

# RUSSIAN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS IN THE SAHEL

## FONDEMOS' VIEW:



AFP

**The leak of nearly 1,400 pages of internal documents, transmitted anonymously to the pan-African media outlet The Continent and analyzed by a consortium of journalists in 2026, reveals a Russian influence apparatus of unprecedented scale established since 2021.**

At the heart of this apparatus lies an organization called **“The Company”**, comprising 90 communication experts, placed under the direct supervision of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). **It operates through systematic disinformation campaigns designed to influence civil societies and shape political dynamics across**

**the African continent.** According to Forbidden Stories, a network of investigative journalists, this plan for *“reformatting Africa”* is based on **propaganda operations led by former agents close to Evgueni Prigozhin**, head of the Wagner militia and who died in August 2023.

The methods employed combine paying journalists to relay pre-written false content and buying fake Facebook accounts to spread pro-Russian content. More than 400 articles are said to have been commissioned from African journalists, while the media face an economic crisis that renders them vulnerable to foreign influences.

**What distinguishes “The Company” from a simple disinformation campaign is its structuring ambition.** Direct influence operations are being carried out with politicians and opinion leaders. A document written in August 2023 describes the project for a *“Confederation of Independence”*, intended to become *“a center for the further expansion of Russian influence”*. This encompasses an arc stretching from Guinea to Somalia, with Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger at its core. **One month later, the Sahel States Alliance was created, bringing together these three countries led by military juntas that came to**

**power through coups d'État.** Documents also mention operations in Chad and Senegal, with a 2023 note outlining plans to **“contribute to obtaining support from competent Russian authorities in the event of a military coup d'état scenario”**.

**The religious vector deserves also particular attention.** In three years, the Russian Orthodox Church has grown from 5 to 350 parishes across the African continent. This rapid expansion illustrates a continuum of influence: the religious sphere functions as a lever for cultural legitimacy and recruitment for Russian operations.

*The pattern that emerges is as follows: exploit grievances (anticolonialism, aspirations for monetary sovereignty), amplify them through carefully targeted disinformation campaigns, and support political dynamics favorable to Moscow.*