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Africa

Is Wagner facing a new challenge in Africa?

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The failed power grab by the head of the Wagner group, Evgeny Prigozhin, will have repercussions in Africa, even if the Russian authorities have spared no effort to mitigate the effects and reassure their African partners.

Wagner is present in different ways in the countries of the continent. These range from the simple establishment of a branch of one of the group's companies, as in Douala in Cameroon, to the massive infiltration of the state apparatus seen in the Central African Republic.

African presence

Wagner's presence in Africa fulfils several functions: a military presence that is above all designed to provide security for the African powers that be; lucrative activities focused primarily on mining; propaganda campaigns against Western countries; and a geopolitical reinforcement of Russia that proved very useful during its aggression against Ukraine.

In Libya, Wagner's troops are working alongside General Haftar to help control the oilfields in Cyrenaica. In Sudan, they are exploiting gold mines through the companies M Finance, M Invest and Meroe Gold with the complicity of Hemidti, head of the Rapid Support Forces at war with his former ally General Burhan.

In Mali, Colonel Assimi Goïta, by demanding the departure of the UN mission Minusma, is only reinforcing his dependence on Wagner. All the more so as the junta is struggling to pay him the monthly sum of ten million dollars. This financial fragility is proving to be a godsend that Yevgeny Prigozhin's company is seizing on to extend its political and economic power over the country. The consequences were disastrous for the population, with violence on the increase. The massacre of nearly 500 people in the town of Moura, perpetrated by the Malian army and Russian mercenaries, is a terrible illustration of this.

Violence and predation

These human rights violations have been amplified in the Central African Republic. The recent report by Sentry, an NGO which fights against predation in war-torn countries, reveals systemic violence against the population by the Prigojine troops accompanying the Central African armed forces. Under the pretext of fighting the rebels, these mercenaries are seizing most of the country's wealth, in exchange for providing protection for Central African President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. Villages are wiped off the map so that the various companies linked to the Wagner group can exploit the diamond and gold mines and cut precious woods. Their stranglehold on the country is such that they now also control customs and Bangui airport, enabling them to recover a large proportion of the taxes on imported goods.

Ensuring continuity

Is Wagner facing a new challenge in Africa?

During Prigozhin's attempted putsch, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov repeatedly reassured his African counterparts that nothing would change. However, the future remains uncertain and several options are possible.

The Kremlin is in a position to integrate Wagner and its related companies into the state, even if it means arresting some of their leaders, as appears to be the case in Syria. Then the Russian authorities will no longer be able to hide behind their avatar and absolve themselves of the crimes they have committed. Another possibility would be to set up another private military company like the Patriot mercenary group linked to Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Finally, some or all of Wagner's forces on the ground could refuse to come under the Kremlin's authority, maintaining their loyalty to Prigozhin or continuing their activities on their own account. This would fragment Wagner's troops. The breakdown of the states in Sudan and the Central African Republic could favour this hypothesis, leading to an exacerbation of violence against the population.

Prigozhin's failed putsch has tarnished the image of authority, strength and virility conveyed by Putin's propaganda, which seemed to appeal to some in Africa, who saw him as a model for their country. Instead of a model, what they have in front of them is an isolated dictatorship, betrayals, a putsch, murders, brigands vying for power - in short, an air of déjà vu on the continent.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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