



Russian Proxy or Rogue Mercenary Army? Situating the Wagner Group

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Abstract

The Wagner Group is an umbrella term referring to a network of mercenary groups, extraction companies, and political strategists linked to the Kremlin by oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin. Wagner has spread throughout Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Characterized by obscured activities and denied by the Kremlin, Wagner escapes conventional definitions of a Private Military and Security Company (PMSC) in both practice and theory. The pervasive labelling of Wagner as a “PMC” makes it difficult to effectively engage with the group at either an academic or policy level. Therefore, a scholarship situating Wagner in relation to PMSC literature would provide a platform to address Wagner across academic and political platforms. This project aims to fill that gap by situating Wagner in relation to current PMSC and mercenary literature. This will be accomplished by an extensive review of the current literature, followed by synthesizing PMSC definitions and categories that are relevant into the contemporary field. Once this has been established a comparative analysis of a variety of the Wagner Group’s global activities will allow us to assess where Wagner sits amongst these definitions and categories. Addressing this gap in the literature will provide a new and effective platform for engaging with Wagner and an academic level, as well as providing a significantly clearer lens from which to examine them.

List of Abbreviations

CAR – Central African Republic

DAG – Dyck Advisory Group

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OSINT – Open-Source Intelligence

PMC – Private Military Company

PMSC – Private Military and Security Company

PSC – Private Security Company

UN – United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations Human Rights Council

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1. Introduction:

Putin's Shadow Army, Russia's Blackwater, Rogue Russian Mercenaries, these are all labels attributed to PMC Wagner, known colloquially as the Wagner Group. Wagner is referred to in the same vein as western PMSCs by some, and as an extension of the Russian security apparatus by others. This division is reflective of the little we truly can verify regarding the group and highlights a significant gap in non-state actor literature.

Contemporary states rely on non-state entities for a number of security services. From intelligence to logistics and training, private corporations are heavily involved and invested in western states' military capabilities. As both a new and an old phenomenon, private corporations have been taking on more traditionally state-centric military roles, such as actual combat operations. Originally prominent through the Middle Ages, private entities in wartime have had a resurgence in the 21st century. Countries around the world employ registered corporations in combat and noncombat roles. These entities are incorporated and registered in order to assess culpability and oversight to both the companies themselves and the states that employ them. As the roles of these entities continue to evolve and become more involved in countries around the globe, being able to categorize and define them is becoming more important in practice, in policy, and in research.

Private forces of various kinds are not a new dimension of international security studies. Mercenaries were referenced in the Old Testament (McFate,2018), and private forces were pervasive throughout the Middle Ages. With the rise of state-centrism after the peace of Westphalia, private military elements (mostly mercenary groups) were largely demonized, re-emerging through the demilitarization period towards the end of the cold war. The end of the cold war marked the beginning of a shift towards a multipolar global system, with new security issues, new dimensions of conflict, and new actors. The return to prominence of the world's "second oldest profession" mercenaries, or private military and security company (PMSC), has been well documented (Avant, 2015). Seen most prominently in weak state conflicts at the behest of the state government or another interested global power; i

n the 21st-century PMSCs have been active and are often the determining factor in conflicts all around the world. They serve many different actors, states and otherwise, PMSCs have filled roles from logistics to intelligence to kinetic combat operations (Singer, 2008; Prem, 2018). Beyond the sensationalized perspective of PMSCs as gun-toting mercenaries, these companies have a hand in virtually all modern conflicts, whether in construction, training, advisory, counter terrorism, or intelligence; PMSCs are omnipresent (McFate, 2017). Research has further documented their diverse clientele, ranging beyond global powers and states undergoing internal conflicts; PMSCs serve individuals, private corporations, extraction companies, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs, all often in defensive security or consulting roles. (Jäger & Kümmel, 2007). PMSCs, for the most part, have made substantial efforts to shed the preconceptions attached with the term “mercenaries” endeavouring to establish clear corporate structures, defined command structures, and only accepting select clients. These efforts to legitimize the profession have largely led to a significant increase in contracts between PMSCs and both stronger western states and NATO members, as well as with weaker states. The use of PMSCs has not been exclusive to western states or weak states embroiled in conflicts however, recent years has seen countries like China, India, Russia, and Pakistan (McFate, 2015) emulate the established use of PMSC or PMSC- adjacent entities. PMSC use by NATO rival states like China and Russia raises two key issues: one being an issue of policy and military strategy, and the other of regulation and accountability. Indeed, PMSCs are increasingly difficult to regulate and hold accountable, even more so for those that do not operate under the same corporate mould that many western PMSCs do. The most apparent example of this in recent years has been PMC Wagner, known colloquially as the Wagner Group.

The Wagner Group is an umbrella term referring to a network of mercenary groups, extraction companies, and political strategists linked to the Kremlin by oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin (Rondeaux, 2019)). Wagner operations have spread throughout Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Characterized by obscured activities and denied by the Kremlin, Wagner escapes conventional definitions of a Private Military and Security Company (PMSC) in both practice and theory. The PMC industry in Russia is of particular interest because mercenaryism is illegal according to Russian law, no Russian citizen may participate in mercenary activity. So

Russian security contractors have had to operate in a gray area with the implicit consent of the Kremlin. Wagner predecessors Moran Security or Anti-Terror Orel paved the way for the existence of Wagner and demonstrate direct evidence of how the Kremlin has improved upon and narrowed the practice.

Initially used as private security for Russian entities abroad, Wagner's predecessors eventually led to a realization by the Kremlin that they can be used to extend the Kremlin's sphere of influence. Wagner can be seen as the outcome and improvement of these former groups, including Russia's "little green men" who rose to prominence in the 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

The Wagner network revolves around two men and their linkage to the Kremlin. Firstly, Dmitry Utkin a Russian military and security services veteran and thought to be the founder and head of Wagner. Secondly, Prigozhin the oligarch and financial backer of Wagner, is known to have strong links to Putin and is widely postulated that he is the puppet master behind the Wagner network. Wagner operations globally and in Africa in particular, are primarily documented through news reports, witness accounts, social media reports, and open-source investigations. Cumulatively, this paints a fairly detailed and accurate picture of Wagner's activities in Libya, Syria, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere. Comparatively, we know very little about Wagner's actual structure (or lack thereof), and its links to the Kremlin; the little we do know is far from definitive, characterized by unverified reports and investigations into logistics pipelines. Despite this, Wagner is widely discussed in the same vein as PMSCs; this rests on the assumption that Wagner is ostensibly a private enterprise, despite a relative lack of evidence corroborating this claim, and a wealth of evidence contravening it.

The pervasive labelling of Wagner as a "PMC" (Rondeaux, 2019) makes it difficult to effectively engage with the group at either an academic or policy level. Wagner serves not as a standalone entity in terms of security studies, but rather epitomizes (or symbolizes) the potential advent of a new trend in international security and military strategy; raising questions of regulation, attribution, discourse, and of course strategic and foreign policy implications. As such, this dissertation will summarize and categorize existing literature and definitions of mercenaries and PMSCs before comparing and analysing Wagner's activities to each of these defined

categories. The goal of this exercise is to highlight the reality of Wagner activities and the importance of proper definitions and consequential considerations. It should be noted that this dissertation will not cover reports of Wagner activities in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, due to the recency and lack of sufficient evidence of this event. It will instead focus on all of the Wagner activity excluding the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and build a clear picture of its roles and operations as they relate to contemporary literature and reporting. It should be noted that Wagner's role and activities in Ukraine have largely been status quo relative to their previous known operations, so excluding the conflict does not exempt a contravening body of evidence. By cataloguing Wagner's activities around the world and comparing them to existing PMSC definitions and categorizations we will assess where Wagner sits relative to the literature and consider whether they can truly be described as a PMSC.

The importance of this research and others of its kind is apparent when we consider the widespread and influential nature of Wagner's operations. The group has extended Russian influence relatively under the radar and has been the subject of investigations by international organizations and humanitarian groups into humanitarian abuses perpetrated by the group. These abuses include placing mines in civilian areas in Libya, and indiscriminate imprisonments and executions in Libya, Syria, Sudan, and CAR. Because of the general preconception that Wagner is indeed a PMSC and consequently a private entity, and the group's lack of transparency or existence of a corporate registration makes it all but impossible to assess culpability. Study is further marred by a lack of clarification over the nature of the group, which fails to link the study of the group to the broader bodies of literature. Therefore, a clear and detailed study into how Wagner fits into the broader bodies of literature would not only be an advancement but a boon to further research into the group and any other similar groups. This research will aim to fill this gap by examining Wagner's activities and structure as they relate to the broader bodies of PMSC, mercenary, and non-state actor literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 PMSC Literature Review

The notion of the privatization of security has been well documented across literature (Singer, 2008; Avant; 2015; McFate, 2017); the most obvious, and arguably consequential

dimension of this is the privatisation of the use of violence. From a theoretical standpoint, much research has engaged with the Westphalian state system and its notions of state sovereignty (Singer, 2008; McFate, 2017). Often centering around Max Weber's notion of a state having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Weber, 2015). The consensus has been that PMSCs erode the state's monopoly on the use of force, coinciding with the world moving towards a more multipolar system. Critical Security Studies aligns with this notion, eschewing state centrism in the contemporary political theatre (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2015). Some scholars have gone so far as to label the re-emergence as "Neo-medievalism" or a variation on the term (McFate, 2017; Singer, 2008), as a defining aspect of modern international security. Meaning a return of source of medieval conflict dynamics where states were not the primary violent actors, with guilds, mercenary groups, companies, or even the church rivalling and often surpassed states' capacity to use force (Singer, 2008). There has been no macro-level theory that effectively engages with PMSCs; however, elements of other theoretical frameworks, beyond the aspects listed above, can be insightful to the topic. From a mercenary standpoint, Frye (2005) provides an interesting discussion surrounding the regulation of mercenary groups and suggests that a contextual understanding is also important. Chesterman and Lehnardt (2009) also make a significant contribution to the literature, advocating for the responsible use and regulation of the PMSC industry, again highlighting their contextual use. Their anthology of chapters from various experts in the field provides a thorough and varied discussion of the field of mercenaries and PMSCs. Topics covered in *From Mercenaries to Market* include the reasons states hire these actors, their status under international law, regulatory and morality issues, and the future of the 'Market'.

Krahmann's "New threats and new actors in international security" (2005) initiated a discussion surrounding the rise of PMSCs through the start of the 21st century. Krahmann reviews the emerging categories of PMSCs commonly put forth in the literature and how companies can move between categories. Krahmann builds upon the notion that PMSCs as well as NGOs and international organizations are "new" actors in international security as they collectively challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force. Their discussion traces the theoretical lines rooted in neorealist thought that characterize the emergence of the study of PMSCs. Deborah

Avant's "The Market for Force" (2005) provides a fresh perspective in the study of private security actors. Avant posits that the "market" is as important, if not more important, when considering PMSCs. The above examples from the 2000s serve as valuable first steps in the growth of the PMSC literature and reflect a limited scope from an emerging field of study. They also provided a valuable platform and starting point for further study of the field. Singer and Avant's works in particular have been cited by a majority of the literature on the subject of PMSCs. Krahnmann's second contribution discussed herein.

"From Mercenaries to Private Security Contractors" (2012) dives into the discourse and linguistic shift that has allowed for the normative use of PMSCs. This shift is something that is important to consider when researching the development of PMSC on practice and in literature. PMSCs shedding the negative connotations associated with mercenaryism has been instrumental in the proliferation of PMSCs worldwide. "Who Am I? The Blurring of the Private Military and Security Company (PMSC) Category" (Prem, 2018), is a significant contribution to the body of literature. Prem investigates the normative and substantive shifts in the services offered by PMSCs. Prem argues that the PMSC industry has diversified to the point that a single umbrella term is more detrimental than beneficial and does not reflect the reality of the industry. This discussion represents an issue that a number of authors come up against when discussing PMSCs and is a significant portion of this project.

