

Decoding Operational Latitude of Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs): A Case Study of Wagner Group in Syria

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Abstract

The usage of private military companies (PMCs) has remained rampant among significant world powers since the Cold War. Historically, PMCs emerged as small contractors initially but gradually attained multiplicity with distinctive capabilities. The Russian Wagner Group provides multi-dimensional and sophisticated support to the Putin Administration. The Group accounts for an advanced, diplomatic, and target-oriented operational latitude that maneuvers Russian strength in Syria and Ukraine. Russian mercenaries are state-specific, i.e., the use of the Wagner Group in Syria and Ukraine, making it challenging for the opposition to understand the functioning and administration of these companies. By 2019, the Group remained covert yet precarious for its enemies. However, the new advancements suggest that the idea of plausible deniability is now shifting towards overt use and far-reaching proprietorship of the Group as a branch of Russian military interests. The research focuses on the private structure of Wagner Group paving the way for new challenges towards the NATO countries, shifting from conventional military threats from Russia towards overt, opportunist, and task-oriented PMCs.

Keywords

Private Military Companies, Russia, Syria, Ukraine, Sudan, Wagner Group, Operational Latitude, NATO

Introduction

The Russian use of Private Military Companies (PMCs) has a historical development legacy from the soviet period to the contemporary international stage. They work in coherence with the Russian army to materialize the idea of proxy warfare in the Middle

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East, Ukraine, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Sudan. Precisely speaking, Russian mercenaries are state-specific, i.e., the use of the Wagner Group in Syria and Ukraine, and henceforth, it is far more challenging for the opposition, i.e., the US and other NATO countries, to understand the functioning and administration of these companies. The primary purpose of these PMCs is to create strategic deception with wide operational latitude. These companies preferably hire volunteers and retired army personnel, and the financial transactions from the state are made through offshore bank accounts. The Group's organizational framework sheds light on Russia's modus operandi and how PMCs can be used effectively and exclusively to combat any major power. So far, Russia has roughly used eight PMCs, and the Wagner group is the most dynamic and swift of all, paving the way for more technologically advanced competition between the U.S. and Russia in the wake of the Ukraine war and the recent situation in Sudan.

This research study is significant for highlighting Russian interests in the Middle Eastern region, which range from security, strategic, and information to economic gains that PMCs serve. It sheds light on how Russia has re-established its stance and presence in the region with the help of PMCs under the Putin Administration. The study also signifies how Russia uses the operational latitude of Wagner Group to contain its rivals in the region and abroad. This research study will further explore how Russian PMCs play a role in fulfilling Russia's national interests. How does the operational latitude of Wagner Group, i.e., leading Russian PMC, fulfill Russian interests? How can Wagner's operational latitude be analyzed and combated by Russian rivals? How is Wagner Group used covertly and overtly? Lastly, would it shed light on how Wagner Group has transformed paramilitary gains into economic gains in Syria?

The research is descriptive, exploratory, and analytical as it describes and explores the amplified role of PMCs in terms of quality and quantity in Russia. It also details the operational latitude, legal background, emergence, ownership and leadership, training, command and control, financing, recruitment, logistics support, and operations of Wagner Group in Syria and Ukraine. As Østensen (2018), in his article 'Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies: The Implications for European and Norwegian Security' states that the Russian Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) are becoming relevant due to President Putin's acknowledgment of the use of these companies specifically during the Syrian Civil War. The phenomena of Russian mercenaries are unique as they are robust, ideologically motivated, and less inclined to provide logistical support. Nevertheless, Russian PMCs must be far from being legalized by the Russian Duma in a bid to waive international responsibility for the actions performed by these companies. However, it was observed in the European regions that PMCs are increasing in relevance and becoming more sophisticated as Russia invests in various PMCs, further polarizing the concept and deepening its vagueness.

Sukhankin (2018) states in his article 'Continuing War by Other Means: The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier PMC in the Middle East' that Russia has endorsed the use of PMCs since the Soviet period as these are pivotal in ongoing proxy wars in the Middle East and its periphery. The covert use of these companies promotes the idea of 'rationality' and thus can be linked with Graham Allison's conceptualization, i.e., 'linking purpose with action.' The intelligence, training, infrastructure, and logistic support are deemed as the 'action,' whereas 'purpose' is rooted in the growing multi-dimensional military spectrum in the region. The ad hoc decision-making from Moscow regarding the creation of Wagner in Syria advocates the fact that these companies are crucial for Russian foreign policy in Syria.

