

By

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A concerning trend in Africa is developing. Political instability is increasing. This trend is reflected in military coups that occurred in African countries between 2020 and 2024. For example, Presidential Guard Commander, General Abdourahamane Tiani, led a coup in July 2023 to overthrow Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum. Two coups transpired in Burkina Faso within the course of eight months in 2022. The provisional leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, was ousted in September, following the overthrow of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in January.

The democratic transition in Sudan was halted in October 2021 when General Abdel Fattah al-Burhane conducted a military coup. Ongoing confrontations between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces [keep](#) the country in perpetual instability. They have also drawn civilians into the bloodshed.

Guinean president Alpha Condé was ousted in a September 2021 coup, and his successors pledged to bring in a civilian government by 2024. This has yet to happen.

Two coups occurred in Mali within a short period of time. The first coup occurred in August 2020, and the second one took place in May 2021. The military government promises to restore civilian control. It has not.

Shortly after Gabon's President, Ali Bongo Ondimba, was re-elected in August 2023, a military coup d'état removed him from power, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the election. Ondimba is but one more example of this trend.

Leaders of these coups frequently use security and governance failures as justification for the actions taken. In reality, they tend to worsen stability and undermine democratic processes. The frequent occurrence of military takeovers in such politically unstable countries adds complexity to diplomatic endeavours and presents substantial obstacles to regional development, stability, and security, including the proliferation of insurgencies and terrorist organizations.

However, a notable trend among these nations in recent years is the steady rise of Russian presence and influence. Over the past few months, there were significant events involving Russian armed groups in Africa, which highlighted Moscow's growing influence and strategic interests in the region. Russian actions have far-reaching consequences for countering Western influence, especially from the European Union and the United States.

Russia is already strengthening its military ties with several African nations, including those that saw political upheaval in recent years. In May, Russia began [implementing](#) a military cooperation agreement with São Tomé and Príncipe, which involves joint exercises, education, training, and logistics.

Guinea-Bissau further strengthened connections with Russia, as President Umaro Sissoco Embalo engaged in discussions with Russian officials regarding diverse areas of collaboration. These include military training and oil exploration.

Russia is also working towards establishing a logistics center on the Red Sea in Sudan. This will strengthen its naval capabilities and strategic presence in the region. Sudan has restated its dedication to Russia in building a naval base on the Red Sea. This development is because of the growing military cooperation between Sudan and Russia, showcasing Moscow's wider aspirations to enhance its military influence in strategic African nations.

According to experts, there is concern that Russian armed groups are taking advantage of migration routes, specifically those that pass through the Sahara. This

exploitation could potentially result in a rise in irregular migration towards Europe. Russia may be seeking to create instability in European nations by intensifying the refugee crises, with the intention of impacting elections and weakening support for Ukraine.

Russia is also actively pursuing economic engagements and resource extraction deals in Africa. Russian officials explored cooperation on infrastructure and natural resource projects, particularly in Chad, Mali, Niger, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Russia also sought to dominate the uranium market by acquiring assets in Burkina Faso and Chad. President Vladimir Putin's strategy to support local regimes, coups, and insurgencies facilitates these economic engagements, as evidenced by recent developments in West Africa.

Furthermore, Russian paramilitary groups, particularly the Wagner Group, or as it is now known, Africa Corps, remained active in supporting local regimes and insurgencies with activities in different African nations, including Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Sahel, the Central African Republic, and Libya. In Libya, for example, Russian forces protect oil and gas interests, which constrains Western access and increases European dependence on Russian energy.

Regardless of the obvious fact that Russia, along with China, has a strategic interest in controlling Africa's natural resources, Russia has a clear objective of countering the West's influence in Africa. The impacts manifest on several fronts.

First, when it comes to strategic military positioning, cementing the presence of its paramilitary forces while also establishing military bases and logistical centers in key African locations enhances Russia's ability to project power and influence regional dynamics—potentially disrupting Western naval operations and trade routes.

Second, by exploiting African migration routes to Europe, Russia can create social and political instability within the EU countries, thus influencing elections and weakening public support for EU policies, including sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine.

Russia's investments in African natural resources also provide alternative revenue streams and reduce the impact of Western economic sanctions. Control over critical minerals and energy resources increases Russia's leverage in global markets, including control of gold mines in Sudan and oil exploration endeavours in various African nations. Russia's expansion of influence through military cooperation has benefited the latter. Strengthening military cooperation with African nations did indeed help Russia build a network of supportive regimes, limiting Western influence in these countries. Furthermore, by forging closer ties with African countries, Russia is proving successful in undermining Western diplomatic efforts in the region, complicating Western economic strategies, and creating votes and positions in international forums that align with Russian interests.

Russia's specific involvement in Libya is also important to consider. Controlling significant oil and gas resources is the central focus of Russia's presence there. By maintaining influence over Libyan oil fields, Russia will constrain Western access to these resources and increase European dependency on Russian energy supplies. The increasing presence of its paramilitary Wagner Group, which is influencing and supporting strongly armed factions within Libya and safeguarding Russian interests, cements this control.

This involvement includes securing key infrastructure and providing military support to local allies. Russian involvement in Libya includes smuggling oil and gas, generating revenue, and undermining EU efforts to cut off Russian energy imports.

Another critical aspect is Libya's role as a transit point for migrants heading to Europe, which allows Russia to influence migration flows and destabilize European nations—exacerbating the refugee crisis. Overall, Libya's strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea provides Russia with significant geopolitical leverage, allowing it to

project a threat into the Mediterranean and challenge the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's presence.

The actions of Russian paramilitary groups in different African countries, along with their emphasis on safeguarding Russia's economic interests, are fuelling the rise of terrorism in the region. The growing presence of Russian forces is already exacerbating regional conflicts and heightening local tensions, potentially fuelling the rise of terror groups. This is particularly concerning as organizations with ties to ISIS are gaining momentum in West Africa and the Sahel. The withdrawal of French forces from Mali and Niger, along with the departure of American forces from Niger, resulted in a significant rise in extremist groups in the region. This is having a detrimental impact on the West's counterterrorism efforts in the region.

Overall, the situation in some African states is proving increasingly worse. The growing influence of Russia comes at the expense of Western powers, resulting in proxy conflicts and potentially destabilizing the continent even more. This can create environments that are conducive to the growth of terror groups. Russia's manipulation of migration flows can result in worsening the refugee crisis. Terror groups can take advantage of this to bolster influence, bases, and activities in Africa and beyond. The dangers of worsening local conflicts are becoming more pronounced and the escalating violations of human rights in numerous African countries pose a range of intricate consequences that could potentially affect the stability of African.

In short, Russian action in Africa is bad for its inhabitants and bad for the West. At some point the West must counter Russia's malicious efforts.

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