov, 2023; Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2023). In the context of post-Operation Barkhane, Russia's strategic interests and activities undermine peace and security in the region, as Wagner units further entrench themselves in various countries experiencing social, economic and security challenges. Russia's pursuit of influence and resources through Wagner's deployment in the Sahel embodies a broader geo-strategic calculation, where Wagner's presence serves as a destabilising force in pursuit of short-term gains, potentially to the detriment of long-term stability and peace in the region. The inherent instability of the partnerships forged with local political regimes and the use of proxies to maintain power, exert pressure, and suppress internal opposition, create an environment of insecurity, violence and political repression.

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



The sudden power shift in Niger, following the unexpected coup d'état in 2023, sent shockwaves throughout the Sahel region, disrupting counter-terrorism efforts and opening the door to Russian influence. After ousting the democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum and installing the military regime of General Abdourahamane Tchiani, Niger has opted to distance itself from the Western powers, like the U.S. and France, which were providing critical support and training to the country's security forces. With the deadline looming for the release of President Bazoum and the spectre of a possible ECOWAS military intervention, the Niger junta sought out Wagner's support, potentially escalating the tensions and uncertainties in the region ("Niger's military rulers", 2023). As a result of this political shift, Niger has moved closer to Russia, establishing a new military alliance with the Wagner Group. Scholars contend that the development not only jeopardises regional stability but also poses a direct challenge to the counterterrorism efforts of the West African regional bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Olech, 2024).

In Niger, the Wagner Group's activities are part of a larger trend of increasing Russian involvement in the country. The group has been linked to providing security services to the Nigerien government, including training and equipment for the country's security forces ("Niger's military rulers", 2023; Rampe, 2023). Some have suggested that the Wagner Group's activities in Niger are aimed at countering the influence of the United States and France, which have traditionally been the dominant foreign powers in the region (Fasanotti, 2022; U.S Department of State, 2024). The situation in Niger is particularly complex due to the ongoing threat posed by jihadist groups in the region, including affiliates of both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The presence of the Wagner Group in Niger has raised concerns among international observers and local populations alike. Some have suggested that the group's activities could lead to further destabilisation in the region, as well as exacerbating existing tensions between different communities. In particular, there are fears that the Wagner Group could exacerbate existing tensions between different ethnic groups in Niger, including the Tuareg, Fulani, and Hausa communities. Moreover, some have expressed concerns that the Wagner Group's activities could undermine the legitimacy of the Nigerien government, as well as the efforts of the international community to address the security and development challenges facing the country.

4.2. The Rationale for Wagner Group Intervention in Niger

The security situation in Niger remains volatile, with the presence of rebel groups such as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) operating within the tri-border region of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Despite receiving support and counter-terrorism efforts from Western nations, Niger's security forces have been unable to

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



effectively counter these groups. Yevgeny Prigozhin, attributed the security situation to the legacy of colonialism, asserting that Western nations have been sponsoring terrorist organisations in the region. Prigozhin's Wagner Group, believes that their thousand-strong force and help to restore order in the region by destroying terrorist groups, thereby preventing further harm to the civilian populations (Lister, 2023).

Niger's strategic decision to align itself with Russia is seen as a calculated move to enhance its global position and counterbalance the prevailing Western influence in the region. This realignment, in turn, reflects the wider trend of African governments' growing impatience with the existing security architecture, led by Western nations, and their subsequent search for alternative security providers. As the search for alternative security partners has been largely unfruitful, with China being unwilling or unable to fill the security vacuum, Russia emerges as the only feasible alternative. Moscow's renewed engagement in Africa's security sector, through the deployment of the Wagner Group, has rekindled the classic rivalries of the Cold War era, reinforcing the narrative of great power competition. In light of the dearth of viable alternative security providers, African nations have increasingly come to view Russia as a necessary counterweight to Western influence (Eledinov & Lechner, 2023).