From a holistic perspective, the proxy militias and paramilitary groups in Syria, Libya, and Ukraine by Russia extend influence beyond Russian territory without legally binding the companies with Russia. The covert use of PMCs is crucial in shaping Russian foreign policy for escalation management and regulating the civil war in Syria, as the responsibility for PMCs' action can be easily denied by the Russian Federation. They are preventing Russia from defamation on the international forums and emerging as a cunning enemy against the United States.

PMCs' Role and Implications in International Relations

There is still no clear definition of PMCs; however, literature on private military security suggests the term is used in coherence with private security providers or organizations (Østensen & Bukkvoll, 2018). This theoretically means that the companies are semi-passive security providers, i.e., providing critical support in armed conflicts, operational support, and assistance in military training. These often need clarification regarding the definition of mercenaries in international relations literature. However, a stark difference exists between both, i.e., mercenaries strictly work for private or personal gain and may or may not be associated with a single state. On the contrary, PMCs have a broad array of interests regarding reputation, linkage with a particular state, and public client base. These companies are now regarded as legal and corporate entities, which consist of highly trained and organized soldiers and military personnel acting as intermediaries between the soldiers and the government (Leander, 2005).

The theoretical ground associated with PMCs accounts for advanced military involvement in the region of influence by a particular state. These companies are sophisticated and stretch beyond the reach of conventional military forces, burdening the state's reputation. The scholarly literature also discusses the advantages of PMCs over the conventional military by characteristics such as the ability to deploy rapidly, minimize public outrage over the use of force, and prevent violation of human rights. Lastly, acting efficiently for the states with weak military and armed forces, i.e., PMCs can be a potential counterweight in such a scenario.

Operational Latitude of Wagner Group

Operational Structure of Russian Private Military Companies

The Russian PMCs are broadly conceptualized under the spectrum of 'plausible deniability,' i.e., the arrangement that allows the state to avoid being criminated in *de facto* illegal activities beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, which can be subjected to punishment through international law. As stated in the literature, the Wagner Group provides innovation and employment of military forces, which is starkly different from Western principles (Rondeaux, 2019). Recent developments in 2023 suggest that the Wagner army has spread across Sudan, Ukraine, and Libya, the major hotspots of Russian interest. Henceforth, it is inevitable that the Russian Federation will reorient and re-define the Group, giving up upon plausible deniability to state responsibility and, therefore, will continue to confuse the Western adversaries and NATO countries (Kumar, 2023).

Legal Background of Wagner Group

Wagner Group shows covert and overt linkages with the Russian Federation depending upon the severity of circumstances. Nevertheless, PMCs such as Wagner Group are considered legal through the Russian Duma regardless of backlash from PMC scholars. By March 2018, a bill was submitted to the Russian Federation Duma to legalize PMCs in Russia. The bill was rejected by the Minister of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

and Russian National Guard; however, due to the profitability of PMCs and the fulfillment of Russian interests, the initiative is rendered acceptable and covertly useful (Østensen & Bukkvoll, 2018).

The politicians and scholars in favor of legalization center their argument around the Soviet Union's historical use of PMCs during the Cold War, deeming the notion tried and tested as part of the 'Russian style' of involvement in various regions of the world.

Recently, Wagner Group's interests have exceeded Russian aims as it intervened in Sudan and Libya (Kumar, 2023), which created insecurity for the Russian military. PMC's structure is slowly and gradually becoming autonomous and focusing on company gains as it depletes Sudan with gold reserves. Therefore, the legal structure that initially benefitted Russia should now be reinterpreted to bring the Group under strict Russian control.

Emergence from Slavonic Corps Limited

Slavonic Corps Limited is regarded as the parent company of Wagner Group, registered in 2012. An in-depth analysis of the Slavonic Corps shows the present-day working and operational structure of the Wagner Group (Asgarov, 2021). It was formulated to increase the competitive advantage of the private military industry in Russia in the wake of the post-Cold War era. The corps consisted of retired army personnel and military professionals who had been part of contractor missions in Iran, Afghanistan, the North Caucasus, East Africa, and Tajikistan.

