



Article

African Back-Up Militiamen in the Russia-Ukraine War: Between Legends and Realities.

Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of
Political Science (NAJOPS).
2025, Vol. 10(3)
ISSN: 2992-5924
©NAJOPS 2025
Reprints and permissions:
www.najops.org.ng

Serge Loungou

Department of Geographical, Environmental and Marine Sciences
Centre for Studies and Research in Political Geosciences and Prospective
Omar Bongo University of Libreville (Gabon)

Abstract

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, on 24 February 2022, caused an influx of foreigners – to the frontline – willing or forced to fight alongside one side or the other. These include an unknown number of African nationals whose role and fate seem to be of little interest to international opinion. In a conflict marked by propaganda and misinformation, this indifference contributes to the speculation on African back-up militiamen. This article therefore aims at highlighting the commitment of these fighters, by dissociating legend from reality. From a methodological perspective, our study draws on both scientific bibliographical references and various media sources (newspapers, podcasts). While some sources claim that thousands of people have expressed the desire to go to the front, consistent accounts tend to limit the number of African fighters to a few dozen in each camp, for most students or economic migrants recruited locally, including in prisons. It also appears that the motivations expressed by these “volunteers” stem from a mixture of vague idealism (defence of the host country) and real opportunism (gain, obtaining a passport, naturalization). Their military contribution seems to be reduced to risky tasks to inexperienced fighters, making them a veritable “cannon fodder”.

Keywords: African back-up militiamen; Cannon fodder; Mercenary; Propaganda; Russo-Ukrainian war; Voluntary.

Introduction

While their respective armies have been fighting since 24 February 2022, Russia and Ukraine are also engaged in a communication battle (Benabid & Boumaiz, 2022). This concerns particularly the number and status of foreign fighters involved in the front (Joly, 2023). On the one hand, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the creation of an international legion for the territorial defence of Ukraine (ILDU) only four days after the start of the Russian military offensive against his country. In order to attract a maximum of foreign fighters, Kiev authorities have developed unprecedented methods: publication on social media of a QR code through embassies

Corresponding Author:

LOUNGOU, Serge. Department of Geographical, Environmental and Marine Sciences, Centre for Studies and Research in Political Geosciences and Prospective. Omar Bongo University of Libreville (Gabon). E-mail : serge.loungou@univuob.org

to download an engagement form, creation of a recruitment site (fightforua.org), using Telegram channels and Reddit wires to explain to foreigners the seven steps to be taken to join that legion (Arredondas, 2022).

On the other hand, in view of shifting the war paradigm in Ukraine (Boulanger & Rosière, 2022), the Russian army was forced to adapt by resorting, too, to foreign fighters who were “volunteers” and had a good deal of experience in counter-insurgency fighting (De Boeck, 2022). It is reported that Russia would have discreetly recruited in countries where its army is present directly or indirectly through the paramilitary militia Wagner (Fontaine, 2022).

This article is particularly concerned with African nationals involved in that war. According to some sources, there are thousands of them on the continent who have expressed their desire to go to fight in Eastern Europe (Crowe & Momar Lô, 2022). Now, apart from the fact that the press has relayed the ephemeral diplomatic tension, derived from the early hours of the conflict, between Ukraine and some African states opposed to the recruitment of their nationals (Idrac, 2022; *Courrier international*, 2022), the case of African back-up militiamen is of little interest to international opinion. This contrasts with the strong media coverage and relative goodwill of policies enjoyed by combatants engaged alongside Ukrainian forces in Western allied countries (Cook, 2022). The thick fog surrounding the presence of African back-up militia in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has fuelled speculation about them (Glez, 2022). In a context of war marked by propaganda and misinformation (Klein, 2023), the article aims to put a spotlight on this rather unknown aspect of the conflict.

What is the reason for the presence of African fighters alongside the two belligerents? How are they recruited? What is their real military contribution? The answers to these three questions will structure our paper. We have chosen to use the term “back-up militiamen” to describe these fighters in the generic meaning – and therefore “neutral” – given by the French dictionary *Le Robert*: “*Temporarily recruited to strengthen regular forces*”. The French Word “*supplétifs*” having no real equivalent in English, we have chosen to term the African recruits “African back-up militia”. This choice allows us to immediately avoid the debate around the controversial notions of “volunteer” and “mercenary” (Cacciamani, 2023) that Russians and Ukrainians – and their respective allies – use according to what suits them: the term “volunteer”, which refers to the combatant driven by a political ideal, is applied to their own reinforcements while the epithet of “mercenary”, which evokes the lure of gain, refers to combatants engaged alongside opposing forces (Mehra & Thorley, 2022).

This study is the result of research that began at the outbreak of the conflict, when the first reports emerged concerning the recruitment of African ‘volunteers’ by Ukraine, through its diplomatic missions in Africa, and by Russia, through the private military company Wagner, which was present at the time in certain countries on the continent, such as the Central African Republic, Sudan and Mali. From a methodological point of view, the study draws on both scientific literature and, more extensively, media sources. These are mainly in French, but also include references in English. The scientific references provide the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study, while the journalistic sources offer empirical and factual statistical material that allows us to track the evolution of African “back-up militiamen” involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Contextualizing the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

The Russian military attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marked a turning point after eight years of high tensions between the two countries, fuelled by the conflict between pro- Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces in the Donbass breakaway region of Ukraine (Boulègue, 2018, p. 107-112). The presence in both camps of foreign fighters linked to non-state entities (armed groups, private military companies) makes the Russo-Ukrainian conflict a proxy war (Mumford, 2013; Bertrand, 2020) whose causes are to be sought primarily in the global context of the post-Cold War era characterized by the “privatization” of armed conflict (Haupais, 2009, p. 87-88).

A Global Context Marked by the “privatization” of Wars.

The end of the East-West military-ideological confrontation in 1991, with the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), had given rise to a great and legitimate hope for peace throughout the world, pressing major Western countries and post-Soviet Russia to reduce defence budgets and military personnel (Belanger & Fleurant, 2022). This hope for peace was quickly shattered by the post-Cold War “world indiscipline” characterized by new conflicts, threats and players. With this new geopolitical environment came the “privatization” of war (Klein, 2004, p. 181-191). In unstable countries or territories, this phenomenon is the work of armed groups whose activities generally range between banditry and political demands (Le Monde, 2004). In large states, the privatization of war involves the use of private military companies (PMEs) to perform tasks traditionally performed by the armed forces (De Jong, 2023). These private companies have particularly been remarkable in the wars of Afghanistan (Charlier-Barou, 2009), Iraq (Cicchini & Herrera, 2008, p. 9-26), Libya (Kharief, 2020, p. 4-5) and Syria (Zeino, 2022). Despite the controversy surrounding their activities, PMEs continue to fuel proxy conflicts around the world, resulting in massive economic gains (Bruyère-Ostells, 2019).

