



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
INSTITUTE FOR AREA STUDIES**

**THE ROLE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES IN CONFLICT
ZONES: WAGNER GROUP IN MALI**

MASTER'S THESIS

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DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN STUDIES

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Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elem EYRİCE TEPECİKLİOĞLU

September 2024

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that the thesis is written according to the writing rules of Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences



Volkan ÖZKAN

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ÖZET

ÖZEL GÜVENLİK ŞİRKETLERİNİN ÇATIŞMA BÖLGELERİNDEKİ ROLÜ: WAGNER GRUBU'NUN MALİ'DEKİ VARLIĞI

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Özel askeri şirketler; devletler, uluslararası kuruluşlar ve çok uluslu şirketlere güvenlik hizmeti sunmaktadır. Özel askeri şirketlerin tarihinde Soğuk Savaşın bitişi milat olmuştur. Savunma bütçelerinin azaltılması ve küçülen ordu birliklerinden terhis edilen askerler, özel askeri şirketlerin hızla çoğalmasına sebep olmuştur. Sağladıkları ekonomik, teknik ve siyasi katkılar dolayısıyla özellikle ABD, Birleşik Krallık ve Rusya menşeli özel askeri şirketler dünyanın farklı bölgelerinde faaliyet göstermektedir. Şirketlerin görevleri arasında çatışmalarda yer alma, askeri danışmanlık ve eğitim, kritik tesislerin korunması ve lojistik hizmetlerin sağlanması yer almaktadır. Batı ülkelerine benzer şekilde Rusya'da da özel askeri şirketler Soğuk Savaş'ın bitimiyle birlikte ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu noktada, hem Wagner Grubu, hem de 2023 yılında onun yerine kurulan Afrika Kolordusu, gerek askeri güvenlik gerekse ekonomik ve algı yönetimi operasyonları ile dikkat çekmektedir. Kronikleşmiş istikrarsızlık sorunuyla karşı karşıya olan Mali hükümeti 2021 yılı sonlarından itibaren Wagner güçlerini davet etmiştir. Kendi sınırları içerisinde egemenliğini tam olarak tesis edemeyen Mali hükümeti bu kapsamda Wagner ile işbirliği yapmaya karar vermiştir. Wagner, Mali'de de askeri, ekonomik ve dezenformasyon operasyonları yürütmüştür. Tezde arşiv kayıtları, ülkelerin kanun ve mevzuatı gibi birincil kaynakların yanı sıra; konuyla ilgili yayınlanmış kitap, makale, gazete, rapor ve benzeri araştırma çalışmaları gibi ikincil kaynaklardan da yararlanılarak Mali'nin Wagner ile ilişkisi analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mali, Rusya, Wagner Grubu, African Corps, özel askeri şirketler

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES IN CONFLICT ZONES: WAGNER GROUP IN MALI

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MA in African Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elem EYRİCE TEPECİKLİOĞLU

Private military companies provide security services to states, international organizations and multinational corporations. The end of the Cold War was a turning point in the history of PMCs. Reduction of defense budgets and demobilization of soldiers from shrinking armies caused PMCs to proliferate rapidly. Due to the economic, technical and political contributions they provide, private military companies mostly from the USA, the UK and Russia, operate in different parts of the world. Duties of these companies range from taking part in conflicts, military consultancy and training, protecting critical facilities and providing logistics services. Similar to the Western equivalents, Russian private military companies emerged after the end of the Cold War. Both the Wagner Group and the African Corps, stand out with military security, business and perception management operations. The Malian government, which has been facing chronic instability problems, invited Wagner forces in late 2021. The government, which could not fully establish its sovereignty within its own borders, decided to cooperate with Wagner in this context. Wagner conducted military, business and disinformation operations in Mali. In the thesis, Mali's relationship with Wagner was analyzed by using primary sources such as archival records, laws and regulations of relevant countries, as well as secondary sources such as books, articles, newspapers, reports and similar research studies published on the subject.

Keywords: Mali, Russia, Wagner Group, African Corps, private military companies

ABBREVIATIONS

AFISMA: African-led International Support Mission to Mali

AQIM: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

CAR: Central African Republic

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

EO: Executive Outcomes

EU: European Union

EUTM: European Union Training Mission in Mali

GNA: Government of National Accord

GSPC: Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

IRA: Internet Research Agency

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MNLA: National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

MPRI: Military Professional Resources Inc.

MUJAO: Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PMSC: Private Military Security Company

PMC: Private Military Company

PSC: Private Security Company

RUF: Revolutionary United Front

SAA: Syrian Arab Army

UN: United Nations

UNITA: National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

INTRODUCTION

States, international organizations, multinational companies and non-governmental organizations are the primary actors of international relations. Private military companies (PMCs), also known as private security companies (PSCs) or private military security companies (PMSCs) have emerged as new actors in the fields of international relations and security. According to the Montreux Document on Private Military Companies, the most widely acknowledged legal norm in the field, concluded in 2008, private military companies provide military and security services to their clients. Regardless of their specific definition, private military companies are entrusted with protecting individuals and critical residences, training and consulting local forces and taking active part in armed operations. The global budget for private military companies is estimated to reach hundreds of billions of dollars. The growing importance of these companies is associated with the privatization and outsourcing of security services, a role traditionally considered one of the core functions of sovereign states.

Considering firstly the history of PMCs, the end of the Cold War seems to constitute a turning point. During this time, many activities previously regarded as state responsibilities have been delegated to the private sector within the framework of neo-liberal transformation. Similarly, private companies have begun to embark on responsibilities in defense and security sectors. Today, private military companies undertake important duties in many countries worldwide, thanks to several advantages that will be explained in the thesis.

Secondly, the roles and capacities of private military companies vary greatly and there are notable differences between Russian and Western companies in terms of their organizational structures. For example, in Western countries, PMCs participate in tenders and compete against other firms. They typically provide services such as logistics, protection of military bases, catering and maintenance. Russian companies, on the other hand, do not engage in sectoral competition, and, in addition to the activities performed by Western companies, they undertake different tasks like direct involvement in armed conflicts.

When private military companies are mentioned, the first image that often comes to mind is the adventurous mercenaries of the past. Both mercenaries and modern private military companies aim to provide state-specific security services in return for financial compensation. When we look at approaches to mercenary utilization throughout history, Machiavelli is the first thinker to come to the fore. Machiavelli, considered one of the founders of modern political

science, discusses his views on mercenary service in *The Prince*. As noted in this book, during the 15th and 16th centuries, Italian princes, the French Emperor and the Pope preferred to employ mercenaries for various reasons. While mercenaries could offer short-term benefits, they often created long term problems. After stating the negative examples which were exposed to the principals of these merchants, Machiavelli argues that although resorting to mercenaries might be a necessary short-term solution, a wise prince should ultimately establish his own army consisting of his own citizens. (Machiavelli 1981, p. 92) Following Machiavelli, thinkers such as Locke, Hobbes, Kant and Tocqueville, who examined the concepts of state and sovereignty, also contributed to the discourse on security. The first part of the thesis explores the perspectives of these prominent thinkers on security and sovereignty. Additionally, it addresses how many African states that require private military companies are classified as failed states, defining the concept of a failed state, and examining the reason why states turn to PMCs from a theoretical perspective. As noted before, theoretical discussions are relatively sparse in academic studies on PMCs. However, the thesis will delve into these theoretical perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

In the thesis, the conceptual framework of Andreas Kruck from his article "Theorizing the use of private military and security companies: A synthetic perspective" is utilized to explain Mali's reliance on PMCs. (Kruck 2014, p. 133) Kruck's narrative explains the reasons why states resort to PMCs using functionalist, political instrumentalist and ideationist approaches. According to the functionalist approach, there are two main reasons for outsourcing security. Firstly, diminishing security budgets and the reduction in the numbers of military personnel after the Cold War are the economic factors driving this trend. For example, in the US, reduction in the army personnel led to transferring troops to more critical tasks, while remaining tasks, considered as support services, were delegated to private companies. The Executive Outcomes company, which is a template model for subsequent PMCs, operated in Sierra Leone and Angola, at a cost one-tenth of the annual budget of both country's armies. The second argument of the functionalist approach relates to the agile nature of private companies. States, due to their cumbersome structure, adapt very slowly to the changing nature of contemporary conflicts. Private companies, on the other hand, can easily adapt to battlefield developments because they employ personnel with experience in special forces, most of whom have served in Western countries.

The political-instrumentalist approach, on the other hand, attributes the outsourcing of security to political and social concerns. According to this perspective, states resort to PMCs to

avoid social and international pressures. With the end of the Cold War, democracy as a form of government and capitalism as an economical model were declared victorious but even in the absence of a rival pole, the number of conflicts around the world increased. This trend became particularly evident following the US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. After the 9/11 attacks, the demand for PMCs surged. At the height of the Iraqi War in 2003, the number of PMC members hired by the USA was almost equal to the number of army units. (Fulloon 2020, p. 30) While there was significant anti-war public opposition in the United States and other countries, the activities of private military companies generally remained outside the public eye. While the dispatch of army units abroad is subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny, private military companies typically operate under the executive branch's initiative. Additionally, public reactions to the losses suffered by army units and PMCs differ. Losses of regular army units in conflicts are highly contentious while the losses of PMC members generally do not provoke the same level of concern. To avoid such pressures, states may deploy private military companies in conflict-ridden areas.

Andreas Kruck's third approach focuses on ideology. Kruck and some other researchers find the functionalist view too economically deterministic. He links the ideationist approach to the states' preference for PMCs with the rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s. According to this approach, states are open to privatization due to the prevailing zeitgeist. This choice reflects the states' own will and initiative. While governments outsourcing their security to the private sector act as employers (or principals), private companies serve as the agents. The first part of the thesis will therefore also focus on the relationship between the state and the private company within the framework of principal-agent theory.

The second part of the thesis provides a detailed explanation of private military companies. Similar to the theoretical section, there is a lack of resources classifying PMCs. There are barely any studies that classify private military companies in a comprehensive manner. This part will benefit from Mark Fulloon's classification on the PMCs. He classifies PMCs based on their roles in conflicts. According to his classification, PMCs are divided into categories as Combat Offensive, Combat Defensive, Non-Combat Offensive and Non-Combat Defensive. While Combat Offensive PMCs are directly involved in conflicts, Combat Defensive companies provide military consultancy to armies and Non-Combat Offensive companies focus on training activities. On the other hand, Non-Combat Defensive companies are responsible for support services. (Fulloon 2020, p. 29) Given the inherent risks and expertise

required for Combat Offensive activities, the number of companies operating in this field is very limited. In this context, the Wagner Group can be considered a Combat Offensive PMC.

The third part of the thesis discusses pre-Wagner Russian private military companies. The end of the Cold War marked a turning point for the PMCs as many soldiers and special forces members discharged from armies formed the cadres of newly established private companies. Russian soldiers, who gained experience during the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the conflicts in Chechnya and the occupation of Georgia, later joined private companies. The new war doctrine adopted by the Russian General Staff emphasized preparing the Russian army to fight its enemies through unconventional warfare. This new approach, defined by the Gerasimov Doctrine, laid the foundation for future private military companies. Although this doctrine paved the way for military companies, Russia officially denied the existence of private military companies until 2022. During this period, Russian criminal laws considered armed organizations illegal and subjected their members to punishment. While benefiting from the political, economics and military contributions of PMCs as force multipliers, the Kremlin government also denies their existence when undesirable event break out. Russia's policy of denial reflects its strategy to avoid the problems associated with private companies while benefiting from their operations on the ground. This attitude of Russia is expressed in the literature with the concept of plausible deniability.

Despite Russia's official denials of Wagner's activities, Kremlin officials have been implicated in agreements that initiated Wagner's operations in Libya, Central African Republic, Sudan, Madagascar and Mozambique. Moreover, the military base where Wagner militants trained belongs to the Russian special forces unit, GRU. It was also documented that cargo planes transporting Wagner militants to conflict zones have been linked to the Russian Ministry of Defense and ammunition used by Wagner militants in the Ukrainian conflict was supplied by the Russian ministry.

In the subsequent part of the thesis, Wagner's operations in Libya, Central African Republic, Sudan, Madagascar, Mozambique, Ukraine and Syria are examined. Wagner's first documented field mission took place in Ukraine, a significant experience for both Wagner and Russia. The 'little green men' which were captured on camera during the illegal occupation of Crimea were later identified as Wagner militants. Given Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine, Wagner's activities in these occupied regions contradicted Russian domestic laws, which prohibit PMCs. Subsequently, Wagner gained prominence in Syria, particularly in the Palmyra region. During the battles in Palmyra, Wagner was on the front much

earlier than the Syrian troops. After securing military victories, Wagner militants were publicly honored with medals at ceremonies in the Kremlin. Dmitry Utkin, a former GRU personnel who named the Wagner company, initially led Wagner in Syria. However, Wagner's ties with the Kremlin government strengthened notably after Yevgeny Prigozhin assumed greater influence. Since the 2000s, Prigozhin has cultivated a close personal relationship with Putin and has since been known as Putin's chief.

The last part of the thesis examines Mali's instability and considers its classification as a failed state. Following Mali's independence, the socialist government, composed largely of former colonial administrators, centralized power in the capital Bamako, marginalizing Arab and Tuareg groups in the north. The exclusion contributed to regional instability, exacerbated by the Algerian Civil War and subsequent Libyan conflicts. Mali has faced Tuareg rebellions three times since 1991, with the 2012 rebellion prompting Tuareg groups to declare independence in April of that year. Political uncertainty intensified with the military coups during this period, while jihadist groups gained traction across the country. Since then, various regions in Mali have become ungovernable, leading to its classification as a failed state. The Malian government's inability to maintain security and provide public services in these regions, prompted their invitation of Wagner forces to the country in December 2022. The remainder of the thesis explores Wagner's extensive activities in Mali.

Research Questions

The thesis analyzes the motivations behind Mali's engagement with Wagner. Within this framework, the following sub-questions are also raised.

- 1) What are the sources of instability in Mali?
- 2) How does the Wagner Group align with the traditional PMC concept, and what characteristics distinguish Wagner from its Western counterparts?
- 3) What specific activities has Wagner undertaken in Mali?

Potential Explanations and Hypotheses

- 1) With the onset of the Tuareg rebellion in 2012 and the subsequent rise of jihadist groups, parts of Mali fell out of state control. After failing to reclaim these territories with the assistance from France and the international community, the Malian government turned to Russia since December 2021.

- 2) Mali's chronic instability mostly stems from ongoing domestic conflicts since 1991, exacerbated by the government's inability to deliver public services in northern regions and its struggle against insurgents and jihadist groups. Periodic military actions have further destabilized the political landscape.
- 3) Various approaches classify PMCs, based on their roles in armed conflicts. While traditional classifications focus on military operations, Wagner's activities extend beyond combat. In addition to military engagements, Wagner is also involved in mining, perception management and political consultancy.
- 4) Since December 2021, Wagner forces have collaborated with the Malian army, conducting military operations such as the reconquest of the city of Kidal in summer of 2023, which attracted significant attention globally and domestically. Currently, African Corps oversees and executes Wagner's activities in the country.

Representation

Wagner is undoubtedly the most discussed private military company. Despite numerous publications on private military companies since the late 1990s and especially after the Iraq war, research on Wagner remains limited. Existing studies primarily focus on the company's activities in Ukraine and Syria, with less attention given to its operations in other countries. For instance, Wagner personnel are more visible in the Central African Republic and engage openly with the media whereas their presence in Mali is more discreet. The thesis aims to capture these diverse aspects of Wagner's operations across different countries, offering insights into Russia's political and military strategies on the African continent. It also provides comparative perspectives on PMCs.

Research Challenges

Research interest in private military companies tend to fluctuate with geopolitical events. Studies surged during the Iraqi War and conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, where Wagner's activities garnered significant attention. Conversely, Wagner's operations in Africa focus mostly on the Central African Republic while its engagement in Mali receives comparatively less academic and media coverage. The dynamic nature of the Wagner issue, coupled with prevalent disinformation on its activities pose additional challenges for the researcher. For example, during the writing phase of the thesis, Wagner's march to Moscow in mid-2023 and the subsequent plane crash that claimed Wagner executives' lives underscored the rapid developments and uncertainties in researching this topic.

On the other hand, Wagner's activities in Africa are predominantly studied by Western researchers. The fact that the company operates in a secretive and military-oriented manner, limits empirical research activities. Therefore, academic research in this field often relies on external sources. Consequently, researchers outside the field may find it challenging to grasp the regions social and political dynamics accurately.

Moreover, studies on Wagner are often influenced by political considerations. French and English literature frequently adopts a critical or adversarial stance towards Wagner and Russian policies in the region. Additionally, publications from academics in Poland and Ukraine, who are more belligerent towards Russian military activities, dominate the literature numerically. While citing these kinds of resources, we acknowledge their potentially biased nature.

The thesis primarily utilized English, Turkish, French and occasionally Russian sources. However, there is a noticeable absence of publications in Arabic and local languages, which could provide critical local perspectives and insights.

Methodology

The thesis addresses a timely and evolving topic. The objective here is not to test a theory, but to conduct a case study by exploring and refining research questions through existing theoretical approaches.

As noted before, The study of private military companies has become a popular topic, especially after the 2003 Iraq invasion and regained significance during the Ukrainian crisis. While empirical data on Wagner's activities in Mali are limited, available data are evaluated within the framework of established theories to PMCs. The thesis employs a qualitative research method, enriched by comparative analysis of Wagner's activities with other PMCs and its operations in other countries. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the PMC concept and the specifics of Wagner. To this end, references to US laws and American companies such as Executive Outcomes and Blackwater are included in the analysis. These companies are prominent in the industry, often serving as benchmarks and extensively cited in academic studies.

In addition to primary sources such as archive records, related laws and the regulatory procedures on the PMCs, the thesis also draws from secondary sources such as books, articles, newspapers, reports and other types of analysis with diverse and sometimes conflicting

perspectives in theory and practice. While integrating different viewpoints from the literature, efforts were made to maintain internal validity within the thesis.

Further Research

In the literature, the number of studies examining the activities of Russia and Russian private military companies in Sub-Saharan Africa is relatively insufficient. It is especially important to make comparative analyses of different country cases. In addition, the activities of Wagner and other military companies in the field of economics are ambiguous. Studying the ways in which Russian private military companies finance their activities would make a significant contribution to the literature. Among the new developments in the region, the deployment of Ukrainian soldiers to the country, the transition to the African Corps in terms of plausible deniability, and the relationship between the Alliance of Sahelian States and Wagner are also topics that can be studied. One of the most notable deficiencies in the area is the unavailability of empirical observations.

Dissertation Direction and Outline

In the introduction part, the research question and hypothesis are put forward along with brief information about all the sections. In the second part, the theoretical framework of the thesis is discussed and within this scope, functionalist, political instrumentalist and ideationist approaches are explained. In addition, approaches of certain thinkers about mercenaries and also the concept of failed state were explained. In the third chapter, the history and the classification of private military companies, as well as the positions of private military companies in Russia are discussed. In the fourth chapter, Wagner's activities in specific countries are defined. The fifth chapter describes the political instabilities in Mali that led to Wagner's intervention in the country, while the sixth and last chapter discusses Wagner's activities in the country in more detail. Activities of the Wagner group range from military services to disinformation and economical endeavors. In the end, transformation from Wagner to African Corps was explained

CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Historical Approaches to Security

Private military companies are often associated with the mercenaries of the past. Still, there are many differences between mercenaries and private military companies. However, in terms of constituting and maintaining order, governments have utilized both mercenaries and private military companies for outsourcing their security-related responsibilities throughout history.

Before delving into the specifics of private military companies, it is important to discuss the appropriateness of states outsourcing security services to mercenaries or private military companies. Considering the Weberian view that entrusts the state with the monopoly on the use of legitimate violence, the delegation of a critical issue such as security to private companies represents an extraordinary departure from the Weberian tradition. In short, turning a public issue into a private one reflects a political choice made by states. (Dufort 2007, p. 29)

The history of states meeting their military security needs through conscripted soldiers recruited from their citizens dates back to the French Revolution. The French army made up of conscripted citizens played a major role in the protection of the country's territory against enemy troops and in the survival of the revolutionary government. (Hicks 2008, p.145) Therefore, the history of compulsory military services might be attributed to France of the 18th century. The idea of equal citizenship set forth by the French Revolution formed the intellectual basis of the republican army. However, armies consisting of conscripts have not been simultaneous with democracy and the advent of republics in each part of the world. For example, Prussia, which would later become a worldwide model with its army structure, accepted compulsory military service in 1813, as a country with a strong aristocratic tradition. Today, there are different views on citizen-military relations. In addition to the views that consider the participation of citizens in the army as important so that armies acquire legitimacy in public and get accepted in social life, there are also views arguing that citizens should serve in the army on the basis of equal citizenship in order for the army to embrace democracy vis-a-vis aristocracy. (Pfaffenzeller 2010, p. 489) During the Cold War, large budgets were allocated to armies around the world and a significant portion of the population was kept under arms and in reserve. During those years, armies filled their ranks with citizens who were conscripted through compulsory military service.

On the other hand, especially during the Middle Ages, empires, kingdoms and principalities resorted to mercenaries in order to strengthen their military power. However, the use of mercenaries has been accompanied by suspicion throughout history. Mercenaries were accused of fighting only for money and have an insufficient degree of loyalty to the person or state they served. Machiavelli, who is one of the founders of modern political science and theorized the concept of state sovereignty, reflects his distrust of mercenaries in his work "*The Prince*".

In the 13th chapter of "*The Prince*", Machiavelli stated that it would be more beneficial for a weakened ruler to turn to mercenaries rather than asking for military help from neighboring rulers. He suggested the use of mercenaries as the lesser of two evils. According to him, mercenaries whose services were purchased and paid by a prince could point their weapons in the long term at the prince who hired them, even if they prove to be beneficial in the short term. The biggest problem with mercenaries in the first place is their lack of courage. In the long run, Machiavelli recommended that a wise prince should always avoid mercenary units and form his own troops. He went on to explain how Italian commanders who resorted to mercenaries in the past experienced regrets in the long run, even though they were initially victorious. Both Machiavelli and the rulers of the period had serious distrust of mercenaries. According to him, even if conflicts between a prince and his mercenaries do not always lead to an armed conflict, the loyalty of the mercenaries to their ruler is always subject to suspicion and unrest. Machiavelli's depiction of the 16th century French army is important as it shows the problems that Swiss mercenaries created in the French nation and army. Machiavelli eventually stated that no state would be safe unless it had an army of its own. He proposes that a state's own army should consist of that state's own citizens. Machiavelli also argues that conscription affects good citizenship. (Machiavelli 1981, p. 92) Recruiting citizens into the military is also beneficial in making citizens feel that they belong to the state and that the state belongs to them. An army which is made up of its own people provides its most efficient service when it is treated well by its commanders and rulers and when it represents the general interest of the people rather than interests of the rulers. (Burk 2002, p. 11)

Machiavelli regards war as a natural consequence of inter-state relations and calls on states to be constantly ready for war. Unlike Machiavelli, Immanuel Kant believes that states governed by law, freedom and equality will achieve eternal liberal peace. In such an environment, the need for armies will decrease and therefore states will not need to have standing forces. He argues that military service should only be performed by volunteer units.

In his seminal book “Perpetual Peace”, he states that maintaining an army leads to a constant race among states to prepare for war. According to Kant, states with standing armies are reluctant to make peace because the cost of peace is the redundancy of standing armies. In Kant’s words, paying people to die or kill is against human rights. However, training individuals to protect themselves or their country in the event of foreign invasion is different and should not be excluded. (Kant 1795, p. 52)

Alexis de Tocqueville is as optimistic as Kant. In his study examining the American Constitution and the establishment of the new state, he states that democracies are more successful in creating peaceful societies. He shows his admiration for the founding philosophy of the USA and states that the USA does not have a conscription system and that compulsory military service contradicts the spirit of republic and democracy that the American system is founded on. He also underlines that the US meets its need for soldiers in its army and navy through mercenaries. However, he argues that if a state’s survival or national interests are threatened, free people will be more self-sacrificing in taking risks and taking on national duty. (Tocqueville 1835, p. 361)

Several other political thinkers including Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard also cited the army and military service as among the methods states use to impose their sovereignty on their citizens. Louis Althusser’s terminology of ‘ideological apparatuses of a state’ and Foucault’s conception of ‘biopolitics’ suggest that states administer and direct citizens through means such as education, mass communication, hospitals and the army. In this case, states are accused of creating appropriate means to establish their power and dominate over citizens. However, the failed states that will be discussed in the next section of the thesis are devoid of these instruments.

1.2. Failed States’ Reliance on the PMCs

Since the end of the Cold War, researchers focusing on the failed state concept has increased. However, there is no single definition of the concept in the literature. One of the first definitions of it came from Gerald Helman. According to Helman, failed states are incapable of sustaining their existence as a part of the international community. (Helman and Ratner 2010) Borrowing its definition as opposed to the Weberian understanding of ‘(successful) state’, a failed state is denoted as failing if it cannot exercise its legitimate authority to use force. Another definition, based on the Hobbesian social contract theory, designates the failed state as not being able to fulfill its function of providing the public services (border control, education and health services, etc.) assigned to it. (Wyler 2008, p. 9)

In more general terms, a successful sovereign state is expected to have exclusive control over its own territory, to direct its population in line with the needs of the state, and to protect its population against internal and external threats. (Karadeli 2009, p. 112) States can be considered successful to the extent that they maintain their monopolies over their own population and territory and are fully capable of fulfilling these tasks. In addition to failed state's inability to provide basic state functions, failed states often have difficulty maintaining control of their borders.

Inability of states may be visible separately in the fields of security, economics development and political representation, or they may occur simultaneously in all fields. For example, while there were multi-dimensional problems in Somalia, which stood out as a failed state during the 1990s and afterwards, Colombia in the early 2010s was unable to establish control over a certain part of its territory, despite having a successful management in terms of economic indicators. (Di John 2011, p.2)

Although the failed state concept began to be used after the Cold War, it gained its real prominence with the article "*the Coming Anarchy*" published by Robert Kaplan in 1994. Kaplan drew attention to the lack of public order in African countries, suggesting the example of the Sierra Leonean Civil War. In Kaplan's remarks, African countries face the problems of overpopulation, lack of resources, migration, and disappearance of borders and dissolution of nation states. According to him, the prevalence of PMCs reveals the failure of states in the security realm. In the African case, the states in question also face legitimacy crises. Artificial borders drawn during the colonial period were prepared without taking into account the social, economic and political realities of African countries. As a result, since their independence, the newly established states have generally faced problems in imposing their sovereignties over the entire territories. (Kaplan 1994, pp. 44-60)

The concept of a failed state is also expressed as 'failing states' and 'fragile states'. They are mostly located in the peripheral countries of the rules-based international system. Problems experienced by these states that may pose a threat to other parts of the world include migration, epidemics, radicalism and transnational conflicts. (The Fund for Peace 2023, p. 10) Certain areas of countries where state authority cannot be established and occupied by armed groups may also be called as 'ungoverned territories'. These vacant territories can also create all forms of security threats including humanitarian crises, ethnic clashes, smuggling, refugee flow, etc. The characteristic features of failed states may also be applicable to ungoverned states where states lose their monopoly on use of force and face difficulty to fulfill basic state functions and

control its borders. The main difference between failed states and ungoverned territories is that while the former encompasses an entire country, the latter may be found in a relatively functioning country. (RAND 2007)

In order to prevent these problems in failed states, international aid activities and international military operations might be put on agenda. In those cases, stable neighboring states are called ‘anchor states’ and serve as a bulwark against chaos, while on the other hand, they are considered as the epicenter for international aid and military operations. However, neighboring countries might face dangers posed by illegal organizations that settle in ungovernable lands of failed states and thrive on instability. In regions where border controls are not rigid enough, spillover effects are very common.

