History, Structure and Management of Private-State Military Groups — Legionnaires and Wagnerians

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‘Wagner leaves no one on the battlefield. If there is a risk that a group will be taken prisoner, we deal with this group ourselves, because we will not allow anyone to be mistreated in captivity’ — Yevgeny Prigozhin, owner of the Wagner company

Abstract. The article contains considerations on the organisational, on the creation, functioning and management of illegal armed forces remaining outside the official control of the state — private military companies (PMCs) but also informal groups such as the Wagner Group, which has an extremely unclear status. The text consists of three main parts. The first explains the concept of ‘mercenary’ in international public law, the second describes the first modern mercenary group, the French Foreign Legion, and the third provides information on the Wagner Group, a private Russian mercenary army. The text includes an introduction and a summary. The main purpose of the article is to present the origins, essence and methods of operation of the French Foreign Legion and the Wagner Group in the context of national, international and even global security. It further intends to show the reader the extremely illegal and criminal practice of modern mercenaries using extremely brutal, and sometimes even atavistic violence.

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Introduction

The history of private military forces begins in antiquity and is divided into two main factions. One of them concerns military groups under control (previously loosely organised clan and tribal structures, then the state), while the other functioned illegally on the margins of social life and formed groups that today

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2 Private military company (PMC), an independent corporation that offers military services to national governments, international organisations, and substate actors. Private military companies (PMCs) constitute an important and deeply controversial element of the privatised military industry. PMCs specialise in providing combat and protection forces. Their work ranges from running small-scale training missions to providing combat units composed of up to several hundred highly trained soldiers equipped with powerful weapons platforms, including tanks and attack helicopters, https://www.britannica.com/ topic/private-military-firm, [accessed: 7/07/2023].
we would describe as criminal. One of the first organisations of this kind was the ancient Assassins, then in the times of Greek city-states, these communities, apart from the citizen army, were largely based on mercenary troops. In the Hellenistic period, Greek mercenaries were used by all the powers of the Mediterranean basin, including Persian and Syrian rulers, including Alexander the Great.

At the same time, medieval England was a hotbed of all kinds of social pathologies, and law enforcement agencies there were obliged to execute about 120 royal arrest warrants a month and muster soldiers for war and apprehending criminals.

On the continent, in turn, one example of mercenary military activity was the state of the Teutonic Order, which used a contingent of English and Dutch mercenaries in the Battle of Grunwald.

A slow decline of mercenary business took place only at the turn of the 18th century, with the advent of the era of enlightened absolutism. It was then that the idea of professional armies with a national profile appeared, which in turn reduced the demand for mercenary services. The introduction of the term ‘neutral state’ by the Congress of Vienna initiated a new approach to armed conflict in international politics. The new law imposed an obligation on states not participating in a conflict to refrain from actions that could be perceived by other states as supporting one of the belligerents. The creation of mercenary units on the territory of a neutral state or recruitment to such units was considered such interference. In the following centuries, the mercenary practice practically decreased and was revived only with the decolonisation of Africa in the 1960s.

Mercenaries were then used by former colonial states against national liberation movements in local armed conflicts. At the other end of the world, a political transformation took place in Central Europe and was the cause of many changes, including those related to the conduct of armed conflicts. The new situation created

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3 The Order of Assassins or simply the Assassins were a Nizari Isma'ili order that existed between 1090 and 1275 CE, founded by Hasan-i Sabbah. The legends are based on the Nizari Ismailis — a breakaway group from the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam — that occupied a string of mountain castles in Syria and Iran from the end of the 11th century until the Mongol conquests in the middle of the 13th. They captured their first castle, Alamut in northern Iran, from the Sunni Seljuq Empire in 1090 under the leadership of Hassan-e Sabbah, an Ismaili theologian and missionary. Headquartered in Alamut, Nizari forces seized a number of other castles, creating a small geographically discontinuous Nizari state, https://www.britannica.com/story/who-were-the-assassins [accessed: 4/08/2023].