The recent rise of PMEs is due to several factors (Condominas, 2016). As early as the 1980s, western states were under considerable budget pressure and were largely attracted by the ideology of privatization (Dusoulier, 2022). This context led them to abolish conscription for the benefit of professional armies and private companies composed of professionals or volunteers “*who are only paid when they are employed*” (Guisnel, 2010). In addition to services not directly related to military activities (management of stewardship, maintenance of the vehicle fleet or facilities requiring scientific expertise...), the “outsourced” areas of activity include front-line combat operations; security of property and persons; military expertise and advice; intelligence gathering and training of security personnel; technical, technological and logistic support in conflict zones (Kaboukin, 2022). The delegation of armed forces activities to PMEs also aims to compensate for the reduced effectiveness of regular strategies and the growing inability of modern armies to face asymmetric or irregular opponents (Lasserre, 2019). Private military enterprises are also “ghost armies” (Bretonnier & Eydoux, 2023); their involvement minimizes or even conceals the political responsibility of governments in conflicts. This invisibility thus gives states the possibility of having an influence on a conflict taking place in foreign lands, without being noticed by the media and the general public (Rissoul, 2020).

The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict, a Proxy War

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a proxy war because of the use by both sides of foreign fighters linked to non-state entities (Van Ossel, 2022). The presence of foreign back-up militia on the Russian-Ukrainian front dates back to the Donbass war that was started in 2014: following the “Maidan revolution”, which led to the fall of the pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, and the territorial redistribution operations conducted or sponsored in retaliation by Russia (annexation of Crimea, referendum for the independence of the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk), the eastern part of Ukraine has become a moving front area (Eckert & Lambroschini, 2017) where, for eight years, heterogeneous forces clashed with more or less intensity in the context of a conflict resembling hybrid war (Dugoin, 2016, p. 85-90; Bohbot, 2017). The Russian-Ukrainian conflict that started in 2022 is therefore only the continuation of the almost silent war in Donbass. This development has by no means put an end to the use of irregular forces.

The involvement of irregular and private forces in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is explained by a combination of factors. The first factor is the anchoring of a “militia subculture” in Russian society (Laruelle, 2019) coupled with the explosion of mercenary activity in Eastern Europe and particularly in Ukraine and Russia after the Cold War (Suarez Sutil, 2022). The second factor is a mix of policy and policy imperatives. On the one hand, for Russia, given the asymmetrical and hybrid nature of the war in Ukraine (Nocetti & Vincent, 2024), the objective is to avoid as much as possible the exposure to the ground of its regular troops, in order to save them from

significant losses on the ground (Mathieu & Dorman, 2018). For Ukraine, the aim is to compensate for the dual deficit in expertise and military personnel (Gautier, 2022): at the beginning of the conflict, the Ukrainian forces numbered 196,000 soldiers and 900,000 reservists, versus 900,000 active military personnel and 2,000,000 reservists for the Russian army (Przetacznik & Tothova, 2022). On the other hand, the influx of foreign back-up militia serves as a propaganda tool for the two protagonists whose concern is to appear in the eyes of the world as having international support (Le Devoir & Agence France Presse, 2022).

As is well known, three main groups of foreign fighters are found alongside the Ukrainian forces: the representatives of US military and intelligence agencies (Arefi, 2014; Schmitt & al, 2022), back-up militiamen from some fifty (50) countries and mainly from Eastern Europe, including retired North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military personnel with combat experience (Military Watch Magazine, 2022). According to the authorities in Kiev, the ILDU would have counted, as of 6 March 2022, about 20,000 “volunteer” foreign fighters. The Russian armed forces are supported mainly by the residents of Wagner paramilitary company whose largest contingents come from Belarus, Transnistria and Syria (Fontaine, 2022). According to the Syrian Human Rights Watch, as of 15 March 2022, the Russian forces had received support from 40,000 fighters from the Syrian army and allied militia (Le Parisien & Agence France Presse, 2022). The statistics and legal status of foreign forces are, however, difficult to confirm due to propaganda and misinformation on both sides (Desaunay, 2022).

Enlistment Modalities and Motivations of the African Back-up Militiamen

The presence of African deputies alongside Ukrainian and Russian forces has been evident since the beginning of the conflict. According to a survey by *Jeune Afrique* magazine, published in October 2024, thousands of them have been recruited into Russian troops since the outbreak of the conflict. How many are on the Ukrainian side? Where do they come from? How are they recruited? Why are they fighting? In the following, we will endeavour to answer these questions.

Recruitment Methods: between Seduction and Coercion.

According to several testimonies and media sources, no less than fifteen African countries are represented in the «mercenary fair» resulting from the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The most frequently cited nationalities are Central Africans, Congolese from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigerians, Cameroonians, Ivorians, Ethiopians, Kenyans, Ugandans and Sudanese. The recruitment methods employed on both sides of the front line are as similar as they are different, and proceed from both seduction and coercion.

Ukraine first reported recruiting “volunteers” using the social media platforms and its diplomatic representations based in Africa. The hostility of several countries to the recruitment of their nationals into the ILDU has certainly limited departures on the continent (Ali, 2022), but it did not affect the will of Ukrainian recruiters. The authorities in Kiev have decreed a general mobilization of men aged 18 to 60 (Marchaud, 2022), and African nationals living in Ukraine, mostly students (Ali, 2022), have been offered to join their army (Randrianarimanana, 2023). It is reported that men of North African origin, mostly Tunisians, detained in Ukrainian prisons were forced to participate in the fighting against Russian forces in exchange for their release (The Daily Report, 2022). According to the Black African Defence League (BADL), Ukrainian military authorities also orchestrated the border blockade of many sub-Saharan students fleeing the war (Kane & Chastand, 2022) in order to engage them by force. However, all these allegations have never been substantiated. According to a statement by the Russian Ministry of Defence dated 12 July 2022, nearly 200 “mercenaries” from eight African countries joined the Ukrainian troops in the first half of the conflict, namely 85 Nigerians, 51 Algerians, 25 South Africans, 15 Senegalese, 10 Guineans, 5 Gabonese, 5 Liberian and 2 Equatoguinean (Al Manar TV, 2022). However, there is no way to confirm these figures or the origin of the fighters declared by the

Russian military authorities. Nor can it be said whether these African deputies were recruited in their respective countries or on Ukrainian territory.