The issue of failed states increased its weight globally especially immediately after the September 11 attack. (Huria 2008, p.2) Western countries have accepted global terrorism as the most important threat perception, with the influence of the attacks in Istanbul in 2003, Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, following the 9/11. The coordination of the Al-Qaeda militants who carried out the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 from the ungoverned regions on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border centered the world's attention on the region. After the attack, the US administration declared Afghanistan as a breeding ground where Al-Qaeda provides training and indoctrination, recruits personnel and accesses financial resources. (Byman 2021) Similarly, ungoverned areas in all geographies of the world are considered to be a breeding ground for terrorist organizations to access opportunities such as training, recruitment and logistics. (Gaibullov, Piazza and Sandler 2024, p. 828). In a similar vein, the instability in the ungoverned areas in the Sahel region was interpreted as a source of serious problems for both the Gulf of Guinea countries, France and Europe. (Yazbeck 2018, p. 7)

The failure of African states to establish their sovereignty over their own people takes its roots from the colonial period. The attitudes of local elites who had been working in the colonial administration and the subsequent independent states, towards the local people and ethnic groups were aimed at dominating them rather than acquiring political legitimacy. (Mohamed Ali 2023, p. 2) The priority of colonial administrations in African countries was to access Africa's natural resources in the fastest and most efficient way, far from approaching local people as political subjects. During this period, local administrations did not make serious investments in the regions they governed, and public services like education and health services were either delegated to churches and missionaries, or largely ignored by the states. In order to rule these remote countries in the colonized continent, European governments preferred to lean

on and favor certain ethnic groups. The most well-known example is the Belgians government favoring the Tutsi ethnic group in government and laid the future grounds for conflicts between them and the Hutus (Berman 1998, p. 316). Those conflicts would escalate into a genocide in the 1990s

The independences of African countries were achieved under the leaderships of small number of educated African elites, rather than being the struggles of the local peoples. Independence attempts of them were far from being mass movements. Local elites who heralded independences often received education in Western institutions, joined civil services and took part in colonial administrations during colonialism. Their view of people and new state also bore the traces of the colonial period. Especially in the countries that adopted socialist rule, state was seen as a tool to transform society. These groups saw the local people as a group to be managed and modernized. Therefore, new administrations did not seek to derive their legitimacies from people and respect accountability in the eyes of them. With military coups taking place in just a few years after independence and the subsequent civil wars in many countries, it became clear how difficult it was for the states to gain legitimacy from the public.

1.3. Theoretical Approaches to the PMCs

The existing literature on private military companies are generally case studies focusing on the reasons and consequences of outsourcing, from an empirical perspective. However, the number of articles providing a theoretical analysis on the preferences and tendencies in this field is lacking. Theories that would allow PMCs to be grouped into specific subcategories are insufficient. The relevant literature is often based on various criterias such as the relationship PMCs establish with the host country's army, the roles they undertake in conflicts, and their proximity to the battlefield. Apart from that, academic studies discuss the historical evolution of private military companies dating back to the Cold War era and afterwards. However, it is noteworthy that the least studied topic in terms of PMCs might be the theoretical dimension covering the issue. Even if wars are getting privatized since especially the last 3 decades all around the world, theoretical approaches explaining why states, international organizations or multinational companies resort to private companies to provide security are lacking.

One of the most widely attributed theories regarding the increasing role of private military companies is that of Andreas Kruck in the article "*Theorizing the use of private military and security companies: A synthetic perspective*". In the thesis, most generally, the conceptualization of Kruck was attributed. In the article, he explains the rise of private military companies with 3 different conceptualizations. These three approaches are not alternatives to

each other. Rather, these three concepts are complementary and all of them might be applicable to each different state. (Kruck 2014, p. 133)

In Kruck's analysis, the rise of PMCs represents one of the most serious ruptures of states from their historical positions and roles. As noted before, state, in the Weberian sense, refers to an institution that has the sole authority to exercise power over a certain population in a designated geography. However, by resorting to PMCs, states delegate some of their authority to use force to the private sector due to particular economic, political and technical reasons. Avant concurs with this idea that states' recourse to the private sector to meet their security needs will harm the states' sole position in this field and that this will become a deviation from the Weberian understanding. (Avant 2005, p. 124)

According to Kruck, states apply to PMCs for functionalist, political-instrumentalist and ideationist reasons. The following sections will focus on different approaches explaining why states choose to delegate some of their prerogative powers to private companies.

1.3.1. Functionalist Theory

The functionalist approach dominates the literature on private military companies. It focuses on the material benefits of utilization of PMCs. First of all, after the end of the Cold War, public demands for restricting military expenditures and shifting the budget to different areas made it increasingly difficult to maintain large military units constantly ready for combat. Thus, states sought to refrain from the cost of keeping a regular army constantly ready for war. (Ballard 2007, p. 49) For instance, while the number of military personnel in the USA was 2.24 million in 1985, this number decreased to 1.37 million in 2001; it was 3.90 million in Russia (former USSR) in 1985; it then decreased to 1.04 million in 2005. (Our World in Data) Similarly, the proportion of defense expenditures in the budget decreased by $\frac{1}{3}$ from 1990 to 1995 all around the world. (IMF e-library)

After the 1990s, even if armies were demobilized and defense budgets were reduced, the number of military clashes around the world did not decrease, on the contrary, it increased. According to the research of Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), conflicts continued in 40 different regions in the world as of the mid-2010s. (Gates and Nygård 2016, p. 2) In order to provide security under such circumstances, the functionalist perspective argues that states take privileges which the private sector offers, especially in order to increase efficiency and diminish financial concerns. In support of this view, Petersohn also emphasizes that privatization is inevitable for states to continue to meet their security needs with their decreasing

financial resources and personnel cadres. (Petersohn 2010, p. 6) Philippe Dufort explains the rise of both demand and supply in the PMC sector. He attributes the reason for this simultaneous rise to the job search of former military personnels who left their duties as a result of the shrinking of armies and to local conflicts that then broke out in many parts of the world. (Dufort 2007, p. 26) Similar to Kruck's argument, Kinsey also argues that resorting to the private sector was an inevitable consequence of the shrinking of armies and decreasing budgets with the end of the Cold War. (Kinsey 2006, p. 98) In explaining why Russia preferred to utilize PMCs, Bukkvoll and Østensen state that, at a time when armies are shrinking and budgets are decreasing, applying to private companies is seen as a necessity of the current era. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 7)

The activities of the Executive Outcomes, which is considered one of the pioneers of private military companies in Africa are shown as a case example of cost effectiveness. Executive Outcomes company participated in conflicts in Sierra Leone and Angola and changed the courses of the civil wars in these countries. During this period, Angola's annual defense expenditure was 515 million US dollars, while Sierra Leone's was around 41 million dollars in 1994. On the other hand, Executive Outcomes company's annual cost to Angola was \$40 million; it was much less in Sierra Leone. The company's cost-effectiveness is also clearly seen in terms of personnel numbers that it employs. In the mid-90s, Executive Outcomes had 30 employees. However, the company declared that it could dispatch a brigade (650 soldiers) to any region of the world within 15 days if it was requested. (Howe 1998, p. 4) In the mid-1990s, the British intelligence service described Executive Outcomes as the most powerful military unit in Sub-Saharan Africa, except the South African army. Executive Outcomes deployed 600 soldiers to Angola and 300 to Sierra Leone. However, despite such a small number of personnel, the company was even able to utilize cargo and attack helicopters and Mig series jet aircraft in its operations. (Howe 1998, p. 3)

Secondly, states are regarded as slow to adapt to the rapid changes taking place in military conflicts due to their cumbersome structures. (Zamparelli 1999, p. 14) The international interventions like the 1991 invasion of Iraq after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact were an indication that wars would not end, but only changed their appearance. The September 11 also constituted a new milestone on a global scale in the nature of wars. Since this date, Western countries have declared global war on terrorism. From then on, Western armies were fighting against phantom enemies, terrorist organizations, which do not adhere to a certain territory and are uncertain about where and when to attack. Today, wars generally

involve states clashing with organizations defined as terrorists. New wars are being waged with unconventional methods, against enemies that are not easy to define and with unclear objectives. (Le Monde 2003) The struggles of states against armed separatist groups or terrorist organizations have the appearance of asymmetric war. Although wars are less intense today, the balance of power between the warring parties is disproportionate and the goals of the warring parties are far from clear. States apply to PMCs against organizations that use the land well, hide among the local population and provide themselves with logistical opportunities. Global fight against terrorism has created a serious need for PMCs. PMCs which consist mostly of former soldiers who can answer new developments in their area of expertise are called in action to cope with these rapid changes.

New and more sophisticated weapons entering the army inventory have also increased the need for more trained and expert military personnel. According to Kruck, as the technological and operational intricacy of modern conflicts increases, there will be an increasing use of private military companies. (Kruck 2024, p. 116) Thus, it is seen as beneficial to receive support from more compatible actors which are small but still technically adept. (Kinsey 2006, p. 52)

1.3.2. Political Instrumentalist Theory

The second conceptualisation in Kruck's taxonomy is the political-instrumentalist model. While the functionalist approach focuses more on cost-effectiveness and the economic dimension, the political-instrumentalist interpretation argues that democratic governments prefer PMCs to avoid political costs. (Chesterman 2007, p. 4) In this regard, governments apply to PMCs to avoid responsibility and shift the blame within the framework of the principal-agent theory. In governments where legal and democratic checks and balances by judiciary, parliament, civil society and media are effective, PMCs are instrumentalized to reduce political pressures.

In other words, legal control and democratic transparency mechanisms can be constraining for a government's security policies. Unsuccessful military operations and images of dead soldiers can reverse domestic public opinion and force governments to account. Thanks to resorting to the private sector, political responsibility of a government is also softened. This is because the public reactions to dead soldiers in a conscripted army are different to lost members of PMCs who voluntarily join in conflicts in return for cash. (Leander 2006, p. 80) Furthermore, governments may not have to bear responsibility for military losses or defeats as long as they manage to maintain their distance from PMCs. (Kruck 2014, p. 117) The utilization

of PMCs constitute also an appropriate way for states to circumvent international pressure. Russian deployment of Wagner would reveal that states may try to refrain from international pressures by denying any connection to a disputed PMC.

According to a research conducted by the Watson Institute, more than 8000 PMC members who had served on behalf of the USA in Iraq and Afghanistan lost their lives after 2001. There are more than 7000 casualties among military personnel serving in the USA. (Watson Institute 2021) However, data on PMC members who lost their lives in conflict zones is far from accurate. Because the US Department of Defense does not announce the deaths of PMC members. Having foreign personnel serving in PMCs makes it further difficult to record military losses.

Analyzing Russia's use of PMCs, Bukkvoll and Østensen state that Russia's efforts to minimize military losses are among the most important reasons for turning to PMCs. In particular, public support for Russian soldiers engaging in ground combat operations to support regimes allied to Russia, seems to be very much limited. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 8) Especially since the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the sensitivity of the Russian public towards military losses has augmented, as shown by several researches. (Pope 1981, p. 347)

Although the use of PMCs will reduce political pressures by decreasing the country's military losses in wars, keeping PMCs within the rules of international law is also among the responsibilities expected from states, and international expectations in this regard is likely to increase. For example, when the issue of attacks and harassment against Afghan civilians by military companies which are supporting the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan was brought to the agenda, ISAF Commander David Petraus stated that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) administration was responsible for the selection and management of private military companies operating in the country. (Krahmann 2016, p. 1411)

For example, the US sought to contribute to the training of the Colombian army which was led by a pro-Western government, through private companies, beside the financial support it brought to the country. Within this framework US-based private companies, notably Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), provided training to the Colombian army in the mountainous regions of the country. (Ospina 2004) However, some of the Colombian troops trained by the US troops were later accused of affiliation to various criminal organizations and human rights violations. In these cases, the US government chose to shift responsibility from itself and thus tried to avoid international pressure. (Mahe and Pouget 2016, p. 21)

In a similar vein, due to military secrecy, governments may choose not to disclose the number and locations of their units and soldiers. Beside these, it may be preferable not to disclose details regarding military expenditures or military losses. However, Avant and Sigelman emphasize that the US army is more transparent when it comes to disclosing its own military activities, compared to the activities of private military companies. They claim that the US government is more reticent about the PMCs and prefers not to share enough details. The US army and relevant departments of the government prefer to conceal the locations of private military companies, their losses in conflicts or government expenditures for them. Exploiting the advantage of the ambiguous situation about the jurisdiction, in terms of PMCs activities, informations about them is covered up by the US government despite the Right to Information Act. Details about PMCs are preferred to be veiled by putting forward the claim that these informations are a kind of commercially sensitive information. (Avant and Sigelman 2010, p. 244) In such a case, sharing the requested information remains at the discretion of the relevant PMC.

On the other hand, there have been some prominent cases where the government faced enormous reactions from the public about their utilization of PMCs. For example, in Iraq, the Blackwater company, which was working on behalf of the USA, caused many casualties during a duty to protect a US embassy convoy in Iraq. As a result of this incident called Nisour Square Massacre in 2007, 17 Iraqi civilians lost their lives. After it, the US government faced enormous international pressures and its relation with the Iraqi government soured. (Lind 2014) In another occasion, security personnel of the Blue Mountain Group company were accused of abandoning their duty areas to protect the US Embassy in Libya in 2012, when terrorist groups attacked the embassy in Tripoli. This incident also caused serious disruptions in the US society's view of PMCs. (Ramirez and Wood 2019, p. 1434) Such incidents lead people to question the allegiance of PMC personnel to their duty and to label them with mere profit seeking in the absence of any national values.

The lawsuit against the Blackwater company after the aforementioned incident in Iraq in 2007 caused the American Congress to be baffled about the prevalence of Blackwater's activities. (Singer 2007) While there were 20 thousand PMC members in Iraq in May 2004, some sources claim that this number reached 190 thousand in early 2008. Congress did not take any steps in the face of such a rapid increase in the numbers of PMC personnel. (Avant and Sigelman 2010, p. 252) Undoubtedly, if the government were to send the same amount of army members to the region, it would create serious problems both in the eyes of the public and the

Congress. However, after the Blackwater crisis in 2007, Congress tried to increase its control over PMCs through budget approvals and new law amendments. Some authors like Pattison, comment about the positive sides of privatization in the field by arguing that increased civilian control over the army is a necessity or result of any democratic governance. (Pattinson 2012, p. 139)

1.3.3. Ideationist Theory

Kruck's third approach is related to the ideological background. According to Kruck, in addition to financial and political concerns, the reasons why states turn to private military companies might be ideological. Due to the neo-liberal economic and political understandings, states may be inclined to delegate the security issue to the private sector, like various other public services.

Incidents like the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the spread of democracy and capitalism heralded a new era for the whole world. The disintegration of the socialist world and the victory of capitalism over it led to the penetration of democracy and capitalism into periphery regions. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were encouraging structural reforms that would integrate third world countries into structural reforms in return for financial support. In addition, countries like France which perpetuates decades-long ties with the continent and extend its technical and economic cooperation with its former colonies, also conditioned financial support in return for pro-democracy and pro-western reforms. In a period of the discussions about *the end of history* and the victory of capitalism, defense and security policies were also getting their share of neo-liberal transformation. The marketization of security was justified by financial and administrative efficiency. As in other sectors, it was claimed that bureaucracy would decrease and unit costs would decline with privatization. Thanks to competition between companies, specialization would increase and the number of personnel would decrease. (Mahe and Pouget 2016, p. 11)

Concurring with these, Meegdenburg argues that the preference stems from the tradition of Neoliberalism rather than a functionalist or instrumentalist perspective. She states that although functionalist and instrumentalist perspectives dominate the literature, they lead others to ignore the individual preferences of states. (Meegdenburg 2019, p. 26) In the 1980s, new steps were taken in the field of security to adapt to the wave of change in politics and economy created by the neoliberal transformation that emerged during the years of power of Ronald Reagan in the USA and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. In a similar vein, Petersohn

concurs with Meegdenburg, and notes that the political norms that existed during the specified period led states to privatize in the field of security. (Petersohn 2010, p. 539) Petersohn accepts outsourcing in military security as a new standard and international norm.

Meegdenburg criticizes deterministic approaches in analyzing states' PMC preferences. She notes that explaining the states' preferences in favor of privatization only as an outcome of functionalist concerns does not take into account the existence of the state as a subject. At this point, Meegdenburg adds a sociological perspective to the study of private military companies. According to her, the choice of states is not the inevitable result of financial (functionalist) calculations, but the result of a decision preferred and reached by the state as a subject. This decision is determined by a states' own identity, the way it defines itself and the historical process that it has been undergoing. Berger states that the experiences undergone by a particular nation in the historical process create a certain way of thinking, which directly affects the way that nation interprets future events and its preferences. (Berger 1996, p. 261) According to Meegdenburg, the meaning of PMCs for a country and nation is related to the way that country defines itself. (Meegdenburg 2019, p. 26)

Dufort also argues that the evaluations of the functionalist approach are too economically deterministic. According to him, the functionalist approach ignores the characteristic features of the security sector. Functionalist analysis interprets the security sector as the result of the classical supply and demand relationship. Therefore, they consider the preference for private military companies separate from social, political and cultural reasons. Ignoring the political dimension creates a serious gap in the functionalist approach. Because it is unrealistic to explain Russia's application to private military companies purely for economic reasons. (Dufort 2007, p. 27) Dufort denies the a priori existence of private military companies. He states the fact that private military services have become a commercial commodity that increases or decreases with supply-demand relations creates a theoretical bias.

Supporting Dufort, Wæver also states that the concept of security should be considered more broadly. According to him, the concept of security should not be treated as just a simple commercial commodity. The reason for this is that security is a process, not an objective phenomenon. (Wæver 1995, p. 52) Market theory argues that every supply creates its own demand. However, in the field of security, the security dilemma problem arises. One state's investment in its own security prompts the other state to invest in this area as well. This situation causes the state of insecurity to become permanent for both states and results in the security

needs of neither party being satisfied. In such a situation, security emerges as a feeling rather than a fact.

1.3.4. Principal-Agent Theory

Functionalist, political-instrumentalist and ideationist approaches explain the exercise of the state's authority to use force by private military companies with the principal-agent dichotomy. According to this kind of conceptualization, a principal actor which is responsible for fulfilling a certain service, realizes this expectation through agents. As a result of an institutional and contractual relationship, a main actor (principal) which has decision-making authority, may transfer a part of its responsibilities to an agent during the fulfillment of a service. Principals may resort to agents in order to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Agents become more attractive to a main actor due to their expertise and resources. (Ramirez and Wood 2019, p. 1439)

Principal – agent theory basically interprets the relationship between principal actor and agent, and the methods by which the principal actor, who delegates the authority, can direct and control the behavior of the agent. Accordingly, the principal should clearly lay out the rules that the agent should follow and determine the formal details of how these rules would be implemented. In addition, it should be clearly stated in the contract that these rules and behavioral patterns are expected to be followed and that sanctions would be applied in case of a contradiction. (Krahmann 2016, p. 1413)

Despite all their abovementioned positive aspects, agents can also cause problems in various aspects. These problems arise, firstly, from the fact that principals and agents may have different interests. As one of the constituting objects of a contract, the aim of a principal is to minimize its expenses, while an agent aims at maximizing its income. In case of a possible misdeed, the representative of a principal will try to throw off the accusations, while agents may also try to avoid taking responsibility. Under this circumstance, it will be hard to find the main culprit and the main party to account. Another issue of disagreement is the sharing of authority between a main actor and an agent (Krahmann 2016, p. 1412)

Similarly, there are inequalities in accession to information between principals and agents. Agents have more opportunities to access and yield information about field operations and may choose to guide the principals incompletely or biasedly regarding their own behavior. The fact that private military companies have more opportunities than states to access information makes it difficult to audit them for compliance with human rights. Their lack of

control makes it easier for PMC personnel operating in the field to engage in improper activities such as looting, smuggling and extrajudicial executions. (Ramirez and Wood 2019, p. 1439) Although principals may also direct agents through contractual control, incentives, threats and sanctions, such practices may affect efficiency. (Krahmann 2016, p. 1413)

Another problem is because the number of PMCs is very limited, existing companies demand huge remunerations. (Whyte 2007, p. 178) Wage differences between a company member serving abroad on behalf of a particular country and a regular army soldier can also be the subject of unrest within an army and become the subject of political debate.

According to Krahman, the presence of more than one principal actor that agents work with makes it difficult to monitor the actions taken by an agent. Since each principal has different agendas and interests, their desire to direct the agent differently will reduce the efficiency of the agents' activities and increase their costs. In addition, agents may try to escape responsibility by taking advantage of disagreements between the principals in case of failures or rights violations that occur in their fields of duty. This kind of disagreement between principals will make it difficult for the local population disturbed by the activities of agents to find a dominant principal who can convey their complaints and to make their voices heard. (Krahmann 2016, p. 1414) It is not always easy or possible for the local population who suffers from violations in the field to reach democratic public opinion or international non-governmental organizations to denounce human rights violations committed by agents. The local population's insufficient access to the dominant country's public opinion prevents them from publicizing the human rights violations that they are subjected to.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

Utilization of private military companies for military purposes by sovereign states dates back to ancient times. Even in the Middle Ages, European states used mercenaries to increase their power against rival countries and to protect their possessions. However, even while benefiting from their contributions, mercenaries were viewed with suspicion. Especially considering their focus on own individual interests and lack of binding norms have increased suspicions and negative attitudes towards them.(Ramirez and Wood 2019, p. 1434)

Although mercenary services are considered a phenomenon of the past, stories of former famous mercenaries like Bob Denard and Mike Hoare are still widespread, especially in Africa. (Baker and Pattison 2013, p. 2) Different interpretations can be put forward regarding the divergence between mercenary service and private military companies. While some researchers argue that today's military companies are the continuation of the former due to the profit-oriented nature of the mercenaries, there are also those researchers who emphasize the differences between them. They point out that today's company structures are different from the mercenary structure of the past. In addition, private military companies offer much more comprehensive services and their service contracts are legally binding and auditable. (Baker and Pattison 2013, p. 3) Today, the Geneva Convention of 1864 prohibits the use of mercenaries. It is noteworthy that the USA, the UK and Russia who are the leading utilizers of the PMCs are not parties to the agreement, which entered into force in 2001 and was signed by 35 countries. (Tekingunduz 2018) As per the agreement, mercenaries are defined as individuals recruited for use in a local or international conflict.

2.1. Changing Nature of Wars

The end of the Cold War have changed the nature of wars. The conflicts in the world since the 1990s have mostly broken out as internal conflicts within states rather than as interstate ones. While conflicts in the past were generally a common struggle of a society exposed to various problems and relatively more limited in size compared to today, recent civil conflicts are more common in number but occur without the need for broad public support and have more violent character. (Bijos and Souza 2020, p. 91)

One of the features that reflect the dissimilar nature of war is the change in the fighting actors. While belligerent parties in the Cold War and before were generally states and their

armies, in the current period, conflicts take place mostly between proxy forces, warlords, jihadist groups and paramilitary structures, as well as state forces. Experts assume that the expression ‘continuation of war policy through other means’, as described by Clausewitz, has become obsolete. (Lindell 2009, p. 3) Wars have now become internal conflicts whose parties and intentions cannot be clearly determined, rather than conflicts between countries and nations. The symmetrical conflicts between equal forces, which were the nature of old wars, have been replaced by asymmetric conflicts.

In previous eras, wars were resulted from interstate conflicts of interest or ideological reasons while today’s conflicts are generally based on ethnic or religious grounds.(Sarkees, Wayman and Singer 2003, p. 57) Although in ancient wars, armed confrontations in single instances determined the outcomes of wars in a decisive manner, in today’s wars, decisive battles are rare and territorial changes generally occur through political agreements.(Kaldor 2012, p. 9) Another difference between old and new wars is also about financing. Wars in the past were financed generally by states, on the other hand current wars fought by non-state armed groups are financed mostly by illegal activities like smuggling, plunder and theft. (Tüfekçi 2018, p. 230)

With the new understanding of war, the role of technology in conflicts has been strengthened, and the responsibility of war has been transferred to military experts rather than the leaders ruling the country. (Malešević 2008, p. 102) In the new type of war, there was no need to recruit large masses of people. Rather than being the subjects of war, the masses have transformed into subjects that will need to be guided through the media about the war. (Bijos and Souza 2020, p. 91)

2.2. The Concept of Private Military Companies

Private military companies are deployed widely in military conflicts in order to protect important centers and individuals, provide military training activities and take part in armed clashes. Besides participating in conflicts, Private Military Companies can take part in strategic planning, intelligence gathering, risk assessment, logistics and technical support. Nowadays, the PMC sector has become a billion-dollar worth industry worldwide. (Fulloon 2020, p. 29) Western countries, mostly notably the USA and the UK, hire private military companies for different tasks, especially for missions abroad. Private military companies recruit their personnel generally among former military members. The facilities and equipment they possess and utilize vary. As was claimed in the previous chapter of the thesis, the demand for private military companies increased with the reduction of the defense budget and the decrease in the

number of army personnel with the end of the Cold War. Beside this, the increasing threat of terrorism was another factor that will increase the application to private military companies worldwide. (O'Brian 2008, p. 14)

The organization that transformed the PMC sector and attracted international attention was the Executive Outcomes company based in South Africa. However, the turning points that increased the popularity of PMCs and served as reference points for future analyzes were undoubtedly the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was estimated that there were 20 - 48 thousand PMC members who supported coalition forces and multinational companies, especially during the most intense periods of the conflict in Iraq. (Fulloon 2020, p. 30) Reportedly, the number of private military personnel operating on behalf of the United States in these zones exceeded the number of US military units operating in the same areas. (Zenko 2016) The way the US military employs private military companies after the end of the Cold War represents one of the most serious transformations the US military has experienced. (Ramirez and Wood 2019, p. 1434)

PMCs contributed to the US army by operating in the fields of logistics, transportation, food services, and also taking part in armed clashes. The use of the private company DynCorp by the US army in its operations in Kosovo in 1998 is considered as the first step in the privatization of war for the country. (Bijos and Souza 2020, p. 102) O'Brien, on the other hand, points to the Global War on Terror launched after September 11 as a turning point in the spread of PMCs. (O'Brian 2008, p. 14)

Similar to the US, the United Kingdom was also one of the first countries to delegate the issue of security to the private sector. Already in the 1990s, the UK army was receiving support from civilian companies in ship maintenance, management of civilian enterprises in military facilities, troop and cargo transportation and various engineering fields. The inability of the UK army to intervene in the refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region and the civil conflict in Sierra Leone in 1996 due to budget constraints is as the breakthrough moment in PMCs' rising role in the UK (Bijos and Souza 2020, p. 101)

As of the beginning of 1990, private military companies accounted for 55.6 billion US dollars as a worldwide sector. By 2004 the amount of contracts signed by private military companies with the US Department of Defense alone had reached 300 billion US dollars. In 2020, it was calculated that the sector had a size of 223 billion USD. (Garcia 2023)

2.3. Principles for Evaluating the PMCs

O'Brien puts forward five different assessment criterias when it comes to evaluating the capabilities of military companies/agents, that are competence, cost efficiency, control, flexibility and impact on government military forces. The concept of competence is related to a private military company having sufficient trained personnel, equipment and plans to fulfill its mission. An agent that wants to fulfill its contractual duty is expected to have certain military expertise and in case of a situation that a contractual duty was not performed as promised, this company may be subject to certain sanctions. When personnel cadres of private military companies are analyzed, many of them are former professional soldiers. Due to their experience, company members can instruct local personnel or take part in training roles at military bases as well as taking part in conflicts.

The concept of cost effectiveness examines which resource is more efficient for a country when fulfilling a security-related duty. A country may want to meet its security needs with an army that it trains, equips and bears on its own expenses. On the other hand, that country may prefer to fulfill this security need through PMCs. Determining a path among these two alternatives is within the authority of decision makers in the government. Since the end of the Cold War, many countries including Russia, resort more to private military companies in an increasing manner.

The concept of control is the check and guidance opportunities that governments have over the latter. Ensuring that the transparency of companies and their actions remain within the law and human rights is important against domestic and international political pressures while ensuring that the state's foreign policy objectives are carried out in a legal and regular manner.

The concept of flexibility is related to the ability of a private military company to quickly adapt to the requirements of another task after completing a previous one within the scope of the contract. The company, which has the necessary means in terms of transportation and self-sufficiency, must be able to respond quickly to changing situations in the field.

