

TRENDING: GOP DEBATE 2024 ELECTIONS

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OPINION > INTERNATIONAL

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Algeria and Russia are uniting to divide West Africa

BY STEPHEN BLANK, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 09/21/23 1:00 PM ET

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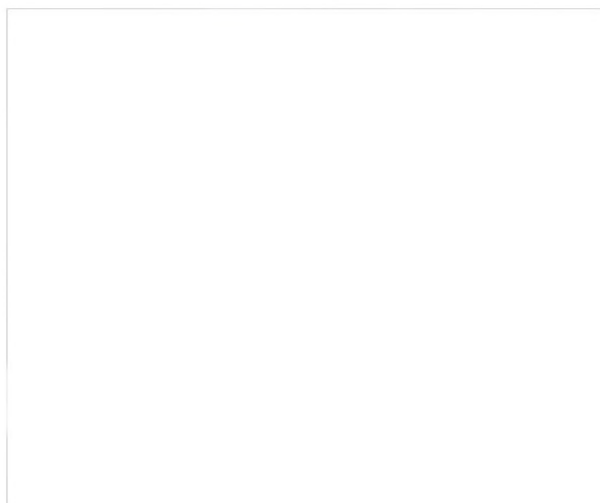


Algerian Prime Minister Aymen Benabderrahmane, left, and Russian President Vladimir Putin shake hands before an official ceremony to welcome the leaders of delegations to the Russia Africa Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, Thursday, July 27, 2023. (Sergei Bobylev/TASS Host Photo Agency Pool Photo via AP)

The July 26 [coup in Niger](#) retains the potential for inciting both a continental African and international crisis.

Apart from the regional potential for a crisis, the Niger government has detained France's ambassador, raising the possibility of action against it.

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The possibility of a foreign, anti-Niger intervention apparently greatly disturbs Algeria, its neighbor to the north.

Algeria, not least owing to its own policies against Morocco, is already surrounded by tensions there, Libya and Tunisia. Therefore, it has loudly proclaimed its opposition to foreign intervention in Niger. Seeing itself as a regional heavyweight, it has issued this declaration, which is allegedly designed to mediate a peaceful solution and avoid a repetition of the foreign interventions in Mali and Libya, which it regards as a catastrophe.

However, if we are to judge from its previous policies, Algeria really opposes only some foreign interventions while remaining supposedly neutral or actively supporting Russian-backed regimes in the Sahel. It refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine while remaining a top buyer of Russian arms. Algeria has provided steady support for the Wagner Group's interventions in the Central African Republic and Mali and does not eschew Russian support in its long-running conflict with Morocco over the Western Sahara territory.

Interestingly, there are numerous indicators of Russian fingerprints in the Niger coup. Although the coup itself probably originated in the personal ambition of Abdourahamane Tchiani, head of Niger's presidential guard, it seems that Moscow got wind of it and helped by deploying thousands of pro-Russian placards to demonstrators who publicly displayed them to warn off ECOWAS's intervention.

discovered many messages on social media from members of the Wagner Group, which is now coming under Moscow's direct control, itching, or in his terms, "slavering" to go to Niger or to Gabon which had its own coup on Aug. 30.

Both Algeria and Russia seem to be coming closer together on overall foreign policy issues. Previously disgraced Russian Gen. Sergei Surovikin's recent bilateral defense meeting with Algerians reflects not only the strengthening defense ties between these two states but also similarly enhanced foreign policy coordination. The Russian publisher Kommersant quoted a source close to Surovikin saying, "The military and political leadership of the country considers the implementation of eastern foreign policy to be of great importance."

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It appears that an increasingly closer Russo-Algerian alignment is taking place to convert the Sahel into a pro-Russian and Algerian bloc threatening either countries in the Horn of Africa or Nigeria.

Algeria has a clear interest in being a regional hegemon. Russia's interests are also increasingly transparent to observers. In return for arms sales and political support for would-be strongmen, including the establishment of large-scale information warfare networks, Russia seeks to obtain long-term mining concessions, energy deals and port access. Through this, it can perpetuate its clients' power and enhance and sustain its long-term political presence and influence in the United Nations or coalitions like the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) grouping or the African Union. It also hopes to obtain rights to permanent air and/or naval bases.

bases in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. And since persistence in territorial expansion remains a hallmark of Russian policy, today that quest continues despite everything that has occurred since and the loss of much of its navy in Ukraine. Indeed, Russia even seeks bases in the Indian Ocean.

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Algeria's selective opposition to foreign intervention and cooperation with Russia is mainly for purposes of regional status. Russia's efforts are to make Africans and other observers believe that it is the great global power it obsessively pretends to be. It is difficult to see what is in this for Africans. After all, the nearest analog to Russian policy is the British East India Company; a poster child for European imperialism that offers nothing to Africans except a new form of colonization.

While Russia's regression to medievalism is clear across many policy domains, it remains a mystery what Algeria or other African states, except for their strongmen, will gain from these adventures.

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