5 See more: R. Catterall, Robin Hood Memories of the Coterel Gang, b.m.w., 2007, 2008; B. Hanawalt, Of good and ill repute, Oxford, 1998.


8 Ibid.

favourable conditions for the activity of private companies (the so-called private military; private security companies). Their personnel, referred to as private military contractors, are perceived by some representatives of the doctrine as 21st century mercenaries.10

**The concept of ‘mercenary’ in international public law**

The first act of international law referring indirectly to mercenary work was the Hague Convention (V) Respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land of 1907.11 Pursuant to Art. 5 of the Convention, the neutral state is obliged to take appropriate measures resulting in prohibiting the formation of units and recruitment in the territory of a neutral state for forces that would support one of the parties in a conflict outside its borders.12

Then, in the years 1974–1977, a diplomatic conference was held in Geneva, the final act of which was the adoption of, among others, I Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.13 One of the points of the Protocol was the introduction into the international legal order of the first legal definition of the term ‘mercenary’. Until 1977, the laws of war did not formally distinguish between mercenaries and other armed participants in armed conflicts.14

Based on Article 47(21) of the Additional Protocol, a mercenary is a person who:
1. Was specially recruited at home or abroad to fight in an armed conflict.
2. Actually takes direct part in hostilities.
3. Participates in hostilities primarily for personal gain and has been promised by or on behalf of a party to the conflict material rewards that are clearly in excess of those promised or paid to combatants of similar rank and function in that party’s armed forces.
4. Is not a national of a party to the conflict or a permanent resident of a territory controlled by a party to the conflict.
5. Is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict.
6. Was not sent by a state other than a party to the conflict on an official mission as a member of that state’s armed forces.15

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15 *I Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions*. 

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*Internal Security, January–June*
The above definition of ‘mercenary’ still raises many controversies for both theoreticians and practitioners of international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflicts. Moreover, the Protocol, unlike the 1949 Geneva Conventions, does not reflect customary law norms. For this reason, the United States and Great Britain have not ratified this document to this day. The Americans justify their position by the ‘political nature’ of the provisions of the Protocol, which is inconsistent with the nature of international humanitarian law.\textsuperscript{16}

In the modern era, the first mercenary force that already has a fairly rich history is the French Foreign Legion.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{French Foreign Legion}

The history of the Foreign Legion dates back to the first half of the 19th century. After the French July Revolution, on March 10, 1831, a force was established by a decree of King Louis Philippe I to ensure control over at least some of the foreign soldiers residing on French territory.\textsuperscript{18} In the overwhelming number of cases, they were veterans serving in Napoleonic regiments, \textit{e.g.}, Poles, Germans and Swiss. The French government decided to use these units in the colonies, including in Algeria. This force was very attractive, especially for former soldiers or immigrants with a criminal past, and the Legion guaranteed anonymity. There were few French citizens in it because formally, service in the new force was forbidden for them (with the exception of the officer cadre, to which professional soldiers were also assigned).\textsuperscript{19} The original internal structure of the Legion followed the pattern taken from the regular armed forces of France. A single regiment was divided into seven battalions, each with eight companies of one hundred and twelve men. On the other hand, individual battalions were dedicated to particular language or ethnic groups, and Polish volunteers were sent to the last 7th Battalion. They replaced the 4th Battalion composed of Spaniards who returned to fight in their homeland in 1934.\textsuperscript{20} In later years, however, the composition of the force underwent multiple changes. Although representatives of all denominations and nearly 150 nations serve in the ranks of the Foreign Legion, its core are citizens of Great Britain and countries belonging to the French Community. An increasing percentage of recruits are also coming from Central Europe (including a large group from Poland) and from Latin American countries. At the same time, the vast majority of the officers are French, who have been redirected to the Legion from other units of the French army. Citizens of the Republic of Poland may legally join the Foreign Legion, but they must first obtain the written consent of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration and the Ministry of National Defence.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
The Wagner Group — a private Russian mercenary group (Private military company (PMC))