The last evaluation criteria is the influence capacity of private companies on government institutions. Private military companies operate together with state forces in the fields in their areas of action. Although PMCs assist state forces in terms of the services they offer, they can also cause side effects in various aspects. For example, the flaws committed by PMCs may negatively affect the attitude of the people exposed. In addition, the salaries and other personal

rights offered by PMCs to their personnel may lead military personnel to leave government forces and sign contracts with PMCs. (O'Brien 2008, p. 6)

2.4. Different Types of PMCs

PMCs may differ in terms of their personnel regimes, focuses of interest, geographical positions and areas of activity. However, their common point is that these companies carry out activities that fall normally under the responsibility of armies. Fullon divides PMCs into four main categories. Although three different models were mentioned in the classification of PMCs in the thesis, we mainly attributed to the Mark Fulloon's classification. Accordingly, Fulloon divided private military companies into Offensive and Defensive PMCs, as well as Non-Conflict Offensive and Non-Conflict Defensive Companies based on their positioning in military clashes. (Fulloon 2020, p. 29)

Offensive Security Companies directly take part in military clashes, while Defensive Security Companies focus on providing close protection to high value individuals or buildings, etc. Non-Conflict Offensive Companies also participate in conflicts by providing military training and military consultancy, and Non-Conflict Defensive Companies are responsible for services such as logistics. (Fulloon 2020, p. 34)

In addition, there are also different researchers who categorize private military companies with a tip-of-the-spear analysis based on their proximity to conflict zones. In this analogy established by Singer, military companies located in conflict zones, war zones and armies in general were analyzed in three different categories. Military support companies at the bottom of the spear specialize in providing logistics support and intelligence; military consultancy companies in the second category operate in the field of expertise sharing and training, and lastly military service provider companies at the tip of the spear participate directly in conflicts. (Singer 2001, p. 200)

In Deborah Avant's approach, a distinction was made depending on the activities of private military companies. Accordingly, private military companies are divided in two separate categories: those providing military consultancy services, military training and logistics support, and those operating in the field of close protection, security of military facilities, crime prevention and intelligence gathering. (Fulloon 2020, p. 32)

Despite all these, dividing PMCs into those that participate in conflicts and those that do not participate in it may cause problems. Even though PMCs have declared that they will not participate in conflicts in their agreements with states or multinational companies, they can

still find themselves in the middle of armed conflicts. It is a common practice for PMCs operating in conflict zones to perform even their civilian duties in readiness for armed contact. Their experience and background as former army personnel, makes it possible for them to use weapons even for self-defense when necessary.

2.4.1. Combat Offensive Private Military Companies

The main objective of the Combat Offensive PMCs is to change the results of conflicts by taking a direct role in conflicts. They are the most powerful private military companies in terms of their military capabilities. However, these companies are the least numerous in the sector due to the inherent difficulty of their tasks. By the nature of their business, these companies are on the front lines of conflicts and seek to help the countries that they provide services to achieve political dominance by getting upper hands in conflicts.

Countries receiving support from Combat Offensive Companies have generally been underdeveloped ones that do not have sufficient military capabilities and are faced with urgent security threats. Considering their military activities in the Ukrainian and Syrian theaters, the Wagner group can also be evaluated within this category. However, Wagner group's activities will far exceed this definition, taking into account its activities from a broader perspective in economical and information domains. The pioneering example within this classification is definitely the Executive Outcomes Company.

2.4.1.1. Executive Outcomes Company

One of the oldest companies that falls under the definition of Combat Offensive Private Military Company is the Executive Outcomes (EO), which is based in South Africa. The Executive Outcomes was founded in 1989 as part of the Strategic Resources Corporation, based in the same country. The company's founder, Eeben Barlow who was a former lieutenant general of the South African Army (The Bell 2019), employed its personnel mostly from the apartheid-era military force. At its peak, the company had 500 military advisors and 3,000 soldiers, as well as attack and transport helicopters, armored vehicles, aircrafts. (O'Brien 2008, p. 30) The company, hired by central governments, has participated in conflicts in Sierra Leone and Angola.

In the mid-1990s, The civil war in Sierra Leone was ravaging the country. The civilian war had its origins in the colonial years. In the country where state institutions were not consolidated enough, different armed groups established their own rule in rural areas. Under these conditions, the Revolutionary United Front came to the fore with the claim that it

represented the poor and excluded masses. (Nkwede and Usonka 2019, p. 5) However, within a short period of time the RUF captured control over the lucrative mining sites, thus depriving the state of the most important source of foreign trade revenue. Against this backdrop, the Sierra Leonean army could not succeed against the RUF due to reasons such as lack of equipment, personnel, training despite the support from neighboring countries. The UK also could not deploy necessary military support even if it intended to do so. Under these circumstances, the Sierra Leonean government first made an agreement with the UK-based Ghurkha Security Guards. However, activities of this company halted after the company's leader was captured and tortured to death. (Fulloon 2020, p. 35)

The government of Sierra Leone's partnership with the Executive Outcomes began in 1995. The company's agreement with the government envisaged an active role in armed conflicts, as well as military training and logistical support. Direct participation in clashes by the company enables us to classify it as a Combat Offensive PMC. Less than a year after the agreement began, the EO took control of the country's resource rich rural regions and eliminated the EO camps. (Fulloon 2020, p. 37) The inventory of EO operating in Sierra Leone was no different from that of an army. They had Soviet era fighter jets, anti aircraft missiles, military cargo planes, attack and transport helicopters, and armored vehicles. (Fulloon 2020, p. 38) In the ceasefire negotiations, one of the demands by the rebel groups was dismantling and deportation of Executive Outcomes. However, only 4 months after EO left its missions, clashes erupted again and the new government was obliged to reach a similar agreement with a different company (Sandline International) for training and weapons supply. (Fulloon 2020, p. 38)

Another country where the Executive Outcomes has operated is Angola. During the civil war that started in the 1990s, the Chinese-backed separatist UNITA group aimed to seize oil refineries in order to obtain financial resources while fighting against the Angolan Army. The EO took on the task of protecting the refineries and operation centers of international oil companies in Angola. Here too, while the company provided training for Angolan security forces, it also had the authority to engage in armed clashes in order to protect oil facilities. The company's activities had a direct impact in ending the Angolan Civil War. EO's activities also contributed significantly to the transformation of the Angolan Army into a regular army. They fulfilled their duties, which they started with 80 personnel, without any casualties and obtained the chance to demonstrate their competence to the whole world. (O'Brien 2008, p. 31) When the number of personnel employed and the military materials devised are taken into account, it

is clear to say that no company has achieved this level of hard power. (Baker and Pattison 2013, p. 3)

In addition to all these, the Executive Outcomes company and its leader Eeben Barlow are a source of inspiration for Russian private military companies, especially Wagner. In 2010, at a meeting which was held in St. Petersburg and attended by senior Russian generals, Barlow made a presentation to the Russian participants about the increasing importance of PMCs in Africa. (The Bell 2019)

2.4.2. Combat Defensive Private Military Companies

Combat Defensive Private Military Companies undertake protection duties such as guarding structures and military facilities which have high strategic value. Protection duties appear to be the most frequently performed activity of PMCs. Combat Defensive Companies, which are less capable compared to offensive-oriented ones in terms of the military equipment they own, focus only on defense-oriented activities. (Fulloon 2020, p. 39)

In addition to international organizations such as the United Nations and NATO, non-governmental organizations and multinational companies can also apply to defense-oriented PMCs for the protection of their facilities or personnel. For example, the British Petroleum made an agreement with a private military company (Defense Services Colombia) for its activities in Colombia and to protect its oil refineries in the country. (Amnesty International Report 1998, p. 2) Russian petroleum giants Gazprom and Lukoil have their own military branches in order to guard their facilities in the Black Sea (Law 2023) and Iraq. (Crisp 2015) There are also other Russian PMCs who have specialized in providing security services in seas.

2.4.2.1. The Blackwater Company

One of the most well-known defense focused companies is undoubtedly the Blackwater USA. Founded in 1997, the company has provided security services to private enterprises as well as to U.S. and other foreign governments. Along with the US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, it undertook duties related to the protection of diplomatic missions and individuals. Blackwater's first mission in Iraq was to provide protection to the Coalition Provisional Authority. In the country where conflicts continue, Blackwater personnel served in crisis areas such as Najaf and Fallujah, sometimes being exposed to ambushes during the deployments, and sometimes trying to defend the areas where they undertake the area defense. Overall, its military operation was deemed successful by US authorities. (Fulloon 2020, p. 41)

2.4.3. Non-Combat Offensive Private Military Companies

Non-Combat Offensive PMCs do not participate directly in military conflicts, rather they provide military advices to one of the parties in a conflict regarding the planning and execution of operations. Non-Combat Offensive PMCs are in charge of providing assistance for structuring an army, personnel regime, procurement, etc. Their most prominent mission is the military training they provide. Private military companies have been present in many conflict zones for training purposes. Most of the time, different private military companies can undertake their own protection in disputed zones. (Fulloon 2020, p. 42)

2.4.3.1. Military Professional Resources (L-3 MPRI) Company

The activities of the Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) company in the Balkans in the 1990s and post-Saddam Hussein Iraq in early 2000s are one of the best-known examples of this concept. Founded in 1987, MPRI company stood out due to its proximity to the Pentagon and the Clinton administration. (O'Brien 2008, p. 35) MPRI contributed to the training of the Croatian army by reaching an agreement with the Croatians at the beginning of Yugoslavia's dissolution. In the assaults carried out by the Croatian forces in the cities held by the Serbs, the Croatian forces obtained outstanding successes. MPRI forces made serious contributions to the planning and tactical management of the early Croatian army. (Fulloon 2020, p. 44) During the Bosnian War, MPRI employed 182 retired US special forces personnels and 17 retired generals. During the war, the US government provided \$100 million in support to MPRI's activities. (Howe 1998, p. 3) The company later carried out military training activities in Bosnia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Angola, Nigeria and Colombia on logistics, intelligence gathering, personnel management and the domestic security issues.

2.4.4. Non-Combat Defensive Private Military Companies

Non-Combat Defensive Private Military Companies do not have a military origin in their establishment and operate and focus more on logistics services as their field of duty. Armies that delegate logistics-related duties to such private companies have the opportunity to shift the units they previously allocated to these tasks to more decisive combat units. (Fulloon 2020, p. 45) Countries that engage in long-term operations, especially the USA, may be more inclined to transfer their non-combat military services to the private sector. Companies within this scope can participate in the provision of services such as health services, mine clearance, water cleaning and processing, food supply, electricity supply, and translator employment.

2.4.4.1. Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR) Company

The most well-known company in this scope is the military engineering company KBR, which worked with the US army in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Central Asia, the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe and also Turkey. KBR company, which operates in many countries where the US army is deployed, is responsible for military cargo transportation, maintenance and purchasing operations.

2.5. Gerasimov Doctrine

With the occupation of Crimea in 2014 and the intervention in Syria, the Russian Federation began to become more involved in its historical spheres of influence. These new interventions were interpreted by Western analysts as Russia entering a new era in strategic planning. This new doctrine was developed and named after Valery Gerasimov, then chief of the Russian general staff, in early 2010s. The Russian chief of general staff stresses the importance of managing not only conventional military methods, but also utilization of irregular forces and public perception operations in order to achieve strategic success in Russia's historical sphere of influence. The new doctrine came to the fore as a reaction to the color revolutions in the countries around Russia and the Arab Spring, which led to the collapse of Moscow-backed governments. During the years succeeding the Soviet Union, the General Staff of the Russian Army, who observed the operations carried out by the USA in Panama, Iraq and the Balkans, developed new strategies to adapt the Russian army to low-intensity conflicts, especially after the experiences they gained in the wars in Chechnya and Georgia.

During the First Chechen War, Russia provided weapons, training and logistical support to armed paramilitary groups established by Russian citizens settled in the region. Subsequently, the civilian casualties experienced in the conflicts in the Caucasus during the Second Chechen War and in the subsequent period led the Russian government to change its strategy. In addition to the military lessons learned by the Russian government in the field, people who would later establish armed organizations such as Wagner gained leadership and command experience for the first time in the Chechnya conflicts. The security support provided by the Kadyrovites, with whom Russia opened space in Chechnya, was also enlightening for Russia and set an example for the transition to private military companies. Another country where Russia intervened with regular army units was Georgia, which it invaded in 2008. Russian troops, who aimed to capture Tbilisi in their military intervention in Georgian territory, could not expand the occupation due to international pressure. The pressure experienced in Georgia may have increased the need for the deniability principle. This new doctrine

complements Putin's aggressive foreign policy approach. The emergence of PMCs arose as a result of Russia's need to demonstrate power in distant countries and in low-intensity conflicts. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 60) The use of PMCs also gives Russia the opportunity to deploy troops anywhere in the world, quickly and undetected.

Pokolova argues that Wagner's activities are similar, to some extent, to the roles of military advisors in Russian and Soviet Union's military history. (Pokolova 2023, p. 4) The Soviet Union and later Russia deployed military advisors in various regions to protect its own interests. These advisors often did not wear military uniforms in order to hide their affiliation with their country.

The new generation war concept envisages Russian army forces operating together with other non-military elements. Russian forces may enter into partnerships with local paramilitary groups and private military companies. The conflicts that started in Ukraine after 2014 became an area where Gerasimov's doctrine was put into action on the field. (Schlesman 2019, p. 4)

2.6. Legal Status of PMCs

The status of private military companies in Russia remained ambiguous for a long time. Denial of any activities of PMCs, enabled the Russian government to benefit from plausible deniability. However, after the Wagner rebellion, the Russian government issued a decision demanding that all military companies be registered by July 1, 2023. (Sauvage 2023)

The history of resorting to armed forces parallel to the army in Russia began with the recruitment of Cossacks during the Imperial period. Although the history and the current situation of PMCs in Russia is not fully clear, it is agreed that Russia has a strong PMCs sector worldwide. Even during the days when Wagner marched on Moscow in the summer of 2023, Russian government officials did not accept the existence of private military companies. Wagner leader Prigozhin also chose to deny the existence of Wagner, his leadership and filed a lawsuit against journalists who made such claims. (Ilyushina 2023)

Article 359 of the 1996 Russian Criminal Code prohibits Russian civilians from participating in military conflicts abroad. (Russian Criminal Code 1996) On the other hand, some parliamentarians in Russia have worked to give legal status to PMCs. Still, these efforts were not approved by Russian parliamentarians. Bitter memories of the military involvements in 1990s and political instability following the dissolution of the USSR are the most prominent reasons for some parliamentarians and the public to be reluctant for legalizing PMCs. On the other hand, institutions such as the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Main Intelligence

Directorate (GRU) are claimed to be refusing any legal status to these companies because they easily carry out their military activities abroad through PMCs without being subject to the supervision of the parliament and other official institutions. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 35)

Another reason why PMCs are not legalized depends on the difficulty of determining the government institution which will control and coordinate the private military companies in Russia. The historical competition between Russia's internal security agency, the FSB, and the military intelligence service, the GRU, is reportedly an obstacle to private military companies gaining a legal position. Among the two intelligence services, the GRU is known to be closer to Wagner. There are also opinions against PMCs within the army and the Ministry of Defense (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 9)

2.7. The Montreux Document

The most important international document regulating the organization of PMCs is the Montreux Document. The document, prepared in cooperation with the International Red Cross and the Swiss Government in 2008, aims to standardize the basic rules on the operating principles of military companies. This document also regulates the responsibility of states in the activities of PMCs. Various companies initiated the preparation of this document. Especially after the scandals involving PMCs in Iraq, private companies, the Blackwater namely, aimed to standardize international rules in order to alleviate the public pressure on them. 56 countries are parties to the Montreux Document. While the USA is a party to the document, Russia did not sign and become part of it.

2.8. Comparing Russian and Western PMCs: Key Differences

Both in Western world and in Russia, the PMCs allow governments to outsource their military activities to private enterprises, however, eyeing fiscal and political benefits, there are enormous differences in organizational structuring and doctrinal backgrounds in both models. Compared to Western private military companies which are far from carrying ideological backgrounds, Russian companies are more political. Companies must be ideologically in line with and prove their value and loyalty to the Russian state in order to start their operations. As in the Wagner example, even though their legal status was not clearly defined, the existence of companies depends entirely on the consent of the Russian state. If the Kremlin approves and allows operational activity of a PMC, it provides the private company with necessary logistical, technical support and allowances for recruitment. For example, besides providing the Wagner group with weapons and ammunition in Ukraine from the military arsenal of the Russian

Ministry of Defense (Euronews 2023), the personnel and ammunition of Wagner groups were transferred to their places of duty in Africa by cargo planes belonging to the Russian army. (Dogantekin 2020) On the other side, relations between Western governments and PMCs are more independent from ideological background while their relations are more contractual and professionally institutionalized.

Russian PMCs provide services in a wider range of areas while Western counterparts are limited to providing services generally in the fields of logistics and training. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 4) Unlike Western companies, Russian private military companies take active roles in conflict zones. As is seen in the Palmyra operation in Syria in 2015, Wagner group was the main actor in the fight against ISIS, making it a Combat Offensive PMC. (Bouzo 2023) Western companies, on the other hand, constrain their activities to providing support and training to local armies and other back-service activities. Especially after the scandals regarding Blackwater Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 5) the attacks on the US Embassy in Libya (Risen 2012), Western Companies have paid more attention to the public image of themselves and have therefore been motivated to limit their services to providing support services only.

Russian individuals who manage private military companies have also contacts with other companies operating in the energy sector. Working in a foreign country, Russian PMCs are accompanied by the actors from the energy sector benefiting from concessions in mineral production. Generally, as will be seen in the following sections, Russian PMCs are paid for their security services either in cash or mining concessions.

Rondeaux states that Russian PMCs are far from being private companies operating on their own account. PMCs' connection with the Russian state is to such an extent that it does not allow independent control of business leaders over their own company. Although the Russian state claims that PMCs are independent as long as they do not violate the laws of the country, the fact that military companies follow Russia's strategic interests does not allow the foundational and operational independence of PMCs. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 58) Again, according to Rondeaux, revealing the financing methods of PMCs will more clearly exhibit the close relationship between the Russian government and private military companies.

Unlike Western and other Russian companies, Wagner is led by a businessman, rather than a former soldier. In addition, it is noteworthy that the transfer of personnel between companies is very common.

2.9. Emergence of Russian PMCs after the Cold War

Utilization of PMCs by the US in Afghanistan and Iraq inspired many countries around the world. Countries, influenced by the functionalist and instrumentalist benefits and the ideationist inspirations, have taken steps in outsourcing some of their military activities to private enterprises. Russia is also one of the earliest countries to resort to PMCs. Especially the large human resources created by the retired personnel of the former Soviet Union and experiences gained in foreign operations formed the basis of newly established Russian military companies. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 3) Soldiers and military pilots who had previously served within the ranks of the Soviet army, worked subsequently in private companies. Similarly, many aircraft and helicopters decommissioned by the Russian army have been put up for sale and used worldwide. Russian pilots were recruited to man these sold aircrafts and helicopters. For example, Russian military pilots were aboard the helicopters and planes which were used by the Executive Outcomes. (Reno 1997, p. 174)

During the collapse of the Soviet Union, some units of the army and the intelligence service of the state maintained their unity and then turned into the ranks of private companies. For example, the company operating under the name Alpha Group between 1999 and 2003 was created when a Federal Security Services (FSB) special forces unit converted as a whole into a private company. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 3) In addition to these, there were also Russian companies organizing Russian citizens who wanted to volunteer in the ranks of fellow Serbian forces, during the conflicts in the Balkans in the 90s. The most prominent of these was the St. Petersburg-based company Rubikon. (Inform Napalm 2015)

In general, the Russian military companies follow global military developments. During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, private companies embarked on tasks to protect the interests of Russian companies. For example, the Russian oil company Lukoil created its own private military company to protect its operations in the country. Similarly, with the rise of piracy in the Horn of Africa, Russian shipping companies had to resort to private military companies for the security of their ships. (Nebolsina 2019) In addition, Gazprom is another prominent Russian company which established its own security branch named Fakel and Plamya to protect its own interests. These companies linked to Gazprom are also reportedly supporting Russia's operations in Ukraine. (Sauvage 2023)

The Russian constitution and legal codes forbids establishment of armed organizations, as a result, many Russian PMCs have established their headquarters in different countries. For example, the Moran Security is based in Belize, the RSB Group in the Virgin Islands, the Moran

Security in Cook Island. (Klein 2019, p. 4). Victor Ozerov, who serves in the Defense Commission in the Russian parliament states that if private military companies are established in another country, Russia will not be held responsible for the actions of them. By denying the existence of private military companies, Russian authorities will refrain from being held responsible for the deaths of Russian citizens within the ranks of PMCs. Noticing the possible contributions to its foreign policy, the Russian government either supported them covertly or let them function in a way that is not harmful to the government interests. Russian President Vladimir Putin, in response to a question from a member of the Duma in 2012, stated that private companies that would provide military security and training services abroad without the involvement of the Russian state could serve Russian interests. Later in his speech, he emphasized that the establishment of these companies could be taken into consideration. (Zarembo 2012)

Even if Russian private military companies have begun to show their influence in Russian foreign policy since the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, Western academia and media have increased their coverage in this issue since 2018. The massacre committed against Russian Wagner militias near Deir ez-Zor oil facilities by the US forces and the murder of 3 Russian journalists investigating Wagner's activities in the CAR in 2018 created a serious interest in the Western public opinion.

The emergence and strengthening of PMCs in Russia is a reflection of Russia's desire to return to the regions where it has lost its influence for a long time. Taking Russia and Russian PMCs as an example, it cannot be said that the principal and agent relationship is very smooth. It can be seen that various Russian PMCs on the Ukrainian front and Wagner forces on the Syrian Front, especially between 2016 and 2018, took unilateral steps.

According to the Ukraine-based research and fact-check site Moran, Russia currently has 27 active private military companies. In addition to these, 10 companies that were previously operating ceased their activities later. The first company to operate in the field of private security is Tsar's Wolves, which was established in 1992. Subsequently, Anti-terrorist Eagle started to exist in 1998, Russian Imperialist Movement in 2002 and RSB Group in 2005. However, these companies fell behind in competition with their Western counterparts and disappeared over time. According to Moran's findings, 37 Russian companies have operated or continue to operate in 34 different countries in the past or currently. (MOLFAR 2019) The events that brought private military companies back to the public attention are the civil wars in Libya and Syria. Slavonic Corps company, which started to operate in 2013 and Wagner are

the most prominent among their counterparts in terms of their number of personnel and the fields in which they operate.

According to Konovalov and Valetsii, the number of Russian PMCs varied between 10 and 20 just before the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War. (Bukkvoll and Østensen 2020, p. 4) Due to military and political secrecy inherent in the military security business, the exact number of Russian PMCs is not well-documented. This ambiguity was further aggravated by the lack of official records. The ideological backgrounds of the mentioned companies, their relations with the government and their organizational structures may differ.

Although Russian private military companies are numerous, their goals are common. The companies provide services within their own expertise, in line with the interests of both their business leaders and the Kremlin. Especially since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Russian elites have tried to establish their own military companies to take part in the war in Ukraine in order to be able to portray themselves in line with the Kremlin in tough times, eyeing further benefits. On the other hand, Putin allowed more companies to emerge in order to prevent companies from consolidating too much power and to rule them by dividing. (Askew 2023) However, the rebellion that took place after June 2023 woke Russia up to the magnitude of the situation. The conflict with Wagner brought Russia to a serious awareness of the danger that an armed organization could pose.

Today, the Russian Federation has not become a party to the Montreux Document, which aims to subject the activities of private military companies to international law.

2.10. Slavonic Corps

The Arab Spring, which started in 2011, has created concern in the Russian authorities that the contacts and privileged relations established in the field of economy and natural resources with the Middle Eastern countries since the Soviet era may be disrupted. Until the beginning of the Arab Spring, Russia's energy companies operating in the field, such as STG, Tatneft and Rostec, were carrying out important activities in Middle Eastern countries, especially Libya and Syria. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 40) It was important for Russia to preserve mutual agreements and economic relations against the widespread instability in the Middle East. In addition, Russian energy and military companies, taking advantage of the gap created by the declining Middle Eastern governments and the ongoing Western sanctions, wanted to fill the gap in the region.

The Slavonic Corps company, founded in Hong Kong in 2012, is important in comprehending the activities of Russian private military companies before Wagner's emergence. The company has created a strong structure by attracting personnel who served in the Russian army and have experience abroad. The establishment of the Slavonic Corps is associated with the Syrian Civil War. During this period, the idea of militarily supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad without getting the Russian army directly involved in the war was a popular idea in Kremlin circles. When the terrorist organization ISIS captured Palmyra in 2013, it announced that it had massacred 100 people, including Russian citizens. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 45) The news about their activities in Palmyra and the subsequent prosecution in Russia enabled Russian private military companies to come to the fore in a comprehensive manner for the first time. With the increasing need for private military companies in Syria, the first ones that started to take an active role in the field were Slavonic Corps, Patriot and Vega groups. Russian private military companies, which were initially in the country to train pro-regime armed groups, began to engage in activities to protect the investments of Russian companies, and then, over time, to engage in attack operations, as Bashar Assad's forces retreated from the country as of 2012.

As the opposition groups and terrorist organizations threatened the existence of the government in Damascus and the oil fields, which are the most important income for the country's economy, fell into the hands of armed groups, the government contacted the Moran Security Group, which manages the Slavonic Corps. It was the Syrian Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources which contacted the Moran Group and enabled the group to send personnel to Syria via Lebanon to first seize and then protect the oil fields in the country. In addition to a large monthly salary for the personnel who will operate on behalf of Slavonic Corps, compensation is planned to be paid in case of injury or death.

In order to refrain from Western sanctions due to its relations with the Syrian government, the Moran Security Group created the Slavonic Corps as a subsidiary. The experience of the Slavonic Corps is considered a pilot project on behalf of the Russian government. It constitutes the first of the pre-Wagner Combat Offensive PMC models. (Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna 2020) Apart from its mission of providing training and logistical support, the company has been on the front lines of direct conflicts.

One of the leaders of the group was Dimitry Utkin, who would later rise to important positions within the Wagner organization. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 2) Dimitry Utkin is the person who gave the group its name. It is understood that Dimitry Utkin and his team, who gave a

German word to the company and named a street in the GRU camp where they are trained "Die Strasse" in German, are seriously interested in German culture. (The Bell 2019) Utkin, who served as a colonel in a Russian special forces Spetsnaz unit and later served in the Chechnya wars on behalf of the Russian military intelligence unit GRU, then joined Moran Security Group after his retirement. While operating on behalf of the group, he received medals for his activities in Ukraine and Syria. Subsequently, Utkin met Prigozhin and joined his company, Concord Management and Consulting. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 3)

During their duty in Syria, Slavonic Corps deployed 267 personnel to different regions, especially Palmyra, in order to protect the mines and oil fields in the region. Sukhanin attributes the failure of the Slavonic Corps in Syria to the old and obsolete combat vehicles used (tanks, armored vehicles, artillery), insufficient air support and missing ammunition. In addition, coordination with the Syrian army and associated armed groups was insufficient. Another issue is that the private company has not clearly determined its targets in Syria. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 45) Interestingly, when Slavonic Corps units subsequently returned to Russia, they were subjected to FSB prosecution. (Miller 2013)

Rondeaux argues that Russian forces' interference over the Syrian army structure increased after the capture of Palmyra by ISIS in 2013. The Syrian army units started to be reorganized upon the directives of Russian instructors, preparing the SAA for closer cooperation with Russians, paving the way for the entrance of Wagner to the country. Starting from this period, Wagner groups replaced the Slavonic Corps and began to provide training and equipment support to local groups fighting on the side of the Syrian army. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 50)

CHAPTER THREE: THE WAGNER GROUP

The primary motivation behind the establishment of Russian PMCs is to advance and protect Russia's interests through non-state actors. Russian President Vladimir Putin also advocates the use of private military companies, viewing them as a solution to the asymmetric threats. This perspective was further reinforced by the Gerasimov Doctrine. Wagner's activities complement the official diplomatic channels used by the Russian government and support government policies in terms of reaching local markets and exerting influence on the continent. Wagner and the Kremlin's policies ultimately serve the purpose of alienating the western companies from African countries. (Kulig 2023, p. 2)

In this context, during the discussions about instrumentalization of PMCs by the Russian government, Eeben Barlow, the founder of the Executive Outcomes company, was invited to a meeting with high-ranking Russian staff in St. Petersburg. (Pokolova 2023, p. 4) Eeben Barlow, who was among the participants of an economics forum in St. Petersburg delivered a speech about outsourcing of military functions of a state and future relations of PMCs and national armies. After this speech, he had a close door meeting with the top brass of the Russian army. He later stated that, during these presentations and closed-door meetings with high echelons of the Kremlin, he mentioned that PMCs from the Western and Eastern world would sweep away the African continent in the future, considering the importance of national resources the continent has. (The Bell 2019)

Considering its activities in Africa, Wagner is much more than a state-supported private military company. It functions almost like a quasi-state organization in Africa, with its armed structure, mining companies, communication experts and employees who conduct diplomatic negotiations. (Pokolova 2023, p. 5) Since its founding, it can be argued that Wagner operated much stronger than an ordinary PMC and created a kind of semi-state structure. However, the methods employed by Wagner in each different country vary. In the press and academic literature, Russia's military activities constitute discussions but other areas like economical and mining activities seem generally to be overlooked.