Russia has long resisted recruiting fighters in Africa (Hessoun, 2022), but indications prove otherwise. Media sources mention the case of 300 fighters from the Central African Republic (CAR), called “Black Russians” (Yekoua, 2022), who were reportedly enlisted in their country before being sent to fight in Ukraine in the ranks of the Wagner paramilitary Company (Obaji, 2022; Ndayiragije, 2023). This PME also reportedly transferred approximately 650 of its boarders from the CAR, Mali and Sudan to Russia in March 2022 (Leclercq, 2022). According to the British Defence Department, an “African Expeditionary Force” of more than 2,000 soldiers and officers has been operating in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine since 2023 alongside the Russian regular army and Storm-Z units (Saballa, 2024). According to several sources, Russia has intensified the recruitment of back-up militiamen abroad and particularly in African countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Congo and Uganda (Lazaréva, 2024), to compensate for the losses suffered and the little enthusiasm of Russian volunteers (Ivshina, 2024). One of the methods of recruitment that the Russians share with their Ukrainian opponents is the use of the prisoners: Evgeny Prigozhin, the head of Wagner PME who died in a plane crash in August 2023, publicly confessed to recruiting African migrants imprisoned in Russia for various reasons, in exchange for their release or the annulment of their sentences (Le Troquier, 2023). Several testimonies, opportunely relayed by the Western press, attest that the Russians also practice forced recruitment of substitutes. Among these revelations is that of “intense pressure” by recruiters on African students, whose number in Russia would be around 40,000, suggesting that they might lose their scholarship or see their tuition increased if they refused to join the troops (Plumey Bobo & Olivier, 2024, p. 26-32). By the same token, we mention the case of dozens of young illegal migrants of Cameroonian origin who were forced to join the ranks of the Russian army to avoid expulsion (Atcha, 2024). Another “iconic” testimony is from the confessions made by a Sierra Leonean fighter taken prisoner in Ukraine with eight other substitute fighters from Somalia, Nepal and Cuba (Miltarnyi, 2024), which describes the scheme that Russian recruiters would have devised to forcibly enlist African fighters: *“After having paid a recruiter and flying to Russia hoping to find a “good job” and support his large family, the unfortunate man revealed only afterwards that he had signed a contract in Russian with the Kremlin forces, something he never wanted to do”* (Malpas, 2024).

With the notable exception of fighters from CAR whose enlistment is organized “almost face- to-face” with the complicity of local authorities (Yékoua, 2022), the recruitment of African back-up militiamen is generally carried out “discreetly” through job-posting platforms with the promise of “good wages”, without mentioning participation in the war in Ukraine (Fontaine, 2022). The search for African labour by Russian companies – as seen recently in Gabon, Kenya and Zimbabwe (Pravda, 2024) – is probably a strategy to recruit potential fighters for the army. It is not excluded that the plan of President Vladimir Putin to exempt from visa possession – for short stays (less than 90 days) – nationals of some African countries also participate in this strategy (Glez, 2024).

The Motivations of African Back-up Militiamen: between Vague Idealism and Real Opportunism.

While most African states display an attitude of neutrality in the face of the Russian- Ukrainian conflict (Africa Press, 2022), their public opinions have very early taken a position in favour of one or the other side, the digital dimension of war which places them at the heart of the fighting (Grimaud, 2023). Russia’s action in Ukraine is popular in countries where its growing influence contrasts with local resentment of the western powers, which are allies of Ukraine (Braun, 2023). In the countries of the Sahel Alliance (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) and in CAR, whose authorities have distanced themselves from these powers, particularly France, this support ranges from the dressing of streets in the colours of Russia to large pro- Russian rallies (France Info & Agence France Presse, 2022). Russia also enjoys popular sympathy in southern Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola) and Ethiopia, where there is a memory of Soviet support for local liberation movements and regimes during the Cold War (Cascais, 2022). The bias in favour of Russia is also the result of its informational strategy

to enable it, in the context of the war against Ukraine, to win the “battle of opinion” on the African continent (Vincent, 2022). The main instrument of this strategy is the *African Initiative* programme: created in September 2023, it is a set of media and cultural initiatives aimed at African journalists, opinion leaders and students to relay the Russian vision of the conflict (Nwonwu & al., 2024; Cheboi & al., 2024). Selected pieces of the pro-Russian narrative distilled during a popular demonstration held on 5 March 2022 in Bangui, capital of CAR, in support of the “Special Operation” in Ukraine: *“The Russians asked Ukraine to stop its attacks, but the Ukrainians did not obey, so Russia was forced to attack Ukraine...”*; *“NATO is to blame”*; *“We will support Russia until our last breath!”* (Valade & Di Roma, 2022).

However, this popular support was not accompanied by a massive voluntary commitment alongside the Russian troops. The rare cases of “idealistic” enlistment are those of students, particularly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the CAR, who were established in the breakaway region of Donbass prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, who said they chose to join a local pro-Russian militia *“because the whole world is fighting Russia”* (Randrianarimanana, 2022). The same applies to the desire for engagement with the Ukrainian army, expressed at the beginning of the war in Senegal and Nigeria by men who claimed they wanted to *“take revenge on Putin”* (Charpentier, 2022), which did not materialize. Thus, the rare examples of voluntary recruitment only concern African nationals who have immigrated to Ukraine. This is particularly the case of *“many Algerians married to Ukrainian women and with children, who would have preferred to remain on the ground to fight alongside the Ukrainian troops”* (Aomar, 2022).

Most of the testimonies tend to place opportunism as the central motivation of these “volunteers”. It is stated that *“hundreds of Africans from countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Algeria are ready to take up arms in the battle against Russia, partly to escape the bleak prospects facing many young men at home”* (Ali, 2022). The lure of gain is all the more irresistible as both belligerents promise large bonuses and various advantages to potential frontline candidates: Ukraine would offer £1,500 per day to fight against Russia (McLoughlin, 2022), the Security Plan would guarantee a US\$2,000 enlistment bonus and monthly salary of US\$2,200 plus the promise of a Russian passport (Africa Defense Forum, 2024). As such, the engagement on the Russian-Ukrainian front would have been, for many Africans, only a *“pretext to leave, looking for an easy way to enter Europe”* (BBC News, 2022). In other words, Russia and Ukraine would be only a step on the way of migration of African recruits whose ultimate goal is to penetrate and settle on European soil. Obtaining, in exchange for their military engagement, the passport and, if necessary, the citizenship of the country whose armed forces they support, and thus have the sesame that would open the doors to Europe, this would be the main purpose of these new African *“tirailleurs”* (Slimani, 2014) engaged or willing to engage on the Russian-Ukrainian front.

News of African Recruits on the Front

The contribution of foreign back-up troops involved in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is not well known. In the next developments, we will try to echo the news from the front concerning African fighters, relying on analyses and testimonies that describe both their military contribution and their destiny.

The Mixed Contribution of Internationalist Volunteers.

Thousands of foreigners who have gone to fight for Russia or Ukraine are a formidable propaganda tool for both protagonists, but convincing evidence of their effectiveness on the front is lacking (Weimerskirch, 2022). According to expert analyses, their military contribution is rather disorderly and mixed (Le Devoir & Agence France Presse, 2022). According to James Rands, an analyst for the British Janes Intelligence Institute, many of these people, often engaged in individual and spontaneous recruitment, *“often come with their own bundles of problems, illusions and incompetence. They claim weapons, do not speak the language and know neither the field nor the culture of the camp they would like to serve. There are also those who suffer from psychological vulnerabilities, [like] drug addicts, recently released prisoners, the ultra-violent ones carried by ideologies that have nothing to do with the conflict in which they engage. Most are therefore difficult to integrate into units under a coherent command, with discipline, respect for the adopted tactics and mastery of engagement”* (Lauras, 2022).

