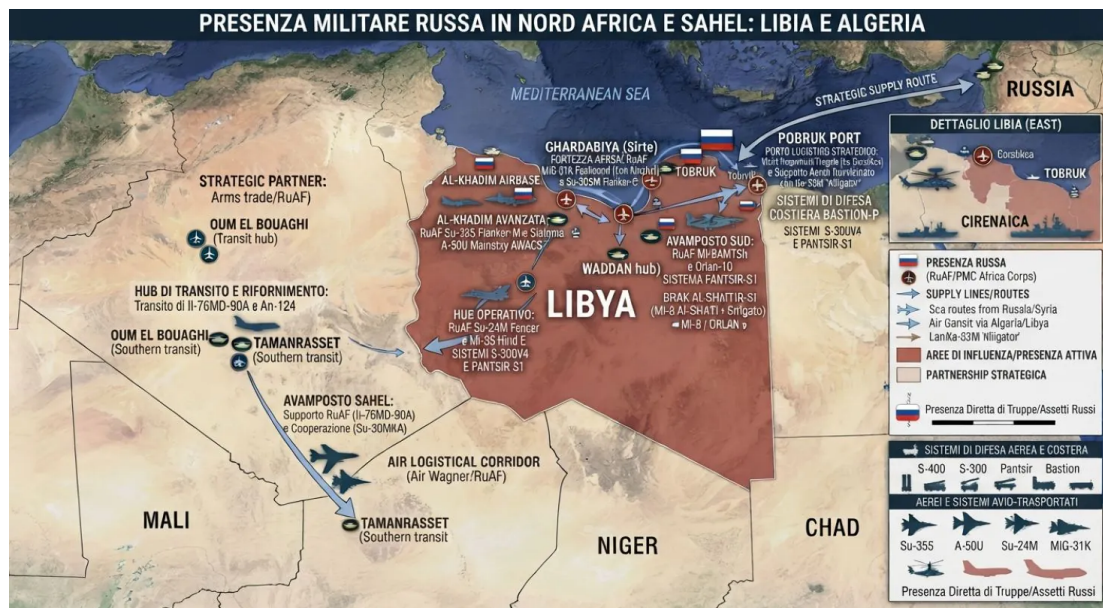




The Russian Threat on NATO's Southern Flank - Italy on the Front Line between Libya and Algeria

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Russia's projection in North Africa has long ceased to be an informal or purely mercenary presence. Through the integration of the old Wagner network into the official framework of the Ministry of Defense (**Africa Corps**) and the use of a dense air and naval logistical network, Moscow has structured a permanent military apparatus divided between two key actors: **Libya** (direct operational pivot) and **Algeria** (transit hub and commercial partner).

Libya: The Military Hub and Infrastructure of the 6 Africa Corps Bases

Exploiting the institutional division between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Russia has consolidated a strong military presence in central, eastern, and southern Libya. Satellite analyses and intelligence reports (including the *Tearline* project of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency) confirm expansion and fortification work on **six strategic air bases**:

- **Key Bases:** Al-Jufra, Al-Khadim (east of Benghazi), Al-Qardabiyah (Sirte), Brak al-Shati, Tamanhint, and Maaten al-Sarra.
- **Structural Enhancement:** Starting from the 2024-2026 biennium, Moscow has invested in the reconstruction and modernization of aircraft hangars, ammunition depots, communication towers, and barracks. For example, at the Brak al-Shati base Russian personnel increased from approximately 300 to over 450 units, while at Al-Khadim new accommodations and support infrastructure have been built.
- **Deployed Tactical Assets:** Tactical fighters (such as **MiG-29**) regularly operate from Libyan bases, along with advanced air defense systems and remotely piloted aircraft (UAS), in addition to thousands of Africa Corps operators.
- **The Tobruk Port Project:** Agreements between Cyrenaica (General Khalifa Haftar) and the Russian-Belarusian sphere provide for access and development of military and port infrastructure in the Tobruk area (including the Gamel Abdel Nasser air base), guaranteeing Moscow a potential naval foothold in the central Mediterranean.