Fullon provides the most similar research to this project, he discusses the nuances and importance of placing PMSCs into the correct typologies for research and policy purposes. However, his article focuses almost exclusively on the military roles PMSCs occupy and fails to capture the diversity of the industry. This makes for an interesting, if not narrow, investigation into the typologies of PMSCs (2020). Deborah Avant's second contribution (2016) of relevance to this project discusses the networks of governance surrounding the PMSC industry. Avant traces the history of regulation of the PMSC industry from a variety of states and highlights steps taken in recent years towards the regulation of the industry. Macleod (2017) builds upon this work by further investigating regulation and accountability. Macleod breaks down four aspects important for this discussion: 1. The relationship between the state and security, 2. State power, privatisation, and the impact on human rights, 3. Why human rights are important

in relation to security, and 4. Human rights accountability. Ettinger's work highlights the boom of the PMSC industry in the US and elsewhere, as well as testing the theoretical notions of a state's right to a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a variety of contexts (Ettinger, 2014).

The 2010s brought further investigations into other aspects of the field of PMSCs, their impact, and their use. For instance, Christopher Spearing (2018b), dives into the comparative use of PMSCs by NATO and Russia. This serves to highlight that the body of literature has grown and has diversified to discuss the wide variety of lenses required to build an all-encompassing picture of the use of PMSCs. Spearin goes on to discuss Russian use of PMSCs in a different work (2018b), in which he draws comparisons between the US use of PMSCs and how Russia has used PMSCs. Spearin highlights the widespread and apparent use of PMSCs by the US in contrast to Russia's limited and clandestine use.

Much of the existing literature has focused on PMSC emergence (Jäger & Kümmel, 2007), legality (Krahman, 2005), future use (Ibid), humanitarian use and concerns (Spearin, 2008), and challenges to state sovereignty (Singer, 2008). However, defining exactly what constitutes a PMSC, and categorizing the variety of PMSCs has been a polarizing topic in academia (Prem, 2018). PMSCs often blur the lines between training, logistics, and combat quite easily, meaning establishing typologies of PMSCs is quite difficult and varied on a case-by-case basis (Ibid). Various qualifiers have been theorized to distinguish the modern PMSC versus mercenaries. These qualifiers often include, but are not limited to, organization, corporate hierarchy, capacity to operate across different theatres, a wider array of services, more transparency, and often more easily held accountable (Singer, 2008). Further attention has begun to focus on the varying consumers of PMSC services; beyond the largest customers, the United States and the United Kingdom and smaller states with internal conflicts, other major global powers have begun to follow this trend (Prem, 2018). Notably, both China and Russia have begun to use "PMSC" services to varying degrees (McFate, 2017).

International organizations provide not only the legal statutes but also contribute to the normative discourse surrounding PMSCs. The United Nations has released a number of

documents and investigations into mercenaries and PMSCs, all of which can be seen as a contribution to the field's body of literature (United Nations, 2018, 2019, & 2020). The UN body of literature is particularly important when discussing the effect PMSCs have on humanitarian situations around the world. The single most important document when it comes to the international law surrounding PMSCs could arguably be the Montreux Document. The Montreux Document is an agreement between signatory states and lists a number of recommendations for best practices regarding states and PMSCs including verifying companies' track record, prosecution when breaches of law occur, and ensuring compliance and personnel training with international humanitarian and human rights law (ICRC, 2008).

2.2 Wagner Group Literature Review

Russia's use of "PMC Wagner", known colloquially as the Wagner Group, has garnered much attention and literature focusing on its existence, origin, and use. Similarly, scholars have suggested that Wagner is an apparatus of "war by other means" or an extension of Russian hybrid warfare (Marten, 2019). Choosing to focus on the goals Russia hopes to achieve instead of the group itself. Literature has, however, discussed Russia's irregular means of warfare, from influence operations in US elections to the infamous "little green men" in Ukraine; this body of literature engages more on the side of Russian foreign policy and often does not engage directly, or even in passing, with Russia's use of mercenaries (Spearin, 2018). However, no substantive literature has engaged with the question of whether Wagner should be considered a PMSC, or how it relates to existing typologies of PMSCs. Often referred to across media and policy as a PMSC, experts contend with this definition (Marten, 2019, Rondeaux, 2019). A comprehensive analysis of where Wagner fits in relation to PMSC literature and typologies fills in this gap. Spearin's work (2018a, 2018b) provides effective comparison between Russian and western use of PMSCs. Though not explicitly or extensively in reference to the Wagner group, the same theoretical and historical threads are integral in tracing Wagner's roots. Discussing the differences between their use and services in the differing contexts helps to set the stage to discuss whether PMSCs literature, predominantly used in western contexts and informed by western literature, is applicable in the same way when discussing PMSCs in non-western

contexts such as with Wagner. Spearin effectively highlights that Russian PMSCs are private in theory but effectively operate as an extension of the Russian security apparatus.

Mark Galeotti's "Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's "new way of war"" (2016) details the broader theory around Russia's use of irregular forces, particularly in its 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Galeotti highlights how Russia's "new way of war" caused a stir amongst western policy makers and academics. Amongst this is Russia's new use of "mercenaries" which presumably include Wagner, given the fact that Wagner was first spotted and involved in the 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Galeotti's contribution sets the framework surrounding the Wagner literature and is important for understanding Wagner in the context in which it operates and originated. Soulé's work represents an African perspective, though "Africa +1" (2020) broadly discusses a "new scramble" for Africa, a portion of the work discusses Wagner's intervention in the CAR as part of a broader grand strategy for Russian involvement in Africa. Whilst this work is not the most important contribution to the literature, it does provide a more granular and local perspective that the broader body of PMSC literature lacks. Too often the loudest voices regarding PMSCs are notably western, so involving and discussing voices more rooted in the environments where PMSCs are most active is critical. Østensenmand and Bukkvoll (2021) discuss the nexus between Russian power politics and the Kremlin's use of PMSCs to those ends. The authors assert that Russian use of PMSCs fits within the broader context of Russian foreign policy by not only supporting Russian foreign policy, but also by "lining the pockets of the Russian political elite and oligarchs". They further highlight that Russian PMSCs are not private in the western sense of the word, nor are they companies in that they cater to an open market, instead, highlighting that Russian PMSCs cater strictly to the Kremlin and Russian business interests. The authors concede that some Russian companies are relatively more private, though operating seemingly in lockstep with Russian foreign policy objectives. The authors additionally highlight that PMSCs are in fact illegal in Russian and therefore operate within loopholes at the Kremlin's discretion.

Marten (2019) articulates Wagner as a "semi-state security force" and details Wagner's use within that context. Marten produces an in-depth case study using primarily Russian sources to highlight the linkages between Wagner and the Kremlin and how they are used in Russian

foreign policy. He notes that in Russia, PMSCs are effectively illegal, using this evidence and more to conclude that it is the “corrupt informal network to explain the existence of Russian PMSCs”. Marten further points to the use and abuse of Russian laws by Russia’s political and economic elite, meaning that PMSCs can be overlooked when they are of use to the Kremlin. This provides further evidence for the lack of separation between Wagner and the state.

Candace Rondeaux produced probably the most comprehensive and insightful investigation into Wagner, “Decoding the Wagner Group” (2019) and dives deep into OSINT investigations and the theoretical and historical context behind the group, highlighting the groups activities, logistics networks, and links to the Kremlin with strong OSINT founded evidence. Importantly Rondeaux’s research identifies several key points that had been previously underdeveloped. 1. Wagner exists only through legal loopholes in Russian law which would be all but impossible without the Kremlin’s go ahead, 2. Rondeaux traces Wagner’s lineage from the post-soviet military privatization, 3. Russia uses PMSCs strategically demonstrating continuity with Russian grand strategy, and 4. The narrative of Prigozhin as the lone puppet master of the Wagner group is beneficial not only to Russia but Wagner itself (ibid). She traces the roots of the group, through Wagner predecessors active in the Middle East, to the formation of Wagner and their deployment in Syria and Libya. Rondeaux’s work is informed by extensive theoretical research and significant open-source investigations and forms a significant contribution to this project.

The topic of the Wagner group in relation to PMSCs sits in a unique position due to the lack of literature linking the two bodies of work. PMSCs and the privatisation of security have been researched and discussed extensively in 21st century literature. Despite being a relatively new phenomena, the Wagner group has received a fair share of academic attention. However, linkages between the two bodies of literature are few and far between, as the labelling of Wagner as a “PMC” seems to be generally either accepted or assumed to be false. Therefore, as described above, this project would address an existing gap in the literature by bridging these two bodies of work.

3. Research Design & Methodology

This dissertation will employ primarily qualitative methods to answer the research question, using a comparative case study design. Due to the nebulous nature of Wagner activities and the relative lack of primary sources or accurate and verifiable data, qualitative methods provide the most effective means of answering the proposed research question. The nondescript and often disputable nature of Wagner activities means that any quantitative and empirical data is all but impossible to establish with any veracity. As such qualitative methods provide a more effective means of analysis.

Due to the nature of the proposed research question, the initial phase of research will involve a substantial in-depth literature review to establish existing PMSC typologies and the various factors that quantify these typologies. An in-depth literature review will help detail existing typologies and distil other quantifiers from established literature in the field. This will involve using examples and previously conducted case studies taken from secondary sources. Once typologies have been established, a list of key determinants in categorizing PMSCs will be used.

This list will assist in a comparative case study of a variety of Wagner group activities, excluding the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This timeframe has been established to assure the amount of research is feasible due to the ongoing and unpredictable nature of the subject matter. Wagner activities will be analysed and compared to the previously established typologies and key terms. Data will be collected through search engines, peer-reviewed journal articles, books from established authors relevant to the field, university library research systems, United Nations reports, official state reports, and think tank projects. Furthermore, due to the relative recency of some Wagner activities, data will be collected from news reports, social media, and open-source intelligence (OSINT) powered investigations used in tandem to provide accurate data.

By utilizing contemporary sources, qualitative research, and case study analysis, this dissertation will engage a relatively recent subject (Wagner Group) with a body of literature that has been continuously changing and largely not yet unified.

3.1 Research Design

The design of this project is strictly qualitative and based on the body of literature both academic and non-academic. This research project will consist of a comparative analysis

between The Wagner Group and typologies of PMSCs and PMSC adjacent actors. This analysis will build upon a body of literature defining and grouping PMSCs and used to place the Wagner group amongst this body of literature. The purpose of this project is to challenge existing preconceptions that the Wagner group is ostensibly a PMSC or even private at all. Wagner group has rose to prominence over the past eight years and has been investigated for human rights abuses and the subject of US and EU sanctions. Despite this, the literature surrounding Wagner has yet to provide an assessment or analysis as to whether Wagner is, in any sense of the word, truly private. Assessing whether Wagner fits under the PMSC umbrella is imperative to the further study of Wagner and any other similar entities. The assumption that Wagner is a private entity calls into question the accountability of such an entity both in practice and in research. The nexus between the Russian state and Wagner is important for further assessing accountability and developing an accurate picture of the broader Wagner network.

The case of the Wagner group is particularly of interest to the field due to a number of reasons, first amongst these is the mutually denied nature of the relationship between Wagner and the Kremlin. A key characteristic of the PMSC industry is the transparent relationship between the companies and the states that both hire and host the companies. Whilst this is a predominantly western notion of how PMSCs operate, it is nonetheless an important aspect. The absence of this aspect is reason to question the private nature of the Wagner Group.

Secondly, we must consider the lack of corporate registration that traces the foundation of the group. Western notions of PMSCs necessitate some form of semi-transparent corporate registry to trace accountability. These notions in conjunction with Wagner's rise in usage throughout the world make the case selection an obvious one. Wagner is effectively an anomaly which has contributed in part to the lack of clarification around the nature of the group. The nature of PMSCs, and non-state actors, combined with the recency of much of Wagner's activity, makes the group difficult to study. Wagner is inherently a secretive network, with secrecy being a key factor in facilitating the groups usefulness to the Kremlin, which in turn makes the group difficult to study. The lack of robust data means that Wagner can only effectively be researched in a qualitative manner. As such, this project engages with the established and developing literature pertaining to PMSCs, and news, reports, investigations, and open-source intelligence,

to build the necessary information pertaining to the Wagner Group. The group has been the subject of numerous investigations and open-source intelligence reports, meaning their activities have been thoroughly discussed and verified as much as reasonably possible.

