

Gabon military officers say they have seized power after election

Military officers in oil-producing Gabon said they had seized power on Wednesday and had put President Ali Bongo under house arrest, stepping in minutes after the Central African state's election body announced he had won a third term. The officers who said they represented the armed forces declared on television that the election results were cancelled, borders were closed and state institutions were dissolved, after a tense vote without international observers that was set to extend the Bongo family's more than half century in power, Reuters reported.

Hundreds of people celebrated the military's intervention, while France, Gabon's former colonial ruler which has troops stationed in the African nation, condemned the coup. The Kremlin also said Wednesday it was concerned by events in Gabon, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying, "We are deeply concerned about the situation in Ga-

bon. We are closely following what is going on there". A jobless 27-year-old who joined crowds on Libreville's streets, said "I am marching today because I am joyful. After almost 60 years, the Bongos are out of power".

In another statement, the officers said they had deposed Bongo, who took over in 2009 from his father Omar, who had ruled since 1967. They said they had arrested the president's son, Nouredin Bongo Valentin, and others for corruption and treason.

Opponents say the family has done little to share the state's oil and mining wealth with its 2.3 million people. Violent unrest had broken out after Bongo's disputed 2016 election win and there was a foiled coup attempt in 2019.

If successful, the Gabon coup would be the eighth in West and Central Africa since 2020. The latest one, in Niger, was in July. Military officers have also seized power in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Chad,



erasing democratic gains since the 1990s.

The Gabon officers, calling themselves The Committee of Transition and the Restoration of Institutions, said the country faced "a severe institutional, political, economic, and social crisis". They said the Aug. 26 vote was not credible.

It was not clear who was leading the coup, but television images showed a man in fatigues and a green beret held aloft by soldiers shouting "Oligui president", a possible reference to Brice Oligui Nguema, the head of Gabon's Republican Guard. Despite the brief sound of

gunfire in the capital shortly after the officers made their first announcement, the streets of Libreville were calm until celebrations erupted. Police officers fanned out to guard major city intersections. There was no immediate comment from Gabon's government.



This video grab shows the spokesperson for the mutinous soldiers speaking on state television as they announce that they had seized power in Libreville, Gabon, on August 30, 2023.

● GABON 24 VIA AP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Washington to send \$250m in weapons to Ukraine



AP - The Biden administration announced Tuesday it will send an additional \$250 million in weapons and ammunition to Ukraine as part of its ongoing support of Kyiv.

The weapons will be drawn from existing US stockpiles and will include mine-clearing equipment, artillery and rocket rounds, ambulances and medical gear, among other items and spare parts, according to the State Department.

Spain's PM rejects to back premiership bid

REUTERS - Spain's acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Wednesday rejected a request from Alberto Nunez Feijoo, leader of the conservatives, to support him in a vote to form a government and will instead seek a new term himself, his Socialist Party said.

Feijoo's People's Party won the most seats in the July 23 elections, but came short of a working majority and is trying to garner enough support in the lower house. He had asked Sanchez, a Socialist, in a meeting earlier on Wednesday to back him for at least two years in exchange for policy pacts. In a document handed to Sanchez, Feijoo had said a two-year government pact could be extended if both parties agreed. Legislatures last four years in Spain.



A view shows a framed photo of Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin at his grave at the Porokhovskoye cemetery in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on August 30, 2023.

● REUTERS

Kremlin: Prigozhin plane may have been downed on purpose

The Kremlin said on Wednesday that investigators were considering the possibility that the plane carrying mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was downed on purpose, the first explicit acknowledgement that he may have been assassinated. "It is obvious that different versions are being considered, including the version - you know what we are talking about - let's say, a deliberate atrocity," Kremlin spokes-

man Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about the investigation, Reuters reported. Asked if the International Civil Aviation Organization would investigate the crash, Peskov said that the circumstances made it different, though he cautioned that investigators had made no formal conclusions yet about what exactly took place. "Let's wait for the results of our Russian investigation," Peskov said.

