



**Sosyal Bilimler
Enstitüsü**

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MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER (İNGİLİZCE) BİLİM DALI

**PRIVATIZATION OF WAR IN FOREIGN POLICY: RUSSIA'S
UTILIZATION OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

BURAK GÜNDÜZ

İSTANBUL, 2022

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TEZ ONAY BELGESİ

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı Uluslararası İlişkiler (İngilizce) Bilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Burak GÜNDÜZ'ün PRIVATIZATION OF WAR IN FOREIGN POLICY: RUSSIA'S UTILIZATION OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES adlı tez çalışması, Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun tarih ve sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından oy birliği / oy çokluğu ile Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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3	Jüri Üyesi	

ÖZET

DIŞ POLİTİKADA SAVAŞIN ÖZELLEŞMESİ: RUSYA’NIN ÖZEL ASKERİ ŞİRKETLERİ KULLANMASI

Bu çalışma özellikle Soğuk Savaşın bitiminden sonra kullanımları ve faaliyetleri giderek artan özel askeri şirketleri (ÖAŞ) konu almaktadır. Ülke kamuoylarının doğrudan askeri müdahalelere ve kayıplara karşı artan hassaslığı, uluslararası hukukun devletlere getirdiği sınırlar ve askeri teknolojinin hızla gelişmesi gibi faktörler düşünüldüğünde güvenliğin devlet dışı aktörler tarafından yerine getirilmeye başlanması devletler ve bu aktörler arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi oldukça önemli bir hale getirmiştir. Ulusal Tez Merkez’i incelendiğinde ÖAŞ’lerin dış politika uygulamalarındaki rolünü inceleyen bir çalışma yapılmadığı görülmüştür. Uluslararası literatürdeki tespit edilen boşluk ise savaşın özelleşmesi sürecinin dış politikaya yansımalarının bütüncül bir yaklaşımla açıklanmadığıdır. Tez, ilk bölümde ÖAŞ’lerin özellikle Avrupa ve Amerika’da başlayan kurumsallaşma süreçlerini, bu şirketlerin dönüşüm ve dış politikada/çatışmalarda kullanım sürecini nedenleri ile birlikte anlatarak uluslararası ilişkilerdeki rollerini açıklamak amacındadır.

İkinci bölüm Rus Dış Politikası, jeopolitik öncelikleri, Rus özel askeri endüstrisi ve Moskova’nın siyasi hedeflerini yerine getirmek amacıyla hem ordu hem devlet-dışı askeri aktörleri kullanımı gibi konulara değinecektir. Son bölümde ise tezin ana argümanlarından biri olan ÖAŞ’lerin devletlerin dış politika uygulamasında de-facto bir araç oldukları yargısı önceki bölümlerde edinilen teorik perspektifin de yardımı ile Rusya’nın ÖAŞ kullanımı üzerinden örnek vakalar ile kanıtlanmaya ve gösterilmeye çalışılacaktır. Tez konusunun doğası gereği, çalışmada bu konuyla ilgili olarak elde edilen veriler nitel analiz yöntemi kullanılarak incelenecektir. Tezin ana araştırma sorusu özel askeri şirketlerin devletler tarafından dış politikalarını uygulamak amacıyla kullanılıp kullanılmadıkları, eğer kullanılıyorsa sağladıkları hangi faydalar sebebiyle devletlerin bu yolu tercih ettikleridir. Tezin temel savı ÖAŞ kullanım ihtiyacının paralı asker kullanımı ile benzer sebeplere dayandığı, küreselleşmenin etki alanını arttırması ile hükümetlerin kendi devlet iç dinamikleri ve uluslararası sistemin kendisine getirdiği sınırlılıkları aşmak için ÖAŞ’leri onların serbest piyasadaki bağımsız aktör statülerinden faydalanarak alternatif bir yöntem olarak kullandıklarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Savaşın Özelleşmesi, Özel Askeri Şirketler, Paralı Askerler, Dış Politika, Rusya, Wagner Grubu

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ABBREVIATIONS

APR	Asia-Pacific Region
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
CAR	Central African Republic
DCAF	Democratic Control of Armed Forces
EAR	Euro-Atlantic Region
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal Security Service
GRU	Organization of the Main Intelligence Administration
GNA	Government of National Accord
LNA	Libyan National Army
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSAs	Non-state Actors
OAU	The Organization of African Unity
PMCs	Private Military Companies
PMS	Private Military Sector
PSCs	Private Security Companies
SAS	British Special Air Service
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TCNs	Third-Country Nationals
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

1. INTRODUCTION

Even though private actors of war were existed in almost every part of history where war is an organized act between at least two political organizations that have a definition, their roles and impact mostly overlooked in a world that is regulated by a nation-state system. There are two main reasons behind this understanding. One reason is highly linked with state-centric approach. Because states are the monopolistic powers of the exercise of violence, for a long time the accepted international norm was that only nation-states fought wars, thus the other part of the story mostly ignored. And other reason is that these private actors were considered as remnants of the previous unmodern system, therefore, labelled as the past that no longer exists in present. However, this attitude is changing due to the emergence of a more organized and capable private military industry that is actively participating and affecting world politics. Therefore, related academic disciplines such as International Relations try to orient themselves in line with these developments. Variety of actors of private violence from pirates, warlords, militias, and mercenaries to private military companies, have become the focus of academia to explain their role in international politics and security (Colás, Mabee 2010: 2). Developments in areas such as technology, transportation, communication, defense, informatics, etc., influenced the conventional use of violence which is based on the state-army-people tripartite in the nation-state structure. These developments have reduced the competitiveness of armies in the technological field. Increasing private sector effectiveness and capacity in the military field has resulted in states' instrumentalization of private military companies in order to protect their interests or implement their foreign policy agendas in cases where they cannot or do not want to intervene directly. Therefore, private military companies (PMCs) started to play a similar role as mercenaries played in history, outsourcing war, in other words politics. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is by establishing a historical connection with their similar structures and roots in the past, to explain how and why Russian originated private military companies are used in certain foreign policy practices.

The tradition of hiring foreigners or militarily skilled professionals who only act for profit not political or ideological reasons continues today. While these fighters were called mercenaries for a long time in history, today they have different names, and each one of them has slightly different functions. However, despite their differences, there is one common pattern both mercenaries and PMCs follow. Both are working in conflicts for profit—including shares from the gains and re-captured areas in conflict, and hired by a superior authority as a replacement/supplement to local armed forces (Taulbee 1998: 148). Thus, the study aims to find an answer to the problematic that whether PMCs are tools of foreign policy or not; if they are, how they are contributing to the foreign policy implementing process especially in terms of the Russian case. However, as Colás & Mabee (2010: 11) argues, I am not in search of direct causation between previous private actors of war and today's, on the contrary, I propound a correlation between them, and would like to demonstrate that for several reasons PMCs today serves to countries in their foreign policies (including conflicts) just as mercenaries did to their customers.

Overall, the research depicted that there was no similar study previously undertaken in Turkey on this particular subject. Until now, various theses from different departments have been written on this subject in the National Thesis Center. These theses which are based on private military companies have been

written about issues such as their effects on the Iraq War, their relationship between the state and the military, their regional assessments such as on the Middle East, their place in the defense industry, connection with intelligence activities, and their use and status in the United Nations and the United States of America in terms of international law. This study, on the other hand, will show the use of PMCs in the field of foreign policy with the example of Russia.

Moreover, this study differs from earlier studies in some significant respects. There are wide-ranging studies and debates on PMCs in the literature. One of the general discussions in the literature is whether these companies are completely independent of the state, acting for profit, and are neutral actors in the international liberal system, or rather they are tools that the state uses to realize some of its policy aims. In response to the first discussion, it will be argued that the state's monopoly over the use of violence has not shifted to the private sector, but rather the method of using violence started to be partially outsourced to private actors rather than using national armies. The study will try to analyze the activities and organizational formation of PMCs, especially Wagner, which called as a mercenary group of the Russian Federation, also will demonstrate their effects in the field of foreign policy as a concrete example. The difference of this chapter, which will distinguish the thesis from other studies, will be the examination of the subject within the scope of the historical background and comparative analysis that will include western PMCs, which will be covered in the first chapter of the thesis. This chapter will be a foundation to the study and assist to reveal the Russian use of PMC utilization in foreign policy.

The main research question of the study is that are PMCs being instrumentalizing by states to achieve their foreign policy goals, if they are, why this way is chosen by states, and how it is beneficial to their foreign policies especially when considered the Russian case? Another question that will contribute to the integrity of the study is why PMCs are considered as mercenaries, how they differ and/or connected in terms of privatization of war? Additionally, the study will look for the answers to the questions that in which ways Russian use of PMCs differs from western use of PMCs, why while western PMCs were contracting within boundaries of their home states' law, but Russian ones such as Wagner Group do not? What is the reason behind that approach of Russia, and how this provides benefits to Moscow's strategic and political aims?

First, it should be noted that due to the nature of the private military sector, there are many informal activities that are taking place, and companies tend not to share information with the public. This makes it very difficult to access the primary sources and limits the study. However, the method to obtain necessary data on the subject will be using the reports of independent institutions and organizations, academic articles and books, information obtained via websites of private military companies, non-speculative statements of PMC officials or various persons, newspaper articles, interviews with former PMC employees published in the media, and official documents of various countries that published about the subject. In addition, the study is going to benefit from online data collection tools such as DergiPark, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCO to collect the necessary data.

All this information and data obtained from printed and online publications from academic, institutional, and governmental sources will be analyzed by a qualitative research methodology that's because the hypotheses of the study will be tested via questions such as why, how, and in what way. This approach will further provide a comprehensive, in-depth understanding about the research subject and will help to determine gaps for possible future studies. Due to the nature of the subject, the study will also rely on

the researcher's assumptions and judgment. Particularly, the comparative-historical approach will be the main theoretical base for the selected methodological approach. There are several reasons why this particular approach is chosen. First of all, the comparative-historical approach will be beneficial to identify the private actors and their roles in the wars, connectedly also in foreign policy activities, in a clearer way and it will help to make sense of the increasing use of PMCs by states (Nebolsina 2019: 78). Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skopcol (1985: 348) describe this approach as analytically inductive and argues that:

comparisons across countries and time periods and an emphasis on historical depth, the tracing out of processes over time, are optimal strategies for research on states. Historical depth is also necessary for the study of states because of another feature that they share with many of the societal structures with which they are intertwined: historical persistence and continuity.

Additionally, Caporaso (1992: 627) also establishes a connection between the explanation power of arguments and the concept's overall transformation process. He claims that there is a narrative behind these arguments, where "timing and sequences matter". Therefore, the historical narrative occupies a significant place in elaborating a subject to determine whether it follows a pattern/process. And the main hypothesis of the study is that private military companies such as the Wagner Group which has deep ties with the Kremlin, are being used as a de-facto foreign policy tool of Russia.

This study heavily uses the terms such as mercenary and some other concepts to refer to private actors of war. Thus, in order to avoid confusion regarding these concepts, it should be noted that this study defines mercenary as militarily skilled man who are working as freelancer, not a member of any national army, fighting for a foreign country or political entity rather than their own one, and does not act as a result of sole religious and/or political motivation rather than profit. Another heavily referred term is the private military company that provides military services. There are several reasons to call these companies PMCs rather than private military and security companies (PMSCs) as contemporary academic studies tend to refer. One of the reasons is related to the nature of these companies. They are born due to the demand in the privatization of war, therefore rather than being just ordinary guards, they have offensive fighting characteristics similar to mercenaries. Referring to them as private security companies would not also be correct since they are only providing relatively low-level guarding services. Thus, this term would be insufficient to cover the direct combat engaged side of the companies that the study is focused on. Furthermore, generalizing the concept as PMSCs would be too inclusive and out of the main topic of the study. Therefore, the term PMCs is used here in a similar way that Chesterman and Lehnardt define. According to them, the concept refers to the fact that these companies are operating outside of their state of origin, providing direct military assistance, training, know-how, and advice to a variety of entities, mainly to states. In an environment, where it is hard to determine whether these companies are in a position that offensive or defensive, they are still "militarily" active, and that is because they are operating in conflict areas rather than stable areas with ordinary guarding duties such as private security companies do, and private "military" company is the best term that expresses the desired meaning so far (Chesterman, Lehnardt 2007: 3).

This study is broken down into three parts. The first chapter lays out the conceptual framework on private military companies within a historical context to establish the necessary theoretical background about the process and will support this context by giving similar examples from history or comparing them with mercenaries. But since this is not a study that describes the history of mercenaries and/or

mercenary groups, not all mercenaries or mercenary groups are involved; only examples that are thought to be useful to draw a theoretical perspective to private military companies are given. Thus, this chapter introduces private military companies, reasons of why they started to be widely used, what is the current terminological debate for classifying them, and how they are being used in foreign policy. To discuss their activities, concrete examples from Africa, the Balkans, Middle East, and Colombia have been chosen as specific cases. The chapter will end with the conclusion about mercenaries, private military companies, and national soldiers.

The second chapter starts with the Russian foreign policy and geopolitics. The chapter elaborates the Russian use of violence by both the army and non-state actors. It continues with the private military industry. In this chapter, the study briefly discusses the private military power understanding of Russia in terms of Moscow's hybrid war concept. Then, reasons for the illegality of PMCs in Russia and this situation's benefits to Moscow compared to western countries occupies the following section's content. Later, the study discusses the role of Russian PMCs, especially Wagner Group, compared to other western PMCs and mercenaries in the contemporary international system.

In the third chapter, the study will continue with the example use cases of Russian PMCs in different parts of the world. In the Ukrainian case, it will be tried to demonstrate how the use of private military power was helpful to Moscow in its geopolitical rivalry against Europe; in Syria, how they were beneficial to save an allied regime and to gain an advantage over the US in the Middle East; in Libya, how they increased Moscow's effectiveness in the Mediterranean; and in other places such as Mozambique, Central African Republic, Venezuela, and Sudan, how they served Russian foreign policy objectives while enjoying the profits from these countries' natural resources.

2. PRIVATIZED MILITARY POWER IN CONFLICT: A CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

“Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence. Hence, 'politics' for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.”

(Weber 1946: 78)

Other than permanent official soldiers of the state, a range of people, groups, and entities can engage with the supply of military services at national and international levels. They are called mercenaries, volunteers, foreign servicemen enlisted in national armies, armed groups, or sometimes militias, warlords, defense industrial companies, and PMCs (Schreier, Caparini 2005: 14). The utilization of external sources in wars was not an anomaly throughout the course of history. However, this chapter will be interested in profit-driven private actors of warfare. Private agents of war are highly interconnected with the concept of the use of force. The practice of hiring someone to fight for is old as the history of war itself. Thus, not surprisingly, the process of privatization of war, and concepts related to it has taken a variety of names (Singer 2009: 41). One of them is “freelance”. The origins of the word can be found in medieval times, which “free lances” was a term for soldiers who pledged their services to a king in return for money. (Anil 2018). One of the earliest examples regarding the use of this term can be found in Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*. In this book, a lord refers to his mercenaries as: “I offered Richard the service of my Free Lances, and he refused them—I will lead them to Hull, seize on shipping, and embark for Flanders; thanks to the bustling times, a man of action will always find employment” (Merriam-Webster 2020).

Considering the current meaning of the word, commonly, freelancers are individuals that self-employed with the decision about to whom they will work and for how long is belong to themselves. Thus, it would not be too far from the original sense of the word if call them corporate mercenaries. According to Latin records, before free lances, there were other terms used to call paid soldiers such as “stipendiarii¹”, “soliderii” or “mercennarius” (Merriam-Webster 2020). Also, the origin of the word mercenary is *mercis*, which stands for merchandise in Latin. Therefore, mercenaries are seen as merchants who sell their services in exchange for direct financial gain (Varin 2012: 5). And these merchants of war therefore well served to the needs of rulers in their immediate needs accordingly and efficiently. According to Axelrod (2014: 12), in the Old Testament, Hebrews recruited fighters from “Twelve Tribes” but soon realized that it was far more economical and wiser to supply this demand from outside rather than taking farmers and shepherds to fight against Canaanites and Philistines.

However, mercenaries are not the only example that is used in warfare as profit-oriented, private agents. The trend continues today in a more sophisticated, structured, and professional way. Private military companies seem to be trying to play that role in a slightly different manner. Since both mercenaries and PMCs were active actors in the privatized war and consequently PMCs continue to be remaining active,

¹ People who were given stipend/earning for their military service in war.

they are carrying a great deal of importance to understand the reasons for the use of private actors in warfare and these actors' role in the foreign policy agenda of states. Not only PMCs but non-state actors as a whole have either directly or indirectly started to participate in every aspect of foreign policy. They are active in a range of situations such as democracy building, humanitarian assistance, fighting against international terrorism/drug trade, economic operations, and even in declaring war (Cohen, Küpçü 2005: 34–35). But private military companies are obviously one of the most debated actors in terms of their vague standing among these non-state actors. In the last decades, there have been some attempts and relatively successful realizations through regulation of these companies with Montreux Document in 2008 and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers in 2010. The main theme of these documents is concluding that PMCs are private business organizations that offer military and/or security services to particular actors, either independently from any other third party or on behalf of it (Nebolsina 2019: 77–78). They are providing a number of different services including combat/logistics/intelligence support, military training/advising, escorting people/convoys, maintaining advanced weapons systems, etcetera (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 16).

Since the private military/security service providers are operating as business entities in the market and called as private military companies/firms/corporations, their structure shows parallelism with any other company in the market. PMCs most of the time have a Board of Directors that is responsible to shareholders, composed of usually former military personnel (Kinsey 2006: 15). At the same time, they have a few other civilian-origin employees in other departments of the company. The main personnel who are in the field providing military assistance consist not only of the nationality of the host state of PMCs but also from several different country nationals all around the world such as Britain, Nepal, France, Ukraine, Russia, South Africa, Israel, Australia, and United States (US). Furthermore, if personnel from a particular state are hired by a company in another state to work in a completely different state, they are called as third-country nationals (TCNs) (Isenberg 2009b: 37). It is a common situation for PMCs but difficult to interpret from the perspective of international law in case of criminal activity. Even though these companies sometimes lead to problematic situations legally and politically, states are eager to use them because of the blurry nature of PMCs, which enables them to cheapen the consequences of military intervention.

However, states are not the only actors that privatize security. There is a gradual and consistent increase in the demand of the NSAs regarding PMCs. These actors are using PMCs for security of their sites, protection of their convoys, and planning of security in a much broader means. BP, for example, hired Defense Systems Limited to accelerate the process of training local security personnel to provide higher levels of security to its pipelines in Columbia (Avant 2004: 154). Certain business firms also benefited from the services of PMCs in their home countries to train their own personnel. This way, they would engage with these privatized actors of war in a more “secure” way rather than engaging in the field, where some questions could arise. Regardless of the engagement method, it is certain that we will witness more NSA-PMC business as the violence and instability escalates in places, where states are having hard times to establish a secure environment (Kinsey 2007: 103). All in all, this chapter is going to examine the use of privatized military power in foreign policy with the ultimate aim of establishing a theoretical background on how these actors were used then, and how they are being used today to make sense of Russian instrumentalization of PMCs.

2.1 Use of Force in Foreign Policy

The prevailing opinion of *realpolitik* continues to hold that force and threats of force are essential for diplomacy and have a contribution to make in foreign policy. It is an acceptable argument that history indicates the effort to address conflicts simply through nonviolent diplomacy do not always win and can pose a significant threat to a country's national interests. However, it is important to consider that there have been several other cases in the past where use of force was not only complex and expensive but also counterproductive (George 1996). Thus, the use of force in foreign policy depends upon a variety of factors and due to these factors, it can either cause success or failure for countries' policy objectives. This versatile process is worth understanding in terms of evaluating use of privatized force in foreign policy. And according to George (1996), the main question is what is the most cost-effective way to benefit from use of force or threat of force in foreign policy and how this technique can help states in their strategies? Even though there is a strong literature that is trying to answer this question, one of the answers is directly related to use of privatized force, in other words private military companies.

But what is the primary reason behind use of force? Why is this particular dangerous way of conducting political activity in the international arena chosen as a way to respond to other countries? The most common situations are in the physical defense of a country against a military offensive and the situations where diplomacy was not enough to bring a country to a position that was desired in the first place. Additionally, the threat of force is also closely linked with what is called coercive diplomacy. This type of diplomacy is mainly based on deterring a country with military power to affect its decision-making process and it is a significant part of protecting national interests (George 1996). Former Secretary of State George Shultz also favors this method by claiming that "Diplomacy not backed by strength will always be ineffectual at best, dangerous at worst." (Blechman, Wittes : 91)

However, it is not always easy to take this way while conducting foreign policy. There are certain limitations, restrictions and probable costs to the country which aims to use force. One of these limitations is international law. As a part of customary international law, the UN Charter prohibits the use of force except for two situations. A collective action under Security Council's decision to protect international peace and security and the right of self-defense. Another limitation is bureaucratic support. This is especially important for democratic countries where state institutions such as parliament, congress etc. play significant roles to authorize and finance such military operations. One of the other significant factors that affects the use of force is public support. Together with support from state institutions, this kind of support does not guarantee success in the use of force but considerably increases the level of orchestration, adaptation and maneuverability of the administration. The importance of public support can be easily seen in the example of America. Especially after the Vietnam experience, the American public became extremely sensitive about military involvement to other countries and possible casualties. Therefore, the public started to become a restricting factor against use of force (George 1996). Even suicide bombing of US Marines in Beirut and deaths of US soldiers in Mogadishu increased the sensitivity. As a result, governments that are aware of this public attitude as in the case of Bush and Clinton administrations become more reluctant to sharply use the card of threatening others with military force (Blechman, Wittes 2000: 116).

There are three main ways of using military force card in international politics. One of them is direct use of force such as in the cases of invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan where the United States believed that this was the convenient way for it to protect its national interests. The second way is using the threat of force as discussed as an instrument of coercive diplomacy. For example, a successful demonstration of this use is US involvement in Haiti in 1994. The US mobilized a military force consisting of twenty-three thousand men ready to depart for Haiti with the ultimate objective of changing the country's current regime. This proactive attitude enabled the US to enhance its position in the negotiation process against the regime. This type of foreign policy generally leads to sharp results. Either positive or negative, not moderate. Indeed, this was the case for Cedras junta in Haiti. There were only two options; either staying in power and facing a US military offensive or leaving the power to prevent such an operation to the country. As a result, Cedras chose the second option and left the power (Sisson et al. 2020: 7). On the other hand, this type of foreign policy does not always bring success if there is lack of determination and clear self-expression. For instance, Clinton Administration's cost-sensitivity and particularly its avoidance to casualties caused half-measures that constantly demonstrated unproductive, damaged perceptions regarding US power to settle conflicts between subordinates. Thus, made significant contributions to the conflict's prolongation at substantial risk to the Bosnian and Kosovar communities (Sisson et al. 2020: 8-9). It appears that there is a dynamic in this type of foreign policy. While one of the parties, a relatively weaker one facing a serious threat of military engagement, the other party, a more powerful one is not facing such a big threat and finds itself in a more comfortable position that sometimes leads to inadequate demonstration of willingness to use force to make accepted its own terms. Occasionally, this lack of will even become greater in liberal democracies due to pressure of public opinion and possible loss of votes (Sisson et al. 2020: 8-9). Consequently, if there is not a determinant enough party that is trying to use military force as a persuasion tool, the overall strategy becomes open to failure. As a workaround, certain states and their administrative powers started to choose a different method of using force, a method that mostly frees them from all these limitations and restrictions. This third way is using a privatized and indirect way of force against other countries which will be explained in detail in other sections of the study.

2.2 The Reasons of the Use of Private Agents of Warfare and Their Re-rise

We can't do what we do without them, so therefore we have to have them.

(Barranca 2009: 21)

Mercenaries in general are often used to define anything from people killing for hire to fighters raised by one nation recruited for another. They worked for a number of different clients such as popes, dukes, Italian city-states, empires, etc. under a contract. They were operating as military enterprises without any national or sentimental loyalty to neither their employers nor their place of origin. This was one of the crucial features of them since it was making the manipulation from the outside harder. Their motivation of fighting for money and/or for a foreign cause together with their professionalism has made them useful tools to pursue foreign policy activities abroad. For example, during the American Revolution, German mercenaries (Hessians) served in Britain's army in order to suppress the upheaval (Avant 2012: 1). Gurkhas (mercenaries from Nepal) were actively present also in two world wars and fought in these wars according to British foreign policy.

For sure, especially after the French Revolution and nationalistic ideas, states started to use citizen armies instead of mercenaries. Freelancing in the military industry has become increasingly unethical and their activities became a matter of international law while some countries found ways of sidestepping these barriers. Under the umbrella of legality, there were contracts between hiring states and hired mercenaries to serve in national armies. For example, Gurkhas served in the British and Indian army, South Africa has made contracts for its army with people from almost all the African countries after the collapse of the apartheid regime, and the French Foreign Legion served under France's authority with its international characteristics (Avant 2012: 1). However, with the increasing anti-mercenary norm in the world, using mercenaries in this state-integrated way became quite challenging and as a result, new players with mostly the same roles but with different names started to take the scene. They are private military companies.

