Into Africa: Prigozhin, Wagner, and the Russian Military

Kimberly Marten

Date: 1/4/2019

Article uses evidence from Russian, French, and African media sources about Prigozhin’s and Wagner’s 2018 activities. Finds that Putin may have “arranged the collaboration of the Russian military in Prigozhin’s corrupt deals in Africa in order to mend a dispute within the Kremlin elite”. Article states that Putin is concerned in his last legal term that he will lose support by seeming weak. Putin must manage the elite rivals in the government. Dmitry Utkin Wagner commander and another Wagner commander have received medals from Putin. Wagner fighter have been buried with Russian military honors after cooperation with Russian forces. Putin claimed in 2018 that Wagner, if the Group “violates something” they can be held accountable but Russia law. If they don’t, they can operate anywhere. References US-Wagner Conoco conflict (Deir-el-Zour). Author believes outcome had to do with infighting between Prigozhin and Russian uniformed military. Goes on to talk about Sudan, CAR, and Libya. In 2018, Russian MP oversaw gold contract with Sudan. Ties to Prigozhin. CAR- In 2017, Russian foreign minister convinced UN to allow Russia to sell weapons to CAR and Russian military trainers for a year. Russian soldiers trained without insignia. Believed to be a party of the Sewa Security Service. Also provide security for diamond mines. Prigozhin has contract for gold mining in CAR as well. Three Russian combat journalists would tried to make a documentary on Wagner activities in CAR were killed in 2018. Two others were poisoned but lived. Finds that Prigozhin is playing a leading role despite military contract lawsuits and Deir-el-Zour. Russian state is involved with his business in CAR. Deals are shady and through firms. Adds to work, a more detailed analysis of Prigozhin’s dynamic with Russian military. Many themes remain common, Wagner should be viewed as a Russian arm of the state, isn’t as successful as generally thought, tied to corrupt business decisions, does not always get along with Russian military.

Decoding Wagner Group

Candace Rondeaux

Date: 11/5/2019

Great article for summary of the functions of Wagner Group and how it fits into PMSCs. Unfortunately, does not provide much of any information on CAR. Believes Wagner to be a frontline agent of a Russian grand strategy that desires a multipolar world. Skews national and international law to support group and delegates authority to shell corporations. Lack of legal structure encourages risk taking. Russia seeks narrative control. Key findings are that PMSCs are designed for perception and vague legal conception allows for work-around. Result of post-Soviet private military industrial complex. Actions of Wagner parallel Kremlin geostrategic interests. Grand strategy chess master image is beneficial for Russia’s desired narrative. That said, lack of plausible deniability as more information is gathered is harmful to the narrative. Speaks heavily on Russia’s hybrid warfare strategy in Ukraine and Syria. Strategic ambiguity is a primary tactic for the Russian state and Wagner is central to this design. This article works well for us because it provides a strong historical analysis of how Wagner came to exist not only as a business, but as a cultural arm of the military industrial complex. The hybrid warfare aspect provides a strong link to Ukraine that is not always mentioned in detail in other works. The article also provides info on PMSCs outside of Wagner and shows that there are overlapping relationships.

Where’s Wagner? The All-New Exploits of Russia’s “Private” Military Company

KIMBERLY MARTEN

Date: 9/15/2020

Provides an update on Wagner Group’s activities since the Fall of 2019. The document highlights their use by the Russian state, some of their failures, and human rights abuses. Like other article, provides background on Wagner Group. Believes that plausible deniability is almost a nonuse because of the amount of journalists following the group. The “private” status allows Putin to disavow activities despite encouraging their business interest. Wagner is not a “mercenaries” because while still on contract, they are extremely patriotic, or at least pro-Russian. Mining and energy contracts are common wherever they go. The article covers Wagner actions in Mozambique, Libya, Belarus, and Syria. Showed to have mixed results in Mozambique. Sent to fight Islamic rebels. After Mozambique president Filipe Nyusi flew to Kremlin, hundreds of Wagner forces sent by Russian contracted planes in 2019. Large amounts of natural gas resources, rubies, ivory, heroin available. Had bad results in Mozambique because often quarelled with Mozambique forces who saw them as competitors for smuggling payoffs. Eventually replaced by South African forces. Interesting point about Erik Prince perhaps making offer to Wagner. In Libya, Wagner supported warlord to fight against UN recognized Government of National Accord. Article points out multiple failures by the Group including military defeats, funding issues, and failure to uphold contracts. Still presence is heavy in Libya. Belarus involvement is unclear. Cites a weird story about Russian men in military fatigues were arrested at a resort, did not hide their identities, were not armed, and eventually sent home. Ultimately, Wagner should not be viewed as a private group but rather an arm in Russia’s hybrid strategy. Their use has a criminal component. Their use does not necessarily suggest experience, but rather a means for Russia to be involved in periphery interests that the Russian state does not believe it necessary to risk more reliable troops. Sees Wagner as a failure and a woeful misuse by Putin.