Another distinguishing factor of the Wagner group compared to other private military companies is that its ties to the Russian state was denied until recently. The Russian Constitution Article 13 (Russian Constitution) and Article 208 of the Russian Criminal Code declares the establishment of non-state armed groups and membership illegal and criminalizes the participants. (Criminal Code of Russian Federation) Although there have been attempts to

legislate private military companies in the Russian Parliament at various times and even declare the Wagner Group as a national hero (RBC 2022), these efforts have failed.

In parallel with the Russian state, Yevgeny Prigozhin chose to deny his leadership within the group and even its existence until 2022. (Pokolova 2023, p. 4) The Wagner Group gained legal status in December 2022 (BBC 2023), when the company was registered with the relevant statutes in Russia. Even if there were other PMCs in Russia, such as the Slavonic Cors, RSB-Group, etc, Wagner's relationship with the Russian government is much closer than them. The Wagner company does not enter into financial competition, such as participating in tenders against these companies.

3.1. The profile of Yevgeny Prigozhin

In the establishment period, Dimitry Utkin took the leadership in the establishment of Wagner, and he recruited many personnel from other private military companies to his own structure. Later, Yevgeny Prigozhin's appointment as the head of the company strengthened Wagner's integration with the Russian state. The most prominent figure in Wagner's ruling elite is Yevgeny Prigozhin undoubtedly. Prigozhin was born in 1961 in Leningrad, the USSR, He was later imprisoned for a total of nine years in various periods for crimes such as money laundering and trafficking of women. Over time, Prigozhin started to establish closeness to the upper echelon of the state by establishing close relations with high-ranking people and Putin himself and received important tenders with a company that provides catering services (Concord Catering). (Shevchenko 2023) For these reasons, Prigozhin was called Putin's chief.

The personal fortune of Prigozhin, who has been interested in providing food services to government institutions since the mid-2000s and has later taken over the industry in this field is claimed to have reached 34 billion dollars even as early as 2011. In a statement he made to a local news site in Russia in 2011, he stated that his dream was to establish an army. (The Bell 2019) Prigozhin was described as a man of action by Kremlin circles. Despite his personal closeness with Putin, standing in a safe distance to power circles inside the Kremlin made him a reliable candidate to be entrusted with the responsibility of an armed group. (The Bell 2019)

The acquaintance of Putin and Prigozhin dates back to the early 2000s. The restaurant run by Prigozhin in St. Petersburg hosted Putin's meetings with George W. Bush, Japanese Prime Minister Mori and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The restaurant has also become a frequent destination for Putin, who often visits to celebrate his birthdays. (Zakharov and Arenina 2023)

Prigozhin then began to provide food and cleaning supplies to army units and to obtain tenders in the field of construction. It is claimed that he received support from people in powerful positions within the Kremlin in winning these tenders. The income earned during these services will later be spent on the organization of Wagner. There are also allegations that Prigozhin's process of establishing Wagner began with an order from the Kremlin, but he was not so enthusiastic about getting involved in PMC business. Prigozhin. (The Bell 2019)

Prigozhin and the companies he manages, Concorde and Internet Research Agency, were sanctioned by the United States on the grounds that they interfered in the 2016 US elections. Although Prigozhin, who appeared to have an extremely secretive character, chose to deny for a long time that he had any connection with the Russian army other than catering and construction work and that led Wagner, over time he admitted that he had a role in the US election interference. (The Guardian 2023)

Another incident symbolically showing the relationship between Wagner-related companies was revealed by the BBC Russian service in 2018. (Barabanov, Soshnikov and Napalkova 2018) On this occasion, a mausoleum was erected for the soldiers of the Russian paramilitary forces who died in the conflicts, close to the Molkino military camp in the Krasnodar province. The statue in the mausoleum carries symbols of Wagner militants, and the silhouette of it resembles Dimitry Utkin. Megaline, the company that undertook the construction of the mausoleum, has a connection with Prigozhin and has received many construction tenders from the Russian Ministry of Defense in the past years. (Svoboda 2018) In the following chapters, the activities of the Wagner group in several domains which are complementary to each other will be discussed.

3.2. Disinformation Activities

One of the issues emphasized within the scope of non-military methods in the Gerasimov Doctrine is information control. There are lots of news and researches about the Kremlin's work on disinformation. Wagner also strives to achieve social and political results through perception management and disinformation activities carried out on social media.

Russia prefers to wear down the enemy through political discourses rather than hard power measures, with a method called active measures (*aktivniye meropriyatiya*). Although the issue of information management is sometimes aimed at shaping public opinion through the news created, it can also be in the form of neutralizing people who will make disruptive news against Russian interests. (Górka 2023, p. 94)

In Africa, Pro-Russian social media accounts try to create public opinion in favor of Russia and against Western countries, especially France, by emphasizing the role of Western countries in the current problems experienced in African countries. One of the most prominent issues emphasized is the neo-colonialism and the failure of international coalitions, especially the Operation Barkhane. Pro-Russian public opinion leaders and social media users, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes for financial returns, try to emphasize that Russia is the closest ally of the African continent, and in these posts the success of the operations carried out by Wagner is over-mentioned. Propaganda, deception and other non-military methods are instrumentalized in Russia's active measures towards Africa. (Financial Times 2023) The role of disinformation and propaganda activities in Wagner's rapid rise in Africa is undeniable. (Le Cam 2023)

The discourse used by Russians in their propaganda activities in Africa is built on the military and economic aid provided to the African countries by the Soviet Union. In addition, attempts are made to appeal to African countries by stressing that both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation were and are involved in an anti-imperialist struggle against Western colonialism. On social media, television, billboards or in newspapers, Russia is portrayed both as a savior and an equal partner compared to former colonialists. The abundance of Russian flags and pro-Russian propaganda posters does not go unnoticed in the support rallies held after the military coups in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. (Quevrain 2023) Particularly on social media (especially Facebook), promising pan-Africanist politicians who appeal to young audiences are used in the name of Russian and Wagner propaganda. (Le Figaro 2023) It is noteworthy that such accounts frequently use pro-Russian hashtags on social media. Rumors spread on social media include comments such as France providing weapons and intelligence support to terrorist groups (O'Brian 2022) and the French army kidnapping African children. (Sideris 2023)

In a parliamentary session in France in 2023, the then French Foreign Minister Catherine Collonna alleged that Russia was the main actor in anti-French propaganda in Africa. (Berthelot 2023) Disinformation spread by Russian propaganda channels includes news that the French Ambassador was expelled from the Democratic Republic of Congo, that Chinese workers were killed by French soldiers in a mine in the Central African Republic (Irish, Pineau and Felix 2023) and that civilians killed in an operation in Mali were buried near a French military base. (Mackinnon and Gramer 2022)

With the Internet Research Agency (IRA) company he founded, Prigozhin carried out a disinformation campaign against Ukraine and the West on social media during the Ukrainian

crisis. Prigozhin admitted that he planned the foundation of the company called IRA and managed it. He also stated that the purpose of this company was to protect Russia against the counter propaganda of the Western countries. (Reuter 2023) The Internet Research Agency which was determined to have a financial relationship with Prigozhin's Concord Catering company, is accused by the US government of intervening in the 2016 US elections. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 8) The US government and the European Union imposed sanctions on the company, citing its activities in Africa as well. (Skadden 2022) Since 2018, Facebook and Twitter are also suspending IRA-linked social media accounts. (U.S. Department of State 2022)

In a recent study on the activities of the IRA, certain scholars found that the Agency has been carrying out propaganda activities since its establishment, for the benefit of the Russian state. (Uhlmann 2019) They have revealed that the IRA's propaganda activities are carried out in a coordinated manner on social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok and Instagram. The authors also found that propaganda on social media stops on weekly off days and public holidays in Russia. (Silverman Kao 2022)

3.3. Economic Activities

The business contracts signed by the Wagner group and the African countries are generally made in return for mining production privileges. Those African countries which are resorting to Wagner, face difficulties in providing their own security, managing the fight against terrorism and maintaining political stability. These countries also suffer from financial problems. Therefore, in many cases, they meet their financial obligations to Wagner not with regular payments, but with concessions on mining, especially gold and diamonds. Agreements concluded with Wagner in this context are also profitable for African governments, as many of these countries do not have the opportunity to extract and market their own mineral resources. (Kulig 2023, p. 4) In a statement made in 2018, Putin stated that the Wagner company is free to pursue its own economic interests in any region, as long as it complies with Russian laws. (Myre 2019)

During its activities in Sudan, Central African Republic and Mali, Wagner contacted the ministries responsible for mining and energy. Economic activities are carried out through shell companies established in each country and led most particularly by local people. Wagner's local teams also include geological and mining engineers. Engineer teams begin to conduct field research even before Wagner military units enter a country. Mines that are evaluated and determined to be profitable are seized in different ways by local companies affiliated with Wagner thanks to concessions from local governments.

In addition, Wagner forces occasionally receive payments from the Russian Ministry of Defense. For example; In his statement after the rebellion that took place on June 23, Putin announced that the Russian state paid Wagner 940 million dollars for its activities in Ukraine. (Sauvage 2023)

3.4. Military Activities

The field experiences that Wagner gained in Ukraine were effective in the development of the group and the formation of its organizational structure. In the early periods, Utkin's leadership came to the fore at the Company. Like Utkin, other Wagner senior executives appear mostly to be former soldiers from the Russian special forces. The personnel received training on various artillery systems, electronic warfare, military communications and intelligence activities. It was an active GRU base that was chosen as the location to train Wagner recruits. (Marten 2020, p. 2) Efforts have also been made to organize and manage the Wagner militants, who operate in different regions and are rapidly rising in numbers. In this process, the Russian army was taken as a model and Wagner groups were placed under an army-like structure. Salaries were also paid depending on the country and periods of service.

Wagner Group recruits members also from non-governmental organizations formed by war veterans, Kazakh (Cossack) organizations (Re Russia 2023) and associations related to the army. Efforts are also being made to recruit personnel who are doing their military service. There are also participants in the Wagner forces from Crimea and Donetsk regions, where conflicts and internationally illegal annexation took place.

3.5. Wagner's Activities in Different Conflict Zones

Although Wagner's activities in Ukraine, Syria and Libya stand out as the leading case examples, it has long been rooted in African countries as well. In particular, the activities of the Wagner Group in Africa have begun to come to the fore and started to attract attention again as Russia turned its face to alternative regions after the Ukraine War and the subsequent sanctions imposed on it.

Wagner established agreements at the local level with many governments in Africa and began to represent itself as an alternative to the status quo. Marten defines Wagner as a quasi-state structure in terms of its activities in Africa. (Pokolova 2023, p. 3) While there are writers who compare Wagner's activities in Ukraine and Syria to the activities of western private military companies, there are also those who compare these activities to special forces units from Western countries. (Pokolova 2023, p. 3) However, Considering its activities, Wagner is

much more anchored in the continent compared to an ordinary Western PMC. It does not only carry out military operations but also economic and disinformation activities, as an organization that has been given free rein by Putin and the Russian state in its business activities. As noted, Wagner's activities in Africa range from participating in armed patrols to close protection activities, from energy and mining to disinformation activities.

Wagner forces are labeled as military advisors in some African countries. (Reuters 2023) However, their loyalties to their principals in these countries is questionable. It appears that they might seek deals with local armed groups without the consent or knowledge of leading politicians in the country that they serve. Wagner groups also intervene in local elections through disinformation campaigns, causing local social protests and therefore creating debates about the legitimacy of local institutions. They sometimes try to distribute food and other humanitarian aid materials to the local people free of charge in order to create positive public opinion in their favor. (Kulig 2023, p. 3)

It is noteworthy that the Wagner Group is generally deployed in geographies whose corrupt political elites want to protect their own positions, profits and power. These African countries are the ones where problems have become chronic. In the countries where Wagner is located, corruption is high, power is not transferred through democratic methods, the position of the army in politics is very strong, and unemployment is very common.

Wagner's activities in Africa appear to follow standard operating patterns. Even before Wagner militants enter a country, propaganda elements come into play and prepare the public with anti-French, anti-Western and Russophile perceptions. After these operations, engineers from different fields and linked to Wagner conduct field researches on areas promising economical benefits. Subsequently, official agreements are concluded with the states and the relevant material infrastructure is established. Finally, Wagner forces are transferred to the countries with the transportation vehicles provided by the Russian army. In the ongoing process, the effort to shape public opinion continues with the smearing of Western powers and the over mentioning of the military successes of Russian forces. However, the visibility of Wagner forces in countries vary. For example, while Wagner members in the Central African Republic provide protection in the president's protocol and are more visible in public, in Mali and Libya they choose to stay behind the scenes and take responsibility only in military operations.

3.5.1 Wagner's Activities in Libya

Encouraged by its success in ensuring the continuity of the regime of its ally Bashar Assad, the Russian government intervened in the civil war in Libya, with which it has had close relations since the Soviet era. The main objectives of the Russians were to hinder the US interests and establish a permanent presence in the Central Mediterranean. In fact, thousands of Russian military advisors have worked in Libya in the late Soviet Union. The relations, which were later suspended with the end of the Cold War, regained vitality with the expansion of Russian interests into the region. Libya's gaining international legitimacy since the early 2000s has been a turning point in its relations with Russia. In this context, the Putin government, wanting to improve the relations between the two countries, canceled Libya's 4.5 billion USD debts, remaining from the Soviet Union era, in return for economic privileges and a military base agreement. (France24 2008) Thus, one of the most important reasons for Russia's recent involvement in Libya's current civil war is to ensure the continuity of these economic and military agreements.

Libya is important for Russia especially because of the country's natural resources. Taking advantage of the security gaps that emerged after the toppling of Gaddafi in 2011, Russia supported the forces affiliated with Khalifa Haftar and gained access to important ports and oil production facilities in the country. While the European Union, which imposed a series of sanctions on the Russian energy sector after the war in Ukraine, could have accessed Libya as an alternative energy source, this was prevented by Russia's presence in the region. (Uniacke 2022) In this way, Russia could increase energy expenditures and costs of the sanctions for the European Union. Another importance of Libya for Russia is related to its geographical location. Aside from its location around the central Mediterranean, Libya constitutes a transfer hub for those Wagner personnel who will be transferred to other regions in Africa, especially to Mali and Sudan. (Kulig 2023, p. 5)

Russia, which initially supported the National Transitional Government in Libya, later became concerned that its interests would be in danger as the UN-backed Government of National Accord gained power, and put its weight in favor of Khalifa Haftar, who was known to be fighting against ISIS. Thereafter, Russia began to support the Libyan National Army led by Haftar. The relationship between Haftar and Russia accelerated after Haftar's visit to Moscow in 2016. (The Guardian 2016)

During the civil war, other Russian private military companies also took part in Libya. Some of these companies were involved in mine clearance issues. At the beginning, they

provided technical support and maintenance activities through the facilities they had established in Egypt. (Pokolova 2023, p. 7) However, the turning point for Wagner in the war in Libya was the meeting between Haftar and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in 2018. (Novaya Gazeta 2018) Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin reportedly attended this meeting. During Haftar's visit, Prigozhin was located in the immediate vicinity of the Libyan leader, as appeared from the leaked photographs. A source within the Kremlin circles, seeking to hide Wagner's intentions and activities in the country, claimed that Prigozhin's role in this visit, as a former restaurant owner and Putin's chief, consisted of preparing the lunch where the leaders would meet. (The Bell 2019) After this meeting, Wagner members began to take part in Libyan territory. On the onset, Wagner's duty in the country was technical support and maintenance. (Pokolova 2023, p. 7) Despite the curiosity of the international community, the Russian government preferred to deny Wagner's activities in the region.

Wagner has gained access to various military bases in Libya to continue its operations in the country. The company provided the logistics of its operations in Libya through Jufrah and Qardabiyat military bases. It has also benefited from its bases in Libya for future operations in the Central African Republic and Mali. Wagner, which initially agreed to provide support in the fields of technical assistance and maintenance, participated directly in field operations with Haftar forces as the time passed, especially with the Tripoli offensive in 2019. During the Tripoli operation, Wagner members were on the front lines as sniper units, as well as taking part in directing air and artillery units and taking electronic countermeasures. (Pokolova 2023, p. 7)

As a result of the failure of the clashes in the city of Tripoli, Haftar and Wagner forces retreated to the oil-rich eastern cities. Haftar's decision to prevent Libya's oil exports in order to reduce the revenue sources of the Tripoli government has become a matter of international debate. (The Soufan Center 2023, p. 17) It was also meaningful for Russia to stop oil exports from Libya, which is an important oil exporter, as it will increase global oil prices and strengthen its own hand against the European Union.

The Wagner group continues to intervene in Libyan internal affairs in the ongoing process. It was claimed that two people of Russian nationality who were detained in the capital Tripoli, governed by the GNA, in 2019 were Wagner members who were spying for Russia. It was seen that Maxim Shugaley, one of the detainees, was a member of a foundation affiliated with Prigozhin. During this period, Wagner and the Russian government supported Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif Gaddafi, in the elections, thinking that he would best represent Russian

interests in Libya. (Pokolova 2023, p. 8) During the run-up to the election, Saif was also supported by Russia and Wagner-related media. While the Wagner presence in Libya still continues, many of its forces stationed in the country have been transferred to the Ukrainian front. (The New Arab 2022)

3.5.2. Wagner's Activities in the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic stands out as the country where Wagner is most visible, most consolidated and operates with all its sub-institutions. In addition, the CAR comes forward as the country where Wagner enjoys the freedom of movement the most in his activities. The CAR is also the first country in which Wagner intervened in Africa. Wagner forces carry out operations with or without the country's security apparatus and make agreements with local armed groups without the knowledge of the ruling government.

In order to prevent widespread violence in the Central African Republic, which has been the scene of internal conflicts and military coups after independence in 1960, France intervened in the country with Operation Sangaris in 2013. During the period, armed groups were able to control more than two-thirds of the country. The central government had no control outside the capital Bangui in the period leading up to the French intervention. In the region under the control of armed groups, mineral resources that could constitute a major source of income for the country remained outside the control of the state. Political instability has become chronic in the country. (Council on Foreign Relations 2021)

In the ongoing process, UN forces also entered the country with the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) operation. However, despite this, conflicts continued in the country. Unable to prevent the existence of armed groups, the Touadera government had to turn to Russia. President Touadera, who has made various visits to Russia since 2017, signed agreements in the field of economy, mining, humanitarian aid and education, as well as military cooperation, during his meetings with Lavrov and Putin. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian federation 2017)

Wagner's activities in the country started in 2017 after the agreement signed with the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadera and the Russian government. Within the scope of the agreement, Russian PMCs would provide protection to the Touadera government, which is suffering from sanctions. Over time, the United Nations exempted Russia from the arms sanctions imposed on the Central African Republic, one of the

turning points of military cooperation between the two countries. Since 2018, Wagner forces have appeared in the country under the guise of military advisors. (Pokolova 2023, p. 9)

Wagner forces were initially responsible for training government military units. Local forces linked to the central government trained by Wagner played important roles in clashes with rebel groups. Many of the operations of state's military units were directed by Wagner; In addition, Wagner forces were directly involved in certain operations together with the CAR troops. The direct participation of Wagner forces in the conflicts was the result of former President François Bozize's marching on the capital after the country's constitutional court blocked his candidacy in the elections. Bozize forces then began to capture various cities of the country in cooperation with rebel groups. In the resulting urgent situation, Wagner forces began to directly participate in the conflict. (ACLED 2022)

Coalition of Patriots for Change, formed in cooperation with François Bozize and rebel groups, has come to control two-thirds of the country. On the other hand, forces affiliated with the Touadera government were in cooperation with Wagner groups. With the participation of Rwandan army units and MINUSCA forces, Bozize's groups were pushed back. By May 2021, government forces have managed to retake the vast majority of the country's territory. As a result of the subsequent elections, Touadera was re-elected as president for another 5 years. Touadera's victory meant the consolidation of Russia's military and mining activities in the region. (Council on Foreign Relations 2021) After the defeat of the troops led by François Bozize and the recapture of the cities they held, Wagner forces began to act more independently in the country. (ACLED 2022)

Wagner's economic activities in CAR are also quite remarkable. Wagner carries out its activities in the country through Lobaye Invest and Sewa Security Services companies. One of these companies, Lobaye Invest, is linked to the Russia-based M-Finance company operating on behalf of Prigozhin, and both companies are working on gold and diamond mining. Lobaye Invest carries out mining activities in the country with the privileges it obtained through the government. It has obtained the right to operate in 7 mines where gold and diamonds are extracted. (Council on Foreign Relations 2021) The proximity of the mentioned mines and the military bases established by the Wagner organization is striking. (Pokolova 2023, p. 10) In addition, Lobaye Invest is also known to provide financial support to various media figures and politicians who promote pro-Russian propaganda. However, it is reported that the Russians in the CAR do not limit themselves to official agreements, but cooperate with local rebels for their own interests and are accused of engaging in illegal activities like cattle smuggling. (Etahoben

2021) There are claims that Russian companies have made agreements with Cameroon in the field of port and transportation in order to extract valuable resources from the Central African Republic through Cameroon. (Kulig 2023, p. 4)

In addition to their military and economic activities, Russian people linked to Wagner can also take an active part in politics in the country. For example, a former Russian military intelligence (GRU) personnel named Valery Zakharov appears to have served as the security advisor to the president in the CAR. (Siegle 2022) In addition, Wagner militants provide close protection to CAR President Toudera. (Council on Foreign Relations 2021) In addition to all these, Russian PMCs either directly manage various radio channels in the country or finance those who make news in favor of Russia. (Medium 2022) Such comprehensive activities of Russia targeting the country are interpreted as 'state capture'.

Khartoum Agreement, signed between state forces and armed groups in 2019, was allegedly mediated by Wagner boss Prigozhin. With this agreement, while the state forces imposed their authority over the armed groups, local groups were also provided with a share from income to be obtained from the country's mineral resources. In this Agreement, Wagner's economic privileges in the country were also guaranteed. (Fasanotti 2023)

On the other hand, there are reports that Wagner members operating in the country are involved in many irregularities. These accusations range from extrajudicial killings, arrests, physical and sexual violence. The one that was discussed the most for days was the murder of 3 Russian journalists who were investigating the irregularities of Wagner members in the country. (Mudge 2020) Especially, during the operations carried out against Bozize troops, widespread human rights violations were massively reported. (ACLEDD 2022)

According to Acleddata's research, 70% of the operations carried out by Wagner independently of state forces were the subject of acts of violence against civilians. In the country, Wagner forces generally carried out operations together with state forces. And it is estimated that more than 500 civilians lost their lives as a result of these joint operations. (ACLEDD 2022) It appears that the group which was most negatively affected by Wagner's human rights violations is the Fulani groups. The Fulani community, accused of widespread support for rebel groups, is frequently targeted by Wagner. (Cosset and Morice 2021)

3.5.3. Wagner's Activities in Sudan

Another country of action for Wagner is Sudan. The Sudanese government, with which Russia has established military cooperation and supplied its army since the Soviet era has a

common ground with the Putin government in opposition to the USA and the West. Russia continued to support the government of Omar al-Bashir, which was sanctioned by the UN arms embargo. Al-Bashir, for whom an arrest warrant was issued by the International Criminal Court in 2009 (Duerr 2019), visited Russia several times and met with Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Soigu. The Russian side's demands from al-Bashir, who requested military aid from Russia, were privileges based on economic interests and a naval base on the Red Sea coast. (Warsaw Institute 2019)

After the visits of the Sudanese side to Sochi in 2017 (Ibrahim 2024) Wagner forces began to set foot in the country. Wagner members in the country took part in suppressing the rebellion movements that started in 2018 when al-Bashir tried to enact the constitutional amendment that would allow him to extend his term of office. During this period, Wagner forces tried to undermine the legitimacy of the demonstrators by organizing disinformation campaigns, while also directing the security forces affiliated with the al-Bashir government to suppress social events. (Pokolova 2023, p. 12) It is seen that Alexander Segeyevich Kuznetsov, who had previously served in Libya on behalf of the company and took photographs with Prigozhin and Utkin, was managing Wagner's operations in Sudan. Kuznetsov has been sanctioned by the European Union since 2021. (Elbagir 2022)

The overthrow of Omar al-Bashir initially appeared to endanger Russia's interests. Adapting to the new situation in the country, Russia established close relations with the Transitional Military Council and continued to support it militarily. In addition, the disinformation operations carried out by Wagner-related companies on social media have been highlighted internationally several times. Perception operations carried out on Wagner-related websites claimed that the demonstrators participating in pro-democracy actions against the coup government in Sudan were agents of foreign countries and they set fire to social places such as mosques, hospitals and schools and that they unfurled pro-LGBT flags during protests. (Hashi and Keita 2023)

As in the CAR, Russians are especially active in the field of gold mining through intermediary companies established in Sudan and with the approval of General Hamdan, who came to power after the coup. (Doxsee 2023) The most important Russian-owned companies operating in the field of gold mining are Meroe Gold, which is a component of M-Invest, Alsdag Mining and Esnaad Engineering. Meroe Gold and other companies associated with gold mining in Sudan are under sanctions from the US Treasury Department due to their activities in the country. (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2020) Wagner's activities in producing gold from

Sudan, which is the 3rd largest gold producer in Africa, are reportedly used to finance not only its operations in Sudan, but also its operations in other countries, especially Ukraine. It is claimed that Russia's interest in gold mines in Sudan started as early as 2014. The Russian government, which was restricted in accessing its assets abroad after the occupation of Crimea, reportedly used the gold resources from Sudan to overcome the negative effects of international sanctions. (Knight and Trad 202) The Sudan example is interesting because the partnership with the Russians was maintained despite the change of governments.

Interestingly, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky came to Sudan and met with General Burhan in October 2023, Ukrainian special forces were also deployed to Sudan. In different images shared online, personnel of the Ukrainian military intelligence GRU are seen targeting Wagner convoys in the country with sniper rifles and unmanned aerial vehicles. Ukraine, which imported military mines from Sudan in 2022, when the war with Russia started, later helped the al-Burhan government in Khartoum during the siege of the city. According to certain reports shared by the BBC, Ukrainian troops in Sudan have been fighting against Wagner troops and the Rapid Mobilization Force which is a Russian ally since August 2023. Ukrainian army spokesmen interviewed by BBC legitimize their activities in Sudan by stating that Russian soldiers fighting on Ukrainian territory and participating in human rights violations will be punished wherever they are and that Ukrainian interests will be defended all around the world. One of the stated aims is to deprive the country of an important source of income by preventing Russia's gold mining activities in Sudan. (Erman 2024) Wagner's activities in Sudan seem to be extremely remarkable in terms of being a new front in the war between Ukraine and Russia.

3.5.4 Wagner's Activities in Madagascar

Another country for Wagner's operation in Africa is Madagascar. During the meeting that the then President of Madagascar Rajaonarimampianina held with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in 2018 that Wagner leader Prigozhin also attended, Russia decided to intervene in the country. Russia's intervention in a country of less strategic importance and low natural resource capacity, was initially associated with the elections to be held in 2018. While Moscow was engaged in perception activities against opposition candidates in the country through Wagner, it also initiated support campaigns for candidates who were seen as beneficial to its foreign policy. (Schwartz 2019) Before the 2018 elections in Madagascar, Wagner supported many candidates participating in the elections and preferred not to tie all his chances to a single candidate. Realizing that the candidate they supported,

Rajaonarimampianina, would not win the election, the Russians put their weight in favor of another candidate, Andry Rajoelina, who would win potentially at the end. (DefenceWeb 2022)

Due to its activities in the country, Wagner obtained a privilege in a chrome mine through a subsidiary company operating in the field. However, due to social protests initiated by mine workers, citing unpaid wages and unmet social rights, the privileges won by Russians in the field of mining were terminated. However, the political and economic connections established by Russian companies remain in effect in Madagascar. (Kulig 2023, p. 2) In an investigation conducted by the Stanford Internet Observatory, it was revealed that pro-Russia social media accounts which were found to be linked to Russia, supported certain politicians in Madagascar. These accounts were seen to be established in 2018 and ceased their activities after the elections held in the same year. In these accounts, the common theme was Russia as the savior against the colonialism of Western countries in Africa. (Grossman, Bush and DiResta 2019, p. 33) Government officials supported by Russia create difficulties for western companies operating in the country through taxation or lawsuits in order to create space for Russian-related companies. (Sheehan 2022)

3.5.5. Wagner's Activities in Mozambique

Cabo Delgado, the region of Mozambique close to the Tanzanian border, has been facing the increasing threat of Ansar al-Sunna which later claimed allegiance to ISIS since 2017. Jihadist groups exploit the economic and social problems of Muslim community whose grievances vary from exclusion from the government and being left economically disadvantaged. The population of the Cabo Delgado region is reported to be 60% Muslim. (Cardoso 2021, p. 8) Armed groups in the region, which has rich natural resources, have started a rebellion against the Mozambican government. Russia expanded the scope of cooperation by signing military and security cooperation agreements with the Mozambican government in 2017. (Kulig 2023, p. 4)

Relations between Mozambique and Russia date back to the Cold War years. The Soviet Union was one of the biggest supporters of the FRELIMO party, which fought for independence against Portugal. This party is still in power in the country. When the Russian and Mozambican governments agreed on the Wagner deployment, the Russian government erased a significant part of Mozambique's debts. (Oliinyk, Oliinyk-D'omochko and Maksymov 2023)

Wagner entered the country in September 2019. The equipment they had included attack helicopters, drones and motor vehicles. The duties of the Wagner company deployed in the

country were to train the local armed forces and coordinate their operations. (Olech 2024, p. 286) However, during the operation, heavy losses were suffered as a result of the Wagner militants engaging in clashes in forested areas they have never been before as well as the insufficient training level and lack of equipment on the part of the Mozambican troops. Following the failure of military operations against terrorist groups, Wagner militants withdrew from the country in early 2020. Wagner's operations in Mozambique are a story of failure. The Mozambique experience showed that Wagner was not tolerant of losses and does not hesitate to leave the country when the expected economic benefits were not at the desired level.

