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Abstract

The Wagner Group has recently piqued the attention of the global press, academics, analysts, and strategic and military studies specialists. Building upon Ghiselli's theoretical framework on the study of Chinese Security Privatisation, this research explains the interplay of market dynamics and governmental power in shaping Wagner's unconventional development. Wagner's most relevant deployments abroad have accommodated the elite-set needs of Russia's public sphere through a clear alignment with the Russian foreign policy agenda. At the same time, the public debate on plausible regularisation of PMCs in Russia has been greatly determined by key events in Wagner's evolution. Recently, estimations of Russian control over this group have been underplayed by Prigozhin's mutiny. Amid recent developments and the War in Ukraine, the future of this Semi-State Security Actor and the country's PMSCs remain uncertain. Russia's leaders must deal with essential questions on the control of on-ground Wagner operatives amid the war in Ukraine before the legal regularisation of PMCs in the country is even conceivable.

Keywords: Russia, Wagner Group, Vladimir Putin, PMSCs, Ukraine, Syria, Africa, Yevgueni Prigozhin

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A mi Papá, siempre conmigo.

List of Abbreviations

PMC	Private Military Company
PSC	Private Security Company
PMSC	Private Military and Security Company
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate
KGB	Committee for State Security
MoD	Russian Ministry of Defense
DOSAAF	Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
CAR	Central African Republic
LNA	Libyan National Army

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Introduction

During an attempt to legislate PMCs in the State Duma in 2012, Vladimir Putin - then prime minister of the Russian Federation- expressed intrigue for PMCs, describing them as “an instrument for the realisation of national interests where the state itself does not have to be involved”. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018, p.6) However, Russia still has no regulatory framework for these entities operating overseas and “mercenarism” abroad is illegal.

The rising pool of Russian Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) has gained increasing international media/policy attention in the past few years. The recent increase and international expansion of these PMCs have been parallel to a change in foreign policy in the Russian Federation under Putin’s rule. With the objective of expanding its influence in the Middle East and Africa and ensuring its sphere of influence and strategic commercial routes, contemporary Russia has strategically turned to the profitable tool of Semi-State Security Actors. (Rondeaux, 2019) Russia’s PMCs have traditionally operated in scenarios to benefit the country’s interests. Evidence and speculation have begun to paint a clouded picture of the PMSC’s relation to the state. These circumstances and observed connections to Moscow ignited a notable debate about the private/public categorisation of Russian security and military contractors has long been debated. One particular actor has garnered the most attention: the Wagner Group. (Reynolds, 2019; Sukhankin, 2019b)

The commonly known Wagner Group (Группа Вагнера, in Russian) is also referred to as “PMC Wagner” or ChVK Wagner. It is the most documented Russian military provider firm. (Marten, 2019) While Wagner may often present itself as a regular PMC, ties exist between its administration and operations and the Russian military and intelligence apparatus. Remarkably, the group interacts with the Kremlin, the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) (concretely the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) or military intelligence). (CSIS, 2020) Given this group’s evident yet complex relation to the Russian

leadership, academic and mediatic attempts to conceptualise this group vary from calling it a PMC to a mercenary network. At the same time, some even argue that it is a de-facto private army for Russia's chief, Vladimir Putin.

The first appearances of Wagner date back to 2014, when it intervened in the War in Donbas in support of Russia. Since then, its operations have proliferated worldwide, mainly focusing on the Middle East and Africa, increasingly entering into security-providing contracts with other states. (Bushuev, 2020) Throughout its global trajectory, Wagner operatives have been involved in several Human Rights violation scandals amid armed conflicts. (Reynolds, 2019; Fidh, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022) For a long time, Moscow denied claims of connections to Russian private security actors such as Wagner, mainly on the basis of its illegal character in Russia, where PMCs are unregulated. (Giedraitis, 2020) The long-awaited official confirmation of Wagner's ties to the Kremlin came in October 2022. (Reuters, 2022) Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of President Putin, admitted to founding the organisation where he holds a leading role. As the War in Ukraine drags on, these connections become more evident yet complex. Still, as noted by Rondeaux (2019), questions remain over the extent of control the Russian leadership has over Wagner and other PMCs. (Rondeaux, 2019) These questions are very much founded, especially in the wake of the group's uprising against the MoD, led by Prigozhin in June 2023. (Poroskoun, 2023)

This dissertation aims to join the much-needed effort to increase and improve the academic study of private security markets by looking at the pool of the less-examined yet crucial commercial security providers in non-Western contexts. Our work aims to assess commercial security actors assembled in Russia from a context-conscious and less Western skewed perspective while paying particular attention to the Wagner Group. Within a limited pool of academic studies and peer-reviewed scholarship on Wagner, there is a need for a theoretically informed analysis of this group's development. That is to say, an examination that is more aware of the complex political and social dynamics in Russia beyond the alarms that this group

may rise. (Barak and David, 2010) It should be noted that, while condemning the group's involvement in Human Rights violations, this text does not intend to judge the ethical conundrum that is Wagner's activities around the world but rather to approach the issue of its development academically. A more precise understanding of the organisation's evolution is key for international policy-making to deal with its consequences. To achieve this, academic rigour and critical thinking are vital when addressing Wagner. Applying Ghiselli (2010)'s conceptual model, which builds on Krahmman (2010)'s ideas of civil-military relations and Habermas's ideas on the private/public, would be valuable to further this objective.

The research question guiding this dissertation concerns how political power and market forces have combined in Russia to shape the current state of affairs of Wagner. Our main argument interacts directly with our theoretical model, being that "societalization" and "statefication" forces shape and will likely continue to shape the development of the Wagner Group and its relation to the Kremlin. These two concepts come from Habermas' notions on the private and the public. "Societalization" refers to growing responsiveness of policy-making to the needs of society, while "stateification" society is related to the extension of political control over sectors of the private sphere. This work aims to test the feasibility of this author's conceptual framework and its effectiveness in the study of private security industries and specific actors in other non-Western countries. This research could potentially help better understand Wagner's evolution from a theoretic perspective. This would be done by identifying factors that could either reverse or further strengthen "societalization"/"stateification" trends in Russia's PMCs, concretely in the case of Wagner. An up-to-date theoretically informed qualitative case study analysis of Wagner is also interesting to comparative studies of PMSCs and to draw valuable insights for developing PMCs in other non-Western contexts. It should be noted that the scope of the analysis on Wagner has been delimited by a cut-off date on June 23rd, to delimit the continuing flow of information that has risen from the Group's military march to Moscow.

This research will be structured into five chapters. The first one will consist of an in-depth literature review overviewing Private Security Academia, as well as the guiding theoretical model inspired by Ghiselli (2020), with the necessary contextual adjustments to the Russian case; Russian Security Privatization and the conceptualisation of the object of study: the Wagner Group. Chapter two will present the research design and methodology guiding this dissertation, including the data selection and analysis. This section will also dive into the research's limitations. The analytical section of this dissertation will comprise the remaining three chapters, assessing observable trends in key Wagner's development. The third chapter will begin the analysis covering the state's observable degree of "societalization" by observing economic and policy contexts around crucial developments in Wagner's evolution to depict the responsiveness of this actor to Russia's 'public' needs. Chapter four will illustrate the "statefication" of society due to Wagner's events, reflecting Russian concern over Wagner's deployment. It examines growing debate and Russian public attention in response to Wagner's developments. Then, the last chapter of the analysis will briefly reflect on the two previous, aiming to showcase how Prigozhin and his links to the Russian state have developed under the pressures of "stateification" and "societalization" forces. To finalise, a conclusion will lay out the research's key findings and their implications. Building on these findings, there will be some final thoughts, practical recommendations and suggestions for possible avenues for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The privatisation of security and the development of PMSCs are processes that have been well-documented and theorised about. As noted by Tonkin (2011, p.6), “private, profit-driven security forces” are not a thing of modernity. He argues they are “almost as old as warfare itself”. The development of modern commercial security firms, particularly PMSCs, has been central to modern strands of Security Studies research. Scholars have extensively scrutinized several aspects of these groups, including their growth, impacts, and regulation. (Abrahamsen and Leander, 2017; Berndtsson and Kinsey, 2016; Avant, 2005; Chesterman and Lehnardt, 2007; Dunigan and Petersohn, 2015) However unparalleled the modern private security industry has been in terms of magnitude and complexity, core questions on legitimacy and state-monopoly force have undoubtedly accompanied and shaped its development. Nevertheless, not much theoretically informed attention has been given to the process of privatisation of security in non-Western states, and an inevitable Western bias is noticeable in most of the few studies that do. This has displayed an academic necessity for theoretically informed and contextually aware analysis of the evolution of PMSCs beyond the West. Ghiselli (2020)’s theoretical framework proves quite compelling, as it caters to understanding non-Western security privatisations, such as the Russian case, in how simultaneous trends, political drivers, and market forces collide and interact in shaping the privatisation process and its limits. The following literature review aims to critically present the state of the art in academia on issues vital to this thesis and establish a theoretically and contextually informed framework from which to develop the research.

In doing so, this literature review will consist of three sections. The first one will address the evolution of private security academia, giving a general overview of the literature on this topic. Theory-wise, it will critically assess some of the main streams of thought and explanations for privatisation. Some emphasis will lie on explaining the Western-centrism of most Private Security academia, which serves as a gap to fill by this dissertation. This chapter will also dive into Ghiselli (2020)’s

theoretical framework, which will guide the dissertation, as well as make some annotations that make it more fitting and comprehensive to analyse the case at hand. The third part of this literature review will review the intricacies of the Russian private security industry, particularly its PMSC sector. This section will consider some of the particularities and academic debates it has sparked, with some emphasis on Wagner, aiming to define and conceptualise it as the object of study of the research.

1.1 On the Study of Privatization of Security

1.1.1 Private Security Academia: An Overview

Since the early 1990s, modern private security has re-emerged as a critical factor in global politics and military operations. (Singer 2003; Avant 2005). Cusumano and Kinsey (2022) highlight how the direct involvement of commercial security contractors in conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, and Papua New Guinea around this time brought systematic attention to the rise in the privatisation of security. From then on, academia on private security has undergone a stealth evolution, focusing their attention on different aspects of this rising market. Cusumano and Kinsey (2022) and Van Meegdenburg (2015) distinguish a first and second wave in Private Security research. Initial studies emerged in the late 1990s and explored the history and beginnings of the current market for security, offering explanations for this resurgence in a private security market, as well as the services offered by this sector. (Mandel, 2001; Singer 2001, Singer, 2003; Avant, 2005; Kinsey, 2006) These authors also introduced and defined classifications within private security actors, establishing similarities and differences between modern PMSCs and the more conventional mercenaries. (O'Brien, 2000; Brooks, 2000) The so-called 'second wave' of research is built on the initial phase's empirical effort and concepts. (Cusumano and Kinsey 2022) Several authors acknowledge that scandals involving PMSCs' activities and misconduct in the early 2000s, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003, inspired extensive academic focus on these entities.

(Carafano, 2008; Abrahamsen and Leander, 2017) This stream of studies increased the analytical complexity of the literature on PMSC. As observed by Cusumano and Kinsey (2022), scholars built on previous research and investigated the causes and effects of privatisation from a theory and policy-oriented perspective. This has resulted in many strands within private security academia, touching on a variety of issues. These range from much-attended matters on classification, legal regulation, and accountability (Krahmann, 2012; Van Meegdenburg, 2015) to the implications of privatised security, including the control of PMSCs or lack thereof. (Tonkin, 2011; Chesterman and Lehnardt, 2007). As observed by Abrahamsen and Leander (2017), there has been a dedication to studying the implications of the rising private security market in many realms, including democracy or foreign policy. (McFate, 2017; Avant, 2005) A sizeable number of studies have touched on the ethics of private military and security activities. (Carrafano, 2008; Elms and Phillips, 2009) Existing literature mainly attends to states' employment of security contractors, although there is a rising interest in their use by non-state actors, such as international organisations and, to a lesser extent, NGOs. (Spearin, 2015; Brooks, 2000)

In recent years, scholars have encouraged broadening the agenda of private security academia. Van Meegdenburg (2015) provides a quantitative study on the dominance of different research priorities/focus within the literature on PMSCs. This study derives that the focus of academia has been oriented mainly to 'regulation, control, and accountability', particularly concerning enterprises contracted by the USA and UK. Eichler (2015) emphasises including post-colonial elements, such as a gender perspective. At the same time, there has been rising emphasis and attempts from academics toward the incorporation of historical perspectives in the study of Private security contractors. (Parrott, 2012; Krahmann, 2012; Abrahamsen and Leander, 2017; Ghiselli, 2020) Bureš and Carrapico (2017) note the need to study beyond PMSCs, to investigate the heterogeneity of private-public partnerships and to analyse non-Western scenarios to achieve a better understanding of varied military formations and structures and standards. Van

Meegdenburg (2015) and Cusumano and Kinsey (2022) derive valuable insights into the Western partisanship of commercial security academia, encouraging a broader geographical scope for research.

