



## INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR SECURITY FORCES RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER

# INSIGHTS

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### **CONTEMPORARY POLEMOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS: Understanding potential geopolitical risks for Africa following Wagner group rebellion in Ukraine**

#### **Introduction**

The major changes in the world have often overturned the geopolitical architecture as much as the grids of strategic analysis. Theoretically outlawed since the Briand-Kellogg Pact (1929), war continues to take its course, masked either by pretexts (humanitarian assistance, humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect) or in its representations ("clean war", "war disguised as peace", "war without death"). The "war without death" aimed at by States to avoid being questioned by public opinion is leading to the privatization of war, entrusted to Private Security Companies (PSCs).

Private Security Companies, also known as Private Military Companies (PMCs), are nothing new in history. Mercenaries have existed since Antiquity, but the trend towards the privatization of conflicts and security has gained momentum since the 2000s, with the end of the East-West confrontation. The players are new, while the historical foundations of mercenarism

are still the same: a sponsor (State, NGO, and company), a war contractor (security Services Company) and employees (contractors). In 1989, with the end of the Cold War, enemies and methods were changing. The UN adopted an International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. According to the author of a book about Bob Denard, "the new legislation adopted in 1989 marked the first time that mercenary activities were criminalized under international law on a global scale". Now that the mercenaries are out of the way, attention should turn to PMCs, which are proliferating around the world, some offering genuine "outsourcing" of security tasks, others offering mercenaries in a more respectable, more acceptable guise.

The outsourcing of war concerns all areas: logistics, military consultancy, combat. From Bob Denard and his team to the "Blackwater contractors, the world's most

powerful private army"<sup>1</sup> (in the battle of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004 or their supposed involvement in tracking down Bin Laden) or Wagner in the current war between Russia and Ukraine, their presence and role place them at the centre of contemporary conflicts.

The conventional war model is now in crisis. Irregularity has arisen from the arrival in conflict situations of rebel movements, warlords, armed gangs, terrorist groups and criminal organizations. Thus, what has changed is not the nature of war, but its face. In particular, when faced with an irregular adversary, the method of combat needs to be adjusted. Military engagement no longer has the decisive virtue conferred on it, as victory is only an intermediate objective and a necessary but insufficient condition for strategic success, which is mainly achieved during the stabilization phase that follows intervention. This is what Didier Danet pertinently attempts to show in most of his works.

As illustrated by Bastien Irondelle and Christian Olsson, the recourse to private actors to wage war is not a new phenomenon, as this stood as the norm for military recruitment in certain historical periods, even if the current period marks a radical break. Although controversial, private military companies such as Blackwater, based in North Carolina, used by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s, and Wagner, which Moscow, according to the West, has been using since 2014 as its armed wing actively and exclusively in external theatres, are changing traditional strategic

military doctrine and shaping security agendas. For several hours, Wagner's fighters occupied a Russian army headquarters in Rostov (south-west Ukraine) and drove several hundred kilometres towards Moscow.

The main purpose of this Insight Note, which takes a substantial look at this situation, is to review the transformation of warfare and the emergence of private military companies at the heart of strategic realities in the light of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Wagner's sedition and the renewed interests of foreign powers in Africa.

The media coverage of Wagner's international presence, especially in Africa, raises a number of questions such as: what is Wagner's real name? What are his achievements over the past decade or so, and why is it causing such a stir against a backdrop of floods of information, much of which seems to be false, distorted, arranged or hidden? The stakes are high: the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the wars of influence in Sahelian and Central Africa show that the Wagner Group is a major player in a global game with military, diplomatic and geopolitical overtones. But do Africans really understand this game and its dynamics in this new strategic environment? And above all, how can they deal with it and come out on top? While the difficulty of investigating a nebula like Wagner is not surprising, and makes any attempt at explanation more difficult, it does call for the central question to be specified. More specifically, the issue at stake here is what are the reasons at the heart of the divorce between Wagner and Moscow and what are the possible repercussions in the African strategic space? This is an arduous

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<sup>1</sup>Jeremy Scahill-Blackwater The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army Revised and Updated (2008).

exercise, and geopolitics cannot be predictive, let alone prophetic. Whatever the case, after examining the circumstances and the motives behind such a sedition, It will be necessary to scrutinize the geopolitical merits of Wagner's presence on the continent and to consider, with a view to effective strategic monitoring, the likely impact of his deployment on African soil following its insurrection vis-à-vis the Kremlin. However, in order to achieve this, it is important to revisit the transformation of warfare.