Genesis, management and character

The Wagner Group was commissioned by Dmitry Walerewicz Utkin, lieutenant colonel of the reserve of the Russian Army, b. in 1970 in Kirovograd (Kirovograd Oblast) in the former USSR, now within the borders of Ukraine. Dmitry Utkin was a professional officer of the Russian Army until 2013. His military assignment is shrouded in mystery. Circumstantial evidence indicates that he was an officer of the GRU military intelligence of the Russian Federation. At the same time, a different version is presented, namely about his service in Spetsnaz (special forces of the Russian Federation). Nevertheless, both versions are only unverifiable assumptions that would serve as a useful legend for the use of the described force.

However, the first military force of this type was the so-called 'Reduta', which was involved in the invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian sources estimate the size of this group at 7,000 soldiers. According to the Russian opposition portal ‘Meduza’, Reduta’s mercenaries were among the first to attack Ukraine. They participated, among others, in the fighting near Kiev and Kharkov. The Russian ‘Novaya Gazeta’ first reported on ‘Reduta’ in 2019.

According to these reports, the force was created in 2008 and deployed in Syria. The purpose was to protect the facilities of the Stroytransgaz concern, which is a company controlled by the oligarch Gennady Timchenko, a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Igor Girkin, the former ‘defence minister’ of the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’, referred to Timchenko as ‘the owner of the

22 Wilhelm Richard Wagner (born May 22, 1813, in Leipzig; died February 13, 1883, in Venice) — German composer, playwright, poet, writer, theatre director and conductor. He changed the expressiveness of Romantic music and the practical foundations of opera by creating the dramatic action as a synthesis of the play, and wrote librettos, music, and stage directions (the author’s directions for staging his plays) from this perspective. He organised the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, where only his works are presented. His innovations in harmonics influenced the development of modern music. The published letter Das Judenthum in der Musik caused him to be classified as an obsessive advocate of anti-Semitism. (Evangelical denomination), https://www.biografie-niemieckie.pl/richard-wagner [accessed: 30/03/2023].


24 The ‘Reduta’ was established on the initiative of GRU general Vladimir Alekseev, who chose his cousin Anataloj Karazja as its commander. Its core consisted of veterans, both with a military past and from the services. Originally, it operated as part of the ‘anti-terrorist family’ as both Reduta and similar military contractors were referred to. In Syria, Reduta was responsible for the protection of convoys and Stroytransgaz infrastructure. The owner of this force is Gennady Nikolayevich Timchenko, also spelled Guennadi Timtchenko; born 9 November 1952), a Russian oligarch and billionaire businessman. He founded and owns the private investment firm Volga Group. He was previously a co-owner of Gunvor Group, https://sanctions.nazk.gov.ua/en/sanction-person/271/ [accessed: 7/07/2023].
Redoubt’. Both Meduza and Novaya Gazeta wrote about Reduta’s links with the Russian Ministry of Defence. Despite the formal ban on creating private armies in Russia, Redoubt’s involvement in the war against Ukraine was even recognised by the court. In the Belgorod region, the sentence against a defendant was reduced after it was established that he had fought in Ukraine in the ‘Reduta’ forces.

As the above information confirms, the ‘Reduta’ is not the only force of this type. In addition to the aforementioned Redoubt, there are also Potok and Fakeł – Gazprom’s mercenaries. According to Pavel Luzin, an expert on Russian foreign and defence policy, such units are not fully private military groups, because they are linked to the Ministry of Defence. ‘Mercenaries were originally used by Russia for three main purposes: to balance the regular army, to be able to avoid bureaucracy and established administrative procedures, and to protect the political and military leadership from accountability’, he explains.25

The Wagner Group26 was established in 2014, just after Dmitry Utkin left the Russian Army in 2013. Most likely, he was tasked to create a private military company that would implement the so-called Primakov doctrine of implementing elements of hybrid warfare, propaganda, ‘unfreezing previously frozen conflicts’ and destabilising certain regions of the world. The Primakov doctrine27 was based on three basic pillars:

— ensuring Russian dominance in the post-Soviet area and gradually extending its influence into areas of Central Asia and the Middle East;
— stopping NATO’s eastward expansion and taking action to weaken the North Atlantic alliance and the United States itself;
— partnership with China and India28 and advocated the creation of a multipolar rather than unipolar world.