1.1.2 Theory and the Privatization of Security

From a conceptual perspective, much theoretical inquiry on security privatisation has grounded on the Westphalian state system and its notions of state sovereignty. (Singer, 2005; McFate, 2017) These traditional notions of Private Security regularly adhere to Weberian notions of a state. Weber (1946) defines the modern state as an entity that “successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”. Sutherland (2022) highlights the general agreement in academia regarding private security contractors that they hinder the traditional notion of the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence. He points out that this coincides with the emergence of other non-state actors and the erosion of state-centrism as the international order moves towards multipolarity. Traditional explanations for the rise of private security include a worldwide rise in insecurity and conflict (Kinsey, 2006; Singer, 2003) and the competition for power that drives states to project their influence beyond their borders through PMCs. (Glaser, 1994) Critics, such as Karkour (2022), argue that these explanations of security privatisation are incomplete, as they are too narrowly focused on security and fail to grasp the reality of other factors, including economic and political pressures, which may be driving this trend. More liberal approaches have emphasised the economic drivers behind the rise in the so-called global ‘market for force’. (Avant, 2005) Dunigan & Petersohn (2015) observe that some scholars focus on the “privatisation revolution”. This is based on the credence that the rise in privatisation is guided by the market’s effectivity and efficiency, as well as the risk-reduction solution that private security firms are for states’ when dealing with security challenges in place of regular militias. (Carafano, 2008; Mandel, 2001; Schreier and Caparini, 2005) In contrast, Avant (2005) argues that states, particularly in the Global South, choose privatisation of security as a cost-effective fallback, given

their inability to deal with security challenges independently and the scarce help from multilateral organisations. While insightful, liberal perspectives on security privatisation can be somewhat limited in studying this process when it is also occurring beyond the West and the liberal market order. Dunigan & Petersohn (2015) recognised the pre-conceived neoliberal inclinations of private security studies, given their homogeneous vision of the rising industry. They argued for the study of this rising industry as a conglomeration of many different ‘markets for force’ around the world instead of a single entity.

1.1.3 Theory and Privatisation of Security: Beyond the West

Amongst modern private security researchers, there has been a tendency to focus on Western democracies and perspectives. Scholars have acknowledged this particularly Anglo-American bias and have encouraged a broader agenda. (Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022; Van Meegdenburg, 2015; Eichler, 2015) Available literature indicates that there is a new-found drive for academics and analysts to research the privatisation of security outside of the Western/EuroAtlantic context. Cusumano and Kinsey (2022) observe that there has been an emergence of academic studies on PMSCs in non-Western states, especially centred around Russia, China, and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Russia’s growing private security industry is the focus of our work, and it has been gaining the interest of literature in the past years. There is regard to Moscow’s (not so) alleged use of military contractors, particularly Wagner. (Rondeaux, 2019; Foley and Kaunert, 2022) To a lesser extent, China’s incipient private security sector, mostly employed to secure economic investments in China and overseas, has grabbed the attention of scholars. (Spearin, 2020; Yuan, 2022; Arduino, 2020; Arduino and Gong, 2018). These interests reflect a broader trend toward understanding the global dynamics of security privatisation and the need for diverse perspectives to develop comprehensive solutions to security challenges. (Eichler, 2015, Dunigan & Petersohn, 2015)

Still, a vast majority of the existing private security literature concentrates on Euro-Atlantic nations, particularly on the US, the UK, and other EuroAtlantic nations. (Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022, Van Meegdenburg, 2015) In their review of private security academia, Cusumano and Kinsey (2022) argue that the noticeable lack of academic work on the privatisation of security in non-Western environments has gone beyond an empirical deficit. Western-centric research has seemingly resulted in skewed theoretically based insights on PMSCs and their prospects. Academia has greatly focused on the enormous process of privatisation of non-combat military support in liberal democracies in the West since the end of the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. (Van Meegdenburg, 2015; Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022) This study on mostly Western PMSCs has often taken for granted occidental norms, such as the Weberian state's monopoly of legitimate force and international prohibitions on mercenaries. This has led most research to perceive the use of private warfare as a rare exception to such norms. Authors, such as Avant (2005), dismissed the outsourcing of combat as an anomaly, a last resource employed by fragile states in the Global South. Nevertheless, as foreseen by Singer (2005) in *Outsourcing War*, military contractors have been observed playing rather noteworthy support and operational roles in conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Nigeria. (Carafano, 2008; Marten, 2019; Petersohn, 2017; Picard and Goodman, 2022) In line with Cusumano and Kinsey (2022), these developments attest that the outsourcing of military force is not so rare, nor exclusive to these so-called 'fragile' states; thus it cannot be set aside as a deviation.

Despite a broader agenda and attempts to reduce Western-centrism and bias, one can easily observe the ingrained Western perspective on the existing pool of studies on non-Western PMSCs. As stressed by Dunigan and Petersohn (2015), the dominating liberal tendency to study Private Security as a homogeneous 'market for force', (Avant, 2005) has overlooked local economic, cultural, social, and political contexts. When examining developing non-Western private security markets that significantly differ from EuroAtlantic markets, this oversight underestimates the impact of national and even actor particularities. (Dunigan &

Petersohn, 2015) The general inclination is not to study these markets from within but from an impact perspective. This is particularly true for the study of Russian and Chinese private security markets. The unregulated and hazy nature of these industries and their governmental links leads to a lack of available and reliable data. (Sutherland, 2022; Spearin, 2020) This is coupled with the understandably cautious view of Western academics, policy-makers, and analysts on these countries' military actions. (Cusumano and Kinsey, 2022) Studies and policy publications on these military and security markets often centre on their estimated consequences on global security and stability (Bajerová and Bokša, 2020; Congressional Research Service, 2020), state use of PMSCs for foreign policy goals (Spearin, 2018; Thorsson, 2022; Marten, 2019; Foley and Kaunert, 2022; Arduino and Gong, 2018) and plausible deniability and challenges for Private Security regulation and control. (Poroskoun, 2023; Rondeaux, 2019; Reynolds, 2019) Ghiselli (2020) notes that, mainly due to a lack of data, most studies on non-Western rising security industries like the Chinese, are "largely descriptive, rather than theory-ridden, and at times speculative and with sensationalistic undertones". There is, indeed, a gap in theoretically informed research on security privatisation beyond the West that transcend a description or estimation of their activities and goals. Ghiselli (2020)'s work illustrated this gap, displaying an empirical need to understand and identify trends in their development. At the same time, this author depicts the need to understand how political responsibilities and profit-based developments interact, shape and limit this private security industry, especially in contexts where the private and public spheres are blurred.

In line with Ghiselli (2020), this dissertation centres on the idea of political control over violence. Furthermore, this work centres around the Russian market of privatised force, which is rather unlike markets in the more commonly studied Western states. (Allison, 2015). Following Ghiselli (2020)'s approach, to examine this issue, it is essential to look beyond theories that assume American/liberal notions of the privatisation of security in foreign policy, especially in studying the Russian case. This author's original conceptual framework builds instead on

Krahmann (2010)'s *Republican and Liberal models of civil-military relations* to study the privatisation of security in China. After diving into a detailed explanation of this model, an overview of the Russian privatisation of security and its study is in order. The following section aims to also ease informed incorporation of the unique Russian context into our application of Ghiselli (2020)'s framework, with particular regard to the Wagner.

1.2 On Ghiselli's Theoretical Framework

Acknowledging the scarcity of theory-informed, non-journalistic literature on non-Western security privatisation, Ghiselli (2020) comes up with a comprehensive theoretical model to study the Chinese case. Particularly, he examines how political duties and market incentives have interacted in shaping and limiting the privatisation of security in China. In his focus to study political control over the means of violence, this author moves past liberal understandings of privatisation of security in international relations and instead builds on Krahmann's (2010) two models of civil-military relations and some of Habermas' conceptual work.

Krahmann's (2010)'s book *States, Citizens and the Privatisation of Security* contrasts the Republican and Liberal viewpoints on civil-military relations in order to shed light on the expanding employment of military contractors by Western armies. On the one hand, Republicanism favours a centralised state security provision and envisages hefty national armed forces to preserve robust democracy and, thus, political control over the military power. As a result, the scope and activities of private actors are limited. They are allowed to support, but not substitute, the national armed forces, which ultimately reflects in a defensive/noninterventionist military strategy. Conversely, liberalism organises and uses the armed forces according to the idea of cost-efficiency. The state's authority over the armed forces should be minimised when it is deemed ineffective and a barrier to individual freedom. In this line, soldiers must be nonpartisan professionals. Liberal-leaning governments typically adopt more aggressive foreign

policies, given their stronger military and lower political control over them. Krahmman (2010) argues that it is best to understand these two models as the extremes of a continuum, with a range of differentiated positions in between, given that they are ideal models with no clear-cut distinctions.

In his article, Ghiselli (2020) deems that Krahmman's models alone are insufficient to analyse the security privatisation case in China. When explaining these frameworks, Krahmman (2010) embraces Weberian notions of the modern state, which are traditionally central to Western private security approaches. This is understandable, as Krahmman's study, like most academia on force privatisation, focuses on the Euro-Atlantic Region. (Van Meegdenburg, 2015) By unquestioningly assuming Weber's ideas, Krahmman's models imply a rigid separation between public and private spheres. Krahmman overlooks the fact that the differentiation between the private and public spheres is, in reality, not as clear-cut and that it is variable across private security markets and states. Ghiselli (2020) argues that Krahmman's ideal models' tight division of the public and private spheres is hardly tenable when analysing Western cases of privatisation of security. This is considerably worse when assessing nations beyond the West. As seen by Haldén (2013), non-Western countries do not always feature the same high degree of separation between public/private realms as their Western counterparts. This is the case in states like Russia and China, where the separation between private and public powers has not been carried out, at least for now. (Ghiselli, 2020) While Krahmman's theories can help compare non-Western and Western 'Markets for Force', the former should be studied through a framework that acknowledges the limited divide of the private/public spheres divide in these countries.

Aiming to make up for this theoretical oversight, Ghiselli (2020) incorporates Habermas' (1991) theory on the concepts of public and private to complement Krahmman's models. Habermas argued that state interventionism and private interests have debilitated the public sphere, understood as a place that kept the state and the society separate. He theorises that this has caused a separation between the

“private” and the increasingly weakened “public”. In analysing this “weakening process”, Habermas (1991) states that there are two identifiable steps: the “societalization” of the state and the “stateification” of the society. “Societalization” of the state is the first step, understood as the growing responsiveness of policy-making to the needs of the society. The second phase is the “stateification” and repolitisation of society as a result of the “extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm” (Habermas, 1991, p. 142; Ghiselli, 2020). According to Habermas (1991, pp. 143–145), the inevitable outcome of this process is the accumulation of power by state bureaucracies, which are entrusted with “stateificating” the society and/or by larger private players in the market that can influence governance, that is, “societalize,” the state.

Ghiselli (2020) stresses the effectiveness of Habermas’s ideas about the mutual infiltration of public and private spheres in analysing Krahmman (2010)’s Republicanism-Liberalism continuum. As displayed in Figure 1, this author believes that “Societalization” and “stateification” can be observed as natural trends taking place in the area between the ideal Liberal and Republican models. While “societalization” pushes states towards the Liberal Ideal model, “stateification” propels in the direction of republicanism. Ghiselli (2020) asserts that assessing the relationship between the state and private security contractors resulting from the clash of “societalizing” and “stateificating” forces or trends is essential when determining a country’s position in the continuum between Krahmman’s ideal models. With this in mind, the author’s application of his framework follows a three-part structure. The first section, aiming to instantiate “societalization”, examines the policy and economic contexts surrounding the evolution and activities of PSCs in China. The second part takes a look at the media, scholarly, and policy discussion on the evolution of Chinese PSC in order to examine the “stateification” of this industry. At this point, the author derives that pro-“stateification” and pro-“societalization” forces have at least equalled each other. The third section reflects on the other two sections. It discusses how the “stateification” and “societalization” forces have pressured the development of Chinese PSCs and their relationship with

political power through the tasked bureaucracies. Ghiselli (2020) also gives sizable attention to legal/regulatory provisions related to abroad activities of Chinese PSCs.

	Republican Model	←	Liberal Model
Private and public sphere	Overlapping		Completely separated
Ideal type of soldiers	Citizen–soldier		Private contractor
Relationship between the state and the arm-bearing citizen	Duty	← Stateification	A contract
Role of the contractor	A support to the regular armed forces.		A substitute of the regular armed forces.
Nature of the primary threat	Traditional, long-term security threats (interstate, high-intensity conflicts)	→ Societalization	Nontraditional, short-term security threats (terrorism, pirates, etc.)

Figure 1: Note on Theoretical Framework. Ghiselli (2020)

Ghiselli (2020)’s amalgamation of Krahmman (2010)’s Republican and Liberal ideal types and Habermas’ (1991) theory on the public and private proves of service to somewhat understand China’s “societalizing” and “stateificating” trends and their effect in the development of the country’s private security industry. As highlighted by the author, this model and analytical structure is potentially compelling to assess other non-Western cases, such as neighbouring Russia. Russia provides an example of another growing non-western private security sector with a different development to the Chinese case, which still somewhat defies assumptions on private/public categorisations.

1.2.1 Adjusting the Model: towards the Russian Case

Following Ghiselli (2020)’s model, one could analyse the “stateification” and “societalization” trends and their effect on the trajectory of the Russian private security market and the vulnerabilities and leverage resulting from this development. Nevertheless, the Chinese and Russian privatisation of security has inevitably differed, given the disparate context. Similar to the Chinese use of PSCs, Russian PMSCs are employed towards state strategic, economic, and foreign policy

interests abroad. (Bajerová and Bokša, 2020; Yuan, 2022) Yet, Russia's current private and security sector is far more established than China's. Russian private security players are present in far greater numbers, and they all have unique growth patterns. (Allison, 2015) Catallo (2015) and Ghiselli (2020) observe that the state management of the quasi-private Chinese private security sector has limited and slowed its development. Coupled with historical and contextual differences, this has prevented a more Russia-like, or even Western-like, scenario. This is illustrated by national restrictions, which restrict Chinese PSCs abroad to security support services. (Yuan, 2022; Arduino, 2020) Contrastingly, the Russian PMCs lack explicit regulation, yet an array of varied military contractors are operating in this legal grey zone. These actors rely on informal networks with links to military and intelligence. (Spearin, 2018; Allison, 2015) Russian PMSCs have long ignited a debate on their hazy private/public categorisation. Opposite to the Chinese case, the hazy connections between these entities and the Russian state are much harder to prove. This debate on Russian contractors particularly applies to Wagner, whose much-anticipated relations with Russian leadership were definitely confirmed not long ago.