**Privatization of war, military transformation and the rise of private military companies: a major phenomenon at the heart of current polemological realities**

International headlines about the military activities of the private Russian organization Wagner have rekindled the debate on the transformation of warfare, military transformation and private military companies (PMCs). Long before the creation of the Wagner group by Russian oligarch Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin in recent military history, PMCs have been present on the international scene as the secular and strategic deployment arms of the great powers, notably France, the United States and the United Kingdom. For any African interested in recent political history, the nightmarish memory of Bob Denard and his men, all linked to the 'Service Action' of the SDECE, French intelligence, the unofficial armed wing of Jacques Foccart, General de Gaulle's fearsome 'Mr Africa', is vivid<sup>2</sup>. As was the role played by

Blackwater on behalf of the United States in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Indeed, the outsourcing and increasing integration of the civilian component, especially PMCs, is an essential part of the overall process of military transformation in the United States and the United Kingdom. The policy of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) shows a very strong link and a very thorough integration of PMCs into the British operational system in the CONDOpolicy (Contractors on deployed operations policy), a policy concerning the use of contractors in deployed operations. From a strategic point of view, they allow Western armies to concentrate on their core business, the exercise of coercion, and to free up resources to finance technological development, while providing weak states with a tool to ensure security. In reality, in these two countries, as the number of crises increases, the demand for security soars.

As far as Western armies are concerned, especially American and British armies with global responsibilities for security and conflict management, PMCs would be the appropriate functional response to the strategic, technological and geopolitical changes of the post-Cold War era. Lastly, PMCs would be better suited to asymmetric or third type warfare -

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espionage and counter-espionage abroad. The gradual declassification of archives and numerous studies of long-classified files on the contemporary history of Africa reveal that Foccart unleashed Bob Denard's "dogs of war" in Guinea Conakry against the regime of Ahmed Sékou Touré, who had said "No" to de Gaulle in 1958. He was involved in all the dirty tricks of Françafrique in the 1960s, from Katanga to Biafra, right up to seizing power in the Comoros! Bob Denard and his backers are indefensible: history has condemned them, and if the past they embodied is having trouble disappearing, these "Affreux", as they were nicknamed, belong in the category of today's Wagner PMC.

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<sup>2</sup>As much as the two superpowers did during the Cold War, private military actors often colluded with States and assumed the role of public intelligence institutions in secret missions,

according to Karl Holsti's own classification - where, by definition, regular armies cannot be adequately operational, according to some.

A close look at the situation shows that, structurally, the use of PMCs resolves the contradiction between the decline of the mass army in advanced democracies and the renewed need for boots on the ground in current operations. It stems from the promotion of a technological and expeditionary military model implemented in the United States and the United Kingdom, which implies a sharp reduction in the size of armies to cope with the growing capital intensity of military capability production. At the same time, however, operational requirements reflect the need for a large troops on the ground for operations which are no longer the core business of technological armies (high intensity). So how should the current development of PMCs be understood?

At the heart of the reasons or factors underlying the surge in PMCs is the development of the private military industry in many Western countries. The prevailing view among some strategists is that the end of the Cold War was decisive in the development of the private military industry, a corollary of the military-industrial complex, causing an increase in both supply and demand for security and military services. It is generally accepted that the large numbers of soldiers put on the market as a result of the conversion of military equipment after the end of the Cold War and the reduction in the size of armies encouraged the explosion of private military companies.