Despite the common trend in linking the appearance of PMCs with the post-Cold War period, one of the prototypes of PMCs emerged in 1967 by the initiative of David Stirling, who was a member of British Special Air Service (SAS). This company is called WatchGuard International, and is predominantly composed of former members of SAS. The company provided services to several countries in the Persian Gulf for operations against insurgencies and continued to pursue business in other continents such as Latin America, East Asia, and Africa. It became a perfect role model to other enthusiastic actors in the market such as Kulinda Security (O'Brien 2000). The very first utilization of WatchGuard was in Yemen right after its foundation. After the coup in Yemen that resulted in a decline of the monarch, the US and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) recognized the new regime except the UK. London was aiming to bring the so-called legitimate power back. Stirling came with the offer of the year; through the WatchGuard, former personnel of the SAS should be employed for training of the monarch's supporters and providing medical aid. That kind of intervention was the cornerstone of conducting foreign policy goals abroad that necessitates military involvement for contemporary modern states. The operation could not be initialized with national troops under the state flag but with private agents of war in the boundaries of the nation-state system (Nebolsina 2019: 79–80).

The companies that emerged that time such as WatchGuard and Keeni Meeni Services— called as corporate mercenaries, were early representatives of PMCs rather than simply mercenary groups. They were legitimate actors of the market with their bank accounts, offices, and organizational structures (Wing 2010: 13). After almost ten years, in 1978, a well-known French soldier of fortune Bob Denard attacked the former French colony Comoros Islands and killed President Ali Soilih who was moving to more socialist economic policies. It was a so-called pro-Western plot against Soilih that was conducted by a couple of dozens of highly qualified mercenaries (Varin 2012: 132). It was a plot that resembles the Pazzi Plot² in 1478 in particular ways. However, using mercenaries was quite problematic for many reasons such as low level of secrecy, growing anti-mercenary norm in the world, and international regulations. Therefore, military tasks started to be conducted by private military agents because of the

² The Pazzi family was an aggressive opponent of Lorenzo de Medici rule in Florence. The Pazzis and their followers were openly supported by Pope Sixtus IV, and by Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa. The plan was to kill Lorenzo and his family in an unexpected attack. The Pazzis' instrument in this plan was the Condottieri captain Gian Battista de Montesecco, who was leader of the Perugian company. The captain was not content to be part of such a political offensive and advised the Pazzis to step back. However, he joined the plot, but it was not a successful one (Murphy, Turner 2007: 49). Despite their distance to politics, that example is demonstrating one small dimension of instrumentalization of condottieri not only in the battleground but also in power politics.

political and legal benefits they provide. Consequently, the private military sector (PMS) started to grow. These companies were not only present in areas such as combat or training but also in intelligence and surveillance. Keeni Meeni Services and Saladin Security were perfect examples operating in these technical areas (Ballard 2007: 43).

In the 1960s and 1970s, PMCs started to emerge and grow, but the real expansion in the sector took place after the Cold War for several reasons. One reason was geopolitical. After the end of the rivalry between the US and USSR—victory of the capitalist block, other countries had relatively lost their importance. That new understanding of superpowers followed by disengagement from lots of countries and regions. The necessity to intervene because of ideological concerns has been exterminated. With the lack of military aid and external balancing mechanisms, frozen domestic conflicts thawed, socio-cultural and socio-economic problems created greater instability and states started to fail also with the negative effects of weak government institutions. In this environment of confrontation of seizing power, PMCs filled the military power vacuum (Ebrahim 2010: 189; Singer 2002). The failure of vulnerable regimes to address domestic conflicts has produced a ready market (Shearer 1998a: 71). PMCs are employed by domestic power contestants, political figures, non-state actors (NSAs), and by foreign country administrations.

The second reason was the shrinking of national militaries in the world after the Cold War. According to O'Brien (2000: 61), there were almost 7 million soldiers in 1990, but the number had dropped to about 3 million by 1997. The sudden downsizing in armies created considerable numbers of unemployed troops. The supply was way more than job opportunities that the civil market can offer. Thus, these troops chose to operate as military business actors. Especially, in the case of South Africa and Russia, the professional ex members of the army came together, and formed PMCs. The Russian "Alpha Group" is one of these types of companies (Axelrod 2014: 192). This situation becomes quite familiar when considered the spread of mercenaries into Africa after World War II. In the African case, the surplus of troops after the war created a ready-mercenary market; and in the first case, the similar surplus after the Cold War—also with the effects of globalization and neoliberalism, created a ready-PMC market. Additionally, there was surplus not only in troops but also in weapons that resulted in abundance in the market with cheap prices. That provided cost efficiency to PMCs in terms of their equipment and combat capacity. The pattern of the (re)emergence of private military actors is not limited to the twentieth century but can also be traced back within history. This was the case with companies of fortune³. A number of men came together after their professional service in battles since they had nowhere to return or no job to continue. Therefore, they formed these companies of fortune to both take care of each other, and to do what they do as all together in return for profit (Singer 2009: 48–49). Also, the very similar abundance in military forces caused the emergence of Great Companies⁴. As a result, mostly after a big

³ In medieval times, rulers, kings, and provinces engaged with companies of fortune that can be identified as groups of men with poor military equipment, weakly organized, more of a gang of thugs-for-hire than a trained military unit (Axelrod 2014: 28). That process was the starting point of the transformation to a more organized, institutional, and professional way of conducting mercenary activities in the market (Singer 2009: 48–49).

⁴ The Great Companies actually are one of the milestones in the history of the privatization of war. They started their activities approximately after the 1300s in Europe and are considered as one of the concrete and strongest examples of earlier forms of modern PMCs in terms of their quite similar features and motives in warfare (Ekmekcioğlu 2020: 17). These companies are sometimes also known as free companies, a group of mercenaries who work free from any government. Usually, these mercenary companies consisted of unemployed veterans who

war or an end of process that necessitated a considerable number of military forces results in an increase in the number of retired/discarded military men who would like to continue their profession in the market in return for money. And this situation leads to creation of mercenary groups or companies as in the case of the post-Cold War.

There was also considerable demand from the third-world or undeveloped countries of the world, where national militaries are easy to manipulate and quite active in the political atmosphere. In these mostly post-colonial countries, because of the lack of strong identity background, armies were open to extreme ideas. Some ambitious officers from the armies were able to affect the politics of the country with the power they had or replace the political order with themselves completely. Thence, certain governments decided to use PMCs in their countries as an agent of security, and insurance to continuation of civil political order (Black 2009: 469). The use of private military actors in order to secure political rule of the governing actor is not a new practice but exercised in history from time to time. For instance, Byzantine emperor Basil II (958-1025), who was not really trusted to their local palace guard heavily used the Varangian Guard⁵ (Axelrod 2014: 26). Under his reign, the structure of the army and the roots of palace guards witnessed a transformation. While these entities were mainly consisting of local forces and soldiers from Constantinople that protect the country, the transformation took place to a more mercenary-oriented army. The emperor was justifying this action of him by claiming that mercenaries are politically more trustworthy rather than his people, which have the potential to interfere with the state business since they are legitimate political stakeholders (Janin, Carlson 2013: 56–57).

Another reason for the explosion of PMCs is closely linked to the demand of private sector and multinational corporations (MNCs). Increasingly globalized system that favors capital, encouraged the market to invest and initiate natural resource extraction operations more than ever. Even states struggling with military confrontation and/or civil war promised remarkable possibilities for profit, and thereby stimulated the investment process of MNCs. However, in these countries where conducting such business is difficult due to the threat of armed groups, MNCs demanded the military/security services of PMCs. Overall, the demand in the private sector occupies a great place in the rapid proliferation of PMCs, but the demand of the public also should be taken into consideration (Brooks 2000: 132–133). The biggest demand from the public sector for example, came from the Army of the United States due to the disproportionality of men and operations. The US military shrunk in terms of personnel but not in number of missions in other parts of the world. Thus, the shortage was managed with the help of PMS (Isenberg 2009a: 25).

The fifth reason is terrorism. After the nineteenth century, but especially in the twentieth and early twenty first century, international society has seen conflict as an occurrence under the monopoly of states, or in the case of civil war, competing governments. Lately, terrorism, whether collective or individual acts of aggression, has arisen as destructive as conflict between nations or regimes. 9/11 terrorist attacks have proven that asymmetric threats could be devastating as conventional attacks or

moved swiftly from place to place. It is hard to claim that there was a solid, strictly determined structure that controls all these companies, but there were rules within each company alone that regulates their working principles.

⁵ The Varangian Guard is one of the oldest professional mercenary groups in Medieval Europe. It is assumed that the Varangians entered mercenary service for the first time in 839 and remained until the 14th century. They served the Byzantine Empire for a very long time (Axelrod 2014: 26).

even more. It would not be true that claiming a total change in the nature of contemporary state-oriented warfare, but participation of NSAs in warfare created a grey area where it is difficult to categorize combatants and differentiate noncombatants from them (Axelrod 2014: 191–192). After the attacks in 2001, the US waged a global war on terror. When considered the ineffectiveness of the United Nations (UN) to play an active role in conflicting areas, weak international law in terms of enforceability together with legal loopholes, PMCs found themselves in a market where there is an increasing demand and job opportunities (Zabci 2004: 22).

That is because terrorism has different ideological, economic, political, and religious roots, it has penetrated into every aspect of society, and became a shell/method for certain groups to achieve certain goals. Some of these groups for instance are drug cartels that intensified their attacks to levels that threaten the sovereignty of states such as Mexico and Colombia. The necessary response from these states to prevent attacks and protect citizens require not just police forces but also military involvement. Thus, this is the point that PMCs offer their services and asymmetric warfare knowledge. However, PMCs are not only working for regimes in need but also for insurgents, cartels, and to some, terrorists (Axelrod 2014: 192). In his interview with Kinsey (2007: 91), Westbury⁶ claims that the increasing number of terrorist attacks and the rise of globalization enabled a suitable environment of step up of PMCs as legitimate actors. As a result, the emergence of international terrorism paved the way for PMCs to find employers from all around the world with diverse motivations and status.

One of the other reasons is the technical management of military equipment due to highly complicated, constantly evolving, and civil (technician) participation requiring weapon systems. As technology advanced, it had reflections on warfare. The weapon systems transformed, and the need for technical experts further increased. Historically, the need for technical personnel being supplied from mercenaries. A perfect example for this is the Roman Empire. Even if a part of the empire's reputation comes from its own citizen army, Romans also highly benefited from Numidians, Gauls, Iberians, and Cretans mercenaries. One of main reasons for hiring mercenaries for the empire was a need in areas that require specialties such as archery and cavalry (Singer 2009: 45). However, in this neoliberal, globalized era, states started to employ PMCs, in other words, today's mercenaries, to fill this technical person gap (Ballard 2007: 41). During the invasion of Iraq for example, private military contractors worked for US Army in positions that require highly technical expertise to maintain weapon systems such as Patriot missile batteries, Apache helicopters, B-2 stealth bomber, F-117 Nighthawk fighters, TOW missile system, and Aegis defense system (Singer 2004: 4–5). Engineers, logistics experts, and individuals from the information technology sector are needed due to the electronic network of military operations (Tangör, Yalçinkaya 2010: 138). Moreover, high capability in the information technology area provides serious benefits to a country. In his personal correspondence with Adams (1999: 115), Major Hugh Blanchard, who is retired from the US Army, confirms the dependency over contracting personnel for keeping the systems functioning, especially in the information-related ones.

⁶ Founder of Hart GMSSCO. The company's aim is "to provide security solutions to companies facing widely differing situations around the world. Using a lifetime of experience in Conventional and Special Forces, as well as those gained as one of the founding members of Defense Systems Ltd, Lord Westbury has gathered a dedicated team of professionals who are all experts in their field. As a result of this combined expertise, Hart GMSSCO is now a global risk management services business expressly designed to provide strategic security solutions and services on land and sea to government, humanitarian, corporate and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in an increasingly dangerous and volatile world." Iraq Suppliers (2004).

PMS offers a broad range of services to its customers. The diversity in its services makes the sector available for a variety of contracts, and therefore, helps to expand the business more easily. For instance, repair of military equipment, minor construction, laundry, food & drink providing, logistics support, reports about intelligence data, communication technologies, and installation of necessary software to track and determine the usual suspects (Terry 2010: 666–667) are all included in PMS' range of services available to hiring actors. Thereby, these actors become more capable to focus their capacity to their main objectives similar to the situation that Great Companies and Condottieri allowed their customers more act of freedom in state business by handling the security dimension of the hiring entity. Thus, outsourcing of these types of works is a win-win situation for both parties. According to Ortiz (2010: 35), this is called as new public management, and method used in order to increase the efficiency of security and military capabilities of states. Thus, rather than a shift from monopoly of states in all military/security-related services, there is a reconstruction of conducting these services (Ariöz 2019: 26), or in other words a cooperation between PMS and states.

The eighth reason of the growing number of uses of PMCs stems from the restrictive power of state institutions on governments, especially in democratic states. One clear example is the US. Regarding initiating security/military assistance programs, the Senate and House use their legislation to shape and canalize these programs towards certain countries with certain limits. The Congress on the other hand, uses its power to interfere with the foreign policy acts of the US government. All these checks and balances systems and transparency limits the power of the US government to conduct foreign policy with the military/security assistance program tool. Therefore, rather than direct policies, the executive branch of the US shifted its focus to the privatization of these military activities, which also means outsourcing its foreign policy. All in all, it was inevitable for the US to utilize PMCs as a handful tool in their foreign policy execution (Grant 1998: 12–13). However, this way has weakened the limiting mechanism of the use of force in the international arena by suspending the participation of the public in decision-making process and passivated overall decision-making process for policy implementations in significant subjects (Mandel 2002; Nebolsina 2019: col. 97).

Another factor is related to public attitude towards military activities. In Ancient Egypt, over time, Egyptians witnessed growing economic, humane, and civilizational standards that caused a reluctance in the population towards serving in the army. The more people became distanced from military activities the harder it became to maintain military mobilization. And the compensation of this tendency was the mercenaries for Egypt (Axelrod 2014: 10). Today, as the life standards and comfort increased in societies, people started to approach more agnostically to military activities that can disrupt this flow of life or can cause physical harm to fellow citizens. Luttwak describes this as a new phenomenon of post heroic cultures. He claims that in these kinds of countries, fighting has lost its charm, and people have stopped being excited about it (Luttwak 1994; Varin 2012: 168). Thus, the last but not least factor that plays a catalyzer role in the growth of PMS is public opinion about external military activities. There is an increasing tendency in publics of developed and to some extent developing countries towards limiting their governments to interfere with other countries' domestic problems both politically and militarily. This restricting factor caused two major outcomes. First, it created a vacuum as a result of noninterventionist policies of states that filled by PMCs; and second, it paved the way for the use of PMCs by developed countries themselves where they saw an opportunity/interest to militarily intervene

or support a particular side but could not do it with national armies that would create vulnerability to public criticism (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 12).

2.3 A Terminological/Descriptive Debate on Classification

Scholars who are working in the PMS subject have brought different perspectives to the classification of this area. In academic literature, a number of studies have been conducted to analyze the PMS ultimately in a better and clearer way. In order to classify these private actors of war, there have been different methodological approaches and naming conventions. One of the most prominent scholars of this area, Peter Warren Singer, uses private military companies as a unit of analysis, and he came up with the idea that the private military industry is a combination of three different sectors. One is military provider firms, which are also referred as PMCs or private security companies. He defines these firms as actors who provide direct combat assistance and command services such as Executive Outcomes and Sandline International (both companies are disbanded). The second type is military consulting firms who provide strategic advice and training such as MPRI, DynCorp and Vinnell. The last type he argues is military support firms like Brown & Root and SAIC, who provide non-lethal services such as logistics, maintenance, and intelligence (Singer 2009: 154–156).

However, another scholar, Deborah Avant found that service type oriented approach is problematic. She argues that while one type of company provides a particular kind of service, it can easily provide another kind of service simply by employing different people with suitable professionalism. Therefore, rather than this approach, she prefers to take advantage of the type of contracts as a unit of analysis (Avant 2006: 123). She explains the services of what she called PSCs (Private Security Companies) as:

A wide range, including tasks associated with external (protecting borders) and internal (keeping order within borders) security. Though few contracts promise participation in ground combat, PSCs offer three broad categories of external security support: operational support, military advice and training, and logistical support. PSCs also offer internal security services ranging from site security (armed and unarmed), crime prevention, and intelligence. (Avant 2005: 16)

One of the other classifications made by Brooks (2000: 129–130) according to companies' position in combat/mission. At first, Brooks made a two-sided classification. He categorized PSCs as passive companies, which provide defensive security in conflictual areas, whereas he defined PMCs as active companies that serve in offensive operations. However, later changed his definition. To capture the development process of these companies, he creates an umbrella term—military service providers, and divides it into three different categories. First, non-lethal service providers (for example Pacific Architects and Engineers); second, PSCs (ArmorGroup, formerly known as Defence Systems Ltd.); and third, PMCs. He also divides PMCs into two different categories as active (Executive Outcomes) and passive (MPRI) ones similar to his early idea (Brooks 2002: 76–77).

Another classification has been made by Isenberg (2009b: 25) according to activities of PMCs. He used PMC as a general term to reference all these companies but at the same time he divided them into three categories. Military combatant companies (Executive Outcomes and Sandline International) which serve directly in conflicts; military consulting firms (Blackwater, MPRI, DynCorp) which provide training and bodyguard services; and military support firms (Halo Group, Vinnell, and Ronco) that provide non-lethal assistance. Percy, on the other hand, used PSC as a general term to indicate these companies. She

also specified three different categories of PSC support. First, operational or tactical support including military interrogation and maintenance of weapons systems; second, security or policing including protection of military/political properties and provision of military police; and lastly, military advice and training (Percy 2009: 58).

The British government also participated in the debate about the categorization of PMS with its green paper about PMCs published in 2002. Apart from other private agents of war such as mercenaries, the paper distinct the sector as PMCs⁷ and PSCs. However, the paper recognizes the fact that the border between these two types of companies is blurry just as their job descriptions. PSCs participate in missions such as training of local forces, fisheries protection, etc. that can be conducted by PMCs either. The paper also argues that there is not a clear distinction between combat and non-combat operations. It is not mandatory to actually pull the trigger to participate/contribute to military conflict since those who operate in military transportation, intelligence, and training are all parts of the war as much as those who fight in the ground (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002: 8–9). It is important to note that military consultant firms also provide training services to local military forces even if it is not directly in their job descriptions (Ebrahim 2010: 186). As a result, all these different perspectives about PMS from different scholars show us that it is not always possible to categorize/classify/name them in a healthy and distinctive way. There are problematic issues regarding the definition of PMCs and PSCs. It is also difficult to separate one PMC from another because of their intertwined structure and services. That is because this study uses the term of PMC to refer to military companies as an inclusive concept.

Besides, the debate over decomposing private agents of war is not limited to only military companies but also mercenaries. McFate (2019a: 6) articulates those labels such as private military contractors, PSCs, PMCs, private military/security companies, military service providers, operational contractors, etc. are euphemisms for mercenaries. According to him, the only difference between private military contractors and mercenaries is the market conditions and personal choice of the fighter. On the other hand, there is indeed a difference between PMCs and mercenaries in terms of legality that PMCs are most of the time officially contracting with the state or other actors, whereas mercenaries mostly participate in covert operations with secret deals. However, it is not a rare occasion of the employment of mercenaries by PMCs either. Thus, the line even becomes blurrier. Also, those who call themselves PSCs share the same organizational structure with PMCs. Their priority of jobs which are related to public security rather than offensive operations does not draw a noticeable line between PMCs and PSCs (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 5). Furthermore, because of the negative perception towards mercenaries, PMCs are making great efforts to convince the international society to prove that they are different; whereas PSCs are trying to convince the world that they are different from PMCs in terms of mercenary “relatedness” (Percy 2007: 241). Therefore, the situation creates a diagram that consists of three intersecting circles, which each of them is trying to differentiate itself from another but they are all parts of a single path after all.

⁷ The Green Paper defines PMCs as those who provide services such as combat assistance, advice, training, logistic support, supply of personnel for monitoring roles, and demining.

2.4 Private Military Actors in International Law

One of the first regulations for private actors of war was The Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and the Protection of their Independence and Sovereignty (Resolution 2131), adopted unanimously in 1965, reaffirmed the UN's strict nonintervention policy and declared that "no state shall organize, assist, foment, finance, incite or tolerate subversive, terrorist or armed activities" aimed at violently overthrowing another state. Resolution 2131 mirrors Hague V's ban on state-sponsored recruitment of troops by not addressing individual mercenary activities and putting the onus on governments (Ebrahim 2010: 203). Few years later, The General Assembly enacted Resolution 2465 in 1968, which targeted mercenaries. The resolution proclaimed "using mercenaries against national freedom and independence" illegal and defined mercenaries as outlaws. Following these events, in 1974, the UNGA defined aggression with Resolution 3314 which specified practices that violated Article 2(4)'s no use of force clause and denounced governments that sent armed gangs, irregulars or mercenaries (Ebrahim 2010: 204).

Apart from the United Nations' efforts, The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa 1977 is also noteworthy. While the UK and other non-African nations have no duties under the OAU Convention, it is an international instrument relevant to mercenary activity and offers lessons for national law. The OAU Convention is more advanced than the International Convention. Article 1 defines what a mercenary is contracted to perform rather than who they are, adding to Article 47 of Protocol I and the International Convention. The OAU Convention translates preamble ideals into substantive legislation. General criminal liability of nations and their representatives is also specified in the OAU Convention. Articles 5 and 6 detail state parties' commitments to end mercenary operations in Africa, buttress extradition against denial, and create the responsibility to prosecute as an exception (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 25). The OAU Convention does not create universal jurisdiction, but states must ratify and implement it into domestic law. Another important regulation, which is the 1985 OAU Convention is seldom implemented. The OAU Convention improves on the International Convention on Mercenaries by prohibiting mercenary recruitment, usage, funding, and training. Like the International Convention, it doesn't include private military company actions or corporate criminal liability, which may be key to restricting such activities. The OAU Convention's binding scope is similarly restricted to Africa, but its framework concerns any mercenary conduct performed in Africa, whatever its origins (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 25).

The UN on the other hand, enacted the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries in 1989. The Convention was developed in reaction to the development of mercenary operations in post-colonial Africa and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s to reinforce neutrality and safeguard governments from the illegal use or threat of force against their political independence and territorial integrity. The Convention is one of the greatest international instruments applicable to mercenaries and private military companies. It offers the ideal starting point for domestic application of international norms forbidding mercenaries (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 24).

Even though all these Protocol I, UN Resolutions, OAU Convention, and UN Mercenary Convention define mercenary status and outlaw them in specific instances, contrary to common misconception, the UN Mercenary Convention does not forbid mercenaries. International law defines mercenaries narrowly and condemns and bans their activity in certain situations. In their current form, PMCs don't fulfill this

description or act in restricted regions (Ebrahim 2010: 208-210). But in 2008, 17 governments, including Sierra Leone, Angola, the US, UK, France, and China, created the Montreux Document, a list of good practices for PMCs and the states who use them (Ebrahim 2010: 213). With all of these developments considered in terms of international law, it seems that international treaties and agreements employ an obsolete mercenary paradigm. And it would not be totally wrong to say that international custom supports a limited ban on mercenaries and approves of the present private military sector.

It is true when also checked European Union side for the use of mercenaries or PMCs. The EC Treaty doesn't cover trade in military services. Article 296 exclusively covers the manufacturing and trafficking of guns, ammunition, and war materiel; services are not protected. National action to prohibit or license trade in military services is probable if it is nondiscriminatory between citizens and firms of different Member States. The EC Treaty has derogations for public policy and security that might justify this conduct (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002: 27).

For the British side there is more concrete approaches through the regulation of PMC even though their overall effects are debatable. The 1998 'arms to Africa' affair, in which the British private military company Sandline International signed a contract with the then exiled President of Sierra Leone Ahmed Tejah Kabbah to supply a 35 tons shipment of arms in contravention of a UN embargo, shows the serious implications private military company activities can have on UK foreign policy. Sir Thomas Legg's independent investigation suggested that UK government employees be given rules for working with private military companies. The Second Report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on Sierra Leone called for the UK Government to revise the International Convention on Mercenaries and detail legal possibilities for managing UK-based private military enterprises. In April 1999, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook indicated that the UK will release a Green Paper on mercenary activities by November 2000 (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 4). Indeed, a comprehensive Green Paper released in 2002.

Private military companies frequently operate outside international law when offering military services to foreign customers. Governments that contract private military companies are liable for their behaviour, especially within international humanitarian and human rights legislation. Despite this requirement and their global character, governments in countries where PMCs are registered and/or operate are liable for their operations (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 21). As a result, the international community has tried to regulate mercenaries. But private military companies and their contemporary analogues offer additional difficulties to governments with no clear answer. The desire to promote accountability may help governments develop laws. Without proper national or international laws to govern their services, these corporations lack responsibility (Beyani, Lilly 2001: 14).

To achieve necessary control, Scherier and Caparini (2005: 68) argues that the main areas of focus for states include:

- Ratification of relevant international and regional legal instruments;
- Introduction of controls over arms brokering and shipping agents into the scope of arms export controls that recognize the role played by PMCs and PSCs;
- Development of national legislation to license and control the activities, and to improve transparency of PMCs and PSCs;
- More rigorous implementation of UN arms embargoes and sanctions which include in their scope PMCs and PSCs and technical assistance that may accompany arms transfers;

- Support for the continuation and broadening of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on mercenaries to include PMCs and PSCs;
- Development of international measures to share information on PMCs and PSCs and to improve the monitoring of their activities abroad;
- Promotion of measures to ensure that employers of PMCs and PSCs introduce sufficient safeguards to prevent breaches of human rights standards, international humanitarian law, and other relevant aspects of international law by PMC and PSC personnel;
- Promotion of security sector reform programs that lead to accountable PMCs and PSCs with proper civilian oversight and democratic control so as to reduce the need for PMCs and PSCs engaging in combat and support efforts to combat illicit trade in arms.