3.5.6. Wagner's Activities in Ukraine

Ukraine is important because it is the area where the Wagner group first emerged and eventually disappeared. The group, which emerged during the annexation of Crimea, later participated in the conflicts in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and allegedly conducted assassination attempts against leading anti-Russian figures in this region. (Congressional Research Service 2023) Although armed groups wearing Russian army standard uniforms were seen patrolling the peninsula after Crimea was occupied by Russia, the Russian government claimed that these groups were not operating on behalf of Moscow. Soldiers patrolling the Crimean streets without any official insignia in their uniforms were called satirically in the press as “little green men” in Crimea. (Al Jazeera 2022)

Wagner's activities in Ukraine have increased since the summer of 2022. After it became clear that the Russian army's victory in Ukraine would not be easy, the conflict zone was opened for Wagner in the operations. While the company initially transferred its most experienced and trained troops to the operation area in smaller numbers, it took the leading role in difficult battles such as the Bakhmut front, due to the Russian army's inability to achieve sufficient success. In this process, the company transferred some of its militants from Africa to conflict zones in Ukraine. (Özdemir 2023) During this period, many in Russian prisons were recruited to take part in the Bakhmut battles on the side of Wagner, with the promise of amnesty after 6 months of front-line service. (Bryjka 2023, p. 2) There are sources claiming that the number of Wagner personnel increased from a few thousand to 50,000 since the middle of the war that started in Ukraine. (Helsel 2023) According to Prigozhin himself, until Bakhmut city was captured, Wagner's losses climbed to 22.000 dead. (Ivshina, Dale and Brewer 2024) Wagner's rise to prominence led to tensions between the group and the Russian army. Subsequently, the Russian army took steps to rein in Wagner's freedom on the frontline. The

most important step taken in this direction was to prevent Wagner from recruiting prisoners from Russian prisons to their ranks. (Shevchenko 2023)

As a result of the dispute between the Russian army command and Wagner, an arrest warrant was issued for Prigozhin and his high echelon. On the other hand, Prigozhin targeted Russian Chief of Staff Gerasimov and Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu and accused them of lying to President Putin and blamed them for the failure in the war. (Murphy 2023) Prigozhin and his team subsequently captured the city of Rostov in the south of Russia, marched on Moscow and declared that their movement was not against Putin, but against the ruling echelon of the Russian army. Prigozhin declared that the troops marching to Moscow under him on June 23 consisted of 25 thousand people. (Aljazeera 2023) Subsequently, the rebellion initiated by Wagner was suppressed, the willing people from the group were allowed to sign contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense, and those who did not want to sign would be transferred to camps in Belarus.

3.5.7. Wagner's Activities in Syria

Russia's direct intervention in the Syrian Civil War was announced in Vladimir Putin's speech to the Duma in September 2015. However, Putin noted that Russia would be present in Syria only with its air force and would not use ground troops in the civil war. Although this was the initial plan, it became clear that the forces affiliated with the Syrian army and proxy forces would not be sufficient to change the course of the civil war and when the use of air forces alone was not a game-changer, Wagner Group got involved in the Syrian front. (Bouza 2023)

The presence of Russian private military companies in Syria dates back to the pre-civil war period. A team, including Dimitry Utkin, one of the founders of Wagner, has been in the at-Tanf region on the Jordanian border since 2010. Similarly, Russian energy companies which started operating in Syria before the civil war, were using their own special military protection units in their activities in Syria. (Rondeaux 2019, p. 46)

Sukhanin divides Wagner's activities in Syria into three categories. Accordingly, the first period is between their entry into Syria in September 2015 and the first half of 2016. In this period, Wagner forces carried out observation activities while completing their deployment in Syria, but did not engage in serious clashes with armed groups during this period. In the second period, that started with the latter of 2016, Wagner members participated in serious conflicts and sometimes suffered significant losses. During this period, the most important front of Wagner operations was Palmyra. The group used different types of heavy weapons and

ammunition during the Palmyra clashes and operated independently from the Syrian government in the planning and execution process during the operation. According to a statement from a Wagner member who participated in the Palmyra Operation, Wagner members bore the brunt of the conflicts in the region, as a result Syrian government hospitals were also filled with Wagner wounded brought from war zones. (Beardsley 2022) He stated that Wagner first took part in the operations in Palmyra, the Russian regular troops entered the operation area, and finally Syrian soldiers and cameras arrived. (The Bell 2019) After the capture of Palmyra, a concert given by an orchestra from Russia in the amphitheater of the ancient city constituted one of the important psychological breakthrough moments in the war. In the third period, unlike the second period, Wagner forces did not engage in clashes for capturing an area, but instead struggled to seize oil and other mineral resources. With the end of large-scale conflicts in the third period, salaries paid to personnel decreased and as a result, there was a decrease in personnel quality. During this period, disagreements also began to emerge between Prigozhin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 9)

Reportedly, 131 Russian citizens, excluding military personnel, lost their lives in Syria from the beginning of the operation to the end of September 2017. As expected, the Russian government continued its policy of denying Wagner's existence in order not to cast a shadow on the success of its operation in Syria. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that the Russian government did not have information about Russian citizens traveling to Syria individually. (Tsvetkova 2017)

During their operations in Syria, on February 7-8, 2018, Wagner forces, who wanted to seize the Conoco oil refinery, which provides an important source of income for the Syrian administration, were subjected to air attacks by the US-led coalition. Wagner troops reportedly conducted this operation as a result of an agreement signed between the Syrian government and the Prigozhin-related Evro Police company. Thanks to this agreement, Evro Police would obtain a one-third share from the production of the oil facilities to be seized in the Deir ez-Zor region. (The Bell 2019) The operations which were carried out against the Conoco oil refinery would constitute a historical turning point for Wagner forces acting under the command of Bashar Assad's forces. After this operation, Wagner would enter a transformation process. While it was previously a military structure trying to achieve field dominance, in its new position it planned to engage in control and protection activities in energy fields on behalf of the Assad administration and Russia. However, in the morning of February 8, the US army dropped bombs on the armed group of 600 people with all the means at their disposal (bombers, unmanned

aerial vehicles, warplanes and helicopters). It is rumored that hundreds of members of the Wagner group died in the bombardment. (Sukhanin 2019, p. 10)

The massacre that took place on February 8, 2018 did not resonate sufficiently with the Russian public. The reaction from the Russian public to the death of contracted personnel in Syria who chose to join the Wagner Group was not enough to urge the government to take action. The Russian government has denied that its own soldiers or citizens were killed in Syria and accused the claimants of spreading fake news. Russia was left in a great dilemma during the conflict called Battle of Khassam. (Żochowski, Strachota and Menkiszak 2018) If Russia had admitted that its own citizens died in the US bombing, this would reveal that Russian PMCs participated in offensive operations in a different country, which would prevent the use of the deniability opportunity provided by PMCs. On the other hand, accepting the losses in question would prevent the opportunity to stay away from domestic political pressure, which is one of the most important contributions of the PMCs, suggested by the political instrumentalist approach. In the clashes that lasted 4 hours, the US side had no casualties and losses of the Syrian Army and Wagner group combined are estimated at least to be 300. The US side stated that they contacted the Russian authorities and shared information before and during the attack, but they did not receive any information or guidance from the Russian authorities. (Gibbons 2018)

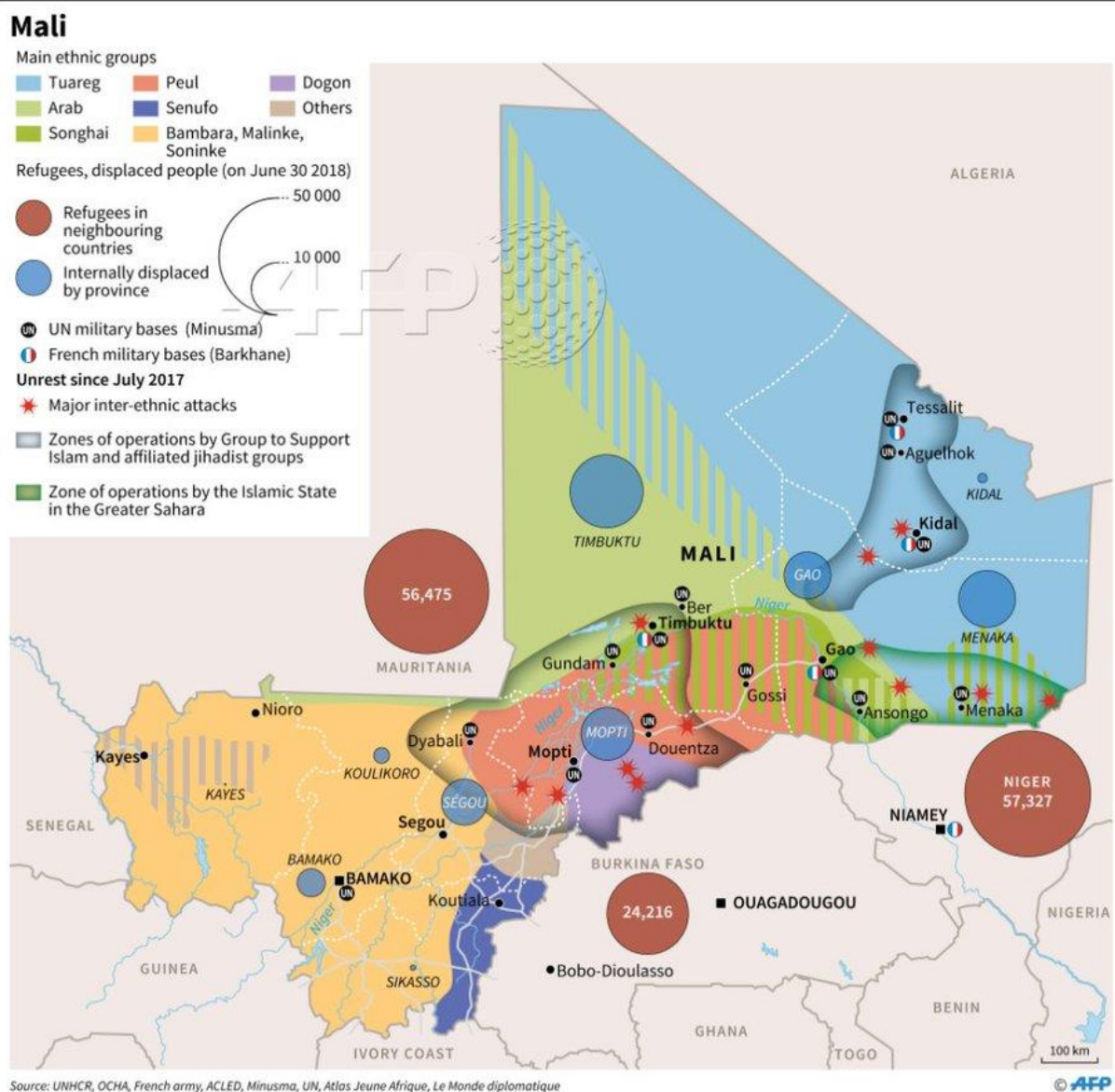
Despite all the problems, Wagner's role in the Syrian War was one of the turning points for the company. After the Palmyra victory, Dmitry Utkin and his team visited the Kremlin and received a medal from Vladimir Putin. (Marten 2020, p. 2)

CHAPTER FOUR: SITUATION IN MALI

4.1. Social Outlook in Mali

The total population of Mali is estimated to be around 24 million (World Bank) with northern Mali's population estimated at approximately 1.3 million. (OECD) More than half of the population in the north consists of Tuareg and Arabs. As Figure 1 reveals; other prominent communities include Songhais, Peuls, Senufo, Bambara, etc. The historical relationships between these ethnic groups and the Malian government are diverse and complex.

Figure 1; Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Mali



Source: (AFP, Distribution of ethnic groups in Mali, 2018)

During the colonial era, the French administration prioritized the black communities in the south, often neglecting the Arab and Tuareg communities in the north. Black communities were provided better access to schools and civil service jobs by the French colonial administration. Therefore, during this period, the country's indigenous elites were made up of southern concessionaires. On the other hand, the French administration favored Tuareg groups over Arab communities in the north.

A defining element of Mali's social outlook is therefore this historical mutual distrust between the communities living in the south and the Tuareg groups in the north. Tuareg groups, established governments in the Sahel region, controlled trade in the vast African deserts, and saw themselves as the masters of the deserts throughout history. However, they were relegated to a second-class position against the groups they ruled for many years during French colonialism. The communities in the south remember that Tuareg societies historically ruled their regions, with the bitter memories of the slave trade. Again, during the colonial years, Tuareg groups frequently raided other groups in the south and north for the purpose of plunder. On the other hand, the irregularities committed by the Southern administrators appointed to the Arab and Tuareg regions as part of the Bamako government's efforts to govern the north were perceived as a new colonialism. (Chauzal 2015, p. 21)

After Mali's independence, the political and economic superiority of southern elites over northern communities became more evident. In order to control minority groups in the north, military outposts were established in these regions, privileged relations were established with various tribes that were close to establishing relations with the state, and communities that were not willing to establish such a relation with the state were excluded. (Chauzal 2015, p. 29) It was attempted to constitute the state authority in the north through military and administrative means.

Arab communities in the northern regions constitute another minority group. Like the Tuareg groups, Arab communities are also nomadic and mobile between the borders of Niger, Libya, Algeria and Mauritania. The close relations between Mali's Arab communities and neighboring countries like Mauritania, Algeria and Libya has caused the central government of Mali to approach this community with suspicion.

The Malian government prioritized the Tuareg against the Arab communities, and the representation of the Arab community was reduced with the electoral system and electoral districts created. This situation becomes clearer when we look at parliamentary arithmetic. According to this; In 2012, while 12 out of 147 deputies in the country's national assembly

came from Tuaregs, the Arab community, which constitutes 5 percent of the population, did not have a single member in the parliament. (Chauzal 2015, p. 19) The representation of Arabs in the state is very low compared to the Songhay and Fulani groups. As an extension of the Mali government's strategies to divide the north, the Hausas, despite being much less populous, and the Songhay groups within the northern population (OECD), were able to occupy very important positions within the state.

Despite having the numerical majority in the northern population, their inability to present political unity weakened the Tuareg movement. Although Ibrahim ag Bhanga tried to gather the Tuaregs under one roof in 2011, the Ansar Dine movement founded by Iyad ag Ghali prevented the establishment of a single union. Unlike the Tuareg, the Arab, Fulani and Songhay groups are less divided. Although the rebelling Tuareg groups claimed to defend the rights of all northern peoples, there were serious clashes during the rebellion, especially against the Songhay and Fulani groups. During these processes, Songhay and Fulani armed groups, which were established to protect their own regions, received serious support from the Malian state. (Chauzal 2015, p. 39)

The relationship of Fulani groups with the state, as in many African countries, has been problematic since independence. As in the colonial years, Fulani groups, who believed that they were in a second-class position in their relationship with the state, felt that they faced obstacles both in accessing education and in advancing to the state ranks. As a result, they clung more tightly to their traditional relations, became isolated from other groups and the state, and became introverted. (Tobie 2015, p. 10)

The central regions of Mali are also diverse in terms of ethnic structure. Along with the Fulani ethnic group, Songhai, Tamasheq, Bozo, Bambara and Dogon groups live side by side in the central regions. While the Fulani are semi-nomadic and engage in animal husbandry, other groups have a more settled lifestyle and engage in agriculture and fishing. Despite the existence of laws regulating the relationship between groups, disputes frequently lead to ethnically based conflicts and violence.

Today, factors such as population growth along with climate change, the growth of animal herds, and the state's expansion towards agricultural lands with the support of international partners are changing the status quo in rural areas. As a result, the shrinkage of the land allocated especially for animal husbandry causes conflicts between tribes with nomadic and settled lifestyles. (Tobie 2015, p. 10)

In administrative terms, the withdrawal of state institutions and the army from the north since 2012, when the last rebellion movement began in the country, has created a serious security gap in the region. Since the resumption of the civil war, the region has been deprived of state functions such as education, health and security. Armed structures that take advantage of the gap and threaten public order prevent the performance of state functions.

4.2. Economical Outlook in Mali

Mali has one of the fastest growing population rates in the world. On the other hand, urbanization and unemployment rates are also increasing rapidly. Malian youth, who struggle to find any opportunities in their country's economy are looking for ways to migrate to European countries, especially to France. The country's economy is primarily based on agriculture. Large parts of territories are formed by deserts while agricultural activities are concentrated around the Niger and Senegal rivers. The most important problems in agriculture are seasonal droughts and technological inadequacies. France, the United States, the European Development Fund and the UN Development Programme, provide development assistance to Mali, primarily in the field of agriculture. (Latorre 2022)

The cities in the north of Mali have been trade centers throughout history, being on pilgrimage routes and rich in natural resources. In the modern period, oil, gold and uranium mineral deposits have been discovered in these regions. Economic and political instability and periodic droughts in the country seriously affect the local economy. While the tourism sector is also important in the north, the Tuareg rebellions in the country and the presence of jihadist groups that have grown stronger since the 2000s hinder the tourism potential.

Another regional dynamic affecting the social and political situation in the region is the competition between Libya and Algeria. Both countries have entered into a years-long competition to shape the developments in the Sahel. Experts believe that the aforementioned competition also has a destabilizing role for Mali. It is argued that Libya's recruitment and arming of the Tuareg groups in the region and their use under the name of "Islamic Legion" in the country's war with Chad has seriously militarized the Tuareg groups. Tuareg warriors, who received training and obtained experience in this war under the Libyan army ranks, later became instrumental in the internal conflicts. During this period, migration from Mali to Libya aggravated due to climate problems and economic difficulties. In addition, the conflicts that led to the overthrow of the Gaddafi administration in Libya and subsequently turned into a civil war also triggered instability in Mali. After the Algerian Civil War that ravaged the country in the 1990s ended, the armed groups that reached peace with the government were allowed to

stay in Algeria, while the marginalized groups which did not lay down their arms, were obliged to move to Mali. (Chauzal 2015, p. 22)

4.3. Tuareg Groups

The earliest groups identified as Tuareg in history appear in the 10th century AD. The word Tuareg means “the free born.” (Lecocq and Klute 2018, p. 24) Although the Tuareg groups, which are completely affiliated with the Islamic religion, appeared previously to be a nomadic community engaged in animal husbandry, they have sometimes settled into sedentary life due to climate change since the 1970s and the agricultural policies of the states they are affiliated with. The Tuaregs fought against French colonialism in Algeria in the north and in the Sahel region in the south, but over time they were defeated by the military authority of the colonial administration. The groups that remained in Libya during the drawing of the borders came under Italian administration.

The French administration's approach to the Tuareg groups has been more positive than other ethnic groups in the north. Tuareg groups were exempt from forced labor and compulsory military service, required for other groups which blamed the Tuareg of being ‘colonial darling’s. (Lecocq and Georg Klute 2018, p. 25) However, the existence of Tuaregs was ignored in the process of determining the borders after independence. Tuareg people had to accept the newly drawn borders of the states in North Africa and the Sahel region. Among the states ruled by Arabs and black Africans, the Tuaregs have preserved their ethnic and tribal differences, yet these differences from other ethnic groups within the country’s borders have become more evident.

The Tuaregs, who initially showed fierce resistance against French colonialism, were integrated into the French administration over time. Many of the French soldiers and statesmen who served in the Tuareg region had admiration for the Tuareg. Particularly the Tuaregs' ability to adapt to difficult conditions and their secular structure were included in the notes of French administrators. Tuaregs also attracted attention as very successful soldiers. French sympathy for the Tuaregs continued for decades, and when the Tuareg rebellions began in Niger and Mali in the 1990s, ideas emerged in the relevant ministries and state institutions of France to support the Tuaregs. It is claimed that the French government called on the Tuaregs in Libya to leave the country and go to their homeland, just before France started its role in the international operations against the Muammar Gaddafi administration in 2011. (Carayol 2022)

With the end of the colonial period, Tuareg groups remained between the borders of 5 different states: Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Since the withdrawal of Western powers from the region, Tuareg groups have periodically struggled for independence. However, the independence demands of Tuareg groups remained at the local level and there was not a unitary and trans-border independence struggle that would bring together Tuareg groups in 5 different countries.

While the integration of the Tuaregs living in Niger, rich in mineral and energy resources in the north, into the country was easier, the relations of the Tuaregs with the state in the neighboring country of Mali were problematic from the very beginning. The Malian government, which had a socialist and anti-Western outlook after independence, continued to be suspicious of the close relationship the Tuareg had with the French during the colonial period, and continued to see the Tuareg as a predatory and underdeveloped community. The Malian government interpreted the Tuareg groups as a community that would be settled by the state and civilized through the education system. (Lecocq and Klute 2018, p. 28) The Malian government's approach to the Tuaregs in the first years of independence reminds the French approach to Africa within the framework of their civilizing mission during the colonial years.

4.4. Tuareg Rebellions

After its independence in 1960, there were 4 different Tuareg rebellions in Mali and subsequently various peace agreements between them and the state were signed. Despite those agreements, the integration of the Tuareg and Arab populations into the central state has not been achieved. The Malian administration could only handle the rebellions from a military perspective but a long-term and permanent solution to the problem has not been found. The privileges granted to certain groups during the making and implementation of agreements have led to the division of armed groups and outbreak of new conflicts. Subsequently, the Mali government's oppression and divide-smash-devour policies were not successful in the field, and in the deadlock, some Tuareg groups were marginalized and became closer to jihadist groups.

The first rebellion movement in the country started just 3 years after independence in 1960, claiming that their demands as to identity and autonomy were not accepted during the rule of the socialist party. The response of the government was to refer the problem to military methods. Accordingly, a military administration was established in the northern region and martial law was declared. The rebel movement was barely suppressed by the Malian government. However, the conflicts led to thousands of people to migrate out of the country particularly to Algeria. Newly independent socialist Algeria and former colonialist France

weighed in favor of the Malian government. In the memory of the Tuareg, the 1963 rebellion is seen as a symbol of their betrayal by the Malian government, France and Algeria, which promised them autonomy during the decolonization process. (Lecocq and Klute 2018, p. 29)

In the 1970s and 1980s, northern Mali suffered severely from droughts, resulting in migration to neighboring Niger and Chad. For decades, the Gaddafi administration attracted Tuaregs from Algeria, Mali and Niger to its country, trained and equipped these groups and included them in its army. Iyad ag Ghaly, who is currently the head of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), also received military training in Libya for a while and served in Gaddafi's army. Tuaregs, who were in the Green Army (Legion Islamique) founded by Gaddafi, also fought in Chad on behalf of Gaddafi and undertook military duties in Libya. Many of them served in Gaddafi's army during the internal conflicts that started in 2011. Some units consisting of Tuaregs undertook the protection of the Gaddafi family. However, over time, they abandoned him. Following the dissolution in Libya, Tuaregs returned to Niger and Mali, but encountered suspicion and state control there. (Carayol 2022) While the Tuaregs who went to Libya joined the Libyan ranks against the Chadian army, those who went to Niger united with the kin groups there and strengthened the Tuareg movement in Niger.

The next rebellion started in 1990. The main demands of the rebels were again the recognition of Tuareg and Arab identities and economic problems. The Tuaregs, who restructured their troops with the experience gained from the war in Chad, put the Malian army in a very difficult situation. Having difficulty in suppressing the rebellion, the Malian government had to accept the ceasefire agreement mediated by Algeria.

Coup d'état that occurred in the following year led the 30-year single-party regime to end. Besides, the government of General Moussa Traoré, who had been in power since 1968, was overthrown. All these developments paved the way for the creation of a new constitution in the country. On the other hand, the coup in 1991 created a tradition of military interventions within the army and therefore paved the way for the 2012 coup. (Elischer 2022, p. 8)

The National Pact that was adopted in 1992 under the mediation of Algeria, France and Mauritania aimed at integrating former rebels into the Malian army. In addition, development plans were put forward for the economic development of the northern region. (Lecocq and Klute, 2018, p.27) Within the scope of the pact, the Tuareg groups ended their demands for independence, while the Mali Government committed to reducing its military presence in the north and granting more autonomy to the north. The Timbuktu Agreement was signed in 1996 to consolidate these pledges.

The 1990s were filled with conflicts between Tuareg groups who accepted the National Pact and those who did not abide by. Later, Songhay groups also entered into conflicts with Tuareg and Arabs. As a result of these conflicts, which sometimes appeared as pogroms and ethnic cleansing, tens of thousands of people migrated within and outside the country.

Although Malian democracy has presented a promising outlook since the 2000s with the dialogue process that took place as a result of the internal conflicts, basic chronic problems such as economic woes, youth unemployment, and inequality of opportunities between the north and south have perpetuated dissatisfaction in the country. In addition, the instability in neighboring countries Algeria and Libya and the interventions of these countries have created hurdles for Mali. Perceptions that certain individuals were privileged among the Arab and Tuareg groups in the North in the 1991 agreement were interpreted as a dividing and swallowing tactic, and divisions began among the Tuareg groups. (Chauzal 2015, p. 13) As a result, belief in the National Pact decreased and certain armed groups rendered state authority ineffective in the northern regions.

The allegation that certain groups among the Tuareg were favored by the state for political purposes and the negative situation in the economy compared to the increasing population, paved the way for a new rebellion in 2006. In this process, especially since the 1990s, the Mali government's prioritization of the Ifogha ethnic group, a branch of the Tuaregs, and its leader Iyad ag Ghali, alienated other Tuareg groups. In addition, Ag Ghali's close relationship with the newly emerging jihadist groups also disturbed Mali's ruling elite and military. Subsequently, Tuareg groups split and many armed groups with varying strength emerged, including the group founded under the leadership of Ibrahim ag Bhangha. Libya and Niger mediated the agreement that ended the 2006 rebellion.

