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Master's Thesis

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**Wagner Group and Opportunism in Russian Foreign
Policy: Case Studies of the Central African Republic
(CAR), Libya, and Mozambique**

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on
12/30/2021

Christopher Strong


References

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Abstract

This research paper concerns Russian foreign policy and the tools it uses to accomplish its objectives. More specifically, the research is focused on the secretive private military company (PMC) Wagner Group. Wagner Group has been deployed around the globe to further the interests of Russia and is a key tool in Russia's opportunistic foreign policy. This paper seeks to answer the research question: **At what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country?** Answering this research question will help academics and policymakers further understand the use of Wagner Group by the Russian government. Wagner Group is meant to be low risk to Russia. Previous research is sparse and often covers many deployments of Wagner Group. In contrast, this paper focuses on three case studies that allow for a more in-depth approach – Wagner Group in the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, and Mozambique. Using qualitative analysis this paper discerned that in its use of Wagner Group, Russia will maintain its deployment of Wagner Group if the potential or realized gains outweigh the potential and realized risks to Russia, and that in the opposite case, where the risks outweigh the gains, Russia will pull Wagner Group back. These findings are significant because they illustrate how the Wagner Group fits into Russia's opportunistic approach to foreign policy. Russia inserts Wagner Group when opportunities arise; when it becomes too risky for Russia, then it will cut its losses and take what it has gained. This means that policymakers looking to counter Wagner Group must ensure its further deployment is too risky for Russia to maintain.

Keywords

Russia, Africa, Private Military Company, Wagner Group, Libya, Mozambique, Central African Republic.

Klíčová slova

Rusko, Afrika, Soukromá vojenská společnost, Wagnerova Skupina, Libye, Mosambik, Středoafriická republika.

Title

Wagner Group and Opportunism in Russian Foreign Policy: Case Studies of the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, and Mozambique

Název práce

Wagnerova skupina a oportunismus v ruské zahraniční politice: Případové studie Středoafriické republiky (SAR), Libye a Mosambiku.

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1. Introduction

Russia has a long and proud history of being a great power on the world stage, through the Czars, the USSR, and post-Soviet Russia. “Russian history and culture has been shaped by the following forces: highly centralized government and despotism, the pendulum of territorial expansion and contraction, grandiose infrastructure projects, corruption, and isolation from external influences.”¹ This historic great power has had constantly changing borders throughout its history. Russia traces its origins to sometime in the 9th century, centered around Kyiv.² In the 12th century, Kyiv was conquered by the Mongols, and the power center shifted to the present-day area of Moscow.³ Russia continued to grow over the centuries and stretched to the Pacific. The Russian Empire was founded in 1721 under Peter the Great, and this empire moved to the West, further into Europe.⁴ Built upon the foundations of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union was formed in 1922, and until its demise in 1991, it grew to control vast amounts of territory from Berlin to the Pacific, and the Arctic all the way down to Afghanistan.⁵ The Soviet Union rivaled the United States (US) in terms of power. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation went through some difficult times, but has reasserted itself on the world stage and is now considered by some to be a great power again.⁶ Its relevant position makes it an important actor for examination, and its influence is far reaching.

¹ Saul Bernard Cohen, 2014, p. 217.

² Marshall, 2016, p. 7.

³ Saul Bernard Cohen, 2014, p. 236.

⁴ Marshall, 2016, pp. 8-9.

⁵ Marshall, 2016, p. 9.

⁶ McClintock et al., 2021, p. 3.

Russia is the largest country in the world at 17,098,250 square kilometers. It has a population of around 142 million people, which is relatively small compared to the vast territory.⁷ The country is well known for the wealth of resources that drive its economy. It has large deposits of oil, natural gas, and coal, as well as strategic minerals, rare earth elements, and timber at its disposal.⁸ Measured in gross domestic product (GDP), Russia in 2019 ranked as the 11th largest economy. The vast majority of its exports come from the energy sector, including oil, gas, and coal. This is followed by the exportation of wheat.⁹ In addition to its economic power, Russia possesses substantial and technologically advanced military might, with prowess that is supported by a sizeable nuclear arsenal and a strong defense industry.¹⁰ Russia is ranked fourth in the world in military expenditures at 61.7 billion USD.¹¹ It has an active force of 900,000, a paramilitary of 554,000, and a reserve of 2,000,000.¹²

The current Russian government is officially a semi-presidential federation with Vladimir Putin as the President and Mikhail Vladimirovich as the prime minister.¹³ Vladimir Putin has either been president or prime minister of the country since 1999. Throughout the years, Putin has consolidated his power and has forsaken any sort of democratic government that the West might have hoped would emerge after the end of the Cold War. Instead, the former member of the KGB has constructed an autocratic regime. This regime can also be classified as a kleptocracy since the people at the top, including Putin, are profiting from the

⁷ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021b.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), 2021.

¹⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021, p. 190., Bowen, 2021.

¹¹ The World Population Review, 2021.

¹² International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021, p. 191.

¹³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021b.

government, and corruption is prevalent throughout the country.¹⁴ Putin must balance the powerful and wealthy oligarchy against the people to stay in power.

For all of his faults, Putin has improved the economy since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and reasserted Russia on the world stage.¹⁵ Despite its lower relative power compared to the U.S. and China, Russia has many strengths. Features that enhance its power include ethnic homogeneity, 74 percent urbanization, 98 percent literacy, and well trained and educated professionals. In addition, Russia has copious amounts of energy and mineral resources, vast forestry and animal products, a sturdy agriculture base, and global strategic location on Eurasia.¹⁶ These attributes give Russia strong strategic potential when competing with other states. Russia can leverage all of these assets and more to formulate a far reaching and creative foreign policy.

“Russian President Vladimir Putin holds a set of core strategic objectives: preserving his regime, suppressing political dissent, expanding his economy, reestablishing his state as a global power, and diminishing the global influence of the U.S. and NATO.”¹⁷ Putin must balance all of these goals in his attempts to expand Russian influence and continue to facilitate a multi-polar world. A resurgent Russia does not have the same power at its disposal as the USSR once did, so it must find creative ways to advance its foreign policy interests. Russia takes opportunities when and where it can, while not overstretching itself or taking unnecessary risks. Wherever a power vacuum appears that Russia feels it can exploit, it acts. The Kremlin uses a variety of foreign policy tools to spread Russian influence.

¹⁴ Lansky & Myles-Primakoff, 2018, p. 77.

¹⁵ Saul Bernard Cohen, 2014, p. 267.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 266.

¹⁷ Bugayova & Regio, 2019, p. 1.

The focus of this paper is the use of the private military company (PMC) Wagner Group in Russia's foreign policy tool kit. Wagner Group, which first came into existence in Ukraine in 2014, has since surfaced in locations around the world where Russia hopes to expand its influence. Wagner Group is a PMC that does Russia's bidding but is able to secure contracts on its own with the blessing of the Kremlin. This thesis aims to answer the research question: **At what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country?** Several hypotheses stem from the research question:

1. If the opportunities/benefits are high and the perceived costs/risks is low, Russia will keep Wagner Group in the designated country.
2. If the opportunities/benefits are high and the perceived costs/risks is low, Russia will withdraw Wagner Group from the designated country.
3. If perceived costs/risks outweigh the opportunities/benefits (risk too high), Russia will withdraw Wagner Group from the designated country.
4. If the perceived risk/costs outweigh the opportunities/benefits, Russia will keep Wagner Group in the designated country.
5. If perceived costs/risks are equal to opportunities/benefits, Russia will keep Wagner Group in the designated country.
6. If perceived costs/risks are equal to opportunities/benefits, Russia will withdraw Wagner Group from the designated country.

This paper is constructed with the initial assumptions that if the risks significantly outweigh the benefits, then Russia will withdraw Wagner Group, and that if benefits outweigh the risks, then Russia will continue to deploy Wagner Group. Since Wagner Group has taken heavy casualties in conflicts such as Syria while maintaining its deployment, this

paper assumes that the risks to Wagner Group, and Russia, must be very high for Russia to consider pulling Wagner group out of a conflict.¹⁸

The use of Wagner Group and other Russian PMCs has grown exponentially in recent years. Due to this rise in the use by Russia, it is imperative to further the understanding of how to counter and deter this new threat. This new tool is by no means the only or most formidable tool in the Russian foreign policy tool kit, but due to its prevalence and the paucity of academic research on the topic, this paper hopes to make a significant contribution to the understanding of its use. Since Wagner Group and other Russian PMCs are often seen as a threat and a destabilizing factor on the world stage, understanding of how they operate can be beneficial to policy makers globally that could be tasked with countering Russia.

Wagner Group is secretive by design, allowing Russia to insert itself into conflicts at low risk and maintain plausible deniability. Due to this, it is a challenging topic to research. This paper will draw on research from academia, think tanks, Russian government documents, reporting, and more, to discern an answer to the research question. The paper consists of 8 chapters. The chapter following the introduction will provide an overview of the methodology. Subsequently, chapters will cover Russian Interests and Foreign Policy, Russian Geopolitical interests in Africa, and Russian Foreign policy tools, which will give important context into how Russia views the world and where Wagner Group fits. Next, the paper will provide a history of Wagner Group, so the reader understands its evolution. After this will be the literature review, followed by the three case studies: the Central African Republic (CAR) (2018-Nov. 2021), Libya (2015- Nov. 2021), and Mozambique (September 2019 – April 2020). Finally, the concluding chapter will summarize the paper and the findings of this research.

¹⁸ Gibbons-Neff, 2018.

The case studies offer an encompassing view of the trials and tribulations of Wagner Group in Africa. The CAR has been relatively successful, with Wagner Group asserting Russian influence over the French and defeating rebel groups in numerous engagements. Libya adds to the value of this paper because after initial success in Libya, Wagner Group had to pull back into defensive positions due to the defeats at the hands of Turkish and GNA forces. Mozambique demonstrates a situation in which Wagner Group suffered several early defeats and was withdrawn from the country. The variety of outcomes (even though CAR and Libya are still ongoing) will provide a perspective on the question of at what point are the risks are too high for Russia to maintain its deployment of Wagner Group inside a foreign country.

2. Methodology

The Russian approach to foreign policy is often described as opportunistic and transactional. The paper seeks to answer the research question: at what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country? To answer this question and to prove or disprove the stated hypotheses, this paper will conduct an in-depth analysis of three case studies rather than briefly covering the many deployments of Wagner Group that the reader will see in the literature review section. The proposed research question will be answered by analyzing the combination of the gains and risks for Russia's involvement in the three selected countries and the behavior of Wagner Group. Wagner Group is still active in the CAR and seems to be making progress. In Libya, after initial success, they have faltered and the mission they set out to complete has been

damaged and changed due to opposing forces. Finally, in Mozambique, Wagner Group was utterly unsuccessful and had to leave. Uncovering the reasons for these different outcomes should help answer the research question.

To compose this research paper, the author will first provide an overview of Russian national interest, global interest, foreign policy and then follow with how Africa is an important puzzle piece in the grand strategy of a resurgent Russia. This paper will analyze Military Doctrine (2014), Russian Naval Strategy (2017), Concept of Foreign Policy (2016), National Security Strategy (2016 and 2021) released by the Russian government and incorporate academic sources to provide a thorough overview. After this section, there will be a brief overview of Russian foreign policy tools and how Wagner Group fits into the tool kit of the Kremlin. The research utilizes sources from think tanks, academia, and news articles to cover Russia's vast array of foreign policy tools. Following this, the paper will give an overview of the murky history of Wagner Group, including its founding as well as the conflicts that the group has been involved in. These aforementioned steps will help further the reader's understanding of Wagner Group's role in Russian foreign policy. Next, this paper has a comprehensive literature review that will show the research done on Wagner Group and illustrate the important contribution this paper makes to the new but growing body of research on this subject.

Subsequent to the literature review, the paper continues with the three selected case studies to illustrate scenarios relevant to the research question. The case studies follow the same format. Each case study starts with a brief history of the subject country's history with the Soviet Union. The history overview is followed by a brief country profile and research into why this country is important to Russia and what opportunities/benefits this country can provide to Russia, answering why was/is Russia there and what objectives the Kremlin might

have, and how this country could fit into the broader African strategy of Russia. These questions are followed by investigating the mission sets and operations of Wagner Group in the designated country. Were they successful? Why or why not? What has caused them to stay or withdraw from the country? These questions will help determine which hypotheses are correct or not. Finally, the case studies will cover how Russia has benefited from the deployment of Wagner Group and what costs and risks it has incurred.

The concluding chapter discusses the findings from each of the case studies and determines which of the hypotheses answers the main research question. It also provides author's final remarks on this and future studies that could follow, including opportunities for further research.

The topic of Wagner Group is complicated to research, by design. The entire purpose of the Wagner Group is a secretive, low-impact force that provides an element of plausible deniability to the Kremlin. In addition to this obstacle, the author cannot read and analyze Russian language documents and media reports. Therefore, the research will rely heavily on English-speaking sources and those that are translated to English, such as many official documents released by the Russian government. This paper will conduct a qualitative analysis of sources including government reports, articles, academic papers, think tank papers, press releases, academic papers, videos, and photographic evidence. The researcher will utilize a snowballing technique that will analyze primary sources and then follow sources that these papers use to ensure the maximization of evidence gathering. This paper will work to illustrate the activities of Wagner Group by analyzing the limited empirical evidence that exists on the subject. As noted earlier, the activities of Wagner Group are covert by design. Despite this obstacle, all available evidence will be used to capture the full extent of the missions of Wagner Group in the case studies, which will give insights into

why they have succeeded or failed. This approach will illustrate the potential benefits of their operations to Russia and will show the costs that the Kremlin was either willing or unwilling to bear to realize the gains in a country.

Working Definition

This section will illustrate what a PMC is and how Wagner Group fits into the definition. First, this paper will establish the definition of a mercenary. Media discussions on Wagner group often use the term "mercenaries", which diverges from what the author believes to reflect its true nature and behavior. Therefore, we will first define Wagner group by what it is not - a mercenary group - and only then by establishing what it likely is - a PMC that is a tool of the Russian government. A mercenary, as defined by the Geneva convention Article 47 of Additional Protocol, is:

“is any person who:

- a. Is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;*
- b. Does, in fact, take a direct part in hostilities;*
- c. Is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party;*
- d. Is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;*

- e. Is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and*
- f. Has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.*

These requirements are cumulative, which means that they must all be applicable for an individual to be categorized as a mercenary."¹⁹

The current contractors that span the world, from logistical support to those that engage in combat, do not fit into this narrow definition of a mercenary. Mercenaries are not part of a company or military, unlike members of these PMCs.²⁰ As the reader will see in the paper Wagner Group works often advances the interests of Russia making it the motivation more than just private gains. Wagner Group is a company/group that's member are not individually hired by the Russian state. Private military and security companies are registered companies with their state. They operate only with recognized governmental and international organizations; contractors hired by PMCs provide a wide range of services, very little of which is actual combat, unlike mercenaries, and PMCs operate in a state legally, under contract.²¹ Seeing as Wagner Group is able to function at the behest of the Russian State, but also outside of it, this report classifies it as a closer to a PMC than government entity. This ambiguity is part of its effectiveness and what makes it so difficult to concretely classify it.

Private military and security companies perform a wide range of tasks and therefore are diverse. The working definition of PMC is based on the typology provided by Major Thomas Arnold of the U.S. Army in 2019, which modifies a previous typology developed

¹⁹ Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict, 1977.

²⁰ Tekingunduz, 2018.

²¹ Manoilo & Zaytsev, 2020, pp. 51-52.

by well-known political scientist Peter Warren Singer. It was chosen because it splits private security companies and private military companies based on whether they are defensive or offensive. A distinction between the operations these companies are tasked with carrying out presents a more accurate depiction than classifying them in the same category (consult Figure Nr. 1).

Figure Nr. 1
Typology of PMCs

Private military and security companies				
- <----- Level of force -----> +				
Type of company	Military support firm	Military consulting firm	Private security company	Private military company
Primary role	Sustainment	Force generation, intelligence, mission command	Defense and protection	Offense
Activities	Transportation Engineering Medical support Procurement Personnel services	Intelligence support Knowledge management Training support	Facility security Physical security Personal protection Convoy security Refugee protection	Combat Combat support Close air support Fire support
Notable examples	Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR)	Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI); Dyncorp	Blackwater/Xe/Academi	Executive Outcomes

Arnold, 2019, p.