2.5 How PMCs Are Used as Foreign Policy Proxies?

There are quite a few different areas that PMCs undertake the role of states evidently or by devious means as in the case of MPRI training of other countries' troops as an expression of US' will (Kinsey 2007: 101). Apart from MPRI, in 2003, DynCorp also has contracted with the US government to provide several services to humanitarian relief operations in Africa; and in Colombia, to back up the Colombian security forces in the war against drug gangs (Kinsey 2007: 101–102). One of the other areas that PMCs operate as proxies for their home state is the international civilian police field. Most of the countries in the world, including the US, lack an international police unit. Since the absence of this unit was not ideal for the US government, they decided to send DynCorp personnel to Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor as international police in the 1990s (Avant 2004: 154).

Considering the meaning of the “proxy” word within the contemporary international relations literature, it makes perfect sense to label the role and position of PMCs in states' foreign policy applications with this term. Taking into account the fact that PMCs are so-called private entities operating independently in the global market, governments who use them can simply declare their alienation to the operations of the concerning company. And this is an enabling advantage to states those who pursue political interests over other states and regions while aiming to keep their unbiased image intact (Zarate 1998: 77). The PMCs not only allow countries to keep their hands clean but also give the opportunity to intervene when state institutions, legislative procedures, and public opposition restrict them. Contracting with these companies diminishes the power of the parliament, constitution and public over foreign policy conducting in times of reluctance to supply critical strategic interests. The use of PMCs in Bosnia to pierce the Congress' limit of 20,000 US troops is a good example in this case. Moreover, using these companies in Iraq also prevented some of the political costs. The US government had four different options in the case of Iraq where three of them would cost serious damage to the popularity of the government, especially in times of elections. These three options were to deploy more national forces, bargain with allies for military deployment, or bring the subject into the UN. The US could have chosen one of these three but apart from these, chose to use PMCs as most ideally to increase its presence, and avoid political responsibilities considering relatively low attention to death of private military contractors, which do not count officially. Even though it was the best for the executive, it is important to note that this is a situation which causes the weakening of the democratic control of governments by state institutions and the public (Schreier, Caparini 2005: 68). For instance, according to the executive

director of CorpWatch⁸, a US government official who works on Sudan responded to a question regarding the use of DynCorp to do peace negotiations:

The answer is simple. We are not allowed to fund a political party or agenda under United States law, so by using private contractors, we can get around those provisions. Think of this as somewhere between a covert program run by the CIA and an overt program run by the United States Agency for International Development. It is a way to avoid oversight by Congress. (Chatterjee 2004)

According to a memo obtained by Spiegel, then-Vice President Dick Cheney of US contacted with CIA to keep Blackwater's⁹ activities in the Middle East classified to the Congress. Thus, members of Congress had limited information about the company's operations that were executed on behalf of the executive body of the US. The connections between PMCs and governments are being established through different mechanisms and individuals. For example, Alvin Bernard Krongard, who was an executive director of the CIA, joined Blackwater and played a critical role in the "business" between these two entities (Der Spiegel 2009). Another example is Richard Cheney, a former Secretary of Defense who became a CEO of Halliburton in 1995. After he came back to politics as the US Vice President in 2000, he played a significant role in contracting military-related works with KBR (a division of Halliburton) (Didion 2006; Leander 2010). All these examples not only demonstrate a natural way of doing business, corruption, or simply outsourcing of some military-related works to a company but also give clues about the ongoing process of the use of violence.

According to Leander (2010: 482), the orthodox claim that states are principal, and PMCs are agents of the use of force is an illusion to help make these companies legitimate; and by doing so, companies' possible challenge over public authority on the use of violence is prevented. However, it should not be forgotten that states in the first place chose to legitimize these companies to use them according to their interests, and simply in the contemporary atmosphere of the international relations they can choose to delegitimize them according to their benefits as it will be discussed in the following chapter about Russian use of PMCs, and the (il)legal status of PMCs in Russia.

Not only US-based but also some UK-based PMCs were part of the further foreign policies of the concerning government. For instance, Saladin Security was an active actor in the training of Omani government security personnel together with British national security forces. The company also managed an air force for Oman, which is mostly flown by British officers. Even though UK-based companies are not big and complex when compared to US-based companies, they are also linked with the British government (Brayton 2002: 311). Thus, there is an increasing concern over the influence of states where PMCs' headquarters are located. Because these home states, to some extent, are controlling the contracts and reshaping them accordingly (Fredland 2004: 213). In Vinnell-Saudi Arabia and MPRI-Yugoslavia deals, the home states of these companies (US) were in-between in the process of forming contracts whether directly or implicitly. There were even occasions that some PMCs did not sign certain contracts due to their inconvenient position compared to their home countries' foreign policy standings

⁸ According to the definition in its website, CorpWatch is an organization "works to promote environmental, social and human rights at the local, national and global levels by holding multinational corporations accountable for their actions." For further information, please see <https://corpwatch.org/node/5>.

⁹ Blackwater is a highly debated PMC both in public/media and academic literature. The head of the company is Eric Prince, who is known as one of the strongest supporters of the order of Christian right wing, and campaign of Bush (Scahill 2010: 17).

(Adams 2002: 56–57). Otherwise, they have been kicked out of the game if they act uncommitted, as it is clear in the closing of Executive Outcomes in 1998. Therefore, they respected the terms and considered the sensitive points of their home countries (Leander 2010: 481–482). Over and above, PMCs are not only reducing the political costs for the exporter country—that PMC is located, but also reducing the economic burden of the importer country—that PMC will operate in as a consequence of the contract, in cases which exporter country provide assistance to cover expenditures if it is suitable to its own interests (Fredland 2004: 213).

With all the benefits they provide, it is not a secret that PMCs are becoming a significant formation in states' geopolitical plans. For example, the US had ambitions regarding total control over world oil reserves. To accomplish that ambition, it was trying to be active in the Caspian Gulf. In line with this effort, the US government decided to use the “mask” of Blackwater in Azerbaijan to not provoke any country in the region, especially Russian Federation and Iran. To some, there were two main reasons behind using Blackwater in such a delicate matter. First, softening the influence of Russia and Iran in the region to gain relative power over natural resources; and second, acquiring a military base to use in a possible conflict with Iran (Scahill 2010: 272–273).

2.5.1 Africa

Africa's shadowy experiences with mercenaries created a strong anti-mercenary norm in the continent. However, it did not withhold certain African governments to use PMCs that operated similarly to mercenaries as a result of their incapability to provide security for their countries. In the 1990s, with the re-rise of the private agents of war, the debates over PMCs and mercenaries flared up. Mainly, it was because some PMCs' mercenary-like combat involvements to conflicts even though these involvements were justified by the law and contract itself (Kinsey 2007: 97). Of course, despite their negative sides, there were significant contributions of these companies that made them desirable for clients such as helping to provide regional stability, security, law, and order (Brooks 2002: 69). Yet it does not mean that the PMCs are not operating in line with their exporting country's foreign policy agenda, there is also another side of the coin. For instance, “The U.S. contribution to ECOMOG, the West African peacekeeping force, was combat support from a private firm, International Charter Incorporated of Oregon” (Cohen, Küpçü 2005: 42). Thus, considering only the positive effects would be misleading; giving the right to operate in areas where natural resources are abundant, also gives a strong position to PMCs in the importer country's economy (Isenberg 1997; Reno 1995). Perhaps, a security importer country manages to accomplish short-term military success but compromises its economic security in the medium and long-term. And, after the success in providing security with the help of a PMC does not solve the problem, but it postpones it.

One of the first examples of PMC involvement in a conflict in Africa dates back to 1993. At that time, there was a conflict between Angolan government and some insurgents in the country, and the situation got worsened with the capture of an oil storage area by insurgents of UNITA¹⁰ (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola). The Angolan Armed Forces failed to repel the insurgents. At this point, Executive Outcomes started to counter-attack with approximately its 50 personnel and 600 Angolan troops, and managed to recapture the area with minimum damage. When the Executive Outcomes started to be responsible for the security of the area, the UNITA immediately claimed that the administration

¹⁰ National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

of the oil storage area is using mercenaries. The response to that claim was that they are just mixed-raced security guards (Adams 1999: 106). Executive Outcomes also accused of being involved in the conflict only because of the existence of natural resources. The claim was based on the company's prioritization of oil-diamond related operations first rather than focusing on all other necessities of the contract such as solving Angolan security issues in general. Also, the earnings of the company were officially increased by further privileges in extracting natural resources (Percy 2007: 214). Besides, it is important to note that internationally recognized sovereign governments have the right to sell public properties to companies even if they do not have a physical control over the property. Angola, in this case, did this greatly to gain strategic earnings. According to Singer (2002: 207), this is a remastered version of "imperialism by invitation" in such PMC-state relations. This interpretation of Singer is true in some respects that PMCs are increasing their power in countries not militarily but also economically by controlling one of the most critical sources of capital, therefore gaining the power to shape the country's political standing indirectly.

Another involvement of PMCs in African conflicts was in Sierra Leone Civil War¹¹ that lasted almost eleven years. In 1995, South African originated PMC Executive Outcomes hired by Sierra Leone government to help to fight and recapture the diamond mine areas from rebels. The company managed to gain great success in a short time. However, considering the problematic financial status of Sierra Leone, the remuneration of the work became one of the main subjects. According to many, the payment was the concession to British firm "Branch Energy" to operate in diamond fields (Adams 1999: 106). According to Brayton, even though the Executive Outcomes and the Branch Energy tried to hide their links, it is quite engrossing that giving concessions to Branch Energy right after Executive Outcomes recaptured the areas. It should be noted that the transaction is concluded against the will of the related minister for mines of Sierra Leone (Brayton 2002: 327). When considered the similar Angolan case and the correlation, the situation becomes clearer, and becomes even more difficult to deny that that privilege was the payment of the company.

Executive Outcomes was working with the official Kabbah government in Sierra Leone. However, after the contract ended, the government fell as a result of rebels' offensive, which led to the involvement of another PMC, UK-based Sandline International. Instead of Executive Outcomes, Sandline started to work for the exiled Kabbah government. The main aim of the company was the restoration of the Kabbah government by a counter-coup; for this reason, the company started to supply the pro-Kabbah groups. The necessary shipment of military equipment and weapons to supporters of Kabbah, however, were captured in Nigeria, and that occasion had been considered as a violation of the UN arms embargo. Despite the denouncements of both UK and US that they do not have any connections with the company, the government enquiry in the UK revealed the knowledge of the British Foreign Office about the operation, which worsened the situation (Percy 2007: 211). But what was the interest of the UK in that

¹¹ The civil war began in 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), started to try to overthrow the government. In the early periods of civil war, the RUF took control of some territory, which was rich in diamonds. In 1995, Executive Outcomes was hired to repel the RUF and became successful to regain some areas. Then, an elected civilian government came to power in March 1996, and the RUF signed the Abidjan Peace Accord. Under UN pressure, the government canceled its contract with Executive Outcomes before the treaty went into force. As a result, war continued. In 1997, a group of officers made a coup. The new government, led by Johnny Paul Koroma, declared that the war is over now. However, the violence continued. In 1999, The Lome Peace Accord was signed. With the treaty, Foday Sankoh, the commander of the RUF, became the Vice President. He gained control of some diamond mines, but the peace process did not continue. By 2000, the insurgents were marching again. The UK took initiative and supported its former colony and the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The RUF was defeated, and officially in 2002, civil war was over.

operation? One part of the UK ambitions with Sandline was the British Labor Party's (then government party) concern over the concept of "ethical foreign policy". The government tried to realize its theoretical foreign policy by putting the elected government back in Sierra Leone with minimal financial and political cost—a cost that would occur if national troops had been used. It should be also noted that there were discussions on the transfer of some mining concessions from Branch Energy to Jupiter Mining Company as a result of a new PMC (Sandline International) existence in the country (Musah 2000: 98–102).

According to the press, Sandline International was a British mercenary company that was protecting only mining interests, but the company stated that they are in Sierra Leone because the British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone asked for help to train and equip local forces enough to replace coup officers in power. In addition to the UK, the US also indirectly and/or tacitly supported the restoration of power by mobilizing PMS (Adams 1999: 109). Another PMC, US-based International Charter Incorporated of Oregon, participated in the power struggle in Sierra Leone with the ultimate task of replacing the Nigerian Army who came to help to defeat the rebels (RUF). Thus, the US interest was not directly in Sierra Leone but in Nigeria. That is because if the rebels would succeed, Nigeria, the fifth biggest oil exporter to the US and a close ally, would be faced with the possibility of being next (Zabci 2004: 33). The UK-based PMCs Rubicon and Northbridge provided security to mine and oil companies in Africa including British oil giant BP. In that way, British PMCs also contributed to their home country's one of the most significant foreign policy objectives—protection of British commerce abroad (Havnelid 2006: 54–55). Therefore, PMCs are used as proxies both by the US and UK in order to protect some financial and strategic interests according to their foreign policy formations. Similarly, not long ago but in the de-colonization process of Africa, the mercenary market composed of mainly disbanded soldiers of the Second World War and retired troops of ex imperial powers was eager to supply the need in military force because of conflicts taking place. As a result, Western countries, emerging regimes, mining companies in the region and local power contestants have made heavy use of these soldiers of fortune (Axelrod 2014: 161). It is important to note that mercenaries were active participants for opposing sides in the Congo conflict in the Cold War. And these sides were supported by both Soviets and Americans. This particular case was a further demonstration of using private military actors as proxy tools in proxy conflicts.

One of the clearer examples of the PMC instrumentalization of security exporter countries occurred in Burundi. There was a threat of spillover effect of the genocide of Tutsis that began in 1994, Rwanda. Hutu rebels that called "Forces Nationales de Libération" were pursuing the continuation of the tragic events by killing the president of Burundi. According to Sean McFate, who is a writer and a former PMC employee, Hutus knew that the death of the president could lead to the continuation of the genocide just as it happened in 1994—the deaths of both Burundian and Rwandan presidents started it all. He says (McFate 2014: xi-xii) in his book:

I was to keep the president alive and in public view and without anyone knowing it was a US program, including staff at the US embassy. This I did. Curiously, I was not a member of the CIA or part of a covert US military unit or even a government employee. I was from the private sector—a "contractor" to many and "mercenary" to some—working for a large company called DynCorp International. DynCorp provides a wide range of services for the US government, from repairing military jets to guarding the president of Afghanistan to

flying counterdrug missions in Colombia to preventing a possible genocide in Africa. This is increasingly how foreign policy is enacted today: through corporations.

Again, the dominant power of PMS, US, was on stage this time with another PMC called DynCorp International. In order to avoid possible political and humanitarian responsibilities, the US one more time chose the trending “privatized path” for its foreign policy realization. Aside from Burundi, DynCorp was also used in Liberia. After two civil wars¹² that severely damaged the country for years, the Liberian president stated that a couple of African leaders decided to abolish the national armies and instead build new ones for the sake of their countries. McFate argues that he was hired by DynCorp (the private military company paid by the US) to build a brand-new national army for Liberia. He continues and claims that in this case, the DynCorp was more like a Wallenstein style military entrepreneur of Germans than condottieri; and the company conducted a unique mission considering the overall idea of using of private enterprise to raise a sovereign country’s army by another sovereign country (McFate 2014: 101–102). Indeed, this incident levels up the business of PMC and the use of PMCs as a foreign policy tool by states to whole another dimension. In this mission, as expected, the high-level job allowed high-level control. The US government was receiving important information before Liberians, making decisions, shaping plans, controlling the army-building process, and forming not just some small African country’s army for the Liberians’ sake but also according to US’ interests (McFate 2014: 125).

PMCs and mercenaries were operating all over Africa. One of the nearest examples is revealed by a UN investigation about Libyan warlord Haftar’s unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the UN recognized government of Libya by using mercenaries in 2019. The plan was to buy helicopters from Jordan and transfer the mercenaries to Tripoli by these helicopters to help to overthrow the government. However, Jordanian officials suspected the situation and did not provide any. As a result, a Antonov 26B showed up to provide necessary transportation to mercenaries. However, the plan could not be realized; according to a UN report, the plane was acquired from a sub company of Frontier Services Group, which former Blackwater CEO Eric Prince has been an important part of this logistics firm (Hettena 2020). Overall, in Africa, the mercenary trend became popular with the start of the decolonization process with a particular logic behind, and later this trend continued in the continent under mostly legal services of PMCs.

2.5.2 Balkans

PMCs also became one of the game-changing actors in the Balkans. Among many, the most prominent one in the region was MPRI.¹³ Foreign governments considered this company as quasi-official US military aid used in cases that the formal US presence and support would be politically impossible or inconvenient (Zarate 1998: 105). There are several reasons behind this understanding. First of all, the MPRI started to train the army of three years old Croatia. The country had experienced a civil/cross-border war within the former Yugoslavia. The training result was astonishing, the Croatian Army was transformed to a modern, highly capable army. Before long, Croatians started a quite effective offensive—resulted in victory and changed the status quo in the Balkans in 1995— that was reminiscent of Operation Desert Storm. Considering the close relations between MPRI and US, it is a widely

¹² The First Liberian Civil War started in 1989 and continued until 1997. The Second Liberian Civil War began in 1999 and ended in 2003.

¹³ Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) was based in Virginia, US. It was incorporated in 1987, and its president was retired US Army General Bantz J. Craddock.

accepted argument that US indirectly fast forwarded the events to achieve peace as quickly as possible (Grant 1998: 17). Indeed, with the sudden change in the map, displaced people and losses, Serbians agreed sitting at the peace agreement table.

However, the real and clearer utilization of MPRI occurred in Bosnia after the Dayton Accords—peace agreement that ended the Bosnian War (one of the Yugoslav Wars)—in 1995. The contract went into force in 1996 and included mainly the training and equipment of Bosnian Army by MPRI. Against the Christian Serbians, several Muslim majority countries supported the Bosnia-Herzegovina. One of these countries was Iran that had sent both military equipment/arms and advisors. By helping the country, Iran was not only trying to expand its sphere of influence in Bosnia but also in Europe, which the US considered this effort in Clinton's Executive Order 12957 as “threat to the national security, foreign policy, and the economy of the United States” (Mohlin 2014: 29). Consequently, to refrain from strong Iranian influence in the region, and to continue the US interests, three distinct aims have been determined by US government; deterring Serbia from any new military offensive that will break the peace, preventing existing and possible further Iran involvement in Bosnia, and dodging the Dayton Agreement and NATO's Implementation Force that restricts US to militarily support the Bosnia (Mohlin 2014: 26). It appeared that the best way to address these three aims was the use of a PMC, which will act on behalf of the US government while legally being present as a private firm.

Nonetheless, to take advantage of the US military and strategic support, Bosnians needed to make certain arrangements before. First, passing the Federation Defense Law, and second, removal of external forces in the country as Dayton Accords demands. Afterall, Bosnia departed Iranian, Pakistani, Turkish, and Afghan people that came to support Bosnia (Zarate 1998: 110). With this move, the connection between Bosnia and Iran was also lost. As discussed in the Green Paper of the UK in 2002, “MPRI has undoubtedly functioned as an instrument of US policy in the Balkans. The fact that MPRI's actions are at least consistent with US Government policy is made plain by the State Department's issue of licences” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002: 18).

2.5.3 Middle East

Iraq, in and after the occupation, has witnessed to the biggest use of private security/military personnel in the history so far. The US contracted with several different PMCs in Iraq to bypass the restrictions of its democratic environment that is because private contractors were not transparent as official soldiers. Therefore, PMCs chosen as one of the main applicators of the operation since the level of transparency, which the army offers to public, would be paralyzing the situation—mainly the physical existence of US in Iraq (Varin 2012: 197). For example, according to “Rolling Stone's” obtained book chapter (which is blocked from release by CIA) of the head of Blackwater, Eric Prince, he claimed that he was conducting business—can be considered as illegal and unethical, in Iraq on behalf of CIA. Hettena (2020) says the book contains information about how Prince played a key role in training a terrorist hit squad, and forming a group of a dozen mercenaries. Additionally, since deaths of private military contractors do not count as official casualty, PMCs served very well in refraining from the massive protests of American voters (Varin 2012: 178), therefore, body-bag effect. Thus, the PMC employees in Iraq allowed the executive branch of the US to handle certain objectives without institutional limitations in addition to less political costs with more manpower (Gaston 2008: 236).

The benefit of PMCs in terms of providing necessary manpower in Iraq was quite important not just in dealing with domestic political concerns of the US but also in such a time of lack of international support. Singer says that the Iraq War is realized thanks to PMCs because they are not deciders but the enablers of politically unrealizable wars with all their useful services. With the emergence of these private actors of war, in situations where it is costly to use national armies; governments decide, legislative branch funds, and PMCs implement. He also claims that the use of PMCs in such situations is a violation of Abrams Doctrine, where the doctrine demands complete public support for military operations (Singer 2007: 3-4). Afterall, PMCs in Iraq provided combat, technical, and intelligence support together with security for civilian officials, sites and convoys. Some of these companies, such as Blackwater, are involved in highly controversial incidents. When Blackwater personnel killed 14 civilians and wounded several more in Baghdad, the Iraqi government highly criticized the company and the case moved to the judiciary in the US. Thus, even though there are not clear legal instructions about the status and trial of private military personnel, highly publicized criminal events of the PMCs lead to the damage in both company's and exporter country's image¹⁴, which can be categorized as one of the side-effects of using them. In order to refrain from that negative perception, Blackwater changed its name to Xe Services in 2009, and later to Academi¹⁵ in 2011.

PMCs operated not only in Iraq but also in other countries in the Middle East such as Jordan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia. Rob Richer, a former senior CIA official, left the agency in 2005 to join Blackwater. He was the bridge between the CIA and the King Abdullah of Jordan. The CIA was training the intelligence agency of Jordan in return for information from the country. However, the training service provided by the CIA was replaced by Blackwater (Isenberg 2009b: 64). In Afghanistan, on the other hand, companies were mainly hired to ensure security of certain individuals and the President Hamid Karzai. One of these companies was DynCorp, later got fired as a result of abusing local Afghans (Gaston 2008: 230). In Saudi Arabia, PMCs served to a much higher purpose: the protection of oil interests of the US abroad. To achieve that aim, several contracts have been made to empower and train the National Army of Saudi Arabia. The main determinant of use of PMCs here was avoiding possible political pressure and negative image by assisting a country that is undemocratic and disrespectful to human rights (Shearer 1998b: 35). For sure, by outsourcing these kinds of tasks, the US could always deny their official involvement, argue that these are independent companies that operate in the free market, and be up and running in the region to pursue its objectives.

2.5.4 Colombia

Latin America engaged with a few PMCs throughout the years due to its internal conflicts with drug cartels. One of the leading countries engaging with PMCs in the region was Colombia. The country suffered from the corruption, weak security forces, violence of drug cartels; and the Bogota administration was not able to stop the drug flow into the US. There were close relations between

¹⁴ One of these events occurred when Turkey found out that the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was using US weapons against her. Turkish media and public went insane. That is because the PKK also considered as a terrorist organization according to US, Military and Justice Department started an investigation. It turned out that two Blackwater personnel were found guilty because of possession of stolen weapons. However, it did not change the perception on the Turkish side (Singer (2007: 15).

¹⁵ In WikiLeaks documents, there was information on Academi that the company provided intelligence and security support to the Syrian opposition and trained YPG forces against ISIS (Ariöz 2019: 29).

Colombian officials and the US government, thus, Colombia demanded assistance from the US. However, the Congress has limited the number of US troops in Colombia as about half a thousand. On the other hand, there were not any restrictions on PMCs to operate in Colombia as expected. Thus, one more time, PMCs became the enablers of the possibility to be militarily involved in a foreign country without democratic limitations. Consequently, there were a number of companies who participated in the civil war, the war against cartels in Colombia. Of course, most of these countries were US-based, and were maintaining deep connections with the US government (Zabci 2016: 6). Thus, PMCs are not providing services to Colombia because it is a country in need of help but a country that the US needs to handle for several reasons.

First, there are many US citizens and civil companies in Colombia, which increases the importance of the country besides its dangerous status due to becoming a center of drug production and trade. The contracts between US and PMCs started to be made especially after the second term of the Clinton administration (Singer 2009: 324–325). One of the PMCs active in the country was DynCorp, started to train the Colombian Army, provide intelligence, and participate in the destruction of cocaine fields in the last decade of the 20th century. Company's casualties in certain operations were not a priority for American media since they were not official US soldiers, which was politically creating a free space for the executive branch (Güç 2007: 137). Apart from DynCorp, the company called ICP Group helped rescue two kidnapped British oil workers (Havnelid 2006: 54), and MPRI was also present to support the counternarcotic program of Bogota (Smith 2002: 7). Additionally, in 2007, well-known Blackwater joined the war on drugs. Therewithal, mass protests were taking place in the streets. As public movements began to gain momentum in the region, therefore not just threatening the right-wing allies of the US but also US' economic interests itself, the war on drugs has become even more significant in US policies. And the realization of these policies as well as their effectiveness became possible through private contractors (Scahill 2010: 566–568). The Bush government withal continued the tradition (Singer 2005) for the sake of maintaining an active military US presence in the country.

To most, the war on drugs via PMCs became a folding screen in US foreign policy that covers the operations against opposition in Colombia that think differently from the government. In other words, American PMC presence in the country started to be seen as US foreign policy to keep its ally government in power. Additionally, another eye-catching subject in Colombia is the use of PMCs by NSAs. For example, there are several claims that the Spearhead (Israel-based company), provides training to drug cartels and anti-government armed groups (Singer 2009: 33). However, Colombia was not the only example where non-state actors used PMCs. In Mexico, drug cartels benefited from the variety of services of different PMCs. Arellano-Félix Organization, or in other words the Tijuana Cartel, received detailed training including military and anti-intelligence tactics, use of certain weapons and devices (Singer 2009: 34). In addition to cartels, some big alcohol (tequila) companies also preferred the privatized security over weak state protection due to attacks of drug cartels and criminal groups (Sullivan 2000, August 11).