4.5. The Rebellion in 2012

The unstable situation in Mali which has led to insurgency and military coups with lasting impacts, began in 2012. Under this backdrop, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) organization declared unilateral independence in the lands it captured in the north, on April 6, 2012. Among the groups that started the uprising in 2012, the most prominent were the MNLA, the Arab Movement of Azawad, and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad. MNLA was formed in October 2011 through the unification of various Tuareg forces. The majority of the commanders in the movement were the warriors with experience in the Libyan army. In addition, the leader of the group, Ag Najim, was a high-ranking figure who served in the Libyan army during the Kaddafi era. During this period, it was claimed that the

French government promised to support the Tuaregs' independence in northern Mali in exchange for their departure from Gaddafi's regime. Malian administrators state that the French government remained silent against the Tuaregs' passing from Libya to Mali with their weapons. (Carayol 2022)

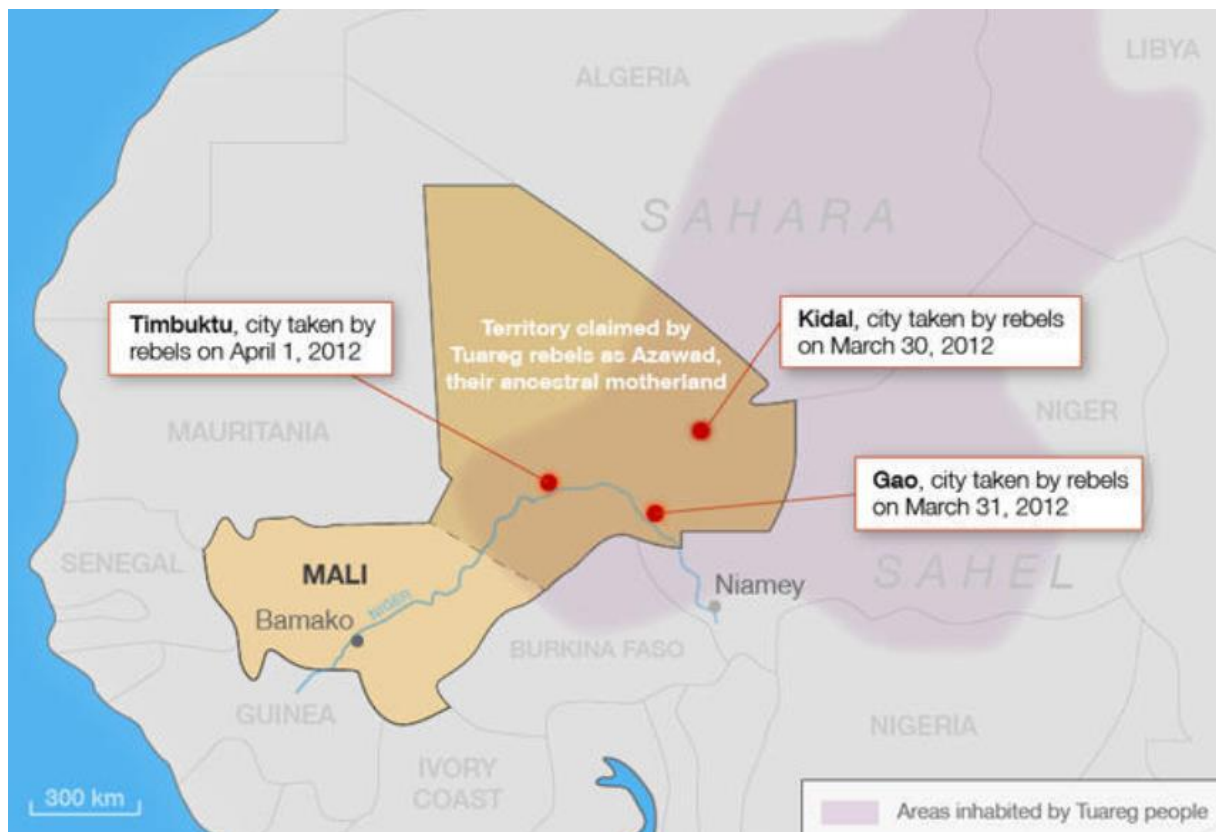
The military coup in 2012 took place on the grounds that the military forces fighting the insurgency in the country did not receive adequate training and the government did not meet its development goals. The difficult situation of the Malian Army, which was fighting rebel groups in the north, constituted the main topic of daily life throughout the country. Especially when the images of 100 Malian soldiers who were killed in the clashes in the Aguelhok region were shown in the media, a great outrage broke out in the country. As a result, the demonstrations and complaints by soldiers' families and relatives created a political discussion in the country. In addition, the Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) government, which could not successfully manage military operations in the north, did not have a good record in the fight against corruption and the realization of promised economic development. On March 22, 2012, troops under the command of Colonel Amadou Haya Sanogou staged a coup and seized power. As justification for the coup, he proposed the government's inability to respond to the rebellion, as is depicted in the Figure 2 below, the inextricable political, social and economic situation in the north, and the poor state of the army. (Charbonneau 2017, p. 331) However, instability continued in the country after the coup. The military intervention which occurred during the most difficult period of the Tuareg crisis, left the country with a government crisis. In such an environment, the international community intervened to address the government crisis, leading to the establishment of a new government.

However, as the jihadist groups like Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Dine gained power, the crisis in Mali became international. The potential of jihadist groups to create a worldwide threat by taking the region as their breeding ground and the possibility of uniting with groups like Boko Haram in the region have attracted international attention. One of the most important reasons why the international community was unable to intervene earlier in the rebellion was the uncertainty surrounding the Mali government. At first, French diplomats failed to persuade their counterparts in the United States and Europe about the severity of the crisis in Mali. Representatives of other Western countries preferred to see the crisis in Mali as an internal matter. (Charbonneau 2017, p. 333) The French government cooperated with the governments of Niger, Senegal and Guinea to address the crisis in Mali.

The international community's initiatives have later intensified to restore stability in the country, where the crisis has become increasingly inextricable. In this context, the possibility of ECOWAS and the African Union deploying troops to the region has come to the fore. Burkina Faso, on the other hand, carried out mediation activities between Tuareg groups and the central government of Mali. However, different visions of neighboring countries for the future of Mali have prevented the international community from being able to speak with a single voice. For example, Algeria did not favor ECOWAS expanding its sphere of influence over Mali while countries like Nigeria and Niger had a negative approach to dealing with the rebel Tuareg groups. (Elischer 2022, p. 12)

The coup in 2020 took place with the allegation that the government of Ibrahim Boubakar Keita manipulated the elections in the country to stay in power and failed to meet expectations in terms of security and economic development. (Elischer 2022, p. 8) Just like in the period leading up to the coup in 2012, the Malian government continued to appear effortless with corruption and mismanagement in 2020. (Elischer 2022, p. 14) During the demonstrations that started before and continued after the coup, anti-French and pro-Russian slogans also appeared on the stage.

Figure 2; Advance of rebel groups in 2012



Source: (France 24, *Mali's perfect storm of woes creates a perfect militant breeding zone*, 2012)

In the military coups that took place in 2012 and 2020, various non-governmental organizations supported the actions of the military administration with the idea that it could return to the democratization wave of 1991 or provide an advantage to their own ethnic groups. (Elischer 2022, p. 11) In this environment of instability, tensions also occurred within the army and politics. These tensions occasionally led to politically motivated purges or conflicts within the army. The military coup in 2020 was carried out by middle and high-ranking officers in the army, and constitutional and parliamentary activities were suspended after the coup. Within the committee, Colonel Assimi Goita stood out among the coup soldiers. The military junta declared that the government would be transferred to civilian administration within 18 months. In 2022, the military junta extended the transition period to 5 years.

4.6. Jihadist Groups

The gaps left by the Malian government, which lost power in the north of the country as a result of internal rebellions and reduced its military presence there with peace agreements, were filled by local forces over time. Algeria, having fought against jihadist organizations on its own territory in the 90s, managed to push these groups southward into Algeria and Mali.

Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which was established in the south of Algeria in 2000 and operates within the borders of Mali, has increased the instability of the region again and has been instrumental in drawing international attention. With the funds earned from activities such as cross-border smuggling and ransom-taking, GSPC was able to both recruit fighters and provide some social services to the people in the regions under its control. GSPC declared its allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2007 and has been renamed Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) since then

During the global war against terrorism that started after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the USA carried the global war against terrorism to the Sahel region and cooperated with the countries of the region within the scope of the coalition against terrorism. The increasing influence of the GSPC, and especially the kidnapping of Western tourists from northern Mali in 2003, forced the international attention to respond to the increasing jihadist threat in the country. After the global war on terror started, the US army began to allocate resources to the training and equipment of the counter-terrorism forces of the countries in the region.

Since 2015, jihadist groups have begun to appear in the central regions of the country. Macina Liberation Front (also known as Katiba Macina) operated in Mopti and surrounding cities, drawing strength from the Fulani ethnic group. Initially, the activities of the Katiba Macina group were not regarded as particularly significant. (Tobie 2017, p. 6) However, over time, it emerged as one of the most important sources of instability in Mali, due to its actions against state institutions and local power centers.

Al-Qaeda's presence in the region has also negatively affected the Tuareg struggle. As of September 2012, the Tuaregs were forced to abandon Gao, the largest city of the then newly independent Republic of Azawad to armed jihadist groups. In addition to losing military superiority over jihadist groups, the inability to provide the authority and services expected by the local people caused the Tuareg groups to lose credibility in the eyes of the public. (Lecocq and Klute 2018, p. 44)

The establishment of Jama'at Nasr Al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM) in 2017, based in the city of Mopti, constituted one of the turning points in the history of the civil war. The group was founded by bringing together the groups Ansar Dine, the Katiba al-Furqan, the Katiba Macina and the Al-Mourabitoun. The Katiba al-Furqan group was established in the early 2000s, while the other three groups emerged after the 2012 uprising. With JNIM, jihadist groups operating in different regions were brought together under one roof and regionalism in jihadist

activities was eliminated, enabling them to operate throughout Mali. As JNIM gained power, the pressure on the Malian state and security forces increased and the severity of the attacks mounted. In addition, JNIM's activities and discourses added an international dimension to the conflict.

In addition to being present in the regions controlled by these four groups, (International Crisis Group 2021, p. 3) JNIM has grown stronger over time and spread to Niger and Burkina Faso. JNIM groups are led by Iyad ag Ghaly. In addition to its success in the military and organizational fields, it also managed to be accepted as an interlocutor to the state. As a strategy, JNIM aims to ensure the withdrawal of foreign powers from the country, as well as to replace the secular provisions in the Malian constitution with sharia rules. In the regions they governed, JNIM groups conducted trials in accordance with Sharia law, regulated prices in trade, and established and administered religious schools.

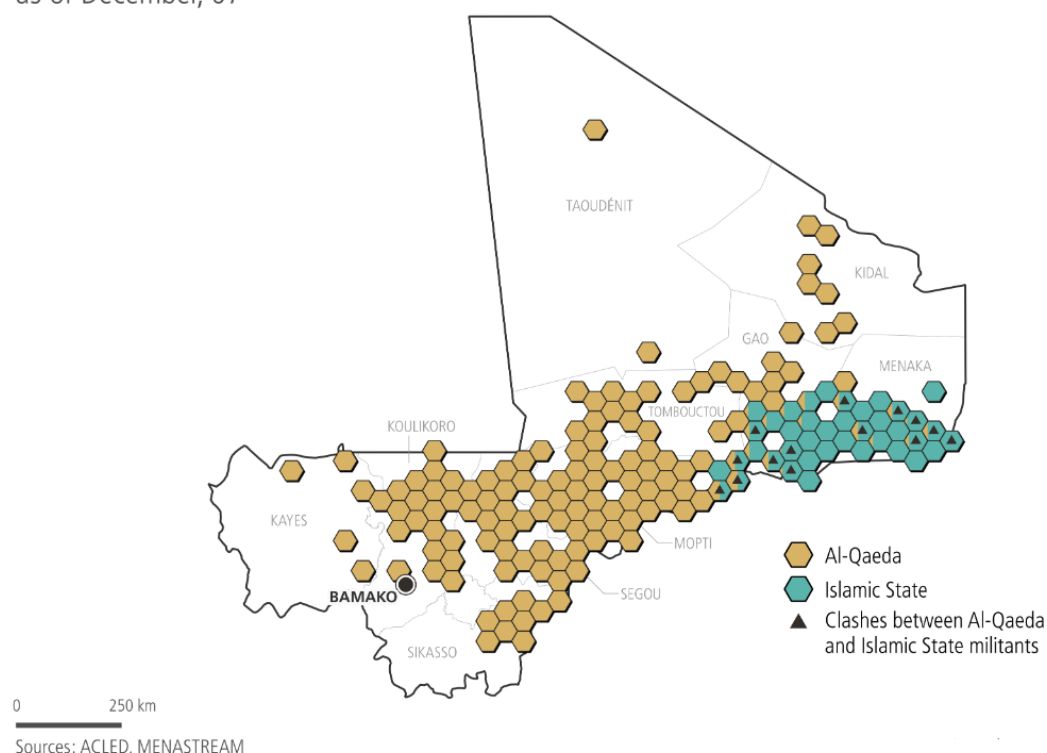
The unresolved nature of military conflicts and the increasing number of civilian casualties have led Malian governments to seek dialogue with armed groups. However, attempts at dialogue with jihadist groups constituted a justification for military coups carried out by the army. The first step towards meeting with jihadist groups came from then-President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in 2020. The new administration established after Keita, which was also willing to continue the negotiations, was removed by a military coup. France strictly opposed any dialogue with the JNIM. (International Crisis Group 2021, p. 7)

Although there are different jihadist groups in the country, the Malian government has accepted JNIM as its interlocutor due to the fact that JNIM's leadership team is of Malian origin and that it takes into account the local dynamics in the lands it manages. However, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) organization was excluded from the negotiations. (International Crisis Group 2021, p. 2)

Figure 3; Activity of Jihadist Groups in Mali in 2022

Activity of jihadist militant groups in Mali, 2022

as of December, 07



Source: (ACLED, Activity of jihadist militant groups in Mali, 2022)

4.7. International Interventions

International law allows external interventions to protect civilians and establish stability. These interventions can be in the form of diplomatic mediation, economic sanctions or military intervention. The history of international operations launched to support regional countries against terrorism dates back to the early 2000s. Immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attack and with the global war against terrorism, the US launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2002 to support regional countries. This program aims to contribute to the efforts to ensure the security and stability of the countries in the region. The scope of the program has expanded over time in terms of budget and scope. It has targeted not only military security but also political and economic development. France, on the other hand, started to create the framework of its own support which is called the Sahel Plan launched in 2008. Despite all, the approaches of the USA and France in the Sahel region were initially criticized for overlooking socio-economic development and attaching too much importance to military dimension.

4.7.1. Operation Serval

The French Army intervened in Mali in January 2013, aiming to repel the rebellion that had been ravaging the cities in the north. Following UN Security Council resolution 2085 dated December 2012, France launched Operation Serval on 11 January 2013.

Purposes of the operation were:

- 1) Stopping the rebels in the north from advancing towards the capital Bamako
- 2) To help Mali ensure its territorial integrity and sovereignty
- 3) Helping the implementation of international decisions and the deployment of international missions such as African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) in the country.

As a result of the Operation Serval, jihadist groups were defeated and removed from the major cities within weeks. The operation continued until July 2014 and 4,500 French soldiers were deployed in the country. The operation changed the course of the civil war. As the Serval Forces pushed the jihadist groups back, the Tuareg MNLA troops began to gain power and attempted to regain the regions occupied by the jihadist groups. French forces also generally refrained from targeting the MNLA militias. Subsequently, government forces continued to take back the cities they had lost. Considering all the objectives realized, the Operation Serval was terminated in the middle of the same year. (Lecocq and Klute 2018, p.45) As the jihadist groups, which suffered heavy losses in the French-led operation, retreated to the countryside, state institutions in the north of the country began to operate again and a general election could be held in August 2013.

Despite the prior success of the Serval Operation, it has been observed that terror groups could not be eradicated permanently and political power could not be restored in distant parts of the country. This situation led to the increased grievances among the local people. In addition, the failure of the international coalition deteriorated the relations of Mali with its Western partners and opened the country to Russian intervention.

Experts emphasize different factors to explain the failure in Mali. The incompatible plans of the international powers, the focus on short-term military successes rather than long-standing social issues such as identity problems and the state-centered perspective are three prime reasons to explain the failure in the Operation Serval. (Bere 2017, p. 61) One of the criticisms of Operation Serval is that the victory over the jihadist groups was attached to short-

term military gains rather than a strategic long term focus. In other words, the success achieved in terms of conflict management could not be transformed into conflict resolution. Another criticism is that military operations within the scope of Operation Serval are limited only to terrorist groups located in Mali. According to this criticism, the trans-border movements of jihadist groups were ignored and the way was opened for the groups that were pushed back in Mali to regroup in Algeria, Libya and Niger. Another criticism is that France had to seek the assistance of neighboring authoritarian states for the success of the operation. This situation strengthens the image of authoritarian governments, which are accused of being the main source of political instability.

There are also some analyzes that evaluate the operation from a more optimistic perspective. According to these analyses, Operation Serval can be considered successful, as the goal of preventing Mali from falling into the hands of jihadist groups was achieved, despite the difficulty in managing the perception of the operation and the low number of personnel. (Centre FrancoPaix 2018, p. 9) Operation Serval has been carried out with a lesser cost, compared to the operations by the USA in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, it was more successful in establishing its legitimacy worldwide. (Charbonneau 2017, p. 324)

4.7.2. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

In addition to French-led counter-terrorism operations, the country also hosted a United Nations mission which is titled as the "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali " (MINUSMA). In October 2012, UNSC decided to support ECOWAS (Economic Community of Western African States) forces in Mali. In this context, MINUSMA was established and the Chadian forces, which had previously served in Operation Serval, were also deployed under the umbrella of MINUSMA. The Chadian force constituted the bulk of this mission. MINUSMA's mission was to maintain security and stability in the country, protect civilians, ensure human rights and support the national dialogue process. It can be argued that The MINUSMA mission was in a division of labor with the French military units. While MINUSMA continues its activities to maintain peace and stability, French forces are waging the war against terrorism. (Charbonnea 2019, p. 447) MINUSMA forces carried out military patrols in different parts of the country to ensure and maintain stability. It was later reinforced with the military training missions from the European Union and the African Union.

Unlike other UN missions, MINUSMA also has an intelligence unit called ASIFU (All Sources Information Fusion Unit) that would provide operational information to its own forces

in the fight against terrorism. Expert personnel, unmanned aerial vehicles, special forces units and observation helicopters, generally provided by European countries, were available for the UN mission. It organized intelligence operations and put forward concrete recommendations. (Centre FrancoPaix 2018, p. 14) However, despite the operational recommendations given by ASIFU, it was observed that the UN forces were hesitant about carrying out preventive operations due to the fact that these were outside the prerogative provided by the donor countries. Although MINUSMA troops carried out activities such as patrolling and observing the ceasefire, they were not authorized to use force other than defensive activities for self-defense.

Most of the time, the MINUSMA mission was protected by the Barkhane Forces but the mission also had to guard its own patrols, members or locations. Since the beginning, MINUSMA forces have lost 310 personnel in the country. Due to the losses they suffered, the MINUSMA mission was one of the most dangerous and deadly operations in recent UN history. (De Simone 2023)

MINUSMA started to withdraw from the country in 2023, upon the urging of the coup government. When the withdrawal process started, the mission had 15 thousand troops located in more than a dozen bases. (Al Jazeera 2023) In the same period, the number of French soldiers who took part in Operation Barkhane was nearly 5 thousand, and the number of personnel in the European Union's training mission, EUTM, was 580 people. (Charbonneau 2019, p. 448)

4.7.3. Operation Barkhane

Operation Barkhane was launched in 2014 in order to consolidate the gains achieved against jihadist groups in Mali. The objectives of the Operation Barkhane were supporting the G5 Sahel countries against terrorism, preventing terrorist groups from gaining safe havens and inclusion of the surrounding countries in the fight against terrorism. (Elischer 2022, p. 14) Other defined objectives of Operation Barkhane was to support MINUSMA. (Centre FrancoPaix 2018, p. 18)

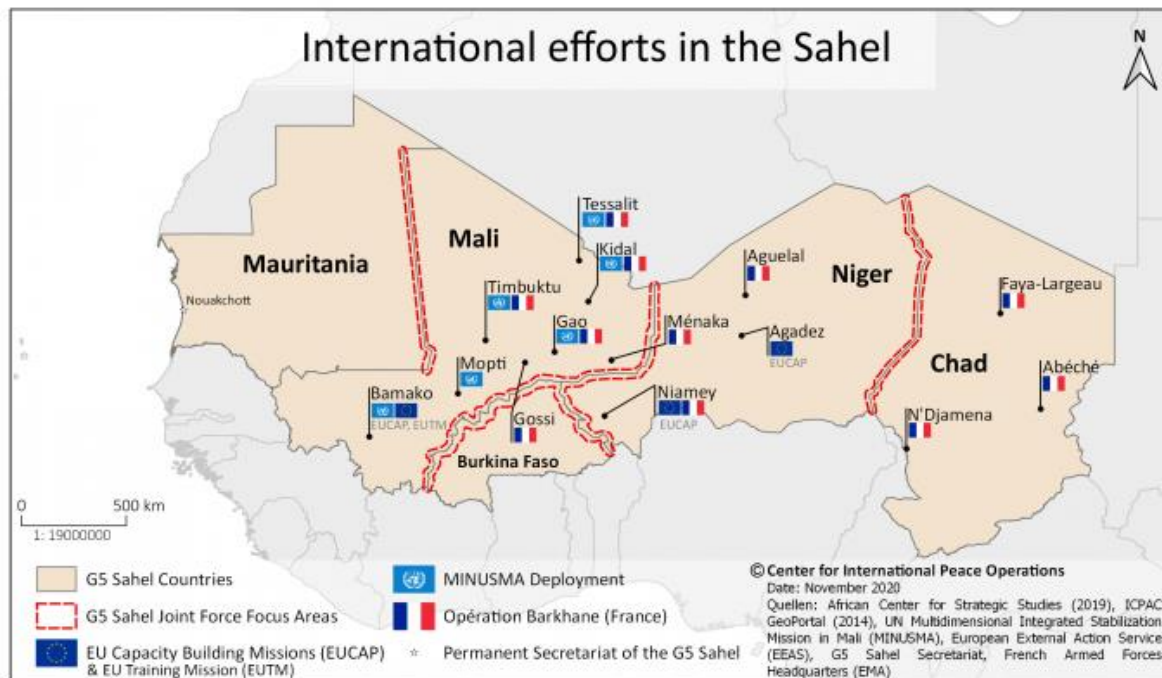
International interventions in Mali started with Operation Serval under the coordination of France and Chad and continued with the French-led Operation Barkhane. Both were carried out thanks to the approval of the UN Security Council. France's intervention was also supported by the ECOWAS and the African Union. In fact, the request for intervention was made directly by the Malian government. Among the reasons for intervention, the emphasis on Mali's territorial integrity and the reference to the fight against global jihadi terrorism are decisive.

The transition from Operation Serval to Barkhane revealed France's changing strategy in the region. The new strategy aimed to ensure that regional countries could take responsibility in the fight against armed terrorist groups. Thus Operation Barkhane was implemented to complete the shortcomings of Operation Serval.

Through Operation Barkhane, France was transforming its military presence in the Sahel region into an international mission under the umbrella of the European Union. (Okur and Togola 2023, p. 371) In Macron's statements, Operation Barkhane was defined as a complement to the MINUSMA operation. France's policy of internationalizing its African policy and making it a policy of the European Union started during the period of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur. Balladur linked all the aid the French government would provide to Africa to the structural reform agreements that the continental countries would make with the Bretton Wood institutions. The aim of the Balladur government is to make African countries part of the capitalist economy and democratic countries. (Charbonneau 2017, p. 329)

It had an annual budget of 600 million Euros and 5,100 soldiers. (Demir 2021) Operation Barkhane has developed into being France's largest military mission abroad. At the request of the coup government, French forces stopped their military activities as of February 2022 and began preparations for withdrawal. In its military activities, French forces suffered 58 casualties in the country. Figure 4 reveals the positions of the French and international military deployments in Mali.

Figure 4; Deployment of International Forces in Mali



Source: (ZIF, Sahel (Mali, Niger), 2020)

The distrust and skepticism towards the French became visible during the recapture of Kidal by the Barkhane forces. After Kidal was reconquered from the Tuaregs, French troops tried to prevent the Malian army units from entering the city. Although it did not occur in other cities taken from the Islamist groups and Tuaregs, such a situation in Kidal was protested fervently throughout the country. In the following days, the suspicion felt towards the operations of the French forces cannot be overlooked in the statement made by the Malian President of the time, Ibrahim Boubakar Keita, regarding the events that took place in the city of Kidal. (Tull 2021, p. 160) In the following days, the city of Kidal fell back into the hands of Tuareg groups, which was one of the breaking moments in the eyes of the Malian people. This situation formed the basis for rumors that French troops were giving power and space to MNLA groups. (Toumi 2020, p. 6)

In his article, Denis M. Tull attributed France's failure in Mali to the uncertainty of its policies and goals. For example, the Malian public initially thought that the French military intervention would be limited to air operations, but to the surprise of the Malians, France began to establish military outposts even in remote cities like Tessalit. Again, the slow attitude of the French regarding the transfer of the city of Kidal to the Mali government and the recapturing of it by the Tuaregs caused rumors. (Tull 2021, p. 159)

While the Operation Serval received support from different segments of Malian society. The operation was interpreted as a fight for freedom against jihadist groups. However, the support given to the French gradually decreased when the Operation Barkhane was concerned. (Tull 2021, p. 151) In the eyes of the Malian people, the French Operation Barkhane is synonymous with failure. The presence of French and other international powers in the region reveals a perception that the Malian state has lost its sovereignty and the administration has become internationalized. (Tull 2021, p. 154)

The French intervention also gave the jihadists in the country the chance to use an anti-imperialist discourse. Exploiting this, jihadist groups added a historical dynamic to their struggle and presented themselves as part of a war with French colonialism that has been going on for decades. (Goyet 2022, p.17)

In his article published on The War On The Rock website, Nathaniel Powell attributes France's success in Operation Serval to the clarity of its goals and its ability to gain local support, while emphasizing that Operation Barkhane's efforts to provide stability were unsuccessful. The legitimacy of the French operation has been overshadowed by the alliance that France has established with authoritarian governments, and the crimes committed by local forces allied with the French against the local people. The fact that France sees the issue as limited to the fight against terrorism and does not pay due attention to the social reasons that lead to the rebellion has also been a source of instability. Both the French and local African powers viewed the issue as a purely military matter. Another problematic step of the French is the alliance they tried to establish with Tuareg forces from the beginning of Operation Serval. It is known that the French have historically had close relations with the Tuaregs. France's military and civilian security units have been in favor of an alliance with the Tuareg MNLA organization against jihadist groups. It was also thought that MNLA's support could be used to rescue captured Western country citizens. However, this situation was found unacceptable by the Malian government and citizens. The slow attitude of the French forces to hand over the Kidal city which was captured from the rebellious groups, to the state forces generated a large antipathy and distrusts among the Malian people against the French. This incident also provided Tuareg and jihadist groups with an excuse to conduct anti-Western and anti-French propaganda to access new recruitments and legitimacy. Powell also states that the French strategy towards the region has done more harm than good to the security and stability in the region. (Powell 2022)

Russian sources, on the other hand, propagates the French failure in the Serval and Barkhane operations. Galina Sidorova, who works at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, stated that the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the French forces was filled by Russia. Sidorova attributes the failure of the Barkhane operation to the differences in the goals of the Malian and French governments. According to her, while the Malian government demanded a real fight against terrorism, France focused on achieving its own geopolitical goals in the country. According to her, the French were not removed from the region as a result of the Russian pressure, on the contrary, they chose to leave themselves. The Sputnik channel and academic Sidorova stated that the Keita government, which they described as pro-French and heavily corrupt, was overthrown by patriotic officers and that this coup was welcomed by the people. At this point, emphasis was also placed on the fact that Malian citizens applauded the coup and waved Russian flags. (Sputnik 2023)

CHAPTER FIVE: WAGNER'S ACTIVITIES IN MALI

5.1. Relations Between Mali and Russia

After the independence, the Malian government, under the administration of Modibo Keita, established a close relationship with the Soviet Union. The Keita administration, which had a socialist orientation, turned to the Soviet Union as a result of ideological affinity and his countries' desire for development. During that period, Soviet Russia's aid to Ghana during the Nkrumah era, Guinea during the Sékou Touré era, and Mali during the Modibo Keita era, was greater than the aid provided by the United States to the whole of Africa in the same period. (Banks 2024) Bilateral relations started in October 1960 and economic and technical cooperation agreements were signed. The Soviet Union provided loan aid and cooperation in education. During the 1960s, more than 10 thousand students from Mali went to the Soviet Union for education, and 5 thousand students received Russian education in language and cultural centers opened in Mali. (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 17) Among those educated in these language centers is Amadou Toumani Toure, who would later become the President of Mali and lead the country during the 2006 and 2012 rebellions. (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 17) Thanks to the Soviet aid, educational institutions were established, infrastructure works were carried out and agricultural facilities and factories, which will be the source of the country's economic income, were constructed. (Davidchuk, Degterev and Korendyasov 2022, p. 721)

Military relations have always been the basis of Russia's relations with Mali and other African countries since the Cold War. Starting from the 1960s, military advisors from the Soviet Union provided training on the use of donated weapons to African armies. Soviet aid also played a role in the institutionalization of army organizations. (Insight Turkey 2019)

The Soviet Union's relations with third world countries weakened in connection with the détente period. (Kempton 1991, p. 9) The decrease in the weight of the General Committee of the Communist Party in foreign policy also prevented the Soviet Union from establishing relations with third world countries on the basis of socialism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's military presence in Africa also decreased. In the 1990s, the emphasis of relations was again in the military field. (Global Security) During the period when Russia started to recover, the foreign policy priority was initially directed towards the ex-Soviet countries, but during the time of the then foreign minister Evgueni Primakov, an initiative was made towards the countries with which the Soviet Union had established good relations.