The unipolar world, practically devoid of the risk of a global conflict, was characterised by enormous chaos and instability, which was visible in regional conflicts, such as the war in Yugoslavia and the invasion of Kuwait. On the other hand, according to Primakov, a multipolar world — requiring the coordination of actions by the great powers — would put an end to chaos and bring about a ‘consensual peace’ — just like the 1815 Congress of Vienna.29

26 It should also be emphasised that even though the Wagner Group is branded as a ‘private military company’, this has never been the correct definition at any stage of its activity. It is a de facto governmental mercenary force, controlled by the Russian state’s secret services, which performs combat tasks typical of regular army units. Nothing of the kind has been seen in the recent history of armed conflicts, Jakub Ber, From Popasna to Bakhmut. The Wagner Group in the Russia-Ukraine War, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2023-04-28/popasna-to-bakhmut-wagner-group-russia-ukraine-war [accessed: 7/07/2023].
The first task of the newly created force was for Bashar al-Assad to hire it to protect Syria’s oil fields and pipelines against attacks by so-called militants: the Islamic State. Subsequently, the Wagner Group revealed itself under its own name during operations in the Lutan region of Ukraine. Because he was a Ukrainian citizen, he was tasked with this by the Russian Federation to justify these actions in the eyes of international opinion as an alleged civil action, and not Russian interference in the integral territory of Ukraine.

The ‘Wagner Group’ operates as a professional mercenary organisation of a military nature by exploiting gaps and imperfections in the international law of armed conflicts, mainly in the Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Convention. Legal complexities (to this day) enable the widespread operation of the so-called mercenaries who function like professional corporations, such as the American Blackwater, and employ former highly specialised and well-trained soldiers on a full-time basis. Thus, the ‘Wagner Group’ offers services in the field of mercenary (contract) military to unlimited political, governmental and economic entities, both in the offensive and defensive contexts.

Structure, resources and management of the ‘Wagner Group’

Originally, the ranks of the organisation were almost entirely composed of former professional soldiers of the Army of the Russian Federation. At present, especially after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the group consists of two main parts: professionals and prisoners from the territory of the Federation, who are recruited into the ranks of Wagner supporters in order to avoid punishment and, in the event of survival, obtain release from prison. The former, entering the Wagner group, retain their military ranks obtained during their service.

The base of the Wagner Group is located in Molkin in Krasnodar Krai, where some tactical exercises are conducted and from where resources are transferred to the region of operations around the world. It is located in the area of a large

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30 Academi (formerly Blackwater USA, Blackwater Worldwide and Xe Services LLC) is an American private military organisation founded in 1997 by Erik Prince and Al Clark. The company is alternatively known as a mercenary or security company. The company is headquartered in North Carolina. In October 2007, Blackwater USA changed its name to Blackwater Worldwide, and changed it again in 2009, after the Iraqi government refused to extend the contract for Xe. Currently, the company is called Academi, referring to Plato’s Academy. See more: P.W., Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2003.

31 There was an explosion in a cafe in the centre of St. Petersburg, as a result of which the famous Russian military blogger, war correspondent and propagandist, Vladlen Tatarsky (Maksim Fomin), died. The explosion took place in a place called ‘Street bar’ that once belonged to the leader of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin. The RIA Novosti news agency confirmed that Tatarsky died on the spot. Russian media reported that about 30 people were injured. https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/wybuch-w-petersburgu-rosyjskie-sluzby-zaospoǳa rly-młoda-kobiete/4b1r0rg, [accessed: 4/04/2023].