In appropriately applying Ghiselli (2020)'s framework to the Russian private security industry, one must shortly acknowledge some critical aspects of the Russian cultural, political, and economic context, which have heavily influenced civil-military relations and the private/private realms. (Gomart, 2008) These help observe and correctly assess the development of Russia's market for force in the broader context of Russian particularities. Ultimately, this facilitates a contextually informed assessment of Wagner's development and a correct situation of Russia's approach to this group within Krahnemann (2010)'s continuum of Republicanism/Liberalism.

The evolution of Wagner and Russian civil-military relations should be understood in the context of the Soviet legacy in Russia's security machinery and militaristic political culture. (Gomart, 2008) Rivera and Rivera (2017) highlight the extensive

discussion on Russia's transformation into a “militocracy” under Putin, where former security personnel hold influential political and economic positions. Many authors explore Putin's leadership, characterised by informal personal networks prevailing over bureaucratic approaches and rules. Understandably given his past as a lieutenant colonel in the KGB, Putin’s inner circle extends to the upper echelons of Russia's security and intelligence services. These individuals are commonly referred to as the “siloviki”, Putin’s elite connections with professional backgrounds in Russia's various armed forces, secret services, security agencies, and law enforcement. (Gomart, 2008, Taylor 2011; Galeotti, 2013; Marten 2018; Snegovaya and Petrov, 2022). The broader dynamics of Putin’s rule also include the leader’s exploitation of the ambitions and personal interests of elites. (Marten, 2019; Snegovaya and Petrov, 2022)

Regarding political and economic context, security privatisation in Russia must be understood with awareness of what Braguinsky (2009) refers to as the post-soviet “oligarchic capitalism”. Russia’s economic transition into capitalism resulted in incremental wealth accumulation in the hands of a small elite of businessmen. These so-called oligarchs controlled many of Russia’s key industries and used their far-reaching power to influence politics and prevent economic and political competition. (Braguinsky, 2009; Guriev and Rachinsky, 2005) Yet, under Putin, the system of influence of business oligarchs has been more limited. The absence of clear property rights makes it easy for the state to subdue oligarchs at Putin’s will, which resulted in economic elites and their interests to fully depending on their loyalty to the president. Monday (2019) This, along with weaknesses within the Russian state apparatus, determined a lack of opposition to Putin from the Russian power elite. This permits what Monday (2019) refers to as Putinization to shape the nature of contemporary Russian elites. The intricacies of Russia’s privatisation and “Putinisation” have ultimately resulted in contemporary Russia-specific despotism, which structurally challenges the public sphere. (Chebankova, 2013) This author observes that the Russian public space is severely underplayed in Russia while the state politically manipulates the public sphere, hence acting as the main agenda-

setter. Moreover, public discussions are largely dominated by the economic elites and the upper classes, which excludes significant segments of the population from participating in policy debates. A mix of these indicates that the state's and economic elites' interests severely rule Russian policy-making's responsiveness to the public's needs. This all translates to the application of Ghiselli (2020)'s framework in our study.

In Russia, the “societalization” of the state in the development of PMSs can be understood as the responsiveness of the state, through proxies such as Wagner, to the political and economic needs of the “public”. However, the prioritised “public” issues in Russian foreign policy-making in employing PMCs reflect the leadership and elite’s foreign policy and economic interests.

On the other hand, the “stateification” and repolitisation of society, as a result of the “extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm” should also be seen through a Russian-specific prism. In the context of concession of its monopoly of violence to private actors, this trend can be reflected by Russian concern and actions towards somewhat controlling these actors, to keep them within the state’s orbit in order to align with ‘public’ discussion. Reflections on public discourse on Wagner in Russia should be understood while acknowledging the impact of state propaganda and control over media and the public sphere.

Lastly, following Ghiselli (2020)'s framework and Habermas’ concepts, to understand how the Russian state and its relation to the Wagner, through the elites tasked with this ventures, such as Prigozhin, have developed under the pressuring interplay of these “societalization” and “stateification” trends. In Russia, this should be considered in terms of how the (lack of) legal arrangements, as well as attempts to regulate Wagner’s abroad operations, and Moscow’s implicit and explicit discourse on Wagner, have varied over time.

1.3 Security Privatization in Russia: An Overview

Historical accounts of Russian military contracting activity situate its origins in the early 1990s; the privatisation of security has accompanied the formation of this state. (Bajerová and Bokša, 2020, Rondeaux, 2019, Volkov, 2002) The collapse of the Soviet Union brought about the disintegration of the Union's influence around the globe and a significant organisational change for the Soviet military. At the same time, state-led industries passed onto the private sector. (Volkov, 2002; Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018) The massive downsizing of the Russian military in 1990-1991 resulted in a surplus of unemployed experienced security personnel ready to meet the market's demands. (Rondeaux, 2019; Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) Volkov (2002) sees that violence and coercion have played a key role in the development of Russia's PMSCs. In her historical review of Russian PMSCs, Rondeaux (2019) argues that this was accentuated by the end of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which spurred the growth of veteran groups. Both Rondeaux (2019) and Axelrod (2013) observe that some of these demobilised military elites maintained enough cohesion to keep existing and evolve into relevant Russian PMSCs.

1.3.1 The Russian Private Security Industry: Current Landscape

The Russian private security sector has steadily grown since then, especially in the last few years. (Marten, 2019, Sukhankin, 2019b, Foley and Kaunert, 2022) Yet, Bukkvoll and Østensen (2020) point out that the modern Russian security market is still relatively small and miscellaneous in terms of the provided services and its competencies. Russian PMSCs differ from Western PMSCs, tending to be rougher and more willing to partake in conflict directly instead of being involved in providing military support. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) These authors also assess how, beyond their support for their national armed forces, Russian PMSCs have often insisted on their apolitical nature. Sukhankin (2018) particularly

emphasises that the “siloviki” play an increasingly important role in forming and coordinating these actors.

In the early 2010s, Konovalov and Valetskii (2013) assessed that there were no fewer than ten and no more than twenty PMSCs in Russia. Despite extensive work from analysts and journalists, the inherently clandestine character of the sector has limited access to information, precluding an up-to-date and precise estimation of the number of PMSCs in Russia. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) As seen by Marten (2019), this has been exacerbated by their quasi-legal status and, within this nebula, the challenges in precisely identifying which organisations can be considered PMSCs. Bukkvoll and Østensen (2020, p.4)’s work highlights some of the most widely known firms “Moran Security, RSB-Group, Mar, ENOT Corp., Patriot, Shchit, and Wagner”, which differ amongst themselves in terms of size and ideologisation.

1.3.2 Academia on the Russian State and PMSCs

In spite of particularly recent increasing academic and mediatic attention to some of these firms, academic research on the Russian PMSC Industry remains quite limited. Nevertheless, studies on these entities have been growing, including some central to this section. (Marten, 2019; Spearin, 2018; Sukhankin, 2019b; Østensen and Bukkvoll, 2018; Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020; Foley and Kaunert, 2022) Given the understandable lack of reliable data, academia on Russia’s military contractors has mainly centred on the somewhat convoluted relationship between the Russian state and PMSCs, speculating on if and how these firms interact with Russian authorities and Russian foreign policy. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020)

Russia and PMSCs: Legal (Un)Recognition

An integral aspect of PMSCs in Russia is that no legal instrument explicitly regulates them. In 1992, PSCs (*Chastnoe Okhrannoe Predpriyatie*) were legislated

in Russia. Technically, if their task is guard duty, domestically or overseas, these businesses are legally registered. (Bukkvoll and Øsetensen, 2018) Article 359 of Russia's 1996 Criminal Code criminalised "Mercenarism". It defined "Mercenary" as "a person who acts for the purpose of getting a material reward, and who is not a citizen of the state in whose armed conflict or hostilities he participates, who does not reside on a permanent basis on its territory, and also who is not a person fulfilling official duties."¹ This regulation does not rule military firms on Russian soil nor refer to PMCs beyond its general definition for mercenaries. At the same time, Russia has shown defiance to Western-led projects of international PMSC regulation by refusing to be a signatory of the Montreaux Document on PMSCs. (ICRC, 2008) As observed by several authors (Rondeaux, 2019; Marten, 2019; Bukkvoll and Øsetensen, 2018), there have been attempts in parliament to update national legislation and allow PMSCs to conduct expeditionary operations legally. Nevertheless, these efforts have been unsuccessful in Russia's official legislative body, the Duma. There were rumours of the official registration of Wagner back in January 2023. (Meduza, 2023b) However, to this day, Russian use of commercial military and security contractors is *technically* illegal or utmost unregulated. This legal grey zone, of which Moscow is aware, has not prevented Russian private security actors from flourishing.

Russian motives for developing a PMSC industry

As aforementioned, much debate surrounds Russia's objectives in PMSCs establishment and use. Western literature on the Russian PMSC industry inclines to perceive financial interests and political connections present in the Russian outsourcing of military force through non-state actors as inherently Russian. (Spearin, 2018) There are indeed defining Russian aspects to PMSC use in the country. However, Marten (2019) argues that the Russian policy of using mercenaries or military firms to wage wars abroad may also be, to some extent,

¹The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation No. 63-FZ of June 13, 1996. Retrieved from: https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/rus_e/WTACCRUS48_LEG_6.pdf

consistent with other rational states' use throughout history. The author illustrates how specialised services of PMCs have been employed by states throughout history to achieve challenging security objectives at a lower cost and to stay out of the political limelight by reducing battle losses. In this line, several authors show that Russian PMCs are used as a force multiplier for government and private interests, minimising military and economic expenses (Doxsee, 2022; Foley and Kaunert, 2022; Sukhankin, 2019b; Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018). In the context of Putin's administration, the usage of these entities has also been theorised to relate to the state's plausible deniability when covertly operating abroad. (Marten, 2019) Sukhankin (2019b) points out that Russian PMCs also function defensively beyond their evident use towards overseas expeditions. This is primarily based on the concept of "control of territory", whereby non-state actors are employed by military strategists aiming to maintain control over relevant areas of the country to impede internal oppositions to thrive in the division-prone Post-Soviet scenario. However, Bukkvoll and Østensen (2020)'s point out that these entities are mostly unmentioned in Russian military theory, at least as military tools. Authors also highlight another plausible motivation, as Russian PMCs could provide a convenient means of using military force in operations where fatalities would hinder the Russian public opinion of state policies (Dunigan, 2011, Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020)

However plausible, these rational approaches fail to capture the whole picture, as they somewhat conflict with Russia's reluctance to legalise PMSCs. Marten (2019) claims that the plausible deniability explanations for this resistance to legalisation have their limits. PMSC actors such as Wagner have been openly discussed in the country, even by Putin. Particularly in Wagner's case, nowadays plausible deniability is of no practical use, given the undeniable ties between the group's founder and Russian command. (Poroskoun, 2023) Marten (2019) provides another explanation, asserting that these entities' semi-legal status allows Putin and his inner circle, which extends to FSB and GRU command, to pursue their personal interests through extra-official means. Bukkvoll and Østensen (2018) bring up

another plausible interpretation, which centres on concerns over the state's monopoly of power, suggesting that internal opposition to PMSCs' regularisation illustrates concerns that commercialising military power beyond state command may bring challenges to governance. These writers also detect instances of internal disagreements of interest on PMCs, notably between the military intelligence GRU and the FSB, the country's security services. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) Rondeaux (2019) claims that the Russian PMCs' irregular legal status stipulates that these entities do not come under the conventional chain of command supervised by the military or other legally required security institutions. Thus, maintaining some restrictions limits the evolution of the PMC market under the strict supervision of the FSB or even Putin as an individual. Marten (2019) sees that non-regularisation allows only a few elite-favoured PMCs to thrive. All of these interpretations function best together, yet they are estimative, and the genuine reasons behind the lack of PMSC are still veiled.