This chart provides a clear typology for looking at how Wagner Group might differ from other private military and security companies. Looking at this typology and what we will be shown later in this paper, it is safe to include Wagner Group in the same category as Executive Outcomes. It is a private military company, and importantly, it is used as an offensive tool. It is important to note that it is not exclusively offensive because Wagner Group provides advising, training, security, and other capabilities provided by a private security company or a military consulting firm, but unlike these, it also conducts offensive

operations. Wagner Group is intentionally obscured and there is an ongoing debate in academic literature on what it should be classified as. Wagner Group does carry out missions on behalf of the Russian state, but it is also able to carry out contracts on its own (although most likely with the blessing of the Kremlin).²² An example would be Wagner Group in the CAR. Wagner Group is there carrying out the interests of the Russian State while also protecting private mining companies and profiting from this.²³ This grey area of what exactly Wagner Group is part of its effectiveness. As a result, states are unsure of how to react to its involvement in conflicts. Even though it is not a legally registered company in Russia it does fit the other parameters of a PMC. It is a company or organization performing actions that are associated with offensive and defensive PMCs. By keeping PMCs technically illegal Russia is able to keep them on a leash and if they were to do something Russia did not want then they can be dismantled.²⁴ Wagner Group can act on direct orders like in Ukraine or it can have operational autonomy like when it attacked U.S. forces in Syria and was defeated.²⁵²⁶ Russia does however support Wagner Group when it sees fit and it is unlikely to purposefully go against Russian interests. The Russian government has the final say whether Wagner Group will be deployed or be withdrawn from a country due to Russia being able to crack down on it at any time. Wagner Group while not an officially registered company seems to operate much like a PMC, that the Kremlin controls when it sees fit.

Russia employs a multitude of private security and military companies around the globe. All of them provide different skillsets and fit into different parts of the typology. None is as active, used for offensive operations, or has gained as much notoriety as Wagner Group.

²² Asymmetric Warfare Group & Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 2020, p. 18.

²³ France 24 English, 2021.

²⁴ Asymmetric Warfare Group & Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 2020, p. 19.

²⁵ Rác, 2020.

²⁶ Gibbons-Neff, 2018.

Wagner Group is the most prevalent around the globe of the Russian private security and military companies. In July of 2021, the Center for Strategic and International studies compiled a list of these companies with their suspected ties to the Russian state, and where they have deployed or continue to operate (consult figure Nr. 2).

Figure Nr. 2

Russian PMSCs and PMCs

Company Name	Suspected Links with Russian Government	Locations Where PMCs Have Operated
Anti-Terror Group	Ministry of Defense (especially GRU)	Iraq
Redut-Aniterror/Centre R	Ministry of Defense	Abkhazia, Iraq, Somalia, Syria
Moran Security Group	Ministry of Defense	Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria
Slavonic Corps	Ministry of Defense	Syria, Ukraine
ChVK Wagner	Ministry of Defense (especially GRU); FSB; Kremlin	Belarus, Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela
Rossiskie System Bezopasnosti (RSB) Group	FSB; Ministry of Defense	African Waters (Gulf of Guinea, Gulf of Aden, and Strait of Malacca), Libya, Sri Lanka, Ukraine
E.N.O.T.	FSB	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Serbia, Syria, Tajikistan, Ukraine
Shchit (Shield)	Ministry of Defense (especially 45th Guards Brigade of the Russian Airborne Forces)	Syria
MAR PMC	FSB; Ministry of Defense	Abkhazia, Libya, South Ossetia, Syria, Ukraine, Transnistria
Patriot	FSB; Ministry of Defense (especially GRU)	Burundi, Central African Republic, Syria, Yemen
Sewa Security Services	Ministry of Defense (especially GRU)	Central African Republic

Jones et al., 2021, p. 15.

As one can see from the chart, Wagner Group is deployed the most often and is, therefore, an essential tool in the Russian arsenal. Wagner Group is listed as ChVK Wagner in the table

(ChVK is the Russian abbreviation for PMC).²⁷ The importance and prevalence of Wagner Group justify it being the focus of this research paper as opposed to the other Russian private security and military companies.

Variables

This section will cover the variables that help answer the research question. These variables are split into two groups: potential and realized gains, and potential and realized risks.

Potential and Realized Gains

The potential gains that Russia might make using Wagner Group could be in various realms. This paper establishes five main areas: security, economic, geostrategic, political and international/diplomatic gains. The first is gains in security. Gains in security could mean working as a stabilizing factor in the region that Russia is involved, which in turn will help them grow influence. Economic gains are seen as those that enrich the Russian economy and the elite. Geostrategic gains include gaining access to an area that provides Russia with more power projection ability. Lastly, political and diplomatic gains, such as propping up a regime that supports Russia in international bodies. Russia can realize a wide range of benefits from using Wagner Group globally and in Africa, where the case studies for this paper are located. Each case study will carefully map out the potential and realized gains that Russia has obtained from being involved in the various conflicts.

Potential and Realized Risks

²⁷ Gostev, 2016.

Now this paper will seek to cover the potential risks that Russia might incur when choosing to rely on Wagner Group to conduct operations abroad. This paper establishes four main areas of potential risk including economic, military, international/diplomatic, and domestic political repercussions that could result from the use of Wagner Group. In actuality, the use of Wagner Group and other shadowy organizations does not inflict much damage on Russia, which appears to be the main reason for the deployment of these PMCs.

Economic:

Wagner Group is used partially to secure favorable economic deals and resources for its owner and the Russian state. An example of this would be securing gold and diamond mines in the Central African Republic.²⁸ Failure by Wagner Group could lead to a loss of potential profits and possibly the loss of future profitable resources due to a perception of incompetence by Wagner Group. Another potential economic risk is that the use of Wagner Group (and groups like it) could prompt the U.S., the European Union (EU), or the international community to impose sanctions on Russia. The U.S. already has sanctions imposed on Russia and many of the oligarchs surrounding Putin, including Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who owns Wagner Group.²⁹ The U.S. has sanctioned Prigozhin for his involvement in interfering in the U.S. election of 2016.³⁰ In addition, Prigozhin has been sanctioned by the EU for his and Wagner Group's involvement in the conflict in Libya.³¹ Economist Gary Hufbauer researched many cases of sanctions imposed by the West on various countries and found that sanctions work to some extent 34 percent of the time.³² While sanctions imposed by the West on Russia have not achieved objectives such as Russia

²⁸ Clancy, 2021.

²⁹ Jones et al., 2021, p. 6.

³⁰ Aslund & Snegovaya, 2021.

³¹ EU Sanctions Map, 2021.

³² Aslund & Snegovaya, 2021.

pulling out of Ukraine, they have negatively impacted Russian GDP by 2.5 – 3 percent a year.³³ Further sanctions could be imposed because of the use of Wagner Group in various conflicts. While Russia seems to soldier on despite economic sanctions, they are still taking an economic toll on the country, oligarchs, and the citizens of Russia.

Military:

In addition to the potential economic risk, there is also a significant military risk that can have a negative impact on Russia. The first issue is the potential loss of well-trained soldiers to the private sector for the promise of better pay. A news segment from 2014, interviewed a former soldier who was training in the Czech Republic for a PMC, and he claimed that he could make much more money in the private sector and that “anybody that is any good in the army isn’t in the Army anymore.”³⁴ It is possible that this is not as much of an issue for Russia because Wagner Group is so closely tied to the state, meaning that soldiers might move back and forth between the private sector and the military. On the other side of this coin is the loss of control over the quality of fighters recruited by Wagner Group to carry out the objectives given to them. The owners and leaders of Wagner Group or other PMCs may not adhere to the strict standards of the military. According to information obtained from a tablet used by Wagner Group in Libya and interviews with current and former fighters, many of the fighters have minimal economic prospects where they come from, and this is one of the few ways out of their situation.³⁵ This does not give one the most confidence in their ability to complete objectives. In addition, there is the obvious risk of taking casualties, which does not carry the political costs of the casualties in the military, but which can still weaken the effectiveness of the company. Reports from Syria indicate that

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Thomas & Vice News, 2014, 6:30.

³⁵ Sturdee, 2021.

Wagner Group suffered heavy losses and, as a result, was recruiting inexperienced fighters as replacements, reducing the company's combat effectiveness.³⁶

Furthermore, with the use of PMCs, the state runs the risk that the company has its own interests that it will put above the interests of the state and will go about completing the objectives through means that have negative repercussions for the state. The state loses control over the use of force.³⁷ This can be explained by using the Principle – Agent theory, which has been looked at through the lens of the use of PMCs, and a paper done on Wagner Group and the Principal-Agent Theory out of Johns Hopkins University.^{38,39} In this theory, the agent has been given a task from the principle, but the interests of the agent and the principle are not always the same.⁴⁰ PMCs, like all companies, are there to maximize their profits, and while gaining favorably economic terms for Russia is part of the reason Wagner Group and others are deployed, other objectives could be more important to the state, which might not get the focus that traditional military forces would give them. Over time, due to these competing interests, the principal and the agent are prone to butt heads and mistrust each other.⁴¹ The loss of control over the agent can result in devastating consequences. One example of losing control of the agent is the Nisour Square massacre in the Iraq war. In 2007 American contractors from the company Blackwater opened fire on unarmed Iraqi civilians killing over a dozen, including two children, and wounding many more.⁴² This action damaged the mission of the U.S. in Iraq, tarnished its image, and resulted in innocent lives lost. Another example concerns Wagner Group in Syria. In February of 2018, Wagner Group and Pro-Assad military forces assaulted a gas plant controlled by the U.S. and Kurdish

³⁶ Dettmer, 2020.

³⁷ Petersohn, 2008, p. 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Feinberg, 2020.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 2

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 3

⁴² Safi, 2020.

forces. Before and at the beginning of the attack, the U.S. command contacted the Russian command to ask them to not attack the plant. The Russian military denied that any Russian forces were involved, so the U.S. forces defended themselves. As a result, anywhere from 200-300 of the attackers were killed, and the U.S. forces sustained no casualties.⁴³ It is unclear why Wagner Group operated in this manner, but this definitely deeply impacted the Wagner Group and even got attention back in Russia, which Wagner is designed not to do.⁴⁴ These are only two examples of some of the risks of using PMCs in combat zones, but they will not be the last in this paper.

International/diplomatic:

The use of Wagner Group could also have a negative impact on the international standing and prestige of the Russian state. There are many different nuanced definitions of prestige and how it influences international relations. Working to define precisely what prestige is and how it is gained is beyond the scope of this paper, but the textbook definition is “respect and admiration given to someone or something, usually because of a reputation for high quality, success, or social influence.”⁴⁵ Political Scientist Hans Morgenthau believes that what others think about us is as important as what we actually are in the struggle for power.⁴⁶ The purpose of the policy of prestige “is to impress upon the other nations the power one’s own nation actually possesses or which it believes, or wants the other nations to believe, it possesses.”⁴⁷ One of Russia’s main interests is the realization of great power status and an increase in “the competitiveness and international prestige of the Russian

⁴³ Gibbons-Neff, 2018.

⁴⁴ Tlis, 2018.

⁴⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.

⁴⁶ Morgenthau, 1948, p. 50.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 51.

Federation.”⁴⁸ Prestige is an essential component of the great power status that Russia believes it deserves.

Wagner Group can either help with this quest for prestige or damage it. Wagner Group has the ability to increase Russian influence at low costs to the Kremlin, but there are risks involved. For example, the failure of Wagner Group can harm the prestige of Russia. Even though Russia denies the state is directing Wagner Group, it is still, at the very least, associated with it. Failure to complete its objectives when hired by a country will probably make it less likely to be hired in the future and create the perception that the Russian state is incapable of achieving its objectives. This makes states less likely to look to Russia for help, reducing the chances of Russian spreading its influence. In addition to failure, there is the prospect of the Wagner Group committing crimes, which they have been known to do. For example, there are reports of Wagner Group committing mass killings, raping, and torturing civilians in the Central African Republic.⁴⁹⁵⁰ The loss of control of the agent, in this case Wagner Group, can result in atrocities that negatively impact the military objectives and damage the prestige of Russia. Obviously, Wagner Group seems to be currently used by governments who could not care less about the treatment of their civilian population, but the international community notes these atrocities and further alienates Russia. At this point, it seems that Russia cares very little about the crimes Wagner Group and other PMCs might commit, but those crimes could prevent them from being deployed somewhere in the future.

International condemnation resulting from the use of Wagner Group could also negatively impact Russia by further isolating Russia from the West. Despite Russia’s contempt for the Western world order, Russia is bordered by the EU and NATO and is one

⁴⁸ McClintock et al., 2021, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Walsh, 2021.

⁵⁰ CNN & Ward, 2021.

of the five permanent members of the UN security council. While Russia is on a mission to assert itself as a great power with its own zone of influence, in this globalized world, further disconnecting from the rest of the world is not a recipe for growth. Russia runs the risk or is even considered by some now of being a pariah state.⁵¹ Further isolating your country makes it harder for the country to affect world events in your favor. It is worth noting that Russia does not respond to international condemnation of its actions in the sense that it will change course. (It does, however, employ propaganda to justify its actions and attempt to change the minds of others).⁵² For example, although the UN General Assembly condemned Russia's occupation of Crimea in December of 2019 there have been no real consequence other than to annoy Russia and call attention to the issue.⁵³ Realistically, this pushes Russia even more into using Wagner Group to support countries that would vote their way in the UN General assembly and not adhere to current international norms imposed on Russia by the current world order.

Domestic Political:

In addition to the risks outlined above, there is some domestic political risk, but this seems very limited compared to a situation in which the Russian military is heavily involved in a conflict and taking casualties. As discussed earlier, the staggering defeat of Wagner Group and pro-Assad forces at the hands of U.S. forces led to an outcry for answers in Russia. The political leader Alexey Navalny called the Russian foreign ministry statement on what happened and the number of casualties a lie.⁵⁴ But, the reality is that this was one big event, and outside of this, there does not seem to be much domestic push back against the use of Wagner Group. Furthermore, the government strictly controls the media seen by

⁵¹ Faulconbridge et al., 2018.

⁵² Paul & Matthews, 2016.

⁵³ Aljazeera, 2019.

⁵⁴ This, 2018.

most Russian citizens, so it is very difficult for citizens to hear information that the government does not want them to hear.⁵⁵ The other potential threat, which is rather implausible but not impossible, is the threat of Prigozhin or another Russian Oligarch using Wagner Group or another private group to overthrow the Putin Regime. Coup d'état is the most common way that autocrats lose power.⁵⁶ While it appears Putin has a firm grip on power, there is always a possibility of discontent among the elite and a desire for a change in leadership. Overall, the domestic political risk of deploying Wagner Group is low.

3. Russian Interests and Foreign Policy

This section will cover the interests and foreign policy of the Russian Federation based on the Military Doctrine (2014), Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030 (2017), Concept of Foreign Policy (2016), and National Security Strategy (2016 and 2021) released by the Russian government. Following the aforementioned analysis, this paper will also bring attention to the work of several scholars and think tanks that have extensively researched the subject. The purpose of this evaluation of Russian foreign policy is to give essential context to the investigation of Wagner Group.

First, this paper will analyze the Military Doctrine released in 2014. Unfortunately, there is not a more recent release to analyze. Analysis done on this doctrine, and the previous one from 2010 by researchers from the Finnish National Defense University concluded that

⁵⁵ Taussig, 2017.

⁵⁶ Kendall--Taylor & Frantz, 2014, p. 1.

both doctrines present a “defensive posture” for the military of Russia.⁵⁷ As in the National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy concept, Russia faces many external threats that it must defend itself from.⁵⁸ Dr. Andrew Foxall from the University of Oxford claims that Russia believes that it is at war with the U.S. and its NATO allies, with both sides believing that the other is the aggressor in the situation.⁵⁹ This train of thought leads to Russia using military power to protect the former Soviet space and beyond from perceived threats, resulting in something that appears far from defensive to the outside world.⁶⁰ The Military Doctrine was created to formulate “a system of officially adopted State views on the preparation for armed defense and armed protection of the Russian Federation.”⁶¹

The Russian Military Doctrine mentions a redistribution of influence that it believes is currently taking place worldwide.⁶² This seems to be an apparent reference to the viewpoint of the world shifting from a unipolar world to a multi-polar world in which Russia sees itself as one of the poles. The military doctrine goes on to list the main external risks and threats facing Russia. Military risk is defined as;

“a situation in the inter-state or intra-state relations characterized by the totality of factors which can lead to a military threat under certain conditions.”⁶³ The military threat is defined as; “a situation in the inter-state or intra-state relations characterized by a real possibility of an outbreak of a military conflict between opposing sides and by a high degree of readiness of a given state (group of states)

⁵⁷ Virtahatju & Rantapelkonen, 2015, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 1.

⁵⁹ Foxall, 2021, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Russel, 2021, p. 1.

⁶¹ The Russian Federation & The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2014, pt. 1.

⁶² Ibid, pt. 9.

⁶³ Ibid, pt. 8B.

or separatist (terrorist) organizations to resort to military force (armed violence).”⁶⁴

The main external risk for the Russian military is first and foremost NATO, followed by destabilized states, interference in internal affairs of Russia and its allies, terrorist threat, and the establishment of governments bordering Russia that threaten Russian interests. Additional external risks are present but not as relevant to the research of this paper. The risk that NATO poses to Russia’s existence is not necessarily new or surprising. Neither are the other risks highlighted, such as the concern for governments that do not support Russia on the border. The invasion of Ukraine is a prime example of how far Russia is willing to go to prevent what it views as unfriendly governments on its border. Furthermore, the terrorist threat is something the Russian government takes seriously both inside its borders and abroad, as we will see in the Mozambique case study.

