Kimberly Marten (2019) Russia’s use of semi-state security forces: the case of the Wagner Group, Post-Soviet Affairs, 35:3, 181-204, DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142

* What question is the author trying to answer?
  + Why is Russia using the Wagner group without “legalizing its existence or role?” (abs)
* What is the method, approach, or theory?
  + “This article provides a definitive, in-depth case-study, using primarily Russian sources, of Russia’s use of the informal “Wagner Group” private military company (PMC) and its antecedents (from 2012 to 2018) in Nigeria, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and the Central African Republic” (abs)
* What is the main argument of the work?
  + “While Wagner is sometimes used in the same ways that other rational states use PMCs, corrupt informal networks tied to the Russian regime have also used it in ways that are not typical of other strong states and that potentially undermine Russian security interests” (abs)
  + More specifically:
    - She argues that Moscow uses PMCs in the same ways as a traditional state and as a way for Puting to make his “personal cronies” happy/wealthy (186)
* Article Outline
  + The challenge of defining Russian PMCs (183)
    - Distinguishing between PMCs and PSCs
      * “Some broader PSCs gather and analyze intelligence, act as bodyguards or guards at physical installations, or are contractors whoprovide food, housekeeping, andother goods and services to state military forces in the field” (183)
      * “PMCs are “expeditionary conflict entrepreneurs,” who “kill or train others to kill” in foreign settings (McFate 2014,1). This definition is similar to what Peter W. Singer earlier called “military provider firms,” thoseworking at the tactical level and “engaging in actual fighting, either as line units or specialists (for example, combat pilots) and/or direct command and control of field units” (Singer 2003,92).PMCs primarily hire military veterans, often those with a special-forces background. The Wagner Group is a “lethal expeditionary conflict entrepreneur” and a “military provider firm,” even though its members sometimes serve broader PSC functions (such as guarding) as well” (183)
    - Distinguishing between PMCs and mercenaries
      * “Mercenaries, he writes, are fly-by-night companies or soldiers of fortune who will work for anyone, while PMCs are concerned about maintaining and expanding their client base, and hence care about their reputation and try to avoid unsavory activity” (183)
    - Who are they fighting for?
      * “while Wagner’s leaders have contracted for profit and its members have fought for money, its members believed that they were simultaneously working on behalf of the Russian state (even though the identity of their actual employers has sometimes been murky)… They have been reliable providers of contract violence abroad, across years and across conflicts, for the Russian state, for Russia’s leading business interests, and for Russia’s allies. Yet Wagner’s relationship to state command and control has varied, inasmuch as sometimes they have clearly worked directly alongside regular Russian military forces, and other times not” (183)
  + PMCs and Russian law (184)
    - Skipping because it’s not relevant
  + Explanations for Russia’s use of legally unrecognized PMCs (186)
    - Broadly talking about Cossacks and why PMCs are not Cossacks
    - Russia as a rational state (186)
      * This just offers the basic info on state use of PMCs as rational, skimming mostly
      * “Key for Putin’s Russia, PMCs can also be used by states to maintain plausible deniability about their secret or disreputable involvement in foreign adventures. Semi-state security groups like Wagner are certainly a component of Putin’s current “information warfare” strategy, using obfuscation in their relationship with the state to sow confusion and chaos among Russia’s enemies. Wagner in particular may have been intentionally created by the GRU as part of its Putin-era unconventional warfare strategy (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2018)
      * Author does say that plausible deniability only partly explains Wagner use
        + Basically, the widespread reporting of Wagner has sort of debunked this, including Putin’s mention of Wagner in Dec. 2018
      * Constructivist views:
        + “Indeed from a constructivist theoretical political science perspective, legalization should have been a preference for the status-conscious Russian state. The actions of other permanent members of the UNSC in signing the Montreux Document demonstrate that legalization is an appropriate action for powerful states to take. Legalization would therefore help emphasize that Russia is a member of the great-power club (Finnemore 1996). In sum, while there are clear state-based interests for Russia to continue to deploy Wagner and groups like it, Moscow’s long-standing decision not to legalize PMCs remains a puzzle from the perspective of state interests” (188)
    - Corrupt informal networks (188)
      * Skimming this section for the same reason as previous
      * Main argument of the section:
        + “Putin’s rule is defined by informal personal network connections, rather than by bureaucratic rules and procedures. These relationships extend to the highest level of the Russian security and intelligence forces (Taylor 2007, 2011;Galeotti 2013, 2016;Marten 2019b). PMCs might provide muscle that is useful for the pursuit of individual profit” (188)
      * Loss of Russian Sovereignty
        + “If this explanation is correct, it implies that the integrity of Russian sovereignty may be gradually falling victim to wealthy patrons and their mercenaries, who use personal connections to flout state law and potentially embroil the Russian state in conflicts abroad. This would indicate that groups such as Wagner are actually undermining state rationality, by leaving the state hostage to private interests. If this is happening, then Russia might be on its way to employingPMCsaswhatAvanthastermedacorruptand authoritarian “weak state,” although she uses the label to refer to post-colonial states that never established firm civilian control over capable militaries” (188)
  + The challenge of finding high-quality information (189)
    - Russian Misinformation
      * Apparantely Russia has used multiple misinformation strategies to fabricate a PMC in Syria, and misdirect the public
    - Journalist’s reporting on Wagner
      * They have been DDoS'ed before and had a number of threats levied
  + The Wagner group: a case study (190)
    - This section is an in-depth history of the Wagner Group; reporting and research style feels very much like what a journalist would do
    - Prehistory (190)
      * “The Wagner Group had its roots in a firm known as Antiterror-Orel, based in southwestern Russia” (190)
      * “An entity known as the Moran Security Group apparently broke off of Antiterror-Orel” (190)
      * “This vignette demonstrates that the Russian state – in this case, its foreign ministry – was willing to go to bat for this PSC abroad and negotiate its employees’ release from prison, when it was engaged in work for state-owned Russian oil shipping interests” (190)
      * “Meanwhile, in the spring of 2013, the Moran Security Group began inviting Russian veterans to interview with a new company called Slavonic Corps, which was headquartered in Hong Kong instead of Russia” (191)
      * Slavonic Corps contracts with 267 men to work in Syria
        + “They had been told that their contracts were with the Syrian government, but with the implication that the FSB and the Russian government had approved them.” (191)
        + “There is probably more to the story than what is available from press reports, but the case demonstrates that the Russian state can at will prosecute PMCs as mercenaries” (191)
    - The Wagner group emerges (192)

Pay attention to what they say is missing

Pay attention to overlapping examples of the same thing

Also anything linking Russia to Wagner