The timing of the formulation of the Slavonic corps is linked with the Civil war in Syria. By 2013, Russia got involved in active 'plausible deniability' by sending quasi-PMCs to fight on behalf of the Russian military, which can be regarded as the first step towards the use of private military in Syria. Back in 2013, the Slavonic Corps battled with anti-Assad forces while keeping close monitoring of areas rich in hydrocarbons (precisely for economic purposes). Under the clause of protecting the processing of hydrocarbons, the Slavonic Corps attained experience of Syrian soil, already battling a civil war. A number of 267 members of the Group were divided into two units consisting of Cossacks and ethnic- Russian mercenaries. The mercenary Group headed by Dmitri Utkin later obtained the name Wagner Group (Sukhankin, 2019).

Ownership and Leadership of Wagner Group

Contractors and business figures typically own PMCs. This is exemplified by the Wagner Group, a Russian entity owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, known for his involvement in illegal activities such as money laundering and prostitution, for which he has faced legal repercussions in Russia. Prigozhin's close associate, Viktor Zolotov, has held prominent positions within the Russian Security Council since the 1990s, particularly under the Putin Administration. Additionally, the ownership structure of the Wagner Group involves coordination with the Putin Administration and the Olgins Troll Factory, which promotes anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda through information warfare tactics.

Prigozhin's business interests extend to Syria, where his companies Ev and Propolis have secured agreements to control a significant portion of the country's oil and natural gas resources (Reynolds, 2019). Furthermore, the alliance between EvroPolis and the Wagner Group has enabled them to exert considerable influence over the Syrian economy, mainly through their involvement in the Syrian electrification program, which encompasses the entire nation (Port, 2021). These developments suggest that Russia's

ownership of PMCs in Syria is driven by strategic interests aimed at consolidating military and economic power in the region.

The leadership of the Wagner Group is attributed to Dmitri Utkin, who is known to be a part of the Slavonic Corps and played a vital role in Syria and Ukraine. The second most famous figure, Andrey Troshev, served in the Soviet and Russian Armed Forces during wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. Since 2016, Troshev has provided training and ensured the interests of war veterans who are a part of PMC's industry. Nevertheless, under the leadership of Troshev, the auto has access to an advanced train, Polygon Polygon (Herd, 2018).

Training of Wagner Corps

The corps training is on an extraordinary training ground, a 'polygon.' The training ground allows the corps to attain expertise in sophisticated rocket launcher systems, guns, and tornado rocket launchers. The training aims to provide Wagner Group with up-to-date means of electronic warfare (E.W.) while coordinating between land and air operations (Marten, 2019). Moreover, partisan and guerilla-type training is also provided by Boris Chikin and Andrey Trosher (Sukhankin, 2019). The courses last about two months but can be decreased depending upon the need and utility of forces. As mentioned, the corps are provided with quality training in the shortest period from Slavonic Corps experience in Ukraine and Syria.

Command and Control System (C2)

As the Private Military industry is based upon extensive duplicate military training, coordination of the 'military path' of Wagner Group is essential. Within the extensive command and control structure, the upper level consists of the Commander-in-Chief and Managing Director, the middle level consists of administrative for the P.S., and the bottom level consists of regular/routine corps. An investigation by Fontanka also reported that the well-organized C2 structure of Wagner mirrors that of the Russian Armed Forces, indirectly showing proximity to the Russian government (Sukhankin, 2018).

Therefore, Wagner Group works like the Russian army and serves the broad military interests of the state in Syria in particular and the Middle East in general. With a firm command and control system in Syria consisting of 5,000 personnel, the structure is expected to double the ratio to 10,000 personnel in a bid to enhance Russian presence and support the Assad regime (Herd, 2018).

Financing of Corps

The Wagner Group theoretically springs from the notion of 'plausible deniability,' which can be hampered if the group's financial structure is clear and transparent. Henceforth, the financial structure must be rendered opaque to maintain the secrecy of how well the corps are equipped or paid. Specific reports suggest that the financing of corps is primarily based on expertise, experience, and successful operations performed by the designated personnel.

Enlightening the undeniable link between the Syrian Government and the Wagner Group, research carried out in 2017 shows that financing of Wagner personnel was regarded as the responsibility of the Syrian government in August 2017. As stated by Wagner Group's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigou, all the transactions of the Wagner Corps are made through hard currency, which is also carried out by contractors and people in business (Russian or Syrian) who can have economic interests associated with specified regions in Syria (Marten, 2019). Henceforth, it is evident that the corps assists businessmen and contractors in accessing the resources in specified regions monitored by

Wagner Group, which gives an utmost advantage to the PMC's growth in Syria for future years.