2.6 Mercenary, Private Military Contractor and Soldier Triangle

Machiavelli evaluated the use of mercenaries as highly destructive to statehood and politics. He argued that mercenaries were the ultimate responsible actors of encirclement of Italy by Charles, looting by

Louis, demolition by Fernando, and humiliation by Swiss (Machiavelli 2018: 85). However, privatization of war did not always come with failure but generally with a positive contribution to warfare. Arch powers of Europe used mercenaries to great extent in their wars until almost the second half of the seventeenth century. It was the French Revolution and nationalism ideology that changed this practice and favored “citizens” in the army. This understanding was identity and/or common culture based. Therefore, fighting for material reasons instead of “homeland” or “state” had lost its importance. Accordingly, Percy (2003: 726) claims that one of the most significant factors that separate a national soldier from a mercenary is the group motivation. She states that mercenaries suffer a lack of group motivation compared to soldiers. They are morally problematic because they are free to make the decision to go to war even if there is no collective utility. She also adds that group motivation can only be a strong determinant if combined with authoritative control. Because mercenaries, mercenary groups, or private military contractors are mainly responsible to their supervisors/companies, whereas soldiers are responsible to their state (Varin 2012: 3). Similarly, PMCs are beyond the scope of US “Freedom of Information Act”. There are only a limited number of contracts between the US and PMCs that are open to the public. The official reports also indicate that the cost of a PMC employee for a day is much higher than the cost of a US Army personnel (Ercan 2014: 58). Less transparent, more costly, minimum level of affinity to the country. Then, why are private actors of war chosen over national soldiers? Indeed, as also mentioned before, the main answer to this question is governments’ ability to conduct missions with the help of PMCs that cannot be conducted otherwise.

For centuries, mercenaries undertook the responsibility of supplying warfare as private agents. Through the course of this critical mission, there were both good and bad activities conducted by mercenaries. However, in the twentieth century, the bad reputation of mercenaries was made peak by highly controversial incidents in the African continent. The anti-mercenary norm started to become universalized. Because of the problematic legacy of mercenaries, the contemporary form of private agents of warfare—PMCs and their employees, tried to differentiate themselves, but the anti-mercenary form was so strong that it was not possible for PMCs to sever ties with mercenaries with all those controversial combat services (Percy 2007: 225). However, some of these companies rejected the mercenary title, and highlighted their virtues such as professionalism and authorization to legitimize their use of violence anyway (Avant 2012: 2–3). For example, Executive Outcomes and Sandline International offered “acceptable” solutions to conflicts and to military aid needed cases in order to show that they are different from “les affreux” of Africa; but both companies had terminated their operations permanently due to international scandals took place during some of their contracts (Percy 2007: 206). Furthermore, some other companies, which provide almost every military service except combat support, claimed that they should be excluded from the anti-mercenary norm. According to Meyer (2016: 35), the scope of anti-mercenary norm cannot be stretched if a PMC does not participate in active combat in the field. Because the problematic area is not really the participation in combat, but it is the problem of control and ethics.

Apart from a relatively abstract understanding of the use of mercenaries when considered the anti-mercenary norm, the legal dimension of the subject should also be considered. What are the main criteria for mercenaries, PMCs, or something to be legal? Is it an institutional presence? Is it national law or international regulation? If one of these conditions is true, then to what degree it is sufficient? All these questions are occupying a great deal of importance regarding PMS. Existing laws about PMS are

substantially in the scope of national regulations. Therefore, these laws do not carry the same quality and/or provisions in all these countries. There are significant differences from country to country in terms of law's scope and enforcement capability. Also, because of the sector's complexity, which comes from its nature as it involves second and/or third-party states, there are conflicts of legislation about which country is going to carry out the judicial process. However, the real challenge about the effective law enforcement in PMS stems from the lack of political will of governments that utilizes PMCs in their foreign policy when there is a restriction dictated by their state dynamics (Isenberg 2006: 19). This benefit of PMCs' given to executive power over legislative by reducing the accountability and democratic control provide ability to governments for acting more independently in cases that involve use of violence abroad (Avant 2006: 128).

On the other hand, international law was insufficient to ban mercenary activities before, and it is still insufficient to create a broad regulation about the PMS that binds the international community. PMC employees are mostly compared with mercenaries according to the mercenary definition in Article 47 of Protocol I of Geneva Conventions.¹⁶ In their corporal, legal business entity form, PMCs fell short to cover all six conditions that defined in the protocol. Despite the fact that it is not legally possible to evaluate the PMCs under the mercenary definition of Protocol I, it should be noted that private military contractors still carry a number of indications similar to the definition of the regulation (Ebrahim 2010: 210). In the first and second clauses among six, mercenaries were defined as "actual fighters" hired for that "specific conflict" which exclude PMC personnel serving in the background services or working long-term for multiple contracts. In third and fifth, clauses necessitate not to be a part of the armed forces of the fighting party to be counted as mercenaries. Moreover, in this case, PMCs dodge the definition by their legal contracts with the state since they are composed to fight alongside with (behalf of) it (Shearer 1998b: 17). However, PMCs fight for profit, and sometimes directly participate in combat like mercenaries. Also, PMCs fulfill the definition of the fourth clause that demands being foreign to the nationality of the conflicting party with their international recruitment policies. Overall, there is a lack of effective, carefully defined, and dominantly accepted international law. While mercenary label suits for a particular company, it could be misleading to define another with the same conditions/understanding. On the contrary, it could also be misleading to classify mercenaries and mercenary groups from PMCs completely. After all, they are conducting practically the same business with different methods.

Similar to the division in the legislative debates, there are two different ideas about the relations between contemporary PMCs and historical mercenary groups. While some scholars such as Zarate (1998: 158) claims that PMCs are modern day versions of mercenary groups like condottieri, some others like Ortiz (2007: 22) argues that that is because condottieri and/or free companies of Italy operated mainly in Italian peninsula, it would not be a valid match. In other words, he points out that while condottieri were a more local formation, PMCs provide services to all around the world, therefore they are global. However, expecting a true world-wide or international service from these companies at that time would

¹⁶ The Protocol defines a mercenary as: (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities; (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that party; (d) is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict; (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and (f) has not been sent by a state which is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces (ICRC 1977).

not be valid condition due to low level of development in transportation networks, etc. PMCs, indeed, are similar to condottieri that operate in Italy. Both are combat support provider organized groups that work under a particular state's authorization by contract (Percy 2003: 732). McFate's (2014: 26) analogy perfectly describes the link by claiming that:

The armed contractors in question are not in Iraq or Afghanistan but in northern Italy, and the year is not 2007 but 1377. The superpower in question is not the United States but the papacy under Pope Gregory XI, who was fighting the antipapal league led by the duchy of Milan. The tragic killing of civilians by armed contractors did not occur in Baghdad but in Cesena, 630 years earlier. The military companies employed were not DynCorp International, Triple Canopy, or Blackwater but the Company of the Star, the Company of the Hat, and the White Company. Known as free companies, these for-profit warriors were organized as corporations, with a well-articulated hierarchy of subcommanders and administrative machinery that oversaw the fair distribution of loot according to employees' contracts. CEO-like captains led these medieval PMCs.

Nevertheless, a significant part of the literature is keeping its distance from considering PMCs as today's counterparts of mercenaries, but by doing that, they are not rejecting the idea that states (especially western countries) continue to outsource military business to profit-oriented NSAs (Ramirez, Wood 2018: 5). Singer, in this sense, makes several distinctions between mercenaries and PMCs. In essence, he argues that unlike mercenaries, PMCs have an institutional structure and legal entity; they operate in a free market not for individual but corporate revenues; they provide a wide range of services in addition to combat support, and they have business connections with financial markets and several holding companies (Singer 2009: 87). The main determinant here is the scope of mercenaries. By using the mercenary term, if Singer refers to twentieth century mercenaries that operated in post-colonial Africa, then most of his claims are true. However, mercenarism is far older than these "les affreux". If he refers to a much broader term, including Great Companies, condottieri, Swiss mercenary groups, Landsknechts, then his distinction becomes highly problematic. That is because these mercenary groups also had a degree of institutional structure, somehow competed in those times' market, gained corporal revenues, and justified their presence legally by contract. Thus, there is not a linear path of private agents of warfare but more than one, adapting according to the changes of conjuncture, needs, and international system. While the conjuncture changes and anti-mercenary norm becomes stronger, there has been a flow of mercenaries into PMCs as the UN Special Rapporteur on Mercenaries, Senor Enrico Ballesteros, has confirmed this transition (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2002: 10). But what was the basic motivation of these mercenaries to make that decision? Were they applying for a different job? Apparently, the answer is negative. These mercenaries were choosing a more "legal" way to continue their profession. It was a decision basically to work full-time rather than as a freelancer. There is also the reason that the system started to sharply distinguish individuals and corporations, motivation and responsible command, actors and activities; as a result, private military force suppliers had to adapt to this new environment (Krahmann 2011: 346).

While trying to understand the private actors of war, another subject appears as an important discussion point. Mercenaries and/or PMCs both enable the privatization of war, thence, play significant roles in states' foreign policy. However, is this privatization of violence changing the relationship between the state and its right to use of violence? The monopolization of violence has become the definition of being a state, with the spread of a constitutional understanding of sovereignty (Black 2009: 348). I believe that the changing subject is not states' monopolization over the use of violence, but it is states' "instruments"

to execute their right to use of violence. For example, Both German rulers and the British benefited from Hessians during the American Revolution. One party supplemented its armed forces while the other made money from it. As a result, the deal strengthened both parties' authority with different benefits rather than breaking it (Avant 2012: 2). And with the emergence of modern states, the mercenary profession has not vanished, but on the contrary strengthened its position (Kadercan 2014: 141). There were mainly three general reasons of the widespread use of private fighters according to Kadercan (2014: 141–142); ever-increasing importance of firearms, combat readiness of mercenaries, and most relevant to the question, mercenaries' positive effect on authority building/maintaining—diversifying the sources of military power by being an alternative. Therefore, using mercenaries in warfare even increased the power of the state rather than decreasing it. The right to use of violence has been kept but rather than local subjects of rulers, foreign fighters are being used to implement it. The same case can be applied to PMCs, which predominantly serve states. They increase these states' power in many ways such as military, strategically, and technically (Avant 2005) as in Angola and Sierra Leone, where privatized military force contributed to enhancement of state authority by supporting national military forces of these states against rebels in internal conflicts (Varin 2012: 240).

3. RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND PRIVATE MILITARY SECTOR

War cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war, the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense.

(Clausewitz 1989: 605)

3.1 Russian Foreign Policy

Modern Russia isn't the Soviet Union, but it inherited its foreign policy and geopolitical realities, including a weak economy and tense relations with the West. Examining Russia's Soviet history may be informative, especially when investigating how Russia might pursue foreign policy goals without directly confronting the West. Under Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), the Soviet Union used military aid and long-term investments in emerging countries to protect vital resources. Analysts examining the role PMCs will play in the Kremlin's foreign policy must understand Russia's history and present (Arnold 2019: 12). When the Soviet Union fell, US-Russian rivalry halted briefly. The new Russian administration, led by President Boris Yeltsin, aimed to entrench democracy and capitalism at home and join the liberal international order. In spite of varying outcomes, ideological struggle had little to no effect in defining Russia's ties with "the West" and the US. Russia and the US, as well as Russia and the West, have disputed during the previous years, but the tensions started to increase especially since 2014, when Putin invaded Crimea and interfered in eastern Ukraine (McFaul 2020: 95). While Russian-Western relations had nearly collapsed by summer 2014, Putin's Russia had been pursuing a foreign policy similar to that of his initially liberal predecessor Boris Yeltsin: maximizing the benefits of Russia's relations with the West while cementing Russia's primacy along its historical borders. Usually, Russian diplomacy finds itself in a position that these two interests must be balanced. However, Putin's administration has favored regional supremacy above ties with the West since the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. Post-Soviet Russian national security elites and many liberals have shared this agenda. As a result, post-Soviet Russia turned into a state-nation with an imperial mark (Lynch 2015: 2).

However, there are not one but multiple understandings that shaping overall Russian foreign policy. One of them is nationalism. Anti-Western nationalism has migrated from the edges to the mainstream of Russian discourse, many claim. This nationalism influenced Russian foreign policy and deepened rhetorical and cognitive dissonance with the West. The New Cold War is between lawless Russian nationalism and law-governed Western multilateralism, according to Edward Lucas. Nationalism's involvement in the 2008 Russia–Georgia War has been largely downplayed. Ronald Asmus, one of the most famous scholars on the war, said that by 2008, a patriotic and revisionist Russia rebelled against a system it believed no longer fit its interests and had been imposed during a period of temporary weakness. His argument supports "lawless Russian nationalism." Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in violation of Euro-Atlantic viewpoints might be considered as the turning moment when Russia started to justify its rhetoric and export strongly nationalistic domestic ideals to remodel the post-Cold War order (March 2011: 187-188). Russian nationalism is neither inevitably expansionist and militarist, as some claim. Even under Putin and Medvedev, the authorities have pushed a pragmatist,

conservative "statist nationalism". In foreign policy, authorities try to avoid constrictive ideational influences, particularly militant nationalism. They have fanned increasingly militant ethno-nationalist feeling ("civilizational nationalism") in the home domain for legitimacy and mobilization, sometimes unintentionally but sometimes deliberately in ways that contradict with their avowed foreign policy aims. Therefore, elites utilize nationalism for domestic goals, rather than nationalism driving foreign policy (March 2011: 188-189).

It would be true to claim that no straightforward link exists between domestic regime type and foreign policy results. Putin's government adopted a decidedly anti-Western nationalist tone after public challenges to the falsified December 2011 parliamentary elections, which has intensified with the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in late 2013. Such steps are consistent with the progressive alienation of Russia's ruling elites from the idealized, and frankly unrealistic, pro-Western policies adopted by the Yeltsin government in the early 1990s. Upon gaining independence following the Soviet collapse, Russia's Westernized liberal elites rapidly realized the country lacked the domestic and international strength to "transition" to a liberal market democracy integrated with the West. Long before Putin, Russia discarded liberal internationalism for a traditional foreign-policy realism. When Putin became Prime Minister in August 1999, an authoritarian government based on presidential prerogative was well underway (Lynch 2015: 10). Some say Putin is inspired by neo-Eurasianist ideals. Growing internal authoritarianism supports anti-Western nationalism, say many. For them, Russian foreign policy is dictated by domestic concerns. The Kremlin idea of "sovereign democracy" was purportedly driven by the necessity to guard against regional "colour revolutions". Many (mostly, but not solely, realists) say that even under Putin, Russia remains a pragmatic, non-ideological state driven by conventional high-level security concerns, material interests, and economic opportunism. The strongly consolidated elite may pursue foreign policy irrespective of domestic interests, as in Putin's pro-Western pivot after 9/11. Russian foreign policy elites embrace this realism vision, regarding their strategy as pragmatic and reasonable national interests based on *raison d'état* (March 2011: 189). During Putin's two decades in power, Russia's government grew more authoritarian, allowing him greater control over foreign affairs. More democracy would have limited Putin's foreign policy initiatives (McFaul 2020: 100).

Apart from Putin's own characteristics, Russian officials perceive regional and global challenges to their position in the international arena. Lavrov outlined Moscow's long-held fears about west, especially US, infiltration into the former Soviet sphere. Attempts to include Ukraine and Georgia in NATO are leading to a substantial unfavorable geopolitical change,' he said; 'we see how the US and NATO are working on Central Asia and Azerbaijan' (Monaghan 2008: 9). Also, Putin's worry over NATO extension and change reflects his fear that the alliance aims to replace the UN, which Moscow prioritizes in international affairs (not least because of its permanent seat on the Security Council). According to a Russian pundit, this anxiety is founded in a view that the international relations framework is changing and that Russia, as neither a NATO member nor one that conforms to the alliance's democratic mission, would be sidelined (Monaghan 2008: 9).

Another important dimension to consider when trying to understand Russian foreign policy is the concept of sovereignty and how the Moscow perceive it. Two theories of sovereignty exist in Russian foreign policy: a 'Westphalian' and a 'post-Soviet' approach. In both approaches, the point of sovereignty ideas in Russian foreign policy remains the same: to enhance Russian security, to challenge US primacy and the extension of US and 'Western' influence in the post-Soviet region, and to enhance Russia's

position as a regional power and a significant power in an emerging multipolar order. Dual approach to state sovereignty—Westphalian sovereignty outside the region of the former Soviet Union and a post-Soviet model inside it—performs different functions in contemporary Russian foreign policy: first, it helps secure Russian national interests at domestic, regional, and international levels; second, it acts as a form of balancing against the US and its allies. And, Russia most strongly associates with the shift towards a post-Westphalian model of sovereignty (Deyermond 2016: 2). In line with sovereignty, reflecting the Russian government's views on the 'Arab Spring' more broadly, was included in the 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept, which states that Russia promotes peace in the Middle East 'on the basis of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states, and non-interference in their internal affairs'. Russian pronouncements on Syria made clear that a prospective invasion would affect sovereignty and the international order. Military involvement in Syria without the agreement of the Syrian government would have reinforced the challenge to state sovereignty from Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya, further eroding international order. In 2012, Lavrov cited Putin's statement that 'international law must be ensured in the international arena as within states' and said that events 'confirm once again the need to respect the key principles of the UN Charter, above all the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, non-interference in their domestic affairs, and the non-use or threat of force' (Deyermond 2016: 9).

Also, the Soviet past plays a role in Russian foreign policy. Russia's connections with the former Soviet countries are important to its foreign policy and may be critical to its relationship with the West. Their relevance is ensured by a variety of factors: worries that crises in these nations might affect Russia, the need to retain economic relations, the necessity for Russia to identify trustworthy friends, and the desire to safeguard the 25 million Russians living beyond Russia's borders. "Near abroad" (*blizhnee zarubezh'e*) is used to define the non-Russian post-Soviet area, implying that these nations are not "as foreign" as others and may be subject to alternative norms or treatment. Some say these nations are within Russia's Monroe Doctrine, or sphere of influence (Kubicek 1999-2000: 556). The idea that Russia is a "great power" by right and historical tradition is crucial to Russian political legitimacy and justifies Russian predominance in central Eurasia. Zbigniew Brzezinski's widely famous comment reassures Russians.

"Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine ..., Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia." (Lynch 2015: 9)

Since WWII, Russia's foreign policy has emphasized the Middle East. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia's political and economic turmoil made the Middle East a lower priority for its foreign policy. Vladimir Putin's principal goal in 2000 was to restore Russia to worldwide greatness. "The Russian Federation has behaved in numerous scenarios, and since 2000, with Vladimir Putin, its major goal has been to secure its place as a great power to return to the glorious Soviet period. Because the international system is in chronic chaos, power and domestic security must be maximized (Tarek 2021: 8). Since 2015, Russia's Middle East engagement has boosted its worldwide impact. Several factors explain why. Russian foreign policy was mostly defensive and restricted to the former USSR until Syria. In Ukraine, Moscow launched a counteroffensive against Western encroachments on its strategic glacis; in Syria, it

launched an offensive and succeeded above its own expectations, as Putin conceded. Russia's status increased throughout the Arab world, from Libya to Egypt to the Gulf; its connections with Turkey and Iran were strengthened; — Russia's foreign policy was more flexible during the Soviet era. No essential actor is ignored; all are kept in touch. Moscow may cooperate with anybody if interests coincide and conditions are suitable. Russia pursues its own self-interest and takes no sides. It's learnt to deal with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and even Israel and Iran. It can use this strategy in Afghanistan, Central, and South Asia (Trenin 2021: 26-27). Russia has learnt how to form and manage 21st-century partnerships during the Syria conflict, which is distinct from Soviet and US experience. Dynamic alliances. Flexible, restricted in time and territory, with clear goals. Moscow's partnerships with Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus are efficient geopolitical and military tools; — Syria operation highlights Russia's effective military reform. First time since Afghanistan pullout in 1989, Kremlin possesses usable military strength. Russia's comeback through Syria's triumphs made it feasible. The reputation of Russian guns has increased across the area, including the Gulf, and beyond, from Turkey to India, which ignored US cautions to acquire Russian weapons. Russia has established itself as a security partner in several African countries, from Sudan to the Central African Republic to Congo; — Kremlin's strong political will, resolute action and successful execution from Crimea to Syria, and effective support for its allies such as Assad or Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela have earned it a reputation for high impact on modest investment. This contrasts with the continuous struggle among the US political elite, the self-defeating actions of the UK ruling class over Brexit, and the persisting incapacity of the European Union to get its act together in foreign policy, or even to deal effectively with the spread of the coronavirus. Russia's worldwide influence has increased despite broad dissatisfaction with globalization and its liberal democratic model. COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem. Russia has no social model of its own, but it displays the capabilities of a strong, self-conscious state, which is the worldwide trend (Trenin 2021: 26-27). Overall, The Russian government and people both value prestige. Countries desire reputation to consolidate their political and economic dominance or to increase it. In Russia, the government seeks greater influence and authority and is strengthening its reputation in line with this aim (Oliker et al. 2009: 135).

3.2 Russian Geopolitical Priorities

Putin stated that “Russia should look to its own history and traditional values” to define its post-Soviet identity and purpose. That is because there is a transition from the previous era to the current one. Indeed, there is a continuity between Soviets and Russia in certain areas and Putin is one of the most influential figures in Russian geopolitical moves. His ideas are in a competition with the US's worldwide. Putin promotes Russia's interests within Western standards. He may also selectively interpret international law to legitimize its activities. When Putin defends his actions in Ukraine or argues for the need to protect eastern brethren from Western encroachment or defend Russia's neighbors from Western hegemony or liberal values, he does so because this discourse reflects his own constructions of Russia's historical and cultural spheres—a discourse he has interpreted and disseminated (Roberts 2017: 37).

Putin looks willing to drive a "geopolitical fault line" across Ukraine, which Allison terms a "strategy of strategic denial" to make the CIS a "no-go zone" for NATO. Russia has no option but to accept NATO's expansion to Central Europe in 1999 and farther east in 2004. Yeltsin opposed NATO invading the CIS. In the 2008 Georgia conflict, President Medvedev used a similar tone (Roberts 2017: 41-42).

Allison says Putin used liberal-dominated international legal standards to insult the West. This shows that the Ukraine issue was about more than just Ukraine; it's typical of Putin's attempts to disrupt the liberal order by giving another interpretation of international law, given that the West uses the current one selectively. Allison considers Putin's efforts as revanchist, attempting to reject the rules of the game in favor of a new set or interpretation determined by all major nations, including Russia. Russia hailed UNGA Resolution 68/262 supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity—including Crimea—as a moral and political win since only 52% of member nations backed it (Roberts 2017: 52).

Crimea's takeover is a geopolitical "grand chess move" and arguably the greatest "benefit performance" of post-Soviet geopolitical thought. Aleksander Dugin's 1997 textbook was one of the most popular interpretations of Crimea's "geopolitical" function for Russia. In it, he said that the absence of sovereignty over Crimea constitutes a direct geopolitical danger to Russia, or, whomever controls Crimea controls the Black Sea. Social networks have rapidly circulated this argument, exhibiting the logic of "mimetic desire": "If we had left [Crimea], NATO's warships would have arrived, and goodbye to Black Sea control" (Suslov 2014: 597). As a result, geopolitics can be seen as the language of Kremlin propaganda and bloggers because geopolitical euphemisms let them avoid problematizing Crimea's annexation and offer them a rhetorical instrument to express themselves (Suslov 2014: 597). Russia's participation may be explicable by a rational actor and neo-realist interpretation of Russian foreign policy after pro-Western and anti-Russian regimes won power in Georgia and Ukraine. Abkhazia and South Ossetia have geopolitical relevance while being minor. Crimea and Abkhazia have lengthy Black Sea coasts. Russia felt uncomfortable on its Black Sea hegemony as NATO advanced eastward. The Black Sea is geopolitically crucial to Russia, but not to the West. Russia can feed its Mediterranean naval station in Syria from there. Syria is the sole Russian client state in a largely American sphere of influence in the Middle East, and it has the only Russian naval station outside the Post-Soviet Space. Russia required sites south of the Greater Caucasus Ridge contiguous to its territory after Georgia closed the final Russian military post in Georgia in 2007 to deploy ground forces quickly and inexpensively if it wanted to interfere south of the difficult-to-penetrate ridge and in the Middle East (Rezvani 2020: 889).

When analyzed the Central Asia's importance for Russia, Moscow faced fewer Western threats in Central Asia than in the Baltics, Ukraine, and Caucasus. In the 1990s, Western energy firms established connections with Kazakhstan, and following 9/11, the USA erected two airbases, one in Uzbekistan and one in Kyrgyzstan. In 2005, US-Uzbekistani ties soured as the US troops departed Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan. In addition to its abundant energy resources, Russia's geopolitical interests in Central Asia are influenced by extreme Islamist terrorist organizations and Afghan drug trafficking (Rezvani 2020: 890-892). Many analysts argue that the rhetoric of fighting terrorism is exploited to curtail political freedom in Central Asian countries. Reality is more complex. Even while it may be difficult to accuse Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a legitimate organization in some Western nations, of active violence, one of its key aims is to re-establish a caliphate, and that organization was clandestinely active in Central Asia. Russian policy towards Central Asia may be analyzed from constructivist and (neo-)realist foreign policy viewpoints. Security is Russia's top priority in Central Asia. Central Asian non-state actors threaten Russia and Central Asian governments' security. Russia shares Central Asia's economic markets with China within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), admitting China's greater economic potential, but it regards Central Asian military and security affairs as imperial prerogatives and a moral

duty, even though this altruism may be informed by imperial history and geopolitics (Rezvani 2020: 890-892).