A significant portion of recent academic attention to Russian PMCs debates on if and how these corporations are used to pursue the state's strategic, economic, and foreign policy interests abroad. (Bajerová, Bokša, 2020; Marten, 2019) In light of Russia's reemergence as a significant force on the international scene, academia has dabbled in Moscow's new foreign and security policy toolbox, which includes various diplomatic, informational, security, and economic means such as PMSCs. (Reynolds, 2019) Authors are increasingly aware of PMCs rising importance in Russia's foreign policy, given they provide the Russian leadership with a valuable instrument of armed force multiplication for the conduction of hybrid activities while maintaining plausible deniability. (Foley and Kaunert, 2022; Klein, 2019; Borshchevskaya, 2019) In this line, Sukhankin (2019b) highlights the opinions of Russian authors, seeing the surge of these PMCs as means of enlarging Russia's 'sphere of influence' beyond the Post-Soviet Space. Military firms allow Russia to penetrate regions and countries that have not been accessible for a long time, particularly the Middle East and Africa. (Klein, 2019, Rondeaux; 2019) In studying Russian foreign policy, Giedraitis (2020) finds a geographical difference in

Russia's motives for employing Wagner in different areas: while some deployments have been in line with economic interests, others have reflected Russia's quest for a geopolitical buffer zone. Foley and Kaunert (2022) insist on Moscow using PMCs towards economic and foreign policy interests while maintaining military ambiguity and plausible deniability. However, this plausible deniability is limited in the context of confirmed links to the state and increased wariness around Russian PMC deployment. Marten (2018) interestingly situates PMCs usage of Putin's Russia as a part of a network of Semi-state security formations, which Moscow is increasingly exploiting to further its goals abroad. Russia uses these formations to exploit the actor's interests towards mutually beneficial campaigns. While Russia's employment of semi-state actors is not exclusive to Putin's regime, Borshchevskaya (2019) claims it has notably escalated under his leadership. Marten (2019) attests that Russia uses PMCs like Wagner as part of Putin's "information warfare" tactic, obscuring their affiliations to the state and causing disorder amongst Russia's rivals. Sukhankin (2018) argues that Russian PMCs differ from others, as the Russian state is seemingly the de-facto client and coordinator of many if not all of their activities. Despite Russian employment and financing of PMCs, this does not mean that they are entirely subject to the Kremlin. The degree of Russia's control over these entities likely varies across specific actors depending on their capabilities, activities, and financing particularities. (Rondeaux, 2019)

Marten (2019) rightly points out that while there are many other security contractors in the country, most of the publicly available information, mediatic attention and academic research has centred on Wagner. Given a lack of hard data, studies on Wagner have relied on estimations of its capabilities or objectives in the context of Russia-associated activities. (Marten, 2019, Rondeaux, 2019) The Kremlin's use of the Wagner Group abroad has sparked much discussion about non-state actors as a foreign policy tool, plausible deniability and regulatory issues. (Marten, 2019) Widely known to the public for its activities across the globe, Wagner appears to have operated since 2014 in Crimea, Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and the Central African Republic, amongst others. (Jones *et al.*, 2021; Marten, 2019) Allegations of Russian

affiliation have followed the study of Wagner from its first appearances. These are understandable, given that Russian military veterans comprise most of Wagner's personnel, and the group's activities seemingly align with Moscow's interests. (Marten, 2019) Amid the War in Ukraine, in September 2022, there was confirmation that Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch and close ally of Putin, was involved in founding the organization, in which he currently holds a leading role, thus having practical control over it. (Poroskoun, 2023) As the War has developed, new developments linking Wagner and the Kremlin have arisen. Given close ties to the state, one of the critical academic challenges when exploring Wagner and other Russian PMCs is conceptualising these groups using existing private security nomenclature. (Marten, 2019)

1.3.3 Hardship in Defining Russian PMSCs: On the Wagner Group

For the sake of the study on Russian PMCs and Wagner's Evolution, it is quintessential to plunge into some terminology to question where this entity stands classification-wise. Defining entities within the framework of private military and security firms has always been a challenge. Despite the extensive literature on definitional issues (Van Meegdenburg, 2015), PMSCs academia has been pluranimous, leading to many diverse terms for these groupings. (Sutherland, 2022) The lack of consensus on terminology becomes even more problematic in non-Western countries, such as Russia, where firms have obscure activities and convoluted links to the government. The contractual-based, Western-oriented definitions are sometimes outdated. They do not englobe the complexities of states that do not necessarily follow a Weberian state model with no clear-cut divide between the private/public spheres. This is the case in Russia and China, where political control over these entities is integral to their development. (Ghiselli, 2020)

As highlighted by Marten (2019), conflicting categorisation is a clear challenge for academia on Russian PMSCs, mainly due to their heterogeneity, variable nature and their estimated links to the state. Some organisations could be categorised as private

enterprises providing services to other actors. Others, such as the Wagner Group, are inextricably linked to the government and their combat services are employed and financed by the Russian Security apparatus. (Bukkvoll, Østensen, 2020)(Poroskoun, 2023) Naturally, Wagner centres most of a sizable amount of this unresolved conversation, igniting a debate on whether it could be considered a PMCs or a mercenary web amongst other terms. Western media commentators and researchers have tended to refer to Wagner by traditional definitions like PMC or a mercenary group. In line with Avant (2005)'s views on changing contracts, Marten (2019) evidences that the group's trajectory has not been consistent, making it harder to conceptualise it as a specific entity. Wagner's fit into these definitions will hence likely vary, depending on the context, the kind of contracts it engages in, and the services it provides. In terms of service provided and arrangements, some of Wagner's activities could fit specific terminology, such as Singer (2003)'s denomination "military provider firm" or, McFate (2017)'s "lethal expeditionary conflict entrepreneur". Wagner does technically click with some of the core elements of these concepts. Yet, the group operates without legal recognition, which conflicts with Singer (2008)'s view of PMCs as "legal corporate entities". This clandestinity and the group's differences with Western PMCs have led many to conceptualise Wagner's activities have led to the term "mercenaries" or "mercenary groups". In the political and media domains, the term "mercenaries" is quite commonly used in connection with Wagner cells and members abroad. (Marten, 2019; Ikono Press, 2022) Marten (2019) notes that this term is sometimes with a derogatory tone, to reflect their illegitimacy. As Sutherland (2022) discussed, Wagner has indeed engaged in mercenary-like quests. Yet, the group's complex contractual relation to the Kremlin also to incorporates Russia's interests. As criticised by Krahnmann (2005), academic definitions for mercenaries focus strictly on their solely profit-driven motivations and leave no room for the variety of an actor's activities.

Most definitional benchmarks used to evaluate Wagner have their roots in Western literature and thought. In agreement with Marten (2019), Sutherland (2022)'s

attempt at conceptualising Wagner concludes that while the group may meet some of the definitional aspects of PMSC activity or Mercenary behaviour, the group does not aptly fit into contemporary private security typologies. These Western-rooted definitions oversee the private/public paradigm evident in the Russian context, which is central to our theoretical framework. Hence they are not enough to fully englobe the changing intricacies of this actor's structure. As an alternative, Marten (2018) brings up the previously mentioned concept of Semi-State Security Groups. This term encapsulates the reliance of Putin's rule on self-interested non-state actors to carry out security ventures for the Russian state. Yet, this term just signifies the broader dynamics of PMC usage for Russian foreign policy, and the author still employs the term PMC to refer to Wagner in other articles. (Marten, 2019) In this study, for the sake of uniformity, whilst acknowledging the limitations of this term and Wagner's lack of a clear and uniform trajectory, it is preferable to maintain the usage of the PMC or "military provider firm" terms. Despite not neatly fitting into some aspects of traditional PMC definitions, they are the most appropriate to englobe Wagner within the scope of this research. Despite the evident convoluted relations to Russian command, the entity is a corporate structure, and the degree of control Moscow has over the group has its limits. This can be illustrated by recent events amid the War in Ukraine, which evidence this entity's certain degree of independence. Throughout the conflict, the group's leader Prigozhin has entered constant debacles with the Ministry of Defense, ultimately leading to a Wagner uprising against Russian political command. (Poroskoun, 2023) In line with Marten (2019)'s usage of PMC, this study's employment of private security terminology must go beyond conventional use. Wagner should be understood as a self-interested military entity with an agenda based on profit and power simultaneous to its political alignment and ingratiation with the Russian military and intelligence structures.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research design

This dissertation aims to investigate how political power and market forces have combined in Russia to shape the current state of affairs of the country's obscure yet prominent private military and security forces. In other words, it attempts to understand Wagner's evolution in the context of the interplay of political forces, such as the role of national foreign policy interests, connections to Russian governance and economic interests, which guide both the group's actions and Moscow's affairs. The main objective of this dissertation is thus to make a theoretically informed assessment of the Wagner Group's evolution in relation to these forces. The work also intends to test Ghiselli (2020)'s theoretical framework's applicability to analyse another non-Western private security industry. To achieve these goals, this research will employ qualitative methods in the form of an integrative single case study design on Wagner.

When diving into this project, much inspiration was retrieved from Ghiselli (2020). This author elaborated a case study on the China's rising private security industry as a whole. However, differentiating factors in Russia's case and this thesis' limitations challenged the possibility of selecting an equivalent industry-englobing case of study for this country. Evaluating the entire private security market in Russia would indeed be alluring. Nevertheless, attempting to simultaneously research this heterogeneous market's manifold complex and recondite entities would pose a significant challenge. In terms of non-Western PMSCs, particularly in Russia, there is a prevalent issue of restricted access to information. As a result, a worthwhile research project would demand far more time and effort than could be accommodated in this master's thesis. This led to limiting the case study from the entire Russian private security and military sector to one entity: the Wagner Group.

Several factors motivated the decision to carry out an in-depth case study, specifically focusing on Wagner as the primary unit of analysis. This group is undoubtedly the most relevant entity within the pool of existing Russian private security contractors. Its international presence, dubious activities, capabilities, and influence, have all gained significant recognition over the last decade. (Marten,

2019; Gostev and Coalson, 2016) In the end, publicly available information on Russian PMSCs and research has focused chiefly on Wagner. Further attention has recently been garnered towards this entity due to its noteworthy involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war. In this context, mounting evidence has related to the intricate relationship between Wagner and the Russian State. (Poroskoun, 2023) Now that the long-suspected connections have been undeniably proven, it is all the more compelling for researchers to examine this group's development retrospectively. An integrative case study can capture some of the intricacies of Wagner's development. Combined with theory, this research method can help to comprehend tendencies in the group's evolution in response to political and economic demands for the organisation and the Kremlin. With this in mind, the project can also shed light on Wagner's role in Russia's policy and on Russia's influence in Wagner's operations. This enables a comprehensive analysis of how the group has adjusted and responded to its environment through time.

Beyond the Russian context, Wagner seems to be amongst the most prominent and distinct players in private security and contemporary geopolitics. (Reynolds, 2019) The results of this case study can also provide insights into the more general phenomena of private military corporations and their evolution. There may be implications for comparable non-state entities acting in other war zones or non-western contexts from the lessons acquired from the Wagner Group's experience. As a result, this case study may provide important new information on emerging non-western private security actors or industries.

The unclear character of Wagner and its activities evidences a need for more reliable primary sources and verifiable empirical data. The non-regularized nature of Russian private security actors, as well as the group's obscure links to the Kremlin, are some of the factors behind the opaqueness of this topic. Thus, the majority of the accessible information comes from secondary sources. The current context accentuates this nebula. Amid the War in Ukraine, the state of affairs concerning Wagner is rapidly and constantly evolving. This makes primary sources all the more

unattainable. Ultimately, this qualitative technique alone, employing secondary and tertiary sources, emerges as the most effective method for the proposed study.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The case study will be focused on the Wagner Group. In facing this complex object of study, the investigation must seek to enhance the validity and reliability of the research. A key strategy will be data sources triangulation. The study will employ a range of data sources, including academic journals, policy publications and reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, Russian and non-russian media information and legal documents. The source of each piece of information will be carefully examined to determine how its viewpoint contributes to a thorough knowledge of the phenomenon under study. By using this approach, data from different sources will be cross-referenced and compared to establish consistency and identify discrepancies. As far as feasible, sources in Russian or descriptive pieces will be preferable. This is to access the most up-to-date information and remove potential bias from the study. Online translation services, namely DEEPL, because of their precise translations, will be used to overcome language hurdles when working with sources in Russian.

A key step in data selection is establishing a cut-off date. This is necessary to limit the unprecedented amount of new information regarding Wagner amid the War in Ukraine. With this in mind, and in light of the time limitations of this research, the data selection process will be restricted to information published until June 23rd 2023. This specific date signifies the start of the two-day-long Wagner uprising, a culmination of escalating hostilities between the group's leader and the Russian MoD. The events leading up to Wagner's mutiny and how it unravelled are compelling, as they shed light on the Group's complex relationship with political power. However, going beyond, and even into, the events of this weekend would be falling into uncertainty, as the aftermath is still evolving.

When taking Ghiselli (2020)'s conceptual framework in this dissertation, one must make up for this author's somewhat unclear threshold for data collection and analytical approach when assessing data. Thus, a clear explanation of the approach is in order for this qualitative data analysis. The chosen approach to analyse the quantitative data is based on Grounded Theory methodology. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) This is arguably also the procedure Ghiselli (2020) follows. This approach is appropriate for the study since it enables an in-depth examination of social processes that have received limited previous academic attention. It allows the unveiling of trends and processes as one dives into data collection. Although Ghiselli has elaborated a prior theoretical explanation, how this will interact with the Russian case is unknown. The Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) entails the development of hypotheses and theories through the collection and inductive analysis of data. This thesis's process thus integrates Ghiselli (2020)'s model to data collecting, deduction and induction to elaborate hypotheses and reach conclusions while preserving previously collected data. This case study will consist of a secondary data examination on Wagner, following a three-part structure similar to Ghiselli (2020)'s application of his original theoretical framework. In line with Ghiselli's theory applied to Russia's case, the sections will discuss different trends. Hence, each part, mainly the first two, will focus on a specific kind of data to identify patterns. In order to adapt to time limitations and better structure our analysis, the scope of the study was limited to specific events and deployments abroad that proved to be the most determinant in Wagner's evolution. These were Wagner's founding and deployment in East Ukraine, Wagner in Syria, Wagner in Africa and Wagner in the War in Ukraine. While one could argue Wagner's uprising is also a key development of Wagner, it will be assessed as a culmination of tensions between the Russian state and the group throughout the deployment in the War in Ukraine. The categorisation and interpretation of the data will depend on each analytical section, following the theory-informed structure.

The initial section of the analysis, Chapter Three, showcases the "societalization" of the state by observing the policy and economic contexts around the pre-selected

Wagner's key developments and deployments abroad. These will be contextualised to their alignment with prioritised "public" issues in Russian foreign policy and how the rise of Wagner aligns with them. It will draw on viewing the extent of Wagner's 'market for force' in response to Russia's need to protect its interests abroad. Throughout this chapter, Russia's interests should be understood holistically, whereby it is imperious to try to understand all elements combined.