3.2 Methodology

The qualitative nature of this project means that it will engage with the Wagner Group as a case study to employ in comparative analysis. Wagner will be compared to the body of PMSC literature to assess whether Wagner can reasonably be defined as a PMSC. This analysis involves a six-step process, rooted in academic literature. It is firstly important to thoroughly investigate the body of literature that pertains to the Wagner group. Because of the nebulous nature of the group, this involves analysis of a wide variety of literature. This includes literature pertaining to PMSCs, non-state actors, semi-state forces, privatization of security, Russian foreign policy, and Russian hybrid warfare. Building an extensive review of the literature helps to build a broad base. The purpose of this project is to see where Wagner fits within the broader body of literature, therefore this literature review is extremely important. For brevity's sake, only significant contributions will be thoroughly discussed, due to the length restrictions of this dissertation.

Secondly, once a thorough literature review has been conducted, it is important to identify and synthesize the contemporary definitions for PMSC and PMSC-adjacent actors. There has been no conclusive or dominant definition for what constitutes a PMSC. This is in large part due to the continuously shifting nature of both the industry and the literature surrounding it, as PMSCs continuously evolve in structure, services, and clientele. Consequently, the body of literature has seen a diverse range of attempts to define PMSCs; these definitions represent varied and concentrated efforts to advance the body of literature. These definitions vary considerably, not only amongst types of actors (PMC, PSC, PMSC, or mercenaries) but also amongst authors. As such, the second step of this project will be to synthesize definitions for each of the above categories. These definitions will reflect the most prominent, most accurate, and most contemporary definitions. It is important to synthesize definitions due to the shifting nature of the field of study, definitions that carried significant weight in the 2000s do not hold the same

weight in 2022. By combining aspects from numerous authors' definitions into one workable definition that encompasses the range of actors, we can create an up to date set of definitions that reflects the shifting realities of the field.

PMSCs encompass such a wide variety of services in diverse environments, that to accurately categorize these actors requires a subset of categories within the PMSC category. PMSCs have evolved to fill roles from intelligence and logistics through training and direct combat roles, meaning that two companies labelled as a PMSC can offer wildly different services. The body of literature has produced a number of different categorizations across differentiating lines. This project opts to utilize a modified version of the tip of the spear categorisation (ToS), brought to prominence by Singer's "Corporate Warriors" (2007). This categorization system will be built upon and modified in chapter 5. Whilst the most effective categorization of PMSCs, the ToS must be modified to reflect the shifting realities of the PMSC world. The reason for choosing the ToS model is because its categorization is based on the nature of the services provided, and when modified, allows for the PMSCs to shift between categories. Too many attempts to categorize PMSCs in rigid categories despite the fact that PMSCs can and do flex and shift the services they offer and the clients they serve. The ToS model is based on the services offered and their theoretical proximity to the battlefield. By modifying the ToS we utilise a more fluid categorization that is all encompassing and reflects the variety of modern PMSCs.

The following chapter will dissect and catalog the Wagner Group such as it is. Wagner activities are difficult to verify, reports of their activity need to be located, assessed, and verified in order to hold up to scrutiny and be effective in this project. To that end, I will lean heavily on my previous project (T-Intelligence, 2021) "*Putin's Mercenaries on Tour: Mapping the Wagner Group's Global Activities*", an in-depth analysis and verification of Wagner's activities catalogued, mapped, and verified to ensure accuracy. The verification process used predominantly OSINT methods based on existing investigations from credible sources. OSINT verification included flight tracking, satellite imagery, telegram chats, customs manifests, and local news reports. This project was effective and built out robust data and an accurate picture of Wagner's global activities. In addition, this project will heavily incorporate the body of literature surrounding Wagner group. This body of literature includes academic articles, NGO

and Intelligence investigations, news reports, and other investigations This project has taken great care to ensure only verified and accurate reports are used within reason and utilises a comprehensive research approach for Wagner’s activities.

Chapter 7 forms the crux of this project and attempts to situate Wagner’s activity in relation to the literature surrounding PMSCs. This chapter will use a contextual case-by-case comparative analysis for each of the definition groupings: mercenaries, PMCs, PSCs, and PMSC definitions. Further analysis will compare the different categorizations of PMSCs along the ToS model to Wagner activity. The decision to utilise different cases of Wagner activity in each instance is a deliberate one, intended to highlight the variety of the Wagner group activities and how they may fit into a variety of categories. This analysis will constitute a comparison of the definitions and categories laid out in chapters 4 and 5, using this synthesized data to analyse where Wagner can be situated on a case-by-case basis. Upon completing this analysis, conclusions will be drawn as to which categories Wagner can be placed in. After determining the results. this project will engage with potential criticisms of the project, and afterwards discuss what these results mean in terms of implications for policy, practice, and for the future of the field. Further, we will suggest further avenues for research.

4. Defining the PMSC Industry and PMSC-Adjacent Entities

Before addressing different definitions and groupings of PMSCs, it is important to understand the existing normative definitions of related actors. Paramilitary groups, foreign forces in a militaries service, semi-state forces, and mercenaries all factor into the study of PMSCs. In this chapter we will briefly identify these different categorizations and some of their key characteristics.

4.1 Semi-State Forces:

“Semi-state forces” is a term that refers to military and security forces that are directly linked to state apparatuses and exert significantly less autonomy than mercenaries or PMSCs. Numerous entities fit in to this category, including organized foreign fighter groups such as the

Nepalese Gurkhas in the British Army or the French Foreign Legion, militias, and state-to-state troop loans for peacekeeping missions (Frye, 2005).

The UN working group on the use of mercenaries has identified key semantic similarities between foreign fighters who may compose many semi-state forces and mercenaries, namely the trait of being an external actor directly involved in a conflict (UN OHCHR Report). Though a relatively benign comparison, this serves to highlight just how muddled the waters are when categorizing external security actors; the difference between a mercenary and a state entity can be defined by semantics.

The Working Group has defined foreign fighters as “individuals who leave their country of origin or habitual residence and become involved in violence as part of an insurgency or non-state armed group in an armed conflict.” (UN, 2018). This definition works in parallel to commonly accepted definitions of mercenaries and can be differentiated through motivating factors, as mercenaries fight predominantly for financial gain.

Semi-state actors often have opaque relationships with their host states, sometimes characterized by plausible deniability and undefined roles (Marten, 2019). Experts have noted the rise of semi-state actors in support of Russian foreign policy in particular. (Marten, 2019). The term semi-state forces is an all-encompassing category whose defining feature is a strong connection to the home state and its government and a lack of structure independent from the state apparatus. These connections may sometimes be clear and ever-present, or they may be oblique and publicly denied, but the strong connection remains, nonetheless.

Similarly, paramilitary groups exist as separate entities, but can often be involved in the broader discussions of non-state actors which can, at times, lead to a conflation of these groups with PMSCs. Though both paramilitaries and PMCs act as separate entities from the state, that is their biggest shared trait. Paramilitary group sponsors can consist of nonstate proxy forces, foreign political organizations, resistance or insurgence operations, transnational terrorist organizations, or criminal organizations aimed at achieving a political, economic, or military objective (Kirshnan, 2019). These entities are entirely separate from PMSCs in organization,

operation, and capabilities (McFate, 2018), though paramilitary groups of this kind can and have hired PMSCs.

4.2 Mercenaries

Mercenaries share the most similarities with PMCs, so much so that they are often defined as modern mercenaries, or the two are conflated entirely. Described by experts as the world's "second oldest profession" (McFate, 2014), mercenaries were not only prevalent, but a defining feature of war well into the Middle Ages. After the peace of Westphalia and the nationalisation of the use of force, mercenaries faded into obscurity before bursting back onto the scene during the latter half of the cold war and its demilitarization period. Today mercenaries are active in conflicts across the globe. Their activities are shrouded, leading to a struggle to accurately define and categorize the term. Existing definitions are indeed narrow, but they are also all very nearly the same definition (Frye, 2005).

"The term 'mercenary' has been used to describe everything from individuals killing for hire, to troops raised by one country working for another country, to PSCs providing military services to their own country." (Marten, 2019). The conflation of mercenaries with other similar actors continues to mar both the study and policy surrounding mercenaries and PMCs. Krahmman argues that the majority of individuals who participated in foreign conflicts throughout the 20th century were defined as mercenaries and consequently condemned or outlawed, whereas their modern equivalents are increasingly normative and are being categorized as private security companies or private military companies (Krahmman, 2012). Whilst in a broad sense this can be understood as a reconstruction of the discourse surrounding the use of non-state forces, such confluations fail to consider the fundamental differences between mercenaries and PMCs. Though similar, these actors are markedly different in practice, structure, and discourse.

The United Nations International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries of 1989 defines a mercenary as:

1: A mercenary is any person who:

(a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;

(b) 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 rank and functions in the armed forces of that party;

(c) Is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict;

(d) Is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; **and**

(e) 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.

2. A mercenary is also any person who, in any other situation:

(a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of

violence aimed at:

(i) Overthrowing a Government or otherwise undermining the constitutional order of a State; or

(ii) Undermining the territorial integrity of a State;

(b) Is motivated to take part therein essentially by the desire for significant private gain and is prompted by the promise or payment of material compensation;

(c) Is neither a national nor a resident of the State against which such an act is directed;

(d) Has not been sent by a State on official duty; **and**

(e) Is not a member of the armed forces of the State on whose territory the act is undertaken.

A number of these qualifiers, with the exception of 1e and 2e, can be applied to virtually every PMC contract involved in a conflict in the 21st century. PMCs are typically recruited from abroad, and in many cases are employed by another foreign state. The most obvious example

of which being the United States' use of PMCs in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. This definition is further muddled as a legal instrument by the fact that all of the above qualifiers must be met in order to meet the requirements for this definition of mercenaryism. Further efforts to define mercenaries in international law have highlighted similar issues. The Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1977, also attempts to define mercenaries:

1. A mercenary shall not have the right to be a combatant or a prisoner of war.
2. A mercenary 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 the 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.

The Geneva Convention definition as well is generally unworkable (O'Brien, 2014), failing to flesh out a definition of mercenaryism and focusing instead on the actor instead of its actions. Other attempts at less formal definitions also fall short; Webster's dictionary defines a mercenary as "a soldier hired into foreign service", which fails to account for foreign units such as the French Foreign Legion, or foreign volunteers who enter the states military service (Singer, 2008). Such forces provide a stark contrast to the images conjured by the term "mercenary".

The UN working group report on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination presented to the General Assembly, 75th session, highlighted that in practice, many mercenary and mercenary adjacent actors fall short of the international legal definitions of mercenaries despite sharing many characteristics (UN, 2020). This further highlights the need to clearly differentiate between mercenaries and PMCs on a case-by-case basis, in light of their unique context and circumstances (ibid), particularly important as many modern actors can move seamlessly from role to role, complicating potential definitions.

“Pure mercenaries are independent and uncontrolled by anything outside their contracts, whereas mercenaries who accept the oversight of legitimate actors such as states are closer themselves to being legitimate armies (Percy 2007)”. Oversight is an imperative differentiator between PMCs and mercenaries; PMCs exist as legal entities and are often beholden to their host states as well as their employees. Peter Singer provides a more analytical definition of a mercenary (2008); he asserts that a mercenary fights for an employer other than his home state’s government, is motivated by economic gain and not by nationalism or other societal or political motivations, and their loyalty is governed solely by contract (ibid). Mercenaries often work loosely and without much coordination or training, either amongst themselves or as part of a larger force (ibid). Another distinction between PMCs and mercenaries is a lack of diversified capabilities; most mercenary groups are unable to provide anything more than kinetic combat support in smaller units, as well as some limited weapons and military training (Singer, 2008).

These differences highlight the importance of distinguishing between the two entities, particularly as the two are often conflated:

“For example, the United Nations has a designated special rapporteur delegated to monitor mercenary activity. This official has claimed that the only essential difference between mercenaries and PMFs was that states are the ones doing the hiring of the firms.” (Singer, 2008)

Effectively there are seven major characteristics commonly used to distinguish modern mercenaries drawn from various experts and international institutions (Singer, 2008; Frye, 2005; Marten, 2019; McFate, 2014)

- 1) Independence: Mercenaries are not integrated in a meaningful way into a national force and are only bound by a limited contract.
- 2) Motivation: Mercenaries are motivated primarily by financial gain, not by further ideological or political goals.
- 3) Recruitment: Mercenaries are recruited through vague measures so as to avoid a clear paper trail and culpability on the part of the employers.
- 4) Organization: Mercenary groups are ad hoc formations of individuals with little organization or oversight.
- 5) Clientele: Mercenaries will work for virtually anyone, and do not limit their employers to “legitimate” actors.
- 6) Services: Mercenaries are limited to combat operations and limited training.
- 7) Foreign: A mercenary is not a citizen or resident of the state in which he or she is fighting, nor are they officially hired by their native state.