There are many sections in the Military Doctrine, and not all can be covered, but the section titled “Characteristic features and specifics of current military conflicts” certainly merits the attention of this thesis. The first point says, “integrated employment of military force and political, economic, informational or other non-military measures implemented with a wide use of the protest potential of the population and of special operations forces.”⁶⁵ This shows the belief in using all facets of the state to conduct war, not just the military. This also furthers the point made by Dr. Andrew Foxall of Oxford in May 2021 that Russia sees economic sanctions imposed by the west as a “Non-military means of war.”⁶⁶ This section of the Military doctrine goes on to state that the military must be able to confront the opponent on the land, sea, air, space, and information space. The doctrine also states that the

⁶⁴ Ibid, pt. 8C.

⁶⁵ Ibid, pt. 15A.

⁶⁶ Foxall, 2021, p. 17.

use of high-tech weaponry is warranted, including and among other things, the full use of combined arms to fight the enemy.⁶⁷ This is again unsurprising, but it is important to note that the doctrine declares that irregular military formations and private military companies would participate in military operations⁶⁸, which is the subject of this paper. It is also interesting to see that “employment of political forces and public associations financed and guided from abroad” in the military doctrine.⁶⁹ Russia and Wagner Group will employ these in their operations in the case studies researched in this paper.

In addition to the section on how the Russian military views the current nature of conflict, the section titled, “Military-political and military-technical cooperation of the Russian Federation with foreign states”⁷⁰ is vital to discuss because it appears that Wagner Group and other Russian PMC’s play an important role as they are deployed to many foreign states. Some of the tasks the military is responsible for, and it would seem Wagner Group as well, are the strengthening of international security and stability, from the lens of the Kremlin’s interpretation of security and stability. The military is also tasked to help develop relations with allies and other states and create regional security systems in which Russia is included.⁷¹ This section also lists the main priorities of the military and political cooperation. It is important to note that none of the case studies in this paper or even the continent of Africa are listed as a priority in the military doctrine. It could be because increased Russian involvement in Africa is a more recent development, and the latest military doctrine was in 2014.

⁶⁷ The Russian Federation & The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2014, pt. 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pt. 15H.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pt. 15J.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, pt. 55.

The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation only mentions private military companies twice. This doctrine was released in 2014. Since then, the use of PMCs by Russia has increased exponentially. With this in mind, it will be interesting to see whether the next doctrine release will reflect this upsurge and refer to PMCs more. The first time PMCs are mentioned is in the military risks section, where the document explains that foreign PMCs adjacent to the borders of Russia are a military risk.⁷² The second mention is in the section describing the characteristics of current military conflicts, where it is stated that PMC's would be involved in military operations.⁷³ The Russian military is one of the most powerful militaries in the world and is capable of projecting beyond its borders.⁷⁴ The Russian PMCs, particularly Wagner Group, are small compared to the entire Russian military, but they appear in strategic situations worldwide and seem to be an important tool in the Russian foreign policy toolbox.

Next, this paper will briefly analyze some aspects of the “Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030”, released in 2017. The fundamentals are a “strategic planning document” of Russia.⁷⁵ Russia calls itself a “great sea and land power” that must continue to develop its navy to solidify its position in this multipolar world.⁷⁶ The Russian navy plays an essential role in the defense of Russia and its ability to project power. The doctrine believes there is competition between nations over resources worldwide, therefore the Navy plays a vital role in securing those and protecting its sea lines of communication.⁷⁷ A great deal of the short document focuses on Russia's desire to project power anywhere in the world to protect its interests. To do this,

⁷² Ibid, pt. 12k

⁷³ Ibid, pt. 15H.

⁷⁴ Business Insider, 2021.

⁷⁵ The Russian Federation et al., 2017, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 16 -17.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 6 -7.

Russia needs bases and friendly countries that allow them to use their ports. This is where PMCs like Wagner Group would come in; using Wagner Group to help secure favorable naval basing or at least port access deals for the Russian Navy. Interestingly, of the two geographic locations mentioned by name in the document, the Mediterranean Sea is one of them.⁷⁸ This indicates the strategic importance of the Mediterranean Sea to Russia, which highlights one of the clear reasons that Wagner Group was deployed to Libya. The aim was to turn the conflict in favor of Russia and secure, among other things, basing for the Russian Navy to allow them to project power into the Mediterranean Sea. This brief document on Russian Naval strategy gives a glimpse into Russian strategic thinking and seems to fit in nicely with the other documents analyzed for this paper.

Next, this paper will analyze some parts of the “Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation” that was released in 2016. While there are some glaring contradictions in the concept of Foreign policy as compared to the actions of the Russian Federation, such as their supposed commitment to the rule of law in international relations or how Russia “consistently advocates reducing the role of the use of force in international relations” (one could consult with Ukraine to gain a better understanding of this Russian advocacy), there is a considerable amount of useful information to assist in understanding Russian foreign policy.⁷⁹ The document outlines what the “foreign policy activities” of the Russian state are attempting to achieve. These include “to create a favorable external environment that would allow Russia’s economy to grow steadily and become more competitive and would promote technological modernization as well as higher standards of living and quality of life for its population.”⁸⁰ The key words in this are: “*create a favorable external environment.*” While

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

⁷⁹ The Russian Federation & The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

this is not unique to Russia, some of the modalities of action that Russia chooses to create a favorable external environment are questionable. As the reader will see later in the paper, Wagner Group seems to have become a foreign policy tool that helps to create these favorable external environments. In addition to this objective, Russia also has the goal “to consolidate the Russian Federation’s position as a center of influence in today’s world.”⁸¹ Russia is working tirelessly to export Russian influence through various means, including Wagner Group. The Russian Federation believes that the international arena is currently a multipolar system and that it is one of the poles and thus should be treated as such.⁸² To this end, they work to be recognized at the same level as the United States and China. This coincides with the spreading of influence around the world and filling any power vacuums that it can. Therefore, this document illustrates the commitment of Russia to being recognized as a great power.

In addition to the Foreign Policy Concept, there is the “Russian National Security Strategy” that was also released in 2016. The Center for Strategic and International Studies in 2016 did an excellent job translating and evaluating its main points. Just like the foreign policy concept, the national security strategy stresses the importance of Russia being viewed as a great power.⁸³ The Strategy also places importance on growing the economy of Russia and improving the lives of its citizens, while decreasing inequality.⁸⁴ The Strategy also seems particularly concerned about domestic unrest and preventing the population from being influenced by outside propaganda.⁸⁵ Perhaps most importantly, though, the Strategy is gravely concerned about the perceived aggression of the U.S.. In the eyes of Russia, the U.S.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Olikier, 2016.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

is trying to “contain” this great power and is a destabilizing force on the world stage.⁸⁶ This gives us a glimpse into the mindset of the Kremlin and that informs the big picture understanding of their view. Professor Margot Light wrote an excellent piece in 2015 that has tracked the foreign policy themes in official Russian speeches and documents. In the research, she has noted several consistent themes including a focus on territorial integrity and international law, Russia’s international status (i.e., great power status), and a focus on fostering a multipolar world.⁸⁷ These themes have been noted in the foreign policy concept and national security strategy, as discussed in the last two paragraphs.

During the writing of this paper, the Russian government released a new National Security Strategy (2021). This paragraph will briefly discuss the similarities and differences and the opinions of some experts on the national security strategy. Dmitri Trenin of the Carnegie endowment for International Peace notes in June 2021, that this document seems to perceive a world with an even heightened sense of threat from the West.⁸⁸ Mark Galeotti (July 2021) from the Royal United Services Institute also notes the viewpoint of a world in which of Russia perceives itself as facing numerous threats, even going so far as to call it a “Paranoid’s Charter.”⁸⁹ The strategy views the West as a threat and believes that the West is declining. Therefore, the West will be rasher, and the world will be unstable as it presumably transitions to a multipolar world.⁹⁰ This multipolar world is a core objective for Putin. Dmitri Trenin notes that the national security strategy is focused much more inward because Putin believes Russia has reasserted itself as a great power and now needs to focus inward to avoid a collapse like that of the Soviet Union.⁹¹ While this inward focus seems to be imperative to

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Light, 2015 pp. 15 - 16.

⁸⁸ Trenin, 2021.

⁸⁹ Galeotti, 2021.

⁹⁰ Trenin, 2021.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Russia, it in no way means that Russia will suddenly stop asserting itself where it can around the globe. While not being the same as the cold war, the global competition with the West still requires Russia to push back the West where it can. The West, militarily and through its culture, is incredibly threatening to Russian security, culture, and unity. This does threat includes not only “unfriendly countries” like the U.S., but also tech companies like Twitter that could be used to spread information that undermines unity.⁹² Undermining unity in Russia certainly would be perceived as a threat to the current regime. A table constructed by the Observer Research Foundation (July 2021) is beneficial in seeing some of the language differences used in the 2015 and 2021 versions. This can be seen in figure 3 below:

Figure Nr. 3

Russian National Security Strategy Language 2015 and 2021

2021	2015
Preservation of people of Russia and development of human potential	Improving quality of life of Russian citizens
National defence	National defence
State and public security	State and public security
Information security	—
Economic security	Economic growth
Science and technological development	Science, technology and education
Protection of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, culture and historical memory	Culture
Environment safety and management	Economy of living systems and rational use of natural resources
Strategic stability and mutually beneficial international cooperation	Strategic stability and equal strategic partnership
—	Public health

Kapoor, 2021.

As one can see from the above table, there are some differences particularly geared towards preserving Russia's economic security, cultural security, and information security.

⁹² Meduza, 2021.

This national security strategy is more about preserving and protecting Russia from the tumultuous world than the previous document.⁹³

Having mentioned some crucial points of Russia's national security strategy and foreign policy concept, this paper will now focus on some of the extensive literature pertaining to Russia's interests and foreign policy, which has been composed by scholars, think tanks, and various experts on the subject. According to the Institute for the Study of War, "Russian President Vladimir Putin holds a set of core strategic objectives: preserving his regime, suppressing political dissent, expanding his economy, reestablishing his state as a global power, and diminishing the global influence of the U.S. and NATO."⁹⁴ Rand Corporation, having done quality research on the topic, concluded that the main Russian interests were regime preservation and defense from internal and external threats, influence in the "near abroad," working towards or maintaining Russian great power status, and improving the Russian economy.⁹⁵ Both of studies come to the same essential conclusion, that Russia is asserting itself as a great power in a multi-polar world, with Russia as one of those poles. This is an important objective for the Kremlin, and it is working to make this a reality.⁹⁶ In addition to these objectives, there has been the constant focus of Russia on securing strategic depth to protect its core.⁹⁷ The interests in these documents are consistent with the interests defined in evaluating Russian national security strategy and foreign policy concept.

There is some debate as to whether or not Russian foreign policy is guided by the nation's interests or is guided by Putin and his inner-circle's desire for regime survival and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Bugayova & Regio, 2019, p. 1.

⁹⁵ McClintock et al., 2021, p. 4.

⁹⁶ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 30

⁹⁷ Gurganus & Rumer, 2019.

personal enrichment opportunities.⁹⁸ While discerning the answer to this is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems likely that the answer is somewhere in between. Why can't the Kremlin satisfy both needs? The foreign policy of the Kremlin has been described as "opportunistic" by several sources.⁹⁹ This opportunistic approach is evident when observing Russia's footprint around the world, particularly in Africa, as we will see later in the report. Thus, the foreign policy often seems to satisfy the enrichment of the inner circle while simultaneously spreading Russian influence. At the same time, Russia is also driven to protect its core when it feels threatened, which is evident from its invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2014.¹⁰⁰ As we will see later in this paper, Wagner Group seems to be an important tool in the survival of the regime in the sense that it allows Putin to expand the global influence of Russia while not taking casualties in the regular Army, which might be unpopular at home.

This quote from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2017) perfectly illustrates Russia's actions on the global stage

*"Russian global activism without exception has one common feature: Russia has not established the underlying conditions that it has been trying to capitalize on. Rather, Moscow has opportunistically exploited conditions that are either indigenous to their respective countries and regions or products of local dissatisfaction with the West writ large or the West's own unfinished business."*¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Rendboe, 2019, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 1., McClintock et al., 2021, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 27.

In a study released by RAND they believe that this opportunistic approach “maximizes overall gains while minimizing the cost.”¹⁰² This idea is central to this paper and the deployment of Wagner Group in the CAR, Libya, and Mozambique. In these case studies, the Kremlin sees an opening and is able to insert Wagner Group into a situation at a relatively low cost. The Kremlin can keep them there as long as it sees benefits and extract them when it sees fit. For example, with its poor governance, civil war, and exhaustion of the French, the CAR provided an opportunity for Russia to insert itself. Another example is Libya and the fall of Mu'ammār Al-Qadhafī, creating a power vacuum. Then, of course, the insurgency in the North of Mozambique created a potential opportunity for Russia to expand its influence through Wagner Group. None of these situations were manufactured by Russia, but Russia has attempted to exploit them with Wagner Group and has succeeded to some degree.

4. Russian Geopolitical Interests in Africa

Russia is working to spread its global influence in the Balkans, Arctic, Middle East, Latin America, the Indo Pacific, and Africa. This section and paper will focus on Africa and how it fits into the grand strategy of Russian influence. Following the annexation of Ukraine, Putin worked to gear Russian engagement more towards China as a response to the sanctions that the U.S. and the West imposed on Russia.¹⁰³ Not only did Russia pivot towards China, but it also decided that it needed to find more like-minded countries that might not be heavily influenced by the West, or at least countries that had the potential to be influenced by Russia.

¹⁰² McClintock et al., 2021, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Chase et al., 2017, p. 18.

Russia decided that a continent ripe for expansion of influence could be found in Africa.¹⁰⁴ Before covering the Russian objectives for Africa and how it fits into its broader global strategy, a brief overview of the historic ties between Russia and Africa is important to understand how Africa fits into Russia's broader global strategy.

Similar to most other regions in the world, Africa was a continent of competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The Soviet Union expended an enormous amount of effort to turn many countries on the continent towards communism during the Cold War. The Soviet Union developed close relationships with Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Ethiopia, Guinea, Ghana, the Congo Republic, Mali, Angola, Mozambique, Benin, and Somalia.¹⁰⁵ Mozambique is one of the countries that will be a case study in this paper. "The Soviets signed cooperation treaties with 37 African countries and participated in building some 600 enterprises, factories, and plants."¹⁰⁶ The Soviet Union also secretly participated in the Angolan Civil War, the Mozambique Civil War, and the Ogaden War, Biafra, Congo Free State, and Eritrea.¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, many of Africa's political elite were educated in Soviet Union universities during the cold war.¹⁰⁹ These strong ties certainly impacted the continent, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has largely been unable to and lacked the desire to regain influence in Africa until recently.¹¹⁰

The Russian Foreign Policy Concept mentions Africa seven times. The concept asserts that "international terrorism is one of the most dangerous realities in the world today."¹¹¹ The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is one of the regions of

¹⁰⁴ Harding & Burke, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Oleg Yegorov, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Posibi, 2019., Atomic Heritage Foundation, 2018., University of Central Arkansas, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Gavin, 2021, p. 10.

¹¹¹ The Russian Federation & The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016.

the world where this is most prevalent. The document cites globalization and external interference as being significant factors in the proliferation of international terrorism.¹¹² External interference is presumably a nod to the U.S. and its allies. The negative influence of globalization is also something that Russia seems to fear in its own country, as demonstrated by the fact that its most recent national security strategy made the point of needing to protect against information that could negatively influence Russian people.¹¹³ Russia sees international terrorism stemming from this region as a threat to Russia and the world's stability. The document declares that:

“Russia will continue making a meaningful contributions to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international terrorist groups, consistently promotes political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in regional states while respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference.”¹¹⁴

The MENA region, which includes Libya, is clearly important to Russia due to its emphasis in the foreign policy concept. Russia also mentions the importance of Africa as a whole. The document states,

“Russia will expand multidimensional interaction with African States both in bilateral and multilateral settings by improving political dialogue and promoting mutually beneficial trade and economic ties, stepping up comprehensive cooperation that serves common interests, contribute to preventing regional conflicts and crisis situations, as well as facilitate post-conflict settlement in

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Kapoor, 2021.

¹¹⁴ The Russian Federation & The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016.

*Africa. Promoting partnership ties with the African Union and sub-regional organizations is an important element of this policy.*¹¹⁵

There is nothing remarkable about this statement, except to note that the entire continent of Africa was out of reach for Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, but Africa has now become a focal point in Russian foreign policy and is one piece of the global ambitions of a resurgent Russia.