Strategic Function: Libya serves as a kinetic and logistical springboard not only for force projection in the Mediterranean, but also for directly supplying allied military juntas in the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) and supporting allied militias in Sudan.

Algeria and the "Shadow" Air Fleet Network (*Air Wagner*)

Unlike Libya, Algeria maintains a rigid doctrine of non-alignment and **refuses the installation of foreign military bases** on its territory. However, the country plays a crucial role in Moscow's global supply chain.

- **Clandestine Logistics Data:** Investigations into international air traffic (including data published by *Defense News*) have traced **at least 167 cargo flights** between Russia and Algeria carried out between March 2025 and April 2026.
- **The "Air Wagner" Fleet:** Routes use formally civilian transport companies but subordinate to the needs of the Russian military-industrial complex (often sanctioned such as *Aviacon Zitotrans*). Heavy carriers such as **Ilyushin Il-76** and **An-124** connect Russian aerospace production facilities (Komsomolsk-on-Amur, Irkutsk) with Algerian bases.

- **Strategic Technical Stopovers:** The bases of **Oum El Bouaghi, Ain Oussera, Annaba, Laghouat, and Béchar** are exploited as intermediate technical stopovers. From here, cargo (dual-use components, supplies, or weapons) is dispatched to sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Guinea) or Latin America, evading Western controls through transponder shutdown (*ADS-B*).
- **High-Level Military Supplies:** Algeria remains one of the world's leading purchasers of advanced Russian weaponry, being a recipient of cutting-edge fighters such as the **Su-57** and **Su-35**, a factor that justifies and intensifies the interchange and technical contacts with Moscow.



The Russian Threat on NATO's Southern Flank – why Italy must remain on the Front Line between Libya and Algeria

The Projected Threat: Drones, Surveillance, and Risks for Italy

The proximity of Cyrenaica to Italian coasts (approximately **700 km**) transforms the bases controlled by Africa Corps into a point of observation and potential hybrid pressure in the central Mediterranean.

Technical and Operational Capabilities toward NATO's Southern Flank

1. **Range of ISR Drones:** Remotely piloted vehicles deployed or operated from Libyan bases (such as Al-Khadim and Al-Jufra) possess autonomy more than sufficient to cover the distance to the Strait of Sicily, major Italian islands, and maritime trade routes.

2. **Electronic Intelligence (*SIGINT*):** From North African positions, Moscow has the capacity to conduct persistent activities of monitoring communications and radar tracking of Italian Navy movements and NATO exercises in the Mediterranean.

3. **Hybrid Risk Vectors:**

- **Submarine Critical Infrastructure:** Exposure to covert monitoring or potential sabotage risks on strategic energy lines (such as the *GreenStream* pipeline connecting Libya to Sicily) and submarine telecommunications cables.
- **Electronic Warfare (*Jamming*):** The theoretical use of electromagnetic jamming platforms could interfere with civil and military navigation systems in the intermediate maritime area.
- **Air Defense Pressure:** The management of anomalous flows of aircraft or drones forces Italian integrated surveillance systems (*IAMD*) to maintain high alert thresholds along the southern strip.

Sources and Documentary References

- **National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (Tearline Project):** Geospatial intelligence report on the infrastructure development of 6 Russian air bases in Libya (2024-2026).
- **Defense News / C4ADS:** Investigative inquiry into the "Air Wagner" air transport fleet and 167 cargo flights between Moscow and Algerian hubs (March 2025 – April 2026).
- **Africa Defense Forum (ADF) & Agenzia Nova:** Monitoring of weapon system flows, agreements for the Tobruk naval and air base, and supply routes to the Sahel.
- **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI):** Historical and recent data on the interchange of advanced weapons systems (Su-57, Su-35) between Moscow and Algiers.