These qualifiers are of course not set in stone, they are fluid and change as the nature of combat and the use of mercenaries continues to evolve. Consequently, these qualifiers are not meant to limit potential definitions of mercenaries, but rather to highlight differences between Mercenaries and similar groupings of PMCs, PSCs, and semi-state forces.

Beyond academic and policy categorization and assessing culpability, defining mercenaries could be a practical and enforceable means of legally regulating certain actors (Frye, 2005), and bolstering “existing and proposed international and domestic conventions, laws, and regulations aimed at mercenaries” (ibid).

4.3 Private Military Companies (PMC)

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines PMCs as “an independent corporation that offers military services to national governments, international organizations, and substate actors.” (Bell, 2016). Whilst fairly rudimentary, this definition serves as a jumping off point for defining PMCs.

Military services cover a wide range of activities, from logistics and intelligence to training to entire units to operate attack helicopters. Beyond the notion that PMCs provide more military content, the organizations are also considered to be more business-like, following a corporate structure and subject to some regulation by the home and host states (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2009). Contrary to mercenary activities, most PMC activities are openly sanctioned by the states, and intended to augment or replace functions the state military would normally perform (ibid).

The reconstruction of the narrative surrounding mercenaries and PMCs, creating separate identities and terminology, facilitated the emergence of the industry as one that operates legally and within international norms (Krahman, 2012). In 2010 over 30,000 and 20,000 PMC contractors worked in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively (ibid), filling not only transport and logistics roles, but also roles that would have traditionally been associated with mercenaries.

Defining the PMC category is imperative as it determines the legitimacy of the companies in the public and international law spheres. Whether a company is called a PMC or a mercenary company dictates their livelihood. PMCs have oft been the subject of debate as they are actors with significant capabilities to violate human rights, but with significantly less regulatory oversight. The Montreux document on the regulation of PMCs, signed in 2008 between signatory countries, provides some 70 recommendations for their effective oversight. Whilst the Montreux document has been seen as a significant step towards effective regulation, it still provides a relatively narrow scope for PMCs and their activities.

Many contemporary PMCs have distanced themselves from activities often associated with mercenaries, opting instead to focus on defensive security and training contracts in support of state militaries. This serves to avoid the relatively narrow international law definition of

mercenaryism (United Nations, 2018). This can be seen as a jumping off point for defining PMCs, the distinction can be understood as an effort to distance PMCs from the negative connotations surrounding mercenaries.

“By the early 2000s, corporate military firms had come to resemble their peers in other business sectors: corporate, legal, and with a global client base—a far cry from the marauders that haunted post-colonial Africa.”

In a nutshell, this quote from P.W Singer’s “Corporate Warriors” summarizes the archetypal modern PMC (2008), as aiming to be as legitimate as possible whilst maintaining operational effectiveness. This mirroring of the corporate world can be seen as an integral factor when defining PMCs; for it is that corporate structure that has allowed the global theatre to warm to their use.

Further entrenching their corporate ties, many of the most active PMCs (particularly from NATO countries) are openly owned by other multinational corporations (Singer, 2008). Constellis Group for example was formed when notable PMCs Triple Canopy and Academi (formerly Blackwater) joined with other security adjacent providers to create a leader in the field. As well, Security giant G4S have diversified from domestic security and risk assessment to more PMC related activities (McFate, 2019). Part of this corporate characterisation is the fact that many of these PMCs compete openly for contracts awarded by state governments and NGOs (Singer, 2008). Detractors argue that many of the largest PMCs are not private at all, and are merely fronts for western governments, meaning they are covert entities serving state interests as opposed to true private corporations (ibid). Whilst it is certainly possible that such operations exist, and many PMCs do serve almost exclusively in their host state’s interest, a majority remain open and publicly corporate entities who take on a variety of clients. Any PMC that would fit in the above description as a front for a state’s will is then fundamentally not a PMC.

Others suggest that many PMCs can be considered mercenaries as they are “foreign fighters paid to fight and have no loyalty to their employing state” (Frye, 2005), and that the narrow definitions attributed to mercenaries by international law allows PMCs to escape the

mercenary label. The purpose of this is not to suggest that PMCs and mercenaries are interchangeable, but rather to highlight the importance of accurate and up to date definitions. PMCs do not all fit neatly into the same categories, they operate in a variety of theatres, with a variety of services, for a variety of clients. Therefore, any definition or categorization of PMCs will be inherently in flux and relevant on a case-by-case basis. However, categorizing PMCs can contribute to clarity when discussing these actors from an academic or policy standpoint.

The following qualifiers have been drawn from experts in the field to paint a picture of the modern PMC world. (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2009; Frye, 2005; Krahnemann, 2012; McFate, 2014; Singer, 2008; United Nations, 2018)

- 1) Independence: PMCs, whilst still independent are in some cases integrated into state forces, particularly in training and support roles.
- 2) Motivation: PMCs are motivated and bound by their contracts for business and financial gain, as well as company reputation.
- 3) Recruitment: The recruitment process for PMC contractors is ambiguous, however the recruitment and competition for state contracts is often more open and transparent, particularly for western governments.
- 4) Organization: PMCs are organized hierarchically in both a military chain of command and in a corporate form.
- 5) Clientele: PMCs can and do work for any legal entity when bound by contract but will mostly work in their home state's national interest.
- 6) Services: PMCs offer a broad range of services within the military realm beyond just conflict services, including transport, logistics, training, medical, intelligence, and advisory roles.

Just as the PMC industry is continuously fluctuating, so too are the typologies and qualifiers associated. But providing some framework to define and categorize PMCs allows us critically to assess the activities of actors in the field and consequently how they should be held accountable.

4.4 Private Security Companies (PSC):

Some non-actors operating in conflict zones are often not direct participants in the conflict themselves, instead operating as security forces for important persons and strategic points, both for the private sector and for the state. The nature of such roles marks a significant distinction from more traditional mercenary or PMC forces (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2009). These PSCs follow the mold of PMCs in their corporate structure and relative transparency. Today's PSCs operate in armed defence of an asset, whether that be a location such as a mine or oilfield, or a high-profile individual. Their skills are not aimed at shifting the strategic landscape beyond protecting their assigned asset (ibid). It is important to note that PSC as a descriptive term has a fairly narrow purview, centering around protection of assets and limited from further military or strategic roles that would then cross over into PMC territory.

It should be noted that for the purpose of this dissertation I have opted to include certain roles that may fall into PSC categories (Intelligence, strategic solutions, base security, etc.) as part of the PMC umbrella, as these services tend to be most common with PMCs. Indeed, most PMC companies can and do fulfill PSC roles, and very few strict PSC companies exist in foreign theatres (Brooks, 2000). Brooks lays out a few examples of services he says are typical of PSCs including, security services in unstable states to private clients, humanitarian protection, demining, police training, and logistics and supply lines (ibid). Again, any of these roles could easily fall under the purview of a PMC, but many of the roles executed by PMCs would disqualify PSCs. Despite the similarities and crossover between PSCs and PMCs, it is still important for uniformity and coherence to lay out qualifiers for the PSC category.

- 1) Independence: PSCs differ from PMCs in this way, they often operate entirely independently from state forces, with the exception being.
- 2) Motivation: PSCs are no different than PMCs when it comes to motivation. They are motivated and bound by their contracts for business and financial gain, as well as company reputation.
- 3) Recruitment: The recruitment process for PSC contractors is equally ambiguous, however the recruitment and competition for state contracts is often more open and transparent, particularly for western governments.

- 4) Organization: PSCs are organized hierarchically in both a military chain of command and in a corporate form, though with less of a military influence.
- 5) Clientele: PSCs differ somewhat in their clientele, working more for private companies in guarding strategic assets, but will operate in security roles for states to a lesser extent.
- 6) Services: PSCs offer a more limited range of services when compared to PMCs. PSCs operate in defensive security roles of an asset and do not participate directly in conflict unless attacked. As previously noted, PSC services are not aimed at shifting the strategic landscape of a conflict.

These qualifiers are extremely similar to the PMC qualifiers previously laid out, the line between PMCs and PSCs is so often blurred that it can be difficult to distinguish. However, I would suggest it is important to highlight the one-way traffic across that line. A PMC can undertake PSC contracts and remain within the realm of PMC activity. Contrarily, when a PSC diversifies their capabilities to take on PMC contracts, they step firmly into the real of military action and should therefore be considered PMCs.

4.5 The Modern Private Military Security Companies (PMSC):

In contrast to PSCs, PMCs operate more in the military sphere and are intended to make a difference in their environment (ending a war or insurgency, peacekeeping operations), whereas PSCs are intended to maintain the status quo as it were, and guard strategic assets, individuals, or locations. The problem herein is that many modern PMSCs can and will blur the line between PMC and PSC. The difference between providing a PSC force to guard assets or train police, and a PMC to suppress an insurgency is simply a matter of the contract which can be easily changed. Many PMSCs can and will fill roles that fall in to both the PSC and PMC category; the difference between offering training on weapons systems and operating the same weapons systems can shift in an instant.

The categorization of PMSCs has provided some conceptual confusion, inherently because the finite categorization of such entities necessitates that the PMSC is fixed in terms of services provided (Prem, 2018), which is undeniably not the case. Some have suggested that once a PSC

progresses into PMC contracts it should be considered a PMC. This offers a fairly narrow and limiting perspective. Some have argued that PMCs fall underneath the umbrella of PSCs, wherein they make up a small subset of the active entities around the world (McFate, 2014, Marten, 2019). Semantically this is true, however it fails to accommodate the fluctuating nature of services offered and provided. For transparency and uniformity's sake it is better to use the overarching "PMSC" as it encompasses all services beyond just direct combat action.

The term PMSC offers a far more encompassing categorization that reflects the reality of these entities. This is reflected within international organizations as UN reports define PMSCs as "a corporate entity which provides on a compensatory basis military and/or security services by physical persons and/or legal entities", further defining military services to include strategic planning, intelligence, investigations, reconnaissance, knowledge transfers, material and technical support, satellite surveillance, and other related activities (UN, 2019). This laundry list highlights the all-encompassing nature of the PMSC label. By using the term PMSC we also effectively engage with the broader and evolving range of services these actors provide, compelling us to draw a line in the sand between military or security services, or offensive and defensive services (Chesterman & Lehnart, 2009). PMSCs have diversified at the same pace at which their clients' needs have and will continue to do so as the nature of security and warfare evolves. Though the armed military service providers of the PMSC world get the most attention, the intelligence and other service providers are more numerous and arguably equally consequential (Moesgaard, 2013). This serves to highlight the importance of a broader catchall term for these actors. Certainly, traditional categorizations of PMCs would fail to include many of the services that now impact all theatres where PMSCs are involved.

When speaking broadly about PMSCs it is important to note that many of the largest western PMSCs are often also part of a larger corporation (Jaher & Kummel, 2007). The Constellis group, for example, has been hard at work over the past 10 years consolidating many industry leaders in the field, most notably Triple Canopy and Academi (formerly Blackwater), whilst maintaining their domestic security, K9 services, construction, and disaster relief services. Though many PMSCs around the world still specialize in fields within the military realm, these lines are becoming increasingly blurred. The omnipresence of PMSCs has been well documented. The UN

working group on the use of mercenaries notes that some state armies may be unable to maintain their wide-reaching military operations without the support of PMSC contractors (UN, 2020). Many PMSCs have either diversified into non-traditional security-related fields or have been swallowed up by larger corporate entities (Prem, 2018), using these more palatable services as cover for their military activity.

By utilising the broader PMSC label we can avoid allowing these diversified companies to slip through the cracks created by the semantics and minutia of definitions. The qualifications below are not fixed, nor are they proposed as a benchmark for further work. They are used herein to highlight the varied nature of PMSCs and to provide a framework of reference and comparison.

- 1) Independence: PMSCs exist independently from their client base, but are often integrated temporarily into their clients' organization, whether it is a state or private organization.
- 2) Motivation: PMSCs are motivated and bound by their contracts for business and financial gain, as well as company reputation.
- 3) Recruitment: The recruitment process for PMSC contractors is vague, they are often recruited from veterans of militaries in the host region.
- 4) Organization: PMSCs are organized hierarchically in both a military chain of command and in a corporate form to a degree.
- 5) Clientele: PMSCs work for a variety of clientele, most often states but can and do execute contracts with private companies, NGOs and international organizations.
- 6) Services: PMSCs offer a wide ranging and continuously evolving range of services across the military and security spectrum.