As stated earlier, according to the Institute for the study of War “Russian President Vladimir Putin holds a set of core strategic objectives: preserving his regime, suppressing political dissent, expanding his economy, reestablishing his state as a global power, and diminishing the global influence of the U.S. and NATO.”¹¹⁶ Russia’s growing influence in Africa has the potential to support these objectives. Russia’s increased impact does not mean that Russia’s influence is comparable to the U.S. or China, but it is taking its opportunities where they are available. Russia’s approach and focus are different from the U.S. and China.¹¹⁷ Russian foreign policy worldwide and especially in Africa is referred to as opportunistic by many experts.¹¹⁸ (See the footnotes for a few of the many sources). The Council on Foreign Relations noted that Russian trade with sub-Saharan Africa is approximately a quarter of what the US trades and less than one-tenth of what China trades. In addition, Russian foreign direct investment pales in comparison to many other wealthy nations, and when Russia does insert itself to “help” it is obvious that it does this to take advantage of a situation.¹¹⁹ In 2019, the percentage of Russia’s total exports to Africa was 3.21% of its total exports, and of that, Egypt made up 41.7%.¹²⁰ Thus a small percentage of

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Bugayova & Regio, 2019, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Procopio, 2019., Soest, 2021., Gavin, 2021, pp. 4-11.

¹¹⁸ Siegle, 2021., Gavin, 2021, p. 10., McClintock et al., 2021, p. 20., Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017 p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Gavin, 2021, p. 10.

¹²⁰ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), 2021.

Russia's total exports. However, the fact that Russia is far behind the U.S. and China in trade and investment does not mean that Russia cannot assert itself where opportunities arise and that it cannot be positive for Russia and sometimes negative for the Western international order.

Russia provides security and arms deals to countries in exchange for economic benefits and political influence.¹²¹ Russia is the number one arms exporter to the continent of Africa, where it controls around 49% of the total arms market.¹²² These economic benefits it derives from these exchanges are mainly in resource extraction, which has the potential to help the economy at home and keep the elite satisfied.¹²³ Providing economic opportunities for the elite in Russia is an important objective in ensuring the longevity of Putin's regime. The political influence it hopes to achieve in exchange for arms sales is gaining allies in international bodies such as the UN. The deals are aimed at creating lasting ties between Russia and the respective African countries so that they vote in favor of Russian objectives in international forums.¹²⁴ Supporting and fostering like-minded regimes in Africa, which will support the global efforts of the Kremlin in international bodies, is a key component for Russia to counter the West and assert itself as a great power in this multi-polar world.¹²⁵ Kimberly Martin (2019) from Columbia University points out that most countries working with Russia are under sanctions or in trouble with the international community, meaning that these relationships are probably forming because the countries do not have many other options.¹²⁶ This again perfectly aligns with the presentation of an alternative community with Russia at the center, as Putin so desperately desires. "Hey, we do not mind if you run an

¹²¹ Marten, 2019d, p. 155.

¹²² Siegle, 2021.

¹²³ Stronski, 2019.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Siegle, 2021.

¹²⁶ Marten, 2019d, p. 157.

oppressive regime over here, come work with us” is an attractive alternative to the criteria one must meet before receiving aid from the West.

In addition to the political and economic benefits, Russia has the potential to increase its power projection by adding military and naval bases on the continent.¹²⁷ Russia is working to open bases in places like Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and more.¹²⁸ These bases not only mean that Russia will have more of a permanent role on the continent but also contribute to power projection in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In addition, positioning bases in places like Egypt and Libya will allow Russia to have a security threat on the southern flank of NATO.¹²⁹ This puts Russia on at least two sides of NATO with an ability to project power deeper into the heart of Europe. The economic, political, military, and geostrategic objectives in Africa have the potential to increase the power projection of Russia, improve the economy for ordinary Russian’s and the elite, and possibly boost Russia’s stature on the world stage, so that it appears as a peer to China and the United States. The key word in this sentence is “appears” because even though Russia is certainly projecting power globally, it still has nowhere near the strategic and economic potential of the U.S. and China.

5. Russian Foreign Policy Tools

Russia uses a variety of economic incentives to pull countries closer to the Russian center of gravity. These include “preferential trade terms, discounts on its oil and gas exports, debt relief, and financial bailouts.”¹³⁰ An example of this would be Russia canceling

¹²⁷ Bugayova & Regio, 2019, p. 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Siegle, 2021.

¹³⁰ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 7.

20 billion USD in debt that African nations owed Russia.¹³¹ In addition to this, Russia uses political and diplomatic means to strengthen its relationships with other countries.¹³² Russia exploits both official and unofficial ties to seek out figures that are friendly to Russia and have a negative disposition to the West. By identifying potentially corrupt or sympathetic individuals, Russia is able to insert itself into the political elite of a country.¹³³ The Russian government works to undermine democracies in Africa and elsewhere with various tools, including disinformation on social media and other platforms.¹³⁴ This was seen on a large scale in the U.S. and could be potentially welcomed by strongmen around the globe looking to stay in power. An example of this in South Africa occurred when Russian-backed media was used to try to stoke racial tensions.¹³⁵ In addition to disinformation, Russia uses other tools in the same realm, such as cyber-attacks.¹³⁶ These cyber-attacks are on government agencies and private companies, mainly tech companies.¹³⁷ Another example of increasing influence can be Russian education. As noted earlier, during the Cold War, many Africans were educated at Soviet universities. “An estimated 15,000 Africans study at Russian universities mainly from Nigeria, Angola, Morocco, Namibia, and Tunisia.”¹³⁸ Finally, there is the area of military and security cooperation, the focus of this paper. Russia uses “security alliances, military training and assistance, and arms sales”¹³⁹ to increase its influence in Africa. Russia has signed approximately two dozen security agreements in Africa in recent years and as noted earlier, is a significant arms contributor to the

¹³¹ Gakweli, 2019.

¹³² Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 8.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Harshé, 2021.

¹³⁵ Siegle, 2021.

¹³⁶ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017, p. 8.

¹³⁷ Colson, 2021.

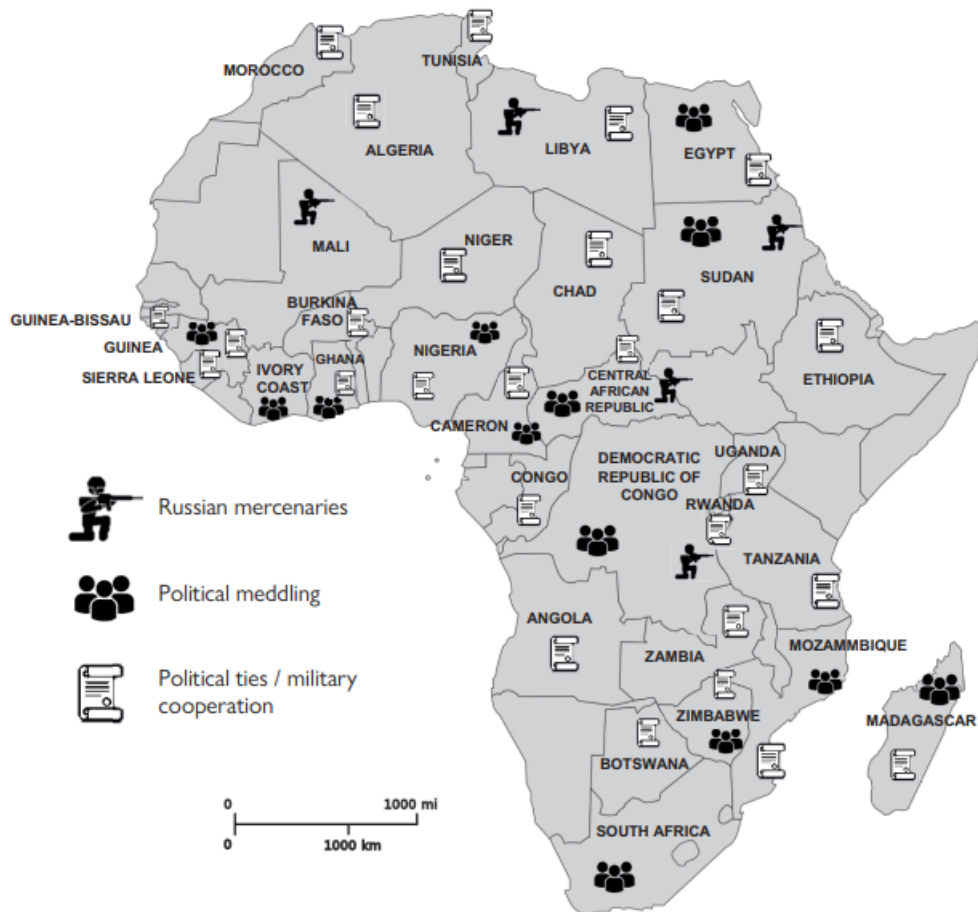
¹³⁸ Stronski & Sokolsky, 2017 p. 8.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

continent.¹⁴⁰ The map below illustrates the prevalence of Russian security cooperation in Africa (consult figure Nr. 4).

Figure Nr. 4

Russian activity and military presence in Africa



Jacobsen, 2020, p. 41.

Among the many ways that Russia expands its security cooperation with countries or participates in conflicts it deems crucial to its interests, one of the most secretive is Wagner Group. The origins and activities of the Wagner Group will be introduced in the next section.

¹⁴⁰ Siegle, 2021.

6. Wagner Group history

Wagner Group and other private military companies (PMCs) are outlawed in Russia, yet Wagner Group trains in Krasnodar, Russia, across the street from a GRU (Russia's primary intelligence agency of the armed forces) compound.¹⁴¹ Given the reputation of the GRU, it is difficult to believe that the GRU would not be aware of a PMC training in the immediate vicinity. This section will cover the formation of Wagner Group and some of its history to show its evolution. Sources indicate that the Wagner Group was created out of a PMC called Slavonic Corps that started fighting ISIS in Syria for Bashar al Assad in 2013.¹⁴² After this, the Wagner group was formed in 2014 by former GRU officer Dmitry Utkin and with funding from Yevgeny Prigozhin, known as "Putin's Chef."¹⁴³ The nickname "Putin's Chef" comes from the fact that Prigozhin became a successful business man through his catering business in the 1990's.¹⁴⁴ He has since graduated to more significant business dealings. Wagner Group got its first mission in the fighting in Ukraine. Right from the start, there was evidence that Wagner Group was taking direct orders from the Kremlin. When Wagner Group was in Ukraine from 2014 to 2015, Ukrainian signals intelligence intercepted phone conversations of Wagner Group commander Dmitry Utkin reporting to GRU Colonel Oleg Ivannikov, in addition to Major General Evgeny Nikiforov, the chief of staff of Russia's 58th Army.¹⁴⁵ "These conversations indicated that Utkin was subordinated both to the GRU and to the Russian military command."¹⁴⁶ Following Ukraine, Wagner Group

¹⁴¹ Marten, 2019a.

¹⁴² Borshchevskaya, 2019, p. 9.

¹⁴³ Marten, 2019a.

¹⁴⁴ Peter, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Rácz, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Rácz, 2020.

deployed to Syria to help Bashar Al Assad retain power.¹⁴⁷ The most famous incident from this deployment was when Wagner Group and pro-Assad Syrian forces attacked U.S. special forces in February 2018.¹⁴⁸ The attack did not go as planned for Wagner group as several hundred fighters from Wagner Group and the Pro-Assad forces were annihilated by U.S. air and artillery power.¹⁴⁹ Curiously, the U.S. forces contacted the Russian command and warned them to call off the attack, but the Russian command stated that the group was not part of the Russian military.¹⁵⁰ This indicates that Wagner was not operating under Russian military command. This is odd because the wounded Wagner Group members from this battle were taken back for treatment to Russian military hospitals.¹⁵¹ Even though Wagner Group is a part of the Russian arsenal, it appears that they were expendable. Since then, Wagner Group has surfaced in places like Sudan, Venezuela, Belarus, and the case studies that are the focus of this paper.¹⁵²¹⁵³

So why does the Kremlin use PMCs like Wagner Group? One reason, which is becoming less and less of a viable option, is plausible deniability to the international community.¹⁵⁴ This plausible deniability offers Russia an opportunity to pursue its international interests without taking responsibility. However, as Wagner Group becomes more prevalent and is seen taking Russian military transport planes¹⁵⁵ to conflict zones, it is becoming more difficult to play that card.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, there is evidence of the members using GRU-issued passports, and when members of the group were captured in Belarus, it

¹⁴⁷ The Economist, 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Gibbons-Neff, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Giglio, 2019.

¹⁵² Weber, 2020.

¹⁵³ Marten, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Rącz, 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Rondeaux, 2019, p. 1.

appears Putin intervened to have them released.¹⁵⁷ Wagner Group seems to fluctuate in and out of control of the Kremlin. The Kremlin can also use Wagner Group for plausible deniability at home and does not need to report casualties to the public as part of the defense ministry.¹⁵⁸ A report done by the National Bureau of Asian research argued that Russia's foreign policy is propelled forward by the desire for domestic stability and regime survival,¹⁵⁹ the regime being Putin and the oligarchs that surround him. The fewer casualties that are listed as part of the military, the less potential for angering the public while Russia injects itself into other countries. Wagner Group plays a key role in securing economic benefits for the Russian elite that Putin needs to keep happy along with the citizens of Russia. In addition to securing economic benefits, the deployment of Wagner Group seems to be cheaper than deploying military forces abroad, as they are hired for contracts that can be terminated after completion.¹⁶⁰ Wagner Group and other PMCs allow Russia to assert itself across the globe with a lighter footprint.¹⁶¹ This lighter footprint allows Russia to quickly test and capitalize on opportunities that arise, and if they become too risky or do not bear any fruit, Russia can pull them out quickly.

Also, as noted in the previous paragraph, the forces seem to be more expendable. Casualties are not seen as a tragedy since they are mere volunteers. Wagner Group is a versatile weapon in the Kremlin's arsenal, having conducted missions that include but are not limited to "Foment separatism from the state in Ukraine, protect a leader from regime change pressure in Venezuela, conduct disinformation campaigns and electoral manipulation in Mozambique, and fight in the war in Syria."¹⁶² Wagner Group can build up and grow

¹⁵⁷ Rácz, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Marten, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Chase et al., 2017, p. 18.

¹⁶⁰ Jones et al., 2021, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.17.

¹⁶² Weber, 2020.

relations with partner forces around the world when the deployment of Russian military forces might cause more trouble than it would be worth for the Kremlin.¹⁶³ The Wagner Group and other Russian PMCs are able to protect or fight for Russian interests abroad while deflecting some of the negative consequences away from the Russian government.

7. Literature Review on Wagner Group

The emergence of Wagner Group occurred in Ukraine in 2014, meaning that this is a recent phenomenon. In addition, this is an elusive and secretive group, so there is not extensive literature covering the topic. Nonetheless, this section will highlight the existing academic literature and provide perspective on this emerging and important topic. Many of these papers have been and will be cited throughout the text because they are crucial to the understanding of this topic.

Kimberly Marten, a leading expert on Russia, has written an in-depth analysis (2019) on Wagner group that discusses its origins and explains why Russia has been using the Wagner Group while not legalizing them.¹⁶⁴ Dr. Marten's work on Wagner refers to the group as a semi-state security force as it seems to do the state bidding but also has its own ambitions. Her findings concluded that Russia uses PMCs like most other countries “to save costs, to avoid military conscript casualties, and for reasons of plausible deniability.”¹⁶⁵ (Although the plausible deniability has dramatically diminished). Dr. Marten also concludes that Wagner is possibly being used in non-state activities, which may be by design to muddy the waters around whether the group is a state actor.¹⁶⁶ Finally, she asserts that the relationship

¹⁶³ Jones et al., 2021, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Marten, 2019b.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 198.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

between the Kremlin and Wagner Group has fluctuated, which seems to give more credibility to the title of a semi-state actor.¹⁶⁷

Niklas M. Rendboe, out of the University of Southern Denmark, wrote a solid piece on Wagner Group in 2019.¹⁶⁸ Rendboe constructs a thorough and comprehensive study on Wagner Group. Rendboe concludes that Wagner Group can be “conceived as a commercialized volunteer corps.”¹⁶⁹ Wagner Group cannot be thought of as a traditional PMC but as something more like a “state military company.”¹⁷⁰ He states that Wagner Group is a foreign policy tool of Russia and that it furthers Russian strategic interests by being able to deploy quickly where Russia has interests and can be deployed to countries to enhance the standing of Russia and increase the influence of Russia over a more extended period.¹⁷¹ In addition, Rendboe concludes that Wagner is a product of military privatization in Russia related to the patronage system surrounding the Kremlin. He notes that Wagner Group is well situated to continue to profit and expand. Wagner’s deniability is a way to prevent immediate action and slow or prevent escalation in a conflict and the paper includes some policy recommendations to deal with this threat.

In 2019 Candace Rondeaux from the Center on the Future of War wrote a piece analyzing Russian PMCs in Russian proxy warfare.¹⁷² The analysis developed by Rondeaux produced some key findings. Firstly, that these PMCs are designed for deception, making it difficult for the international community to identify and counter their actions. Second, “Russia’s PMCs are products of post-Soviet privatization of Russia’s military-industrial complex and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 199.

¹⁶⁸ Rendboe, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, Abstract.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p.66

¹⁷¹ Ibid. Abstract.