Viewed from another perspective, one of the rationales for Wagner Group intervention in Niger is for economic reason that is, known to offer lucrative deals, including financial incentives and resource extraction rights, in exchange for their support. Russia's intervention in the Republic of Niger, employing state-linked actors like the Wagner Group, is seen as a continuation of its strategy to expand influence and cultivate dependencies in Africa. This strategy is designed to counter U.S. policy objectives, secure access to valuable resources, and advance Moscow's geopolitical interests. By offering private military companies like Wagner as a solution to complex security challenges, Russia is able to leverage African governments' need for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism support in exchange for concessions on natural resources, commercial contracts, or strategic access, some of which include important raw materials, such as oil, gold, diamond, uranium and manganese. While Russia's intervention can be viewed as an exploitation of anti-French sentiment and a leveraging of existing tensions between the United States and France, the strategy also reflects a deeper level of sophistication and long-term thinking. By positioning itself as an alternative security partner, Russia is establishing the conditions for enduring insecurity in Africa that will ultimately serve Moscow's interests. This approach characterized by a focus on private military companies, cheap weapons, and regime protection, presents a significant challenge to efforts to promote stability and security in Africa (Fasanotti, 2022; Larsen & Jacobsen, 2023; Faulkner & Paren, 2024). The increasing dependency on Russian mercenaries and weapons will create a reliable market for Russian arms

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



and equipment, allowing Moscow to circumvent sanctions. In effect, Russia will be able to turn the security challenges in Africa into an opportunity for its defense industry, while leveraging its mercenary forces to establish a foothold in the region.

The apparent domestic drivers of the coup in Niger, which saw General Abdourahamane Tchiani rise to power, could include political tensions, internal power struggles within the military, or the personal ambitions of the junta leadership. The swift international condemnation of the coup by major powers such as the US, France, the EU, the UN and ECOWAS highlights the destabilising impact of such events on regional and global security. The military's stated reasons for overthrowing the civilian government, namely the perceived mismanagement of security threats and economic issues, could be pivotal in shaping the junta's future policies and alliances. The coup, therefore, creates a strategic opportunity for the Wagner Group to further entrench itself in Niger, positioning itself as a key ally of the Tchiani-led junta and capitalising on the country's mounting security and economic challenges. By offering enduring military assistance and support for the consolidation of the junta's power, Wagner is effectively aligning itself with a perceived liberator and defender of Niger's self-determination, potentially creating a formidable partnership (Zambakari, 2023; Yabi, 2023; Romaniuk & Besenyo, 2023).

The long-standing historical relationship between France, other Western powers, and Niger, marked by the legacies of colonialism and post-colonial exploitation, has contributed to deep-seated distrust and resentment among certain sectors of the population and the military. This has helped to foster a shift in alliances towards non-Western actors like Russia, seen as a potentially more advantageous partner due to its lack of colonial history and greater diplomatic distance from domestic affairs. The political shifts towards Russia in Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger's immediate neighbours, further complicate the regional dynamics and add to the potential for escalating tensions and hostilities to assume international dimensions. These regional complexities are rooted in what can be described as 'ontological anxieties' - a collective sense of identity, culture and sovereignty that has been threatened or violated by the West (Meisel & Szymanski-Burgos, 2023; Issoufou, & Ochieng, 2023).

In response to these anxieties, African governments have turned to Russia as a counterweight to Western influence, perceiving it as a more neutral actor with less historical baggage. Russia's deepening involvement in the security affairs of African countries, including Niger, through the deployment of mercenary groups such as the Wagner Group, has allowed it to exert an outsized influence in the region. This influence extends beyond military training and has also included securing lucrative concessions for mining of valuable resources like gold in exchange for a share of the profits (Romaniuk & Besenyo, 2023; Lister, 2023; Eledinov & Lechner, 2023; Zambakari, 2023).

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



4.3. Wagner Group's Intervention and its Outcomes

The international community's response to the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger will shape both the course of the crisis and its potential outcomes. The strong condemnation and threats from ECOWAS indicate the regional bloc's determination to uphold democratic norms and protect Niger's sovereignty. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued an ultimatum to the coup leaders, threatening military intervention if Bazoum was not returned to power. However, the warnings from Mali and Burkina Faso, both of which have ties to the Wagner Group, signal the potential for further conflict and a weakening of regional cohesion. Consequently, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS, and The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) granted the three countries a six-month grace period to persuade them to reconsider their planned January 29 departure from the bloc; Mali's military leader called their decision to withdraw "immediate and irreversible" (Romaniuk & Besenyo, 2023; Dembele & Hoiye, 2024).

The responses from France and the European Union illustrate the potentially destabilising effect of international condemnation on the crisis in Niger. The withdrawal of French troops, whose presence had provided security against insurgency, and the reversal of laws aimed at curbing human smuggling by the military leaders suggest that the international community's strong stance may have unintended consequences ("Niger's coup", 2023). The decision by ECOWAS, led by Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu, to impose sanctions on Niger following the military coup has resulted in significant economic and humanitarian consequences for the country. The immediate effect of the sanction was the suspension of electricity supply from Nigeria's Mainstream Company, which accounts for 70% of Niger's electricity consumption. This has led to increased power cuts and further destabilisation of the already precarious electricity infrastructure in Niamey (Kavak, 2023).