Russia's foreign policy attitude says that Eurasia, the Euro-Atlantic region (EAR), and the Asia-Pacific region (APR) are the most important "geopolitical spaces". All these regions are next to Russia, and Russia is a part of all of them because of its size and location. In the same way, these regions represent both "the old" and "the new." The Euro-Atlantic used to be the center of international politics, but in recent years, the focus has slowly shifted to the East, especially the Asia-Pacific (Svarin 2016: 131). Russian involvement in three geopolitical zones affects its Great Power status. As a "member" of each of these areas, Russia is a big power with interests in each. Russian participation in these geopolitical areas is both crucial to Moscow's foreign policy and its conception of its role in the international system. The Ukraine conflict has shifted Russia's geopolitical outlook according to a preliminary research. Russia was a "full member" of Eurasia, Euro-Atlantic, and Asia-Pacific until the Ukraine conflict. The 2014 events in Ukraine and their worldwide implications influenced Russian geopolitical thought. The Ukraine crisis showed the Russian leadership that Moscow cannot join the EAR in its existing shape. Rejection and unsuccessful integration were too weighty. This rejection and exclusion, together with the Ukraine crisis, accompanied Russia's new Eurasian narrative and Eurasian integration growth (Svarin 2016: 138). In addition to mentioned region-based approaches, there are some other important concepts such as "Greater Europe," and "The Russian World" that all give the state a different role in the international order and encourage different foreign policy goals. Each geopolitical imaginary tries to solve some of the biggest problems with Russia's international identity after the fall of the Soviet Union. These problems are mostly caused by a double sense of loss: the loss of territories controlled by the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, and the fall from a global superpower to a regional power on the edge of Europe. Each spatial project promises to solve Russia's problems with its post-Soviet borders and its quest to become a "Great Power." Either it will try to make peace with the West on Russia's terms ("Greater Europe") or it will create spaces that are centered on Russia and where Western influence is no longer welcome (Lewis 2018: 1).

The Valdai Discussion Club¹⁷ drew from many of these concepts but proposed a geographical project—a 'community of Greater Eurasia'—that would give Russia a leadership position in world affairs. This notion spread fast. By May 2015, Karaganov could write, "When we first discussed this, it felt like a dream, but now it's happening". Greater Eurasia gained media attention. Russian TV aired "The Silk Road and Greater Eurasia: Politics, Economics, and Infrastructure" in June 2015, featuring Valdai Discussion Club members and Chinese specialists. First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov addressed the notion at that summer's Valdai Discussion Club, where he insisted the government still backed 'Greater Europe' but emphasized the new Eurasian focus of Russian foreign policy and the move towards the East. Former foreign minister Igor Ivanov lamented the 'sunset' of 'Greater Europe' in September 2015, saying that instead of Lisbon to Vladivostok, Greater Eurasia runs from Shanghai to Minsk (Lewis 2018: 5).

Apart from these explanations to Russian geopolitics, Russian diplomats on the other hand looking out over the world stage see a dynamic and perilous scene. Russia is the most vulnerable of the world's big powers. Russia has been able to reverse its precipitous slide during the 1990s. It has been able to re-

¹⁷ It is a Moscow-based think tank and discussion forum that is closely associated with President Vladimir Putin.

establish itself as a significant global actor in large part due to the challenges experienced by the US in the Middle East and the EU's continuing economic stagnation. However, its power trajectory is far less dynamic than that of the other emerging world giants, as it confronts a slew of issues (its demographic crisis, reliance on natural resources, and institutional weakness) that threaten to derail its growth. Regional integration in this case is something Russia and other regional powers are doing to get ready for what they think will be a more chaotic and unpredictable future.

Another important subject to consider regarding Russian geopolitics is the energy. Geopolitics drives Russia's energy strategy. Energy is a strategic good, not a commodity, according to its strategy papers. Russian policy favors security above the market, top-down problem-solving, and governmental meddling. Russian energy supplies to Europe are so crucial, it's claimed, that Gazprom deserves special treatment. Russia sees energy as a method to improve its global and domestic growth. It's simple to consider Russia solely geopolitically (Romanova 2016: 871). The geopolitical model emphasizes energy policy goals and top-down administration above technicalities and delegation. Vladimir Putin is logically its most active booster. Even as Prime Minister from 2008–2012, he retained intellectual leadership. The MFA promotes this geopolitical strategy. Gazprom's management agrees. All of these actors (the president, MFA, and Gazprom) stress the importance of Russia in the EU's external gas supply and its role in energy security, highlighting that the "EU simply does not have another partner that can guarantee secure deliveries in such amounts," which implies that Russian gas must be treated differently (Romanova 2016: 864). As part of its Third Liberalisation Package strategy, Russia negotiated with China and Turkey to diversify away from the EU market. The aim behind these dialogues was to diversify export markets and lessen Russia's vulnerability to changes in EU law (Romanova 2016: 866).

3.3 Use of Force in Russian Foreign Policy

Since the Crimea incursion in 2014, Russia has employed its military beyond its boundaries often. According to Charap (2016: 1) some of these episodes of forcible usage followed Crimea are:

- March 2014 Donbas insurgent support.
- Military action at Ilovaik in August 2014.
- January-February 2015 separatist takeover of Debaltseve.
- Syria intervention in September 2015.
- Brinksmanship with NATO and other Western armies.

Since 2014, every time Russia used force, it was to accomplish a policy aim. There were no simply military aims; politics drove military objectives. Russia's use of force is coercive in that way. The Russian examples of force were definitely acts of compellence. For example, the destruction of Ukrainian troops at Ilovaik did not result in ultimate loss, but it did illustrate Moscow's readiness to harm, forcing Kyiv to adjust its tactics (at least briefly). Russia's goal was not just to modify the conduct of the Ukrainian military, but also to push President Petro Poroshenko to negotiate (Charap 2016: 2). Moscow employed just enough power to accomplish its goals. The late August 2014 action occurred when utilizing separatist proxies was failing. No high-end capabilities were used, and most of the massed troops never crossed the border. Russian regulars departed when Ukraine agreed to Minsk I. Coercion is characterized by its restricted use of force, unlike wartime confrontations. Violence is vital in coercive

warfare because of its knock-on effects. Schelling cites that "coercion relies more on what is still to come than on harm already done." The activity would be governed by diplomacy, not war, and although diplomacy may not demand slowness, it does require an outstanding damage reserve (Charap 2016: 3).

Another Russian military activeness was in Georgia. Georgian army attacked South Ossetia on 7–8 August 2008 to gain political authority. Russia counter invaded South Ossetia and attacked Georgian soldiers in Abkhazia and Georgia, advancing as far south as Gori. Russia shelled the port city of Poti during the battle. After five days of warfare, Georgia and Russia struck a preliminary ceasefire deal on 12 August. Russian soldiers withdrew from what they claimed to be Georgian territory but stayed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia recognized both areas' independence on August 26. This five-day conflict seemed to be a Russian victory (Lannon 2011: 27). And the use of force brings political benefits in this case.

One of the later Russian army engagements that is still ongoing is Ukraine. Putin began a "special military operation" on February 24, 2022, to "denazify and demilitarize" Ukraine. He clearly anticipated his military troops and intelligence agencies to seize Kyiv and establish a compliant administration of Russian allies. Putin portrayed Russia as an aggrieved party dragged into conflict by a globalist West and a criminal Ukrainian dictatorship pursuing genocide in newly independent nations. He said Russia had no territorial aspirations and that his objective in Ukraine was to liberate abducted Ukrainians (Wasielewski 2022: 4). In this case Russia is using its military to force its own conditions to Ukraine. However, it is still a question mark whether this one will be successful demonstration of use of force in foreign policy or not.

3.4 Russia's Violent Non-State Actors

As most other countries and societies, Russians also historically have made use of private actors of warfare. It was the case for the Russian Empire when Carsten Rohde served to Ivan the Terrible in the Livonian War, Yermak Timofeyevich was employed by the Stroganov family, and a volunteer army helped to defeat Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. All these occasions supported the geopolitical interests of the Russians in Baltics, Siberia and in other regions (Sukhankin 2018: 292). When considered the use of private fighters, one important social group in Russian Empire was "Cossacks¹⁸" who played an important role as a buffer zone to (Islamic and/or Turkish) south. The relationship between Cossacks and the Tsar was based on common interests of both sides. Cossacks sometimes were referred as "subjects" by the Tsar, but sometimes called as non-subjects when the situation became inconvenient in times such as protests were occurring to the Russian Empire about the Cossack raids on Turkish territories (Østensen, Bukkvoll 2018; Wallace 2015). In this way, while the Tsar was enjoying the plausible deniability in his covert operations against neighboring countries, Cossacks were enjoying their semi-independent or relatively free status inside the Russian Empire.

Although they do not have the same function and status, Cossacks today still exist. Even in 2005, like their historical purpose of use, they were mobilized to force the Meshketian Turks from southern Krasnodar. In that way, Cossacks were able to draw a curtain to cover their instigators. There are even

¹⁸ Cossacks are semi-independent peasants/people mainly operated in or close to the Russian border to defend/control it as a result of their contract with the tsar. They are also employed by certain oligarchs to provide security to their assets (Marten 2019: 181).

further claims that Cossack ataman Yermak's assignment to capture Siberia in the name of the Russian Empire was almost functionally the same with a PMC operation (Østensen, Bukkvoll 2018: 17). Of course, it would be anachronism to identify Cossacks as a kind of historical PMC because of differing reasons including their motivation, market dynamics, international system etc. However, in terms of their representation of an understanding in warfare and politics, it would not be wrong to say that Russians were using NSAs then to achieve certain geopolitical interests without involving themselves (state) directly, and now they are also following a very similar pattern.

Similar to its predecessor, the USSR was also familiarized with these NSAs practice of use of violence. For instance, more than thirty thousand mercenaries have participated in several conflicts on the Soviet side in several regions, and about two thousand fighters were present in Yugoslavia (Singer 2009: 71; Yakov 1993). The trend continued in the Russian Federation in a slightly different understanding in order to be able to keep the sphere of influence in former parts of the Soviet's. After the dissolution of the USSR, certain former members of the union have not experienced a smooth transition process to their independence. There were bloody conflicts, and Russia tried to be active in those conflicts without using its official, national army. It was more like a participation through NSAs. One of the first trials of this strategy was conducted by so-called "volunteers" to overthrow then-Chechen President Dudayev right before the Battle of Grozny. However, the mission failed, and Defense Minister Grachev classified these volunteer fighters—mostly with Russian military background, as mercenaries. The other dimension of the strategy consisted of again "volunteers" fighting in non-former Soviet territories such as Yugoslavia in 1992-95 (Sukhankin 2018: 295). Thus, until the 2000s, Russia chose the concept of volunteers to label those fighting in a war to distance itself from the incidents. It was more convenient to use volunteers rather than using mercenary term because of its bad-reputed perception. These volunteers have been used as a way to interfere in politics abroad.

According to Sukhankin (2019c), Russians, starting with the 1999 NATO operation in Yugoslavia, have witnessed several major events that affected their understanding of the contemporary nature of military/political operations towards foreign countries. These events were the Iraq War in 2003, color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and the Arab Spring. Almost all these events were sharing a common pattern, which was a fall of the ruling political regime mostly as a result of public mobilization/civil war flared up by different factors. Russia considered this type of military strategy as a "hybrid warfare", which is a mix of different types of political/military engagements including conventional, cyber, unconventional, and small war. Hybrid warfare is associated with the operation of both civil and military actors in discreteness and informality plus support of electronic means of warfare to operation. One of the aims of this type of warfare is to create instability in the target country. In this understanding, mostly mercenary-like non-state actors are leading actors of the mobilization in combat. Thus, in addition to the use of volunteers, a variety of military operations and services started to be privatized to mercenaries, private contractors, and PMCs.

One of the important figures of contemporary Russian military understanding, Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov, published an article about unconventional, high technology involving warfare in line with the concept of hybrid warfare. He argues a method that encapsulates hackers, media, and both conventional and unconventional military tools. These principles that mix war and politics are also known as "Gerasimov Doctrine" (McKew 2017). It is argued that the doctrine enabled the wider use of NSAs—especially mercenaries and PMCs, in military operations to achieve

geostrategic interests (Dan C. 2021). This type of utilization from NSAs constitute one of the main pillars of hybrid warfare because of the cover that gives to the state. For instance, some US officials were having difficult times to announce the attack of Wagner in Syria, 2018, to US-YPG point as a direct representation of the offensive of the Russian state because of the responsibilities and necessities of such a declaration would bring (Spearin 2018: 68).

According to Galeotti (2016), apart from the Russian understanding of hybrid warfare, Russia itself is a “hybrid state” that struggled to institutionalize or to some deinstitutionalize in the 1990s. With Putinism, it became mainly a president-oriented regime where there is less involvement of bureaucracy, not a clear boundary present between public and private, less distinction between military and civilian (private military contractors), and a grey area happened to exist between legal and illegal fields (Wither 2020: 22). Obviously, PMCs in Russia one way or another have been shaping themselves in line with these state dynamics, historical, and cultural context that Russian society dictates (Østensen, Bukkvoll 2018: 12). Thus, it is not surprising that generally owners of the Russian PMCs—even though these companies are trying to hide their military activities by diversifying their businesses into other sectors, are oligarchs that sustain deep relations with Putin, or in other words, the state.

Overall, Russia's use of non-state military organizations to supply expeditionary soldiers is drawing attention. Internationally, this is due to concerns about Russia abusing this new aspect of state authority and the fast expansion of its usage. Since Russian PMCs were initially reported in Crimea and east Ukraine, and subsequently in Syria, their presence has spread to Libya, several African states, and Venezuela. Russia also celebrates Wagner. Russia uses non-state actors for information warfare, intelligence gathering, logistics, subversion, destabilization, and now conflict as it searches for vulnerabilities and openings and increases acceptable activity. In below-threshold combat, proxy troops like Wagner are used (Giles, Akimenko 2019: 1). Modern military theories recognize the rise of militias and PMCs in crisis zones. Hybrid warfare dominates current literature. It is the employment of military and non-military instruments in an integrated campaign to create surprise, take the initiative, and win psychological and physical advantages using covert and sometimes overt military and intelligence activity. In hybrid warfare, the enemy poses novel combinational dangers. Instead of discrete adversaries with fundamentally different tactics (conventional, irregular, or terrorist), any kinds of war, including criminal behavior can be used. State and non-state entities have used conventional and asymmetrical strategies throughout history (Karagiannis 2021: 550).

Other than PMCs, Putin has used coercive tools to support ideological partners, including "little green men" (masked troops in Ukraine wearing unmarked green army uniforms whom Putin originally denied were Russian soldiers), hybrid warfare, and more traditional military action. In hybrid ground operations, pro-Russian militias and irregular soldiers are vital. Local collaborators are ideologically or financially motivated to pick up guns to stir internal disturbance and prepare for a real or imaginary separatist rebellion. These interact with the local populace by mobilizing huge demonstrations, building blockades, and enrolling others in so-called "self-protection units" In addition to tactical and operational goals, proxy organizations legitimize Russian intervention (Giles, Akimenko 2019: 23). Armed militias led or controlled by Russian military intelligence personnel are incorporated into centralized operations planning and undertake missions alongside regular soldiers, special forces, and other security forces backed by cyber, information, and psychological warfare operators. The success of proxy organizations like the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics in east Ukraine is directly tied to Russia's ability to

exploit social, political, and economic weaknesses. East Ukraine has been a trial ground for new state-controlled but ostensibly private enterprises, such as the Chechen Vostok Battalion, deployed in 2014, or Cossacks, veterans, and volunteers (Giles, Akimenko 2019: 23). The use of non-Russian fighters met Moscow's foreign policy aims. The presence of foreign fighters, whom the Russian side portrayed as "volunteers" worried about "the fate of Russian speakers in Ukraine," bolstered Moscow's narrative that Russia is willing to stand up for its citizens abroad (Sukhankin 2019d: 1).

Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) notes that "most of today's armed conflicts take occur inside states and are conducted by at least one non-state military player battling state forces and/or other non-state actor". These military formations are frequently among the most significant in domestic, regional, and worldwide battles (Roberto, Melos: 2014: 248). However, when non-state military players are taken into account, there is a great deal of uncertainty. In order to describe these groupings, one must employ terminology that are both contentious and represent one's own personal opinions. It's possible for non-state military actors to be seen as "liberation movements," "freedom fighters," or "revolutionaries," yet at the same time "rebels," "insurgency" or even "terrorists." Generally, a state will label non-state actors based on the political issues they are involved in. Terrorists and insurgents are usually defined as groups that threaten the existence of the state or its allies; on the other hand, liberation movements and freedom fighters are groups that delegitimize or weaken international adversaries (Roberto, Melos: 2014: 248).

Vladimir Rauta has gone into detail, categorizing non-state actors as affiliates, auxiliaries, and proxies. Affiliates are PMCs, mercenary groups, etc. which is already discussed. Auxiliaries can be considered as more local groups. For example, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after violent demonstrations in Kiev in November 2013 toppled Viktor Yanukovich's administration. Longstanding tensions between Ukraine and the EU and Russia led to the crisis. The campaign was called 'hybrid warfare' because it encompassed deception, political disruption, and propaganda. Hybrid operations united Russian Special Forces and local self-defense groups. The latter had a 'supporting role. In Crimea, auxiliaries participated in pro-Russian rallies and roadblocking to impose the annexation. As events unfolded, they obstructed OSCE military observers and pro-Kiev rallies. The Night Wolves, a local motorcycle gang led by Dmitry Sinichkin, and Afghan War veterans like Frantz Klintsevich mobilized auxiliary (Rauta 2020: 9-10). Proxies on the other hand (Donbass People's Militia, the Luhansk People's Militia) more different. The rebels in Southeast evolved from weak political enterprises like the Ukrainian Front. With Russian assistance, they became separatist rebels fighting for autonomy, independence, and unity. Their warfighting was traditional, yet opportunism, lack of training, and experience led to tiny triumphs. The referendums in Luhansk and Donbas created two unrecognized people's republics, and the progress of the Ukrainian military necessitated Russian active assistance in August 2014, when the Kremlin put in over 4000 regular soldiers. Russia's proxy gamble failed because it thought it could conduct an undeclared war inexpensively using local militias, and it created a scenario in which it had little control over its proxies. Following Russia's political directions in the Minks talks to halt the conflict, proxies were cleansed and reduced to a 'buffer and screening force' (Rauta 2020: 11).

Russia also uses organized crime as its non-state violent actor to achieve certain aims. The connection between Russia's top officials and organized crime differs from the West. Overt and covert means are employed to achieve Moscow's foreign policy aims. In Europe, Russian organized criminal organizations have been employed to launch cyberattacks, traffic persons and products, and even carry

out targeted killings. Russian intelligence services exploit criminal underworld networks both in unarmed and violent situations. This is particularly true in Ukraine, where criminals function as collaborators and soldiers. (Suvari 2021: 36-37).

As a result, after 2014, various groups of non-Russian peoples were employed to perform various functions, ranging from information-propaganda (primarily attributed to fighters from the European Union) as a means of demonstrating to the Western world the "righteousness" of the Russian cause in Ukraine, to (para)military (a.k.a. mercenary) functions. As a result, non-Russian mercenaries and "volunteers" in Russia's shadow wars have operated as both a "soft power" and an actual "hard power" political weapon (Sukhankin 2019d: 1). Skeptics say Russian military force was crucial in Ukraine, Georgia, and Syria. Moscow's hybrid actions in Europe wouldn't be as successful without physical force. When open military engagement isn't realistic or viable, hybrid tactics are used, but the Russian Federation's hard strength is always noticeable. Overall, this chapter will further analyze the reasons of why Russian private military companies are labelled as mercenary companies, the link/relation between PMCs and the Russian state, and the position and utilization of PMCs in Russian foreign policy compared to their western counterparts.

3.5 Russian Private Military Industry

In the future, wars will move further into the shadows. In the information age, anonymity is the weapon of choice. Strategic subversion will win wars, not battlefield victory. Conventional military forces will be replaced by masked ones that offer plausible deniability, and nonkinetic weapons like deception and influence will provide decisive. Shadow war is attractive to anyone who wants to wage war without consequences, and that's everyone. That is why it will grow.

(McFate 2019b)

To provide assistance and gain further influence, the USSR has sent its official military advisors to certain countries throughout the Cold War. The state was dominant in every aspect of military activities. After the dissolution, the business sector started to increase its activities including military related areas. Without a strong institutional and legal background, several armed groups formed by former Soviet soldiers emerged, and soon after it was claimed that they were posing a threat to Russia's national security. As a result, in the 2000s, Moscow increased its control over private military actors (Nebolsina 2019: 82). For sure, sudden development of the private military industry could cause such side effects in terms of domestic security. The Russian private military industry was born due to the surplus of military personnel as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union similar to surplus occurred after the 100 Years Wars and Second World War, which resulted with the emergence of a private military market. While western PMCs were increasing, former Soviet soldiers also established different companies to supply security demand in both domestic and international markets with different roles. The integration of these personnel into the international security/military business—first via employment of Russian and Ukrainian personnel as pilots/technicians by Executive Outcomes, paved the way for further development of Russian PMCs (Østensen, Bukkvoll 2018: 21). At first, Russian companies started as defensive in nature that refrain from offensive operations. They tried to use Soviet's Cold War connections to be involved in the business. The control of the Russian government was not as tight as today. While companies were trying to satisfy corporal interests, Russian intelligence services realized

the capabilities of these companies that could serve Russian national interests in different parts of the world (Arnold 2019: 10). Even though not all Russian PMCs are under the direct control of the Kremlin, and almost all of them are conducting profit-oriented business, they are still doing it without contradicting Russian national interests and even to some extent serving them.

Over time, Russia has managed to create one understanding in PMS that will serve both to state and company interests; and quickly turned its focus to mostly relatively weak (natural resource rich that opportune to do business with) states that needs military assistance. One of the first Moscow-affiliated PMCs was Rubicon which formed in 1992 with the support of Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) to contribute Serbian cause against Bosnians (Arnold 2019: 11; Gusarov 2015). Rubikon was a forerunner of that one understanding and planned to be used in modern geopolitics. Additionally, it was symbolizing the “siloviki’s”¹⁹ profit from PMS (Dan C. 2021). Another PMC, Alpha Group, was created by individuals that linked to one of the FSB special force units (Group A). The company was bought by ArmerGroup and continued its services as a part of it. One of the other earliest PMCs was RusCorp. The company is based in Moscow and defines itself as a service provider for all kinds of security (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 2).

Since PMCs are illegal in Russia and only PSCs are considered as legal, it is hard to classify RusCorp as a homogeneous PMC, but one should also consider that there is a very thin line between activities of a PMC and PSC. In 2010, for example, a well-known Russian oil company Lukoil formed a specific PSC to protect its assets in Iraq. However, many claimed that the company far exceeded the limits of being a private security company that was defensive in nature. The quantity of distinctive characteristics between a PMC and PSC in Russia further decreased while engaging with Somalian pirates (Popkov 2016 cited in Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 2). Like other ships, Russian ones also needed a secure environment while navigating in the Gulf of Aden. The response to this need came from so-called PSCs of Russia. Though, these companies started to be seen as not a pure PSC anymore because of their offensive, pre-emptive attacks to deter pirates before any attack even took place (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 2). Therefore, a crystal-clear distinction between any Russian PSC or PMC operating outside of Russia could be misleading.

According to an article published in International Volunteer Community InformNapalm who describe itself as a volunteer-based initiative to expose the secrets of Russian hybrid war, there are lots of other PMCs of Russia (Gusarov 2015). One of them is “RSB Group” that calls itself a military consulting company; another is “Anti-Terror,” consisting of former officers of special forces, and has support of FSB; “MAR,” on the other hand, offers broad range of security/military services, claimed to be active in Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone²⁰; there is also “Moran Security Group” and “Center R.” Center R personnel were present in Yugoslavia, Caucasus, Iraq, and Afghanistan. “E.N.O.T Corps,” was also present in the ATO zone. There are some other claims regarding the existence of several Russian PMCs like “Turan,” whose members are mainly from Central Asia and Caucasus; “Patriot,” focusing on Syria and CAR (Central African Republic) in coordination with Russian officials; “Shchit” and “Vega” (Colton, 2019: 14). However, there are not concrete evidence about the existence of some of these PMCs, but the important thing is to understand the general patterns of Russian PMCs which will reveal

¹⁹ Siloviki, or in singular form, a silovik, is a politician who came into politics from a military/security background.

²⁰ It is a term used by Ukrainian public and officials as well as by OSCE and some other foreign representatives to refer to Ukrainian territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the control of pro-Russian separatists.

the basic behavioral peculiarities, and structural features to analyze Russian private military industry regardless of the name of the company.

Nevertheless, the real attention of international society and media have come to the Russian PMS as a result of the bloody conflict between US-YPG forces against Wagner-Assad forces in Syria. Also, the incident regarding the deaths of Russian journalists who were investigating the activities of ChVK²¹ Wagner in CAR increased the attention. Overall, according to Bukkvoll & Østensen (2020: 4–5), Russian scholars provide four main reasons for the rapid development of Russian PMS. The first one is based on the necessity due to Russian business companies' need for security in conflict areas where they are dependent upon the services of western PMCs compared to inadequate and insufficient Russian PMCs. The second reason shares the similar motivation with the West, using PMCs as means of foreign policy. The other reason is to exploit the PMCs' one of the most desired benefits provided to the state: the ability to use of violence abroad without being held responsible for possible outcomes. The last determinant of the development of Russian PMS is to refrain from body-bag effect. Especially after the Afghan War in 1979–89, the Russian public became more intolerant to the loss of Russian soldiers abroad just as the American public also became more sensitive to the deaths of their soldiers after the Vietnam War.