¹⁷² Rondeaux, 2019.

reconsolidation of the security state under Putin.”¹⁷³ In addition, Russia uses these PMCs to facilitate its grand strategy in the Middle East and its periphery.¹⁷⁴ Next, that the narrative of Putin as a grand chess master sending Wagner to do his bidding is a beneficial narrative to Russia.¹⁷⁵ Finally, the use of Russian PMCs is partly to prevent escalation and problems for the Kremlin but that the flow of information and investigations that expose information about Wagner Group produce risks for Putin.¹⁷⁶

In 2020 Preston Feinberg, a student from John Hopkins University, wrote a paper that examines the fluctuating relationship between Russia and Wagner group using the principal-agent theory.¹⁷⁷ This study looks at how the actions and location of Wagner group might change the relationship the PMC has with the Kremlin. The study argues that in Libya and Ukraine, the objectives of Wagner and Russia were aligned, and in Syria, the objectives of Wagner deviated at times, which may have resulted in the massacre of Wagner forces by the U.S. and Kurdish forces as well as serious problems between the senior leadership of Wagner and the Russian government and military officials. Regardless Feinberg believes that Wagner group plays a substantial role in Russian power projection and will continue to do so.¹⁷⁸

Aivaras Giedraitis, out of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, wrote a paper in 2020 PMCs in Russian foreign and security policy.¹⁷⁹ Giedraitis also uses the principal-agent theory to analyze Russian PMCs. The paper asserts that the Kremlin does not have complete control due to delegating the command of the PMCs to private

¹⁷³ Rondeaux, 2019, p. 7.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Feinberg, 2020.

¹⁷⁸ Feinberg, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Giedraitis, 2020.

persons.¹⁸⁰ In the case studies examined in his work, the author notes that Russia was mostly able to achieve its goals while avoiding the consequences of negative actions carried out by the PMCs. This shows that Russia is able to delegate tasks while avoiding direct consequences it might incur if using the Russian military to do the same missions.¹⁸¹

In 2019 Sergey Sukhankin, out of the Jamestown Foundation, wrote a paper on Wagner Group in Syria.¹⁸² This paper by Sukhankin outlines the use of Wagner Group in Syria. He shows that Wagner can be used as a military force against a weaker enemy, and that it could work in tandem with the regular military on reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, that it could be used as a security force, and finally, to train local forces.¹⁸³ He states that Syria was a successful training ground for Russian PMCs, and now they will be exported elsewhere. He also notes that they are part of a “powerful triad composed of oligarchs, the military, and the government,” but more research needs to be done on that.¹⁸⁴

Major Thomas Arnold of the U.S. Army wrote a paper on the geoeconomic

dimensions of Russian PMCs in 2019.¹⁸⁵ He defines the definition of geoeconomics by Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris that is “the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial results.”¹⁸⁶ He shows in his charts that he believes that the control that the Russian state has over Wagner Group is not consistent across each country or conflict it is involved with. For example, in Ukraine, the group was under the direct control of the state, but in Sudan, there was only partial control.¹⁸⁷ He argues that Russia prioritizes securing cash flow and strategic resources abroad to help

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 161.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 162.

¹⁸² Sukhankin, 2019b.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Arnold, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ Arnold, 2019, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 9.

the domestic economy. Russia does this by offering the services of Wagner Group and others for favorable economic terms concerning sectors they are competitive in, which are “arms trade, energy (nuclear and petroleum), and mineral extraction.”¹⁸⁸

In 2021 Jason Matthew Port out of the University of North Carolina attempts to investigate whether or not Wagner Group is a state actor.¹⁸⁹ Port argues that Wagner Group should be considered a state actor of Russia (Hybrid-PMC). He does this by examining four case studies: Ukraine, Syria, Russian power projection in the global south, and Libya.¹⁹⁰ He concludes that Wagner Group is a key and permanent fixture of the Russian foreign policy apparatus operating in the examined countries to the benefit of Russia.¹⁹¹ Port also illustrates how Wagner receives equipment and benefits from the government that only a state actor would have the privilege of receiving.¹⁹² He also shows how Wagner Group coordinates with the Russian state at high levels in its operations.¹⁹³ He illustrates that the operations of Wagner Group “Exhibit a high degree of coordination” with the foreign policy interests of Russia.¹⁹⁴

In 2020 Tor Bukkvoll and Åse G. Østensen wrote a paper that outlines the rise of the Russian PMC industry and focuses on what the PMCs could be used for in the future.¹⁹⁵ The authors note that classifying these companies as private or part of the state in Russia might not really matter because regardless of the classification, the Russian government will call upon them to perform a mission if they deem it necessary.¹⁹⁶ The authors believe that the companies could be used for any number of operations normally reserved for special forces,

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸⁹ Port, 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 97.

¹⁹³ Ibid, pp. 99-100.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 102.

¹⁹⁵ Bukkvoll & Østensen, 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 9.

regular forces, or intelligence services, and that Western countries need to be aware and prepare for a threat that might be difficult to immediately tie to the Russian state if carried out.¹⁹⁷ The authors also conclude that the Russian PMCs can be used for operations in developing countries, which we can see today, and that is the situation with the case studies being examined in this work.¹⁹⁸

In 2021, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Transnational Threats Project wrote a comprehensive report on the global use of Russian PMCs.¹⁹⁹ This report is a thorough overview of how Russia uses private military companies as a foreign policy tool. This report focuses on several PMC's, unlike this paper that just focuses on Wagner Group. CSIS, like other literature on this topic, finds that the PMCs are closely linked to the Russian government and that the use of these PMCs has increased dramatically from 2015 to 2021. This paper has several key findings, including that the use of PMC's fits into the broader context of Russian "irregular warfare and gray zone methods."²⁰⁰ CSIS defines irregular warfare as: "activities short of conventional and nuclear warfare that are designed to expand a country's influence and legitimacy, as well as to weaken adversaries."²⁰¹ The report found that Russia has used these PMC's to increase influence abroad, extract resources, and increase intelligence and military presence abroad.²⁰² By examining case studies ranging from Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and Sub-Saharan Africa, CSIS showed the effectiveness and, at times, the ineffectiveness of Russian PMCs. This is a relatively new phenomenon for Russia in the way these PMCs are used, so it seems the Kremlin is not entirely sure of the exact limits of the PMCs. CSIS also points out the importance of keeping this threat in perspective

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ Jones et al., 2021.

²⁰⁰ Jones et al., 2021, p. 1.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 12.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 1.

and compared to many other challenges faced by the U.S., Russian PMCs are not close to the top of the list of threats. The report goes on to recommend policies that the U.S. and its allies could enact to counter the threat posed by these PMCs.

In summary, there is a small but growing number of papers dedicated to the study of Russian PMCs and, more specifically Wagner Group. Wagner Group is a murky subject, and it is a relatively new phenomenon in the world. This paper hopes to add value to the body of literature by exploring why Wagner Group has succeeded, or at the very least remained in Libya and the Central African Republic, as opposed to its failure and withdrawal in Mozambique by focusing on the opportunistic nature of Russian foreign policy.

7.8. Case Studies

Central African Republic (CAR)

March 2018 to November 2021.

The first case study will focus on Wagner Group in the Central African Republic (CAR). During the process of researching this paper, no evidence was found of significant ties between the Soviet Union and the CAR. The CAR sits in the center of Africa, bordered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and South Sudan. The country has a population of around five to six million people, mainly concentrated around the capital Bangui.²⁰³ The former French colony is rich in diamonds, uranium, timber, gold, and oil.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the country has been unable to assemble a functioning and stable government that can meet the needs of its citizens since its independence in 1960. The Fragile State Index gives the Central African Republic a score

²⁰³ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2020.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

of 107 out of 120 points, where a high score is indicative of poor performance. This ranks the CAR as the 6th most fragile country out of 179 countries measured for the index.²⁰⁵ The CAR ranks 179th out of 189 on the Human Development Index.²⁰⁶ Many African nations have had difficulty state-building since their independence from colonialism. Political scientist Jeffrey Herbst has done extensive research on state-building in Africa, and one of his key arguments in his book *States and Power in Africa* (2014 ed.) points out that it has been extremely difficult for African states to broadcast power because of low population density. People in the rural areas, which is a considerable amount of area, do not care about the state, and the state is unable to provide services and connect with them.²⁰⁷ Despite the large size of the CAR (622,984 km²), it has favorable population density and geography compared to most African states, according to J. Herbst.²⁰⁸ The fact that population is concentrated around the capital and mainly in the country's Western half leads J. Herbst to this conclusion.²⁰⁹ However, building the state has been exceptionally challenging despite the favorable demographic and geographic position. Part of the issue is the lack of effort in building roads to connect the population. Roads are vital to broadcasting power, especially in Africa, where most other transport infrastructure is lacking considerably.²¹⁰ However, the CAR has done very little to build roads to connect its population; for example, the CAR has an abysmal 39.02 km of roads per 1000 km².²¹¹ In addition to these problems, the CAR has over 80 ethnic groups with their own languages.²¹² The CAR can be classified

²⁰⁵ The Fragile State Index, 2021.

²⁰⁶ The World Population Review, 2021a.

²⁰⁷ Herbst, 2015, p. xxv.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 154.

²⁰⁹ The World Population Review, 2021a.

²¹⁰ Herbst, 2015, pp. 161-163.

²¹¹ World Stat Info, 2021.

²¹² The World Population Review, 2021a.

as a phantom state. It is a state with a central government, but it has very little control over anything.²¹³

The Central African Republic has been dysfunctional since its independence. It has had only one independent democratic transfer of power (in 1993). Prior to this, the French still assisted with the transfer of power. After this, there have been many armed rebellions and two successful coups.²¹⁴ The most recent conflict in the CAR started in 2012 when the primarily Muslim (minority) rebel group the Séléka overthrew the leader at the time, François Bozizé (who led a 2003 coup).²¹⁵ The Séléka went on a rampage against their fellow Christian countrymen. As a response, some of the Christians formed a group known as the Anti-Balaka. The Anti-Balaka turned around and committed horrific crimes against the Muslims, spiraling the country into sectarian violence. This caused a massive refugee crisis. The French and African Union sent in their soldiers to stop the violence.²¹⁶ Eventually, the United Nations authorized a peacekeeping force in 2014. During this period, the country's leadership changed a more than once.²¹⁷

After that, the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka split into 14 different groups, fighting each other for control over resources and territory.²¹⁸ In 2019 the groups came together and made peace with the central government.²¹⁹ In December of 2020, there was a presidential election where President Faustin-Archange Touadéra was re-elected by the people of the CAR.²²⁰ Many saw this election as fraudulent, and various rebel groups came together to form the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC).²²¹ This coalition was made up of Séléka and

²¹³ International Crisis Group, 2007, p. i.

²¹⁴ Carayannis & Lombard, 2015, p. 1.

²¹⁵ VICE News & Gold, 2014.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ BBC News, 2018a.

²¹⁸ VICE News & Anderson, 2020.

²¹⁹ Losh, 2021a.

²²⁰ BBC News, 2020.

²²¹ Ibid.

Anti-Balaka groups who put aside their differences to fight President Touadéra.²²² This rebel group and others controlled approximately two-thirds of the country.²²³ The UN peacekeepers, which number around 15,000 and include around 11,000 military personnel, were unsuccessful in trying to keep the peace.²²⁴ They were joined by the military of the CAR, Rwandan forces, and Russian personnel, including Wagner Group.²²⁵

Since the beginning of 2021, the UN forces, CAR military, Rwandan military, and Wagner Group have been pushing mostly Muslim rebel groups back and capturing cities and towns.²²⁶ In January of 2021, the CPC, which was loyal to former President Bozizé, started attacking the areas surrounding the capital of Bangui in response to the 2020 election.²²⁷ In the month of February, the CAR army, along the Rwanda and Wagner Group, was able to push some of the rebel forces back.²²⁸ In March, there were successful runoff elections for the government, and Touadéra began his second term as president. Also, due to the escalation of the conflict, the UN deployed more soldiers to the tune of 2,750.²²⁹ In April, the conflict continued with some groups breaking away from the CPC due to continued losses.²³⁰ During May and June, the government, with the help of Wagner Group and other forces, continued to gain ground while multiple claims of human rights abuses surrounded them. One significant development was that France suspended military cooperation with the central government over its unwillingness to talk with the opposition and Russian, anti-French disinformation campaigns.²³¹ During July, August, and September, the fighting and war

²²² Gathman, 2021a.

²²³ BBC News, 2020.

²²⁴ United Nations Peace Keeping, 2021.

²²⁵ BBC News, 2020.

²²⁶ Losh, 2021b., Centanni & Djukic, 2021.

²²⁷ International Crisis Group, CAR, 2021.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

crimes continued, but finally, in October, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope as a cease-fire was agreed upon.²³² Unfortunately, all sides have since violated the cease-fire, and the conflict seems to be continuing,²³³ perhaps not to the same scale as earlier in 2021, but the fighting is not over. The CAR has been and is in complete disarray with millions of people in need of humanitarian aid and at least 1.5 million displaced.²³⁴

The question arises, what is Russia hoping to gain from being involved in a conflict that has been fluctuating for years with no clear end in sight? There is not a clearly stated document published by the Kremlin that maps out the Russian ambitions in the CAR, but Russia's actions and investigative reporting can provide indicators to the motives. Leaked Russian documents obtained by the Guardian in 2018 suggests that Russia views the central geographic position of the CAR as strategically important and expects that a foothold in the CAR will facilitate the spread of Russian influence across Africa.²³⁵ One argument made by Professor Kimberly Martin (2019) for another reason Russia could be in the CAR is to use this opportunity to increase its status on the world stage and, therefore, have more reason to be recognized as a great power,²³⁶ a primary goal of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy. To achieve this, Russia needs governments on its side who will do things such as vote for measures that Russia supports in the UN. The leaked documents acquired by the Guardian also state that one of the goals of Russia in the CAR is to oust pro-French leaders in the government and replace them with leaders that lean towards Moscow.²³⁷ This objective further coincides with the idea that Russia is working to create areas of influence similar to the Cold War. In addition, investigative reporters found that there were mining contracts

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ The UN Refugee Agency, 2021.

²³⁵ Harding & Burke, 2019.

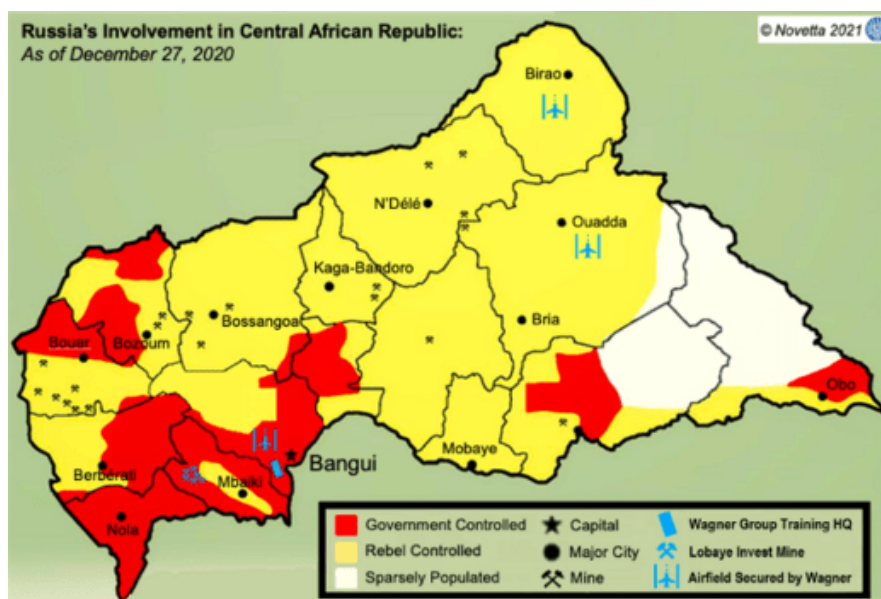
²³⁶ Marten, 2019c.

²³⁷ Harding & Burke, 2019.

made between the government of the CAR and the Russian company Lobaye, owned by Prigozhin.²³⁸ These contracts have the potential to help fulfill some of Putin’s objectives, such as Russian economic growth and regime survival, since they can provide diamonds and gold to enrich the important oligarchs in the Russian government. Putin must keep his people happy but, more importantly, keep influential people with money happy. The fact that there are other resources such as oil that Russian can exploit could also be a motivator for Russia to be involved. Therefore, the CAR has the potential to help Russia achieve its key strategic objectives by expanding Russian influence in Africa while simultaneously degrading the Western influence, i.e., France. The Russians could expand their projection of power capabilities with bases, they can move towards getting more votes in international bodies by acquiring the vote of CAR, and finally, Putin can possibly extract resources to boost the economy and the elites of Russia. The CAR fits well into Putin’s strategic objectives. However, the success of Putin’s plans in the CAR are anything but certain.

Figure Nr. 5

Russia’s involvement in the Central African Republic (CAR) as of December 2020



Africa in Transition & Africa Program, 2021.

