**Wagner Group Activity in Africa**

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For this project, I chose to focus on the Wagner Private Military Company’s (PMC) presence in Africa. I worked with data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). As stated on the ACLED website, “ACLED collects real-time data on the locations, dates, actors, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world.” They provide free, unlimited API calls to their database by verified university students. ACLED data is limited to characteristics of specific political and violent events conducted by known actors. The limited number of fields made it simple to execute an API call and create a clean data frame in python. From this data, my aim was to investigate the Wagner Group’s primary countries of operation, the type of attacks they are involved in, and which of those attacks resulted in the most fatalities.

My initial call to the ACLED API was tailored to pull in activity directly tied to the Wagner Group, which yielded 431 observations. Therefore, there were 431 reported events between 2018 and 2023 that involved the Wagner Group. I then created a subset of the data that only contained events located in Africa, which yielded 355 observations. Most of my analysis and graphs were done using this subset. By graphing these data points based on latitude and longitude, we can see that the Wagner Group is primarily active in the Central African Republic and Mali (seen in the graph below).

A map of africa with different colored spots

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Once plotted, it looks like many of the reported observations fall near the borders of Mali and the Central African Republic. It seems unlikely that this activity would never bleed into neighboring countries. This unnatural boundary is likely a shortcoming of the data collected. I attempted to look further into this issue by digging into attacks tied to anonymous or unknown groups within the dataset. However, ACLED observations must be tied to a known actor. Therefore, I was unable to link any anonymous attacks to the Wagner Group based on proximity and time.

Although the focus of this project is the Wagner Group’s activity in Africa, I found that excluding activity from other countries led to missing context and false assumptions. For example, if we only look at Wagner’s activity in Africa, it looks like the number of attacks associated with the group has decreased substantially since 2022. However, if we include all reported activity, we can see that 2023 will soon outnumber 2022’s activity. This realization allows us to differentiate between Wagner Group slowing operations and the group relocating due to the conflict in Ukraine.

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Next, I wanted to see the type of events the Wagner Group was involved in and how fatal those incidents proved to be. The heatmap below shows that Wagner Group attacks and armed clashes are the most frequent events that result in fatalities.

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Based on my research, the number of fatalities due to Wagner Group events peaked in 2021 with over 800 deaths in the Central African Republic. However, Wagner activity has been increasing in Mali over the past year, and Malian fatalities will likely outnumber Central African Republic fatalities this year.

Overall, I was able to successfully execute an API call and cleanly organize data in a data frame. However, I struggled with the limitations of my source and drawing conclusions to my initial questions of interest. Going forward, I hope to spend more time identifying and utilizing a stronger API and extracting meaningful data. If I were to undertake this project again, I would spend more time researching and setting up the Bing API. Using a broader web-search service would have expanded the type of calls I could make and would allow me to tailor my results to better fit my research goals.