Following this, a military cooperation agreement was signed between the Russian and Malian governments in 2003. This agreement was expanded by the anti-terrorism agreement signed with the Malian government in 2009 (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 52) In addition, Russian authorities have increased arms exports to Mali.

In 2006, Putin visited South Africa, marking the first Russian president to visit Sub-Saharan Africa. After the removal of Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi, two of Russia's long-term allies, pressures resulting from conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, Moscow sought to diversify its foreign relations. Russia also aims to take advantage of African states' frustrations with China's plan to lend and provide development aid (Elischer 2022, p. 24) Russian news channels, especially RT France, also carried out perception operations to lay groundwork for Russia's re-entry into the continent. Pro-Russian media has emphasized the colonial legacy of the Western powers and highlighted Russia as a liberating power against colonialism.

Two different turning points stand out in Russia's recent African policy. Firstly, Russia's isolation in the international arena and exposure to sanctions with the occupation of Crimea and a part of Donbas in 2014, and the Russians' gaining self-confidence in Syria in 2015, paved the way for Russia in African policies. Russia felt the need to expand into new geographies both to find diplomatic support in the UN General Assembly and to diversify its economic and diplomatic relations. Ensuring that Bashar Assad remained in office in Syria and defeating ISIS also enabled Russia to assert itself militarily. In particular, Russia's achievements in Syria attracted attention at a time when the French-led coalition's anti-terrorism activities in Africa were deemed insufficient. The Russia-Africa summit, the first of which was held in Sochi in 2019, is another turning point in the relations with Russia and African countries. Russia vaunts its so-called success in the fight against terrorism in Syria as a model to offer to African countries exposed to terror attacks.

Evgueni Korendiasov, who served as the Russian Ambassador to the country in 2016, noted that 80% of the weapons used by the Malian army are of Russian origin. (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 54) Russia, which has been isolated against the West, is trying to give an anti-colonialist outlook to its relations with Africa. While African countries, which have difficulty in achieving success in the fight against terrorism by their own means, benefit from the aid provided by Russia. On the other hand, Russian aid decreases their dependency on France.

Today, Russia's presence in Africa is gaining strength through non-state actors. Mali is the sixth country where Wagner is known to have served in Africa. According to Audinet and Dreyfus, it would not be correct to interpret Wagner in Africa as a direct extension of the

Russian state. According to them, although the company essentially operates in Africa in line with Evgyeni Prigozhin's personal economic interests, it is a flag carrier for Russian foreign policy in terms of its operations in the field. (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 17)

Wagner forces are involved in African countries where the Russian Federation does not want to be directly involved due to various political reasons, and while operating in line with corporate interests, they also serve the interests of Russian foreign policy. Prigozhin participated in many meetings of African leaders with Putin or leading politicians of Russia. Wagner company, which supports pro-Russian governments with its activities in the field, also carries out information activities against Western countries and in favor of Russia by trying to manipulate public perception. As stated in the previous sections of the thesis, the use of a group with a controversial legal existence such as Wagner in the execution of its foreign policy interests also provides deniability to Russia. In this way, activities are carried out in favor of Russia with low political and economic costs.

Researchers such as Marlene Laruelle and Kevin Limonier began to use the concept of “entrepreneurs of influence” to describe Russian businessmen operating abroad in the field of military security and information. They categorize the impact of entrepreneurs into three different types. First of all, there are those who operate in Russia or abroad around various think tanks for the benefit of Russian foreign policy. The second group includes those who try to make an impact through the websites they establish. The third group includes private military company managers whose relations with Russian state officials are more ambiguous. (Laruelle and Limonier 2021, p. 320) The activities of these companies extend to every region of the world. It is alleged that there are Russian influence entrepreneurs who carry out operations ranging from interference in elections in the USA, France (Daniels 2023) and Mozambique (Zitamar News 2019) to perception operations in Mali and military protection, consultancy and PMC activities in the field.

Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine had an impact on the Wagner group's structure in Africa, this impact was less visible in Mali. While a significant part of the Wagner forces, especially in Libya and Madagascar, were withdrawn to the Ukrainian front, the Wagner group in Mali continued its operations in the region, independent of the Ukrainian war. Since February 24 2024, Russia's military grants to Mali pursued and new helicopters and radar systems were donated. During the period when Russia was subjected to isolation, negotiations continued between Malian President Assimi Goita and Russian President Putin. Mali also abstained from voting in the UN General Assembly to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

During Wagner's intervention, Mali was facing a widespread terrorist threat and political instability. While the contribution of Barkhane forces to the fight against terrorism was criticized in the country, there were also disturbances in this regard within the army. In the following sections of the thesis, Wagner's activities in the fields of military, economic and perception management in Mali will be discussed.

5.2. Post-Coup International Conjuncture

One of the legitimizing arguments of the coup plotters was that the Western support was not successful for combating terrorism and stability. The junta administration, which opposed the French presence, was looking for a reliable ally in order to fill the security gap in the country and strengthen its position in power.

After the junta decided to postpone the presidential election in January 2022 for 5 years, ECOWAS countries decided to impose sanctions on Mali. Accordingly, the borders with Mali were closed, commercial and financial relations were suspended, bank accounts belonging to the Central Bank of Mali were frozen, and financial aid was suspended. The European Union and the United States have also frozen the bank accounts of Malian officials.

After the coup, French forces declared their intention to reduce the number of their military units in Mali. (BBC 2021) Similarly, ECOWAS countries, that joined their forces against regional terrorism, have taken a common decision to impose sanctions against the Malian government. (Al Jazeera 2022) Mutual showdowns continued, and Malian troops announced that they had ended their military cooperation agreements with France in February 2022, while France stated that it would begin to withdraw its troops from the country. (France24 2022) Macron later announced that success in the fight against terrorism is only possible with the support of the host government. Macron also stated that he would not accept comments that Barkhane's forces failed. Within the Barkhane Operation, the French lost 58 soldiers. The withdrawal process of 2400 French soldiers from the cities of Gossi, Meneka and Gao has been completed in an orderly manner. (Al Jazeera 2022) The French ambassador in the country was also asked to depart. In addition to all these, the Danish troops (Al Jazeera 2022) serving in Mali upon the invitation of the French administration (Reuters 2022) were also requested to leave the country. In particular, discussions about the lack of invitation or permission from the local government regarding the presence of Danish troops in Mali attracted attention. The Mali administration emphasized that the French violated Mali's sovereign rights by inviting Danish soldiers without permission. (Tasamba 2022) In February 2022, the transitional government requested that all European soldiers leave the country. (Elischer 2022, p. 21) In addition to all

these, it also suspended the activities of French media organs RFI and France 24 in the country. (France24 2022)

In September 2021, there were reports that Wagner forces were close to reaching an agreement with local administrators in the country. Embassies of France and other Western countries took action to deter the Malian government from signing the agreement. (Irish and Lewis 2021)

Wagner's arrival in Mali is important not only for contributing to the country's fight against terrorism, but also for defending the junta regime in Bamako against domestic rival groups particularly in the army and preventing coup attempts in the future.

With Wagner's entry into the country in December 2021, 15 countries with representation in Mali condemned the group's deployment and blamed Moscow. French President Emanuel Macron planned to visit Mali in the week the deployment began, but the visit was canceled due to Covid-related reasons. (France24 2021) France's last military unit in Mali was withdrawn in August 2022. While MINUSMA completed its withdrawal in early 2024.

5.3. Military Operations

The transfer of Wagner's forces to Mali was conducted with cargo planes belonging to the Russian army. Some of the cargo planes which were carrying personnel and equipment of Wagner units were transferred via Syria and Libya (Bamas, Dejaifve and Tchoubar 2022) Wagner's presence in the country was documented in December 2021. In their first weeks, Wagner forces built a military camp at an airport near Bamako.

Yevgeny Prigozhin chose to deny that Wagner forces were involved in Mali from the very beginning. He stated that Russian soldiers or Russian citizens are not serving in Mali for military purposes, but they exist in the country only for humanitarian purposes and as part of a military technical cooperation agreement. He also added that claiming the opposite would be an unprofessional attitude. (Audinet and Dreyfus) Similarly, despite the visual evidence presented, Malian officials denied that Wagner militants were in the country and participated in the operations. These officials argued that the Russian military personnel in the country only served as military advisors within the scope of the cooperation agreements signed between the two countries. (Burke and Akinwotu 2022) After the denial of the early days, it began to be accepted that there were Russian private military companies in the region, but they were

operating in the region at the request of local governments, independent of the Russian state. (Africa News 2022)

Wagner's presence in Mali differs from its position in the Central African Republic and Sudan. For example, in the Central African Republic, Wagner embarked on the close protection of the President and its militias are visible in public areas. However, in Mali, Wagner forces are stationed in military bases and not in public places. Wagner's financing method in Mali also remains unclear. Again, in the case of Sudan and the Central African Republic, Wagner is known to benefit from diamond and other important mineral deposits. This situation is in line with Prigojine's working style. However, there is not enough research on the commercial and economic activities of Prigozhin and Wagner in Mali. Former military commander of the Barkhane force, Laurent Michon, who previously served in the country, stated that the mining laws in the country changed under the pressure of the Wagner group and that the group is after 3 different mineral deposits in Mali. Later in his speech, he accused the Wagner group of exploiting natural resources. (Arab News 2022) Although similar accusations have been made by different figures, it is estimated that the Wagner group receives cash compensation for its security services from the Malian government. General Stephen Townsend, commander of the US troops in Africa (AfriCom), claimed that the agreement between the Malian government and Wagner included a monthly payment of 10 million USD, as well as privileges in the mining area. (AFP 2022)

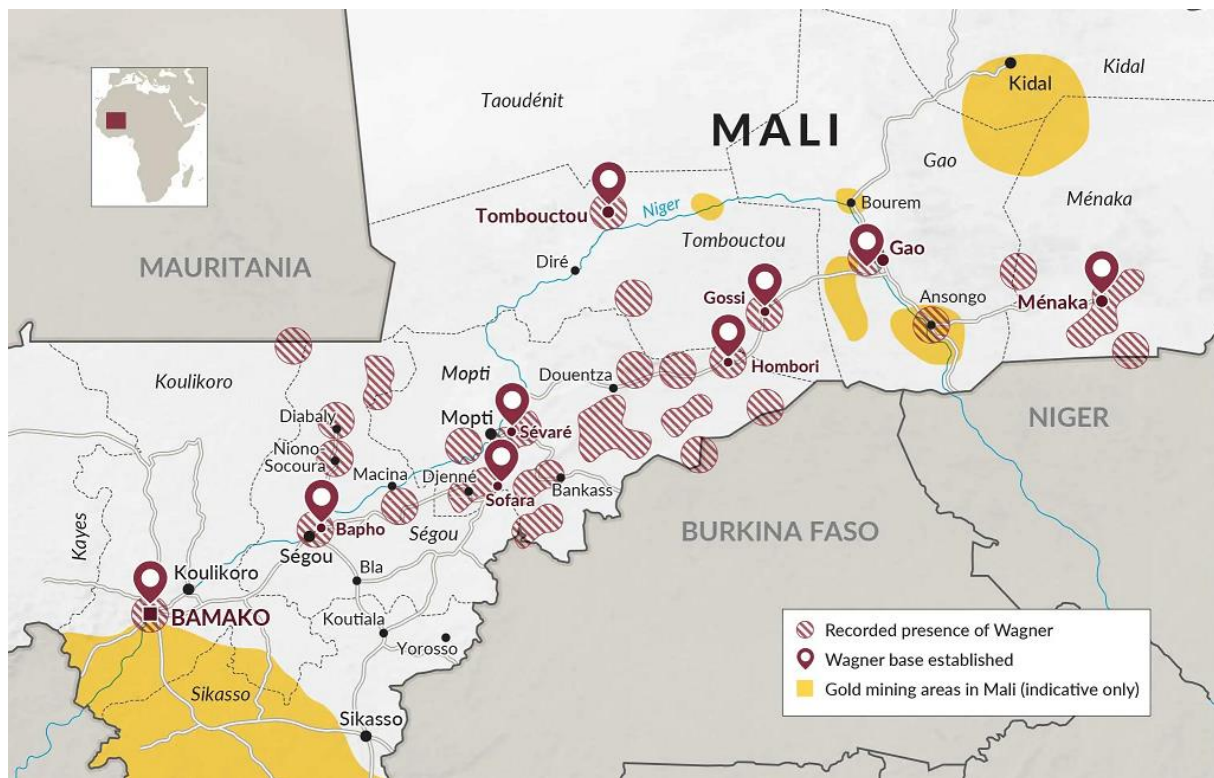
According to All Eyes On Wagner (AEOW) data (2022, p. 11), the Wagner group is militarily led by Ivan Maslov, who served under Yevgeny Prihozhin and Dmitri Utkin. Maslov previously took part in the conflicts in Donetsk, Ukraine and the Central African Republic.

Wagner groups were initially located in the south of the country, around Bamako. In addition to their military base in Bamako, Wagner forces are also deployed to the city of Timbuktu. Its forces, acting with Malian army units, began to advance towards the north against the rebel forces as of January 2022. Over time, Wagner forces expanded their presence to the cities of Menaka and Gao, which were evacuated by the Barkhane forces. With Wagner's entry into their regions, JNIM groups retreated towards the north. After deploying and fortifying their areas, Wagner militants started their patrolling duties.

Wagner forces suffered their first known casualties on January 12, 2022. They appear to suffer mostly from the detonation of improvised explosive devices placed on roadsides by JNIM. Like JNIM, ISIS also targeted Wagner groups. (One Year of Wagner in Mali 2022, p. 18)

Wagner's entry into the city of Gao and its efforts to establish itself at the airport previously used by the French Barkhane forces in the city created discomfort in the German troops operating in the region. During this period, there were approximately 1,000 German soldiers in Gao, and the task of the German mission in question was to carry out intelligence work for MINUSMA. (Siebold and Marsh 2022) In parallel with the departure of the troops of the European Union from the region, Malian troops have increased their operations both independently and in cooperation with Wagner. The movement of the Malian Army and Wagner forces towards the central and northern parts of the country continued rapidly. On November 14, 2023, the city of Kidal, which was held by Tuareg groups, was captured. After this victory, a military parade was held in the city. Wagner personnel became publicly visible in the city of Kidal and allowed their photographs to be taken there. It is believed that the reason for this situation is to send a message to Western countries. With their success in taking back the city of Kidal, which is considered difficult and has been in the hands of the Tuareg since 2013. In the footage, it is seen that the Songhay groups, which have close relations with the central government of Mali and are accused by the Tuaregs of spying for the benefit of the state, joyfully greet the Wagner militants in the city of Kidal. (Anara 2023) Wagner groups have begun to carry out military operations independently from the state forces. For example, allegations of looting and kidnapping have been reported in the villages raided by Wagner, in the Mopti region and Segou city. (ACLED 2022) Figure five reveals the Wagner activity in the country.

Figure 5; Wagner's deployment in Mali



Source: (Geneva: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, *The Grey Zone: Russia's Military, Member, and Criminal Engagement in Africa*, 2023)

After its cooperation with Wagner, the Mali Army began to generate obstacles for the operations of the UN forces in Mali. For example, on 16th May 2022, a routine patrol mission by MINUSMA forces was not allowed in Djenne, where jihadist groups are intensely active. According to the MINUSMA spokesperson, routine patrols allowed the people to continue their daily lives and economic activities safely. The blocking that took place on May 16 was the first of its kind. Again, in his statement, the MINUSMA spokesperson stated that although they respect Mali's freedom to choose its partners, it is important that this cooperation does not hinder MINUSMA operations. The Malian army, on the other hand, blamed the UN forces and cited the operations currently being carried out by the Malian forces in the same region and claimed that the UN operation was not prevented but only postponed to a future date. One of the obstacles created by the military junta to the MINUSMA operations is the declaration of no-fly zones in the central and northern regions. With these bans, UN forces were unable to fly in operational areas without permission. Additionally, they were prevented from entering the city of Moura, where a massacre is alleged to have taken place. (Africa News 2022)

The military junta in Mali demanded that the MINUSMA leave the country as of 2023 and did not extend the mission's term as of December 31. However, GSIM attacks have

increased in these regions, especially after the evacuation of the MINUSMA bases in the Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal regions. Separatist Tuareg groups are against MINUSMA's evacuation of its bases in the region and the settlement of Malian army forces in these bases. (France24 2023)

5.4. Human Rights Violations

Despite the military progress in the field, allegations of human rights violations and torture against civilians increased significantly during this period. A study by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies shows that incidents of violence increased significantly in the country during the military junta period, which took office with promises of establishing security, justice and democracy. (Africa Center 2022) The Mali administration, on the other hand, denies those allegations and claims that these are a disinformation war against Mali. (Reuters 2023)

News of a massacre in which Wagner was involved came from the city of Dogofry. In the city, Wagner militants are reportedly responsible for the killing of 35 people of Fulani origin with their hands tied behind their backs and then set fire to the village where they live. However, the magnitude of the massacre in the city of Moura is horrifying. Nearly 300 people were killed in the city, where Mali forces and Wagner militants entered, between 27 and 31 March 2022. The massacres in the cities of Dogofry and Moura were revealed by Human Rights Watch. (One Year of Wagner in Mali) According to the data recorded by the Armed Conflict Location and Event DATA (ACLED), 500 civilians lost their lives in Mopti, Segou, Tombouctou and Koulikoru regions, which are among the regions where JNIM is strongest. During this period, 71% of Wagner's activities in Mali included acts of violence against civilians. (ACLED 2022)

As stated by international observers (HRW 2023) and UN reports (United Nations 2023), civilian casualties and human right violations (United Nations Security Council 2023, p. 5) in the country are increasing rapidly after the intervention of Wagner forces. It is alleged that due to the mass human rights violations by Wagner and the Malian forces, participation to JNIM has increased. (Parens 2023)

The ethnic group that suffered the most from the operations carried out by Wagner and the resulting human rights abuses was the Fulani community. Just like in the Central African Republic, Fulani groups in Mali have been targeted because they are accused of being close to armed groups. (ACLED 2022) Wagner groups are reported to be involved in numerous cases against the Fulani community. They were described by locals as "white men speaking an unknown language". (Larson 2023) Due to the pressure exerted by the group on local people

and the difficulty of accessing the internet, human rights violations are not publicized freely. (One Year of Wagner in Mali 2022, p. 18)

In the report published by MINUSMA for the first quarter of 2022, violent incidents quadrupled compared to the last quarter of the previous year. While the number of civilians killed in armed actions carried out by different armed groups (jihadist groups, militants, self-defense groups and forces) in the previous quarter was 128, this number increased to 543 in the first quarter of 2022. Malian government forces were held responsible for nearly half of these (249). The name of the Wagner group was not directly mentioned in the report, instead the expression “foreign military elements” was used. The report also states that the dead bodies of 35 people known to have been detained by the Malian government were found. Malian government officials, on the other hand, claim that the allegations are unfounded and purposefully produced to denigrate the army, and claim that respect for human rights is a part of military training. (United Nations 2022)

5.5. Disinformation Activities

In addition to their military and commercial activities, Wagner forces also operate in disinformation activities. Wagner’s goals include creating public support for its military operations through media outlets, strengthening its relations with local partners, increasing cooperation between countries, and wearing down opponents. Wagner carries out its communication activities through Russian and French-speaking media outlets, websites, Telegram, VK, Twitter and Youtube social media channels. Perception management activities are being carried out in favor of Russia and Wagner in broadcasts made on traditional and social media.

Prigozhin and other “influence entrepreneurs” in the media field have established different companies depending on the country. In this context, local offices have been established in Africa to operate in the field of communication. (Švedkauskas, Sirikupt and Salzer 2020) These structures, which engage in pro-Russian communication activities, share posts in Russian, French and African local languages. As noted before, the most important companies operating under Prigozhin in the field of media are Internet Research Agency and RIA Fan. The RIA FAN website affiliated with the IRA company is at the center of the media activities carried out by Prigozhine in Mali. RIA FAN shares pro-Russian articles published across Africa. The number of articles published on the RIA FAN website increases significantly after each crises and important events in the country. On the web site, Russian soldiers are depicted as advisors and trainers. (Audinet and Dreyfus 2022, p. 39)

Before Wagner's deployment, various non-governmental organizations were advocating closer cooperation with the Kremlin by holding demonstrations and calls in favor of Russia. Just on 27th May 2021, in a demonstration held in Bamako Independence Square, crowded groups were calling for the French army to leave the country and calling for the Russian army to intervene. During those demonstrations, Malian activists were waving the Russian flag as well as the Malian flag. The crowd was unusually large for Mali at the demonstration, where Mali's independence was emphasized and pro-Assimi Goita slogans were chanted. (Diallo and Sangaré 2021)

It seems that efforts to create perception in favor of Russia and Wagner began long before Wagner forces deployed security personnel to Mali. The website All Eyes On Wagner, which follows Wagner activities, states that the soft power efforts that would lead to Russia's intervention in the country have long begun in 2016-2017. Accordingly, a civil political formation called "Le Groupement des Patriotes" has been leading pro-Russian activities since these dates. (One Year of Wagner in Mali 2022, p. 4) In a 2016 report by the Niger-based "Le canard déchaîné" website, online posts by "Le Groupement des Patriotes" members calling on Russia to help Mali were documented. According to this report, in the posts of the mentioned civil organization, comments are made that Russia's intervention in Syria is lawful and respectful of the honor of the country receiving aid. In these posts, Russia's military successes are over mentioned. The report also argues that the failure of the French intervention and the MINUSMA, as well as the longing for the socialist era, are among the reasons that turned the people towards Russia. (Diarra 2016) The same group (Le Groupement des Patriotes) submitted a petition to the Russian Embassy in August 2017, which they claimed containing several million signatures, inviting Russia to help their country. (BBC Afrique 2017)

During the same period, a civil society organization which is called "Yerewolo debut sur les Rempart", was publishing posts online calling for French forces to leave the country. In their posts, they shared pro-Russian propaganda. The "Yerewolo debut sur les Rempart" group described themselves as Pan-Africanist. (Facebook) The group's social media accounts share videos containing support for the military juntas in Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as Mali. The group also continues to praise Russia while making anti-MINUSMA and anti-France posts.

The Yerewolo group is led by Adama Ben Diarra, who is introduced as "Ben the Brain". It is known that Diarra has close contact with the M5-RFP group. (One Year of Wagner in Mali 2022, p. 4) The M5-RFP group is one of the most important political formations operating in the country. Founded in 2020, the group brings together religious groups and non-governmental

organizations. The group is also one of the leaders of the opposition against Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who was removed from office by the coup. The M5-RFP group is supported by Kemi Seba, known for its Pan-Africanist comments and anti-French views. It has been seen that Kemi Seba frequently travels to Russia and meets with important figures such as Alexandr Dugin, attends Africa-related summits held in Russia, and is hosted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, an investigation by Jeune Afrique revealed that Seba also had close relations with Wagner leader Prigozhin and that he received \$440,000 in financing from Prigozhin between 2018 and 2019. (Roger 2023) Within the scope of these sponsoring, Pan-African non-governmental organizations and media outlets which were founded by Kemi, were supported. (RFI 2023) Kami Seba was stripped of his French citizenship by the decision of the French Ministry of Internal Affairs. (RFI 2024)

One of the structures to seek to create a pro-Russia and pro-Wagner perception in the public was the National Values Protection Foundation. In surveys conducted in August and September 2021, the Foundation showed that the support of Malian people for junta leader Assimi Goita increased from 62% to 72%. According to the same surveys, Malian citizens opposed the Barkhane and Serval operations led by the French with a rate of 83%, while 87% of the public supported the rapprochement initiated by the junta government with Russia. (Web Archive 2024) The foundation and its director, Alexander Malkevich, are known to have served Wagner's purposes and cooperated with the Internet Research Agency. The foundation and its leader Malkevich were sanctioned by the US Treasury Department in April 2021. (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2021)

In October 2021, Alexandr Ivanov, the leader of the International Union of Officers for Security, based in Bangui, gave an interview to the Malian press, praising the successes of Russian PMCs in Syria, Libya, CAR and mentioning that they could make serious contributions to Mali's fight against terrorism. Ivanov emphasized that the group Wagner was able to successfully adapt to the demands and geographical conditions of the countries in which it worked. Military training and technical-logistical support were also among the things Wagner could do in Mali. (Diarrah 2021)

In addition to all these, with similar activities of different non-governmental organizations, anti-French and pro-Russian and Wagner perception-creating operations continued with posters, demonstrations and various news.