²³⁸ Kyzy, 2020.

Another question that is important to consider is what has the Russian PMC Wagner group done in the CAR? Wagner Group first set down in the CAR in early 2018 along with weapons shipments and a mandate to train forces for the CAR.²³⁹ In addition, the group also started providing security for President Touadéra.²⁴⁰ In return for this support, Prigozhin's mining companies have obtained contracts to extract resources, thereby potentially enriching Russia and the Russian elite.²⁴¹ Miners interviewed by reporters from CNN said that the Russian mining companies arrived in the country at the same time as Russian trainers (Wagner Group) did and that everything they find must be given to the Russians.²⁴² The leaked documents the Guardian reported on in 2018 outlined the mission sets of the Wagner Group in the CAR. These included: strengthening and training the army as a guarantee of security, stabilizing the political situation, replacing national assembly representatives and foreign ministers who are orientated towards France, assisting in the building of state institutions, owning a radio station and two print publications, and developing the Khartoum declaration' - the start of a real negotiation process between sides in the conflict.²⁴³ The first objective to train the military as a guarantee of security is essential because these forces being trained will also have some allegiance to Russia over the forces that are just trained by the UN. K. Martin believes that Russia is working on being the sole "lynchpin" that can guarantee security for the government. This would leave them as the most influential actor.²⁴⁴ Wagner Group has succeeded in funding Russian radio stations with the objective of pushing pro-Russian, pro-government news to the people in the CAR.²⁴⁵ This report found no evidence of Russian meddling in the national assembly of the CAR, but the former

²³⁹ Marten, 2019b.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Clancy, 2021.

²⁴² Lister et al., 2020.

²⁴³ Harding & Burke, 2019.

²⁴⁴ Marten, 2019c.

²⁴⁵ Lister et al., 2020.

president of the national assembly Karim Meckassoua was voted out, presumably at the direction of Russia in 2018.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Russians succeeded in getting all 14 rebel groups to sign a peace agreement; however, the peace has deteriorated since then.²⁴⁷

Usually, the actions of Wagner Group are secretive, but there is quite a bit of media circulating about the presence of Wagner Group in the CAR, even from Wagner Group deployed in CAR. For example, some members of Wagner Group seem to have released a video of them rapping about fighting in the CAR.²⁴⁸ In addition to that, there was a movie released recently called “турист” (*Tourist*) that celebrates the actions of Russian PMC fighters in the CAR.²⁴⁹ More importantly, though, the RTV network released a short YouTube documentary on June 1, 2021, that shows the work that Wagner Group and possibly other Russian PMCs have been doing.²⁵⁰ The RT network is a well-known voice for Russian propaganda and is unlikely that it would be producing material that the Kremlin would not want the world to see.²⁵¹ The short documentary takes the viewer around with “Russian instructors” who were sent there when the CAR asked for help.²⁵² At the beginning of the video, they claim that Russia had helped the CAR government retake 90% of the country from the various rebel groups.²⁵³ The video even interviews some of the instructors, including one who is there “for the good.”²⁵⁴ Surprisingly the video even goes to a mine where they claim that all the locals get to keep everything they find, and the locals are thrilled

²⁴⁶ Al Jazeera English, 2019.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Al-Atrush, 2021.

²⁴⁹ Eckel, 2021.

²⁵⁰ Rozhkov & RT, 2021.

²⁵¹ Scott, 2020.

²⁵² Rozhkov & RT, 2021.

²⁵³ Ibid, 3:43.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 11:15.

with the Russians.²⁵⁵ While none of these pieces mention Wagner Group by name, they are the leading Russian PMC involved in the CAR.

In addition to the previously mentioned activities, it is quite clear that Wagner Group has taken part in actual combat missions, fighting alongside the Central African forces they trained. It is estimated that in June 2021 there were 2,100 Russian PMC personnel located in the CAR. The following statement expressed by a former member of the Wagner Group clearly shows that the group acts on behalf of Putin “It’s just a fighting unit that will do anything that Putin says.”²⁵⁶ Reports before the election indicated that CAR forces fighting with Wagner Group were defeated by rebel groups who were able to capture two critical cities not too far from the capital Bangui.²⁵⁷ However, since then, with the help of the CAR military and Rwandan military, the Wagner group have been engaging with various rebel groups. The Wagner Group, who is only supposed to be advising and training, has been taking an active combat role and even conducting missions on its own.²⁵⁸ While it seems that Wagner Group has undoubtedly helped the government in Bangui, they have left a trail of destruction in their wake. The UN has accused Wagner Group of murdering innocent civilians, including over 20 in a Mosque, raping women, and torture.²⁵⁹²⁶⁰²⁶¹ It is unclear how many casualties the Wagner personnel have taken since the conflict, but there have been reports of casualties throughout this year.²⁶² Reports also indicate that between August and mid-October, at least 11 Wagner operatives were killed in the fighting, which is another

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 16:01.

²⁵⁶ Lister et al., 2020.

²⁵⁷ Sukhankin, 2021.

²⁵⁸ Jones et al., 2021, p. 57

²⁵⁹ 11th Hour News, 2021., Lister et al., 2021., Walsh, 2021.

²⁶⁰ Lister et al., 2021.

²⁶¹ Walsh, 2021.

²⁶² Centanni & Djukic, 2021.

indicator of the Russian “instructors” taking a very active role in the conflict in the Central African Republic.²⁶³

Wagner Group has played a crucial role in the Kremlin’s plans for the CAR. They have participated in training forces, spreading propaganda, supporting the government, ousting pro-French members of the government, guarding the president, guarding diamond and gold mines for Russia’s profit, and conducting combat missions. According to a former commander of US Africa Command, General Thomas Waldhauser, the Wagner has also been involved in influence activities at “the highest levels of government to include the president.”²⁶⁴ These all fit into Putin’s broader objectives of enriching Russia and the Russian elites and having governments friendly to Russia in Africa that negate western influence. Russia seems to be making considerable gains in the CAR due in no small part to the use of Wagner Group.

Let us examine some of the variables that would help us measure whether or not Russia will deploy and maintain its deployment of Wagner Group in CAR. The first and most obvious indicator is that Wagner Group has been deployed to the CAR for some time and seems to be managing the situation without the help of the regular Russian military. However, this the situation lacks clarity since the presence of the regular Russian military would be hard to find. For example, they may be at the very least providing logistical support. Russia has clearly made the security better for the government of the CAR, which gives Russia a close relationship with the government. We know this because as recently as July of 2021, the government and its allies had pushed most of the rebels out of the ecumene of the country.²⁶⁵ This gives them influence in the CAR, the region, and possible help in

²⁶³ Janes, 2021.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Centanni & Djukic, 2021.

voting for preferred Russian outcomes in the UN.²⁶⁶ As previously stated, the French have become increasingly angry at the Russian influence, and it looks like they are losing influence as a result.²⁶⁷ Founder of Executive Outcomes, Eeben Barlow, noted at a recent conference at Charles University in Prague in November of 2021, that if you go to a government meeting in the CAR, members of Wagner Group will be there and that the CAR government needs approval from Russia for many issues.²⁶⁸ It seems Russia has successfully inserted itself into the highest levels of the CAR government and has a hand in any decisions it deems important. Pushing out Western forces while asserting Russian influence is a huge strategic win for the Kremlin. Not only does this make Russia look good, but it also makes the West look incompetent and weak in comparison, which is something that Putin certainly enjoys. The perception of a weaker West backing down to Russia emboldens the Kremlin and makes countries in the region more likely to look to Russia.²⁶⁹ In addition, the Russians have secured valuable mining sites that will enrich, at the very least, the Russian elite, potentially allowing access to other resources in the CAR in the future.²⁷⁰ The use of the Wagner Group in the CAR seems to have worked quite well for the Kremlin with limited risks. There have been casualties, but they do not count as official military deaths.²⁷¹ There have also been reports of war crimes and international condemnation, but in response, Russia just denies and continues doing what it is doing and it seems to face no real consequences.²⁷² Many governments that need assistance but will not fulfill the human rights standards of the West are happy to turn to Russia for help.²⁷³ In fact, recently, the Malian government seems to think Wagner Group has done an excellent job despite these violations of human rights

²⁶⁶ Warsaw Institute, 2019.

²⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, CAR, 2021.

²⁶⁸ Barlow, 2021.

²⁶⁹ Giles, 2021, p. 9.

²⁷⁰ Kyzy, 2020., Warsaw Institute, 2019.

²⁷¹ Janes, 2021.

²⁷² Losh, 2021b.

²⁷³ Jacobsen, 2020, p. 63.

and has agreed to have them deployed in Mali, another former French Colony.²⁷⁴ It seems that the Kremlin has made considerable gains with minimal and acceptable negative consequences. Due to these indicators, I believe that Wagner Group will continue working in the CAR, and Russian influence will continue to grow in the region.

Libya

2015 – November 2021:

Libya and the USSR, and later the Russian Federation, have had a strong relationship for many years. This relationship developed after Muammar Gaddafi gained power in 1969. From 1970 to 1975, Soviet trade with Libya grew by 46%.²⁷⁵ In response to a perceived growing threat of the U.S. to Libya, Muammar Gaddafi sought to strengthen its ties to the USSR in 1976. During the next decade, the Russian military advisors and engineers helped improve the military and defense of the country. In addition, Libya was one of the main customers of Russian heavy industry, and many Libyans went to the USSR for training and education.²⁷⁶ Libya became an essential forward base area for the Soviet Union due to its position in the Mediterranean Sea.²⁷⁷ After the fall of the USSR, the ties between the Russian Federation and Libya were not as strong until 2008, when Gaddafi returned to Moscow. Russia forgave Libyan debt, and the two countries made an expensive arms deal, energy deal, railway deal, and developed other construction projects.²⁷⁸ When the Arab Spring hit Libya in 2011, Russia had to pull out of the country, and as a result of the government collapse, Russia lost approximately 10 billion USD worth of contracts with Libya.²⁷⁹ The

²⁷⁴ ADF Staff, 2021.

²⁷⁵ Riding, 2020.

²⁷⁶ Fasanotti, 2016.

²⁷⁷ Souleimanov, 2019, p. 95.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 95.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

previous close ties between Russia and Libya help explain why Russia is so invested in the future of Libya.

Libya is a large country of 1,759,541 km² in North Africa with approximately 6.5 million people.²⁸⁰ However, ~ 1.4 million people in the country require humanitarian aid, and around 250,000 people are internally displaced.²⁸¹ Libya is bordered by Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria, Tunisia, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north, which separates Libya from southern Europe. Most of the population of Libya lives on the coastline.²⁸² Its resources include large quantities of oil, natural gas, and gypsum.²⁸³ Libya has the ninth largest oil reserves in the world, and the largest in Africa.²⁸⁴ Libya's key location places it at the crossroads of the Sahel, southern Europe, and North Africa."²⁸⁵ This strategic location on the Mediterranean Sea, combined with its vast energy resources, makes what happens in Libya paramount to the surrounding nations and the world.²⁸⁶ Libya gained its independence from Italy in 1951 under King Idris al-Sanusi. However, his reign was ended almost two decades later when Muammar Gaddafi overthrew him in 1969.²⁸⁷ Gaddafi brutally reigned over Libya for almost 42 years before being overthrown in 2011 during the Arab Spring.²⁸⁸ Currently, Libya ranks 105 out of 189 on the Human development index.²⁸⁹ Libya is ranked 17th out of 179 in the fragile state index.²⁹⁰

Beginning with the Arab Spring, Libya fell into a catastrophic civil war that continues today, more than a decade later. In 2011 Libyans revolted against Muammar

²⁸⁰ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021a.

²⁸¹ Al-Ghwell, 2021.

²⁸² U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021a.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Fillingham, 2015.

²⁸⁵ Souleimanov, 2019, p. 96.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ BBC, 2021.

²⁸⁸ Asser, 2011.

²⁸⁹ The Facts Institute, 2020

²⁹⁰ The Fragile State Index, 2021.

Gaddafi and eventually were able to capture and kill him with the help of United Nations-backed NATO airpower.²⁹¹ After the fall of Gaddafi, various factions of the government and groups have been vying for control, including Jihadist groups such as the Islamic State.²⁹² Most recently, the two groups engaged in conflict are the House of Representative's government and the Government of National Accord (GNA). The House of Representative's government is supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA), controlled by General Khalifa Haftar in the East, and backed by Russia, the UAE, Egypt, and France. On the opposing side, in the west, the GNA is the UN-recognized government, receiving support from Turkey, Italy, and Qatar.²⁹³ It is important to note that Moscow has also maintained relations with the GNA so as to not put all of its eggs in one basket.²⁹⁴ More recent reports indicate that Italy and France are vacillating on whom they support, while Russia and Turkey remain steadfast. are the key players in their support for opposing sides.²⁹⁵ Russia and Turkey are vying for power in Libya, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea, which is part of a larger geopolitical competition between the two countries.²⁹⁶

Last year the LNA executed what at first seemed to be a successful campaign across Libya to capture the capital of Tripoli supported by Wagner Group (reports indicate around 2000 were involved).²⁹⁷ The campaign was stopped short of capturing Tripoli from the GNA, in large part because Turkey intervened.²⁹⁸ In October of 2020, all sides reached a cease-fire deal and were working on a peaceful resolution to the conflict.²⁹⁹ Part of the agreement stipulated that all foreign fighters would leave within three months, but that did not

²⁹¹ BBC News, 2018b.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Robinson, 2020., Al-Ghwell, 2021.

²⁹⁴ Katz, 2021

²⁹⁵ DW News, 2020.

²⁹⁶ Yazici & Ivanescu, 2020.

²⁹⁷ Robinson, 2020.

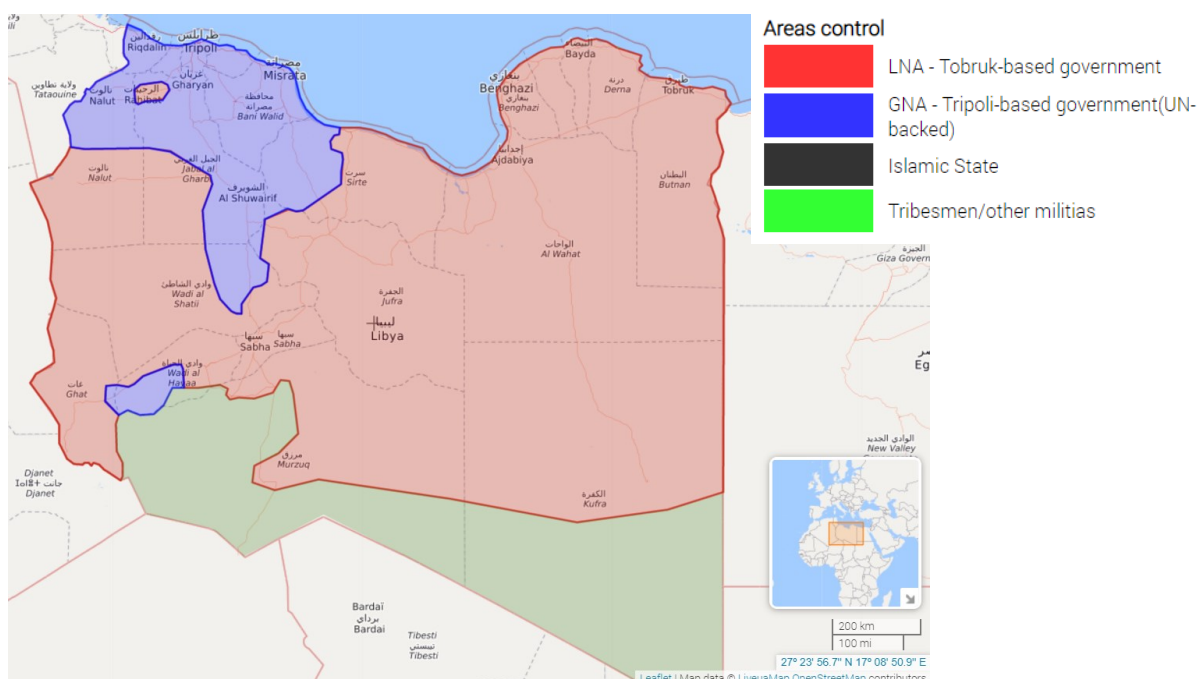
²⁹⁸ Yazici & Ivanescu, 2020.

²⁹⁹ Al Jazeera, 2020.

happen.³⁰⁰ During the last 12 months or so, the cease-fire has largely held with the two sides entrenched on the front lines. Since the cease-fire, the two governments, with the help of the UN, have been slowly moving towards a peaceful resolution and have formed a nascent joint government called the Government of National Unity (GNU).³⁰¹ Putin has supported this UN peace process.³⁰² The agreement includes a plan to have an election on December 24,³⁰³ but it is currently unclear if the elections might be pushed back since the legislative elections have been pushed back to January.³⁰⁴ At this time, the situation looks to be improving in Libya, and world leaders are calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces, including PMCs like Wagner Group. However, the outcome is still undetermined.³⁰⁵

Figure Nr. 6

Map of the situation in Libya as of November 23, 2021



Live Universal Awareness Map, 2021.