5. Categorizing PMSCs – A Modernized Tip of the Spear Typology

The breadth of this PMSC category required further distinction; categorizing these entities is important in both policy and practice. We cannot expect to include a PMSC that provides base construction and reconnaissance services, and a PMSC specializing in attack

helicopters under the same category. Consequently, many experts have categorized PMSCs under a variety of determining factors (Avant, 2005; Singer, 2008; Moesgaard, 2013, Fulloon, 2020). Some categories are based on the contracts and clientele, whilst others are based on the services provide (Avant, 2005; Singer, 2008).

A common distinction is between “active” and “passive services (Chesterman & Lehnhart, 2009), wherein the line is drawn between combat and military services (active) versus training and support services (passive). Whilst the argument can be made that some PMSCs are “little more than glorified mercenary operations” (ibid), the reality is that a majority of PMSCs sit more in the passive category, whilst the most consequential and largest PMSCs firmly operate with both active and passive capabilities. Other experts have taken this categorization further, opting for multiple categories, dividing PMSCs based on services provided into four categories: military operations, military support operations, defensive protection services, and non-lethal security operations (Chesterman & Lehnhart, 2009). Alternatively, others have labelled these categories as: the combat offensive PMC, the combat defensive PMC, the noncombat offensive PMC, and the noncombat defensive PMC (Fulloon, 2020). Offering slightly different distinctions from category to category, Fulloon’s distinction remains largely similar to other four categorized groupings. These broader and more reflective groupings offer more appropriate categorization, considering the wider range of services that can very easily blur the active and passive divide. However, these categorizations are limited by the exclusive focus on the military aspect, letting the security aspect fall by the wayside. That is to say they are focused on PMCs as opposed to PMSCs. PMSCs have and continue to morph and cross categorized lines (Krahmann, 2005). As such there have been limited attempts at firmly categorizing PMSCs along these lines.

Due to the shifting nature of the field the most apt categorization of PMSCs must also be fluid and not divided along concrete lines. Singer’s “Tip of the Spear” model provides the most flexibility (2008), allowing for PMSC categories to be placed along the spear as it were. This typology is centered around frontline, midline, and backline PMSCs (labelled by singer as military provider firms, military consulting firms, and military support firms, respectively) with the tip of the spear (frontline) representing more kinetic and combat oriented firms, working

backwards towards the end of the spear (backline) for more support and less combat oriented firms. Singer's tip of the spear model has been widely replicated and used across academia and has evolved to reflect the realities of the PMSC industry. Singer's model has been used and modified by a number of academics in the field (Avant, 2005). It is important to note is that this modern tip of the spear typology is best understood as a sliding scale as opposed to firm categories, wherein PMSCs can be situated at different points along the spear based on their activities. This view takes a more consequentialist approach wherein PMSCs are categorized based on their actions and not on their proposed contracts. As such this allows observers to accurately situate and reflect on PMSCs in a more realistic fashion.

Singer defines the tip of the spear as 'Military provider firms' defined by their focus on services at the forefront of conflicts, designed at shifting the tactical environment. These firms supplement or outright add value to existing military forces through direct action, this can include providing air support, carrying out critical offensives, providing missile or air strikes, and direct control or command over forces (2008). Effectively the tip of the spear, or the frontline, means PMSC activity that supports the literal frontline of a conflict, wherein PMSC units are actively engaged in the conflict. Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) serves as an example of a firm whose purview has fallen into the frontline categorization. The South African based PMSC was hired by the Mozambique government in 2019 in the fight against the Islamic extremist insurgency in its northern province Cabo Delgado (Østensen & Bukkvoll, 2021). In addition to significant training programs DAG provided air superiority and combat on the frontlines in efforts to push back and end the insurgency (ibid). Notably in the battle of Palma in spring 2021 wherein DAG flew civilians and government officials to safety, as well as engaging directly with the insurgents. It should be noted, however, that there are claims of indiscriminate shooting resulting in civilian casualties against DAG (ibid). Other examples of PMSCs that often fall into the frontline category are Academi, Erinys International, Sandline International, Triple Canopy, and the now defunct Executive Outcomes. These are some of the bigger names in the field whilst dozens of smaller outfits are active with services that fall within the frontline category.

'Military consulting firms' or the midline of the spear is occupied primarily by PMSCs that provide services aimed at indirectly altering the tactical landscape, as Singer notes, these

services include a wide variety of training services, and strategic, operational, or organizational analysis (2008). Beyond this the modern PMSC has evolved to be able to provide significant reconnaissance services to supplement activities (McFate, 2015). Furthermore, site and asset security services should be included within the midline classification as they often do not engage with frontline activities but still possess lethal capabilities and tactical importance. It is important to note that in some cases, PMSCs that provide armed security can and do slide up the scale into frontline territory by directly engaging in the conflict beyond defensive reactions (Ibid). A prominent midline PMSC would be the Vinnell Corporation (now a part of Northrop Gruman), which operates virtually anywhere the US military operates as well as in support of allied country militaries. These contracts mostly involve weapons and equipment training, organizational consulting, and intelligence assistance (McFate, 2017), and are notably active in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Libya. These midline PMSCs are the most common from a western perspective, operating in virtually every conflict zone of destabilized area providing security or training. Other examples include MPRI, Dyncorp, Aegis Defence Services, and Defion Internacional.

The backline is described by Singer as 'Military Support Firms' who provide nonlethal support services. These services can include logistics, intelligence, transportation, amongst other similar services (Singer, 2008). These PMSCs are the most common and have become integrated into most western militaries. Providing critical intelligence and building bases and staffing support staff for prolonged deployments. The backline PMSC features a wide array of examples, one of the bigger names historically was Brown and Root Services, who famously secured contracts provided construction and logistics for military bases in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan (Singer, 2008). A list of backline PMSCs is incredibly diverse and varies substantially based on how you define the category, however it should be noted that most midline PMSCs undertake some backline functionalities.

The ToS model is a sliding scale of contemporary PMSC categorization, to attempt to firmly categorize PMSCs into neat unmoving categories is near impossible and would do a disservice to the study of such entities. Such a categorization would either disregard the fluidity of the modern PMSC in terms of services provided or create a list of categories of PMSCs that would

be wholly unmanageable due to its length. The fluidity of a modified ToS model allows for PMSCs to move up and down depending on the case study or contract in question. It has been well documented that PMSCs can and do shift the nature of their services provided on a case-by-case basis (McFate, 2015). To highlight the importance of this flexibility we must look no further than the Constellis group. Constellis offers services across the spectrum of PMSC activity, including disaster relief, demining, investigations and intelligence, and armed security/training (Prem, 2008). Amongst many other services, Constellis serves as a picture-perfect example of the need for flexible categorization.

Categorizing PMSCs is imperative for the field. PMSCs have evolved to be so diverse in composition, services, and clientele, meaning that two companies can be wildly different under the PMSC umbrella. For instance, take Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) or Aegis Defence Services. The South Africa based DAG operates frontline, combative services to countries all around Africa, notably offering air superiority in the form of attack helicopters, as well as extensive training and advisory roles. DAG has been notably active in Mozambique through 2019 (Østensen & Bukkvoll, 2021). Likewise, Aegis - based out of the UK, operated in combat roles throughout the Iraq war (McFate, 2017). Contrast these companies to Brown and Root, who predominantly executed logistics and base building contracts for the US military in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq (ibid). Further diversifying the field is a company like Defion Internacional, based out of Lima, Peru Defion operates on a wide variety of contracts and pulls its contractors from South American military and police veterans, both for their own contracts and others. Now consider all of these companies and it is easy to see why diverse categories are important. Discourse, theory, and policy that may apply to Brown and Root certainly needs to be different than that that applies to DAG. Further, we must recognize that these categories must not be rigid but must be malleable as the PMSC world changes.

6. Russia's PMC Wagner

PMC Wagner, known colloquially as the Wagner Group and referred to herein as Wagner, exists ostensibly as an interconnected network of mercenary groups, extraction companies, military trainers, and political strategists all indirectly connected to the Kremlin

(Rondeaux, 2019). Depending on who you ask Wagner's very existence is up for debate (McKinnon, 2021), no such entity formally exists in Russia nor anywhere else in the world. Despite this, the purpose of the group remains clear to outside observers: to advance the Kremlin's foreign policy objective whilst maintaining a shroud of plausible deniability. The group operates as an extension of Moscow's arm throughout Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and South America (T-Intelligence, 2021), often accompanied by Russian-backed business ventures, most often natural resource extraction companies. It is important to note that Wagner is not the only Russian entity operating abroad, this coupled with the international spotlight on Wagner can lead to conflating these other Russian actors with Wagner. As such this work will focus only on Wagner activity confirmed by firsthand reports, OSINT experts, and international organizations. Wagner mercenaries are known to be referenced as 'musicians' both by themselves and networks claiming to speak for them (T-Intelligence, 2021). Wagner exists in a grey zone between state and non-state actor. Half of academics, policy makers, and media pundits refer to and study Wagner as a PMSC and within that lens, whilst the other half consider Wagner to be an extension of the Kremlin. This division has been detrimental for the development of the body of literature and policy that pertains to Wagner. This division is reflective of the lack of a coherent body of work, which in turn is due to the assumption that Wagner fits the bill of western notions of PMSCs. The crux of this division lies in the structure, or lack thereof with reference to Wagner. Wagner does not have a clear paper trail or registration that traces the lineage of the group.

6.1 Tracing Wagner's Framework

The Wagner network is ostensibly linked to the Kremlin through oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, nicknamed "Putin's chef" (Rondeaux, 2019). Prigozhin acts as a buffer between Wagner and the Kremlin, affording Moscow a modicum of plausible deniability. Prigozhin achieved notoriety as the founder of the Internet Research Agency, the troll factory that interfered in the 2016 US presidential in favor of Donald Trump. Prigozhin first rose to prominence in Russia as a close friend of Putin and was awarded many catering contracts with the Kremlin. This contributes to the vague nature of the Wagner Group as they operate in a grey area between state and non-state actor, formed through an obscure network with inextricable

links to the Russian state (de Deus Pereira, 2022). Such an entity appeals to the Kremlin for a host of reasons, they offer some separation from the Kremlin and the ability to operate in areas where Russia cannot openly operate and distancing the activity from Russian foreign policy rhetoric, like non-state actors they are not subject to body bag syndrome (de Deus Pereira, 2022), and importantly because mercenaries are illegal under Russian law (Rondeaux, 2019). Article 359 of the Russian criminal code makes mercenaryism illegal, though PSCs are given some legal leeway to exist and operate outside of Russia (de Deus Pereira, 2022). Wagner members are often recruited from veterans of the armed forces from Russia and states under the Russian sphere of influence (ibid).

Wagner's genealogy can be traced back through a number of semi-state actors and PSCs, such as Moran Security Group, Anti-Terror Orel, group, and Ruscorp, amongst others, that served as predecessors to Wagner. Such groups have been active throughout the Middle East and Africa in support of Russian foreign policy objectives (Rondeaux, 2019), primarily in site security roles. These entities have provided valuable the roadmap for Wagner as we know it today. However, Russian use of Wagner shows continuity with Russian foreign policy and its historical strategies. Throughout the Cold War the Kremlin deployed "hundreds of comrade tourists, essentially covert military operators" in support of Moscow's foreign policy objectives (Rondeaux, 2019). Wagner was reportedly founded by and named for Dmitry Utkin, callsign "Wagner" (a tribute to Adolf Hitler's favourite composer) (de Deus Pereira, 2022). Notably Utkin was decorated by the Kremlin in 2016, most likely for his role in operations with Wagner (ibid). Whilst Utkin is reportedly the founder of the military arm of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin operates as the financial backer and political link to the Kremlin. Prigozhin is a businessman with significant links to Putin who has been growing in influence since Putin came to power (Rondeaux, 2019). Prigozhin first gained international notoriety when he was accused of running the "troll factory" aimed at influencing the 2016 US presidential election to benefit Donald Trump (de Deus Pereira, 2022). Prigozhin has been linked to a host of extraction companies in Africa where Wagner has a presence; Evro Polis in Syria, Lobaye Invest in the CAR, and M Invest in Sudan, serve as some of the most prominent examples (ibid). Notably, Prigozhin and several of his companies have been sanctioned by both the US and the EU (de Deus Pereira, 2022). The Prigozhin puppet master

mythos has been effective and beneficial for the Kremlin, with the oligarch appearing in meetings around the African continent, and his companies benefitting from Wagner activity as well as acting as their logistics network (Fasanotti, 2022). The separation Wagner affords the Kremlin is not to be underestimated both in its efficiency and in its complication of the subject.

