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Russia Opens Military Office in Central African Republic

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Russia has donated small arms and sent trainers in recent years to bolster the CAR government's fight against militia groups. **AlfvanBeem / Wikicommons**

Russia has opened a Defense Ministry representative office and donated 10 armored vehicles to the Central African Republic in Moscow's latest effort to expand its influence on the continent, Reuters reported Saturday.

The moves come amid President Vladimir Putin's push to revive Soviet-era influence and challenge other powers' foothold in resource-rich Africa. In the conflict-torn former French colony of CAR, Russia has donated small arms and sent trainers in recent years to bolster the government's fight against militia groups.

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Russia's Ambassador in CAR Vladimir Titorenko said that Moscow airlifted a second batch of 10 BRDM-2 armored personnel vehicles to Bangui as a gift, according to Reuters. The first

batch arrived on Oct. 15.

Russia also sent five members of the military, including senior officer Oleg Polguev, who will lead the Russian Defense Ministry's representative office in CAR and will also advise the country's defense ministry.

Titorenko said that Moscow was considering expanding its pool of military instructors in CAR, the Russian state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"Russia's strategic goal in the CAR is to establish full central government control over the entire territory of the country and strengthen the armed forces," he told RIA Novosti after the first BRDM-2 delivery.

According to Retuers, Titorenko said that Bangui has asked Moscow for help in lifting a UN arms embargo "so that it would be possible to supply heavy weaponry, including artillery and helicopters."

The UN Security Council cleared Russia to deliver arms to CAR in 2017. The country has faced near-constant armed conflict since 2013, when a mostly Muslim rebel coalition overthrew the country's then-president and sparked reprisals from Christian militias.

Russia has stepped up its activities in Africa in recent years with military support, nuclear energy and other services in exchange for mining rights.

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