

New Movie Depicting Heroic Russian Instructors in Central African Republic Linked to ‘Putin’s Chef’

As Russian mercenaries are accused of human rights abuses in the impoverished African country, the film paints a rosier picture.

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A new film depicting a group of Russian military advisors in the Central African Republic (CAR) as heroes was funded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the catering magnate and Kremlin ally known as “Putin’s Chef,” according to an investigation by The Moscow Times.

“The Tourist” tells the story of a group of young Russian military advisors sent to CAR on the eve of presidential elections. Following a violent rebellion, they defend locals against groups of murderous rebels.

The opening credits of the movie, filmed in March and April of this year in CAR, say it was inspired by the 300 Russian military instructors serving in the resource-rich but impoverished country to support President Faustin-Archange Touadera's regime, which Russia has openly backed since 2018.

Prigozhin is nicknamed Putin's Chef for his catering businesses that host dinners for the Kremlin. He has gained notoriety for his reported involvement in advancing Putin's interests abroad, particularly in [Africa](#) and his alleged role in the hacking of the 2016 U.S. election, for which America recently sanctioned him.

Russia stepped up its support late last year to help Touadera fend off a rebel advance launched before the Dec. 27 presidential election. On Thursday, The CAR notified the UN Security Council that it intended to welcome 600 new Russian instructors.

Numerous NGOs as well independent UN observers, however, [say](#) that the instructors are in fact paramilitaries from the Wagner Group, a secretive mercenary group [believed](#) to be controlled by Prigozhin.

'Prigozhin's movie'

According to two movie industry insiders contacted by The Moscow Times, Prigozhin is most likely the backer of "The Tourist."

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"There is no doubt a Prigozhin movie," one well-connected movie insider who asked for anonymity told The Moscow Times.

"No one else would want to finance such a film," the insider said.

"The Tourist" is backed by a relatively unknown studio based in St.Petersburg registered under the brand "Paritet Film." Russian public registry records [show](#) that Prigozhin's wife, Lubov Prigozhina is the owner of a separate entity that was previously registered under the name "Paritet" in St. Petersburg.

Other ties to Prigozhin include the movie's cast, which has recently been involved in movies financed by Prigozhin.

The film's screenwriter Vladimir Izmailov and its two producers previously [worked](#) on a two-part film financed by Prigozhin based on one of Prigozhin's key advisors Maksim Shugalei.

The cast of the movie has also given extensive [interviews](#) to the Federal News Agency (FAN) — a fringe media outlet, which Prigozhin heads.

Two separate sources also [told](#) the independent Meduza outlet that the tycoon financed the film.

According to one of Meduza's sources who worked on the movie, Prigozhin spent around

150,000 dollars on the film to improve Wagner's reputation.

Meduza also reported, based on an interview with a former Wagner soldier, that "The Tourist" features a number of Wagner soldiers as movie extras.

The Moscow Times was not able to independently confirm these reports.

However, one of the lead actors in the movie, Vladimir Petrov, [told](#) FAN that the actors received training and help from "Russian professionals on the ground."

Sergei Vorobyev, another star of the film told The Moscow Times that he did not know who financed the movie.

"We, actors do not ask difficult questions, we just do our job," Vorobyev said.

"It was a great honor to be in such a movie showing Russian heroes in a tough place. What an experience!" he added.

Prigozhin was not immediately available for comment.

On Wednesday, he told Meduza that Russian instructors in CAR "deserve fame and respect.

They are Russian and we are proud of them."

Mark Galeotti, an expert on Russian security affairs, said that the movie looked to be a personal "vanity and profile project for Prigozhin."

He added that there might also be a practical reason behind the release of the movie.

"At present, Wagner is having trouble getting the best recruits, as they are being scooped by government-sponsored military groups such as Patriot and Shchit that offer better terms and pay," Galeotti said.

"The Tourist" was trending on Friday on pages dedicated to Wagner and private military companies on

Russia's largest social media network Vkontakte.

"What a fantastic movie. How do I join Wagner?," one user [asked](#) in a post.

"The Tourist" premiered May 14 in [Bangui](#), the CAR capital. In pictures posted on social media by the cast, thousands of locals, some of them waving Russian flags, are seen attending the movie screened at a local sports station on Friday and Saturday.

According to Prigozhin-linked media, "up to 70,000" people [attended](#) screenings in the local Sangho dialect.

The movie had a modest Russian premier late on Thursday evening on the government-friendly NTV channel. It will not be screened in cinemas.

Rosy story

According to an explosive March [report](#) by a group of independent UN experts, Russian Wagner mercenaries have committed human rights abuses in CAR while fighting alongside government forces.

The alleged violations include mass summary executions, arbitrary detentions, torture during interrogation and the forced displacement of the civilian population, about 240,000 of whom have fled their homes because of fighting in recent weeks.

“The Tourist” paints a very different picture.

Throughout the movie, Russian military experts are portrayed as kind and generous while the film frequently takes digs at French and other Western advisors, portraying them as spreading instability and chaos in the region.

“Americans say they fight for democracy ... Russians fight for justice,” [says](#) one of the stars as Russian inspectors prepare to protect a local village.

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