The second analytical chapter depicts the "stateification" and repolitisation of society as a result of the selected Wagner events. In the context of the state's concessions of its monopoly of violence to Wagner, this trend can be reflected by Russian concern over these actors. This will be observed by examining mostly Russian media, scholarly and policy publications to highlight the changes in the 'public' debate on control of Russian PMCs, which Wagner's developments have often inspired. The pressures to "stateificate" Wagner will be identified with rising demand or attempts to regulate PMCs. Given the Russian context, the section will address how (lack of) legal arrangements on PMCs; thus Wagner's, abroad operations and Moscow's implicit and explicit discourse on Wagner, have varied over time.

A third and last portion of the analysis will shortly reflect on the other two sections, consistent with Habermas's work, discussing how the "socialization" and "stateification" trends have shaped Wagner and its relations to political power. The section will briefly draw from media and policy information to showcase how these trends affected the relationship between the formerly hidden Prigozhin and his links to the Kremlin (Putin and MoD).

2.3 Scope

As established by the research design section, this research will cover the evolution of the Wagner Group through a qualitative case study. The work analyses the group's interactions with the Russian leadership, in how economic and political

forces have interacted to shape its development. It examines the interplay of policy and economic interests in shaping the group's evolution from its founding in 2014 to June 2023, limited by a self-established cut-off date and to the aforementioned key events in Wagner's evolution. Once the scope of the research has been outlined, it is necessary to make an in-depth review of its limitations.

2.4 Limitations

This research has several main constraints. The first relates to the scarcity of first-hand sources and challenges in accessing specific sources of information. There is an apparent information vacuum, coming hand in hand with the obscurity of the topic and the non-regularized nature of Russian PMCs and their clandestine activities. Thus, much of the data is retrieved from secondary and third-hand sources. The Wagner Group still suffers from this limitation despite its position as the most prominent and documented private force in Russia. Given Wagner's notable role in the war in Ukraine, the group recently attracted increasing mediatic and academic attention. Despite recent advances and confirmations, information on this actor remains very nebulous amid the current context. Much of the nitty-gritty of the relations between the Kremlin and Prigozin's company remains classified, leading most of the available information to be quite up to interpretation. This is particularly true in the wake of Wagner's uprising in June 2023. (The substantial information gap can constrain the research while simultaneously revealing much about the Russian private security market and Wagner. It is essential to acknowledge this dearth of empiric visibility for a true understanding of the outcomes of this research.

Within the already limited pool of disclosed information on this organisation, language and time barriers are also substantial limitations. A large amount of the available up-to-date information concerning Wagner's development, as well as official legal and policy documents, is found only in Russian-language sources. Not being a proficient Russian speaker slows down the process of data compilation and

limits the horizons of this research. Thankfully, nowadays, one has access to high-quality translating tools that facilitate this process. Time barriers are also a constraint to this study, especially considering the volume of information and the necessary time to verify and curate the available data. The limited research time may toughen an in-depth analysis to comprehend the scenario at hand appropriately. A well-established cut-off date and deliberate data-selection criteria are employed to minimise this handicap. This study's emphasis on a theory-informed approach favouring comprehension beyond merely 'looking at data' is also helpful. Furthermore, maintaining a big-picture perspective, rather than an exclusive focus on particularities, helps achieve this study's ultimate purpose of visualising patterns and trends.

Another limitation of data collection is the continuity of events. The current state of affairs, with Wagner's involvement in the ongoing war in Ukraine, has resulted in a spiral of new information. The volatility of Wagner's current state may potentially constrain this research's findings. Some extremely recent events are the most glaring illustration of how quickly Wagner's position might shift. These include Prigozhin turning on the Russian Ministry of Defense and mobilising Wagner's agents towards Moscow, along with the still unclear aftermath. This renders the new and upcoming data quite attention-grabbing and compelling to assess. But information on emerging developments is simultaneously harder to obtain and accurately interpret. Hence, for the sake of this time-limited research, the established data collection cut-off date also aims to avoid dipping into the pool of uncertainty that is Wagner's future.

Potential bias in data gathering, partly given constraints to access data, may also constitute a challenge for this research. Certain notions unique to this topic and the researcher's perspective can influence data interpretation, potentially introducing bias into the findings. This can be evidenced by the most recent Wagner-related events in June 2023. These are striking and self-evidently relevant. Hence they have garnered unprecedented amounts of mediatic attention. This traction can easily lead

research to focus excessively on attention-grabbing details when analysing. To avoid sensationalistic events from overtaking the study, it is crucial to carefully evaluate the information at hand, its source, and its corresponding weight within the larger context. Potential biases can be reduced by consciously attempting to compute data correctly in the context of the group's evolution throughout the analysis.

Beyond the lack of data and bias in data collection, the quality and veracity of the information involving Wagner can also be limiting. A potential bias in data derived from Russian sources is evident. The obscurity of the subject and the war context in Ukraine open the possibility for Russian disinformation and propaganda campaigns. These sources' ingrained perspectives may interfere with the partiality of the information on Wagner. On the other hand, a majority of media, policy, and scholarly publications on Wagner have a Western bias. Often, the study and documentation of the group have been dependent on perceived consequences on Western security and stability. (Marten, 2019) As seen by (Ghiselli, 2020), the occidental coverage of some non-western PMSCs has sometimes been quite estimative and, at times, has had sensationalistic undertones. This is also true for some studies on Wagner, which could inaccurately estimate the group's assets, capabilities, or impact, leading to skewed assumptions. If these potential biases are not recognised when analysing the data, they could undermine the validity of this research's findings. It is thus essential to approach this topic critically, maintaining a balanced awareness of both Russian narratives and Western-centric viewpoints. It is also crucial to ensure a nuanced understanding of the role of Russian culture, society, and politics in privatising security. The triangulation of sources will direct the data selection process to reduce these restrictions. All data will be carefully and critically examined for any potential biases in the sources to prevent distortions and anomalies. The use of descriptive reports will be preferred to speed up this procedure.

Another restriction to be mindful of is the somewhat limited generalizability of this research. This study may produce valuable reflections applicable to emerging non-western private security actors or industries. Nonetheless, potential generalisations should be taken with a grain of salt. This research is carried out in a specific context, focusing on a distinctive actor as the case of study. Wagner is a unique organisation with numerous case-specific characteristics that are still being unveiled. The Russian context for the privatisation of security is also peculiar. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to other industries or organisations. Conscious recognition of this limitation is nothing but beneficial to the outputs of this thesis. Having said this, it is essential to note that the goal of this qualitative study favours in-depth comprehension above generalizability. This narrows the focus of the work to a rather case-specific pathway while maintaining the prospect of valuable findings that could benefit the study of other private security providers.

As a scope limitation of this study, the analysis was confined to specific variables or aspects of the research topic based on time limitations and the theoretical framework guiding the investigation. Thus, other factors that could potentially impact the phenomenon are not explored in depth. As the analysis continues, some of these factors may be identified and noted in the conclusion. The time limitations refrain from widening the scope. Hence, it is important to be self-critical and accept external variables' possible impact on Wagner's evolution and the thesis' findings.

Thanks to new technologic advancements and the work of researchers, journalists and analysts, the image of Wagner is gradually clearing up. However, due to insufficient quality and quantity of data, generating an unclouded picture of Wagner is still a significant challenge. In facing the limits of this research, one must maintain a holistic view of the topic and field at hand. Considering the big-picture elements in the industry and the Russian context is crucial for a worthwhile analysis. Acknowledging possible biases and constraints is key, so they can be avoided to the fullest extent while still providing valuable insights. The three following chapters

will execute this research's analysis by piecing together information on the Wagner Group's development.

Chapter 3: The “Societalization” of the State and Wagner

3.1 Wagner's Founding and Deployment in East Ukraine

3.1.1 Contextualising ‘Public’ Russian Interests

Wagner's participation in hostilities in Ukraine from 2014 until the ceasefire should be understood within Russia's political and economic situation at the time and its resulting foreign policy interests. These had recently started to rely more on semi-state security actors. The political context ties back to the events of Euromaidan in 2013, which consisted of a series of protests and civil unrest in Ukraine. These forced the former pro-Russian Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, to resign, leading to the subsequent election of a new president closer to the West. (Hunter, 2022) This regime change in Ukraine triggered Russian concerns about the country's future, resulting in the annexation of Crimea and the Donbar War. (Montoya Forero, 2022) Ukraine's rapprochement to the West implied a departure from Russia's sphere of influence, which had several implications for Russia. In the last ten years, Moscow's key foreign policy goal has undoubtedly been its quest to re-establish Russia's international reputation as a great power, seeking to expand its influence against the West. (Petersohn, 2017) Petersohn (2017) observes that Ukraine has a strategically critical position for Russia regarding geographical barriers with the West and access to the Black Sea. Yet, the country has played a significant role in defying Russia's interests politically by aiming to halt its dependency on Russia. (Hunter, 2022) As seen by Østensen and Bukkvoll (2022), Moscow's goal is also increasingly challenged by the limits of Russia's economy. The country's GDP heavily depends on fuel trade, a significant source of Russia's national income. Moscow's officials have claimed Russia's status as a global “Energy Superpower” (Baev, 2007). Russian and Western experts have also commented on Russia's oil and gas exports as an alleged source of Putin's personal

wealth. Åslund (2019) observes that the leader's close associates control most of the export and transport infrastructure for energy manufacturing networks across parts of Africa and the Middle East. Rondeaux (2019, p.30) pointed out that regime change in Ukraine "threatened to upend Russia's longstanding access to important maritime and land routes for energy trade and arms transit". This jeopardised a large share of markets vital to Russia's economy and the elite's interests in the context of recovery from the 2008 oil price drop and its consequences. Crimea's annexation is a reflection of this. Furthermore, this event was justified by Russia in defence of Russian-speaking minorities in the region. (Montoya Forero, 2022) All in all, Moscow's main foreign policy interest towards Ukraine at the time, which still applies to this day, was to keep the country within Russia's sphere of influence by ensuring Russian-friendly governance. Ultimately Moscow aimed to prevent Ukraine from joining Western multilateral institutions such as the EU and NATO. (Petersohn, 2017)

3.1.2 Wagner's Activities

Wagner appeared promptly following the dissolution of the PMC Slavonic Corps in 2014. (Marten, 2019) Wagner is believed to have grown out of this company which had reportedly operated in Syria since 2013. (Borshchevskaya, 2019; CSIS, 2020) Following Russian sources, Marten (2019) observes that the company was formed in 2014, when Dmitrii Utkin, a recently retired GRU veteran, took command of the first units that would later be formally identified as members of Wagner in the Dombas. While there are rumours of earlier activities in Crimea (Korotkov, 2016), the Security Service of Ukraine recorded the first evidence of the Wagner activities in May 2014 in Donbas, after the annexation. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) Official confirmation of Wagner's origins arrived in late September 2022, as reported by The independent news agency Meduza. (2022) Corroborating the suspicions of journalists and analysts, Yevgueni Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch closely linked to President Putin, admitted to founding Wagner to support Russian forces in the war in Donbas in May 2014. Prigozhin had repeatedly denied his

involvement with Wagner and had fought many journalists on the issue, allegedly to protect its operatives. At the same time, Prigozhin insisted on the organisation's core Russian patriotism. (Meduza, 2022)

Throughout the conflict in Donbas, Marten (2019) considers that Wagner's consolidation served as a way for Russian interests to be executed extra-officially. In 2017, the head of the Security Service of Ukraine, Vasyl Hrytsak, announced the involvement of Wagner in several military incidents in Donbas in June 2014. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) Constant conflicts between pro-Russian rebel leaders in Ukraine and Crimea remained until 2015, making them a divided force against Ukraine's government. (Marten, 2019) Korotkov, (2016) notes that Wagner's presence has been associated with the assassinations or captures of numerous leaders unaligned with Russia's interests. According to Marten (2019), Russian sources indicated responsibility from the PMC through training of pro-Russian rebel forces or possible direct involvement. There is, however, no independent verification of this information. Furthermore, Marten (2019) argues that Wagner's forces partook in the pro-Russian rebel victory in the Battle of Debaltseve in early 2015 (Zoria, 2018), which was vital to stall the war and stop the Ukrainian offensive in the region, thus forcing the implementation of a ceasefire shortly after, which would keep the conflict relatively static until February 2022. (Montoya Forero, 2022)

Wagner's deployment in Donbas reflected Russia's rising economic and political needs. Arguably, the group's presence functioned as an extra-official way for Russia to get involved and maintain Ukraine in its sphere of influence. These Russian goals were intrinsically tied to protecting economic interests to safeguard the national economy. These goals also aligned with the interests of the Putin-akin elites. In principle, using Wagner was less costly than sending Russia's army and had fewer repercussions. It ensured plausible deniability in the international arena while simultaneously making sense from a national public opinion perspective. As noted by (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020, p.8), in contemporary Russia, there was

“considerable scepticism in Russia about risking Russian lives in operations not directly connected to the defence of the country”.