3.6 PMS in Russian Legal Environment

Although Russia became one of the most active exploiters of PMCs in the last decade, PMCs are legally forbidden in the country according to Article 359 of Russian Criminal Code. The code sees the military activities conducted by non-state agents as a mercenarism (therefore PMC activities included to definition) and punishes it with an imprisonment up to eight years. The article says, “a mercenary, shall be deemed to mean 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” (Colton, 2019: 19–20). Article 13 of the Constitution also supports the idea of state monopoly in use of violence. Consequently, Russian PMCs are registered outside of the country. For example, RSB Group is based in the British Virgin Islands (Chifu, Frunzeti 2020: 48), and Moran Security Group's Slavonic Corp registered in Hong Kong (Marten 2019: 11). These companies had to be registered abroad because of their service-ready military activities such as armed protection including maritime, military training and consulting etcetera. However, Russia does not forbid the companies (PSCs) that operate in the country who provide protection services to public assets, companies and individuals with a limited right to use arms (Nebolsina 2019: 80–81). Therefore, while domestic companies inside Russia were showing the characteristics of a regular PSC, Russian companies operating in foreign countries predominantly function as PMCs.

The Russian Federation also did not sign the international attempt “The Montreux Document on Private Military and Security Companies” in 2008 which gives several recommendations to states to protect international humanitarian and human rights law where PMCs are present. Including China, US, and UK, fifty-seven countries are supporting the document (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs 2020). There were not only international but also domestic (by Duma) seeking for legalization of PMCs in

²¹ “Chastnaya voyennaya kompaniya,” the Russian term for private military company.

Russia. In 2009, Andrei Lugovoi, a Russian politician and once the head of "Ninth Wave" security company who also had KGB background, proposed a law that enables PSCs to conduct business in foreign countries. There were also other proposals in 2012, 2014 and 2018 but all failed to go into force. Part of the internal dissent to PMC regulation is potentially ideological and related to state monopoly on use of violence. There is also the question of who regulates PMCs. Rival entities within the Russian bureaucracy will aim for such supervision due to possible political influence and the control over the flow of income via PMCs (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 6).

Hence, under that vague environment, the internal dynamics of Russia choose to stay distanced with a possible regulation about PMCs. This was the case when there were hot debates regarding the PMCs in 2018. At the same time, Putin's spokesperson Dmitrii Peskov announced that the administration stays indifferent to this subject. It should also be noted that the official Russian military doctrine approved in 2014 (most recent one) only considers PMCs as foreign threats that participate in military operations close to the border of the Russian Federation or its allies' (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 4). In the same year, President Putin signed a decree making all the information confidential about relations between the Organization of the Main Intelligence Administration (GRU) and its non-official partners. There is a strong belief that this decree has been signed as a result of the deep connections of GRU with the Wagner Group and paved the way for protecting the "illegal" PMCs against journalists who can compromise them (Marten 2019: 184–185).

Even though there seems to be harmony within Russian state dynamics about PMS, there is an interesting divergence between FSB and GRU. The divergence mainly derives from the questions of which party will have the power of control on these companies, and whether these companies are that effective as claimed or not. Regarding the second question, the Russian military and FSB are standing in a position where there are a number of question-marks towards the role of PMCs in conflicts. Even if GRU could be seen as the main propellant behind PMS, it is also keeping its distance to the discourse of legalization of the industry. However, rather than restricting the activities of the PMCs, it seems that FSB, or in other words Russian government, is allowing the presence of PMCs under the ultimate control of the political authority as long as they are useful (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 6).

As discussed in the previous chapter, private agents of war became handful tools for ruling administrations to dodge the restrictions of the legislation. In contemporary international politics, PMCs are mostly also serving states' foreign policies in addition to theirs. As Thomson (1994: 153) argues, it is hard to completely isolate the state from a non-state violence by asserting that the action is conducted by private actors. As buffers, PMCs could relieve the executive power from internal political pressure but could also fail to cut the link between the foreign operation and the hiring state so that the state walks away without consequences. In certain situations, crimes committed by PMC personnel could bring responsibilities or negative outcomes to states because of the lack of effective supervision/monitoring (Chesterman, Lehnardt 2007: 5). Thus, one reason behind the decision of Russia not to legalize PMCs stem from that understanding. By keeping them illegal, Russia manages to claim that PMCs are illegal, so that they do not exist within Russia, therefore, Russia could not be even indirectly responsible for any PMC or PMC employee activity because it never became a home country to any PMC. Thence, Russia uses the traditional "plausible deniability" method of western countries' even stronger, where Russia affiliated PMCs such as Wagner becoming increasingly popular in media and Duma. The second reason regarding not to legalize PMCs according to Marten (2019: 186–188) could be to increase the

wealth and power of pro-Putin oligarchs or individuals by allowing them a free environment to do business. Moreover, keeping these companies illegal gives Putin a power to menace the heads of these PMCs by mercenarism according to article 359. And this eventually increases their level of “allegiance” to Moscow in a possible foggy time of the government. Sukhankin (2019c) points out two more probable concerns of Moscow regarding not to legalize PMCs. One of them is related to national security. In the case of legalization of PMCs, the sector would need to follow the demanded regulations of the World Trade Organization, and as a result of this integration, Russia would have nothing to do but give access to a variety of PMCs from different home-states to conduct “business” in Russia. The other concern is homeland security, meaning that a high number of militarily trained private personnel have the potential of endangering the society if they stay unemployed for a period of time, or can challenge the official law enforcement agents of the state.

3.7 Wagner and Other’s Place in the Triangle

One of the most prominent PMCs of Russia is Wagner Group due to its activeness in several parts of the world and the controversial incidents that it became part of. However, Wagner did not emerge from scratch but evolved from the segmentation of several other companies. The first predecessor was the “Antiterror Orel Group”—consisted of former Russian soldiers, generally providing security to Russian businesses in Iraq after the war (Rondeaux 2019). Later, a new company emerged from the Orel Group called as Moran Security Group. On its website, Moran describes itself as “an international group of companies offering premiere security, transportation, medical, rescue, and consulting services.” The Moran Security Group has offices in different parts of the world including Russia and conducted a number of operations especially in the Middle East and Africa. Even though this company stands legally in Russia, in 2013, hundreds of “volunteers” were made a contract with Moran for their deployment in Syria. These private fighters became a part of Slavonic Corps—which was seen as an offshoot of Moran Security as a result of clear link between the two companies (Larson 2019). One of the participants of the Slavonic Corps was Dmitri Utkin (Galeotti 2016), who was a former Spetsnaz commander. Later, Utkin became the “head” of the Wagner Group that had been formed in the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict. To many, he was obsessed with the Nazism and the Third Reich so that he chose the name of the company as Wagner, who was the most favorite composer of Adolf Hitler. However, according to Ukraine’s Security Service phone intercept records during the conflict in 2015, Utkin was reporting to men such as Oleg Ivannikov, a senior GRU officer, and to Andrey Troshev, a former police colonel from Russia. Rather than a real head of Wagner, he claimed to be a puppet who acted according to instructions of the Kremlin under the umbrella of Yevgeny Prigozhin (Bellingcat 2020). After the increased media attention due to Utkin’s presence in the reception with Putin, he disappeared from the front side of the public. Few months later, a man with the same name as Utkin but not the real one was appointed as CEO of Prigozhin’s firm Concord Management and Consulting. The plan was to use Concord Management as a cover for Wagner. However, after the disastrous operation of Wagner’s in Syria, Prigozhin fired the fake Utkin and appointed himself as a replacement (Bellingcat 2020; Dan C. 2021). Prigozhin is a Russian oligarch who is close to Putin, and indeed serves his state’s foreign operations by directing PMC Wagner (Wither 2020: 22). Of course, it is not one-way agreement that solely serves the geopolitical priorities of Russian state but as discussed before as “one approach”, the operations also serve to interest of the company; in this case, by giving to Prigozhin a chance to conduct

business in different natural resource wealthy regions of the world, thereby further increasing and strengthening his networks (Dan C. 2021; Reynolds 2019).

In his interview with Estonian TV channel, former Wagner personnel Oleg claims that Wagner Group cannot be considered just as a normal PMC but a lot more than that due to their wide military inventory including tanks, mortars, armored personnel carriers etcetera (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 7). In terms of their army-like capabilities—most likely with the help of state authorities, and numerous personnel, Wagner from time to time is compared with Blackwater. It is also claimed that some Wagner personnel were transported to Syria with Russian air forces (Karaoğlu 2019: 188). However, the illegality of PMCs (Wagner registered in Argentina) gives Russian authorities a certain power of deniability. For example, Fontanka News argues dozens of dead Wagner personnel while six official deaths reported by the Russian Defense Ministry. Even if the Russian administration denies any link, some papers and honors were sent with the signature of Putin via GRU to the relatives of Russian private military personnel who lost their lives (Chifu, Frunzeti 2020: 49). Also, in 2015, a training base for Wagner was identified in Molkino where inside of the campground of GRU's 10th Special Brigade (Colton, 2019: 12; Sukhankin 2019a). Not only these, but also there is another basis to the idea of cooperation between Wagner and Russian authorities. According to some investigative reports, passports of Wagner personnel were issued by the same place who issued fake passports to some GRU personnel (Giles, Akimenko 2019). When all these factors are considered, it even becomes easier to claim that Wagner is a foreign policy tool—a quasi-PMC, being used by the state in its hybrid warfare even though officials deny any relevance (Balestrieri 2020; Giles, Akimenko 2019).

However, giving a certain label to Wagner is challenging. It heavily consists of retired Russian soldiers that not only desire to continue their profession in exchange for profit, but also wish to see Russia as a superpower (Alessandro 2020). For sure, part of the personnel favors Russian nationalism, but this cannot be considered as an overall group motivation for violence (Reynolds 2019: 7). Even though Wagner became one of the key actors of the Russian state for military operations in other countries, its position is not guaranteed. Slavonic Corps, one of the earliest forms of Wagner, sued by state for mercenarism, and Wagner also sometimes demonstrates mercenary-like behavior (Marten 2019: 183–184). Since it does not meet all the necessities of the UN convention on mercenaries, it cannot be considered as it is; on the other hand, it does not truly comply with the framework of the Montreux Document, therefore not a legal private military/security provider company either (Ranito, Mayer 2020: 26–27). In reality, it shows characteristics of all of them; it is a PMC since it has a private corporate structure and profit motives, it is a mercenary group since it conducts offensive and controversial operations abroad, and it is also a half-soldier brigade since they mostly operate under state orders and its members favor Russian nationalism and Russian state. Therefore, while Russia uses Wagner and other “PMCs” as a part of its hybrid warfare, the tools themselves are also hybrid.

In a press conference in 2018, Putin first time accepted the presence of Russian PMCs, and stated that they have the right to conduct business and protect their commercial interests in any part of the world as long as they comply with the Russian laws. He also added that Wagner Group's activities should not go beyond what the law dictates (Sukhankin 2019a; Vesti.ru 2018). However, it does not mean that Russian PMCs are purely the same with its other counterparts in the world. Because of the strong anti-mercenary norm, western companies started to provide more defensive military/security services in order to refrain from side-effects. In that way, their actions to some degree could be considered under

self-defense norm, and they could continue to exist in the market (Petersohn 2014: 477). However, it seems that so far Russia is reluctant to transform their PMCs—integrating them to the market legally—but desires to continue the tradition. Thereby, Russian PMCs and contemporary Western PMCs started to differentiate from one another. Whereas Western PMCs provide a broader range of services including supportive services, consulting, technical and technological help, Russian ones focus more on direct military involvement (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 2–3).



4. USE OF PMCs in RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: CASE STUDIES

Think that this (PMCs) undoubtedly is an instrument for the realization of national interests where the state itself does not have to be involved.

Russian President Vladimir Putin²²

During the period of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, who led the Soviet Union as General Secretary of the Communist Party between 1964–1982, the realization of geo-economic vested interests gained by a foreign policy that combined both military assistance and comprehensive economic investments (Arnold 2019: 12). In the military part of the equation, there were “advisors”, basically soldiers/intelligence services who assisted the relevant country on behalf of the Kremlin. This way of foreign policy still exists in Russia slightly in a different way from its predecessor. Nowadays, the advisors who represent a direct link with the Russian state are mostly being replaced by PMCs (Arnold 2019: 14). Thus, Moscow is utilizing PMCs in especially third world countries to further stretch out its sphere of influence by providing a variety of aids to governments (one exception is Libya since Libyan National Army is not recognized by the UN) who needs help and/or capable to provide certain capitulations or priorities in return. Russian private military companies are also actively present in protecting the public and private assets that have key roles in Russian long-time interests (Arnold 2019: 6). As parallel to USSR’s previous actions such as security for leaders and natural resource infrastructure, military training, and consulting to armies, today the practice is continuing in Russia with different enablers in countries such as Sudan, Libya, Syria, Venezuela, and CAR. This time, while the Russian state is enjoying strategic and economic benefits, PMS also is taking advantage of the emerging profitable ecosystem (Chifu, Frunzeti 2020: 50). According to Giles and Akimenko (2019), this is called as “power economy,” where a possible violent act under the state’s control takes place to achieve money-making objectives. It is a part of the idea of obtaining political, strategic, and economic earnings while keeping the official distance from the actual event. Considering Russia’s efforts to strengthen its position in the international arena, its increasing (foreign policy) activities in both strategically and economically promising regions such as Africa and Middle East should not be evaluated without PMCs.

Starting from the 1990s, the factors that affect foreign policy making/implementation became more diversified. One of the reasons for the occurrence of that diversion is the rise of NSAs in the nation-state dominant international system. Since there are numerous types of NSAs active in a variety of areas, states started to develop deeper relationships with some of these actors in order to support their foreign policy objectives (Cohen, Küpçü 2005: 35). The importance of these NSAs is coming from their increasing influence over any part of the world without the boundaries of nation-states. While some of these actors are trying to operate only for their own interests, others are engaging with states, and to some degree serving the interests of states (Cohen, Küpçü 2005: 35–36). Thus, the rise of NSAs in the neoliberal, free market based “new” international environment carried the privatization of war process a couple of steps further. By decreasing the accountability level and providing more space for free movement, PMCs became cut out for violent acts abroad under the state’s instructions but without its official presence (Godfrey et al. 2014). In other words, apart from their financial dimension in the market, PMCs also carry the characteristics of a political institution since they are highly engaged with

²² Vladimir Putin quoted in Østensen and Bukkvoll (2018: 29).

political entities (Nebolsina 2019: 78). However, they are neither complete reflections of the state nor totally independent organizations, but hybrid.

With all these developments in the world over the last couple of decades, Russian Federation now considers that the conflicts in Venezuela, Ukraine, Libya, or Syria are part of the hybrid war; therefore, to be victorious in this type of war, it is trying to rearrange its army and other non-military/non-state capabilities accordingly. It seems that Russia is foreseeing that while the chances for a possible conventional/total war is decreasing, the probability of hybrid wars is increasing for the future. And, apart from these projections about the characteristics of today's and future wars, it is important to increase the capabilities for a hybrid war because of the advantages and effectiveness it provides in international politics (Clark 2020: 11). According to Kiselev (2016) cited by Clark (2020: 22), PMCs are occupying one of the key roles in this hybrid war of Moscow.

Even though Russian PMCs started to emerge right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and participated on several occasions, their apparent use in foreign policy was in 2014, in the annexation of Crimea, and later in Syrian civil war. After that point, Russian PMCs, especially Wagner, became more active in different parts of the world including the African continent. Overall, they have two blurring effects. First, between public and private interests (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 7); and second, between “state-supported military activities abroad and the private use of force abroad by an oligarch with a criminal past who is connected to Putin” (Marten 2019: 198).

The Russian foreign policy under Putin's lead is a revisionist one based on the idea of widening the circle in which Russia is influential over foreign countries similar to its historical position with the USSR. One challenge in this attempt to change the status-quo is Western bloc that Russia may experience a conflict of interest with (Chifu, Frunzeti 2020: 47). In this point, rather than a direct confrontation with the West, Russia is adopting a more indirect way via PMCs to accomplish its goals without taking the risk of becoming subject to incidents that involve use of violence. By this way, a grey area emerges where traditional means and concepts are replaced by contemporary hybrid means including combatants who are not official soldiers or non-combatants that participate in the inter-state conflict. As a result, this method is weakening the power of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) under Article 5 in terms of identifying and addressing the conflict (Lauder 2019: 32). And this decreases the possibility of a military retaliation which would not be possible if they would have used not this private method but only the national army. As discussed by the former advisor to Putin and Yeltsin, Sergey Karaganov, Russia relatively managed to contain Western expansion and the domino effect of color revolutions, which were both reasons and outcomes of the increasing sphere of influence of Russia abroad. To further widen this circle, to continue to provide military/security for target parties, and to increase its ability to accomplish geopolitical and foreign objectives more effectively, PMCs became more valuable (Sukhankin 2019c) for Moscow. Fueling up or suppressing a civil unrest, organizing cyber-attacks, training a foreign national/insurgent army, or participating in a conflict directly as combatants are a few of those added values.

On the other hand, heavy use of PMCs in the foreign policy was criticized by many. For example, Kinsey (2006: 15–16) refers to them as proxy military companies; AFRICOM also labeled the Russian ones, ChVK Wagner in this case, as “Russian Ministry of Defense Proxy”. Hence, both definitions are showing the blurry landscape of the Russian private military industry since it is hard to distinguish them

from mercenaries, private actors, or pure proxies of the state. For example, a former Wagner personnel, Marat Gabidullin, says in his interview with Meduza that “nobody hid the possible consequences—they spoke honestly: ‘Guys, you’re destined for war where our state has interests. Prepare yourselves for the fact that this could turn out badly for you. Fatally’” (Igumenov 2020). Also, despite the impugnments of Russia, a couple of former Russian PMC personnel sued Russia in the International Criminal Court because of intentional removal of rights, and they claimed that hundreds of PMC personnel have lost their lives due to their active presence in conflicts of different regions of the world such as Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Asia (Giles, Akimenko 2019).

4.1 Ukraine

That was the twentieth century, when military might was power. Now it’s a liability. Russia had enough tank divisions to blitzkrieg Ukraine but instead chose to conduct covert operators. Why? Because clandestine forces allow Russia to escalate the conflict in secret. Little green men, proxy militias, mercenaries, and Spetnaz flooded the countryside, forming a ghost occupation force. By the time the international community figured it out, Russia’s conquest was fait accompli. Plausible deniability is more decisive than firepower in the information age. How can the United States or the United Nations rally the world to fight a war that many not exist? They can’t. It’s an effective strategic offense by Russia, and it’s an example of what’s to come.

(McFate 2019b)

The earliest instance which Wagner Group involved in is the annexation of Crimea, in 2014. Russians invaded Crimea after Yanukovych's ouster. Moscow seized the peninsula in March 2014 after a referendum. Two weeks later, Russian-speaking protestors took government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk. Local police allowed or helped separatists during violent demonstrations. Mid-April, the Ukrainian government authorized a 'anti-terrorist operation' to retake separatist districts. 2014 summer saw more conflict. Early in September 2014, Russia, Ukraine, and the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk signed the Minsk Protocol, establishing a ceasefire. Since then, eastern Ukraine has seen sporadic military confrontations (Karagiannis 2021: 553). Together with the fact that PMCs occupy a key role in Russian hybrid war as means to intervene in a foreign country in a non(national)military way, they are also capable of contributing to information-psychological warfare over society, therefore have power to influence or guide masses that oppose the ruling government. Crimea became one of the first playgrounds of this strategy—also a successful one, since these tools and methods provided a quick and clean victory to Russia with the occupation of key state buildings and bases in a short period of time in Crimea. Moreover, relatively negative public opinion towards Ukraine in Crimea made the process even easier (Sukhankin 2019b). "The Russian naval facility in Crimea" has historically strained NATO-Ukraine relations. Russia deemed its Ukrainian naval base "endangered" due to this collaboration. A new, Western-oriented administration would "definitely" oppose a Russian naval facility in Ukraine after the toppling of pro-Russian President Yanukovich. Both parties may cancel the 2010 accord, and Russia would lose its "only" Black Sea military station. Having "control" over its Black Sea fleet and retaining its naval base in Sevastopol may have been a key incentive for annexing Crimea and Sevastopol (Klotz 2017: 270). Also, Russian policymakers believed Ukraine's EU membership may lead to NATO membership. These well-documented discursive tendencies among Kremlin leaders allowed and fueled Russia's invasion of Crimea.

And Russia intervened to the situation. Interdependent variables fueled the Crimean operation's success. First, Ukrainian military, intelligence services, and politicians/civil activists made strategic mistakes. Second, Russia's adept use of maskirovka (doctrinal deceit, disguise, camouflage, denial, etc.) proved vital. According to Russian military analyst Colonel (ret.) Viktor Baranets, Russian exercises in the Arctic and the decision to transport empty military rail wagons to the Urals were a cover-up for the true purpose. Moscow's choice to combine linear, small, and cyber/information war aspects was the third reason (Sukhankin 2019b: 4). One of the Russia's instruments was Wagner Group. Even though there are not concrete evidence about the detailed physical operations of the Wagner Group in the beginning of annexation, several Russian sources such as "Gazeta.ru" claims that the group was present in the arrangements of the controversial referendum for leaving Ukraine (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 7).

However, Russian PMCs not only discussed under the Crimean issue but also as much more active participants of the Ukrainian Crisis. The crisis, or civil war, in a way reflects a competition between Europe and Russia over the political affinity of Ukraine. As a result of the unsigned EU-Ukraine agreement, mass protests were started, and the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich resigned from his position. After the fall of the government, Russian-originated Ukrainians started to protest the new government. The protests quickly turned into an armed conflict in Donbass where Russian-originated people were the majority. The rebels quickly occupied governmental buildings and declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Nevertheless, they did not get any recognition from any states so far. The armed conflict that started in Donbass provided Russia to a chance to examine its irregular forces' offensive and defensive abilities against a fairly incapacitated rival country. It was also a good opportunity to eradicate the negative perception towards Russian PMCs due to previous failed Slavonic Corps in Syria (Sukhankin 2019b). As a result, Wagner Group got involved with the civil war in the country and started to conduct some operations in favor of the Russian government. It relatively managed to organize disconnected rebel groups against the Ukrainian government and obliterated some local rebel leaders who are not very much in the same line with Moscow. Therefore, the group is called "the cleaners" (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 7). Both Ukrainian and some Russian sources argue that Wagner assassinated local rebel commanders Alexander Bednov and Aleksey Mozgoyov together with de-facto Luhansk People Republic's Minister of Defense Oleg Anashchenko (Sukhankin 2018: 306) who was controversially one of the figures of the coup attempt in Luhansk. According to Larson (2019), these interesting eliminations in the pro-Russian rebel area indicate a Wagner-Moscow cooperation to protect Russian strategic interests. Because a more independent or unstable establishment that tries to deal with internal power struggle (rebel areas in this case) is no way close to turning the current situation into a frozen conflict, which would be in line with Russian foreign policy.

Although ChVK Wagner or others' activities declared untrue by Russian authorities, a geolocatable video released on YouTube as an additional proof to both Wagner Group's involvement in 2015 Debaltseve conflict in Ukraine, and to its close relations with the Russian officials due to modern Russian military trucks seems in its possession (Marten 2019: 193; Zoria 2018). Ukraine's security services also claimed that approximately two hundred Wagner personnel participated in the conflict in Donetsk (Giles, Akimenko 2019). Furthermore, Utkin's state medal for his actions in conflict, and some other Wagner personnel's presence at dinner in the Kremlin with Putin constitutes a clearer image for Wagner as a foreign policy tool of the state (Rizotti 2020: 578). In addition, not only Russia and/or pro-Russian rebels hired private contractors but also some Ukrainian oligarchs such as Igor Kolomoisky

hired them. In this case, the motivation for the well-known businessman was not quite his states' interest but rather a private one. The aim was to continue to control the headquarters of the oil company UkrTransNafta (McFate 2019a: 3). Also, E.N.O.T. members participated in both periods of the Ukrainian crisis. In Crimea, members of the organization (together with Russian Cossacks and Berkut) stirred popular dissatisfaction and undertook supplemental mass mobilization and vital infrastructure operations. E.N.O.T. Corps conducted military and non-military actions in Donbas. The latter involved armed monitoring of 14 Russian "humanitarian convoys," while the former featured actual military actions in Luhansk (Chornukhyne) and Donetsk oblasts (including the Debaltseve battle) (Sukhankin 2019b: 12).

Overall, Klotz (2017: 279) suggests several different reasons and explanations for Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The first reason is stemming from geopolitical interests. Russia has managed to have a naval base in Black Sea with the annexation of Crimea, which further strengthened its strategic military positioning in the region. The other reason is highly interconnected with the power politics between classical Russian-Western sides. With the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russia aimed to address the further expansion of the NATO and European Union (EU) considering increasing enlargement of the West towards Eastern Europe and former Soviet countries. Ukraine was one of these target countries and was gradually increasing its engagement with the West both in an institutional and on a public level. The last explanation of Klotz is pointing out the idea that Russia flared up the situation in Eastern Ukraine as an extension of its internal politics. By creating a physical foe, or a concrete example of "the rival West" to clash with, the Russian government aimed to solidify its political position inside the country. With all these different motivations, Russian aggression was possible thanks to non-official but pro-Russian PMCs. While these companies tried to decrease the possibility of a potential military aggression with Russia and the West, they assisted Russia to conduct its foreign policy in a geopolitically "delicate" area.