³⁰⁰ Diffidenti, 2021.

³⁰¹ Katz, 2021.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Reuters, 2021., International Crisis Group, Libya, 2021., Al Jazeera, 2021.

³⁰⁴ Arab News, 2021.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

Vladimir Putin views Libya as extremely important for Russia for many reasons. A primary goal is to re-establish energy and weapons contracts. Prior to the fall of Gadhafi to the fall of Gadhafi, Russian energy and weapons companies had lucrative contracts with the Libyan government. These contracts were canceled because of the Arab Spring in Libya, resulting in a loss of billions of dollars for the companies involved.³⁰⁶ As discussed earlier, Putin is focused on expanding Russian influence to restore Russian great power status and facilitate a multi-polar world, while enriching the Russian economy and elites to keep political stability at home. Libya fits nicely into Kremlin's global and regional interests, as are perfectly outlined by The Center for Strategic and International Studies (Sept. 2020),

“At the regional level, Putin’s grand strategy translates into four objectives for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): (1) support leaders favorable to Russian interests in order to cultivate future clients and erode U.S. influence; (2) become a key player in regional affairs to reinforce Russia’s stature on the global stage; (3) develop economic interests in order to enrich the Russian state and elites; and (4) secure military positions beyond the Black Sea to expand Russia’s confrontation with the West.”³⁰⁷

Libya is rich in oil, so securing oil contracts for Russia from Libya would greatly help Russia’s economy. In addition, if Russia were able to secure a naval base in Libya, it would significantly improve its power projection in the Mediterranean Sea as well as the African continent, achieving its goal of expanding its influence while being a thorn in the side of NATO.³⁰⁸ By supporting General Haftar and the LNA, Russia is also able to bolster closer ties with Egypt and the UAE, both of whom support General Haftar.³⁰⁹ Maintaining strong

³⁰⁶ KJ Reports, 2019.

³⁰⁷ Arnold, 2020.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., Jones et al., 2021, p. 47.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. p.47

ties to Egypt is a top priority for the Kremlin, due to its control of the Suez Canal.³¹⁰ Finally, Libya serves as a battleground in the competition that has formed between Russia and Turkey.³¹¹ Overall, Russia is working to secure energy resources, secure a base, enhance its great power status, and have a pro-Russian government installed in Libya.³¹²

Now that the Russian objectives in Libya have been illustrated, how has the Wagner Group contributed to these goals? Unlike in the CAR, Wagner Group in Libya does not appear to have been sent to carry out such a diverse workload. Wagner Group in Libya seems to have been a combination of a training unit, a fighting unit, and a support unit. Wagner forces were deployed to Libya as early as 2015. Wagner Group was responsible for training, equipping, and advising the LNA during the first couple of years. Using Wagner Group, Russia provided advanced weapon systems to General Haftar, which gave the LNA significant advantages on the battlefield. The Russians provided equipment such as desert vehicles, infrared-guided missiles, tanks, artillery, drones, and combat aircraft. These weapons systems help tip the scales in favor of the LNA against various militias and the GNA.³¹³ In 2016 and 2017, Wagner Group was working with Spetsnaz (Russian Special Forces) and the GRU (Russian foreign military intelligence agency) to train the members of the LNA.³¹⁴ As noted earlier, the main base of Wagner Group is located right next to a GRU base, and both are guarded by the GRU in the town of Molmino in South Western Russia.³¹⁵ Wagner Group and Russian forces trained the LNA in Benghazi, Tobruk, and at Sidi Barrani Airfield in Egypt. The training helped provide the forces with the necessary expertise required to use the Russian weapons provided, including unmanned aerial vehicles

³¹⁰ KJ Reports, 2019.

³¹¹ Yazici & Ivanescu, 2020.

³¹² Arnold, 2020.

³¹³ Ibid. p. 42.

³¹⁴ Ibid. p. 42.

³¹⁵ Rác, 2020.

(UAV).³¹⁶ In 2018 Wagner Group began to take a more active role on the battlefield. In addition to logistical support and maintenance, Wagner Group started coordinating airstrikes, intelligence gathering, electronic warfare, and embedding with the LNA in an advisory role.³¹⁷

In the summer of 2019, in support of the LNA campaign to capture Tripoli, Wagner Group was directly engaged in combat.³¹⁸ It is unclear how many members were involved, however most sources say around 800 to 1,200.³¹⁹ Wagner Group was conducting combat operations with Russian air support³²⁰ and deployed sniper teams to support the LNA advance.³²¹ The sniper teams were said to be highly effective and played a crucial role in the advancement of the LNA and Wagner Group forces.³²² In addition, Wagner Group used rockets, artillery, guided air support, were used as tank crews, drones, and even as frontline infantry units. In some cases, these infantry units were conducting operations and controlling territory independent of the LNA.³²³ The LNA and Wagner fought all the way to Tripoli, where they were defeated by the GNA forces with Turkish support and forced to retreat.³²⁴ Around this time, Africom reported that Russian fighter jets were flown to Libya, and the Russian flag was painted over, so that the Wagner Group would be able to operate with the jets.³²⁵ This was certainly an escalation in the PMC's capabilities. Also, Wagner Group was operating anti-aircraft weaponry, including the Russian Pantsir S-1 surface-to-air missile (SAM) in order to defend against Turkish airstrikes.³²⁶ Despite the Russian hardware,

³¹⁶ Jones et al., 2021, pp. 42-43.

³¹⁷ Ibid. p. 43.

³¹⁸ Ibid. p. 43.

³¹⁹ Marten, 2020.

³²⁰ Jones et al., 2021, pp. 41-42.

³²¹ Jones et al., 2021, p. 43.

³²² Kirkpatrick, 2019., Sturdee, 2021.

³²³ Jones et al., 2021, p. 43., Sturdee, 2021.

³²⁴ Marten, 2020.

³²⁵ Ibid., United States Africa Command, 2020.

³²⁶ Jones et al., 2021, p. 43.

Wagner Group and the LNA were forced out of Tripoli and further East by the GNA and Turkish forces.

After the retreat, Wagner Group and possibly other Russian PMC's, numbering around 5,000, were given the task of securing oil fields in Libya for Russia and the LNA.³²⁷ Wagner Group was successful in controlling most of Libya's so-called Oil Crescent and secured major ports, entrenching Russia in the vital infrastructure of Libya.³²⁸ Besides securing oil fields, the Wagner group held several key airfields around the country.³²⁹ While Wagner Group failed to capture Tripoli in the face of Turkish forces, it has secured vital infrastructure in Libya and is still involved on the ground, giving Russia influence over what happens in Libya. The fighting eventually died down with the October of 2020 cease-fire.³³⁰ As discussed earlier, there has been a long road to get Libya to the point where it might hold elections soon, but as of November of 2021, it seems that Wagner Group (as well as other foreign fighters) is still present in Libya.³³¹ While Russia does seem to be backing the UN-backed peace process and elections in Libya, it is unclear if they will withdraw Wagner Group, especially since they are most likely unwilling to give up control of energy infrastructure, ports, airfields, and the influence they have over the situation.³³²

The Wagner group has played an essential role for the Kremlin in Libya, but as with the CAR, this is an ongoing situation, therefore the outcome is yet to be determined. On the downside, much like in the CAR, Wagner Group has been accused of war crimes in Libya, including murdering innocent civilians.³³³ However, the overall outcomes to date have been

³²⁷ Marten, 2020.

³²⁸ Jones et al., 2021, p. 46.

³²⁹ Harchaoui, 2021.

³³⁰ Al Jazeera, 2020.

³³¹ Momtaz, 2021.

³³² Tass Russia News Agency, 2021.

³³³ Ibrahim & Barabanov, 2021.

favorable for the Kremlin. Putin has been able to exert influence into Libya without having official Russian soldiers as casualties, which helps keep Russian citizens unaware of the actual costs of Russia engaging in this conflict, a key factor in the use of Wagner Group. Russia has made some significant gains due to the deployment of Wagner Group in Libya. Wagner group controls some key oil fields, ports, and airbases that it is unlikely to give up without some sort of agreement in its favor. Russian oil companies Gazprom, Rosneft, and Tatneft, have already started operations in Libya this year.³³⁴ Russia has succeeded in inserting itself into a major conflict and being a crucial player³³⁵, which will make other powers recognize it as more of a great power, and therefore the perception of a multipolar world would be more prevalent. Russia's position in Libya certainly gives it a solid foothold in the Mediterranean Sea. At the same time, the defeat of General Haftar and Wagner Group in Tripoli damages plans of having a pro-Russian government, as well as the prestige of the Wagner Group and, therefore Russia. Whether or not Russia claims Wagner Group, it is widely associated with Russian armed forces. Just because Wagner and the LNA are defeated does not mean the end of the possibility of a Russian-backed government as General Haftar has put his name in the ring to run for President in the upcoming elections.³³⁶ Therefore, while the Wagner group has had some setbacks and Russia is not the victor in Libya, it has still gained influence at the expense of its competitors in Europe. The control over crucial infrastructure like airbases and ports that are still guarded by Wagner puts Russia in a position to secure military bases in Libya, which would represent an accomplishment of a primary strategic goal of Russian involvement in Libya. A military base and or naval in the Mediterranean Sea and the southern flank of NATO. Russia's control over the vital infrastructure in the East of Libya means that it will undoubtedly have a say in the country's

³³⁴ Ahmed, 2021.

³³⁵ Al Jazeera, 2020.

³³⁶ News Wires & France 24, 2021.

development moving forward, an important outcome favoring Russia. The situation in Libya has not been resolved; therefore, this paper cannot definitively say whether or not Wagner Group has completely succeeded. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in putting Russia into a better position than if they had not been deployed, all at relatively low cost to the Russian state. The Center for Strategic and International Studies seems to also agree with these conclusions as many of the same were made in its report concerning Russia in Libya.³³⁷

The experience of Wagner Group in Libya also informs our understanding of what risks might cause the withdrawal of Wagner Group from a conflict. Wagner Group suffered hundreds of killed in action and was forced to retreat quickly in its battle outside of Tripoli. As a result, they lost high-tech equipment to the advancing forces of the GNA and Turkey.³³⁸ Wagner Group withdrew when faced with the Turkish military. Russia chose not to provide more support and escalate the fight in order to tip the scales back in its favor. This could be for several reasons, but two possibilities resonate. Either Wagner Group was incapable of dealing with a superior fighting force and had no option but to retreat or, knowing that they were up against a strong military that is also a member of NATO, Russia was unwilling to support Wagner Group because they were worried about igniting a wider conflict with Turkey and therefore NATO. The Chatham House recently released a comprehensive report on what deters Russia. Chatham House found that forces responding to Russian aggression with escalation, especially when dealing with covert and semi deniable forces like Wagner Group, prompt Russia to back down. The reason for this is that if the force escalates the conflict, then Russia would also have to escalate in return, and would be unable to deny its involvement anymore. Therefore, in this case, Russia would be engaged with Turkey, a

³³⁷ Jones et al., 2021, pp. 49 - 50.

³³⁸ Jones et al., 2021, p. 49

NATO ally, and this might spark a wider war with NATO.³³⁹ At that point, the risk outweighs the possible benefit. In addition to this, it is apparent that Wagner Group was incapable of dealing with a peer or superior fighting force, even with the advanced weapons and equipment provided and the LNA forces. Upon the entry of Turkish forces, the Russian foreign ministry started negotiating with the Turkish foreign ministry to establish a cease-fire.³⁴⁰ However, it is important to note that Russia did not necessarily need to escalate the conflict in order to benefit. Russia has put itself in an advantageous position with the potential for more gains in Libya, even with Wagner Group getting crushed by Turkish forces and the GNA. In conclusion, even though Russia has made significant gains in Libya and could have tried for more, it seems that if Wagner Group meets a superior force, especially one allied to NATO, the risk will be too high to continue. Russia will gladly take what it can get, and then pull Wagner Group back. Russia calculates its risks, and has shown that it is unwilling to escalate conflicts that would eliminate all plausible deniability and risk sparking a larger war, which Russia most likely does not want to participate in.

Mozambique

September 2019- April 2020:

Portugal first arrived in Mozambique in 1498 and colonized the country in 1752.³⁴¹³⁴²

In 1962 Mozambique started on its quest for independence from Portugal.³⁴³ Russia has had the longest relationship with Mozambique of the three case studies. The USSR supported Mozambique's Marxist-oriented Frelimo against Portugal in its fight for independence

³³⁹ Giles, 2021, p. 58.

³⁴⁰ Reuters Staff, 2020.

³⁴¹ BBC, 2019.

³⁴² BBC, 2020.

³⁴³ Ibid.

during the 1960s and 1970s.³⁴⁴ Frelimo had members that were educated in the USSR, they had units that were trained by USSR, and they were supplied arms by the USSR.³⁴⁵ In addition, some citizens of Mozambique were able to receive education in the USSR during the duration of the fight for independence.³⁴⁶ Mozambique gained its independence in 1975, and the Soviet Union had a strong foothold due to its support of the Frelimo against the Portuguese. The Soviet Union had several reasons for being involved in Mozambique. The first obvious reason was because they wanted to gain a foothold anywhere, they could in their competition with the West during the Cold War. Additional reasons were to contain and subvert Chinese influence, gain access to Mozambique's harbors, access to resources in Southern Africa, and threaten the Cape oil route.³⁴⁷

Unfortunately, following the quest for independence, Mozambique descended into a civil war from 1977 to 1992. Frelimo did not control most of the country at the time of the departure of Portugal, and Portugal's departure meant that most of the skilled and educated people left as well, leaving not enough qualified people to run the country.³⁴⁸ The country was unstable, and the consequence was civil war was between the ruling Frelimo and the Rebel Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo).³⁴⁹ While the intricacies of this conflict are beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to point out that just like most conflicts during the Cold War, the USSR was supporting one side, and the U.S. was supporting the other. The Soviet Union supported Frelimo while the U.S. supported the Renamo.³⁵⁰ The USSR provided arms, including tanks and artillery, and military advisors.³⁵¹ After 15 years

³⁴⁴ Opperman, 2019.

³⁴⁵ Calvert, 1973, pp. 82, 84, and 85., Vanneman, 1976, p. 42., Vanneman, 1976, p. 47.

³⁴⁶ Katsakioris, 2020, p. 10.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 42-43.

³⁴⁸ Newitt, 2017, p. 153., Ibid. p. 154.

³⁴⁹ BBC, 2020.

³⁵⁰ Nduneseokwu, 2020.

³⁵¹ Belfiglio, 1983.

of fighting, the United Nations successfully negotiated a peace deal between the warring parties, and the first elections were held in 1994.³⁵²

Despite the UN-brokered peace deal, the elections since then have been fraught with controversy and sometimes have resulted in small-scale conflicts.³⁵³ Despite this, Mozambique has had significant economic growth since the end of the civil war.³⁵⁴ Mozambique is 799,380 km² and is located in southern Africa bordering Malawi, South Africa, Eswatini, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Indian Ocean.³⁵⁵ The population of Mozambique is approximately 32 million.³⁵⁶ The population density is 40.23 people per square kilometer. Most people reside in port cities along the 2,470-kilometer-long coastline, with the core of the population living in the South, in and around the Capital of Maputo.³⁵⁷ Renowned scholar Jeffrey Herbst puts Mozambique on his list of countries with difficult political geographies. He notes that Mozambique's has challenging political geography arises from the fact that it is so long. The capital has difficulty broadcasting power though out the country.³⁵⁸ This separation of its citizens can negatively impact the ability of the government to build up the state and include all the ethnic groups. Mozambique is ranked 181 out of 189 on the Human Development Index, which reflects a dreadful situation in the country.³⁵⁹ Mozambique is also ranked 22 out of 179 countries on the Fragile State Index.³⁶⁰ Mozambique's natural resources include coal, titanium, natural gas, hydropower, tantalum, and graphite.³⁶¹ A major coal basin was recently found in central Mozambique while a major

³⁵² BBC, 2020.

³⁵³ Newitt, 2017, pp. 181 -182., BBC, 2019.

³⁵⁴ Stratfor, 2012.

³⁵⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021c

³⁵⁶ Worldometer, 2021.

³⁵⁷ Stratfor, 2012.

³⁵⁸ Herbst Book. P. 150.

³⁵⁹ The Facts Institute, 2020.

³⁶⁰ The Fragile State Index, 2021.

³⁶¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021c

natural gas basin was located off the coast of the northern province.³⁶² The country is also home to 33 million hectares of arable land. In addition to this, with its long coastline, Mozambique is the “gateway to Southern Africa.”³⁶³ “The country provides sea access for a number of countries in the region, including Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana and the Northern region of South Africa.”³⁶⁴ Unfortunately for Mozambique, the country has been dealing with an insurgency from an Islamic militant group with ties to ISIS in the Northern province of Cabo Delgado.