The other trend is the refocusing of the military on combat operations and the

outsourcing of many functions previously carried out by the armed forces to the private sector (logistics, security, operational readiness, training, transport). At the same time, however, the demand for security specialists is increasing due to persistent local conflicts, the failure of certain states to provide security and a monopoly on violence, the transition from Soviet bloc military systems to NATO systems, and the complexity and duration of stabilization and crisis resolution operations, which are generating demand not only from Western armies, but also from non-state actors (from oil companies to certain humanitarian NGOs) and public international organizations.

However, although the end of the Cold War has created a favourable context offering important opportunities, as this dominant thesis adequately shows, it is not sufficient or unique to explain the choice of the privatization of security as a response to the proliferation of threats. The influence of cultural and normative factors is just as important.

In fact, the growing use of PMCs is part of a wider trend towards the privatization of the defence and security sector, which, in the industrial sector, is reflected in a trend towards privatization and, in the organic sector, in the development of outsourcing. From this point of view, the defence sector is simply following the wider movement that enshrines market mechanisms, free competition, the privatization of public sectors, and the reduction of the scope of State activities to regalian domains as a basic principle of economic operation. It is also part of a historical dynamic marked by three converging phenomena: the decline of Keynesianism and the rise of

monetarism and neo-liberalism as doctrines and practices of economic policy in the second half of the 1970s, the globalization of economy which accelerated in the 1980s, the end of Cold War and the defeat of the Soviet economic system - socialism - the combination of which confirmed the privatization revolution.

The evolution of norms concerning the military is obviously linked to changes in the nature of military commitments and the types of conflict in which Western democracies are involved, or to the basic requirements of security system reform. However, this reform, initiated by the West and currently undergoing a process of globalisation, is confronted with some resistance to this order as well as its attempt to impose or westernise military cultures. It is also in this context that the Wagner group came into being, considered in the West as a de facto branch of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, although its existence there is not officially legal.

#### **A look at the possible implications of Wagner's abortive insurrection against the Moscow regime for Africa's strategy.**

Wagner's rebellion last June was accompanied a few weeks later by the death of his leader Prigozhin. Was the first event the cause of the second, or did it just precipitate it? For the moment, it is difficult to establish the historical links. But in the search for causal links between historical dynamics or between events, this hypothesis is neither futile nor without interest. It is clear that Prigojne's presumed

death in a plane crash<sup>3</sup> occurred after the mutiny.

At first sight, from an analytical point of view, these two events pose a dual problem of loyalty and strategy. In terms of loyalty to the Russian system, any attempt at betrayal would inevitably result in supreme sanction. As the Putin system has taken steps to counter Western propaganda and the Western model, it cannot tolerate any attempt by the West to manipulate a structure set up to strengthen its image, build its power and raise its international profile. In the non-Western world, the Kremlin's strategy consists of proposing another vision, another model, and another alternative to the Western worldview. Therefore, it must be seen as a tool of power built by Putinism. Geopolitics is not prediction, still less clairvoyance or prophecy. But the data available can be used to project and shape an analysis based on a hypothetical-deductive approach. This is the common thread running through this analysis, which is based not on speculation but on a cold, rational interpretation of hot data: the historical presentism or immediate history, the history that is unfolding, with all its risks and opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> News of Yevgeny Prigozhin's death has spread around the world like a shockwave, prompting numerous comments. While many people are certain of this official information, which was first announced by the Russian media, another category of analysts see it as manipulation, as a plot hatched by the Kremlin. This sceptical view of Prigozhin's death is more widespread in African military circles. For many African officers, Wagner's leader had become vulgar in the eyes of the world and an embarrassment to Russia. So a way had to be found to make him disappear. Many soldiers are not convinced that he was killed. For the proponents of this hypothesis, either he has undergone facial surgery or he is with the master of the Kremlin, which is equally questionable.



As we can see, the PMCs are participating in the privatization of war and the transformation of the profession of arms. Wagner was added to the list of pre-existing paramilitary groups in 2022. This group was founded on 1 May 2014 by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and was initially presented and criticized by the Western media as a Russian PMC supplying mercenaries before diversifying or in exchange for tribute, which often takes the form of mineral prospecting and the exploitation of various natural resources, particularly gems in Africa.