6.2 Wagner's Global Reach

Like any military entity Wagner forces are trained at home before being deployed abroad, despite most of their members being military members of Russia and other former Soviet states. Wagner trains supported by Russian military and intelligence personnel at a location attached to the 10th Special Mission Brigade of GRU Spetsnaz in Mol'kino, Russia (Doxsee, et al. 2021). Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine served as the first test of Wagner Group's utility. Wagner troops were instrumental in battles in both Crimea and the Donbas regions, providing training, operating equipment, and engaging in combat operations (Sukhankin, 2019). Estimates suggest there were as many as 5,000 Wagner troops at the peak of the conflict, pivotal in strategic operations on Russia's behalf (ibid).

In October 2015 Wagner was deployed to Syria in support of President Al-Assad's government, undertaking key roles in battles and successfully winning a stake in the country's energy industry for Prigozhin-linked companies, and indirectly, the Kremlin (Galeotti, 2016b). As many as 2000 Wagner troops played a key role in recapturing parts of the Deir ez-Zor province, and a number of other key strategic points such as the Tiyas airfield in eastern Syria. In February 2018 Wagner troops sustained significant casualties at the hands of US military air strikes, marking the first time that US forces and Wagner troops engaged (ibid). Wagner 'musicians' have been omnipresent in Libya since 2015 (Rondeaux, 2019). Wagner operatives have served in critical frontline roles in support of General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) against the

internationally and UN-recognized Government of National Accord. Wagner has engaged in training as well as combat operations, including the assault on Tripoli. Beyond direct combat intervention and training Wagner helped to secure and guard critical LNA infrastructure such as the ports of Tobruk, Derna, Benghazi, and Sirte, as well as oil refineries, airfields, and other strategic points (T-Intelligence, 2021). Wagner notably pilot Russian fighter aircraft and operate advanced air defence systems on behalf of the LNA (U.S Department of Defence, 2020). Wagner continue to be present and operate in Libya despite ceasefire agreements that necessitate the removal of mercenaries and foreign fighters.

With Wagner's success in Ukraine, Syria, and Libya, the Kremlin expanded their purview, and the Wagner network grew throughout Africa and South America. As of February 2022, Wagner has had a footprint in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, CAR, Venezuela, Sudan, Madagascar, Mozambique, and recently Mali, with a rumoured influence in another half a dozen countries (T-Intelligence, 2021). In early 2018 reports emerged of Wagner 'instructors' and Prigozhin linked extraction companies making waves in the CAR. Wagner had arrived to help train the CAR military and assist in the government's fight against rebel elements in the country's northern regions. Despite claims by the CAR that Wagner was brought in exclusively for training evidence suggests that Wagner operatives were not only directly involved in combat but perpetrated significant human rights abuses (Rondeaux, 2019). Wagner fronts "Lobaye Invest", and "Sewa Security" have secured a share in the country's gold and diamond mining industry as payment.

Across the Atlantic in Venezuela, Wagner was brought in to support embattled Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro after he faced significant opposition in 2019 (T-Intelligence, 2021). Wagner operatives assisted in providing security, training for Maduro-backed forces and militias,

and recruited informants. In 2020, Rosneft, the largest Russian oil company in Venezuela, sold all its assets to an unnamed company owned by the Russian government, further solidifying Moscow's interests. Wagner has been present in the Sudan since 2017, assisting in training the state's military and suppressing anti-government demonstrations. Wagner affiliated companies Meroe Gold and M Invest operate in mining endeavours throughout the country with the expressed consent of President Omar al-Bashir, and in 2019 the Kremlin confirmed that "Russian companies" are training the Sudanese army (ibid). To the southeast Mozambique called in the Wagner group to deal with the bloody ISIS-linked insurgency in the northern region of Cabo Delgado. Wagner undertook combat operations against the insurgents, however they sustained significant casualties and subsequently pulled out of the country (Fasanotti, 2022). In Madagascar political strategists hired by Prigozhin were involved in the 2018 presidential election in exchange for a stake in the country's national chromite mine (ibid). It was later reported that the mine was guarded by armed Russian individuals. Most recently, Wagner arrived in Mali for supposed training (de Deus Pereira, 2022). Evidence has since emerged that the Russian 'instructors' have not only participated in combat but have sustained casualties. Further reports have emerged of 'white soldiers' massacring more than 100 people near the city of Moura, and other instances of human rights abuses and war crimes (ibid). These reports presumably point to Wagner as further evidence mounts.

Questions remain about the degree of control the Kremlin exerts over Wagner, and how they fit into Moscow's foreign policy goals. Is Wagner a PMSC or mercenary group loosely linked to the Russian state? Or are they under direct orders from the Kremlin and Russia's intelligence apparatus? Whilst these questions cannot be definitively answered by someone on the outside,

what is undeniable is Wagner's presence and impact wherever they operate. Wagner operates as a force multiplier allowing the Kremlin to extend beyond where it can traditionally or openly operate (Blank, 2017). However, the modicum of separation and plausible deniability afforded to the Kremlin also means Wagner cannot easily be held accountable for its apparent human rights abuses. Wagner represents a critical part of Russia's proxy warfare strategy and will likely outlast Putin's tenure (Blank, 2017). The narrative surrounding Wagner group, in terms of its label as a PMSC, Prigozhin's involvement, and its capabilities, all serve to benefit the Wagner mythos and increase its impact as a foreign policy tool. Therefore, it is important to categorically assess where it fits within the broader discourse of state and non-state actors.

Chapter 7 Comparative Analysis

The discourse surrounding Wagner centers largely on their influence, activities, and humanitarian abuses. The pervasive labelling of Wagner as a private military company has been left largely unquestioned by literature. A significant portion of academics, policy makers, and journalists conflate the self-prescribed name of "PMC Wagner" as an indication of what kind of actor Wagner really is. This notion is one that only serves to benefit both Wagner and Russia. The mythos of a shadowy organization and an oligarch benefactor exerting their influence throughout Africa not only creates a compelling story but also serves to distance the Kremlin from its actions. This perceived distance allows Moscow to reap the benefits whilst washing its hands of culpability. Russian-owned businesses benefit directly from Wagner's involvement, some of these businesses are then even bought out by Russian state-owned businesses after some time has passed (Ulmer & Parraga, 2022). More apparently, Wagner extends the Kremlin's influence in regions where western powers traditionally have had a foothold, and bolsters Moscow's sphere of influence.

Assessing if Wagner can accurately be described as a PMSC or a mercenary group can be useful in assessing culpability and for addressing their growing influence. Throughout this chapter I

will analyze, on a case-by-case basis, how Wagner fits in relation to the definitions and categories laid out in chapters 4 and 5. The reason for using varied cases is twofold: Firstly, to encompass the broad range of activities of the Wagner network, and secondly, to highlight the notion that Wagner can easily fit into different groupings in different cases.

7.1 Mercenary vs Wagner

The terms mercenary and PMSC are often conflated, both by definition and practicality, though there is some overlap they largely occupy different roles. When it comes to Wagner many characteristics often attributed to mercenaries can also be applied to the group. In this section we will compare Wagner's operations to international legal and academic definitions of mercenaries. When applying the definition of mercenary from the Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions Wagner can easily be defined as a mercenary. As a refresher, the attributes for mercenaryism in the Geneva Conventions are as follows:

A mercenary 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 the 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.

When examined in the context of Wagner's operations in Libya, Wagner can neatly fit this definition of a mercenary. In Libya Wagner (a) was recruited abroad to fight on behalf of Haftar's LNA; (b) is known to take direct part in the conflict, notably in the Tripoli offensive beginning in spring 2019; (c) Wagner is seemingly motivated by financial gain, investigations reveal a salary of upwards of \$3000 USD a month, far beyond what any of Haftar's LNA could hope to make. Further evidence suggests that Russian oil companies have substantially benefitted from Wagner's involvement (Rondeaux, 2019); (d) Wagner operatives are neither a national of the parties in the conflict nor a resident of the territory; (e) Though there is likely some integration of Wagner troops into the LNA given the longevity of Wagner's deployment, they are not considered to be part of the armed forces; (f) Wagner was not openly sent by a state that is not a party to the conflict, since Russia formally denies the existence of and its connection to the Wagner group. Therefore, when it comes to Wagner's operations in Libya since 2015, Wagner can fall under the label of mercenaryism according to the Geneva Conventions.

The other widely cited international legal definition of a mercenary is the United Nations International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries of 1989, this apparatus builds upon the definition put forth in the Geneva Conventions. The first section of this definition is identical to that proposed within the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Convention, omitting only one point (a mercenary does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities). The second portion however elaborates as follows:

2. A mercenary is also any person who, in any other situation:

(a) Is specially recruited locally or abroad for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of

violence aimed at:

(i) Overthrowing a Government or otherwise undermining the constitutional order of a State; or

(ii) Undermining the territorial integrity of a State;

(b) Is motivated to take part therein essentially by the desire for significant private gain and is prompted by the promise or payment of material compensation;

(c) Is neither a national nor a resident of the State against which such an act is directed;

(d) Has not been sent by a State on official duty; **and**

(e) Is not a member of the armed forces of the State on whose territory the act is undertaken

Continuing with the discussion of Wagner's role in Libya it remains clear that Wagner's activities within Libya fit under international legal definitions of mercenaryism. (a) Wagner was recruited abroad for the express purpose of participating in an act of violence aimed at overthrowing a government. Despite claims that Wagner operates in Libya as military trainers their participation in combat is well documented. Furthermore, Wagner supports the LNA which aims to destabilize and overthrow the internationally and UN recognized GNA; (b) As previously discussed Wagner's motivations are clearly financial from an individual perspective (payments far beyond what individuals could hope to make elsewhere), network perspective (as with other regions the Prigozhin network of companies has greatly profited from Libya), and at a state level (Wagner's intervention hopes to grow the Russian sphere of influence, and has significantly benefitted Russian owned businesses) (Rondeaux, 2019); (c) Wagner operatives are collectively neither a nationals nor residents of Libya; (d) Wagner has not been formally sent by a state on official duty; and (e) Wagner operatives are not a member of the LNA. When examined through the lens of these international legal definitions of mercenaries it is clear that Wagner can be defined as mercenaries. The nebulous nature of Wagner and its activities means that the aforementioned points can be argued or outright avoided through loopholes and discourse framing. It is commonly understood that the international legal mechanisms that apply to mercenaries and PMSCs are lacking and do not encompass a wide enough scope (McFate, 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider the voices of experts in the field and how they define mercenaries and address the shortcomings of international legal definitions. As discussed in chapter five we have laid out seven major qualifiers for an entity to be considered a mercenary, taking in to account the opinions and classifications of experts in the field:

Effectively there are seven major characteristics commonly used to distinguish modern mercenaries, pulled together from various experts and international institutions (Singer, 2008; Frye, 2005; Marten, 2019; McFate, 2014)

- 7) Independence: Mercenaries are not integrated in a meaningful way into a national force and are only bound by a limited contract.
- 8) Motivation: Mercenaries are motivated primarily by financial gain, not by further ideological or political goals.
- 9) Recruitment: Mercenaries are recruited through vague measures so as to avoid a clear paper trail and culpability on the part of the employers.
- 10) Organization: Mercenary groups are ad hoc formations of individuals with little organization or oversight.
- 11) Clientele: Mercenaries will work for virtually anyone, and do not limit their employers to “legitimate” actors.
- 12) Services: Mercenaries are often limited to combat operations and limited training.
- 13) Foreign: A mercenary is not a citizen or resident of the state in which he or she is fighting, nor are they hired by their native country.