The private Embraer jet on which Prigozhin was travelling to St Petersburg from Moscow crashed north of Moscow killing all 10 people on board on Aug. 23, including two other top Wagner figures, Prigozhin's four bodyguards and a crew of three. The cause is still unclear, but villagers near the scene told Reuters they heard a bang and then saw the jet plummet to the ground.

The plane crashed exactly two months since Prigozhin took control of the southern city of Rostov in late June, the opening salvo of a mutiny which shook the foundations of the Russian government. The Kremlin has rejected as an "absolute lie" the suggestion by some Western politicians and commentators - for which they have not provided evidence - that Putin ordered Prigozhin to be killed in revenge.

Is US seeking ...

Among the most significant is the containment of China, which, as it gains power, is increasingly perceived by Washington as a threat to both its interests and those of its allies.

By forming political, military, and economic coalitions the US is trying to portray China as a security threat. Other measures include bolstering military bases in the region, arms sales to allies like Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and even the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as holding joint military exercises. The trilateral security pact known as AUKUS among Australia, Britain, and United States, aimed at deploying nuclear submarines in the Pacific Ocean, fits into this framework. AUKUS, to some degree, appears to be in breach of the terms of the

nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Likewise, the Quad security pact with the US, India, Australia, and Japan, in the Indo-Pacific region, aims to counterbalance China's growing power. Alongside these efforts, the US is attempting to mend historical conflicts between its key allies, Japan and South Korea, which are neighbors to China. The recent agreement struck at Camp David also contributes to resolving disputes between these two countries.

Beyond China, the possible threat posed by North Korea in Southeast Asia is also a concern for the US and its allies. It is logical for Japan and South Korea to form an alliance against this threat and cooperate alongside a major power like the US.

Referring to the agree-

ment as 'Asian NATO', North Korea's leader has interpreted it as the US establishing a military presence in East Asia. Does this agreement pursue objectives similar to that of the NATO military alliance?

There are indeed some parallels between this trilateral agreement and the North Atlantic Treaty or NATO, given that in both cases, the US holds the central role and power, and Washington's interests are definitely in focus. In fact, without the US, NATO would be meaningless. However, the term "Asian NATO" used by North Korea's leader doesn't mirror the extensive commitments of European NATO. Article 5 of NATO emphasizes that an attack on any member state is considered an attack on all members. Regardless of the agree-

ment's name, it doesn't negate the expansion of the US military and security presence in East Asia. However, in these pacts, the US mainly plays strategic, managerial, and supportive roles, and follows a policy of "outsourcing," just as in NATO where it has engaged Europe with Russia, or even in the Middle East, where the US has involved Israel, Jordan, and other Arab countries in an arms race. In the Southeast Asian region, the US has played South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Singapore off against China.

Will these security-military moves ultimately lead to stability and enhanced security for the regional countries, or could they potentially stoke threats and insecurity? I doubt that the US aims to



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attain lasting security and stability in the region as a primary goal. In the short term, the US might achieve its goals and come out as a winner in this rivalry. As mentioned earlier, the US seeks to portray China as a security threat. This approach forces China into a defensive position, prompting Beijing to invest more in its military policies in response to such new coalitions. Essentially, the US aims to pass off China as a military threat. On one hand, this issue diverts China's focus from economic development to military expansion, and on the other hand, it fuels suspicion



among regional countries toward China, particularly due to historical and territorial disputes. However, in the long run, I don't think the US will necessarily succeed in its strategy. As the German philosopher and critical theorist Herbert Marcuse said, "History is not an insurance corporation to guarantee things." Hence, there's no guarantee that the substantial US investments and costs in Southeast Asia will yield the desired outcomes in the long term. China might become so powerful within the next decade that these coalition formations and US measures



US President Joe Biden (C), Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (R) and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol arrive for a joint press conference during the trilateral summit at Camp David near Thurmont, Maryland, US, on August 18, 2023.

● JIM BOURG/REUTERS

might not pose a threat to Beijing anymore. Or the US might weaken and decline, prompting the need for updates within the current coalitions. For instance, consider India, a member of the Western-oriented Quad security pact, but also part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, where China is the cornerstone.