32 See more: Z. Parafianowicz, Private armies of the world. That is what modern conflicts look like, Publisher Mando, 2021.

33 M. Mazzini, Putin fights on many fronts. The Kremlin’s mercenaries are spreading fear around the world, ‘Polityka.pl’, May 29, 2022.
complex of the Army of the Russian Federation and its Special Forces. Currently, the organisation is headed by Russian entrepreneur and oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has a criminal record and served a prison sentence for multiple robberies in one of St. Petersburg’s prisons. After gaining freedom, he managed the so-called Kremlin trolls and then became a well-known restaurateur with direct ties to the Russian authorities.

The staff resources of the Wagner Group are extremely difficult to determine precisely due to the scarcity of reliable sources. When the organisation was founded, it had about 1,000 people, while in 2017 there were about 6,000 in its ranks. Currently, according to the sources of Z. Parafianowicz, the force has about 10,000 permanent and up to 50,000 rotating members. These resources are obtained through high salaries by Russian standards (this applies to specialised staff). The monthly salary, depending on the military rank (most often transferred from service in the professional army), ranges from 1,500 to 4,000 dollars. These funds are, of course, tax-free. In addition, an important component of the package is informal insurance against death or disability acquired during operational tasks.

The operation of the mercenaries of the Wagner Group is characterised by exceptional cruelty and ruthlessness, which is mainly attributed to those members of the group from the Caucasus (mainly from Chechnya). One example of such cruelty comes from Syria. After a Wagner mercenary captured by ISIS was tortured, a video surfaced showing Wagner soldiers in the Palmyra area decapitating a captured jihadist.

Military operations involving the Wagner Group — selection management

The Wagner Group is active in many parts of the world, but its activities are often masked and concealed at both the national and international levels. Nevertheless, independent objective sources confirm participation in the following military

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34 Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin (born 1 June 1961 in Leningrad) — a Russian businessman, close associate of Vladimir Putin, owner of the so-called ‘troll factory’, closely linked to the private military company Wagnerakt Group. Owner of Konkord Holding, which includes Konkord Management and Consulting, founder of 27 companies.

35 See more: Z. Parafianowicz, Private armies of the world. That is what modern conflicts look like, Publisher Mando, 2021.

36 Ibid.

37 Ramzan Akhmatovich Kadyrov (Russian: Рамзан Ахматович Кадыров; born October 5, 1976, in the village of Centaroj) — Chechen politician, Prime Minister of Chechnya in 2006–2007, from 2007 to March 2011 its president, from 2011 — Head of the Chechen Republic). Son of Akhmat. Accused of committing war crimes in Ukraine. Ramzan Kadyrov confirmed that his Chechen troops are participating in the Russian invasion. According to the Ukrainian side, the Russians were supported at the beginning of the invasion by troops that included the 141st Motorised Regiment of the Chechen National Guard unit, which was initially commanded by Magomet Tushayev. See: https://www.newsweek.pl/ramzan-kadyrow, [accessed: 4/04/2023].

operations: the occupation of Crimea, Donbass, Luhansk Oblast, followed by operations in Syria, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Libya, Venezuela, and Mozambique.

Wagner’s group participated in, or rather assisted regular Russian troops during the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014 and operations in the Donbass and Luhansk regions. The international public has been informed that unidentified uniformed but unmarked militarised troops have appeared in the vicinity of Crimea, commonly referred to as ‘little green men’. In fact, they were officers of the Wagner Group. Successes in connection with the seizure of Crimea meant that the Wagnerians were moved deep into Ukrainian territory, to the Donbas region. In addition to its ground troops, the Wagner Group’s air forces was also used there. For example, on May 22, 2022, one of its members, Brig. Gen. Kanamat took part in a combat mission.

The mercenaries of the Wagner army are primarily engaged in the activities of so-called hybrid warfare and sabotage and offensive activity, i.e. in fact they already use the previously described Primakov doctrine and the Gerasimov doctrine.