Recruitment

The recruitment drive of Wagner Group is multi-dimensional and critical in terms of the rise of the PMC's industry, and the notion of secrecy provided the contours of the Syrian Civil War. There are various sources through which recruitments are made, showing direct and indirect linkages between the Russian identity and the armed forces. There can be divided as follows:

Cossacks

The Cossacks have been repeatedly tested in Ukraine in a protest against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. By attaining successful results and annexation of Crimea by 2017, an offshoot of the Cossack Organization was also found in Syria under the leadership of Roma Zabolotny. However, the Islamic State in Syria denies any such link or presence of Cossack organization, which leads to the fact that Cossacks can be limited or minute to be recognized by the enemy but add to the strategic presence of Russia and understanding of the landscape (Rizzoti, 2019).

War Veterans/ Retired Military Personnel

Russia tends to reorient and re-vitalize its lost legacy on strategic and military grounds by utilizing retired military personnel to command and head its PMCs and Wagner Group. It is usually divided into two factions: the Union of Donbas Volunteers and the Combat Brotherhood. The groups are an instrument of recruitment.

The Volunteer Society for Co-operation with Army Aviation and Navy (DOSAAF)

The cooperation provides extensive and short-term training ideal for Wagner Group, as stated by the Deputy Director of DOSSAF. The cooperation provides expertise in specific weaponry and munitions and guarantees short-term military-style training, which was the reason for becoming a recruitment tool for Wagner Group. Similarly, DOSAAF provides target areas upon which the retired army personnel and Cossacks work. Henceforth, it is a joint effort for recruitment, training, and strategic military planning (Marten, 2019).

Military Commissariats

The military commissariats generally refer to the military department wing that supplies food and equipment to the functioning military. In a bid to supply food to military camps and lumber camps, these personnel are also aware of the military and strategic landscape. In the case of Wagner Group, it is reported that military commissariats in various conflict zones such as Tajikistan, Afghanistan, South Caucasus, and Chechnya were given priority in recruitment regarding know-how regarding military functioning. By 2015, military commissariats had aided around five military operations in Syria and Libya and connected with the Wagner Group (Sukhankin, 2019).

Ethnically Non-Russian Regions

The Russian Private Military culture is inclusive and target-oriented. Henceforth, Wagner Group recruitment includes a broad spectrum of candidates for whom Russian nationality and ethnicity can be compromised. For example, corps belonging to ethnic non-Russian regions such as Crimea have often been used in Syria depending upon operational utility.

Logistical Support

The logistical support of Wagner Group includes air and sea logistical support. The close coordination and support from the Russian government mainly act as a cord and backbone of the operation of the Wagner Group. The air logistical support includes close coordination with military contractors and aviation companies and military presence in spheres of influence for Russia. The military-transportation aviation link strengthened in 2015 between Russia and Syria. A study further explores the Russian ambition and commitment to provide logistical support to the entire Southern Federal District (SFD). The author further explains that the city of Rostov-on-Don in Russia is specially designated to supply soldiers and munitions to Syria through Cham Wings Air Company, showing Russian policies prioritizing the functioning of Wagner (Benaso, 2021). Similar is the case with providing supplements to Ukraine, highlighting Russian interests and commitment to providing aviation support mainly through Platov International Airport.

In terms of sea and naval logistical support, it is stated by Russian Foreign Minister's Department of Non-Proliferation and Armed Control Mikhail Ulyanov that Russia has been aiding naval equipment to Syria since 2013, which is the backbone of PMC's industry in Syria (Ulyanov, 2015). The naval and sea equipment provides not only assistance in radio-electronic warfare equipment but also maneuvers. It manifests Russia's manifold economic interests through Syrian-bound cargos (military and non-military). Examples such as that of the Black Sea Fleet and Landing Ship Kaliningrad (an offshoot of the Baltic Sea Fleet) was a strategic move to transport not only personnel and food but heavy weaponry, military equipment, and tanks under the guise of transporting cargo to the Syrian Arab Republic.

Covert Use of PMCs by Russia

Russia has endorsed the use of PMCs since the Soviet period, as these are pivotal in an ongoing rift in Syria, Ukraine, and Sudan. The covert use of these companies promotes the idea of 'rationality,' which can be linked with Allison's conceptualization, i.e., 'linking purpose with action.' The intelligence, training, infrastructure, and logistic support are deemed as the 'action,' whereas 'purpose' is rooted in the growing multi-dimensional military spectrum in the region. The ad hoc decision-making from Moscow regarding creating the Wagner Group advocates that these companies are crucial for Russian interests. The covert use of PMCs is crucial in shaping Russian foreign policy for escalation management and regulating the civil war in Syria, as the responsibility for PMCs' action can be easily denied by the Russian Federation. They are preventing Russia from defamation on the international forums and emerging as a cunning enemy against the United States and NATO countries (Sukhankin, 2018).