Title: Russia’s Growing Presence in Africa – A Geostrategic Assessment

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“This is a geostrategic assessment of Russian activity in Africa that aims to help U.S. Air Forces Africa make sense of the growing mass of often contradic­tory micro-level reporting on Russian involvement on the continent.” (2)

Key findings:

* Russia’s presence in Africa is very limited. Because Moscow strategically withdrew from the region from 1990 to 2015, recent growth in Russian activity started from a very low baseline and remains modest compared with that of the United States and China. (1)
* There is little evidence that the Kremlin has a grand plan for Africa. Because the continent remains peripheral to Russian grand strategy, Moscow’s approach in Africa is essentially opportunistic.
* Russia’s future activity pattern in Africa could be predicted by identifying where Russian power brokers are most likely to find conducive conditions: preexisting government and commercial relationships, lucrative opportunities in extractive industries, local elites seeking external sponsorship, and opportunities to burnish Russia’s great power credentials.
* Moscow will continue to find such opportunities across a wide swath of the continent, but conditions will be especially ripe in North Africa, particularly in Libya, Algeria, and Egypt.
* Given the areas of greatest potential overlap between Russian opportunities and AFAFRICA priorities, Libya, Algeria, and Egypt are the three most likely arenas for strategic competition and entanglement between Russia and the United States in Africa.
* AFAFRICA should adopt a Compete and Disentangle approach to Russian activity in Africa: Compete where Russian activity jeopardizes key U.S. strategic objectives, primarily in North Africa, and focus on disentangling U.S. operational forces from Russian operational entities elsewhere, primarily in Central and West Africa.

Methodology

We adopt an inductive assessment approach, in which the probable patterns of future Russian involvement in Africa are derived from the observable patterns of recent growing involvement

we assembled data on Russian activity from a wide variety of sources, then employed inno­vative visualization techniques to analyze geostra­tegic patterns in the data with the goal of creating a “mental map” heuristic to help AFAFRICA interpret the emerging patterns of Russian behavior in Africa.

We assembled 20 key data sources across these commercial, diplomatic, military, and paramilitary domains (Figure 1). The data sources ranged from widely known World Bank trade databases to commercial flight plan and passenger records, corporate and financial reports, and Russian and English media reports.2

Data sources by function area on page 3 – (honestly pretty cool)

demographics (including the private presence of Russian nationals in Africa)

• trade flows

• commercial projects

• diplomacy

• military assistance

• operational presence (of both uniformed Russian personnel and PMC activities on the continent)

• USAFE (presence and operations).

In areas with no single credible database, such as the Operational Presence and Commercial Projects domains, we constructed individual databases from scratch by collecting large sets of individual data points, scrutinizing those points carefully for internal validity, and comparing them with observations available from other sourc­es. – 3

In some cases, such as media reports on Russian PMC activities in the Operational Presence domain, filtering and validation were painstaking processes of evaluating the credibility of each author, compar­ing reports across sources, and assigning an explicit credibility estimate using the estimative probability framework used in National Intelligence Estimates (Friedman and Zeckhauser, 2015). – May be worth looking into.

Once each source was filtered and validated, these data were integrated into a custom software tool, called the RAGAT, which we created for this project. In essence, RAGAT is a cross-referential database of all of the data sources.

Central African Republic

* Beyond the general trade patterns, our analy­sis indicates that Russian commercial entities are engaged in 36 major projects in Africa, including 14 mines and nine hydrocarbon projects. Russian mining projects tend to be concentrated in Central and Southern Africa. - 8
* There are credible reports of both indi­vidual and collective training in all three of these North African states. The Central African Republic (CAR) stands out as the geographic exception, where Russians are conducting individual training, col­lective training, and direct advisory support to the regime of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. The remaining examples of Russian training activities on the continent are quite limited and episodic. – 13
* Moscow’s arms sales greatly exceed those of other major powers and continue to grow while those of others stagnate. Algeria, Egypt, Libya, CAR, and, to a lesser extent, Angola emerge in data as key recipients of Russian assistance. – 13
* However, we assessed that the remaining 10 per­cent of Russian PMC activity across Africa included combat or other operational tasks beyond immediate self-defense, putting them in the category of merce­nary operations. These mercenary activities were all conducted by the Wagner Group, a Russian paramil­itary organization, or its subsidiary, Sewa, in CAR, Sudan, and South Sudan – 16
  + The potential strategic sig­nificance of this mercenary percentage of all Russian PMC operations in Africa is obviously much greater than might be indicated by its share of the total.
* It is worth focusing on the contiguous countries of CAR, Sudan, and South Sudan. Nearly one-third of the 34 highlighted Russian PMC operations—11 in total—were found in these three countries
  + All of the Russian PMC activities in these countries had either moderate or strong links to the Russian state. Fully two-thirds of the PMC operations with strong links to the Russian state across the entire continent were in CAR, Sudan, or South Sudan.
* Prigozhin is the owner of the Wagner Group, the most prominent Russian PMC and the organization most heavily involved in mercenary operations in Syria, Sudan, and CAR. Although there is no demonstrated link between Prigozhin’s political consulting services and subse­quent paramilitary operations by the Wagner Group, it seems plausible that this linkage is Prigozhin’s intent (Rozhdestvensky and Badanin, 2019) – 18
* A swath of countries in the African interior—from Libya south to Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, CAR, DRC, Cameroon, Gabon, and the surrounding region—appears especially conductive to further growth in Russian PMC activity.
* Tier 1:High Potential - Expect PMC use to increase in CAR – 20
* Areas of Competition and Entanglement - CAR is only of moderal importance to U.S. - 24