3.2 Wagner’s Deployment in Syria

3.2.1 Contextualising ‘Public’ Russian Interests

Simultaneously to Donbas operations, Wagner began operating in Syria in 2015, notably preceding the contracting of PMC Slavonic Corps Limited in the country. (Sukhankin, 2019a) Russia’s interests should be understood in the context of Putin’s foreign policy shift, which greatly emphasised the projection of power across the Middle East and Africa. (Petersohn, 2017) Rondeaux (2019) sees how Moscow relied on the arms trade, particularly with Syria, to maintain stable authoritarian allies and to reinforce Russia's influence amid rising energy markets in the region. From a strategic perspective, Syria’s position is vital for Russia’s arms trade economy and military expansionism against the West. After the collapse of the Gadafi regime in 2011, Russia supported the Bashar al-Assad administration and sent regular arms shipments and other PMCs. (Rondeaux, 2019) As seen by Kozhanov (2018), growing Russian involvement in the Middle East culminated in 2015, with Russia's official military intervention in the Syrian Conflict defending Assad's rule against rebel factions. This move allowed Russia to establish its first military base in the Mediterranean and deepen its arms trade with the country, leveraging political influence in the region. (Kozhanov, 2018) Moscow’s entrance into Syria occurred during an economic crisis related to the fall in oil prices and the recent Ukraine crisis. (Petkova, 2020) Russia’s official justification to the public involved the fight against terrorism, with expressed concern that the collapse of his regime could spark the spread of instability and radical Islamism to the post-Soviet space. (Kozhanov, 2018) Moreover, Putin was vocal against Western attempts to topple yet another authoritarian regime and brought up the existential threat that brought for Russia. (Borshchevskaya, 2022) It is worth noting that despite public support for the Kremlin’s Syria policy, polls unveiled that a large percentage of

Russians opposed Russian ‘boots on the ground’. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) This demonstrates the disconnection between the ‘public sphere’ and the government’s agenda-setting.

3.2.2 *Wagner’s Activities*

Since the second half of 2015, evidence of Wagner PMC activity appeared in Syria, seemingly to support Russian troops in the civil war. (Marten, 2019, Korotkov, 2015) This PMC has been contracted to conduct law enforcement activities in various regions of the country to secure access to oil and gas for the Bashar al-Assad regime, aiding in confrontation with rebel armed groups. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) Reynolds (2019) observes that unlike in most of the African conflicts in which it is involved, Wagner in Syria had a rather sizeable combatant role. During earlier stages of Wagner in Syria, the group seemingly acted independently. However, The Russian Armed Forces provided support to Wagner units and personnel in terms of artillery, air force, weapons, ammunition, military technology, and evacuation services. (Rondeaux, 2019) Notably, there is confirmation that Wagner operatives reportedly participated in direct military action in the first and second assaults on Palmyra in 2016 and 2017. (Korotkov, 2016, Sukhankin, 2019a)

Nevertheless, from the summer of 2017 onwards, the PMC maintained close communication with the Syrian government and reportedly trained the Syrian Armed Forces on issues such as the coordination of ground and air operations, cyber warfare and counter-insurgency tactics. (Korotkov, 2016, 2017) This coincided with a sudden significant halt of support from the Russian Armed Forces. (Rondeaux, 2019) The targets of Wagner seemingly shifted at this time from direct fighting and training towards offering its services for commercial gain. Bushuev (2020) points out that the company *EuroPolis*, strongly linked to Prigozhin, signed an agreement with the Syrian state offering to be engaged in protecting and extracting oil and gas fields and receive at its disposal a quarter of the profits. Wagner's PMC fighters were expected to carry out security functions. Hence, what

started as a Russia-support operation seemingly resulted in an increasingly profitable operation for the group. Throughout Wagner's activities in Russia, there were multiple accusations against Wagner's repressive actions on civilians, which were dismissed in Russia. (Fidh, 2022) In 2018 the organisation reportedly suffered a decisive defeat against US troops in the Battle of Khasham, which ended with a bombing raid by U.S. aircraft that killed Wagner operatives. (Sukhankin, 2019a) This attack by al-Assad, in which Wagner played a significant role, was reportedly an excursion to capture a natural gas reserve and infrastructure. Sukhankin (2019a) explains that the number of reported Wagner fatalities greatly varies across sources, ranging from scores to hundreds of fallen contractors. Russia denied any connections to the fallen Russian contractors. Denysova (2018) shows that the information reached the Russian public via unofficial media and Telegram, and response of politicians and specialists was subject to much criticism.

Overall, Wagner's presence in Syria aligned with Russia's strategic, political and economic interests. During direct military action, the group's forces fought rebel forces and served as shock forces, which reduced the casualties of regular Russian soldiers on the frontline. Wagner's quest for profitable commercial opportunities diverged sometimes slightly from Moscow's objectives, as it resulted in human rights scandals that brought international attention and investigation to the PMC. Nevertheless, Wagner's shift from a (relatively inefficient) military proxy to a PMC engaging with new customers, the Syrian Authorities, resulted in being cost-effective as it served for Wagner to gain renown and further proliferate, and allow Moscow to greatly increase its presence and influence in Africa. At the same time, Wagner's engagement in contracts with other countries have not only occurred due to the group's self interests. There is a clear alignment between investments and extractions carried out by Wagner and the key sectors in which Russia's elites have had their eye out for a long time.

3.3 Wagner in Africa

3.3.1 Contextualising 'Public' Russian Interests

It is estimated that Wagner began operating in Africa around 2018, when they reportedly entered CAR. (Ikono Press) It is worth noting that Syria, like the Donbas and Crimean Wars, served as a platform to increase the reputation of Wagner, which would have a rising presence in Africa parallel to increasing Russian influence. (Montoya Forero, 2022) Russia's interests in Africa can also be understood, in the climate of Putin's global power status quest with mutually reinforcing economic and political interests. In the economic and commercial sphere, Africa represents a great pool of opportunities for Russia due to its natural resources, especially minerals, precious stones and raw energy materials. Herranz and Vega (2022) explain how from Russia's point of view, penetrating the region allows for the diversification of the exploitation of certain raw resources at considerably lower costs than in Russia. Africa also attracts Russian energy interest, both from a commercial point of view and for energy raw materials. Many of these countries have growing domestic energy demand and poor infrastructure, for which Putin's Russia wants to position itself as a one-stop energy service provider from the construction of facilities to the consultancy and management training required. Rondeaux (2019) and Marten (2019) emphasise that these economic interests align with investments from Moscos's business elites. Russia's presence in Africa also has a military element, reflected in the growing military and security cooperation with several African countries. The Kremlin seeks to project an image of Russia as a solid security provider at the international level. Its anti-Western and anti-interventionist narrative has favoured Russian rapprochement with some African countries distant from the international community, such as Sudan or Libya, and others, such as Mali, which are moving away from Western influence. (Duursma and Masuhr, 2022) One of the main dimensions of this cooperation is the arms trade, highlighted by Rondeaux (2019), which is a significant source of income and a means of contact with these countries for Russia. The Kremlin also aspires to establish Russian military bases in African territory for strategic purposes and to counter existing Western installations. Russia's growing strategic, economic and

military presence parallels its intention to extend and increase its influence and media. (Herranz and Vega, 2022) Wagner's activities seemingly aid Russia's rising influence in Africa.

3.3.2 Wagner's Activities

Indeed, from 2017 onwards, Wagner would be contracted by different governments throughout the continent to carry out mostly non-combatant tasks, mainly escorting high-ranking officials, protecting critical infrastructure and counterinsurgency training. (Parens, 2022) Wagner has also been associated with disinformation campaigns and propaganda supporting Russia and its own presence in the country. (Parens, 2022) This has been done partly through Prigozhin's Patriot Media Group, a media conglomerate dedicated to promoting anti-Western sentiments inside Russia. (The Dossier Center, 2023) However, numerous accusations of human rights abuses have been associated with Russian contractors, particularly in CAR and Mali. (Human Rights Watch, 2022) In recent years, the presence of PMCs on the African continent has expanded. While there is talk of Wagner operations in Mozambique, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Angola and even Burkina Faso (Jones *et al.*, 2021), the analysis will focus on the most relevant and evidenced deployments: Libya, Sudan, CAR and Mali. These have been the most defining in Wagner's trajectory, as well as confirmed extensively.

Invited by the then-president Omar al-Bashir, Wagner is believed to have initiated gold exploration in Sudan in 2017 under the guise of Meroe Gold, a mining company owned by the Russian company M Invest, which Prigozhin controlled. (The Bell, 2018) The group has reportedly worked in many Sudanese cities, from Port Sudan to Khartoum and Darfur. Allegedly, the PMC arranged the supply of weapons and transportation of personnel through airports and borders from Sudan to Central Africa. (The Bell, 2018) There are rumours that Russia and Wagner have been building connections to Hemedti, leader of the paramilitary RSF, since the deployment, mainly linked to the protection of Russian merchants and gold

extraction. However, Wagner's role in the Sudanese conflict remains unclear. (Obaji Jr, 2023)

Wagner gained the most notoriety in Africa due to its activities in the CAR. In late June 2018, the PMC reportedly arrived in the country and established a base and a training camp near Bangui. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) Since then, Russian PMCs like Wagner train the army and provide security for President Fostin-Archangel Touader. Wagner is also believed to provide security for the country's gold and diamond mines and has interests in other industries, such as mahogany processing. In return, the PMC receives particular preferences and benefits from the country's government. (Schreck, 2018) For instance, coinciding with Wagner's arrival at CAR, the government granted two Russian companies linked to Prigozhin, Lobaye and SARLU, licences for gold and silver mining. (Marten, 2019) In late 2020, regular troops of the Russian armed forces were deployed in CAR, which may indicate a connection between Russian official authorities and the leadership of Wagner's PMC. Wagner forces and other Russian instructors have been accused of severe human rights violations in the country. (Human Rights Watch, 2022)

Wagner presumably has been active in the Libyan conflict since 2015. Its personnel have served in critical frontline roles in support of General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) (Sutherland, 2021) Wagner was reported to operate at the El Jufra airbase in the central part of the country, in Sirte and at the port, jointly with regular Russian armed forces. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) Wagner forces have reportedly acquired contacts to guard oil, gas and industrial facilities and ports under the LNA. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) In October 2020, the parties to the conflict in Libya signed an agreement in Geneva under UN auspices, ending the Tripoli conflict and agreeing to withdraw foreign forces within three months. However, in 2020, the United States Africa Command revealed that Wagner's deployment in eastern Libya, loyal to the retired Haftar, has not yet withdrawn its operatives from the bases in Sirte and Al-Jufra. (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 2020) Russian officials have

denied these allegations, saying it is an information campaign against Moscow's Libyan policy. (Sukhankin, 2020)

Following the military mutiny and coup d'état in Mali in 2020, the representatives from the new government initiated negotiations on cooperation with Wagner PMC. Western powers, especially France, condemned this move. High tensions between the latter and the military junta over Wagner's presence in Mali led to the complete withdrawal of the French military from the country. (Lazareva, 2021) According to a CSIS report in 2022, in December 2021, Wagner's troops began building a camp outside the perimeter of Bamako's Modibo Keita International Airport. (Thompson *et al.*, 2022)

For the most part, Wagner's African expansion and activities have served Russian regional objectives. Both directly and indirectly, the PMC has significantly projected Russian power in the region, leveraging political power from commercial transactions. Wagner has also seemingly protected private investments related to Russia's oligarchic networks. Arguably, Wagner's presence in Africa, or rather Western reluctance towards it, has somewhat eased the termination of some Western military operations, particularly in the Sahel region.

3.4 Wagner in the War in Ukraine

3.4.1 Contextualising 'Public' Russian Interests

While most of the intricacies of Russia's interests in Ukraine have been discussed in the first section of the chapter, one must note what contextual differences led Russia to commence its so-called "special military operation" in the neighbouring country. In February 2022, after months of tension and escalation amid Russian troop accumulation on the Ukrainian border, Moscow recognised the territories in Luhansk and Donetsk in the Donbas. (DW, 2022) Shortly after this, Russia announced the start of a "denazification" and "demilitarisation" operation in

Ukraine. Russia accused Ukraine of genocide against the Russian population, particularly in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. (Montoya Forero, 2022) Hence it commenced a full-blown invasion, resulting in the ongoing war in Ukraine. As it did in 2014, the Kremlin uses the presence of Nazi individuals and symbols in Ukraine to justify its attack. Russia's narrative of protecting Russian-speaking minorities in Donbas fueled public support for the invasion. (Montoya Forero, 2022) Although the Kremlin's objectives may have changed throughout the war, Russia's economic and political interests in Ukraine remain essentially the same, which are to protect its nationals abroad while ensuring economic interests and political leverage over the country, all while opposing the West and seeking its global superpower status. Notably, in terms of the needs of the 'public', the use of Wagner has been justified to reduce the high number of Russian casualties, aiming to garner further support for the ongoing conflict.