Overt Use of PMCs by Russia: Wagner Presence in Sudan

The recent reports by various media groups shed light on the presence of the Wagner group in Sudan. By February 2023, the E.U. has sanctioned a Wagner group subsidiary, i.e., Meroe Gold, for intervening in Sudanese soil and promoting an anti-state narrative. The Group is also involved in illegal gold mining, depriving the state of essential revenue. Moreover, the E.U. has also documented evidence of human rights violations in Sudan. These developments suggest the Wagner Group is moving far beyond Russian interests and focusing on personal/prosperity-based gains. However, the Wagner group has utilized Russian contacts with the Sudanese company to issue gold mining permits, which leaves less margin for the E.U. to intervene and sanction the Group (Strong, 2022).

By 2022, Prigozhin admitted to creating the Group as he campaigned towards recruiting more troops for the Group. The Group also owns Wagner Centre, which is located in St. Petersburg, Russia. It is the first property ever owned by the Group for training and recruitment. Henceforth, the Wagner group, which remained undercover for almost a decade of its creation, now remains present and seen on Russian soil. It may also allow other parties or private military groups to assist and help, which was not the case previously. The current situation becomes grave for NATO countries as Prigozhin claims that Wagner troops are the best in the world. Similarly, it can also be envisioned and expected that the Russian Federation will remain a covert owner and supporter of the Group. At the same time, it fulfills its ambitions in Libya and Sudan (Sukhankin, 2020).

Power, Profit, and Plausible Denial of Russian PMC: From Paramilitary to Economic Gain

The Syrian Arab Republic is regarded as the hotbed of the Russian Private Military industry; as termed by Vesti-24 (Russia's major information outlet), Wagner Group is working swiftly in the right direction regarding aviation and artillery forces. However, a gradual shift from military and paramilitary operations to specifically extending control over areas rich in hydrocarbons is observed in this regard. As analyzed through the study published in 2018 by Ruslan Leviev (member of the Conflict Intelligence Team Investigation platform), explained by Reynolds (2019) in his study, there was limited or no trace of Islamic State in the Latakia Region. However, only a few anti-Assad militants, yet still, the Wagner Group increased deployment of forces into the region. The shift from military presence to economic gains is regarded as the 'right direction,' which precisely means that the Group followed a path to attain its ulterior motive of economic gain (as already outlined in the Russian foreign policy objectives, i.e., to attain a higher seat in natural gas, oil, and petroleum prices) (Reynolds, 2019). Missions such as Ground Reconnaissance, Baptism by Fire, and Deep Involvement deserve special attention.

The mission Ground Reconnaissance was enacted from September 2015 to early 2016. The operation is regarded as the preliminary task of deploying forces and critical encounters with the anti-Assad forces to provide an entrance to the Wagner Group. After the first mission, Operation Baptism by Fire occurred in December 2016. The operation involves the word 'fire' deduced from innumerable fire shot exchanges with the anti-Assad forces, despite attaining victory in the liberation of Palmyra, i.e., the liberation involved units from Syrian Armed Forces and Russian Forces such as Russian Naval Infantry, Hezbollah, and Wagner Group against Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. The Group's dedication to the mission led to several 32 personnel being killed and the deployment of 1,500-2,000. Baptism by Fire was meant to show full performance to the Syrian Government, increasing trust in the partnership and leading to more contracts. Also, the operation was marked by the use of the best possible munitions and artillery separately from the Syrian government, which invested in the Group after the success of this operation.

The third essential operation, i.e., Deep Involvement, was carried out in February 2018 and can be regarded as contemporary. The operation is named Deep Involvement mainly because it acknowledges the link of the Wagner Group with the paramilitary-style missions aimed at enhancing control of areas rich in hydrocarbons. The Group aims to provide Russia with economic and strategic benefits in oil and natural gas. However, the ongoing Civil war and the presence of militants in zones and areas, which can be a source of monetary benefit to Russian businessmen and the state in general, provide a hindrance to the cause. It can be inferred that the economic interests outweigh the military interests

of the Wagner Group in the contemporary scenario and power politics. Henceforth, the use of the Wagner Group is inevitable, provided the presence of militants and anti-Assad groups.