To those who are fundamentally unfit to fight, there are other candidates, military or not, whose heroic ardour has been cooled once on the spot, to the point of turning back after only a few weeks of engagement. More than half of the candidates who landed in Ukraine left prematurely, complaining about poor military organization, insufficient equipment or the obligation to sign an indefinite engagement (Kuntz, 2022; Sénéchal, 2022). This premature abandonment is also linked to the fear aroused in many foreign recruits by the threat of the Russian and Ukrainian authorities to consider them as “mercenaries”, that is, individuals who are liable to be prosecuted as criminals for their participation in the hostilities and whose ill-treatment they may suffer if captured would not engage the responsibility of States (Vercammen, 2022). For example, on 9 June 2022, a court in Donetsk (Donbass) sentenced to death three foreign nationals, two British and one Moroccan, for “mercenary” activities committed alongside Ukrainian forces (Amnesty International, 2022). Allegations of torture by both sides (United Nations News, 2022) have certainly contributed to the fear among foreign fighters of being taken prisoner, prompting them to leave the front hurriedly. It is not surprising that at the end of the first year of hostilities, the results obtained on the ground by these internationalist volunteers were in the eyes of some observers at least mediocre (Rodier, 2022).

African Recruits, a “cannon fodder”?

The number of African nationals sent to the Russian-Ukrainian front is difficult to establish with accuracy and their actual military contribution remains a mystery. According to the Russian authorities, of nearly 200 African “mercenaries” engaged alongside Ukrainian forces in the first quarter of the conflict, one third among them were eliminated during this period. These statistics are difficult to check, but the high mortality they indicate tends to confirm that African recruits would serve as “cannon fodder” (Robert Lansing Institute for Global Threats and Democracies Studies, 2022) in this conflict where, following an old military tradition dating back to Soviet times (Véronique, 2022), tens of thousands of people, including prisoners, are sent to the front line with little chance of escape (Grynszpan, 2022). The now famous story of three African emigrants recruited in prison by the Wagner PME is edifying from this point of view: sent to the Ukrainian front to buy their freedom, only one will have survived after six months of service (Paravicini & al., 2023). According to several sources, Russia is not alone in using its soldiers as “cannon fodder”; trained at the same school as their Russian counterparts, when their respective countries belonged to the Soviet Union, Ukrainian military officials also *“turned back to the sadly costly tactics of the Red Army”* (Laurent, 2023).

As a proof, in early June 2022, a senior advisor to the Ukrainian president admitted that their troops were losing 100-200 soldiers per day (Haberson & al., 2022). As if that were not enough, on 6 March 2023, President Volodymyr Zelensky ordered his army to find *“appropriate forces”* to defend the city of Bakhmut surrounded by Russian forces at all costs, while many analysts questioned the interest of Ukrainians to cling to this devastated and depopulated locality (France 24, 2023). The human toll of this bloody battle is difficult to establish, each

side tending to reduce its losses and exaggerate those of the opponent. After the first six months of hostilities, Russia estimated that more than 100,000 Ukrainian casualties had been lost, compared to less than 6,000 on its side. The Ukrainian authorities estimated Russian losses at ten times higher than the statistics announced by the Kremlin authorities (Monnet, 2022).

According to the estimates of the Norwegian General Staff, dated 22 January 2023, Russia has recorded 180,000 dead or wounded at that date, compared with 100,000 on the Ukrainian side (Joly, 2023), while other western sources have reported 150,000 casualties in each camp (Euractiv, 2023). According to the *BBC*, Russia reportedly recorded over 70,000 deaths in Ukraine as of 20 September 2024, including 24% of volunteers, 19% of former prisoners and 13% of mobilized soldiers (Ivshina, 2024). The *Wall Street Journal* estimated that, at about the same time, there were 1,000,000 casualties on both sides since the war began (Pancevski, 2024). These overall statistics are, however, difficult to verify and do not allow for accurate estimates of the losses suffered by the ranks of African back-up militiamen engaged on both sides of the front.

Conclusion.

The presence of African back-up militiamen alongside Ukrainian and Russian forces has been established since the outbreak of the conflict on 24 February 2022. It attests that the opposition of several African states to the recruitment of their nationals was not enough to stifle the ardour of recruiters on the continent. The number, motivations and role of African fighters in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are subject to speculation, but they are rarely reported by international media. While some sources claim that thousands of people have expressed the desire to go to the front, consistent accounts tend to limit the number of African fighters to a few dozen in each camp, for most students or economic migrants recruited locally, including in prisons. According to the testimonies we collected from media sources – Africa Defense Forum, BBC News, The Daily Report, Jeune Afrique, Le Monde –, the motivations expressed by these “volunteers” stem from a mixture of vague idealism (defence of the host country) and real opportunism (gain, obtaining a passport, naturalization). Their military contribution seems to be reduced to risky tasks, usually assigned, in accordance with the tradition inherited from the Soviet era, to inexperienced fighters, making them a veritable “cannon fodder”.

The engagement of African back-up militiamen in irregular combat units operating outside the continent is not new. We can mention the experience of “volunteers” from North Africa, mainly Algerians and Egyptians, who joined forces with Muslim forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Otasevic, 2013, p. 219-230). We can also look at the case of Kenyans and Ugandans serving as a stand-in force for the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s (Vicky, 2012). By joining forces with Russian and Ukrainian forces, notably via the social digital platforms, African “volunteers” attest to the evolution towards what appears as an “uberization” of war (Van Offelen, 2023). This form of liberalization of mercenary activity could only lead to an influx on the continent of war entrepreneurs, synonymous with a greater destabilization of Africa (Parens, 2023). The recently proven existence of a workforce from East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda) working in Russian military drone assembly plants (Faucon & al., 2024) as well as Israel’s plan to recruit African asylum seekers as back-up militiamen for its army (Kubovich & Peleg, 2024) attest to the role that Africa could be expected to play in future conflicts: that of a demographic reservoir providing for “infantrymen”. This perspective is worrying, when we know that the Armed Islamic Group (AIG) – which became the Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting (SGPF) then Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), led the civil war in Algeria during the 1990s, was born from the contingent of “volunteers” who returned from Afghanistan where they had been trained in the art of war fighting the Soviets.