**Activities of the Wagner Group in Syria**

Wagner was sent from Russia, along with regular troops of the federation army, for military action against ISIS and to suppress the uprising of Syrian rebels against the dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad. The Wagner group was transported with its equipment to Syria on transport planes of the federation forces and by Syrian transport planes. However, weapons and equipment for both the Wagner detachment and the regular Federation Army have been shipped to Syria by sea, both by merchant ships and by transport ships of the Federation Navy since 2012. The presence of Wagner Army mercenaries in Syria dates from 2015 to 2017.

The international public was first officially informed of the existence of the Russian informal armed group in 2015 in The Wall Street Journal and Russia Beyond. Dmitry Utkin was described in these magazines as legendary, and tasked and supervised by the military intelligence of the Russian Federation and the GRU.

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40 Hybrid warfare is a diverse way of perceiving military power, the organisation of which is an expression of the level of socio-economic development and applicable social norms, while using modern technologies in tactical and strategic activities. See more: W.J. Nemeth, Future war and Chechnya: A case for hybrid warfare, Monterey, CA 2002 [online], calhoun.nsp.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5865/02Jun_Nemeth.pdf?sequence=1, [accessed: 3/04/2023].


42 Ibid.
At the same time, the Russian authorities, represented by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, explicitly denied that the Wagner Group and its mercenaries had any connection with the Russian state. The New York Times reported at the time that participation in activities against the so-called Islamic State in Syria drained $170 million from the Kremlin treasury. However, these expenses were to be compensated by the agreement with Damascus, according to which 25% of the proceeds from the exploitation of oil fields recovered from ISIS were to belong to Russia.\(^43\)

In the second half of 2015, a larger group of ‘Wagner’ men was formed. At that time, the Kremlin decided to use a unit that had fought in Syria; this group would not use the Russian flag, but would fight as part of a Russian military contingent and be strictly controlled by the Russian security services. This was mainly dictated by the desire to cover up the number of dead and wounded regular troops. Government propaganda intended to use the intervention in Syria to show the world and its own citizens the power of the Russian army, while in fact the riskiest tasks were entrusted to the mercenaries.\(^44\)

The Wagner Group is not the first armed force in 30 years that appeared in the Middle East after the end of the so-called cold war, but it is very interesting and they got heavily involved in marking the (presumably permanent) presence of the Russian Federation in this part of the world. Nevertheless, the Wagnerians were tasked with activities in the following parts of the globe: Africa (Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Madagascar and also (although these are not confirmed missions), Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad.

In addition, according to the author of the text, the activity of the Wagner group is also evidence of the re-colonisation of Africa and the expansion of economic and political outreach in this part of the world (e.g., profiting from gold mines and other rare resources, corrupting local warlords, protecting dictators, etc.). The Wagner group also has its ‘dirty deals’ in Belarus,\(^45\) Moldova, the Karabakh Mountains (Azerbaijan-Armenian borderland) and Serbia.\(^46\)

### Activities of the Wagner Group in Mali

In late 2021, after a coup d’état in Mali, the new military junta turned to the Wagner Group for military support. According to the Washington Post, the Mali government was to pay $10 million\(^47\) a month for its presence (about 1,000 members).


\(^45\) Ibid.

\(^46\) Due to the limited framework of this study, the article includes selected territories where the Wagner Group appeared.

\(^47\) M. Mazzini, *Putin fights on many fronts. The Kremlin’s mercenaries are spreading fear around the world*. ‘Polityka.pl’, May 29, 2022.
The Malian military junta confirmed the presence of Russian ‘military trainers’, which was immediately denied by the Russian authorities, saying that these ‘instructors’ were beyond Russia’s control. Russian mercenaries fought Islamist militias and terrorist groups in Mali, but according to the Washington Post, they also committed crimes against civilians. Among other things, 300 people were murdered in Moura with the participation of mercenaries. By the decision of December 13, 2021, the Council of the European Union imposed sanctions on the Wagner Group, due to its responsibility for serious violations of human rights in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Sudan and Mozambique, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings.