The Russian Federation also adopted cordial relations with Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir by signing various deals, including establishing a naval base and gold and mineral mining agreements. These deals remained essential as the recent situation unfolded. The Wagner group exploited resources because the deals had already been signed. A significant amount of gold is now smuggled through Wagner Group, as stated by U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in 2020, that Wagner Group and its network are exploiting Sudan's natural resources and using them for personal gain to influence across the globe.' The EU and US imposed sanctions on the Wagner Group, claiming that the Group conducted paramilitary operations, preserved authoritarian regimes, and exploited natural resources. By 2021 and 2022, Wagner Group grew its ties with Sudan-based Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which is fighting against the conventional military of Sudan thereof, carrying on a Civil War in the country already battling the economic and political crisis. Sudan, Libya, Central African Republics, and Mali have also been the hotspots for Wagner to remain intact. Therefore, Russian presence globally cannot be undermined after the recent scenario, which stretches towards the Middle East, Africa, and Ukraine, sourced through Prigozhin's Wagner Group (Barabanov & Ibrahim, 2021).

New Avenues for Russian Proxy Warfare Strategies through Wagner Group

In retrospect, PMCs such as the Wagner Group in Syria have provided Russia with multi-dimensional military scope in the conflict-prone states. The Group is a product of 30-year phases of privatization and military modernization by Russia, which has now made state-led corporate armies a reliable phenomenon for Putin's administration. Vladimir Putin utilized many of the military contractors who served in the Soviet period. The contemporary PMCs predate the Putin administration and are expected to outlast this tenure with a new form of hybrid warfare and project-oriented corporate structure. By orchestrating Russian proxy war strategies, PMCs are adding to the economic involvement of Russia in the Middle East by increasing core exports of arms and energy. Around 43 billion dollars of trade is associated with Wagner Group alone to carve out economic linkage with local militias and population. Meanwhile, the undocumented percentage of economic influx moves beyond 64 billion dollars from the Syrian government during reconstructional projects in Aleppo.

The transition from state security to private security, which is government-sponsored, has been part and parcel of Wagner's history since its ancestral Soviet origins. With multiple phases of privatization and modernization, the strategic importance of the PMC industry has increased the Russian deployment of the military, which was the main feature of Yevgeny Primakov's foreign policy during the Cold War till the collapse of the Soviet Union. Special units such as the KGB Development Courses for Officer Personnel training regime have been used in proxy warfare hotspots in states such as Angola and Cuba. KGB provided Russia with connections for private security in the post-Soviet era. Henceforth, the process of strategic vitality of Russian PMCs is slow and gradual, which is the main reason behind the expertise in the PMC industry (Rezvani, 2020).

Conclusion

The operational structure, hiring, financial and recruitment particulars, and logistical structure of Wagner Group show precision and a focused target to provide maximum

support to the Russian Federation. While working covertly, the operations carried out by the Group signify the presence of the PMC's industry and how it is becoming more sophisticated and task-oriented with time. By closely analyzing the operational structure, it can be inferred that the Putin Administration is working closely with the Group, starting with hiring, leadership, agendas, and operations. Henceforth, the Russian Federation is actively using the Group by providing it with pertinent resources while gaining trust, commitment, investments, and contracts from Sudan and Syria. Therefore, as the West expects that Prigozhin's interest may overpower the Russian state's interests, it is less likely to happen, considering how far both parties have benefitted from the two-way relationship. Wagner is moving towards Sudan, Mali, and CAR to internationalize Russian interests and fulfill Putin's wishes.

The notion of 'plausible deniability' is particularly lethal, which can reorient and re-define Putin Administration's stance in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Sudan while denying linkages to 'private contractors' yet specifically using these contractors in counterbalancing US presence in the region. However, the recent gold mining explorations by Wagner in Sudan suggest that complete ownership of Wagner Group's actions also disturbs U.S. and NATO countries as now, the Group has become far-reaching. It declares its linkages with the Putin Administration at a point where the Group is highly potent.

With such advancements in PMC's industry, Russia can emerge as a hegemon mainly because of its high-tech military involvement in Syria, exploitation of resources in Syria and Sudan, political linkages with high officials, and human rights violations that EU sanctions cannot easily tap. Henceforth, the Russian PMC industry is going stronger and sometimes even ahead of the Putin Administration, leading to concerns in the Western bloc.

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