The Russian government and Prigozhin initially denied any link with the Wagner group, until Prigozhin acknowledged in 2022 that he had created the group. Since its creation in 2014, the group has been present in Ukraine, where it was involved in the war between pro-Russian separatists and Kiev troops in the Donbass region. Its overall strength is estimated at 50,000 men with a reserve of 200,000. While the paramilitary body has been in the spotlight for its role in the conflict in Ukraine<sup>4</sup>, it is also present in other parts of the world, in

Syria, Venezuela and much more in Africa, where its first presence dates back to 2018 in the CAR. It was also active in the Syrian civil war, then in other conflict zones, notably Mali, where the withdrawal of French troops in June 2021 left a vacuum. It is increasingly present in the Sahel, where populations fighting against the French presence - as is currently the case in Niger - and the intensification of the terrorist threat following the Libyan crisis, are radically demonstrating their support for Russian forces.

Since 2022, Wagner has been under European Union (EU) sanctions and, from January 2023, it has been labelled a criminal militia by Washington, in the same way as the Mafia and the Japanese Yakuza, and a terrorist group by Ukraine and other pro-Ukrainian countries in the war against Russia from February 2023. The fundamental concern for a better understanding and analysis of the decapitation of the Wagner group is to know what may be at stake or what may be the direct or indirect influence of the last June mutiny on Prigozhine's disappearance and its impact on Africa.

First, an overview of the causes of the June rebellion. How did it come about? Realism dictates that the operations carried out by the Wagner group should be seen as methods of advancing Moscow's interests around the world, manoeuvres that are intended to be discreet. What follows is a film of this event of great strategic significance. Since the battle of Bakhmut last spring, tensions have escalated between the head of Wagner, Prigozhine, and the Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu. Both men have a long-standing dislike of each other, and both are competitors for defence contracts. The

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<sup>4</sup>As said above, the rise and emergence of Wagner in the context of the war in Ukraine since 2014 is a compelling indicator of Moscow's desire to influence geopolitics and overturn the table of the world order in force since 1945, and to reclaim what it considers its due, a colonial remnant on the margins of empire. This war not only calls into question the Western world order, the 'free world' and the westernisation of the planet, it also calls into question the principle of sovereignty embodied in the UN Charter, re-establishes the law of the strongest, which could make other authoritarian powers feel uncomfortable, and puts international relations under strain with the emergence of a global South that refuses to adhere to the Western narrative and advocates a new non-alignment. Of course, to understand it better, we need to go back in history, the stumbling block being Western influence in the former Soviet bosom, its precarious state, the backyard of the USSR.

attacks on the Russian General Staff and this final show of force could in fact be motivated by a desire to become Caliph instead of Caliph. In the end, it was Putin who was targeted, as if the Kremlin's creature had turned against its creator.

Tension increased further on the evening of 23 June, when Prigozhin accused the Russian army of killing mercenaries by carrying out strikes on the Wagner base camps behind the Ukrainian front. This information was immediately denied by the Russian command, while on their Telegram channel, Prigozhin's supporters called for a mutiny, to stop the high command and arrest the traitors, and their leader announced a march for justice. Claiming to have 25,000 men at his disposal, the oligarch encouraged Russians, particularly soldiers in the regular army, to join Wagner. The word was out: this was a call for armed mutiny, according to the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor to the KGB, which commenced an investigation. His men intended to march on the Kremlin and President Putin was directly threatened. On his Telegram channel, Prigozhin declared: "Any soldier who does not join the clean-up operation will be considered a traitor and dealt with appropriately." Hackers broadcast messages against Putin and in praise of the group on Russian television channels. Before the clock struck midnight, the authorities had military equipment delivered to the Duma building - the Russian parliament - in Moscow and sealed off parts of the capital. According to a source at the TASS agency, transport was placed under surveillance, and the National Guard (Rosgvardia), riot police and SOBR units were put on high alert. Putin disappeared off the radar, giving free rein

to speculation. On Saturday 24 June, the master of the Kremlin reappeared in a black suit, looking grave and martial. On television, he solemnly addressed the nation and, without naming the man who appeared to be challenging him, declared: "This is a stab in the back to our country, to our nation [...] what we're facing is exactly a betrayal. Big ambitions and personal interests led to treason". These are clear summaries of the causes and stakes of this rebellion, the repercussions of which do not seem to be limited to Europe, the natural anchor of the conflict.