Ukraine became Russia's "polygon" (training ground) for testing PMCs in real-time, removing mistakes of the past and preparing them for future operations in Syria. Wagner Group undertook frontal assaults on Ukrainian soldiers, urban combat, intelligence gathering, information-psychological missions, and sabotage/subversive operations against local players in Ukraine, showing rising independence. Wagner's major missions in Ukraine between 2014 and 2015 (before the PMC's formal establishment and before its main soldiers were deployed to Syria) were a mix of diversion-sabotage operations, partisan warfare, and frontal attacks/counterattacks. Few of them are 205 Wagner Group soldiers fought at Sandzhariivka and Debaltseve (January 14–February 20, 2015). (21 were reportedly killed). The fight represented a critical turn in the conflict, resulting in the Minsk Agreements. 72 group members participated in the Battle of Luhansk Airport (April 8–September 1, 2014). 15 were killed. Il-76 shoot-down (Luhansk Oblast, June 14, 2014), 49 deaths (including 40 Ukrainian paratroopers from the 25th Separate Dnipropetrovsk Airborne Brigade). 47 The 9K38 Igla man-portable infrared homing surface-to-air missile was purportedly used (SAM). Sources said the plane was shot down by "a highly nimble squad of militants in an off-road vehicle." This material surfaced in various sources, showing Wagner Group's trend.

Ukrainian writer and military analyst Yuri Butusov says "Russian private military enterprises [were] the backbone of Russian assault in Donbas... The same materials were then transported to Syria. This review reflects the essence of Russian PMCs and irregular formations' "Ukrainian chapter" (role, purpose,

effect). Russia used Ukraine as a testing ground between 2014 and 2015 to reproduce several phases of non-linear new-type warfare (seen by Russia's military-political leadership in the Middle East). Operations in Crimea and Donbas prepped Russian PMCs and irregulars for Syria (Sukhankin 2019b: 16-17).

Nonetheless, the adventure of Russia in Ukraine rised to a whole another level. With the starting of a military operation to Ukraine in 2022, Russia stifled its foreign policy. In the past 15 years, Russian foreign policy has used hybrid warfare, soft power, political collaboration, and diplomatic engagement to position Moscow as an alternative power center in the 21st century great power conflict. The kind of war Russia is waging in Ukraine narrows that objective, weakens the Kremlin's global image and stance, limits their ability to dedicate resources to other projects and geopolitical playgrounds, isolates the country due to its hawkish reputation, and invites political and economic risks that other nations don't want to be exposed to by dealing with Moscow. Russia's conflict will change European security. It will boost European nations in NATO and EU organizations (EU). Poland, Slovakia, and Germany have rearmed because of Ukraine. Turkey, the EU, and the US would need to further stabilize and deter Russia via interregional cooperation, which may extend the European security architecture into a larger Eurasian framework. The Russian conflict in Ukraine ended 30 years of Moscow leading post-Soviet integration efforts. After Ukraine, a values-based partnership between Russia and other post-Soviet countries seems doubtful. Russia will likely lose its ability to leverage cultural links to unite post-Soviet nations. President Putin cited an alleged nuclear threat, the necessity to demilitarize Ukraine's army, the need to safeguard the Russian-speaking people, and Russian elites' opinion that Ukraine is a 'artificial state' as pretexts for conflict with Ukraine. These may be projected on any other post-Soviet state, so the conflict worries them and raises doubts about Russia's objectives (Kusa 2022: 10-11).

Ukraine is crucial to Russian geopolitics and prestige. Two reasons: First, Russia's westward incursions crossed Ukraine's plains (as well as Belarus). This is prevalent in modern Russian strategic thinking and affects the country's threat assessments. Second, according to Russia's primary national identity narrative, Kievan Rus is the historical epicenter and birthplace of Russian culture. Large swaths of the Russian political class perceive Ukraine to be in their area of influence (Götz, Staun 2022: 5). Moscow took control of the area of Ukraine with the closest ethno-linguistic, cultural, and historical links to Russia by annexing the peninsula. Russia ensured Ukraine wouldn't join NATO by fostering separatist in Ukraine's southern Donbas area. According to NATO's rules, nations with territorial or ethnopolitical problems can't join. Thus, Russia accomplished two aims. Moscow's desires weren't always fulfilled. Both the Poroshenko and Zelensky administrations adopted a pro-Western foreign policy despite Russia's forceful conduct after Euromaidan (Götz, Staun 2022: 6). The search for military successes continues, but there are two crucial factors to consider when assessing this war's global and regional consequences. First, economics. Russia's invasion of Ukraine reshuffled energy markets, particularly in Europe. The EU has cut Russia's gas and oil imports. Although it would be impossible for Europe to cease Russian gas and oil imports, most nations are optimistic they can cut imports in the next 2-5 years. This will allow other nations export more energy to Europe, such as the US, Qatar, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and Algeria. The Russian invasion hastened Ukraine's integration into the European energy network in March (Kusa 2022: 8).

4.2 Syria

In March 2011, Syria experienced the "Arab Spring." Syrian government forces greeted peaceful protests in Deraa and Damascus with tear gas, machine gun and sniper fire, and mass arrests. Protests expand countrywide. In urban areas, Syrian army launched significant attacks. Some civilians formed tiny armed organizations to protect demonstrators and communities from this brutality. As violence between government troops and armed groups escalated, Syrian soldiers deserted rather than shoot fellow Syrians. Nearly 60,000 Syrian troops left by March 2012. Many joined government-opposing groups. These organizations had varying viewpoints. The Free Syrian Army pulled together moderate organizations in July 2011. It wanted a more democratic Syria. Free Syrian Army gained 35,000 fighters after early victories against Assad. Political conflicts, struggle for resources, and the advent of more extreme factions like the Islamic Front and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham slowed its pace (Rizotti 2020: 572-575).

Military involvement of Moscow in Syria to assist the Assad regime started with the mobilization of Slavonic Corps into the region in 2013. The workforce profile of the company varied from former Russian soldiers to military engineers and riot polices. However, at the end, they were all private "volunteer" military contractors. The aim of the Slavonic Corps was specified as protecting military and/or oil facilities in Deir ez-Zor and Homs (Karaoglu 2019: 187–188). According to Miller (2013), the personnel were informed that their departure to Syria was approved by FSB. They were also believing that they will be in Syria as a desire of Syrian President Assad to protect important facilities. However, things changed when Slavonic Corps—with approximately 250 personnel, arrived in Syria. It turned out that their employer was not the Syrian state but private individuals, and the promised military equipment and tanks never delivered apart from the old, nonfunctional ones. In addition, their job description has changed from protecting oil/military facilities to actually recapturing them from Islamic State. As a result, the operation has ended with a failure and Slavonic Corps has turned back into Russia; but there was one more surprise waiting for the company. Upon arrival, FSB disowned the fact that it had approved the operation in Syria and arrested two responsible people from the operation due to act of mercenarism. Mark Galeotti, who is a professor working in the area related to Russian security/military operations, says in his interview with The Interpreter that all these foreign operations are realized if FSB finds them convenient (Miller 2013). Correspondingly, Le Figaro notes that it is not realistic for hundreds of armed men to fly to Syria from Russia to militarily support a Moscow-backed country in the Middle East without the knowledge of FSB (Chifu, Frunzeti 2020: 48–49). Therefore, it is not hard to conclude that even though the Slavonic Corps was not officially part of the state, it was conducting business in line with Russian interests. Thus, despite the existing mercenarism law in Russia, the approval of FSB to Slavonic Corps can be considered as a proxy usage in foreign policy.

The rise of ISIS, also known as Daesh, transformed the Syrian war in 2013. ISIS, an al-Qaeda-affiliated extremist organisation, seeks an Islamic state. ISIS captured significant swathes of Syrian and Iraqi land with 30,000 militants. The Iraqi government first asked for foreign help in June 2014. Iraq subsequently asked the US to spearhead an international campaign against ISIS. The vast flight of Syrians fleeing the bloodshed rendered the regime's forced service unenforceable. Syria resorted to Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah for help in 2015 with just 125,000 men in uniform. In September 2015, after providing just logistical assistance, Russia started deploying combat soldiers to Syria (Rizotti 2020: 572-575). After

Russian combat soldiers arrived in October 2015, the Wagner Group started supporting Assad. Wagner Group's original goal was to preserve Syrian government assets, especially military sites that housed Russian servicemen. It's unclear whether the Wagner Group was sent to Syria by the Russian government or the Assad administration to reinforce Syrian soldiers. In both cases, static security turned into offensive combat operations, including a 2016 push in Palmyra against ISIS and the 2018 attack on the Deir-ez-Zour stronghold (Rizotti 2020: 576).

With the increasing desire of Moscow to be involved in Syria to help the Assad regime in order to protect its strategic military positioning in the Middle East together with several different economic reasons, Russia became more active in the region. The unsuccessful attempt of the Slavonic Corps has been put aside, and a new private military formation, Wagner Group, has been blessed with the authorization of conducting (military) business in Syria. While the Fontanka.ru was claiming in 2018 that almost three thousand Wagner personnel participated in the conflict in Syria since 2015, a journalist Liliya Yapparova determined the total number as six thousand, of which 1500 of them were always active. Wagner Group's one of the main missions in Syria was to recapture Palmyra in 2016. It was donated with tanks and rocket launchers, and managed to become successful even though the city fell again, and then recaptured again in 2017 (Colton, 2019: 12–13). Thus, Wagner in this case participated in combat to “liberate” a territory and to maintain the regime's authority again. There was another motivation for Russia to support Assad. There is always a possibility that Sunni Islamist movements in Egypt and Turkey might impact the Caucasus and Central Asia, heightening Russia's southern instability. Iran and Syria, Russia's two key regional allies, are controlled by non-Sunni Muslims. Supporting the Damascus dictatorship in the face of international action appeared like an obvious decision, especially considering Russia's lone Mediterranean naval base in Tartus (Nizameddin 2012: 8).

In international politics, Russia is portraying a resurgent image. The Syrian crisis is the best evidence of Russia's regional dominance. Russia supports the Syrian state armed forces in war and fights for Assad's survival in the UN Security Council by avoiding resolutions to remove the government. Indeed, Russia's engagement in the Syrian war impacted regional and worldwide affairs in a manner that the world has once again recognized Russia as a key player in international politics (Haider, Khan 2020: 402). Russia's involvement in the Syrian war has helped to restore its status as a global force. The Russian resurgence has alarmed international power centers, especially the US. This is clear from the interaction patterns between the US and Russia in Syria, where rifts can be noticed among the main powers of the international order, even while battling a shared adversary like ISIS. Russia opposes a religious extremist dictatorship in Syria. The relationship between non-state actors and terrorism is an issue for Russian internal and foreign security (Haider, Khan 2020: 403).

Apart from the classical use of Wagner in fighting over cities, the company was also used by certain other companies to obtain financial gains. In 2017, Fontanka claimed that there are documents regarding an agreement between the Damascus regime and the private company Euro Polis—meaningfully owned by Prigozhin, about recapturing oil and gas facilities from Islamic State. The deal was promising to Euro Polis a quarter of the income from liberated facilities. The military part of the agreement was conducted by Wagner Group. Since the nature of the agreement is mixed as both commercial and strategic, it would not be appropriate and feasible operation for Russian army to fight in a foreign country for the economic benefit of a business company, but it was a suitable job for a PMC (Bukkvoll, Østensen 2020: 8). As a further proof, former Russian Energy Minister Aleksandr Novak admitted the existence of a

Memorandum of Understanding between Evro Polis and Syria. It was about Evro Polis' obligations to recapture oil, gas, and other important facilities in exchange for part of the profit and the cost of military expenses over five years (Marten 2019: 194). Similar to some post-colonial African states' experience with mercenaries, or like more lately the practices of Angola and Sierra Leone, Syria chose the way that regaining its territories from insurgent groups by hiring third party (military) contractors in return for concessions in oil & gas fields, or profit that will come from these liberated facilities. And at least two Russian firms—Evro Polis and Stroytransgaz, became direct part of these contracts (McFate 2019a: 3). While Syria is trying to maximize its strategic interests and military gains in the field by offering more financial advantages to foreign companies, it also aimed for sustainable relations with these companies via the existing mutual interests (McFate 2019a: 31). Thus, while Wagner is serving Moscow for Putin's further strategic and foreign policy considerations, it is also pursuing to make financial deals as a business actor who is enthusiastic about natural gas and oil fields (Reynolds 2019: 6).

One of the most prominent acts of a Russian PMC occurred in Syria. The incident has brought Wagner Group into the front pages due to the importance, results, and different parties of the operation. In February 2018, presumably five or six hundred Wagner personnel with pro-regime fighters attacked the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces base in Deir ez-Zor. Wagner had artillery, tanks, and armored vehicles (McFate 2019b). The skirmish was the first incident that included Russians and Americans themselves pulling the trigger since the Vietnam War. The clash resulted with a catastrophic defeat for the Russian side and costed more than hundreds of dead Wagner personnel because of the precise US airstrikes (Colton, 2019: 13). According to the Pentagon, the US military was in contact with the Russian side via a special line before and after the airstrike, and told by Russia that it is not an operation which Russia is a part of (Eckel 2018; Marten 2019: 194). Russian officials also announced that it was not an offensive involving the Russian military, however there were an unknown number of Russian or former Soviet citizens who were wounded or died in the skirmish (Lauder 2019: 24). But what was the point of this dangerous attack? One reason could be related to the nearby Conoco oil facility. The emergence of an opportunity due to Syrian Democratic Forces' fight against Turkish Armed Forces in Afrin could be tempted the regime and Russian side (Spearin 2018: 67; Yaffa 2018) to take advantage of that distraction. When considered the commonly agreed dividing line that is separating US and Russian areas, even if the mission was not possible for Russian troops, Wagner was able to try to penetrate a US controlled area because of its private, non-official status.

PMCs will continue to serve as proxy armies in armed warfare. The Wagner Group's offensive combat actions in Syria illustrate the lack of a treaty or customary law regulating its activity. The absence of treaty or custom regulation is compounded by the Law of State Responsibility's fact-intensive approach. Without further development of international law on PMCs, Syria and Russia are likely to continue escaping accountability and promoting the use of PMCs for tactical benefits at home or strategic aims abroad (Rizotti 2020: 614). The Wagner Group displayed four crucial characteristics while in Syria: First, it demonstrated that it could be used effectively in military-related duties (assuming a relatively weak opposing force). Second, it might be used to acquire information and conduct reconnaissance in cooperation with conventional formations (the Special Operations Forces and the Aerospace Forces). Finally, this force might be utilized to safeguard things or essential infrastructure. Wagner's fourth important use has been training local military troops. The latter two roles are commonly done by Western PMCs, which may indicate that Russian PMCs are progressively, and at least partly, becoming

more like their American and European counterparts in Syria (Sukhankin 2019a: 1). Russian PMC actions in Syria should be viewed with Russia's wider engagement in the Syrian civil conflict (since 2015). Despite concerns that this would be "Afghanistan 2.0," drawing Russia into a new deadly quagmire, these forecasts were mistaken. One of the main (but never mentioned by Russian officials) preconditions that prevented the Russian intervention from becoming unwinnable was the use of PMCs—an "invisible" but effective force that delivered substantial results with minimal economic expenditures and visible profits for "shareholders" (Sukhankin 2019a: 17).

Basically, war can be considered as an act to create the desired post-conflict environment. In this case, one of the desired post-war conditions for Russia in Syria is to be able to control the natural gas routes. There is also an economically tempting reconstruction process of Syria which many firms could enjoy the profit including Russian ones. Not only these but for many other reasons, Syria is an important country for Russia to keep its control within the country. Among these reasons, there are subject headings such as keeping the prerogatives in Latakia, restricting the US sphere of influence in the Middle East by being a second layer between Israel and Iran, dominating the flow of natural gas to Europe, etcetera. In this volatile and risky region, using PMCs became strategically central because of their less political costs and high capabilities such as the ability to fight in a combat without public fear (because of casualties), training the regime and pro-regime militias, and organizing offensives without mobilizing national forces; therefore, refraining from responsibility in the international arena. Likewise, Mohlin (2014: 34) underlines that "they (PMCs) allow decision-makers to operate in the twilight space of world politics where they can silently participate in the reproduction of the present global political and social power structures."

Thousands of private contractors have worked for the Kremlin in Syria. 500 to 600 guys killed in Syria in 2016, a Russian mercenary said. Most worked for Wagner Group, but new Russian PMCs operate there. PMC Patriot is claimed to be operational since spring 2018. Russian contractors train and operate with Syrian soldiers. Moscow uses militias and PMCs for three reasons: fatality aversion, legal and reputation issues, and military benefits (Karagiannis 2021: 554).

4.3 Venezuela

Even though Venezuela has a serious amount of natural resources within its territory, the country suffers from high levels of poverty and low life standards. Starting with 2017, Caracas government is trying to suppress the mass protests due to corruption, lack of reforms, and indigence of fellow citizens. Especially in 2019, tension between protesters and the government increased, and in some cities Venezuelan army and the police were involved in the incidents. While protestors were accusing the government and Nicolás Maduro—the successor of Hugo Chavez— for the poor conditions of the country, officials considered the incidents as a coup attempt guided by American imperialism. Despite the rising criticism from almost all the international community to the Maduro government Turkey, Russia, and China decided to back Caracas. What was the motive for these countries to support the Maduro government? Well, Venezuela is a geo-strategically important country due to its location close to the US. It is also economically carrying great opportunities due to its natural resources. The ability to influence this country near the US would definitely give a great strategic advantage. Thus, Russia and Turkey are involved in this crisis in order to use this ability as leverage against the US. From this geo-

strategic perspective, the power politics over Venezuela was important for the US. However, one of the most significant concerns of the US regarding Venezuela is its natural resources. The US is an oil-exporting country now, but this will not last for too long. According to the estimates, in 10 years, the US will need to import oil. In this case, rather than a costly Middle East adventure, Venezuela can be the cheapest and most efficient address for the US to sustain its energy security.

Considering the ambitions of this triple block, in 2019, Russia mobilized a few PMC (arguably Wagner) personnel to Venezuela in order to protect Maduro in this political turmoil. It is expressed that Maduro was also carrying suspicions over his own personal security services, so he was positive to the idea (Sukhankin 2020a; Giles, Akimenko 2019). According to Tsvetkova and Zverev (2019), a local Cossack leader Yevgeny Shabayev claims that approximately 400 Russian private military contractors have been sent to Venezuela, which is the most generous assertion among others. In the same year, Rosneft—the very same firm who contracted with GNA and has ambitions in Mozambique, turned into one of the biggest business partners in transportation of Venezuela's crude oil, and started to provide an alternative for those who are refraining from buying oil from Venezuela due to US sanctions. Rosneft's this way of business first was not considered as a breach since the firm was taking oil as a repayment of debt that given couple of years ago, but this situation seems to be pacified with former President Trump's sanctions towards Rosneft in Venezuelan oil trade in 2020 (Russia Insider 2019; Sukhankin 2020a).

As a result, securing Maduro's position in power by Russia and Turkey enabled these two countries to use Venezuela as a trump card against the US in Syria. In other words, to prevent further US challenges over the transition of power and allocation of spheres of influence in Syria, Venezuela appeared as an advantage for Russia and Turkey to bargain with the US. However, in order to use this strategy, there was a need for an actual military involvement in Venezuela without taking legal responsibility or any military risks. That is why the deployment of regular military troops would not be a real option but a PMC, who has close ties with the state, and follows state instructions was suitable for the mission. Overall, apart from the economic side-benefits, the use of privatized way for military actions in Venezuela played a direct role in achieving foreign policy objectives. Thereby, the actor that makes possible the use of Venezuela as a trump card against the US was Wagner by allowing the military involvement.

4.4 Africa

Russia's "return" to Africa is based on several factors. First, geo-economic goals (such as acquiring scarce natural resources in Africa and boosting Russia's export capabilities in non-raw commodities). Another reason is related with geo-political considerations (such as utilizing African votes at the UN to "show" Russia's capacity to overcome its isolation on the world arena). This factor has a new significance after the 2014 Moscow-West political conflict. African nations, which have 54 UN votes, are considered in Russia as a "gateway" and a route to escape Western dominance in international organizations. Moscow is interested in African nations because it wants to rebuild the global institutional landscape by boosting BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Sukhankin 2020b).

One of the other aims of Moscow is to increase African imports of natural resources, exotic agricultural commodities, fruits and vegetables, and boosting Russian exports of agricultural items, weaponry/arms, fertilizers, and industrial goods and services. Economic cooperation includes Russian exports of hydro-

and nuclear-power projects, light industries, pipelines, satellites, and IT. During ATOMEKSPO- 2017 (the world's biggest forum for nuclear power industry meetings and talks), Russia completed preliminary nuclear project accords with Zambia, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Moscow has strengthened and improved its bilateral relations with African actors to implement this plan. Another factor is the economic interests of numerous Russian non-state players in natural resource-rich Sub-Saharan Africa. Cooperation with the above-mentioned players encroaches on a "gray zone" where legitimate business operations give way to semi- or criminal conduct. Russian players seek unstable, isolated governments in resource-rich nations. In this regard, Russia's competitive advantage is based on three main factors: its distancing from critiquing domestic affairs (human rights abuses), the use of means (including covert political consultations and shady electoral schemes), and little fear of potential exposure due to the "plausible deniability" advantage (Sukhankin 2020b).

As a result, Putin's visit to South Africa was encouraged by then-President Dmitry Medvedev's 2009 travel to North (Egypt) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Angola, Namibia, Nigeria). This tour led in a number of institutional improvements in Moscow, including the introduction of an Africa adviser post (subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Lavrov's March 2018 "African tourney" includes just Sub-Saharan African countries: Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia. Lavrov's multi-country journey revived Moscow's hunt for an Africa strategy. Russia lacks the economic potential and "soft power" to compete with China, the US, and the EU (both as an entity and some individual member states). In order to achieve all the aims that mentioned above, Moscow's plan uses tools and methods from other places. Arms sales, "hybrid" security cooperation, and political/informational efforts are significant in this respect. Along with conventional weapons sales, PMCs and irregulars are essential to Russia's competitive edge in Africa. This strategy—similar to Moscow's pre-1991 modus operandi—has gained a new instrument: Russia's readiness to provide political consulting and misinformation. People/entities related to Yevgeny Prigozhin allegedly provide these services (Sukhankin 2020b).

Russia has "hybridized" its "security export" system. Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan are examples of this combination of legitimate technical-military assistance (including deploying restricted numbers of uniformed military instructors) with services performed by illegal formations — Russian PMCs that are de jure outlawed by the Russian Penal Code. As indicated above, many African governments may embrace this form of collaboration for two primary reasons: first, the governing elites' fear of popular uprisings and second, increasing Islamist extremism and the inadequacy of local military forces to adequately cope with this threat. Russia's capacity to utilize these variables may be essential to its competitiveness on the African continent. "Security export"—consulting and training in anti-insurgency and anti-terrorist operations—is one of Moscow's primary trump cards in Africa. Russian military instructors (officially) and PMCs supply these services to Sub-Saharan Africa (unofficially). Russian PMCs may also be implicated in violently suppressing anti-government protests (Sukhankin 2020b).

Russia sees Africa as a critical stage to display its hostility to Western values and boost its credibility as a conflict mediator. Russia has maintained trade ties with Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, Sudan under Omar al-Bashir, Eritrea, and the CAR. Russia justifies these moves by supporting national sovereignty and non-interference and condemning Western attempts to impose their beliefs on African nations (Ramani 2021: 9).

4.4.1 Libya

After the protests started in February 2011 against the Qaddafi regime, Libya quickly found itself in a civil war. The civil war has ended with the violent death of Qaddafi. However, since then the country was not able to promote stability and peace. Due to the military offensive initiated by Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar to UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) led by then Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, a second civil war started in Libya in 2014. While Libya's oil resources and control of these assets became crucial for the overall control of the country, both parties were supported by different countries (Alessandro 2020: 4–5).

One of these countries is Russia who is implicitly supporting Haftar. There are certain motivations of Russia to be involved in the region. First, Libya is a strategic country in the Mediterranean in terms of controlling the flow of immigrants to Europe. Russian presence in the Mediterranean with military bases, like the Syrian case, could allow Russia to use immigrants as a political pressure tool against Europe. Libya is also a country where there are rich oil resources. In 2017, Rosneft—a Russian oil & gas firm, and Libya's National Oil Corporation signed an agreement. Even though the deal was made with a legitimate company of the UN-recognized government in Tripoli, most oil facilities were in the eastern part of the country either in or close to Haftar-controlled areas. Thus, this created a situation that Russia should act accordingly. Also, controlling Libyan oil resources and the amount of production to the market could allow Russia to also keep the prices high as possible since the Russian economy is dependent upon oil and gas exports. Furthermore, not only oil but also the Russian arms industry is willing to go back into business in Libya after the loss of a couple of billion dollars due to the fall of Qaddafi. Moreover, Russia and the Qaddafi regime signed a contract worth almost \$2.5 billion for the construction of a high-speed railway in the country which the deal suspended due to civil war and fall of Qaddafi (Kartsev 2018). Therefore, continuing these kinds of projects with a regime that can be influenced by Moscow such as LNA is one rationale for the Kremlin. Also, supporting LNA geostrategically seems more beneficial since the Haftar offers two military bases to Russia in Benghazi and Tobruk. This is not an ideal scenario for Western countries and NATO when considered the Russian military presence also in Syria and generally in the Mediterranean (Dyner 2019). In order to accomplish these objectives, Russia is trying to use a method that will put the conflict in Libya at an impasse that is not possible to solve without Moscow, such as in Syria (Dyner 2019). And the tool to execute this method, or foreign policy approach, is using PMCs that provide plausible deniability; in this case specifically using Wagner Group.