French références

- Africa Defense Forum (2024). La Russie emploie des menaces et de fausses promesses pour envoyer les Africains au combat en Ukraine. <https://adf-magazine.com/fr/2024/07/la-russie-emploie-des-menaces-et-de-fausses-promesses-pour-envoyer-les-africains-au-combat-en-ukraine/>
- Africa Press (2022). L'Afrique, un médiateur clé dans le conflit russo-ukrainien ? <https://www.africa-press.net/niger/dossiers/lafrigue-un-mediateur-cle-dans-le-conflit-russo-ukrainien>
- Ali, S. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine-Russie : ces Africains qui préfèrent combattre en Ukraine que de rester dans leur pays. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-60750419>
- Ali, S. (2022). Guerre Russie-Ukraine : pourquoi tant d'étudiants africains étaient dans le pays. *BBC News Afrique*. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-60605584>
- Al Manar TV (2022). La Russie publie un tableau sur le nombre de mercenaires étrangers en Ukraine et leur pays d'origine. <https://french.almanar.com.lb/2376805>
- Amnesty International (2022). Ukraine/Russie. Les « condamnations à mort » prononcées contre trois membres étrangers des forces ukrainiennes par des tribunaux séparatistes sont une violation flagrante du droit international. <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2022/06/ukraine-russia-death-sentences-against-three-foreign-members-of-ukrainian-forces-by-separatists-courts-a-blatant-violation-of-international-law/>
- Aomar, A. (2022). Des Algériens parmi les combattants étrangers en Ukraine. *ObservAlgerie.com*. <https://observalgerie.com/2022/07/17/societe/algerienscombattants-etrangeurs-ukraine/>
- Arefi, A. (2014). Ukraine : la CIA en sous-marin ? *Le Point*. https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/ukraine-la-cia-en-sous-main-05-05-2014-1819233_24.php#11
- Arredondas, M. (2022). Des milliers de combattants étrangers rejoignent l'armée ukrainienne dans la guerre contre la Russie. *Atalayar*. <https://atalayar.com/index.php/fr/content/des-milliers-de-combattants-etrangeurs-rejoignent-larmee-ukrainienne-dans-la-guerre-contre/20220309133948155445.html>
- Atcha, M. (2024). Des Camerounais enrôlés dans l'armée russe pour combattre sur le front en Ukraine. *Actu Cameroun*. <https://actucameroun.com/2024/04/08/des-camerounais-enroles-dans-larmee-russe-pour-combattre-sur-le-front-en-ukraine/>
- BBC News (2022). Guerre Ukraine-Russie : un Nigérian dit qu'il veut se venger de Poutine. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-60677429>
- Belanger, Y. & Fleurant, A. (2022). Les dépenses militaires : la fin des cycles ? *Revue Interventions économiques*. <https://journals.openedition.org/interventionseconomiques/1206>
- Benabid, M. & Boumaiz, H. (2022). Russie-Ukraine : la communication est-elle le nouvel instrument de guerre ? *Policy Center for The New South*. <https://www.policycenter.ma/podcasts/russie-ukraine-la-communication-est-elle-le-nouvel-instrument-de-guerre>
- Bertrand, P. (2020). La guerre par procuration. *Cahier de la pensée mili-Terre*. https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/fr/plugins/cdec/pdf/to_pdf.php?entry=561
- Bohbot, J. (2017). La guerre du Donbass. *Diploweb : la revue géopolitique*. <https://www.diploweb.com/La-guerre-du-Dombasshtml>
- Boulanger, P. & Rosière, S. (2022). Géographie et guerre. Au-delà du conflit en Ukraine, quels liens ? Quelles évolutions ? *L'Espace Politique*. <https://journals.openedition.org/espacepolitique/10322>
- Bretonnier, M. & Eydoux, T. (2023). Mercenaires russes de Wagner : enquête vidéo sur l'« armée fantôme » de Vladimir Poutine. *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/video/2021/04/04/mercenaires-russes-wagner-enquete-video-sur-l-armee-fantome-de-vladimir-poutine_6075520_3210.html
- Boulègue, M. (2018). La guerre dans le Donbass trois ans après les Accords de Minsk 2. *Revue Défense Nationale*. Vol. 809, N° 4, p. 107-112.
- Braun, J. (2024). Géopolitique : Pourquoi l'Afrique devient-elle un champ de bataille entre la Russie et l'Occident ? *BBC News Afrique*. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-66545373>

- Bruyère-Ostells, W. (2019). Mercenaires et entreprises de sécurité : vers une privatisation de la guerre ? *Diplomatie*. <https://www.areion24.news/2019/03/16/mercenaires-et-entreprises-de-securite-vers-une-privatisation-de-la-guerre/>
- Cacciamani, E. (2023). Militaires, mercenaires, contractors, volontaires...à ne pas confondre. *De Facto*. <https://defacto-observatoire.fr/Medias/Les-Surligneurs/Fact-checks/Militaires-mercenaires-contractors-volontaires-a-ne-pas-confondre>
- Cascais, A. (2022). Les alliés de la Russie en Afrique. *Deutsch Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/fr/les-allies-russes-en-afrique/a-61069668>
- Charlier-Barou, M. D. (2009). Les sociétés militaires privées en Afghanistan : une coalition dans la coalition. *Revue Défense Nationale*. N° 723, p. 87-96.
- Charpentier, S. (2022). Un volontaire Sénégalais s'engage pour défendre l'Ukraine. *TV5 Monde*. <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/un-volontaire-senegalais-sengage-pour-defendre-lukraine-134548>
- Cicchini, J. & Herrera, R. (2008). Sociétés militaires privées : la guerre par procuration ? *Recherches internationales*. N° 82, p. 9-26.
- Condominas, B. (2016). Le boom des sociétés militaires privées. *Jeune Afrique*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/moyen-orient/20160209-mercenaires-chiens-guerre-armees-boom-societes-militaires-privees-war-on-want>
- Cook, J. (2022). Les médias occidentaux sont devenus des supporteurs de la guerre en Ukraine. *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/opinion-fr/ukraine-guerre-russie-medias-occidentaux-occupation-palestine-propagande>
- Courrier international (2022). Alger en colère après l'appel ukrainien aux combattants volontaires. <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/diplomatie-alger-en-colere-apres-lappel-ukrainien-aux-combattants-volontaires>
- De Boeck, P. (2022). Le vrai ou faux : la Russie va-t-elle recruter des « étrangers volontaires » pour combattre en Ukraine ? *Le Soir*. <https://www.lesoir.be/429896/article/2022-03-14/le-vrai-ou-faux-la-russie-va-t-elle-recruter-des-etrangers-volontaires-pour>
- De Jong, P. (2003). Agir entre les lignes - Les sociétés militaires privées : Wagner, Blackwater, Mozart et les autres. Mareuil Éditions.
- Desaunay, D. (2022). Russie-Ukraine : désinformation, propagande et guerre d'influence, l'autre champ de bataille. *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20220301-russie-ukraine-d%C3%A9sinformation-propagande-et-guerres-d-influence-l-autre-champ-de-bataille>
- Dugoin, C. (2016). La guerre hybride en Ukraine. *Revue de Défense Nationale*. Vol. 8, N° 793, p. 85-90.
- Dusoulier, A. (2020). Les sociétés militaires privées : des acteurs au cœur des conflits. *Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité*. <https://www.grip.org/les-societes-militaires-privees-des-acteurs-au-coeur-des-conflits/>
- Eckert, D. & Lambroschini, S. (2017). La ligne de démarcation entre séparatistes du Donbass et le reste de l'Ukraine. *Mappemonde*. <https://journals.openedition.org/mappemonde/2317>
- Euractiv (2023). L'effroyable bilan d'une année de guerre en Ukraine. <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/international/news/leffroyable-bilan-dune-annee-de-guerre-en-ukraine>
- Fontaine, M. (2022). Qui sont les mercenaires recrutés par la Russie pour combattre à ses côtés en Ukraine ? *GEO*. <https://www.geo.fr/geopolitique/qui-sont-les-mercenaires-recrutes-par-la-russie-pour-combattre-a-ses-cotes-en-ukraine-209230>
- Fontaine, M. (2024) La Russie recrute sur les portails d'offres d'emploi ses futurs soldats en Ukraine. *GEO*. <https://www.geo.fr/geopolitique/la-russie-recrute-sur-les-portails-doffres-demploi-ses-futurs-soldats-en-ukraine-210331>
- France Info & Agence France Presse (2022). « A bas la France », « Vive Poutine et la Russie » : ces slogans qui se multiplient dans les pays du Sahel. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/niger/a-bas-la-france-vive-poutine-et-la-russie-ces-slogans-qui-se-multiplient-dans-les-pays-du-sahel_5371339.html