**Final conclusions**

Summarising the considerations contained in this text, it should be clearly stated that military mercenaries are by no means a product of modernity, but they have accompanied humanity since its inception. Informal armed groups have always had the support of their protectors, who, depending on the circumstances, were local, regional or royal rulers. Private armies were hired for the duration of armed conflicts, and their members were willing to fight as long as they were adequately paid. These types of armed groups rarely use lofty slogans of fighting for peace or justice, but their motives are extremely simple — the desire for quick profit without cost. In this way, their activity consists mainly of brutal violence, obedience, ruthlessness and cruelty towards the victims indicated by the principals. Therefore, these types of groups concentrate elements of organised crime groups or terrorist groups, and sometimes they have these elements while creating specific criminal hybrids that use various methods of operation, from traditional (sometimes primitive) to advanced technologies. Generally speaking, modern mercenaries always take advantage of the loopholes and shortcomings of the law and ‘intertwine’ in a kind of criminal economic system — supply and demand.

**Post scriptum**

On 24 June 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin was accused by the Russian government of organising an armed uprising after he threatened to attack Russian forces in response to a claimed air strike on his paramilitary soldiers. Russian security forces accused the founder of the Wagner group of launching a coup attempt as he pledged a ‘march of justice’ against the Russian army. Prigozhin posted a voice memo claiming that Wagner had left Ukraine and was advancing on the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. After that, he went to Belarus and met with the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. According to the agreement they forged,

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Prigozhin was to leave Russia for Belarus, and the criminal case against him was to be dropped. No legal action was to be taken against his troops, and the Wagner fighters were to sign contracts with the Russian Defence Ministry.

Their presence would mean that Ukraine now has to worry about reinforcing its northern border, while neighbouring NATO countries Poland, Latvia and Lithuania have concerns about future subversive activity Wagner may undertake from Belarus. ‘Wagner’s [leader] is no career soldier. The former convict and hot dog salesman enjoys popping up on Wagner’s Telegram channel, dressed in combat clothing, and launching popular tirades of expletive-laden abuse at Russia’s military leadership for its incompetence’.

As of July 2023, there is no reliable information about J. Prigozhin himself or his subordinates. It is believed that some of them are in Belarus or in African camps, while J. Prigozhin himself resides either in Belarus or in St. Petersburg.

J. Prigozhin is still active in the network (mainly on the Telegram portal) and in one of his last entries, he promoted the figure of Victor Buta51, who will provide support (mainly know-how and military logistics). To sum up, it is difficult to determine what will be the fate of both Wagner’s army and J. Prigozhin himself, but this figure will still be present in Russian (or rather Kremlin) internal politics. The situation is worthy of observation and constant monitoring, especially since his actions have alarmed NATO leaders.

References


51 Viktor Anatolyevich Bout (born 13 January 1967) is a Russian arms dealer. A weapons manufacturer and former Soviet military translator, he used his multiple companies to smuggle arms from Eastern Europe to Africa and the Middle East during the 1990s and early 2000s. Bout gained the nicknames the ‘Merchant of Death’ and ‘Sanctions Buster’ after British minister Peter Hain read a report to the United Nations in 2003 on Bout’s wide-reaching operations, extensive clientele, and willingness to bypass embargoes. See more: Ignacio Esteban, VIKTOR BOUT: The WORLD’S MOST NOTORIOUS ARMS DEALER, Kindle Edition, 2022.
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34. Trenin D., What is Russia up to in the Middle East?, Polity, 2018.