Some sources claim that approximately there are a thousand Wagner personnel present in Libya, and 35 of them died in the attack of Turkish armed unmanned aerial vehicles (Balestrieri 2020). There are also statements that Syrian fighters are fighting in Libya for both sides. A former Wagner personnel Gabidullin claims that he took an order to send Syrians from “ISIL Hunters” unit to Libya (Igumenov 2020). In 2019, Turkey and Libya signed a military cooperation agreement. According to this agreement, Turkey supports GNA by sending military advisors to the country. However, it is argued that via SADAT²³, a Turkish private military company, Syrian mercenaries are transferred to Libya to fight for the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. These mercenaries are predominantly share the ideology of

²³ According to official website, “SADAT Defense is the first and the only company in Turkey, that internationally provides consultancy and military training services at the international defense and interior security sector.” The company offers services in three main areas, which are consultancy, supply, and training (SADAT 2021).

Muslim Brotherhood like GNA (Ersozoglu 2020). Additionally, Turkey clearly falsified another claim that via SADAT Ankara participated in operations with non-uniformed military officers (Kozera et al. 2020: 90).

There are different reports about the presence of Wagner Group in the different parts of Libya. For instance, Wagner supported the LNA in Benghazi with tanks, artillery, and about 300 personnel to ultimately control the energy production (Giles, Akimenko 2019). Moreover, US Africa Command reports that Wagner activity in Sirte is present with several re-painted Russian aircraft to cover their origin, which they first transferred to Syria and then to Libya. This is considered to be a violation of the UN arms embargo (United States Africa Command 2020b). Also, a photograph has been published that proves Russian aircraft in al-Jufra. USAFRICOM director of operations Bradford Gering commented on the subject and said "Russia's sustained involvement in Libya increases the violence and delays a political solution. Russia continues to push for a strategic foothold on NATO's southern flank and this is at the expense of innocent Libyan lives" (United States Africa Command 2020a). Apart from the Russian support and "guidance" to Wagner Group in Libya, another country, the United Arab Emirates is also financing Wagner according to Pentagon's Inspector General for counterterrorism operations in Africa (Mackinnon, Detsch 2020). Even if the United Arab Emirates is one of the countries in the Gulf that sustains a close relationship with the US, it has different foreign policy priorities in Libya. Thus, PMCs appeared to be allowing safe military engagements not only between foes but also against an "ally" supported country.

Even though there were a series of talks, and diplomatic maneuvers to solve the Libyan conflict, both sides have not come to common terms yet. CNN still reports kilometers long trenches in the country. Libyan Defense Minister Salahuddin Al-Namroush says he does not think that the people who take cover in these trenches today are going to leave anytime soon (Independent Türkçe 2021). GNA's powerful Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha is trying to force Russia to depart Wagner and mercenaries from Libya by promising to talk business if this condition is fulfilled. On the other hand, he is also trying to get more support from the US side by claiming that ISIS is increasing its power due to attacks of Haftar to GNA. While he credits Turkey for its support, highlights that Libya's wellbeing and stability also concerns Europe and the US. According to Associated Press, Bashagha is pleased with the results of the presidential elections in the US and looks for more active participation of Biden in Libya's peace process (Libya Al-Ahrar 2021).

4.4.2 Mozambique

For the first time after the dissolution of the USSR, Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi, who is in office since 2015, has made an official visit to Russia in August 2019 during his election campaign with some of his government officials; and a number of official agreements were signed in addition to agreed business deals. Even though it seemed as a normal official visit that enhanced economic cooperation between the two countries, Russian support to Nyusi on election day, October 2019, increased the suspicions over his visit to Russia (Kachur 2020: 47). Shortly before the elections, a survey was published on the website of International Anticrisis Center that favoring Nyusi's win even if the publication of election surveys during the campaign is illegal in Mozambique. By "coincidence", the website is claimed to be linked with Prigozhin. After the survey became a trending topic in social media, Stanford Internet Observatory-Facebook duo managed to disable Prigozhin-linked Facebook pages and

other online addresses. Few of these online sources were spreading the disinformation that opposition had agreed with China upon the transfer of radioactive waste to Mozambique, also were making propaganda of Nyusi's governing party (Kachur 2020: 48).

Mozambique is a country that trying to suppress terrorism and extremist movements in the country just like many other African countries. In order to address this issue more efficiently, Mozambique seems to be eager to work with Russia. Thus, one dimension of Nyusi's visit to Moscow could also be understood from this perspective. While in the Kremlin, Nyusi stated the USSR's contribution to his country's freedom, thanked Moscow for forgiving most of the debts of Mozambique, and welcomed Russia to his country for further business cooperation. In response, Yuri Ushakov, a government official, confirmed the interests of some Russian companies such as UAZ, Kamaz, Rosneft, Gazprombank, and Inter-RAO to conduct business in Mozambique (Sukhankin 2020a). According to Sukhankin (2020a), Moscow is applying the same strategy that worked in Syria, offering military services in return for involvement in the country's natural resources business. Military presence of Russia was first claimed by military journalist Nuno Felix in late 2019. Even though the identities of these personnel could not be confirmed at first, later it is highly suggested that they were ChVK Wagner. About two hundred Wagner personnel, couple of drones and helicopters entered Mozambique as a result of Nyusi's agreement with Putin which obviously was military support—especially in the fight against ISIS militants in gas-rich Cabo Delgado and generally against insurgents—paid by shares from Mozambique's development of gas business (Balestrieri 2020; Petersohn 2020: 5–6).

After the worth-considering discovery of gas reserves in 2010, in the Cabo Delgado region, Mozambique started to witness the strong desire of foreign energy companies to conduct business in the country (Kachur 2020: 41). Even though this exploration of foreign firms has put Mozambique into the top fourteen natural gas rich countries and paved the way for serious attention of big firms towards it, the corrupted system of the country plus inadequate planning and management capabilities prevented a stable development. Government in Maputo, on the other hand, accused foreign companies for unfairly taking advantage of the resources, and providing only low-level/paid employment opportunities to its citizens. Also, the insecure environment in the gas-rich region Cabo Delgado due to rebels further disrupted the process (Sukhankin 2020a). Thus, at this unproductive point, Mozambique turned to Moscow for help. After Nyusi's visit to the Kremlin, Wagner Group started to operate in the country to both assist national soldiers of Mozambique on the ground and to train them. By this way, insurgents in Cabo Delgado could be defeated (Kachur 2020: 48).

Even if the operation did not go as planned, the ultimate aim was to establish a secure environment for firms to conduct gas business in the area including Russian ones. Therefore, one of the main motivation sources for Russia in providing indirect military assistance to Mozambique was geo-economic. Russia assigned a PMC to this mission because it was a dangerous environment that could create political burdens to Moscow if used national troops. Maputo, moreover, demanded assistance from Moscow because of two reasons. The first reason was to escape the political turbulence by winning the elections, therefore continuing the rule of the governing party. To achieve this aim, Nyusi visited Moscow during his election campaign. The second reason for Mozambique was quite similar with the previous examples of Sierra Leone, Angola, and Syria. Just like these countries, Mozambique also chose the way of regaining its territories from insurgent groups and defeating them with the help of a private military company in return for certain privileges in the business of natural resources of its country.

4.4.3 Central African Republic

CAR is a former French colony that struggles with high levels of poverty with its rich diamond, gold, and uranium resources due to weak state authority. There is no effective control of government in most parts of the country, and corruption is widespread. Besides its economic importance, CAR is also geopolitically attracting other countries' attention due to its central position that connects the western and eastern parts of Africa. The country began to experience severe internal conflicts among different (mostly religious) power centers starting from 2004 (Sukhankin 2020b). With the crisis in 2012/13, the country started to even suffer more from humanitarian crises. In order to prevent these humanitarian issues, prevent deaths, and to provide security in the CAR, France has made an operation to the country but could not get the expected result. In 2016/17, French and US forces withdrew from the region, and this created a power vacuum that was filled by Moscow. In the same year, President Faustin-Archange Touadéra agreed with Russia for military equipment, training, and his personal security (Dukhan 2020: 2). With the approval of the UN Security Council, Russia also granted permission for transfer of some Russian military equipment and weapons to the CAR Army.

Russia announced that it has sent some military and civilian instructors to CAR. However, evidence showed that these civilian instructors were in fact members of the Wagner Group. According to Dukhan (2020: 3–6), the presence of Wagner in CAR stems from several different reasons that serve further Russian foreign policy objectives. First one is conducting peace negotiations with different armed groups in the country; second, obtaining political allies who will stand by the President Touadéra; third one is assisting CAR army (if necessary in direct combat) in its efforts to take back country's territories and natural resource facilities; fourth, supporting pro-Touadéra non-states armed groups; and lastly, modifying the constitution so that Touadéra can stay more in power, and Russia could enjoy the contracts that have been made with him. With all these objectives and more, Wagner transferred to CAR to play a role that is parallel with Moscow's aims. The main threat to the central government today is posed by religiously motivated militias such as the Muslim Seleka and Christian Antibalaka which control majority of the country, while government soldiers control the capital and surrounding regions. The guards at Touadéra were originally Rwandan UN troops, but the country's reconciliation with Russia resulted in their displacement and the whole transfer of security responsibilities to the Russians, who now have unrestricted access to the president's schedule (Asgarov 2021: 15). Russia's military and economic presence in the Central African Republic can also be viewed through the lens of geoeconomics, because the CAR's geographical location makes it a bridge that opens the way to more economically attractive regions of Africa, thereby "creating an axis of influence from Sudan in the north to Angola in the south." (Asgarov 2021: 18). Russia is not interested in stopping the country's horrific religious battles between Muslims and Christians, or in restoring President Touadéra's complete control over the whole country's territory. Except for military cooperation, Russia cannot and will not provide a viable development model to African nations. On the contrary, Russia seeks to foster instability in order to enhance its military presence, retain the present system, and obtain access to natural resources, which principally corresponds to the hunger of Russian economic institutions and powerful oligarchs close to power. Such economic collaboration benefits just Russian companies and does not bode well for the people of the Central African Republic. In economic terms, African nations may most likely anticipate more from China than from Russia (Asgarov 2021: 18).

Although there is no conclusive evidence about either their existence or their functions, apart from Wagner, two more PMCs—Sewa Security Services and Patriot, claimed to be present in CAR (Giles, Akimenko 2019). However, it is argued that Sewa, which is registered in CAR in 2017, is created to cover the legal background for the deployment of Wagner personnel, who train CAR Army regarding the use of Russian weapons (Dolinina et al. 2019; Dukhan 2020: 6). Gradually, the number of instructors in the country reached to hundreds. If not similar to the previous cases, a firm called Lobaye Invest appeared in 2017 in CAR and has been awarded with the “privilege” to have mining licenses throughout the country including areas where the insurgents dominate. While Russia was up and running in CAR via its hybrid methods, there was one important impediment who had the potential to restrict Moscow in the country: France. To prevent further influence of Paris in the CAR, Russian “instructors” who are present in the country started to inspire a discourse that defines Paris and other western countries as an imperialist/colonial power, whereas Russian Federation appears as a friend who helps you in your difficult times (Dukhan 2020: 7–8). However, this perception changing effort of Moscow is rather pragmatic than long-term strategy. It is hard to claim that Russia is aiming to replace France who is the most crucial country for CAR’s economy right now. Thus, the most convenient path for Moscow is utilizing a couple of official military advisors accompanied with lots of PMC personnel who are capable of a variety of jobs. Indeed, it seems to be the first consideration of Russia to conduct its foreign policy while economically having one foot in CAR (Sukhankin 2020b). One dimension of this economic foothold comes from the diamond industry in CAR. Moscow is eager to lift UN sanctions on CAR that dictates limited export of diamonds. Therefore, Russia’s position as chair of Kimberley Process²⁴ is in accordance with its aims in CAR diamond trade. Together with Russian diamond firm Alrosa, not surprisingly Prigozhin-linked M-Invest is also willing to become a part of the diamond business in this Central African country (Ramani 2021).

The presence of Wagner is well documented by the photographs taken during the May Day celebrations in Bangui, the capital city of CAR, while they were guarding the president and other officials (Searcey 2019). However, the suspicious deaths of three Russian journalists in 2018, in CAR, who were making research about the activities of Wagner Group in the country even increased the focus over Russian activities in the country and created a strong belief that the party responsible from the deaths of these journalists is Wagner itself to keep its activities relatively hidden. Regarding the allegations, a former Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky claimed that he can prove Russian attachment to the incident (Gricius 2019). And the presence of about three Prigozhin-linked planes over CAR “within days of the murder of Russian journalists” (Dolinina et al. 2019) only increased the suspicions.

All in all, Bangui also chose the Russian hybrid military support to stabilize the country. President Touadéra’s spokesperson Yaloke Mokpeme stated that they will be able to control their diamond mines with the assistance of Russia, and therefore, CAR aimed to finance the reconstruction costs of the country from the income from diamond trade. Nevertheless, the assistance also costs money. Therefore, there were several contracts between the Russian side and the Bangui government on mining areas (Searcey 2019). And, yet another country was relying on its natural resources to suppress the insurgency or terrorism activities by receiving military support of a foreign country in return for giving

²⁴ The Kimberley Process is a series of meetings of African diamond-producing states to discuss ways to stop the trade in ‘conflict diamonds’ and ensure that these diamond trade does not finance insurgents.

shares/licensing rights from its natural resources; and the pattern works the same when exporting country use PMCs to operate more freely and effectively in the importing country.

4.4.4 Sudan

Sudan is a country that follows a very similar pattern with other countries mentioned in this chapter. It has a geo-strategic importance (such as CAR and Venezuela) due to its access to the Red Sea; and it possesses a considerable amount of natural resources but still struggles with fierce poverty and insecure public environment (such as Syria, Libya, CAR, Mozambique, Venezuela). During the era of former President Omar al-Bashir (who came to power in 1989 and was overthrown by military coup in 2019), Sudan started to witness rebel movements and civil war within the country. In order to save itself from this both domestically and internationally unsustainable position, Sudanese officials tried to get close with Russia. Apart from the majority of the world's position, al-Bashir stood with Russia in its conflict with Georgia in 2008, and annexation of Crimea in 2014. In 2017, there appeared to be some video-backed claims suggesting the Russian (via PMC) presence in Sudan that was training Sudanese military. In the same year, President al-Bashir made an indirect proposal to the Kremlin for being more "active" in his country which would result in a widened sphere of influence of Russia in Africa and neighboring regions (Sukhankin 2020b). The mainstay of the proposal was giving an opportunity to Russia in Sudan to create a naval base on the Red Sea that would be a geo-strategically significant gain against western powers. (Larson 2019). Moreover, Sudan found itself in a similar position with Syria where there are natural resources but also civil war, and thought what worked for Assad regime—Russian military equipment, involvement, and training changed the direction of the conflict—could very much work for al-Bashir regime.

In 2018, the presence of Russian military personnel training Sudanese army in South Darfur was confirmed by president al-Bashir. Stratfor also claimed that Wagner is there to provide security for a variety of mining facilities. However, several photos in online circulation points out that the aim of Wagner is not just to train Sudanese army or to provide area security but also directly participate in conflict within cities (Gricius 2019). Regarding this participation, after the appearance of Russian military vehicles near the protests, it is strongly suggested that PMC Wagner is used to suppress the public protests that were against the regime. Even though there were not any official announcements regarding the Russian military activities in Sudan, it was later disclosed by the Kremlin that both private (Wagner) and official Russian military personnel were lawfully assisting to Sudanese military forces within the boundaries of a contract (Sukhankin 2020b; Luhn, Nicholls 2019). Although the continuation of Russian military presence in Sudan was questioned after the fall of al-Bashir in 2019, a group of Russian representatives flew to Sudan immediately via a Prigozhin-linked jet (Dolinina et al. 2019). New administration of Sudan did not cancel the military base project of Russia near Port Sudan, and Putin approved the construction of the base with nuclear capacity (Independent Türkçe 2020). It seems that one important point of Sudan's approval of continuation of the project is the desire to continue to take advantage of the benefits of Russian PMS. And that could be considered as a foreign policy win for Moscow via PMCs.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has sought valid answers to the question of whether private military companies play a role in foreign policy implementation process of states? If they do, in which roles and instances they are involved. In the contemporary international system, use of violence by sovereign actors over others increasingly became unpopular and restricted by international law. Therefore, states are headed to alternative ways to realize their foreign policies which necessitates military involvement. This study points out that one of these ways is utilization from PMCs. Therefore, the importance of the study in international relations stems from understanding this particular instance of conducting foreign policy abroad. In the literature, there are a number of relevant studies written about the link between PMCs and foreign policy. However, most of these studies either consider private military industry as a brand-new concept that emerged as a result of neo-liberal market that took advantage of the globalized world to spread, or simply evaluate it as a continuation of mercenary tradition. PMCs on the other hand, do not define themselves as mercenary companies but legal entities that operate within the boundaries of law. Therefore, with all these different perspectives there emerges a need for another explanation that both covers the past and contemporary dynamics of private violence with a more holistic understanding. Firstly, this study theoretically argues that mercenarism was always a part of the privatization of war, and this situation was not always an unethical practice as today. Thus, it is objectionable to both disroot PMCs completely from mercenarism because of their bad reputation and few organizational differences, or to present them as a new concept regardless of the historical evolution process. Thus, to have a more solid perspective of the Russian way of privatized war and overall use of PMCs in foreign policy, it is important to consider the broader historical picture without being anachronistic. Even though they are not the same organizations or formations, they are not that different either. PMCs are transformed, more institutionalized, and corporatized according to today's world.

Throughout much of the course of history, there was not strict centralization or total monopolization in armies. There were commercial, contractual military initiatives that served the contracted party's interests in return for profit. Money, interest, and war were all together. Apart from the conventional apparent use of mercenaries like before, because of the ethical questioning of the concept especially with the rise of the nation-state system, mercenary use switched to a more confidential practice. Lately, this privatization practice started to be supplied by PMCs who are using the principle of being politically independent from state authorities. Thus, they present themselves as legal, business-oriented actors, but they are collaborating with states similar to mercenaries anyway.

The emergence of PMCs was especially after the Cold War. All the different factors such as the power vacuum that occurred in certain places after the retreat of super powers, military personnel and equipment surplus after shrinking of militaries, rising terrorism and civil wars, weak political authorities that depends on external military aid, increasing public discontent towards deaths of soldiers abroad, democratic restrictions to foreign military operations/missions, a broad range of PMC services and including their technically competent ready workforce, facilitated the wide use of PMCs. Since there is not one type of PMC that provides only one type of service, it is hard to distinguish them from one another, and hard to categorize them. In Africa, the previous negative mercenary experience did not stop

some countries from depending upon private military actors, specifically to PMCs. Balkans, Middle East, and Colombia in addition to Africa, became the most prominent areas of active use of PMCs and their involvement in foreign policy.

In the Russian part of the story, PMCs is a part of Moscow's hybrid war concept. Even though mercenaries and PMCs in Russia are illegal, Russian PMCs are registered abroad to bypass the law. Moscow, like the West, is highly benefitting from them in foreign policy. There are several reasons why PMCs are suitable for conducting foreign policy. First, states can falsify their own presence by claiming that PMCs are not state-driven actors, so can claim that they do not carry any responsibility. Also, states can make a circuit by using PMCs but not national armies to militarily interfere in a case to refrain from public and institutional pressure and limitations such as in the case of US mobilization of PMCs to Bosnia as a result of 20 thousand soldier limitation of US Congress. They are perfect cover to operate militarily abroad—at least they provide legal deniability, and highly convenient to decrease public opposition in terms of body-bag effect. For Russia, they are also relatively effective in restricting NATO's response since the physical source of aggression is not the Russian Army but (proxy) PMCs. Mainly, Russian PMS started to attract attention with the Ukrainian Crisis, but the quantity of debates made its peak in the Syrian Civil War. Wagner here participated in several missions including fighting against rebels, recapturing oil and gas facilities, and training locals to keep the Assad regime in power. In Libya, another pro-Russian side Haftar supported by PMCs to increase Russian strategic and financial gains in the region. In Mozambique, Sudan, and CAR, Russia by using Wagner tried to keep pro-Russian administrations in power, secure the areas where there are both natural resources and insurgents, and worked to increase its influence in these countries. In Venezuela, private military companies allowed Russia to geo-strategically disturb the US, and gain advantage in other foreign policy subjects like Syria.

The study reached several conclusions regarding this research subject. The first conclusion is about the well-known mercenary-PMC debate. It is not possible to consider PMCs as pure mercenaries or completely different independent actors but rather as transformed actors of private war. They share a considerable amount of similar logic and characteristics. The practice of "contracting" fighters to foreign entities is still the same. In other words, while Kings or other sovereigns were outsourcing the war in order to be more effective in their strategies, today states or NSAs of international relations are outsourcing the war via PMCs to further enhance their positions or policies. Thus, the main change is not regarding the functionality but the title. PMCs, who adapted themselves according to the needs and conditions of the contemporary world, are much more flexible and have diverse capabilities. They are cat's-paw in foreign policy when mobilized by powerful countries, and free—or at least necessary tools, when hired by weak countries (Nebolsina 2019: 98). Nevertheless, whether privatized or not, the use of violence continues to be an expression of the political agenda of states as Clausewitz argues.

Another conclusion is the fact that private military companies are heavily being used as foreign policy instruments of states. There are several reasons behind that practice. One reason is that while PMCs are serving to foreign policy and economic interests of the state as a power factor, they are decreasing the legal, military, and political costs by keeping the state as distant as possible to the military instance. Therefore, concerning government becomes able to dodge the internal pressure as well as legal restrictions, and the necessary effort to convince the public for the use of violence loses its importance. However, benefiting from PMCs directly by contracting them is not the only way. In the case of some

African states who are willing to hire PMCs to use them in their civil wars, home states of these PMCs are indirectly got involved with these African states' natural resource business as a result of given concessions to their PMCs in return for their services. Moscow, by providing its "illegal" PMCs to states who need military support, or using them in operations, gained many benefits. Overall, PMCs occupy a significant place in Russia's hybrid war as both military and foreign policy proxies. By unofficially mobilizing them, the Kremlin became capable of engaging with other states—such as Ukraine or the US (in Syria), without raising the intensity and tension of conflict. And in both cases, this method was successful to prevent the conflict from turning into a direct total war. This type of covert war of Russia in Ukraine increased the concerns that the Kremlin can deploy Wagner Group or another PMC to any other part of former Soviet space to conduct another hybrid war if finds necessary. That's because this type of covert war via private/non-state actors creates confusion between other states on how to interpret the situation, it weakens the possibility of a strong response just as it happened in the Ukrainian case (Reynolds 2019: 10). Overall, Russia's utilization of PMCs can be discussed under two main motivations. One of them is implementing its own grand strategy or foreign policy to gain geo-political and/or geo-strategic achievements against the West as in the case of Sudan, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Syria. The second one is economic since the country's economy heavily depends upon oil and natural gas exports. Thus, Moscow tries to engage with the weak states who are rich in terms of natural resources, in order to gain influence over these resources to manage them in a way that minimizes the Russian losses in the market.

In the first years of the emergence of PMS, companies such as Sandline International, Blackwater, and Executive Outcomes were heavily involved in direct combat to achieve their home states' military objectives. Later, with the incidents that resulted with the deaths of innocent people and increasing effect of the anti-mercenary norm over PMCs, private military companies started to retreat from active combat and started to provide more background services. However, most of Russian PMCs including Wagner, did not experience such adaptation, and they continued to be in the ground with their only difference being that they were not official parts of Russia, and that provided them a broader area of movement. These PMCs are not officially connected to Russia, because it is illegal in the country to conduct such military business. This is strengthening Moscow's position in two ways. One, the illegality of PMCs allows Russian officials to control these companies' activities by keeping the stick of mercenary-act law. The other way is related to the nature of discreteness of the PMC-state relations. While Western states were claiming that PMCs are independent actors of the free market to free themselves from the responsibility, therefore, their "business" abroad is not an act of the state, Russia even tries to cut the indirect link with PMCs in front of the international community by claiming that they are illegal in the country and they do not interact with illegal actors, so that they are not responsible and/or involved in these actions. In that way, Russia creates a more solid ground to defend itself against accusations of using PMCs.

It is important to note that the study faced several limitations. The nature of the private military industry is not transparent, and it is quite difficult to conduct interviews with the active personnel of the companies, or to obtain first-hand information from these companies about their operations. Because of the lack of primary resources, there are lots of speculative information in both literature and media which makes the liability of obtained information not solid. When considering states' covert engagements with

these PMCs, it becomes hard to provide concrete examples of PMCs in foreign policy. Therefore, apart from the careful examination of the sources of information about their accuracy, logical justifications of the author contributed to study to further reveal the nature of connection between state and PMCs.

Even though there are considerable amounts of studies on PMCs, still there are specific areas that need to be studied. One of them is regarding the states' use of violence. There is a gradually increasing understanding among people that human life is more valuable than ever, and that results in more distanced attitudes of the public towards military operations abroad, which leads governments to use PMCs. In other words, states outsource their military operations to refrain from public pressure. However, it is still a question mark whether this behavior corrodes the monopoly of the state over the use of violence as Schreier and Caparini (2005) discusses, or this privatization of war is decreasing the role of the army in the use of violence instead. Thus, the role of PMCs as an (partial) alternative to armies can be discussed. In addition to uncontrolled governments, the possible effects and outcomes of the deactivation of the public in a delicate state, soldier, and public trio via privatization of war should also be discussed. Another subject that is beyond the scope of this study is supposed Russian PMC involvement in countries such as Nigeria, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Angola, Sierra Leone, Brunei, and Mali. However, that is because there is almost no concrete information, and the existent information is highly subjective and limited at the time of this study is written, possible area-studies in this subject could be made in the future.

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