Thus, whether we consider the insurrectionary movement of 24 and 25 June between the Kremlin and Wagner to be real or imaginary - conspiratorial - Africa is exposed to a number of plausible consequences. For a better analysis, the hypotheses to be considered may be divided into two main categories: on the one hand, the impact of the break-up or total and effective separation between Russia and the paramilitary organization, and on the other, the impact inherent in the total autonomy of Wagner and its evolution on the continent as a lone voice. Of course, this can only be done by ruling out the conspiracy theory that seems to be flourishing and gaining ground.

Indeed, for many people today, plots are omnipresent in international relations and the whole history of international politics is punctuated by plots. In their opinion, Russia is no stranger to conspiracies and so has a long history of them. As far as Russia is concerned, this disinformation and deception is known as *maskirovka*. This technique was already used by the Soviets in the 14th century against their northern neighbours, the Mongols, and in 1944 against the Germans during the Second

World War. According to the proponents of this theory, the rebellion began when Vladimir Putin received information from his intelligence service that there was a traitor in his army. He therefore devised a plan with Wagner's boss to unmask the enemy within. This is how General Serguei Souvorikine, better known as the Butcher, second-in-command of the Russian special operation and cumulatively head of the Russian aerospace in Ukraine, came to be trapped and arrested. At the same time, Putin managed, on the pretext of a negotiation initiated by Belarusian President Lukashenko, to send some of Wagner's troops back to Belarus, thus creating a second front in the theatre of operations, to the general surprise of the Ukrainians and their Western and NATO partners. This second line of engagement was reinforced by Russian tactical nuclear bombs already in place in Belarus well before the alleged rebellion. But how do we get to the bottom of this manipulation?

According to many African and foreign strategists who give credence to the plot, it is a political mechanism, a mania, if not a masquerade, aimed on the one hand at ousting the spies in the Russian ranks, and on the other hand at repositioning the forces engaged or loyal to the Russians along the border with Ukraine.

An array of convincing or no less convincing and combined arguments are put forward to justify or explain this conspiratorial hypothesis, namely: two days of pseudo-rebellion, Saturday and Sunday; barely two or three tanks and a few soldiers stationed or ready to overthrow the regime of the current President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin; over-medicalization of the event by the Kremlin and Russia's public

television channels and extensive media coverage by Russia, contrary to its usual practice; little or no bloodshed for an uprising of this kind; no heavy-handed or large-scale reaction from Moscow against the Wagner demonstrators; rapid resolution of the rebellion and rapid exile of Wagner to Belarus without prejudice to prosecution. These are all arguments supported by observers which would justify the existence of a conspiracy, but which do not rule out the existence or possibility of Wagner's independence from his Moscow guardianship.

Should this happen, the African countries bound to the Kremlin by military cooperation agreements (arms sales, training and/or military exercises) and nuclear and other cooperation agreements (agricultural agreements, mining, energy and hospital investments) would experience a breakdown in expertise or supplies of Russian equipment and spare parts. And, in turn, the latter could fall into a cycle of violence, upon losing the support of the Russian Federation and being taken over by other powers, old or new, in strategic limbo. What's more, another scenario could be the rise of confrontations between Wagner and the Russian Federation, betrayed in its indirect strategy in the sense of André Beaufre. But, since Wagner has no political wing or branch, the African states affected by this influence will be and may remain a source of permanent rivalry and vulnerable opposition, held together only by the territorial, logistical and legitimate support it receives from a power such as Russia.

Based on a video released on 19 July on the *Telegram* channel of the Wagner group by the head of the paramilitary organization, Prigozhin, who had not



spoken since 24 June, in the wake of the aborted rebellion against Vladimir Putin, announced from Belarus, that his mercenaries would no longer fight in Ukraine and would head for Africa for a more concentrated, effective and efficient redeployment.