When we apply the above to Wagner and its activities in Libya its labelling as a mercenary group is slightly less definitive. 1) Wagner is not integrated in a meaningful way with the LNA. 2) Wagner and its operatives are very likely motivated purely for financial gain, though it is all but insured the wider Wagner network operates in support of Russia’s ambitions. 3) The vague nature of Wagner and its operatives is evidenced by the fact that only a few dozen Wagner soldiers have been positively identified, and their leadership and recruitment process are largely contested. 4) Wagner is known to operate more similarly to a traditional military outfit in Libya with a clear command structure. In this way they do not mirror most mercenary groups. 6) In the case of Libya Wagner works for the LNA against the UN recognized GNA government, and for Russian private businesses, there is little evidence of Wagner operating for illegitimate actors. 7) Neither Wagner nor its operatives are a citizen or resident of Libya, and

the fact that the Kremlin denies the linkages to Wagner means they were not “officially” hired by the Russian state.

In the case of Wagner’s operations in Libya, it is my assessment that they can fit under the label of a mercenary group. Wagner supports the LNA in combat operations as a foreign actor and is motivated primarily by financial gain. It is important to consider that the activities and organization of Wagner is constantly in flux and can shift as required. Because an actor fits neatly in to one category in one context does not necessitate it will maintain this shape in other environments. The most significant detriment to discussing Wagner in the mould of a mercenary group is the unknown. We cannot conclusively say that Wagner is an instrument of the Kremlin, nor an independent company, and it is entirely possible that the discourse surrounding the overall cohesiveness and organisation of Wagner is overblown. Wagner can be considered as a loose network of mercenary groups working at the behest of the Kremlin and Russian companies. This further muddies the water, but it must be taken into account when discussing Wagner.

7.2 PMSC vs Wagner (Framework)

PMSCs differ from mercenaries in a variety of ways including, services, structure, transparency, and clientele. They are more structured and openly registered corporate identities with legal contracts; In practice they can be similar to mercenary groups however they offer a much wider range of noncombat services. In addition to diverse services PMSCs are also more clearly structured entities, with a paper trail verifying their existence and validating them in the eyes of much of the international community. In chapter 4.5 we laid out descriptors for PMSCs:

- 7) Independence: PMSCs exist independently from their client base, but are often integrated temporarily into their client’s organization, whether it is a state or private organization.
- 8) Motivation: PMSCs are motivated and bound by their contracts for business and financial gain, as well as company reputation.

- 9) Recruitment: The recruitment process for PMSC contractors is vague, they are often recruited from veterans of militaries in the host region.
- 10) Organization: PMSCs are organized hierarchically in both a military chain of command and in a corporate form to a degree.
- 11) Clientele: PMSCs work for a variety of clientele, most often states but can and do execute contracts with private companies, NGOs and international organizations.
- 12) Services: PMSCs offer a wide ranging and continuously evolving range of services across the military and security spectrum.

Applying these descriptors with reference to Wagner's continued involvement in CAR, reveals that Wagner can indeed fit under the scope of a PMSC. 1) Wagner undoubtedly exists independently from the CAR military; however, they have been integrated into the broader CAR security apparatus, highlighted by Wagner security officers working closely with the President Faustin-Archange Touadéra (Marten, 2019). 2) On the surface it is inarguable that Wagner at an individual and network level are motivated by financial gain. This is evidenced further by the gold and diamond mining concessions given to Prigozhin and Russian linked companies (T-Intelligence, 2021). From a broader perspective the argument can be made that Wagner is further motivated by political and influence gained on behalf of the Kremlin. 3) As previously noted, Wagner's recruitment process is infamously vague and varied. 4) In the CAR Wagner is known to have organized into military style units and command structures (Marten, 2019). 5) Wagner is working directly for the CAR and its military. 6) In the CAR Wagner has largely served in training, combat, and security roles. It is likely however that Wagner supports in further reconnaissance and intelligence roles.

With reference to Wagner operations in the CAR they do mostly emulate the typical role and characteristics of a PMSC as laid out in the above qualifiers. However, it is important to highlight that one of the most important characteristics of a PMSC is their existence and recognition as a corporate entity that necessitates separation from the state. In this capacity we see the biggest differentiation between Wagner and PMSCs; Wagner's very existence is denied by both themselves and the Kremlin, and there is no such entity registered anywhere in the

world. The only way Wagner emulates these entities is with the network of extraction and security companies that are sometimes registered in countries where Wagner operates. However, these companies can easily be considered as the employers of Wagner in their given states and do little to build a corporate framework for the group.

7.3 PMSC vs Wagner (Frontline)

In Chapter 5 we laid out the categories of PMSCs. These categories reflected Singer's "tip of the spear" methodology which incorporates elements from other experts and has been updated for the modern PMSC. The first category, the frontline PMSC, refers to PMSCs that carry out direct action on a conflict. This can take the form of air support, boots on the ground, advanced weaponry, and direct control over armed forces, to name a few (Singer, 2008). This group represents the most controversial and sensationalized category of PMSC, as they are often involved directly in a conflict in a kinetic fashion. Wagner fits most neatly into this category. In Syria, where Wagner has been active since 2015, Wagner has served a variety of frontline roles. In return for a stake in the country's energy industry (Galeotti, 2016b) upwards of 2000 Wagner operatives were instrumental in securing key strategic points throughout Syria. These points include airfields, ports, and oilfields (ibid). Wagner was further instrumental in assaults on the city of Deir ez-Zor, clearing the city of IS militants. In February of 2018 Wagner contractors alongside Syrian armed forces and Iranian-backed militias attempted to capture an oilfield near Khasham, Syria from US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (T-Intelligence, 2021). Wagner sustained significant casualties at the hands of US military air strikes. Since this setback Wagner has maintained a presence in Syria, based out of the T4 airbase in western Syria. The case of Wagner as a Frontline PMSC is fairly cut and dry. In early 2019, Wagner snipers were evidenced by photo and video accounts to be present across the Idlib frontline in expectation of

a Syrian Army Offensive (Marten, 2019). In December 2020, with IS attacks intensifying Wagner withdrew from the Deir Ez-Zor province (T-Intelligence, 2021).

There is a mountain of evidence of Wagner being directly involved in combat and humanitarian abuses from eyewitness accounts, NGO reports, and OSINT investigations. This role is perhaps the most effective role Wagner occupies, acting as a force multiplier at the frontline for the states where Wagner is present. Evidence highlights Wagner's direct role in the conflict, casualties attributed to the group, firsthand reports, and news reports, all cement this notion (T-Intelligence, 2021). Syria is far from an isolated occurrence, Wagner is known to be active in combat scenarios in Libya, CAR, Ukraine and most recently Mali. Whilst states are quick to assert Russian forces are only there for training purposes, evidence suggests that Wagner is intentionally and extensively involved in combat operations. We have seen several instances of Wagner casualties in CAR, Libya, Syria, and Mali, often attributed to clashes with rebel groups. This not only serves to verify their presence, but further attribute the frontline role to the company.

7.4 PMSC vs Wagner (Midline)

Midline PMSCs, or 'military consulting firms' are those that aim to indirectly alter the battlefield landscape (Singer, 2008). This may take the form of anything from training to intelligence and reconnaissance. Midline PMSCs should also include site security services, as these services do not directly seek to alter the battlefield or engage in frontline activities but do have tactical importance aimed at maintaining the status quo. Midline, or training roles, are the most common official roles for Wagner involvement in a state. In states where Wagner's is present (though not officially labeled "Wagner" they are referred to as 'Russian instructors'), for example in Libya, Syria, Venezuela, Mali, and Sudan, amongst others, the official capacity of Wagner is to train the state's military and police force (de Deus Pereira, 2022). In Sudan in

particular, Wagner has continued to train the Sudanese army as well as state-backed militias. Reports dating back to 2017 indicate Wagner had been deployed in Sudan (Ледвид et al, 2017). Their presence has involved supporting and training President Omar al-Bashir's military with training and suppressing anti-government protests. In return Wagner affiliated entities Meroe Gold and M Invest received the right to search for gold in the country, and "hammered out beneficial conditions for Russian Companies" (ibid). Video evidence showed what appeared to be Wagner instructors training Sudanese military (ibid) highlighting Wagner's midline role in the country. Wagner reportedly initially had 300 contractors working in the country under the auspices of Prigozhin's M Invest, further reports indicate that over 500 Wagner contractors were training military and police elements in the Darfur region (ibid).

After al-Bashir was ousted, Wagner continues to support General Mohamed Hamdan in training the Sudanese military, despite claims from Sudan that Wagner is not present in the country (Fasanotti, 2022). Though there is some evidence of kinetic action by Wagner in Sudan their activities have largely been limited to security roles and military training. Wagner's role as training has been one of its most lucrative, securing training roles in a number of countries. Following the 2021 coup d'état in Sudan, Wagner's activities seemingly expanded, obtaining lucrative mining concessions, and operating in security roles for key assets and mines throughout Sudan (ibid). This midline role is one that Wagner occupies often, however evidence suggests that while their official capacity in most states is for military training they can and often do blur the line between frontline and midline PMSCs. Elements of Wagner activities fit the midline role in most countries they are active, including Venezuela, CAR, and Mali. It is important to additionally highlight that Wagner rarely exclusively sits in midline roles, outside of Venezuela and Sudan Wagner often moves beyond this boundary.

7.5 PMSC vs Wagner (Backline)

Backline PMSCs or 'Military Support Firms' are amongst the most numerous worldwide (Singer, 2008), but is the category most difficult to ascribe to Wagner in terms of their operations. Backline PMSCs provide nonlethal support services including, logistics, transportation, and other support services. The modern backline PMSC have evolved to contribute less impactful intelligence services as well (McFate, 2017). Typically, Wagner's

logistics needs are met through Prigozhin's network or Russian state apparatuses (Rondeaux, 2021). Likewise, most of Wagner's traditional intelligence needs are cared for by Russian security services or their host state. However, Wagner does conduct some manual intelligence and interrogations, their methods and activities can hardly be categorized as a backline PMSC. With reference to Wagner's activities there are few if any cases that fall under the purview of a backline PMSC. Wagner does not typically engage in logistics or support services, instead acting kinetically as a force multiplier. The closest example would be the Wagner-linked political strategists deployed in Madagascar alongside Wagner operators in training and security roles (T-Intelligence, 2021). However, political strategists do not fall under the purview of a PMSC. Moreover the security and training role of Wagner in Madagascar would fall under the label of a midline PMSC. Backline PMSCs can be seen as a western-centric form of PMSC. Though prevalent in western states, backline PMSCs are less often seen in non western states like China or Russia. In effect, Wagner rarely if ever fills the backline PMSC roles, at least not predominantly.

Chapter 8 Discussion of Results and Conclusions

Before diving into the discussion and results of this project it is important to again consider the context of both the group and the field. PMSCs and non-state actors as a whole are constantly evolving and the dynamics between them and other international actors are as well. PMSCs diversify, rebrand, and become defunct on a yearly basis. What's more is the relationship between PMSCs, and other actors are continuously evolving. The UN has been notably anti-PMSC and yet has begun to engage with the actors (Spearin, 2018a). So too are the sources of PMSCs evolving, new companies are emerging from countries that are not historically the source of PMSCs, China for instance has a booming PMSC industry (McFate, 2017). Wagner too is an unknown and evolving variable. Wagner's services and activities have evolved far beyond what was first seen in 2014 and 2015 and will likely continue to evolve. Because of the expertise of OSINT analysts and NGOs worldwide we also learn more and more about Wagner on what seems like a monthly basis. Because of the factors discussed above it is important to consider this project in context; it is not intended to be a rigid and timeless research into the Wagner Group. The goal of this project is to assess where Wagner sits today

in relation to contemporary literature, policy, international law, and discourse surrounding PMSCs and Wagner itself. As such the results and recommendations within should be considered another step along the path to further analyzing Wagner, and certainly should not be considered within the context and time it was written.

8.1 The Wagner-Kremlin Nexus

In sum we can see that when examining Wagner's activities, the group can, to a degree, fit into the varying categories of PMSCs and of mercenary groups. Without knowing the facts of Wagner's operations and structure we cannot definitively place the group. However, the comparisons can serve to question the notion that Wagner is in fact a PMSC or a private entity at all. Wagner exhibits a number of differences between themselves and the characteristics most commonly associated with western PMSCs. It is important to highlight that most literature and categorizations are heavily informed and influenced by Western ideals and norms, as such we must consider that these definitions and categories of PMSCs could be notably western. Therefore, this discussion should be considered within that context. The most compelling argument is that Wagner is not a PMSC, and this argument rests on the evidence linking Wagner to the Russian security apparatus.