3.4.2 Wagner's Activities

Reporting on the early activities of Wagner in the war in Ukraine is complicated due to the severe information warfare that has characterised this conflict. Without a minimum temporal distance, the difficulties in contrasting testimonies and versions of parties in a scenario of open warfare, and the fact that some of the most relevant news comes from communiqués issued by political and military authorities and intelligence services that have an evident interest in disseminating a narrative favourable to Ukraine, make it necessary to take all available information with particular caution. Days after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a Times report stated that four hundred Wagner mercenaries were deployed in Kiev to carry out the task of assassinating Ukrainian president Volodimir Zelenski. (Rana, 2022) Wagner operatives were accused of executing false flag attacks to improve the image of the conflict in the eyes of the Russian public. Devlin *et al.* (2023) draw attention to "car bomb" attacks in the Dombas region, which the Russian media attributed to the Ukrainian government, as well as attacks on Russia's energy infrastructure network and sabotage of the pipeline system transporting gas to

Western Europe. While no further confirmation of these events or Wagner's involvement exists, they should still be acknowledged. The group is estimated to have been involved in the war from the start, mostly scattered around the Donbas provinces. (Force News, 2022) The Wagner is also accused of employing terror tactics against the Ukrainian civilian population, as it did in Syria. (Montoya Forero, 2022)

Regarding their participation as combatants, according to a research documentary carried out by Force News (2022), Wagner forces have been deployed as light troops. The group is seemingly not fully integrated with the rest of the Russian Armed Forces. Rather, they move independently in small groups. Wagner reportedly stands out at seizing areas already decimated by Russian artillery, especially in partly urban areas, such as villages or small towns, where fierce resistance has existed. The operational flexibility of the PMC and the harsh methods of its employees seem to be relatively successful in assaulting points of civilian resistance. After Prigozhin admitted to having founded and financed Wagner in September 2022, he became a more vocal yet somewhat unreliable figure in the group's advances. (Lohmus, 2023) The group's role in the conflict began to gain prominence during the seize of the city of Soledar in January 2023. (Lohmus, 2023) Meduza (2023a) reported video evidence of Prigozhin showing that many of Wagner's recruits in Ukraine come from Russian prisons, having been offered pay and future pardon. Later on, the oligarch noted the recruitment of fifty thousand Russian convicts. (Meduza, 2023a) The oligarch has been highly vocal about Wagner's role in the long-lasting battle for the eastern Ukrainian town of Bakhmut. In May 2022, he stated that, despite the leave of Russian forces, the group had captured the city. (Trevelyan, 2023) Prigozhin implied that his force lost around 15000 fighters, half of which were Russian convicts. (Meduza, 2023a) However, Ukraine's military officials denied the fall of Bakhmut. (Trevelyan, 2023) The group's leader has repeatedly clashed with the Russian MoD over the lack of ammunition the group is receiving from Russia's armed forces. These tensions

escalated, culminating with Prigozhin calling Wagner forces to rebellion on June 23rd 2023. (Poroskoun, 2023)

Wagner's deployment in Ukraine has essentially aligned with Russia's interests. The PMC's tasks have been in line with Moscow's offensive, working not only as a direct military weapon but to increase the morale of Russian forces. The company has worked to reduce civil resistance and support achieving specific objectives. Furthermore, as seen by Prigozhin's insistence on the group's casualties, Wagner's presence can somewhat manifest public reluctance to make Russian official forces expendable. It should be noted that Prigozhin has utilised his umbrella company Patriot Media Group to increase public support for Wagner in Russia. (The Dossier Center, 2023) While the events of June 2023 may indicate otherwise, Wagner's presence in Ukraine has also served as a platform to increase international attention towards the group. While Russia's plausible deniability has completely diffused throughout this deployment, the company has performed for disinformation purposes and to lay the ground for future ventures outside of this war.

In short, the "societalization" of the state has deeply impacted Wagner's development. Russia's quest for profitability and influence abroad to rebuild Russia under Putin's command mostly aligned with the deployment and actions of this PMC. Wagner was undoubtedly used in the persuasion of the Kremlin's multiple and mutually reinforcing goals, which evolved over time. While the company was initially used primarily on military ventures, PMC contracts with Syrian authorities depicted Wagner's capacity to act as a private contractor. Sometimes Wagner's self-interest towards financial gain did not seemingly align as much with Moscow's overarching goals. However, its commercial engagements proved cost-effective to gain enough popularity to dive into other regions, which benefits Russia's international reach. In the cases of Syria and the war in Ukraine, Moscow's use of Wagner also related to information campaigns and Russian public opinion on Russian fatalities abroad. The responsiveness of the state's foreign policy to strategic, political and, essentially, economic factors observed in Wagner's

worldwide activities pushed Russia towards Krahnmann's (2010) Liberal ideal model within the continuum. After having inspected the effects of the Russian state's "societalization," the following Chapter explores the "stateification" of Wagner.

Chapter 4: The "Stateification" of the Public in Russia and Wagner

As seen above, the "societalization" of the state in Russia has increased the market-oriented chances for Wagner. This chapter will address national pressures for Moscow to "stateificate" the group. In doing so, the chapter will comment on the evolution of the position of Russia's public debate, the subsequent politicisation on PMC regulation and how pressures to tackle the issue of PMC regulation in the country relate to Wagner's deployments.

Sukhankin (2019b: 4-6) makes a solid review of the intellectual debate on PMCs in Russia. While not all of it is Wagner-related, these annotations are compelling within the context of repeated denial of associations with the group by Russian Authorities. The author observes that the intense internal debate the legal status of Russian PMCs and their abroad activities was fueled by the state's rising yet officially denied deployment of PMCs overseas and by comments by Moscow's elite military and political officials. (Sukhankin, 2019a) Consistently with the idea of "stateification", Wagner played a crucial role in advancing this conversation, as most of the peaks in the domestic discussion on PMC regulation somewhat relate to the group's activities. Notably, there is a considerable lack of first-hand sources, given the informal channels for communication on Wagner throughout the early stages of the group's development. Official remarks only started spurring in recent months. (Marten, 2019) This "stateificating" push appears most clearly in statements made by scholars, strategists, military practitioners, the "siloviki", and public officials, and how these relate to Wagner's evolution.

4.1 Early developments: On Russian PMCs

In 2014, there was another unsuccessful attempt by Duma deputy Gennadiy Nosovko to regulate PMCs in the Duma, emphasising the potential marketability of these entities abroad to compete with foreign entities on equal ground. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018) Nosovko's initiatives were dismissed, yet Bukkvoll and Østensen (2018) highlight that two journalists insisted that shortly after, military sources had implied this would not prevent PMSC use. Interestingly, this was the year that Wagner was founded. Notable military strategist Boris Chikin claimed in 2015 that Russian governance had not reacted timely to the rise of these entities; thus, the normative approach would radically differ from Western models (Chikin, 2015), which could hinder the global projection of Russian PMCs.

Simultaneous with the initial Wagner Deployments from 2014 to 2015, there was a significant rise and change in academic attention to Russian PMCs. (Marten, 2019b) Sukhankin (2019b) observes that before 2014, academic debate on this issue was nearly nonexistent and mainly focused on regulatory issues from a somewhat Western perspective. Although the build-up of Russia's use of PMCs abroad was officially denied, it sparked a change in public discussion on PMCs. Military strategists and Russian scholars accommodate key Russian-specific insights to their approach, such as the increasingly plausible potential for state usage of these entities. (Sukhankin, 2019b) The same author explains that discussions then oriented towards the prospective employment of PMSCs in offering non-military specialised support in Russian foreign policy goals and future outlooks for PMCs' regularisation. Sukhankin (2019b) also highlights testimonies on the "siloviki" military elites and the MoD, indicating that the nation-level discussion on using PMCs abroad had somewhat reached these spheres. Some of these individuals reportedly insisted on the difficulty of legalising PMCs in the Duma. At this time, the evidence of state connection to Wagner and other PMCs and information on the group itself was severely limited; hence no specific mention of Wagner was made.

4.2 Syria: Stateificating Pressures and Wagner in the Public Eye.

Wagner's operations in Syria in 2015 began to draw mediatic attention. Notably, some journalistic investigations in the online newspaper Fontanka began to explore the so-called "Return of the Slavic Corps in Syria". These also started to unveil the group's role in the Donbas War and its close associations with the GRU. (Korotkov, 2015, 2016, 2017) Those reports linking Wagner to the Kremlin or referencing Prigozhin are now unavailable, likely indicating censorship.

Amid the rising rumours of Kremlin-linked mercenaries operating in Syria, new academic studies on the prospects and need for regularisation appeared. (Shumikhin, 2017) Within available Russian literature on Google Scholar, the earliest Russian study that makes explicit reference to Wagner is Mikhaylenko (2016)'s assessment for future PMC laws. This evidences a rising tendency to acknowledge the group's existence. In January 2018, security expert Alexei Podberyozkin stated that PMCs are much more profitable in military conflicts than state participation. (Podberezkin, 2018) Former attempts at controlling Russian PMCs derived from the goldmine these entities could be for Russia. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018) However, from 2017 onwards, there seemed to be a clear political element guiding the pressures to "stateificate" Russian PMCs.

Sukhankin (2019b) highlights that siloviki, particularly from the military branches, issued initiatives and remarks in 2017. The author emphasises that Viktor Volodatsky, the current deputy director of the Duma, spoke positively about a test PMC project initiated by the DOSAAF. Furthermore, another relevant figure in the Duma, Shamanov, explicitly stated Russia's need for PMC legislation. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018) Parallel to this supposedly rising support to control PMCs, Wagner had started entering into contracts and operating hand in hand with the Al-Assad administration. (Korotkov, 2017)

An event that drastically fueled PMC discussion in Russia was the Battle of Khasham on February 7, 2018. (Sukhankin, 2019b) A few days after US airpower killed an undetermined amount of Russian contractors, the news started to reach Russia through Telegram and unofficial media, referring to Wagner operatives as Russian “volunteers”. (Denysova, 2018) While condemning the attacks, the Kremlin denied the presence of Russian nationals in the incident. (Rondeaux, 2019) Sukhankin (2019b) points out that Pogodin, a Russian military commissar, refused to give a direct answer when asked about Russian PMCs enlisted in the Syrian contractors ten days after the Khasham strike. A month after this incident, a proposed bill on PMCs in March 2018 was rejected unanimously by all significant ministries, including the security services faction, “siloviki”, which had voiced support for regularisation. (UAWHire, 2018)

4.3 Africa: Political Recognition, and Plausible Deniability

While there seemed to be some push towards legalisation, and the topic was candent within academia, political and bureaucratic opposition seemed to align with one of Wagner’s key elements, plausible deniability. Interestingly, the position of the upper echelons of Russian politics, namely the president, had not been vocal on PMCs. (Sukhankin, 2019a) The lack of public acknowledgement from the Kremlin was somewhat contradictory with the accounts of interactions and rising evidence of their connections. (Marten, 2019) Indeed, increasing mediatic and research attention to this entity hampered this plausible deniability.

In November 2018, several developments were unveiled to the Russian public through media outlets. Prigozhin had been spotted at a meeting between the commander-in-chief of the LNA, Marshal Khalif Haftar, and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. (Lenta.ru, 2018) In the same month, there were reports on Prigozhin’s provision of security services in several African nations, including Libya, CAR and Sudan, in exchange for the right to mineral extraction and other concessions. (Lenta.ru, 2018) The newly available information on Wagner’s then-

alleged founder heightened public discussion in and out of Russia, particularly on incongruities with national law. (Marten, 2019)

Less than a month after this news got out, Putin broke his silence and publicly addressed the Wagner question by stating: “If they (Wagner) violate something, the Prosecutor General's Office should give a legal assessment; if not, they have the right to work and pursue their business interests anywhere on the planet.” (Lenta.ru, 2018) Surprisingly, this was the first time Putin had publicly acknowledged Russian PMCs since 2012. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2018) As observed by Sukhankin (2019), this statement illustrates both the fluctuating trend of Russian PMC evolution and global proliferation and the firm resistance of Russian authorities to the legalisation of these entities. Indeed, Russia’s elites treasure the plausible deniability of this actor and other PMCs, arguably due to their agendas on Russia’s foreign policy, which caters to their economic interests. (Marten, 2019) In Libya, plausible deniability has allowed the continued presence of Russian forces in LNA territory. (Jones *et al.*, 2021) The grip on public deniability has been a direct challenge in “stateificating” the group for a long time, although the claim has been increasingly harder to sustain. For instance, this is illustrated by Putin’s approval of a decree in 2018, which declared secret all information about groups and individuals who cooperate with the FSB. (De la Corte, 2022) This coincided with Wagner’s arrival in African nations. Two Russian journalists making a film about Wagner PMC's activities were assassinated in CAR the following year. (BBC News, 2019) Even so, the confirmation of Wagner’s ownership in 2022 checkmated the plausible deniability argument. Despite attempts to conceal Wagner’s activities, Human Rights violation counts and the controversy of Wagner’s deployment in Mali brought more attention to the topic. (Lazareva, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2022)

4.4 War in Ukraine: Implausible Deniability

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, Russian and international media have reported all kinds of statements, testimonies and rumours concerning Wagner’s

operations in the country. (Marten, 2019) While Wagner's existence at this point was indisputable, and links to Prigozhin had been unveiled, there was no direct confirmation. The ambiguity in the grey-zone-embracing narrative towards Wagner increasingly blurred throughout the war as images and videos of the oligarch in Ukraine increased. (López Miralles, 2022) As stated throughout this thesis, Wagner's deployment in Ukraine observed Prigozhin's admission of his role in founding and financing the PMC. (Meduza, 2022). This further politicised the issue through increasing national and international press and policy documents. (Marten, 2019) Arguably, the official verification of Wagner's origins brought a final blow to the Kremlin's intended plausible deniability, which only intensified as the conflict evolved. Interestingly, in January 2023, Wagner was allegedly legally registered in St.Petersburg. (Meduza, 2023b) Prigozhin became increasingly vocal about Wagner's ventures in the War and openly criticised the MoD's military command. (Meduza, 2023e; López Miralles, 2022), In view of this, Viktor Sobolev, a State Duma deputy, expressed his opinion on the role of PMCs using the example of Wagner, suggesting that such structures should be integrated into the MoD system to ensure the centralisation of command and control. (Gavin, 2023) This illustrates a new traction to "stateificate", pushing for some sort of normative state control. State-owned media and official communications from the Russian state have referred to Wagner and other non-state actors in the conflict as "Russian Volunteers". (Poroskoun, 2023) This evidences the lack of contracting and, thus formal command structure under which Wagner operated in the War. (Force News, 2022) The newly-found "stateification" pressure materialised in May 2023, when the Defence Ministry mandated all Russian volunteers in Ukraine, including Wagner, to sign contracts with the government. (Mazurenko, 2023) This was reportedly solicited for a more efficient Russian offensive in Ukraine. However, it could simultaneously be a cautionary measure to keep Prigozhin and his group under control amid rising tensions.