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Niger have played a crucial role in shaping the response to the military coup and the subsequent Wagner Group's intervention. Through peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives, CSOs have sought to mitigate the adverse effects of the ongoing conflict on local communities. Simultaneously, humanitarian organisations have striven to provide relief and aid to civilians affected by the crisis, despite navigating a complex and unstable political and security environment. The involvement of civil society and humanitarian organisations in the crisis in Niger underscores the multifaceted nature of the conflict. Their efforts not only provide immediate relief and support to affected communities, but also contribute to shaping the broader narrative and international response to the situation. However, the complex dynamics of the crisis may also hamper the effectiveness of these efforts. Finally, the way the media presents information about the crisis in Niger, and the goals that political actors have in shaping public opinion, can make it difficult for people to understand the real



situation on the ground (Humanitarian Action, 2023; European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024; International Rescue Committee, 2024; International Organisation for Migration, 2024).

4.4. The potential Implications of the Wagner Group's intervention for Niger

The Wagner Group, a Russian private military group, has been actively involved in conflicts across Africa and the Middle East, including Syria, Libya, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic (CAR). The Wagner Group's presence in Niger could have both positive and negative impacts on the country's security and stability. In Niger, the group's presence could potentially boost the Nigerien government's efforts to combat Islamist insurgents. The group has also engaged in activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. In the Central African Republic, Wagner continues to prosper, with 1,500 to 2,000 men helping the military recapture many rebel-held territories. The group has established operations in several African countries, focusing on security issues and providing security services and paramilitary assistance. It has supported African governments in combat operations against rebel groups and vice versa, such as defending the capital Bangui in CAR in 2018 and fighting the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Mozambique in 2019. Wagner also acts as a security service for vulnerable regimes, providing training and support (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2022; Rampe, 2023; Mussa and Dubianskij, 2023; Châtelot, 2024).

The presence of the Wagner Group in the Republic of Niger, however, could have significant negative implications for civilian security and stability, given the group's established pattern of high levels of civilian targeting in other conflict zones. For example, in Mali and CAR, Wagner mercenaries have been involved in a disproportionately high number of civilian fatalities, particularly when operating independently of state forces. The group's tactics are known to include aggressive methods that could exacerbate violence and create new cycles of conflict, fuelling casualties and civilian displacement. The use of mercenaries in conflict zones is not a new phenomenon, but the Wagner Group has become a significant player in recent years, notably in Africa. Their intervention in the Republic of Niger could have serious repercussions, not only due to their previous human rights violations but also due to the complex dynamics of the region. Niger's security environment is already fragile due to its proximity to conflict zones such as Mali, Nigeria and Libya, making it vulnerable to instability and violence. The presence of Wagner forces could exacerbate tensions, particularly if they engage in activities that harm local populations or disrupt delicate power balances (Serwat, Nsaibia, Carbone & Lay, 2022). Equally, the Wagner group's operations in Niger could spill over into neighbouring countries, further destabilising the Sahel region. This could lead to cross-border conflicts and create safe havens for terrorist groups to operate.

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



In addition to the security concerns, the Wagner Group's presence in Niger could also have implications for the country's stability. For instance, the group's involvement could provide support and assistance to the junta government in maintaining control and consolidating its grip on power. This may lead to a more stable political environment in the short term, as the government can rely on Wagner's military backing to deter or crush any opposition. However, such a situation could lead to long-term instability if the junta fails to address the underlying causes of the coup and fails to foster national reconciliation. The long-term instability that could result if the junta fails to address the underlying causes of the coup and foster national reconciliation is tied to the potential for sustained grievances and divisions within the country.

Even if the junta succeeds in crushing opposition in the short term with the support of the Wagner Group, this does not necessarily resolve the problems that led to the coup in the first place. If the coup was driven by a lack of political inclusion, marginalization of certain ethnic or social groups, or widespread dissatisfaction with the previous government's handling of security or economic issues, these problems will persist if they are not addressed.

For instance, similar to the break-up of Yugoslavia, Niger's complex ethnic makeup and proximity to conflict zones could exacerbate these issues. The politicization of ethnic identities in Yugoslavia contributed to the escalation of violence, potentially threatening the country's stability and citizens' safety (Zenovic, 2020; Sotiropoulou, n.d.). The 1994 Rwandan genocide was a result of years of discrimination and violence against the Tutsi minority, which the government failed to address. The genocide was a result of decades of division and hatred towards the Tutsi by extremists in the Hutu majority group. The region had been under Belgian colonial rule from after WWI until 1962, which fostered divisions between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, struggles for independence led to violence between the two groups (Maron, 2019). Moreover, the presence of a foreign paramilitary group could also create stiff competition among foreign actors, including traditional allies of Niger, such as France and the United States.