A number of conclusions can be taken from the comparison of Wagner activities to the categories and definitions of mercenary and PMSC groups in the previous chapter. Firstly, the ease with which PMSCs, PMSC adjacent groups, and entities like Wagner blur the lines of categorization and definition in different context highlights the importance of analyzing the structure of the organization and the degree of separation from the state. In the case of Wagner, this provides the biggest indication that Wagner should not be characterized as a PMSC. Whereas most PMSCs are characterized by corporate structures and contracts with clients, Wagner operates under a veil of secrecy. The fact that Wagner's existence is formally denied, and that no such entity exists legally beyond the network of companies in areas where Wagner is known to operate, casts significant doubt on Wagner being labelled a PMSC. The nebulous reality of the PMSC world means that PMSCs are notoriously hard to tie down to one host state. However, what most modern PMSCs share is a corporate and legal foundation that creates a traceable line of culpability for their PMSC services. While it is true that Wagner-

linked corporations such as Meroe Gold or M-Invest do have a legal basis in their host countries, they make no mention of security services and focus solely on resource extraction (Rondeaux, 2021).

Networks of ostensibly private Russian extraction companies linked to Prigozhin's network have been directly linked to the Wagner contractors through logistics paperwork (Margolin, 2019). The transport of Ural multi-purpose vehicles and even MI-8T helicopters through Prigozhin controlled supply lines link entities from Russia to Wagner elements throughout Africa (ibid). This serves to further entrench the link and lack of separation between the Kremlin and the Wagner network. On occasion, PMSCs who are employed by a state or work closely with their host states government, do utilise the states logistics operations, however the fact that Russia denies its linkages to Wagner entirely make this evidence noteworthy. Furthermore, Wagner's observed structure and operations provide evidence for a lack of separation between Wagner and the Russian state. For example, investigations have revealed that Wagner had often used Russian MOD aircraft to transport its operators and equipment in Libya, Syria, Sudan, and the CAR (Margolin, 2019). Before Wagner operatives are even deployed, they are trained in the Krasnodar region of Russia; Wagner training occurs attached to the 10th Special Mission Brigade of GRU Spetsnaz in Mol'kino, Russia (Jones, et al. 2021). There is a mountain of evidence linking Wagner directly to state apparatuses, however it is important to highlight that many PMSCs use the logistics pipelines of their host or contracted states, and this does not necessarily preclude them from being considered PMSCs. What is unique about the Wagner group is the mutually denied nature of the relationship, both Wagner and Russia deny a close relationship with the other. This lack of transparency and legal foundation at the root makes Wagner an anomaly amongst PMSCs. An investigation by the Center for Advanced Defence Studies (C4ADS) revealed direct linkages and paperwork connecting the Kremlin's logistics network to the Wagner contractors in Africa (Margolin, 2019). This evidence directly contravenes the Kremlin's denial of their involvement in the Wagner network, further highlighting the desire from Moscow to maintain separation from themselves from Wagner. Where there is smoke there is almost always fire, and in this case the smoke leads to an inextricable link between Wagner and the Russian state, and further separates Wagner from

the pervasive practice of labelling it as a PMSC.

The perceived centre piece of the Wagner network is Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, notorious for his association with the Russian “troll factory” that worked to influence the 2016 US Presidential elections, and an ally of Putin (Rondeaux, 2019). Prigozhin’s linkages throughout the Wagner operations has led to a number of sanctions against him and his companies (ibid). This mythos of Prigozhin as a puppet master behind the Wagner network both highlights the linkages between Wagner and the Kremlin, but also serves to distance the Kremlin from culpability. With a large portion of the media and academics discussing Prigozhin in detail it moves the spotlight away from the Kremlin. As Candace Rondeaux highlights:

“In Putin’s Russia, what does it take contractually to organize the recruitment, training, deployment, and payment scheme for hundreds or possibly thousands of presumably seasoned military veterans across thousands of miles of land and ocean territory?”
(2021)

It defies all logic that an entity such as Wagner would operate without significant oversight by the Russian state. However due to the aforementioned lack of clear definitions, and the inherently secretive nature of the PMSC industry, we cannot conclusively separate Wagner from the PMSC category based on existing mechanisms and literature, and it is beyond the scope of this project to lay out a new international legal framework for PMSCs. Approaching the topic instead from the lens of Russian hybrid warfare strategy also limits our field of view. Wagner and other Russian entities can, and often are, used in Russia foreign policy. The usefulness of Wagner or other Russian “PMSCs” is apparent, providing the Kremlin with a modicum of plausible deniability that fits within Russian foreign policy. It is important then to engage both from a policy and academic standpoint with realities and not with labels. That is to say, the prescribed label of a PMSC, should not be considered as a one-size-fits all, and instead should be discussed within the context of the PMSCs home/host state and state in which they are contracted.

As is the case with many of the prevalent modern PMSCs, Wagner can fit into a variety of categories based on the case in question as they are known to undertake a variety of roles. This is not a characteristic unique to Wagner, but one that makes categorizing PMSCs difficult and sometimes ineffective. It also suggests that, when it comes to entities like Wagner that may not fit neatly in to the PMSC or mercenary category, we may be better suited taking a more granular, consequence-based approach. This is reflected in the noted failure of existing international legal definitions surrounding PMSCs and Mercenaries (site S Macleod) that focus on events on a case-by-case basis that can be attributed directly to the entities on the ground, instead of trying to untangle the mess of obscured linkages that make up the Wagner network. From a research perspective, this should mean abandoning preconceived notions that Wagner operates and exists as any other PMSC and focusing instead on the reality that it operates as an extension of Russian hybrid warfare and an extension of the Kremlin's reach.

From this research I would assert that Wagner lies towards the semi state actor end of the spectrum as opposed to the PMSC end. Critics would suggest that the evidence linking the Kremlin to Wagner is insufficient to definitively categorize the group, and whilst that statement holds merit, I would assert that the burden of proof should lie more on proving that Wagner is private rather than proving the linkages. In this case there it is easier to attribute the actions and crimes of Wagner. The labelling of Wagner as a PMSC only serves to further remove Russia from culpability for the group's actions. Assessing culpability is becoming increasingly important in the study and policy surrounding the group, Wagner is already shrouded in secrecy and easily moves its fighters and groups around. 2022 has seen allegations against Wagner for gross human rights violations from a variety of countries. In Mali Wagner is thought to have committed many humanitarian abuses, notably contributing to a massacre of more than 300 civilians (Doxsee & Thompson, 2022), and the groups systematic arbitrary detentions, torture, and executions of CAR citizens is well documented (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The Wagner group operates relatively unchecked and will likely continue to carry out human rights abuses and exert Russian influence where the country will not or cannot openly operate.

Perhaps most interestingly, for those private companies that Wagner and Wagner predecessors do business with their primary ownership is the Russian state, meaning the Russian state should

be held responsible for their actions. Indeed, extraction companies in areas where Wagner is active and that do direct business with the group are often, at least partially, owned by the state. This relationship in conjunction with the mythos of Prigozhin as a “puppeteer” highlights Wagner’s thinly veiled link to the Russian state.

8.2 Criticism

The reality of studying a group like Wagner, and to a lesser extent PMSCs, is that it is all but impossible to find firsthand sources of contracts, structure, or operational details beyond witness accounts. As such the majority of evidence has to be gathered from third party sources, open-source investigations, and other sources. The sources we can find from either ex-Wagner operators, the Russian state, states that work with the group, or the group itself are less than revealing, subjects to doubts over veracity and whether they are more propaganda than fact. This makes it difficult to verify and create a clear picture of Wagner from its foundation to its network, to its operations globally. Without true and verified data any results and research can and will be questioned as it should be. Fortunately, the quality of open-source intelligence and investigations conducted into Wagner activity has been successful in creating a relatively coherent picture. Nonetheless we must make note of this lack of true and verified data, first party data would provide an immeasurable boost to further research.

Furthermore, a majority of the sources, particularly of an academic nature, come from predominantly western authors and institutions. Which is understandable given the focus the west puts on research of Russia and its security apparatus. However, there exists a significant lack of sources from countries and regions in which Wagner operates. Beyond blog, opinion, and news sources there is little in terms of academic sources or investigations from the regions in which Wagner is active. Having a field dominated by western sources is not a new phenomenon, however, it becomes concerning in situations where non-western voices are disproportionately muted. This is somewhat balanced by the fact that many of the investigations into Wagner, from an open source and humanitarian perspective, have taken reports and accounts from non-western sources and those within the regions where Wagner operates. To an extent this helps mitigate a western-centric view and provides a more encompassing investigation into the group’s activities. The study of PMSCs as a whole is

dominated by western voices, and this can be an issue when we consider that other states and regions may, and likely do, have differing definitions and categories for PMSCs and PMSC adjacent actors. The western-centric view of states and “mercenaries” or PMSCs can differ substantially from other parts of the world. It is not unreasonable to consider that whilst one group may be considered a PMSC in one region, it may not be in another.

With reference to this dissertation every effort has been made to ensure that the studies, sources, and investigations used are not only reputable but include voices and accounts from the regions in which Wagner operates, additionally incorporating Russian and French language sources. That being said, this project is also marred by a particular focus on Western sources, as is the field as a whole.

This project has been further limited by the strictly qualitative nature of the research. This reflects the previously discussed fact that raw data and factual information on Wagner is not robust enough to promote a thorough study. The limited amount of quality information restricted not only the sources, but the methodology of this research. Furthermore, limitations of time and access prevented further methods such as interviews.

8.3 Conclusion and Future Research

The results of this paper highlight the notion that Wagner is not, and should not be considered, a PMSC by western and conventional standards. Though the results are far from definitive this project provides a significant step in the refocusing of the discussion surrounding Wagner. Wagner is demonstrated to not meet the criteria commonly set forth for PMSCs as there is very limited evidence of verifiable separation from the Russian state. There is also a significant amount of evidence pointing to strong linkages between the state and the Wagner network. Whilst this on its own is not definitive, when coupled with a lack of corporate identity, the limited evidence separating Wagner from the state, the evidence linking Wagner to the state, and importantly the mutually denied nature of the relationship between Wagner and the Russian state, the argument that Wagner is not in fact a PMSC is compelling. It should further be considered that Russia does not use the same measuring stick for qualifying what constitutes a PMSC that the west does, and Wagner can therefore be considered a PMSC.

However, the purpose of this project has been to decide whether Wagner can or cannot be considered a PMSC as per the standards laid out in literature and international law. The evidence leads us to the conclusion that it cannot. By highlighting that Wagner does not fit the mold of a PMSC this project hopes to better refocus the study of the group away from PMSC-focused descriptions and assessments. By prescribing the label of PMSC to the Wagner network it removes the focus and culpability from the Russian state. It also serves to create an unwarranted mystique surrounding the Wagner network, which is beneficial to both the Kremlin and the group itself (Rondeaux, 2019). With this labelling under question the group itself can continue to be researched, but with a renewed focus on the group's Kremlin linkages, and hopefully place some culpability for humanitarian abuses places at Moscow's feet.

It is important to highlight that the PMSC standards by which Wagner was compared are firmly rooted in western literature and theory, and the thought that inform international law can also be seen as firmly western-centric. As such further research can and should be devoted to identifying how non-western states characterize and define PMSCs both in literature and in practice. The obvious route for further research is to continue to monitor Wagner activities and investigations to further nail down the structure and realities of the Wagner network. This would go a long way towards definitively categorizing the group and highlighting the importance of proper categorization. In essence more research must be conducted into not only Wagner itself but the frameworks for categorizing PMSCs and PMSC-adjacent entities, this research must encompass global perspectives. Wagner and other similar entities will likely continue to operate in this gap of both literature and policy. With reference to this project, it has helped to further identify this gap and highlight the notion that the Wagner Group does not fit in to contemporary PMSC typologies from a structural standpoint, even if its operations may tick similar boxes of PMSC activity.

Wagner group may exist in a gray area in 2022, however given its notoriety and relative success in expanding Russian influence, and Russian corporations' material gain, it is highly likely that we will see other similar entities emerge from non-western countries. It will also likely lead to a shift in how western countries consider and utilise PMSCs themselves. Above all, international organisations and the UN will likely continue to search for a meaningful way to regulate these

entities and to address the humanitarian abuses attributed to Wagner. The most critical issue facing Wagner, and entities of its kind, is undoubtedly regulation and attributing accountability.

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