In sum, the discussion about Wagner's normative "stateification" has strongly guided the PMC debate of Russian scholars and military experts. Nevertheless,

“stateficing” forces detonated by Wagner, which have varied throughout time, have not materialised through normative legislation. Russian scholarship has been adamant about the role that bureaucratic politics and rivalries between different services may have in difficulting the legislation of PMCs. (Bukkvoll and Østensen, 2020) Amid the Ukraine deployment, the recent conventional attempt to “stateficate” Wagner and other non-state actors has not been fruitful for the group, as it has only fueled more rebellious behaviour on Prigozhin’s part.

On the other hand, the non-regularisation of Russian PMCs has acted as an alternative “stateficing” factor in the case of Wagner. Not legalising Russian PMCs seems to be an unconventional way of limiting these actors’ proliferations and capabilities and potentially serving as leverage to subdue them at any given time. The Russian state could technically prosecute Wagner operatives, given their “mercenary” capacity abroad. At the same time, the MoD could deny the group military protection mid-conflict. This was the case in the Battle of Khasham in Syria, where the Russian military refused to treat wounded Wagner operatives in Syria, having them transported to Russian territory first. (Denysova, 2018) However, the legal grey zone under which the actor falls can be selectively ignored by Moscow whenever the group’s operations are valuable. Ironically, the lack of regulation has functioned as an unconventional regulatory system for Putin’s elites, at least in Wagner’s case, as it has prompted Wagner’s global proliferation in protecting Russian interests. (Petersohn, 2017) The following section discusses rising tensions between Wagner and the Russian state as a product of the counterposed push of “statefication” and “societalization”.

Chapter 5: Uncertain Results and Prigozhin

Several things become clear from the interaction of the examined trends. Firstly, “stratification” and “societalization” throughout Wagner’s development have indeed clashed differently throughout Wagner’s deployments. The interests of elite groups who likely benefit through Wagner's actions and bureaucratic complexities

in the Duma have limited the normative “statefication” of Russian PMCs. However, the reluctance to legislate can also be interpreted as an unconventional way of “stateficing” of Wagner, as it has allowed the Kremlin to maintain control over the group while permitting public decoupling from the entity when necessary.

The clash between the fulfilment of Russian interests and attempts to control the entity has fluctuated throughout time, impacting the entity's evolution. The impact has been most evident in the varying relationship the state has had with the private authorities seemingly tasked with managing the Wagner. Despite other alleged actors within the entity’s command, such as veteran Dmitry Utkin, most evidence has involved Prigozhin’s beyond-confirmed links to the Kremlin. This oligarch is the figure in Wagner’s authority par excellence, and his fluctuating relationship with Russian governance is arguably a reflection of the clash of “statefication” and “societalization” of Wagner.

Wagner’s activities abroad, led by Prigozhin, have mainly reflected the interests of the Russian state. There has, however, been a critical difference between those involving direct reliance on the MoD in a broader military campaign and those who did not. The War in Ukraine and the Syrian campaign have been instances where the relationship between Prigozhin and Shoigu has become more tense. Evidence mostly concurs with the fact that Wagner collaborated with and received support from the military in the campaigns in Eastern Ukraine and Syria. (Marten, 2019, Korotkov, 2017) In 2017, support abruptly decreased when the group’s operatives engaged in the Prigozhin-led Europolis agreement to collaborate with Syrian authorities. (Bushuev, 2020) No causal relation can be ensured, early frictions between the oligarch and the MoD were palpable. Allegedly, he criticised Shoigu’s campaign in Syria. (De la Corte, 2022) On the other hand, the oligarch and the MoD engaged in legal disputes over unpaid catering and cleaning services done by Prigozhin’s enterprises. (Rondeaux, 2019, Marten, 2019)

Throughout the War in Ukraine, relations between the two actors increasingly soured, especially after Prigozhin's criticism of the inadequate supply of ammunition. (De la Corte, 2022) In early May 2023, Wagner's leader commenced a full-on discrediting campaign against Shoigu, sharing online videos that blamed the Minister for the deaths of Wagner operatives and blaming it on the MoD's indecisiveness and corruption. (López Miralles, 2022) The response from the MoD to this was an order for all "Russian Volunteers" to sign contracts with the government, reportedly to centralise the Russian offensive and make it more effective, Putin supported this initiative. to which Prigozhin refused. (Poroskoun, 2023) This led Prigozhin to further accusations that the Russian military command had attempted to destroy Wagner several times. (Poroskoun, 2023) For instance, he claimed the MoD knew of incoming US strikes that resulted in numerous Wagner fatalities in the Battle of Khasham in 2018. (Meduza, 2023f) Contrary to the intended regulatory effect, the MoD's push for military regulation fueled tensions with Prigozhin, who ultimately called for a so-called 'march of justice' on June 23rd after accusing Shoigu of bombing one of Wagner Group's camps. (Meduza, 2023d)

Operations in Africa have had a very different taint to them. Wagner contractors were no longer just a "support" for the Russian Military abroad. They established contracts with states, sometimes under the auspices of Russian ministries. (Marten, 2019) This deployment is not solely orientated to direct combat, although it can be provided. (Reynolds, 2019) Prigozhin's new model allowed for political influx, strategic positioning of Russian armed forces and exploitation of resources in exchange for protection. The broader range of services provided and the economic and political influence gained from Wagner's presence across Africa were more effective in achieving Russia's grand strategic goals. It should also be noted that the fast proliferation of Wagner throughout the continent benefited from the non-regularisation of Russian PMCs. Marten (2019) argued that Russian state elites, particularly Putin's inner circle, likely control Wagner's deployments via informal connections rather than following the command of one specific actor. It is true that,

when operating in a more Liberal PMC fashion, Wagner's actions have brought more benefits to Russia regarding power projection. While Russian elites have preferred this model, regularisation would impose bureaucratic demands that would be hard to compute within the variability and complexity of Wagner's operations.

Even when directly challenging the MoD, Prigozhin proclaimed Wagner's complete subordination to the interests of the Russian Federation and Putin. Although these are yet unclear, Prigozhin's interests, personality and power aspirations have played a large role in the evolution of the company. In November 2022, two insider Kremlin sources reported to Meduza (2023g) that Prigozhin is rumoured to be part of the so-called "war party", which included members of the Kremlin who defend the invasion and see the potential for escalation.

Overall, there is uncertainty regarding the relationship between Wagner and the state due to the impasse between "societalizing" and "stateficing" forces. Instead of precise regulation of PMCs and Governmental acknowledgement of this entity, informal command networks tied to Putin's regime have widened Wagner's opportunities for operations abroad. At the same time, keeping Wagner unregulated allows the Russian State to somewhat control the entity without risking deniability. However, the lack of clear command in joint military ventures and the personal interests of Prigozhin has made Wagner less fit to participate in the War in Ukraine.

These contradictions and lack of normative and direct support have translated into heightened tensions between Prigozhin and the military command in the context of unified military campaigns. Having discussed the clash of the forces in shaping the Group's trajectory, we should assess how this translates to Russia's position in Krahnmann's continuum between Republicanism and liberalism.

Conclusion

This thesis studied the role of “statefication” and “societalization” forces in shaping the development of the Wagner Group and its relation to the Kremlin. The above analysis shows Russia’s approach to Wagner has varied throughout time and deployment type, but there is a general tendency towards Republicanism. Wagner's activities show the group’s fit into Putin's foreign policy strategy to restore Russia to its former status as Great Power. While Wagner’s evolution has not been accompanied by a normative “statefication”, the discussion has been very politicised. Nevertheless, a non-conventional “statefication” can be observed in the Russian reluctance to legislate PMCs, as it arguably allows a state-led non-bureaucratic instrument for Putin’s inner circle to employ for Russia’s sake and their own self-interests. As a result, Wagner has been able to increase worldwide and take on different duties, all within the paradigm of illegality. This conclusion does not come without its contradictions, as Wagner’s position within Krahmann’s continuum has fluctuated throughout time. As a result, Wagner has been able to increase worldwide and take on different duties, all within the paradigm of illegality.

This conclusion does not come without its contradictions, as Wagner’s position within Krahmann (2010)’s continuum has fluctuated throughout time. Internal approaches to Wagner’s deployment in Ukraine and in the first stages of the Syria campaign has resembled a more Republican image of civil-military relations. On the other hand, approaches on the group’s African deployments have tended to shift slightly towards the Republican model.

A brief reminder of the study's limitations and the current state of affairs is in order to understand the scope of the implications of our research. Although the picture of Wagner is becoming increasingly more precise, finding hard data on the capabilities and dynamics involving Wagner and the Russian state is unrealistic. While this study has attempted a holistic analysis of the issue, it is likely that veiled or unobserved factors, as well as implicit Western bias, have and will continue to play a part. The continuity of events has an evident impact on the quality of the findings, whereby we should annotate some of the latest updates.

Indeed, Prigozhin's call for a Wagner rebellion against the MoD resulted in a two-day-long military march of the group towards Moscow. Wagner contractors seized the city of Rostov and advanced from southern Russia towards the capital. They stopped their advance 200 kilometres from Moscow when Prigozhin ordered a withdrawal after negotiating with the Russian Government under the mediation of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko. After the mutiny, Putin offered Wagner contractors to join the Russian armed forces or exile in Belarus. (Poroskoun, 2023) Putin also clarified to a Kommersant correspondent that Wagner, like all PMCs in the country, does not legally exist. (Kolesnikov, 2023) Although the Russian president initially called Prigozhin's move 'treason', the Kremlin has dropped all charges against the Wagner leader and his fighters, allowing him to reside on Belarusian territory. (Meduza, 2023c) Shortly after the mutiny, Putin said that the Wagner's financing was entirely provided by the state, from the Defense Ministry's state budget. (Interfax, 2023) Seemingly, the group was halting recruitment and relocating to Belarus due to a pause in their operations in the War in Ukraine. (Meduza, 2023c) However, the independent news outlet Istories (2023) reported that Wagner continues to recruit, particularly for African deployments. Mid-July 2022, the MoD announced that Wagner mercenaries were handing over their weapons to the Russian military. (AP News, 2023) This unpredictability is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict and Russia's continuing influence abroad.

The future of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin and the conditions of the deal that stopped the military uprising, permitting Prigozhin's relocation to Belarus and offering Wagner members amnesty, is uncertain. (AP News, 2023) Moscow's inability to contain the "Wagner threat" and Prigozhin's apparent impunity after the military march raise many questions about its control over the Group. Wagner's rebellion arguably opened a reputational wound in Putin's regime. However, it is within Russia's interests to hold on to the position and benefits it has gained access to through Wagner's operations, particularly in Africa. Strategic shifts and

reconfigurations in Russia's military offensive in Ukraine could result from the mutiny, especially with Wagner reportedly leaving Ukraine. Despite the rebellion, Wagner's potential to open the market for other Russian PMCs and to keep increasing the country's influence overseas remains.

Nevertheless, Russia's future normative management of Semi-state Security Actors may undergo some changes. Estimations on Russia's future endeavours should be taken with a grain of salt, given the state's involvement in what seems to be a long-lasting conflict. The most certain assessment we can derive from these events is that Wagner's development is veering and incomplete. Undoubtedly, the amalgamation of these newly found questions and their impact on the rest of the world make this issue more pressing for study.

Guiselli's conceptual model has been feasible to understand Wagner's evolution to an extent. As seen throughout the key findings, this model has helped guide the analysis and allowed for a holistic view of Wagner, uncovering valuable reflections on the group's evolution. However, an in-depth understanding of socio-political and cultural Russian elements and analytical specifications have determined this fit. The heterogeneous character of this industry and the lack of available data have deemed it unfeasible to assess the entire industry. The weaknesses in Russia's public sphere, as well as the seemingly self-preservatory interests of the siloviki and other Russian elites, have been some factors difficult to compute within the theoretical framework at hand. Furthermore, the complexity of Prigozhin's relationship with political power in Russia deems that, as well as the lack of accessible official legal and policy documents, have led to reliance on estimations for some parts of the analysis.

This work has evidenced how the development of one singular private security actor can become incredibly complex, especially when connected to the state. The heterogeneity of PSIs and their trajectories worldwide evidences the oversight of a large amount of (Western-leaning) academia on Security Privatisation. Acknowledgement and normalisation of private/public contradictions in non-

Western contexts should be more prominent in this field of study. Simultaneously, an increased context-conscious understanding of non-Western private security sectors must be integral for future researchers. Particularly in the case of Russian PMCs, there is a tendency to estimate the country's objectives and capabilities inaccurately, and information warfare does not help. This study stresses the need for more quality research on Russian PMCs that acknowledges their unique and non-Western particularities, especially when assessing new developments. Future studies should come with objectivity, academic rigour and an understanding of Russia's history and how it translates into its private security objectives, structures and capabilities. In sum, studies of Russian PMSCs must continue to move beyond simplistic interpretations and descriptions of Russian objectives towards an all-encompassing comprehension of the phenomenon that is theoretically and contextually informed. This will be a crucial instrument for policy-makers to appropriately assess the Russian PSI industry and calculate the effects that new scenarios could have on the geopolitical chessboard and global instability.

From an empirical outlook, this thesis encourages further testing of Ghiselli (2020)'s Framework in other Non-Western cases that Krahmman (2010) did not consider or revise the ones she did. In agreement with Ghiselli (2020), comparing and contrasting the applicability of this framework in different cases can be used to identify contextual variations for elements that strengthen or reverse "societalization" and "stateification" trends. Having seen how complex one private security actor can be, research on the development of PSIs would benefit from adapting liberal-leaning theory to the particularities of emerging "markets for force" worldwide. This approach could enrich upcoming literature on security privatisation beyond the West. It would be insightful to continuously evaluate Guiselli's model's efficacy in adapting to other cases and topics and interacting with theories, such as the Principal/Agent Theory. This model could also be potentially studied to assess the role of PMSCs in non-conventional warfare, which could allow for an exploration of how private/public realms interact in facing non-military threats.

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