On April 23, 2022 Le Monde reported that 11 people in military uniforms dug graves and buried 10 dead bodies in these graves, near a military base that was evacuated 2 days ago

by the French Barkhane forces in Gossi in the north of Mali. Allegedly, the intention was to place the responsibility for the 10 deaths on Barkhane forces. According to the statements of the French army, the 11 people working in the region were not wearing uniforms belonging to the Malian army and they were determined to be in contact with Wagner forces. (Bensimon and Le Cam 2022) Following their activities, a Twitter user named Dia Diarra, who describes himself as a former member of the Malian army and a Malian patriot, shared a post in a way that blamed France for the deaths. (Bensimon and Le Cam 2022)

French army sources reported that Dia Diarra had interacted with people who previously had profiles on the Russian social media platform VKontakte. In addition, the French army sources stated that during the grave digging and the burying process, French army drones were taking aerial footage. They also claim that photos taken from army drones match up with the photos shared online by Dia Diarra's social media accounts. It was determined that the base, evacuated by the French army, was taken under control by the Malian army and Wagner's forces the next day. (Bensimon and Le Cam 2022)

Reportedly, the dead bodies buried in the grave may be linked to the operation carried out by Wagner and the Malian army in the city of Hombori, in which 600 people were detained. On 19th April 2022, an armored vehicle belonging to Wagner forces serving in the city of Gossi was damaged by the detonation of an explosive device placed on the roadside, and a Wagner militant lost his life in the incident. The subsequent operation carried out by Wagner forces and the Malian army took the form of an act of revenge. Many civilians were injured during the operation and their valuable items such as gold, money and phones were looted. Dia Diarra, who tweeted about the operation in which 20 people allegedly died, described the operation as an activity undertaken by the Mali Army against terrorism and stated that the army attaches importance to respecting human rights during operations. (Bensimon and Le Cam 2022)

Sources close to the Russian and Malian governments, on the other hand, recall that the digging and burying of the dead bodies took place two days after the French forces evacuated the military base. However, when the structures of the dead bodies are examined, it appears that the deaths occurred much earlier. They claims that the incidents leading to the deaths of so many civilians may have occurred due to French operations. Russian sources emphasize that the resolution of the images taken from the French drone is very low. Despite all the insistence of the international press, the French army refuses to provide high-resolution images. Russian sources state that this process is part of disinformation directed at Russia and the Malian

government and that they expect such perception operations to increase in the future. (Sputnik 2023)

5.6. Economic Activities

Similar to that of CAR and Sudan, Wagner's military operations in Mali grew simultaneously with economic activities. It is reported that the Alpha Development and Marko Mining company, established subsequently, in late 2021 and early 2022, carried out gold mining activities while geologists Viktor Popov and Serguei Laktionov were assigned to the country by Wagner. These two geologists were operating to take over the production rights of 3 different gold mines located in the West and South of the country, operated by Australian and Canadian companies. (One Year of Wagner in Mali 2022, p. 7)

Laktionov, who is reported to speak French very well, entered the country in July 2021 and carried out studies on the country's gold mining potential. Around the same time that Laktionov started to conduct research in the country, Wagner leader Prigozhin also completed his negotiations with the junta leaders and an agreement was made for 1400 mercenaries to be deployed to the country. During his visits to Mali, Laktionov frequently met with the Minister of Mines and Energy of the interim government. He also had close relations with the Minister of Defense Sadio Camara, who could speak Russian and was considered one of the architects of the agreement with Wagner. (Roger 2023) Camara, is considered "Russia's man" in the country and is one of the most powerful figures in the interim government. (Roger 2022)

Laktionov and Popov's activities in Mali also received support from Andrei Mandel, the manager of M-Invest company, which operates on behalf of Wagner in Sudan. Mandel visited Mali and took responsibility for the structuring of new mining companies to be established in the country. (Roger 2023) As in Sudan and the Central African Republic, mining activities in Mali will be carried out through front companies established in the name of Wagner. Alpha Development, a local company owned by Malian citizens, started operating for Wagner's benefit. It is noteworthy that the people who founded the company are close to high-level politicians in Mali. According to the research conducted by Jeune Afrique, a second mining company was needed to be opened in Mali in order to quickly meet the increasing financial needs of the Wagner group, and thus the Marko Mining company was established in a similar way to Alpha Group. Subsequently, Wagner began to make a profit from the mines by taking over the mining facilities or receiving the shares from the possession of the Malian state. It was reported that the gold produced, washed and prepared in Wagner's facilities was removed from the country and taken to the United Arab Emirates thanks to collaborators within the police and

customs. The money obtained from the sale was laundered through off-shore accounts. (Roger 2023)

5.7. International Sanctions on Wagner

The first US sanctions against Wagner and Prigozhin began in 2016. Prigozhin and several other executives of his company have been accused of interfering in the 2016 US Presidential election. Subsequently, sanctions were imposed by the USA and the EU on Wagner-related companies such as the Internet Research Agency and M-Invest. (U.S. Department of State 2023)

On 25th May 2023, the US government decided to impose economic sanctions on Ivan Maslov, who is reported to be the highest ranked officer of Wagner in Mali. Maslov was accused of procuring military ammunition for use in Ukraine through his activities in Mali. In the details of the decision, in which all economic assets and real estate belonging to Maslov were seized. In addition, American companies were prevented from doing business with him. In the decision, the Wagner group was defined as a source of instability for all countries where it was located. Similarly, in February 2023, the European Union also decided to impose economic sanctions on 10 Wagner executives, including Ivan Maslov, due to human rights violations. The United States defines the Wagner group as an international terrorist organization, accusing it of human rights violations and exploiting Africa's natural resources. (Le Monde 2023)

5.8. The Fall of Wagner

The dispute between Wagner and the Russian Ministry of Defense is reported to be related to the Ukraine crisis. Experts who made a statement to the Lenta.Ru website emphasized that Wagner had always been active abroad until the Ukrainian crisis. Wagner forces, which operated in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions after 2014 and undertook the protection of pro-Russian local elites in return for financial returns, also received serious arms support from the Russian government. However, with the annexation of these regions to the Russian Federation in 2022, Wagner forces began to operate in a region where Russian laws are in force. This situation seems to contradict the concept of sovereignty of states. Although there were intentions to integrate Wagner into the Ministry of Defense in the following period, Prigozhin and his team were not keen on this idea. The capture of the Ukrainian city of Soledar was again a breaking point. While Wagner forces tout the capture of the city as their own success, Ministry of Defense troops think otherwise. (Lenta.ru 2023)

Wagner and Prigozhin had been criticizing the Russian Ministry of Defense's strategy of managing the war for months, especially during the days when the army suffered heavy losses on the Ukrainian Bakhmut front. Prigozhin, in one of his speeches, posing in front of the Wagner militants who died in the war, claimed that the Russian Ministry of Defense did not provide them with weapons and ammunition and demanded the dismissal of the Minister of Defense, whom he severely insulted. (France24 2023) Prigozhin also accused Russian army troops of launching a missile attack on Wagner bases. (Sauer 2023) Subsequently, Wagner forces rebelled and started their march towards Moscow. They firstly captured the city of Rostov-on-Don. During Wagner's march north from the city of Rostov, Russian security forces were put on high alert and precautions were taken on state institutions and transportation lines in the capital Moscow. Prigozhin's advance to Moscow ended on the evening of June 24 with the mediation of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. During the days of the attack, Russian government circles claimed that Western intelligence agencies were involved in the mutiny. (Sputnik 2023)

On August 23, the plane carrying Wagner leaders crashed near Moscow. It was confirmed on August 27 that Prigozhin died in the crashed plane. Along with Prigozhin, there were 10 people aboard, including Dimitry Utkin, who was his right-hand man and responsible for the military operations of the group since its establishment, and Valery Chekalov, who was responsible for financial affairs. (BBC 2023)

Regarding the plane crash, pro-Kremlin sources first mentioned a technical malfunction and also blamed Ukrainian forces. It was reported that Prigozhin and Utkin had a habit of not traveling on the same plane. It is very hard to believe in coincidence that the accident occurred during a flight with both people on board.

After the plane crash, Putin stated that Prigozhin was a person with a difficult fate and someone who had made serious mistakes in the past, but he also spoke with praise and gratitude for his and Wagner's contributions to the country on the Ukrainian front. However, both the Kremlin administration and Belarusian President Lukashenko rejected the claims that the plane crash was a deliberate assassination. (Sputnik 2023)

5.9. African Corps

Shortly after the Wagner rebellion that started on June 23 was brought under control, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced in his statement that Russia's activities in CAR and Mali through Wagner would continue. (The Moscow Times 2023) Immediately after

the rebellion, discussions began in the Russian parliament, the Duma, regarding the future of Wagner and other Russian PMCs. On the one hand, there were calls for the immediate dissolution of Wagner and other PMCs, on the other hand, the high level of war preparedness of Wagner was emphasized and it was argued that a possible closure would be to the benefit of Russia's enemies.

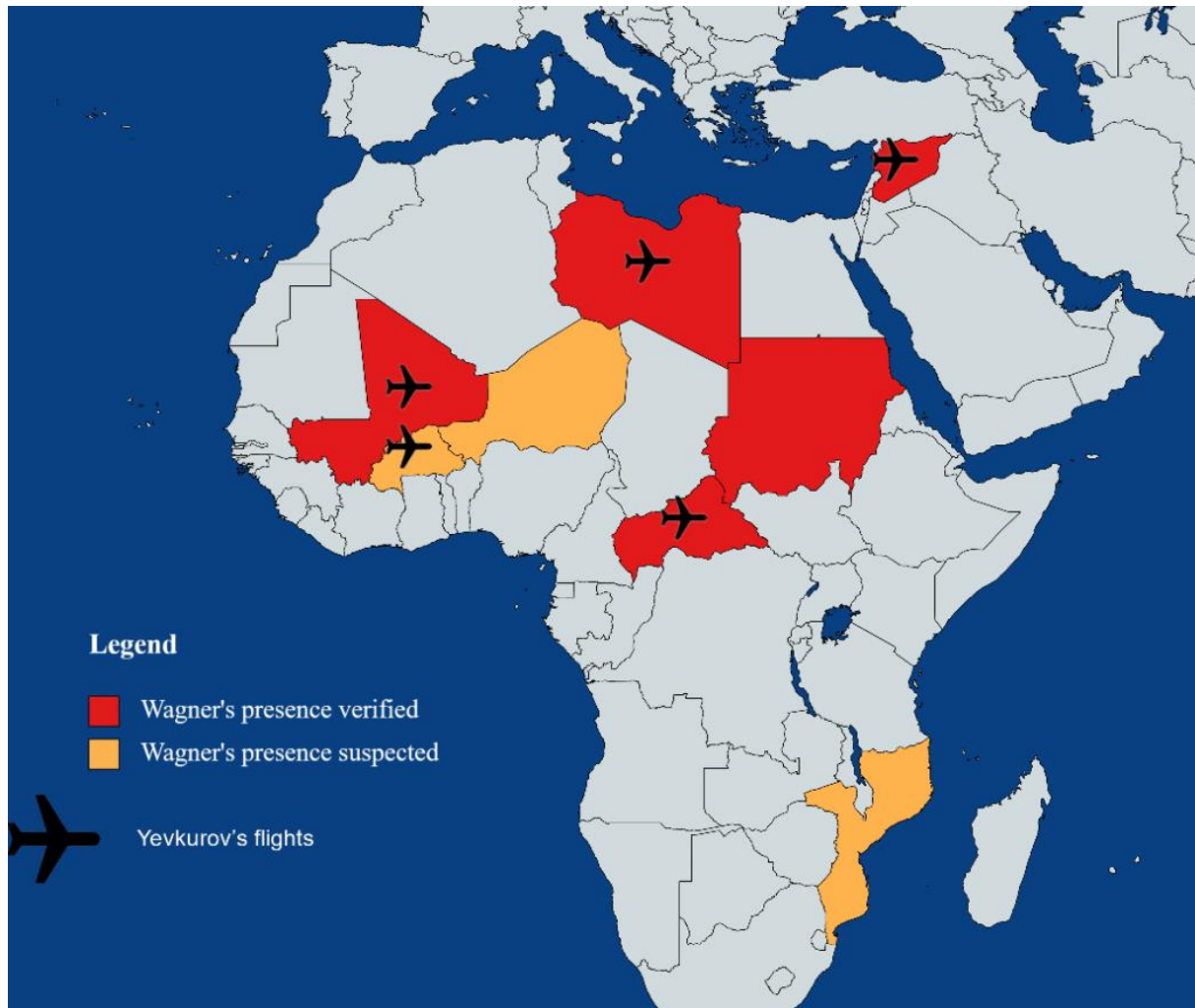
The intention to transform Wagner into African Corps emerged in July 2023. At the Russia-Africa summit held in St. Petersburg, guests from Africa were informed about the developments. African Corps used the same discourse with Wagner, about fighting against neocolonialism in a joint fight with the African countries. (Masuhr 2023, p. 9) In September 2023, Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Yunusbek Yevkurov and Andrei Averyanov, an experienced officer of the Russian military intelligence GRU, visited Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and held meetings with political leaders. The duo also visited Libya a day before the death of Wagner leader Prigozhin and met with Khalifa Haftar. The duo, with their visits to the mentioned countries, aimed to emphasize that Russia will continue to support these countries after the demise of Wagner leaders. (Seibt 2023)

While in Mali, the duo also met with Wagner militants. Yevkurov, who had a successful military career in the Russian army, served in Ingushetia between 2008 and 2019 and played a significant role in ensuring the security and stability of the region. Yevkurov stands out with his conciliatory and persuasive character. General Averyanov led a unit within the Russian military intelligence GRU, specializing in covert operations such as sabotage and assassination, for many years and served in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Moldova and Crimea. (Schwartz 2020) In this respect, it can be said that Averyanov's area of expertise is foreign special forces operations. When the two names are considered together, they complement each other. Since they are professional military personnels, it is certain that they will be seen as more reliable than Yevgeny Prigozhin in terms of loyalty to the state. (Seibt 2023) In addition, Vladimir Putin met with some of Wagner's senior executives and instructed them to form volunteer units that would serve in Ukrainian front in the future. (Sputnik 2023)

The transition from Prigozhin to the Yevkurov-Averyanov duo represents a change in the nature of the support Russia provides to African countries through private military companies. It is argued that the semi-secret relations maintained by Wagner will become more open in the new period. The semi-secret and semi-official support that Russia provides to the region through influence entrepreneurs may now be switched to direct state support. However,

it will be a matter of question whether the Russian government will renounce the ‘plausible deniability’. (ADF 2024)

Figure 6; Wagner's presence and Yevrukov's visit in Africa



Source: Wagner Group All information on the Wagner Group's mercenaries, Prigozhin is dead, and Russia's empire in Africa is crumbling, 2023

Wagner's decentralized working style, developed specifically for countries, will be suitable for Russia in terms of easy adaptation to local conditions. Wagner has developed tremendous flexibility in adapting to the geographies in which it works. For example, while Russia provides military protection services in the Central African Republic on the condition of access to mineral resources, it even has beer and vodka production facilities in the country. After suffering from Wagner's unexpected escalation, Russia is less likely to delegate the same autonomy as Wagner. It is assumed that the Kremlin government desires a more loyal and clearer leadership in the new post-Wagner operations. (Seibt 2023)

It is also a matter of curiosity how African states will adapt to the new era. Supporting statements are coming from African countries in this direction. Some African officials argue that the agreements that led to the deployment of Wagner militants in their country were signed directly with the Russian state, not with the private company. Making a statement after Wagner's rebellion, Fidele Gouandjika, special advisor to the CAR president, stated that his country made the 2018 security agreement with Russia, not with Wagner. He went on to say that it was Russia that sent the group to the CAR by making a subcontract with Wagner, and that if they did not want to work with the group, they would expect Russia to send a new group. (Pilling, Schipani and Adeoye 2023) Sergei Lavrov stated in a statement at the end of June 2023 that the relations between CAR and Russia are government-to-government and that CAR will continue its operations if deemed necessary by the personnel it needs. It is noteworthy that Lavrov referred to Wagner personnel as 'military advisors' in his statement.

In an analysis conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Wagner military base, which was built next to the airport of Bamako, is being gradually expanded. It is considered that the continuation of the expansion in the base even after the rebellion and Prigozhin's death is a reflection of African Corp's intention to remain in the country further. (Doxsee, Bermudez Jr. and Jun 2023) One of the reasons for the slow progress of the takeover of Wagner remnants by African Corps groups in Africa is the existence of a very wide network of people that were receiving their share from Wagner's economic activities. These people who had their role in Wagner aim at ensuring the continuity of their income through the PMC activities (Seibt 2023)

It is observed that African Corps units are taking over Wagner activities in countries such as Libya, Sudan, Mali and CAR. Although its formation is independent from the army, it operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defense. Economic and propaganda activities, which were also conducted by Wagner offshoot companies, are reported to be separated from the military structure and responsibilities of them were shared among various intelligence units of Russia. The responsibility of some economic companies, such as the Concorde Group, taken over from Wagner, was transferred to Prigozhin's son Pavel. It is aimed to ensure the loyalty of the former Wagner militants to the new regime through Pavel's presence. (Loh 2023)

In addition to African Corps, the newly established "Volunteer Assault Corps" also took over Wagner's activities outside Africa. Former senior leaders of Wagner serve in the management team of VAC, and the rank of combat personnel consists of former Wagner militants. (Watling, Danylyuk and Reynolds 2024, p. 19) Law dated December 12, 2023; allows

the establishment of private armed units to undertake military missions. However, it imposes a geographical limitation on these unions. Accordingly, the troops in question will only be able to operate outside Russia. (Bryjka and Czerep 2024, p. 9) The GRU military base in Krasnodar, which Wagner used to train his own personnel, was also used by African Corps. (African Digital Democracy Observatory 2024)

African Corps, which reportedly have closer ties with the Russian government compared to Wagner, will focus more on advancing the interests of the Russian government rather than prioritizing corporate interests in its activities on the continent. In this context, African Corps' activities in Sudan and the Central African Republics will begin to lose their importance. Because in both countries, supporting only one side of the conflict did not represent the interests of the Russian government. In the new period, the agenda is to focus on the more general goals of the fight against Western colonialism and economic cooperation between partners, rather than trying to ensure that a particular party wins in conflicts in different countries.

The coming to power of anti-Western governments as a result of the military coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and most recently Niger has opened the way for Russia in the region. In particular, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) which was recently established, envisages cooperation between the three countries in the military field and in the fight against terrorism. Among the objectives of the alliance is the expression of cooperation in the field of information.

Leadership in the new formation was continued by Wagner's former managers serving in the country. (Lechener and Eledinov 2022) It managed to take the city of Kidal from the Tuaregs. While this victory provided the junta government in Mali with serious prestige within the country; It became a new source of self-confidence for the Africa Corps and was also presented by Russian propagandists as the success of Russian power against the French and Americans.

The first country in which African Corps operates differently from Wagner is Burkina Faso. From the very beginning of the coup, it was obvious that the Burkina Faso government had a pro-Russian attitude. The first duty of African Corps units in Burkina Faso was to fight against jihadist groups, and Russian military advisors served as the guard of Captain Ibrahim Traore. In addition to the military units deployed in the region, the capacity of the Russian Embassy was expanded and the Russian Cultural Center was opened. (Bryjka and Czerep 2024, p. 17) Wagner's activities and Yevkurov's visits to the continent were depicted in the Figure 6.

5.10. Tinzaouatene Clashes

The Malian army and Wagner forces clashed with Tuareg forces and Al-Qaeda militants in the Tinzaouatene region between July 22-27, 2024. At the beginning of the conflict, a large contingent of Tuareg units had been spotted entering the region. In response, Malian army units and Wagner militants were dispatched to the region. In the clashes that continued for days, Tuareg units and jihadist groups ambushed Malian soldiers and Wagner militants with heavy weapons, drones and explosive-laden vehicles. Wagner unit commander Sergei Shevchenko was also killed in the clashes in the region. (Van Der Made 2024) African Corps militias announced that they lost 20-50 militants in the attack. On the other hand, pro-Tuareg groups claimed that 84 Wagner militants and 47 Malian soldiers were killed in the attack. (TRT Afrika 2024) Pro-Russian sources said that although African Corps forces managed to neutralize the Tuareg groups at the very beginning of the clashes, the jihadist groups later attacked with a force of 1,000 in the disadvantaged atmosphere created by the sandstorm. (Chibelushi 2024)

Malian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maiga stated that the army units lost a battle against terrorists in the Tinzaouatene region, but that they would not lose the war. The Prime Minister then had a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in which he later stated that Russia will continue to support Mali and the Confederation of Sahel States. (AFP 2024)

Another surprising development in the conflict concerns the involvement of Ukrainian troops. Ukrainian Military Intelligence Agency (GRU) spokesman Andrii Yusov said that Ukrainian troops were supporting Tuareg forces in the offensive and that this support was not limited to intelligence sharing. Yusov did not answer questions about whether Ukrainian personnel were directly involved in the fighting. He cited the involvement of Wagner militants in human rights violations in the Russia-Ukraine war as the reason for Ukraine's support for Tuareg groups. (Walker 2024)

The Malian government announced that they had cut off official relations with Ukraine following the official statement made by the Ukrainian authorities. The Malian government spokesman stated in his statement that Ukraine's activities amounted to a serious violation of sovereignty and support for terrorism. Malian authorities also accused Ukrainian forces of neo-Nazism and stated that any military aid given to Ukraine would amount to supporting terrorism in the Sahel region. Ukrainian authorities stated that Russia was the party that disrupted the international system that guarantees security and stability in Africa, and that they reserved the right to respond to the Malian government. (RFI 2024) The losses they suffered in Mali are the

heaviest losses Wagner has suffered in Africa to date. Russian sources, on the other hand, claimed that the Ukrainian government had formed an alliance with terrorists in Mali. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova likened Ukraine's involvement in the Tinzaouatene Clashes to the clashes taking place on Ukrainian soil and claimed that the Ukrainians were once again attacking civilian settlements and using civilians as human shields. She also claimed that Tuareg troops who attacked Wagner militias, were trained by the Ukrainian forces in Mauritania. (Sputnik 2023) When we look at the international press and pro-Russian accounts, it is seen that the terms Wagner and African Corps are used interchangeably.

In the following days, the coup government in Niger has also announced that they cut diplomatic ties with Ukraine, in a show of support for the Malian government. In addition, after the ambassador of Ukraine in Dakar explains his support on social media to the rebel groups attacking Malian troops and Wagner militias, he was convened to the Senegalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The incident in Tinzaouatene soured the relations of the Kiev government with the African countries, showing the former in cooperation with the rebels attacking a sovereign and central government in Africa. This incident also coincided with Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitry Kulebas' visit to the continent. After the clashes in Sudan between the Wagner troops and Ukrainian special forces, Mali appears to be the second front where the fight in Europe spread to Africa. Considering the fact that it withdrew its forces from Mozambique after suffering from heavy losses, it is a matter of curiosity after the Tinzaoutane clashes whether Wagner will decrease its presence in the country or the reverse.

CONCLUSION

The thesis elaborates Mali's outsourcing of security services to private military companies. It begins by defining failed states, exploring historical perspectives on military security and theoretical approaches for outsourcing security services. Finally, motivations behind Mali's use of private military companies are analyzed.

Machiavelli's views from the 16th century are presented to illustrate European attitudes toward mercenaries at that time. Even then, mercenary service was interpreted as the lesser evil, employed by princes during the times of crisis. Machiavelli argued that a well functioning state and a wise prince should establish their own citizen-based armies rather than relying on mercenaries. In Machiavelli's era, as in contemporary times, mercenary service was an ad hoc solution to an urgent problem. PMCs are now especially the choice of failed states. The concept of a failed state refers to countries plagued by civil conflicts, epidemics and migration crises, often controlled by armed groups. Similarly, princes in Machiavelli's era struggled to maintain sovereignty over disputed lands by employing mercenaries. Thus, the thesis argues that mercenaries and PMCs represent a last resort for rulers confronted with immediate crisis, a perspective validated by historical and modern examples.

In the following part, the reasons why states resort to private military companies are examined through financial, political and ideological lenses. According to the functionalist approach, which explains one aspect of states' decisions to engage PMCs, economic and technological concerns play a decisive role. The costs associated with maintaining a standing army capable of immediate combat readiness and sustaining a large military force often outweigh the expenses employing PMCs. For example, the annual cost of the Executive Outcomes company, a significant player in Sierra Leone and Angola during their own civil wars, and the budget allocations for national armies in the same period are analyzed comparatively. The amount of payment as part of the agreement between Wagner and the Malian government in this regard was not disclosed. The reason for this is that, unlike his Western counterparts, Wagner typically enters into agreements not solely for monetary compensation but also in exchange for privileged access to the country's underground mineral resources. Before deploying troops to Mali, Wagner dispatched mining engineers to make an assessment on the country's resources. Another argument from the functionalist approach is that states and traditional armies often struggle to swiftly adapt to the changing nature of war and technology due to their cumbersome structures. In contrast, Private military companies can

quickly adjust to the changing demands of the battlefield due to their experienced personnel and agile structures. The inadequacy of the Malian army in managing the civil war that erupted in 2012 was a critical factor leading to a military coup in the same year, highlighting discontent with the government's handling of the conflict. In 2013, an international coalition led by French forces defeated the rebel groups in a very short time during Operation Serval. Despite this initial success, the central government has not been able to establish full military and administrative authority across Mali's territory. Consequently, in December 2021, Mali signed a military agreement, leading to the deployment of the first Wagner troops in the country. Wagner, in collaboration with the Malian army, began to advance towards central and northern regions with the recapture of Kidal generating considerable enthusiasm in Mali. The success in Kidal was also enthusiastically promoted through Russian propaganda channels.

The second approach used to explain why states resort to private military companies revolves around minimizing domestic and international pressures. Typically, states dispatch their conventional military forces to foreign regions with parliamentary approval, and public opinion at home is sensitive to such deployments. Past experiences, such as the United States' engagements in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, where public and international pressures mounted due to military losses, serve as vivid examples. Similarly, the Soviet Union is known to face significant public discontent following its losses during the invasion of Afghanistan. However, private military companies are used to alleviate such public pressures. It is evident that the loss of a PMC member does not evoke the same level of public discomfort as the loss of a soldier serving in the national military. For example, in 2018, Wagner forces operating in the Deir ez-Zor region of Syria were bombarded for hours by the US army. However, the Russian government disregarded the incident for a long time. Had such losses occurred within the Russian military, the response would likely have been different. In Mali, leading up to the coup in 2012, public demonstrations by soldiers' relatives reflected discontent over the government sending their loved ones to perish under challenging conditions in the northern part of the country. Given the long standing integration issues between Mali's northern and southern regions, it is difficult to explain the reasons of the war in the north to the people in the southern regions. Wagner's presence in Mali addressed a critical need by alleviating these legitimacy concerns for the Malian government.

Another approach explored in the thesis is ideational, which posits ideological reasons and the prevailing zeitgeist as explanations for states turning to PMCs. Advocates of this approach, argue that attributing states' orientation towards PMCs solely to economic and

political reasons oversimplifies the role of states as subjects. They suggest that privatizing security may reflect a state's unique ideological choice to transform a traditionally public domain into a private sphere. States that adopt neo-liberalism in other areas of politics and economy may also seek to privatize security as part of broader ideological motives. The rise of neoliberalism since the 1990s particularly increased this tendency. However, the applicability of this approach in Mali remains uncertain. The ideological motives behind the military coups of 2020 and 2021, which seized control of the country, have not been fully elucidated. Future studies in this field may provide more concrete insights.

In the third part of the thesis, global applications and classifications of PMCs are examined. The relevant literature typically categorizes these companies based on their roles in conflicts, ranging from offensive combat roles to military consultancy, training or back-service activities. Western companies often focus on non-combat roles, partly influenced by scandals engulfing companies like Blackwater that prompted Western firms to retreat from direct involvement in conflicts. On the other hand, companies such as Executive Outcomes and Wagner are notable for their direct engagement in conflict zones, distinguishing them from Western counterparts. Wagner also differs from Western companies because of its close ties to the government, its avoidance of competitive bidding process, and the breadth of its operational scope. Another factor that differentiates Russian companies is that Russian laws prevent the establishment of private armed groups and the participation of Russian citizens in such entities. Yet, Russian private military companies continue to operate, facilitated by a policy of official denial in certain geographies. In contrast, US laws and constitutional provisions permit the activities of PMCs, requiring US-based companies to obtain specific legal authorizations before operating internationally. The activities of Russian PMCs abroad are supported by the Gerasimov doctrine.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, Wagner's activities in the military, economic and propaganda fields are discussed. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Wagner is the company's comprehensive actions. The thesis attempted to illustrate Wagner's unique nature by comparing its activities across different countries. The fronts in Syria and Ukraine have been pivotal in institutionalizing Wagner and gaining experience. The company has demonstrated its value and success for Russia through its engagements, particularly highlighting achievements on the Palmyra front and in Syria overall, effectively leveraging these successes for brand promotion. In Africa, the Central African Republic (CAR) is where Wagner feels most at ease. Wagner carries out military operations either in collaboration with government forces or

independently. The company also offers political advice to the president and acts as his guard. Reports suggest Wagner entered into agreements with local armed groups CAR, and its militants do not refrain from making appearances to the press. Examination of Wagner's military bases in CAR reveals strategic placement near mineral-rich areas. Wagner's activities in the country are funded by natural resources extraction. The company acts almost like a state within a state in CAR. It aims to guarantee its own economic agreements by mediating between local armed groups and the government. Similar operational patterns are observed in Madagascar and Sudan where Wagner maintains close ties with specific political figures. The transition from Wagner to African Corps marks a shift towards minimizing political affiliations and avoiding strong identification with particular political groups

In the fifth chapter of the thesis, the source of instability in Mali is explained. When Mali had gained independence, the country's new rulers were local elites educated as per the French *école*. Most of these elites originated from the southern regions and held an elitist view towards the northern part. Since the early days, Arab and Tuareg groups have felt excluded and been disadvantaged in terms of social and economic dimensions. Since independence, the country has witnessed four different Tuareg rebellions. Although there have been agreements and constitutional amendments mediated by other countries to integrate Tuareg and Arab groups into the state, permanent success has not been achieved. In particular, the rebellions in neighboring Libya and Algeria caused a spillover effect in Mali. As a result, public services were disrupted in the north of the country. Particularly, the Algerian Civil War led to the jihadist groups to settle down in the north of Mali, which resulted in the emergence of ungovernable areas in the country. The Tuareg rebellion of 2012 was also sabotaged by jihadist groups from the very first months. Armed groups advancing from the north to the south of the country were stopped thanks to Operation Serval with the intervention of the French army, and the subsequent Operation Barkhane and the UN mission (MINUSMA) aimed to maintain stability in the country.

Wagner's activities in Mali are similar to its operating pattern in other countries. When the Malian government could not restore its sovereignty with its own resources and after a disagreement with the French government, it turned to Russia. Wagner's activities in the country began first with perception operations. Through online posts, street demonstrations and other means the activities of the French and other Western powers were demonized and they were accused of supporting terrorism and continuing the colonial rule. Meanwhile, before the deployment of first Wagner troops, mining engineers working for the company also started

research activities on the region's natural resources. In terms of its military activities, Wagner started its operations after deploying to the country with military transport planes belonging to the Russian government, in December 2021 and settling around Bamako Airport. Wagner's activities in the country led to serious human rights violations. For example, reports indicated that more than 300 civilians were massacred in a village near Mopti. After transitioning to African Corps, Wagner continues its activities in the country and expands its bases. The capture of Kidal, one of the major cities of the country, in July 2023 was reflected as a success story by both Wagner and the Malian government. However, during the capture of Kidal, there were tensions between various ethnic groups, demonstrating that capturing cities does not necessarily mean permanent restoration of the situation. Mali is also the last country where Prigozhin appeared. The Mali case is illustrative as it reflects Wagner's operations in all domains in which it operates.

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