



The Wonga Coup: Guns, Thugs, and a Ruthless Determination to Create Mayhem in an Oil-Rich Corner of Africa

Adam Roberts

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Equatorial Guinea is a tiny country roughly the size of the state of Maryland. Humid, jungle covered, and rife with unpleasant diseases, natives call it Devil Island. Its president in 2004, Obiang Nguema, had been accused of cannibalism, belief in witchcraft, mass murder, billiondollar corruption, and general rule by terror. With so little to recommend it, why in March 2004 was Equatorial Guinea the target of a group of salty British, South African and Zimbabwean mercenaries, travelling on an American-registered ex-National Guard plane specially adapted for military purposes, that was originally flown to Africa by American pilots? The real motive lay deep below the ocean floor: oil.

In *The Dogs of War*, Frederick Forsyth effectively described an attempt by mercenaries to overthrow the government of Equatorial Guinea — in 1972. And the chain of events surrounding the night of March 7, 2004, is a rare case of life imitating art—or, at least, life imitating a 1970s thriller—in almost uncanny detail. With a cast of characters worthy of a remake of *Wild Geese* and a plot as mazy as it was unlikely, *The Wonga Coup* is a tale of venality, overarching vanity and greed whose example speaks to the problems of the entire African continent.

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