- France 24 (2023). Guerre en Ukraine : Zelensky demande à l'armée de « trouver les forces pour défendre Bakhmout ». <https://www.france24.com/fr/europe/20230306-%F0%9F%94%B4-en-direct-le-ministre-russe-de-la-d%C3%A9fense-s-est-rendu-dans-le-donbass>
- Glez, D. (2022). Africains morts en Ukraine : « tirailleurs » ou « mercenaires »? *Jeune Afrique*. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1356807/politique/africains-morts-en-ukraine-tirailleurs-ou-mercenaires>
- Glez, D. (2023). En annonçant la possible fin des visas, Moscou fait des yeux doux à l'Afrique. *Jeune Afrique*. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1616786/politique/en-annoncant-la-possible-fin-des-visas-moscou-fait-les-yeux-doux-a-lafrique/>
- Gautier, M. (2022). Nombre de soldats actifs en Russie et en Ukraine en février 2022. *Statista*. <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/1293659/soldats-actifs-russie-ukraine/>
- Grimaud, C. (2023). Ukraine : la bataille des opinions publiques dans la guerre de l'information. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-la-bataille-des-opinions-publiques-dans-la-guerre-de-linformation-216851>
- Grynszpan, E. (2022). Comment des prisonniers russes sont envoyés par dizaines de milliers en première ligne sur le front ukrainien. *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/11/17/des-milliers-de-prisonniers-russes-envoyes-sur-le-front-en-ukraine_6150290_3210.html
- Guisnel, J. (2010). Quand l'armée de terre analyse le marché des sociétés militaires privées. *Le Point*. https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/quand-l-armee-de-terre-analyse-le-marche-des-societes-militaires-privées-30-09-2010-1243471_24.php
- Haupais, N. (2009). Les enjeux juridiques de la « privatisation de la guerre ». *Annuaire français de droit international*. N°55, p. 87-88.
- Hessoun, C. (2022). Afrique : la Russie nie recruter des combattants malgré certains témoignages. *La Nouvelle Tribune*. <https://lanouvelletribune.info/2022/05/afrique-la-russie-nie-recruter-des-combattants-malgre-certains-temoignages/>
- Idrac, C. (2022). Dakar proteste auprès de l'Ukraine pour ses recrutements de volontaires au Sénégal. *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20220304-dakar-proteste-aupr%C3%A8s-de-l-ukraine-pour-ses-recrutements-de-volontaires-au-sénégal>
- Ivshina, O (2024). Les volontaires meurent alors que le nombre de morts de guerre en Russie dépasse les 70 000. *BBC News Afrique*. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cly3jvj84ego>
- Joly, V. (2023). Guerre en Ukraine : qui sont les étrangers qui s'engagent pour Kiev ? *La Croix*. <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Guerre-Ukraine-sont-combattants-etranagers-sengagent-Kiev-2023-05-31-1201269469>
- Kaboukin, R. (2022). Blackwater, Wagner...mode d'emploi des sociétés militaires. *Deutsch Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/fr/wagner-blackwater-societes-militaires-privées-smp-mode-d-emploi/a-60704920>
- Kane, C. & Chastand, J.-B. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : le difficile exode des étudiants Africains. *Le Monde*. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/03/01/guerre-en-ukraine-le-difficile-exode-des-etudiants-africains_6115635_3212.html
- Kharief, A. (2020). Libye, le terrain de jeu turco-russe. Un afflux historique de mercenaires. *Le Monde diplomatique*, septembre, p. 4-5.
- Klen, M. (2004). La privatisation de la guerre. *Études*. Vol. 401, N° 9, p. 181-191.
- Klen, M. (2023). La désinformation dans la guerre en Ukraine. *Revue Défense Nationale*. <https://www.defnat.com/e-RDN/vue-tribune.php?ctribune=1622>
- Kubovich, Y. & Peleg, B. (2024). Israël recrute des demandeurs d'asile africains pour des opérations risquées à Gaza en leur promettant un statut juridique. *Agence Media Palestine*. <https://agencemediapalestine.fr/blog/2024/09/16/israel-recrute-des-demandeurs-dasile-africains-pour-des-operations-risquees-a-gaza-en-leur-promettant-un-statut-juridique-permanent/>
- Kuntz, T. (2022). Je ne veux pas d'une mission-suicide : en Ukraine, des combattants étrangers font demi-tour. *Slate.fr*. <https://www.slate.fr/story/225744/combattants-etranagers-ukraine-reparent-guerre-abandon-manque-armement>