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Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono rozważania na temat organizacji, tworzenia, funkcjonowania i zarządzania nielegalnymi siłami zbrojnymi pozostającymi poza oficjalną kontrolą państwa — prywatnymi formacjami wojskowymi (ang. PMC), ale także grupami nieformalnymi, takimi jak Grupa Wagnera, posiadającą wyjątkowo niejasny status. Tekst składa się z trzech głównych części. W pierwszej wyjaśniono pojęcie ’najemnika’ w międzynarodowym prawie publicznym, w drugiej — opisano pierwszą współczesną grupę najemników, francuską Legię Cudzoziemską, a w trzeciej — przedstawiono informacje na temat Grupy Wagnera, prywatnej rosyjskiej armii najemników. Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie genezy, istoty i metod działania francuskiej Legii Cudzoziemskiej oraz Grupy Wagnera w kontekście bezpieczeństwa narodowego, międzynarodowego, a nawet globalnego. Ponadto zamierzeniem autorki jest zaprezentowanie skrajnie nielegalnych i przestępczych praktyk współczesnych najemników, posługujących się niezwykle brutalną, a niekiedy wręcz atawistyczną przemocą.

Resumen. El artículo plantea una reflexión sobre la organización, la formación, el funcionamiento y la gestión de fuerzas armadas ilegales fuera del control oficial del Estado: empresas militares privadas (PKW), pero también grupos informales como el Grupo Wagner, cuyo estatus resulta sumamente confuso. El texto consta de tres partes principales. La primera explica el concepto de ‘mercenarios’ en el derecho internacional público, la segunda describe el primer grupo mercenario moderno, la Legión Extranjera
Francesa, y la tercera aporta información sobre el Grupo Wagner, un ejército mercenario privado ruso. El objetivo principal del artículo es presentar los orígenes, la naturaleza y los métodos de la Legión Extranjera Francesa y del Grupo Wagner en el contexto de la seguridad nacional, internacional e incluso mundial. Por otro lado, pretende mostrar al lector la práctica extremadamente ilegal y criminal de los mercenarios modernos, que recurren a una violencia excesivamente brutal y a veces incluso atávica.

Zusammenfassung. Der Artikel stellt die Überlegungen zum Thema der Organisation, der Bildung, der Funktionsweise und der Verwaltung mit illegalen Streitkräften dar, die sich der offiziellen staatlichen Kontrolle entziehen - privaten militärischen Formationen (PMCs), aber auch informellen Gruppen wie der Wagner-Gruppe, deren Status äußerst unklar ist. Der Text besteht aus drei Hauptteilen. Im ersten Teil wird der Begriff 'Söldner' im internationalen öffentlichen Recht erläutert, im zweiten Teil wird die erste moderne Söldnergruppe, die französische Fremdenlegion, beschrieben, und der dritte Teil enthält Informationen über die Wagner-Gruppe, eine private russische Söldnerarmee. Das Hauptziel des Artikels besteht darin, die Ursprünge, das Wesen und die Arbeitsweise der französischen Fremdenlegion und der Wagner-Gruppe im Kontext der nationalen, internationalen und sogar globalen Sicherheit darzustellen. Darüber hinaus möchte der Autor die extrem illegalen und kriminellen Praktiken der heutigen Söldner aufzeigen, die mit äußerst brutaler und manchmal sogar atavistischer Gewalt handeln.

Резюме. В статье рассматриваются вопросы организации, формирования, деятельности и управления незаконными вооруженными формированиями, неподконтрольными официальному государству, — частными военными формированиями (анг. PMC), а также неформальными группами, такими как ЧВК Вагнера, имеющая крайне неопределеный статус. Текст состоит из трех основных частей. В первой части раскрывается понятие «наемник» в международном публичном праве, во второй дается описание первого современного формирования наемников — Французского иностранного легиона, в третьей — информация о частной российской наемной армии — Группе Вагнера. Основная цель статьи — представить историю создания, основные задачи и методы деятельности Французского иностранного легиона и ЧВК Вагнера в контексте национальной, международной и даже глобальной безопасности. Кроме того, автор намерен представить совершенно незаконную и преступную деятельность современных наемников, использующих крайне жестокое, а порой и атипичное насилие.