According to some media sources, a possible consequence of this mutiny can now be seen in the Central African Republic, where the mercenaries of the Wagner group are gradually withdrawing from strategic positions held in several towns in the country. This information has been nuanced by the current government, which refers to a rotation. However, local and security sources are reporting the withdrawal of Russian mercenaries from the field. These include the towns of Birao, Kouï, Nana Bakassa, Nana Boguila, Bouar and Sido, in the north and north-west of the country. According to these sources, who see no difference between the actions of Prigozhin's men and those of the Russian government, the Russians are leaving, even though their presence in CAR was a deterrent. However, with their departure, the situation, they say, has become more fragile and is going to be even more difficult. This opinion naturally contrasts with the opinion that this departure is also a good thing because of the many abuses committed by the Wagner group fighters in training the Central African army.

Many informants on this issue, who do not a priori differentiate between Russia and Wagner, believe that the Russians left the CAR after the insurrection, while the Central African rebels did not capitulate definitively. From this standpoint, it should be acknowledged that the arrival of these Russian paramilitaries was a real relief for the local populations who were languishing

under the weight of the rebels at the gates of Bangui. The United Nations estimated the number of Russian troops to be around 3,000, but no official figures have yet been released. This is worrying the Central Africans who had found in these Russian fighters protectors, liberators, angels after many years of insecurity and socio-political instability. All these arguments suggest that, although castigated by the Western media, Wagner has had positive results or made his mark in promoting peace. As a result, it has remained in the hearts of some Africans, contrary to what a certain opinion seems to believe, focused on virulent criticism, opprobrium and manipulation.

In fact, criticism of Wagner's fighters, who are essentially former prisoners and retired Russian soldiers, is not just a Western affair. Indeed, even in Africa, some Africans find this strategy ineffective. Then, in the event of a total breakdown between Russia and Wagner as a result of the mutiny, Africa would be transformed into a veritable theatre of competition and confrontation between irregular forces - jihadist, separatist, terrorist or radical groups - supported by the Wagner organization. This is where vigilance is called for. African states should have more control over Wagner's paramilitary groups. Otherwise they run the risk of replacing yesterday's imperialists and today's neo-colonialists with other private actors. The control of the continent's natural resources by the same entity could lead the country into another dependency. Also, if the next President of Russia after Putin does not have the same connections with Yevgeny Prigozhin and Dmitri Outkin, or is not in favour of Wagner's presence in Africa, it would be a total failure for the security and

development desired in the countries concerned (CAR, Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Madagascar, Botswana, Zimbabwe, according to data from the *Institute for the Study of War - ISW* -, *FRS*, *Jeune Afrique*, *Le Monde*).

Unless they can control the number of Wagner personnel deployed in Africa, and knowing that no power will want to transfer technology, States should set up a well-defined agenda for developing and ramping up their armies in a Partnered Military Operation (PMO) that defines the objectives to be achieved, the deadlines, the level of operationality of the armies, the way in which logistics contracts will be managed so as to reduce dependency, and disengagement at the end of the agreed deadlines. At the same time, these States should work together to train their own troops in a specific strategic culture and develop alternatives to the Wagner group.

For many observers, Wagner and the Russian state are probably still linked by arms deliveries to Sahelian countries. Given that a country's arms industry remains a tool of influence, outreach and even domination or submission, Russia cannot entrust its armaments to a third State unless it is certain that they will not end up in the hands of an adversary. This leads many analysts to argue that the PMC Wagner and the Russian army form a single entity whose tentacles change colour according to circumstances.

Some analysts saw it as a sham by the Kremlin to unmask the enemies of the nation within the army. Also, for many Westerners who do not give enough credence to Prigozhin's outbursts and speeches, these verbal outbursts and

tensions were likened to propaganda and conspiracy against the West. Africa, which is endowed with resources and regarded by the West as a cash cow and a hotbed of authoritarian regimes and conflicts, is not immune to the influence of this Russian paramilitary organization.