- Laruelle, M. (2019, avril). Les milices russes et leur utilisation à l'intérieur et à l'étranger. *Russie.Nei.Visions*. N° 113, IFRI.
- Lasserre, I. (2019). Les conflits par procuration sont-ils l'avenir de la guerre ? *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/les-conflits-par-procuration-sont-ils-l-avenir-de-la-guerre-20190512?msocid=3d0dc108a4516a573b93d174a5156b68>
- Lauras, D. (2022). L'apport désordonné et mitigé des combattants étrangers. *Le Soleil*. <https://www.lesoleil.com/2022/04/01/lapport-desordonne-et-mitige-des-combattants-etrangers-en-ukraine-69f9112d32360d6b8404d54ce3acce8/>
- Laurent, B. (2023). Comment l'armée russe envoie, par vagues successives, ses soldats à une mort certaine. *GEO*. <https://www.geo.fr/geopolitique/ukraine-comment-armee-russe-envoie-vagues-successives-soldats-mort-certaine-tactique-wagner-pertes-prigojine-rusi-214964>
- Lazaréva, A. (2024). Comment la Russie recrute des Rwandais pour faire la guerre en Ukraine. *The Ukrainian Week*. <https://tyzhden.fr/comment-la-russie-recrute-des-rwandais-pour-faire-la-guerre-en-ukraine/>
- Leclercq, H. (2022). La Russie recrute des combattants en Afrique contre un salaire. *La Libre Belgique*. <https://www.lalibre.be/international/europe/2022/03/08/la-russie-recrute-des-combattants-en-afrique-contre-un-salaire-FA6GBNI4SZEITBM5PIGU3OWUYA/>
- Le Devoir & Agence France Presse (2022). L'apport mitigé des combattants étrangers en Ukraine. <https://www.ledevoir.com/monde/europe/694626/l-apport-desordonne-et-mitige-des-combattants-etrangers-en-ukraine>
- Le Monde (2004). La guerre privatisée. https://www.lemonde.fr/une-abonnes/article/2004/05/07/la-guerre-privatisee_363993_3207.html
- Le Parisien & Agence France Presse (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : 40 000 Syriens ont été recrutés pour combattre. <https://www.leparisien.fr/international/guerre-en-ukraine-40-000-syriens-ont-ete-recrutes-par-la-russie-pour-combattre-15-03-2022-4HFMVPT7VRBVZFDI327OEDTVEU.php>
- Le Troquier, P. (2023). Russie : comment des ressortissants africains sont enrôlés en prison par Wagner. *Radio France Internationale*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230127-russie-comment-des-ressortissants-africains-sont-enr%C3%B4l%C3%A9s-en-prison-par-wagner>
- Malpas, A. (2024). Capturés en Ukraine, des étrangers disent avoir combattu malgré eux pour la Russie. *Le Devoir*. <https://www.ledevoir.com/monde/europe/809353/captures-ukraine-etrangers-disent-avoir-combattu-malgre-eux-russie>
- Marchaud, C. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : l'armée convoque les hommes mobilisables. *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/guerre-en-ukraine-l-armee-convoque-les-hommes-mobilisables-20220818?msocid=3d0dc108a4516a573b93d174a5156b68>
- Mathieu, L. & Dorman, V. (2018). Mercenaires russes : du Donbass à Damas, des « héros » pas assez discrets. *Libération*. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/03/12/mercenaires-russes-du-donbass-a-damas-des-heros-pas-assez-discrets_1635677/#mailmunch-pop-1146266
- Monnet, N. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : 100 000 morts ukrainiens mais 16 fois moins côté russe...les chiffres fous dévoilés par le Kremlin. *L'Indépendant*. <https://www.lindependant.fr/2022/09/21/guerre-en-ukraine-la-russie-devoile-ses-pertes-humaines-pour-la-premiere-fois-depuis-mars-10558041.php>
- Ndayiragije, F. (2023). Le groupe Wagner recrute-t-il en Afrique ? *Deutsch Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/fr/rca-groupe-wagner-recrutement-guerre-ukraine-afrique-russie/a-64300553>
- Nocetti, J. & Vincent, E. (2024). Contre Kiev et ses alliés, Moscou intensifie les opérations de guerre « hybride ». *Espace Média*. <https://www.ifri.org/fr/presse-contenus-repris-sur-le-site/contre-kiev-et-ses-allies-moscou-intensifie-les-operations-de>
- Nwonwu, C., Tukur, F., Alo, O. & Korenyuk, M. (2024). Quelles sont les stratégies d'influence de la Russie en Afrique ? *BBC News Afrique*. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c77121xzm1o>
- Otasevic, A. (2013). Les organisations combattantes irrégulières en Bosnie-Herzégovine. *Stratégie*. N° 103, p. 219-230.

- Plumey Bobo, Y. & Olivier, M. (2024). Les tirailleurs de Poutine. *Jeune Afrique*. N° 314, octobre, p. 26-32.
- Pravda (2024). Les entreprises russes ont commencé à recruter activement des employés en Afrique. <https://francais.news-pravda.com/world/2024/07/17/197283.html>
- Randrianarimanana, P. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : cet étudiant congolais membre de la milice pro-russe de Lougansk. *TV5 Monde*. <https://information.tv5monde.com/international/guerre-en-ukraine-cet-etudiant-congolais-membre-de-la-milice-pro-russe-de-lougansk>
- Randrianarimanana, P. (2023). Qui sont les combattants africains dans la guerre en Ukraine ? *TV5 Monde*. <https://information.tv5monde.com/international/qui-sont-les-combattants-africains-dans-la-guerre-en-ukraine-1959475>
- Rissoul, H. (2020). Les sociétés militaires privées, le mercenariat 2.0. *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/decryptages/mercenaires-societes-militaires-privees-conflits-guerres>
- Rodier, A. (2022). Ukraine. Les « volontaires » étrangers dans les deux camps. *Magazine Raids*. <https://raids.fr/2022/03/15/ukraine-a-s-les-volontaires-etrangers-dans-les-deux-camps/>
- Sénéchal, J. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : des anciens de la Légion internationale dénoncent les pratiques de certains chefs. *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/guerre-en-ukraine-des-anciens-de-la-legion-internationale-denoncent-les-pratiques-de-certains-chefs-20220822?msocid=3d0dc108a4516a573b93d174a5156b68>
- Slimani, L. (2014). Histoire : qui étaient les combattants africains des deux guerres mondiales ? *Jeune Afrique*. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/134995/politique/histoire-qui-taient-les-combattants-africains-des-deux-guerres-mondiales/>
- The Daily Report (2022). La Tunisie soupçonne les autorités ukrainiennes de recruter des prisonniers tunisiens détenus en Ukraine pour combattre les Russes. <http://www.thedailyreports.com/fr/2022/03/07/la-tunisie-soupconne-les-autorites-ukrainiennes-de-recruter-des-prisonniers-tunisiens-detenus-en-ukraine-pour-combattre-la-russie/>
- Ukrinform (2024). Renseignement : la Russie intensifie le recrutement d'Africains pour la guerre contre l'Ukraine. <https://www.ukrinform.fr/rubric-ato/3869065-renseignement-la-russie-intensifie-le-recrutement-dafricains-pour-la-guerre-contre-lukraine.html>
- United Nations News (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : de nombreux prisonniers de guerre ukrainiens et russes soumis à la torture, selon l'ONU. <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2022/11/1129862>
- Valade, C. & Di Roma, C. (2022). Comment la Centrafrique est devenue le laboratoire de la propagande russe en Afrique. *Le Monde Afrique*. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/06/08/comment-la-centrafrique-est-devenue-le-laboratoire-de-la-propagande-russe-en-afrique_6129431_3212.html
- Van Offelen, C. (2023). Les mercenaires modernes ou « l'ubérisation » de la guerre. *Conflits : revue géopolitique*. <https://www.revueconflits.com/les-mercenaires-modernes-ou-l-uberisation-hde-la-guerre/>
- Van Ossel, D. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : Tchétchènes, mercenaires, volontaires étrangers, Syriens... Qui se bat en Ukraine ? *Radiotélévision Belge Francophone*. <https://www.rtbf.be/article/guerre-en-ukraine-tchetchenes-mercenaires-volontaires-etrangers-syriens-qui-se-bat-en-ukraine-10951503>
- Vercammen, M. (2022). « Combattants », « mercenaires » ou « terroristes » : quels impacts pour les volontaires étrangers en Ukraine ? Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité. <https://www.grip.org/combattants-mercenaires-ou-terroristes-quels-impacts-pour-les-volontaires-etrangers-en-ukraine/>
- Véronique, P. (2022). Guerre en Ukraine : des soldats utilisés comme chair à canon, une vieille tradition russe. *L'Express*. https://www.lexpress.fr/monde/europe/guerre-en-ukraine-des-soldats-utilises-comme-chair-a-canon-une-vieille-tradition-russe_2183373.html
- Vicky, A. (2012). Mercenaires africains pour guerres américaines. *Le Monde diplomatique*. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2012/05/VICKY/47652>
- Vincent, E. (2022). Dans les arcanes de la lutte informationnelle russe en Afrique. *Le Monde*. <https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/01/28/dans-les-arcanes-de-la-lutte-informationnelle->