As discussed earlier, Russia has had a strong relationship with Mozambique since it supported the country in its war for independence against Portugal. Mozambique is in a geostrategic location as it is located on the Indian Ocean with several deep-water ports. Securing a naval base or the ability to dock there would significantly increase the power projection of Russia. Furthermore, the surrounding landlocked countries need access to these ports, so by improving its relationship with Mozambique, Russia would be more likely to be able to improve relations with other countries and South Africa, advancing its objectives of growing its influence in Africa. This would potentially further Russia’s sphere of influence and support its vision of Russia as a great power in a multi-polar world. Russia is also able and willing to support leadership that is friendly to it, and which supports it in the UN and other international bodies most of the time.³⁶⁵ Fostering this support in international institutions has been a key motivator in response to Russia’s isolation from the West. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Mozambique offers the potential for Russia to develop its economic interests through resource extraction. The country is rich in resources, including natural gas, which Russia could use to enrich Russia and, most notably, the Russian elite.

³⁶² Stratfor, 2012.

³⁶³ Diplomat Magazine, 2015.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Sukhankin, 2019a.

Mozambique has a lot to offer Russia, and due to their strong preexisting relationship, this country is an obvious route for Russia to increase its influence.

Prior to the arrival of Wagner Group in 2019 to Mozambique, Russia was already securing deals with Mozambique. In 2018, the two countries negotiated “deals on military-technical cooperation, naval coordination, and access to ports.”³⁶⁶ After this, the President of Mozambique, Filipe Nyusi, visited Moscow in August of 2019. During this visit, Russia forgave 95% of Mozambique’s debt.³⁶⁷ This is a standard foreign policy tool of Russia’s where they use debt relief in exchange for favorable economic deals, particularly in resources or arms sales.³⁶⁸ Many other notable deals came from this meeting. There was an agreement between the Mozambique ministry of mining and the Russian company Norgold to mine in the Cabo Delgado region. The Russian state bank, VTP, and Gazprombank agreed to establish an investment bank in Mozambique to deal with income from liquified natural gas (LNG) coming out of Mozambique. Russian gas companies Rosneft and Gazprom also obtained contracts to work in Mozambique. There were also security agreements that included Russia providing equipment, advisers, and training to the Mozambique military.³⁶⁹ This is presumably where Wagner Group steps in, however it is important to note that even without the presence of Wagner Group, Russia already had strong ties with Mozambique.

Before discussing what Wagner Group did in its brief stay in Mozambique, it is vital to illustrate why they were needed. Mozambique has been dealing with a Jihadist insurgency in the North of the country since 2017. The group is called Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ) and is affiliated with ISIS.³⁷⁰ This would be a problem for any region of Mozambique, but it

³⁶⁶ Jones et al., 2021, p. 59.

³⁶⁷ Opperman, 2019.

³⁶⁸ McClintock et al., 2021, p. 20

³⁶⁹ Opperman, 2019.

³⁷⁰ Columbo, 2020.

is particularly detrimental to Mozambique because the insurgency is located in and around the Cabo Delgado region, which is full of potential places to mine minerals and also has a natural gas basin located off the coast.³⁷¹ The Northern region of Mozambique is far from the southern core of the country, making it very difficult for the government to broadcast power into the North. The Jihadist group first emerged in 2007 but did not turn to violence until its first attack on the town of Mocimboa da Praia in October 2017.³⁷² The group is based out of the Cabo Delgado region, that, while rich in resources, is the poorest region in Mozambique. The region also has high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. It appears that the ASWJ is mainly focused on socio-economic grievances, and the religious aspect is used more for validation.³⁷³ In addition, there are ethnic divides that exacerbate the group's grievances. "The Mwani, a local Muslim ethnic group, holds grievances against majority ethnic groups, particularly the predominantly Catholic Makonde."³⁷⁴ These kinds of grievances fueled the rise of the ASWJ.³⁷⁵ Due to the region's importance to Mozambique, the government and military needed assistance in dealing with this insurgency, and Wagner Group won a contract to engage the group.³⁷⁶ Russia also had important interests in the North because of its companies having contracts to mine minerals and extract gas in the region.

Wagner Group first touched down in Mozambique in September of 2019 with 200 members, and they would be gone by April 2020.³⁷⁷ Unfortunately for this paper, but not so much for the people of Mozambique, the short period of time means that there is not as much information as there was for the two previous case studies. Wagner Group participated in combat against the ASWJ, provided weapons and equipment to Mozambique, and provided

³⁷¹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2021c

³⁷² Columbo, 2020.

³⁷³ BBC, 2021a.

³⁷⁴ Manaker, 2020.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Jones et al., 2021, p. 59.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 60.

security to energy infrastructure. It seems likely that Wagner Group protected other firms associated with Prigozhin that were participating in disinformation campaigns and election meddling.³⁷⁸ Wagner Group's small fighting force was supported by three attack helicopters.³⁷⁹ Wagner Group started taking casualties within the first few weeks of its deployment to Cabo Delgado.³⁸⁰ During these first few weeks, it appears that Wagner Group had 11 soldiers killed in action during three separate engagements, including some who were beheaded by the insurgents. In addition to the members killed, there were 25 more who were wounded.³⁸¹ Reports indicated that Wagner Group quickly moved into the region "without proper intelligence, training, preparation or knowledge of the terrain."³⁸² The harsh jungle environment was too foreign for Wagner Group to operate in and negated a lot of their high-tech equipment.³⁸³ There were also reports of distrusts between Wagner Group and the Mozambique military due to the language barrier and because insurgents dressed as the Mozambique military entered their camp and ambushed Wagner Group.³⁸⁴ After an unforgiving start, Wagner Group retreated to the South to the city of Nacala in November of 2019, only two months after arriving.³⁸⁵ This withdrawal was meant to give Wagner Group time to reorganize, reenforce, and gather intelligence.³⁸⁶ Wagner Group brought in more forces and equipment in order to start a new offensive, but that was not enough for Mozambique to want them to continue their contract. In April of 2020, the Dyck Advisory

³⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 60 -61., Sauer, 2019.

³⁷⁹ Jones et al., 2021, p. 60.

³⁸⁰ JACOBSEN, 2020, p. 33.

³⁸¹ Fabricius, 2019.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Balestrieri, 2020., Sauer, 2019.

³⁸⁴ Jones et al., 2021, p. 60., Fabricius, 2019.

³⁸⁵ Jones et al., 2021, p. 60.

³⁸⁶ Fabricius, 2019.

Group, a PMC out of South Africa, was hired to replace Wagner Group.³⁸⁷ Wagner group was utterly unprepared to fight an insurgency in Mozambique and failed completely.³⁸⁸

The introduction of Wagner into Mozambique had the potential to further entrench Russia in the security apparatus of Mozambique. It also would have meant more control over the resource-rich North of Mozambique. While this would have been an accomplishment, many economic and security deals were negotiated and signed before Wagner Group deployed to Mozambique, including the Russian companies looking to mine minerals and extract gas from Mozambique. With respect to research done for this paper, there is no indication that the withdrawal of Wagner Group caused the loss of any of the contracts or agreements made before their involvement. This would indicate that compared to the other two case studies where Wagner was a key component in exerting Russian influence into the CAR or Libya, Wagner was more of a bonus on top of an already strong relationship between Russia and Mozambique. Russia's strong historical ties combined with the contracts and agreements between the two countries were enough for Russia not to engage Wagner Group further in Mozambique. Not only that, but firms tied to Prigozhin were assisting the Frelimo party to keep control, giving Russia plenty of influence without the need for deployment of Wagner Group.³⁸⁹ Wagner Group was incredibly unprepared for fighting in Mozambique, and it showed. The members stood no chance of success immediately after getting there and were never able to recover. For all the talk and evidence of Wagner Group being expendable, the people in charge recognized that Wagner Group was in way over its head, and the risks were substantially higher than they expected. It appears that Russia surmised that the added risks did not warrant their involvement because they already had enough positive gains from

³⁸⁷ Jones et al., 2021, p. 60.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 64.

³⁸⁹ Jacobsen, 2020, p. 38., Akinola & Ogunnubi, 2021.

its relationship with Mozambique. Why waste Wagner Group when it can be someone else's problem, and you are still benefiting from a close relationship with Mozambique? Another takeaway from the withdrawal of Wagner from Mozambique is that similar to Libya, as soon as the situation got out of hand, Russia was unwilling or unable to match the escalating conflict. This lends credibility to the view of the opportunistic nature of Russian foreign policy. Russia assessed that the opportunity was not there or at least it was going to be challenging to obtain, and decided it was not worth the trouble. Russia keeps pushing to see what it can gain, but when it is met with strong opposition, it is satisfied with cutting its losses and taking what it already has.

8.9. Conclusion

The use of Wagner Group as a foreign policy tool is a growing concern for policymakers around the world. While it is still only a small cog in the arsenal of the Kremlin, its use has grown considerably in recent years. This paper sought to shed more light on the purposefully shadowy Wagner Group and add to the small number of academic papers that have also taken on this task. This paper attempted to answer the research question: **At what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country?** Hopefully, the answer to this research question will better equip decision-makers and influence other academics to expand upon the research question. To tackle this research question, this paper investigated three case studies: the Central African Republic (CAR) (2018-Nov. 2021), Libya (2015- Nov. 2021), and Mozambique (September 2019 – April 2020).

The CAR seems to have been the case study with the most success for Wagner Group. Russia has benefited from securing its position in the CAR and improving the security situation in the country. As a result, Russia has become a key player in Central Africa. The central position of the CAR will allow Russia to continue to spread its influence in the region. This position has also come at the expense of the West in the form of previous French influence in the former French colony. Further, engagement of the Wagner Group has led to increasing the status of Russia on the world stage and increasing the view of a multi-polar world. Wagner Group has succeeded in cementing itself into the government and military of the CAR, allowing Russia to have a hand in decision making and the possibility of support in international bodies like the UN. Additionally, Russia has been then procuring of profitable mining contracts that can enrich the country and the Russian elite. The CAR is also rich in other resources that Russia will most likely be able to extract later. All of this has come at meager costs to the Kremlin, mostly in the form of international condemnation over war crimes and some casualties taken by Wagner Group. These low risks/costs pale in comparison to the overall gains made by Russia. Russia has kept Wagner Group in the CAR, and it seems like it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. These findings indicate that hypothesis number one is correct and that if the opportunities/benefits are high and the perceived cost/risk is low, then Russia will keep Wagner Group in the designated country. One can expect that Russia will work to further entrench itself in the CAR through the use of Wagner Group.

Libya has had its ups and downs for Wagner Group. The outcomes were mostly positive for Russia, and although it experienced certain downturns during Turkey's entrance into the conflict, it remains relatively positive overall. Wagner Group and the LNA were able to fight all the way to Tripoli with great success until the entry of Turkish forces on the side of the GNA quickly stopped the advance and then drove it back. Even with this

development in the conflict, Russia has secured new energy contracts in Libya. These energy contracts will enrich Russia and the Russian elite. In its retreat from the fighting, Wagner Group has still been able to secure vital infrastructure, including oil fields and ports that it will most likely not give up without some sort of beneficial agreement with Russia. This gives Russia a foothold on the Mediterranean Sea and the potential for bases there that would dramatically increase Russian power projection and be on the Southern Flank of NATO. Russia has been able to make itself a key player in the outcome of the Libyan conflict and, therefore, the region. This again ups the perception and evidence of Russia's return to a great power and the view of a multi-polar world. Even with the retreat of Wagner and the LNA, Russia has the possibility of General Haftar being elected president in the upcoming elections, which would give Russia even closer ties to the government of Libya. The risks that Russia took were limited to international condemnation for war crimes and limited Wagner Group casualties prior to the entry of Turkey into the conflict. With the entry of Turkey, Wagner Group suffered significant casualties, and Russia risked sparking a wider conflict with Turkey and, therefore, NATO. Russia was unwilling to escalate the conflict and try to gain more than it already had. Following its opportunistic nature, Russia pulled back Wagner Group and consolidated its gains, and while Wagner was not withdrawn from Libya, it retreated in the country, and a cease-fire was negotiated. The risks became too high to continue. This evidence indicates that the hypothesis number three is confirmed and that if perceived cost/risk outweigh the opportunities/benefits (risk too high), then Russia will withdraw Wagner Group from the designated country. Again, while not entirely out of the country, Russia pulled Wagner Group back and was forced to engage in other means to achieve its goals. The escalation of the conflict and/or further casualties was not something Russia was willing to risk.

The last case study was the use of Wagner Group in Mozambique. This case study was different from the other two because Russia already had strong ties to Mozambique and the conflict was much shorter in duration than the other two, which are still ongoing. Before Wagner Group entered Mozambique, Russia had a long history of supporting Mozambique since its quest for independence. Russia had also gained many favorable contracts and agreements before the insertion of Wagner Group into Mozambique. Russia made agreements on military and technology cooperation, as well as agreements for access to the deep-water ports of Mozambique. This access increases Russian power projection and allows them to later spread their influence to the surrounding countries. Russian companies had also gained lucrative mineral and gas contracts that would enrich Russia and the Russian elite. Russia's strong relationship preceding the insertion of Wagner Group also meant they already had the potential for Mozambique support in international institutions. It seems that deploying Wagner Group would have further entrenched Russia into the security of the country and given them closer control of the minerals and gas. However, this was not enough for Russia to keep Wagner Group deployed there as it quickly incurred heavy casualties. For all the talk of the expendability of Wagner Group, Russia seemed to recognize that it was unable to perform in the harsh conditions in Mozambique. After being met with fierce resistance, Russia was either unable or unwilling to escalate the conflict and deal with more casualties as well as a potential loss of prestige for Russia and Wagner Group. Successive embarrassing defeats might make governments unwilling to accept Wagner Group in the future. Russia already had significant ties with Mozambique before the deployment, resulting in their willingness to cut their losses and withdraw. The evidence in this case study further proves the hypothesis number 3 is confirmed and if perceived cost/risk outweigh the opportunities/benefits (risk too high) then Russia will withdraw Wagner Group from the designated country.

Russia takes opportunities when they appear to contract and deploy Wagner Group to advance their interests. Wagner Group is a relatively low-cost tool that Russia can deploy till it faces stiff resistance. This paper sought to answer the research question: **At what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country?** This paper cannot definitively say where the exact point is for Russia when the risk becomes too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group. However, this paper can confidently state based on the three case studies that when Wagner Group is met with an unsurmountable force that it cannot compete with or when the continued use might escalate to a conflict Russia does not want to be involved in, Russia will pull back or withdraw Wagner Group from the conflict. The Kremlin is opportunistic in its use of Wagner Group, and when it is met with insurmountable obstacles or escalation Russia will pull them back and be content with the gains it has already made. Russia would rather consolidate its gains than take further risks with Wagner Group according to the information from the three case studies examined by this paper. The opportunistic approach to Russian foreign policy is commonly cited, but it is essential to know that this extends to its use of Wagner Group, which has the perception of being expendable. The results of this research indicate that in the future for policy makers to counter Wagner Group they must make its use too risky for Russia to maintain its deployment. This realization will hopefully better inform policymakers in government who might be tasked with countering Russian aggression with Wagner Group in the future.

The use of Wagner Group by Russia is becoming more and more common around the world. The research of these three case studies has presented valuable insight into the decision-making process of the Kremlin when it comes to dealing with cost benefit analysis with the use of Wagner Group. Hopefully this research inspires others to expand upon it. Further examining Wagner Group's other deployments around the world in the same context

as these case studies would further develop the understanding of this subject. New case studies could either further prove these hypotheses or disprove them. Either would be valuable to policy makers working to counter this threat. While Wagner Group is just one small tool in the Kremlin arsenal its growing prevalence requires further research by the academic community.

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Summary of the Master Thesis

This research paper concerns Russian foreign policy and the tools it uses to accomplish its objectives. More specifically, the research is focused on the secretive private military company (PMC) Wagner Group. Wagner Group has been deployed around the globe to further the interests of Russia and is a key tool in Russia's opportunistic foreign policy. This paper seeks to answer the research question: **At what point does the risk for Russia become too high to maintain the deployment of Wagner Group in a foreign country?** Answering this research question will help academics and policymakers further understand the use of Wagner Group by the Russian government. Wagner Group is meant to be low risk to Russia. Previous research is sparse and often covers many deployments of Wagner Group. In contrast, this paper focuses on three case studies that allow for a more in-depth approach – Wagner Group in the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, and Mozambique. Using qualitative analysis this paper discerned that in its use of Wagner Group, Russia will maintain its deployment of Wagner Group if the potential or realized gains outweigh the potential and realized risks to Russia, and that in the opposite case, where the risks outweigh the gains, Russia will pull Wagner Group back. These findings are significant because they illustrate how the Wagner Group fits into Russia's opportunistic approach to foreign policy. Russia inserts Wagner Group when opportunities arise; when it becomes too risky for Russia, then it will cut its losses and take what it has gained. This means that policymakers looking to counter Wagner Group must ensure its further deployment is too risky for Russia to maintain.