The potential implications of the Wagner Group's intervention in Niger must be weighed against the country's economic and geopolitical interests. The group could provide short-term economic benefits by supporting mining operations, which could generate revenue, improve infrastructure, and create jobs; however, these benefits must be viewed in the context of the broader Russian strategy of resource exploitation and regime support in Africa. Niger must be cautious about becoming overly dependent on Russian assistance, especially in sensitive areas such as security and mining, which could potentially compromise its sovereignty and long-term economic stability. Furthermore, the potential implications of the Wagner Group's presence extend beyond Niger's borders. For instance, U.S. Departments of State (2023) reported that the Wagner group's

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



activities in other African countries, such as the Central African Republic and Libya, have been marked by human rights violations, illegal mining operation, and support for authoritarian regimes. These practices could undermine stability and democratic norms in the region, potentially fuelling conflict. Also as reported by the U.S. Departments of State, 2024, the Wagner Group was accused of engaging in corrupt practices, such as siphoning off resources and profits for its own gain in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Sudan, and Libya.

Therefore, the Wagner group's intervention could undermine Niger's efforts to combat corruption and promote good governance. In the longer term, the involvement of the Wagner Group in Niger's economy could also have broader implications for the country's development and growth in terms of social inequality. Without diversification of the economy, if the government of Niger allows the Wagner group to focus on resource extraction only, it could further exacerbate social inequality in the country, as the benefits may not be distributed equally among the population which could create additional tension and conflict. Again, the Wagner Group's intervention could also have potential implications for Niger in terms of relations with other countries. The Wagner Group's intervention in Niger could have significant geo-political implications, impacting Niger, France, the United States, and the international community. The shift in Niger's relationship with France, tied to uranium exports and military cooperation, could have economic and security implications. The Wagner Group's presence could signal a realignment of regional alliances and a changing power balance, potentially undermining counterterrorism efforts and straining relations between Niger and its traditional security partners. The coup in Niamey, Niger, also threatened the United States' counterterrorism support and operations in the region (Faulkner, Plichta, & Parens, 2024).

5.0. Conclusion and Recommendations

Niger's insecurity and instability, exacerbated by terrorist threats, tribal rivalries, poor governance, which have resulted in loss of life, displacement and social cohesion have led to and military ambition to usurp power. However, Niger's coup d'état in 2023 has opened the door to Russian influence. The ruling junta shifted to the Wagner Group to enhance its global position and counter Western influence, and consolidate its stay in power. This aligns with the growing impatience of African governments with Western security architecture. The Wagner Group, which is closely linked to the Russian government, tends to make deals with many African governments when it intervenes in their countries. This means that they give military assistance to the government in exchange for something else, like access to valuable resources like oil or gold. This can make the Wagner Group very powerful and influential, and also very rich, which can be both good and bad for the country in which they intervene. However, the long-term

Salami *et al.* (2025). Insecurity In The Republic Of The Niger: Implications Of The Wagner Group Intervention



effects of Wagner's presence in Niger remain uncertain, with potential implications for political, economic, socio-economic, foreign relations, security and stability. Niger must be cautious about becoming overly dependent on Russian assistance, especially in sensitive areas like security and mining, to maintain its sovereignty and long-term economic stability.

To salvage the situation, the government of the Republic of the Niger should address grievances through grassroots engagement, that is, with local communities, particularly marginalised groups, so as to address grievances and foster community-led initiatives to promote peace and stability.

The government of the Republic of the Niger should closely monitor Wagner's activities, including its interactions with local communities and security forces and Government should counter any display of over bearing its influence by the Wagner Group and address concerns about human rights violations or involvement in illicit activities.

The government of the Republic of Niger should strengthen local security capacity, particularly in areas vulnerable to Wagner's influence this is to help prevent the group from becoming entrenched in those areas while it should also address the underlying causes that fuel insecurity and instability.

The government of the Republic of Niger should develop alternative partnerships with countries or organisations that are more committed to promoting human rights and economic development and that could counter Wagner's influence and provide more sustainable, long-term solutions to Niger's challenges. This means that while they maintain relations with Russia, they should diversify their foreign relations with as many countries in line with their own interests.

Competing Interest

The author had declared that no conflicting interest existed regarding this paper.

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