[russe-en-afrique_6111448_3210.html](#)

Weimerskirch, P. (2022). Ces Luxembourgeois partis se battre en Ukraine. *Radiotélévision Luxembourg Infos*. <https://infos.rtl.lu/actu/luxembourg/a/1913262.html>

Yékoua, B. (2022). Centrafrique : Wagner, recrutement massif en cours. *Corbeau news Centrafrique*. <https://corbeaunews-centrafrique.org/centrafrique-wagner-recrutement-massif-en-cours/>

Yékoua, B. (2022). Centrafrique : désertion en cascade parmi les Russes noirs à Bambari. *Corbeau news Centrafrique*. <https://corbeaunews-centrafrique.org/centrafrique-desertion-en-cascade-parmi-les-russes-noirs-a-bambari/>

Zeino, W. (2021). Wagner – une société militaire privée russe en Syrie. *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*. <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/wagner-une-societe-militaire-privee-russe-en-syrie>

English references

Crowe, P. & Momar Lô, A. (2022). Why hundreds of Africans want to fight for Ukraine's foreign legion. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/world/ukraine-war-russia-africa-foreign-legion-b2058741.html>

Entous, A. & Schwirtz, M. (2024). The Spy War: How the C.I.A. Secretly Helps Ukraine Fight Putin. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/25/world/europe/cia-ukraine-intelligence-russia-war.html>

Faucon, B., Bariyo, N. & Luxmoore, M. (2024). The Russian Drone Plant That Could Shape the War in Ukraine. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/world/the-russian-drone-plant-that-could-shape-the-war-in-ukraine-7abd5616?msockid=3d0dc108a4516a573b93d174a5156b68>

Haberson, S., England, R., Dale, B. & Ivshina, O. (2022). War in Ukraine: Can we say how many people have died? *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61987945>

McLoughlin, B. (2022). Ukraine: Foreign Fighters offered £ 1,500 a day to fight against Russia. *The Standard*. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/ukraine-foreign-soldiers-russia-foreign-legion-fight-b986175.html>

Mehra, T. & Thorley, A. (2022). Foreign Fighters, Foreign Volunteers and Mercenaries in the Ukrainian Armed Conflict. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. <https://icct.nl/publication/foreign-fighters-foreign-volunteers-and-mercenaries-ukrainian-armed-conflict>

Militarnyi (2024). A Russian mercenary from Sierra Leone was captured near Mariyinka. <https://mil.in.ua/en/news/a-russian-mercenary-from-sierra-leone-was-captured-near-mariyinka/>

Military Watch Magazine, (2022). Mercenaries or Ideologues? Examining the Most Famous Militia in Ukraine the Georgian National Legion. <https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/georgian-legion-examine-militia-ukraine>

Mumford, A. (2020). *Proxy Warfare*. Polity Press. Cambridge.

Obaji, P. Jr. (2022). Insiders Warn Notorious Foreign Rebels to Fight with Russia in Ukraine. *Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/central-african-republic-officials-warn-notorious-union-for-peace-rebels-to-join-putins-war-in-ukraine/>

- Pancevski, B. (2024). One Million Are Now Dead or Injured in the Russia-Ukraine War. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/world/one-million-are-now-dead-or-injured-in-the-russia-ukraine-war-b09d04e5?msocid=3d0dc108a4516a573b93d174a5156b68>
- Paravicini, G., Lebedev, F. & Light, F. (2023). The Africans fighting on Russia's front line in Ukraine. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-wagner-africa/>
- Parens, R. (2023). Mercenary shocks: what the war in Ukraine will eventually mean for Africa. *War on the Rocks. Texas National Security Review*. <https://warontherocks.com/2023/02/mercenary-shocks-what-the-war-in-ukraine-will-eventually-mean-for-africa/>
- Przetacznik, J. & Tothova, L. (2022). Russia's war on Ukraine: Military balance of power. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729292/EP_RS_ATAG\(2022\)729292_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729292/EP_RS_ATAG(2022)729292_EN.pdf)
- Robert Lansing Institute for Global Threats and Democracies Studies (2022). Russia uses African mercenaries as consumable in the war against Ukraine. <https://lansinginstitute.org/2022/04/25/russia-uses-african-mercenaries-as-consumables-in-the-war-against-ukraine/>
- Saballa, J. (2024). Russia Intensifies Recruitment of African Mercenaries for Ukraine War: Intel. *The Defense Post*. <https://thedefensepost.com/2024/05/29/russia-recruitment-africanmercenaries/>
- Schmitt, E., Barnes, J. E. & Cooper, H. (2022). 'Commando Network Coordinates Flow of Weapons in Ukraine, Officials Say'. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/us/politics/commandos-russia-ukraine.html>
- Suarez Sutil, A. (2022). Mercenaries on Ukraine: Continuation of an existing phenomenon. *Atalayar*. <https://www.atalayar.com/en/opinion/alberto-suarez-sutil/mercenaries-ukraine-continuation-existing-phenomenon/20220424094928136397.html>

Author biography

Serge Loungou is a senior lecturer in political geography. Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, he is also the executive director of the Centre for Studies and Research in Political Geosciences and Prospective at Omar Bongo University. His research focuses mainly on migration dynamics and geopolitical conflicts.