As underlined above, its presence on African soil in several countries, far from being the result of altruistic thinking, is based on realistic strategies skilfully orchestrated for geopolitical and hegemonic ends of Russian power. Though the existence of official links between Wagner and Moscow is yet to be proven, Africa should not be taken in. As we know, since Montesquieu, States have been like men with international action obeying no criteria whose rationality is known to all. State strategy is a complex enough test for the motives of a group as powerful as Wagner to be known in advance and in such a short space of time. The news is raw and immediate, while the historical and strategic analysis devoted to it is cold. In other words, African leaders have every interest in remaining cautious, the caution taught by the great realist strategists of history as a *sine qua non* for victory.

## Conclusion

At the end of the day, the reflection that has just been completed shows that today we are faced with a complex world that seems increasingly difficult to decipher and more dangerous with each passing day. It can therefore be tempting to give up trying to understand it, even though we are dealing with a major strategic issue that will determine the future of the world and of Africa: changes in warfare. In Russian political culture, it is not customary to

wash one's dirty laundry in public. All conflicts need to be resolved behind the scenes as far as possible. Could the leaking of the Prigozhin-Shoïgou feud be indicative of the prevailing malaise, one of the manifestations of which was the death of the leader of the Wagner group in a plane crash on 23 August? For the moment, it's hard to say. In the end, at a time when the sudden presence of the Wagner group in Niger is being announced and Central Africa is facing a military coup in Gabon, this reflection is imperative. The issue of PMCs is a strategic one, and should not be approached in a simplistic or naïve way. Rather, it requires a complex approach and an analysis based on the hyper-complexity of the new international relations that are taking shape. It was almost ten years ago (2014-2023) that Wagner came into being. Better structured and apparently better off and more effective than the other Russian paramilitary organizations, it is present on African soil with multiple actions of varying degrees of impact.

A geopolitical climate reminiscent of the Fachoda complex and the Cold War is currently driving the major powers' Africa policy. A major geopolitical and strategic issue during the Cold War, Africa is now emerging as an area of strategic competition and predation, attracting the major non-European powers (United States, Brazil, China, Russia, India, Turkey, Israel, etc.) in rivalry with the former metropolises or established powers (France, United Kingdom, etc.). Although, driven by geostrategic and messianic designs, Washington still remains the dominant external player in continental security, a project of catching up through initiatives in state military and private

paramilitary operations outside soft power - soft, non-coercive or seductive power - is underway in favour of Moscow's growing influence, which no longer seems to be limited to arms sales and defence advice alone.

As mentioned above, Wagner provides services in exchange for various tributes. Therefore, this is not without its geo-economic, geo-strategic, geo-political and geo-cultural implications. Indeed, news of the war in Ukraine since its inception shows that the world is changing, interests are shifting, positions are changing and strategies are not going unchallenged. In the context of globalization, renewed interests and strategic competition on and at the expense of Africa, all strategies are being thought out and all shots are being taken. In their fierce competition, the major powers are well aware of this, and none of them, not even Russia, can conceal or sacrifice their interests on the altar of humanitarian assistance *stricto sensu*. This is why the Wagner rebellion is far from being a fortuitous military act, but one that is rich in strategic lessons: important economic, security, strategic and geopolitical stakes and influences for Africa and Africans. Beyond this, issues as important as asymmetric conflict and the privatization of security and warfare through PMCs should give rise to fruitful reflection in Africa on how to strengthen the 'security-defence' continuum and the professionalization of armies, which affects not only liberal democracies but the majority of the world's armies.

However, with regard to the new global balance of power, the crisis that have been plaguing the West for nearly two decades, international rivalries and the thirst for power that drives the emerging powers of

Russia and others, force to remain cautious and to think, each day that passes, about the destiny of Africa on the international scene in the great geopolitical balances of the world. For Moscow and the Russian world, Wagner is officially a private defence organization, but strategically an instrument of power to counter Western hegemony. Similarly, seen from the West, Wagner is no more than a propaganda tool and a means of the new Russian geostrategy. The interests of all these entities are in no way those of Africa, which must work hard to (re)find its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the geopolitical power blocs in a changing world, which is definitely a big challenge.

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