

EVIDENCE SUBMISSION BY THE DOSSIER CENTER (WGN0009)

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About The Dossier Center

1. The Dossier Center is a non-profit investigative project founded by the Russian opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2017. Dossier carries out independent analysis of the crimes of the individuals connected to the Russian authorities including corruption, money laundering and illegal interference abroad.
2. We have investigated more than a dozen crimes committed by individuals linked to the Kremlin, both in Russia and abroad and our findings have been published by leading global media. Where possible, Dossier seeks to take legal action against the perpetrators in appropriate jurisdictions.
3. Dossier has a particular focus on Kremlin interference in the internal affairs of foreign countries through structures affiliated with the Russian state and pro-Kremlin businessmen. We have carried out extensive investigations into Russian PMCs operating in the Central African Republic and its neighbouring countries, due to their likely involvement in the murder of three Russian journalists in July 2018. As such, we have collected extensive information regarding the Wagner Group and other parts of Evgeny Prigozhin's empire. Dossier has assisted the UN, think-tanks and leading journalists with analysis and information.

About The Wagner Group

4. Information about the Wagner Group – an unofficial armed force operating in Ukraine, Syria and Africa – first appeared in October 2015.
5. Wagner is funded by and associated with Evgeny Prigozhin, a Russian citizen and one of the largest state contractors providing catering services to Russian government offices, Moscow's school system. For the military, Prigozhin provides catering, engineering, logistics, cleaning services, facilities, infrastructure construction and energy.
6. Although Russian law officially prohibits PMCs and mercenarism ([punishable](#) by 4-8 years imprisonment), the Kremlin creates optimal conditions, including financing, for

their establishment and development, subsequently using them in advancing its geopolitical agenda as an instrument of hybrid warfare.

7. The Kremlin has blocked appeals for the legalisation of PMCs. PMCs' unofficial status is too useful for the Kremlin, enabling it to deny involvement in acts of aggression.
8. For example in 2018 near the Conoco oil refinery in Syria, approximately 250 Wagner mercenaries were killed by US airstrikes after the Russian command denied the presence of any Russian forces, demonstrating that Russia has at times used Wagner as cannon fodder while maintaining deniability.
9. It has proven impossible to calculate Wagner's exact numbers in the 2022 Ukrainian campaign. The most conservative estimates are 1500, with several thousand more involved in other Prigozhin-associated projects – mainly in Africa and the Middle East.
10. According to internal payroll documents and staff schedules, we deduce that the Wagner Group numbers approximately 5000 fighters, including those not on active duty.
11. In 2016, Wagner had 2,349 people on its payroll (evidence available on request) – a maximum number during periods of peak activity, such as the storming of Palmyra, Syria (2016-2017). Typically, Wagner fighters operate on rotation, with some units in Russia in, generally, unpaid "disbanded" state or on training.
12. Since 2016, the scope of Prigozhin's projects has expanded considerably such as in Africa, where both the Wagner Group and his Russian political technologists are active.
13. Wagner carries out continuous recruitment, mostly through word of mouth and social networks. The Molkino training camp in the Krasnodar region (next to the 10th Separate GRU Special Forces Brigade) has also become a known contact point for recruitment.
14. In January 2019, Wagner carried out targeted recruitment of Crimean residents for operations in Sudan, according to Ukraine's Security Service. Notably, the passports of these Crimean recruits had the same serial numbers as those of GRU personnel.
15. Currently, Wagner is actively recruiting mercenaries from the Balkans and the Foreign Legion. It seeks recruits with local experience, contacts and languages for its African operations.

16. In 2022, recruitment is also taking place through Wagner's subsidiaries and other officially unregistered PMCs. People are recruited through advertisements, with no strict candidate selection. Consequently, virtually any man with minimal experience can participate in combat operations in Ukraine.
17. Dossier has payrolls and other evidence identifying Wagner fighters and their salaries. They are often paid more than what is stated in their contract. In addition to bank transfers, they can receive cash at special "offices". According to powers-of-attorney papers, relatives/other proxies could receive the cash while Wagner employees were on "business trips". However, in 2020, they were also required to show a numbered Wagner badge to receive money.

Further background information on the Wagner Group

18. In 2012, Slavonic Corps Limited was registered in Hong Kong and Russia by former Russian servicemen (ceased operations in December 2013).
19. The Slavonic Corps Ltd listed director was S.V. Kramskoy, an employee of Moran Security Group (MSG), whose beneficiary was an offshore company in the British Virgin Islands. MSG's managers, Vadim Gusev and Evgeny Sidorov, were listed as executives. They were the first to be convicted of "Mercenarism" in Russia.
20. In 2013, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad signed a decree licensing PMCs. By then there was already a recruitment drive to send former Russian servicemen to protect oil fields and pipelines for the Syrian regime.
21. Among the 250 former military personnel recruited into Slavonic Corps was Dmitry Utkin, a former GRU unit leader. In 2013, he was a Corps leader in Syria. A year later, Utkin was head of the Wagner Group and began using "Wagner" as his personal call sign.
22. Wagner Group fighters, along with the affiliated political technologists, have been mainly involved in sabotage, reconnaissance, supply base control and media operations. One of their first operations in Ukraine was the disarming of Crimea in 2014. They were also involved in the downing of the Ukrainian MOD IL-76 (resulting in 49 dead) and attacks on Luhansk airport and Debaltseve.
23. Utkin and Wagner might also have been involved in the assassination of at least 10 Luhansk People's Republic warlords.

24. In 2016, Utkin appeared at a Kremlin event honouring "Heroes of the Fatherland", with four Orders of Courage medals on his chest.

Syria

25. In July 2016, the Prigozhin-affiliated Euro Polis LLC was registered in Russia. The same year, the company signed a memorandum with the Syrian Oil and Syrian Gas companies. In exchange for a quarter of all gas and oil produced in the reclaimed territories, Euro Polis pledged to liberate and protect Syria's oil fields. It became known that Wagner fighters took part in combat operations there. In early 2017, Oleg Erokhin, a former police officer, a member of Prigozhin's security service and co-founder of the Local War and Military Conflict Veterans' Defense League, became company director. The owner, according to the Russian company register, was ZAO Neva linked to Prigozhin.

26. Prigozhin's employees have also been involved in local Syrian politics. An internal document provides budget estimates for the three phases of "addressing the integration of Syria's eastern territories", including for establishing offices throughout Syria and refugee areas. The tasks include "re-training Kurdish leaders", "information and organisational work against foreign military bases" and "working in the information space (new media, social networks, etc.)". Prigozhin's staff also administered 41 Syria-dedicated groups on the Russian social media platform, VKontakte.

27. Meanwhile, employees of the Prigozhin-affiliated Federal News Agency have operated under the cover of being "journalists" to spread disinformation and perform intelligence tasks in MENA (evidence available).

28. The participation of Wagner in Syria is confirmed by extensive evidence including photos, lists of casualties and maps.

Africa

29. The interaction between Wagner and its host countries is governed by agreements negotiated by Prigozhin's staff, with the support of the Russian Foreign and Defence Ministries which organise meetings with local officials. As a rule, they include concession/pseudo-concession agreements, primarily for mineral deposits. In return, Wagner participates in military operations supporting the Kremlin's regime of choice, protects local infrastructure and authorities, and provides military training.

30. Wagner is embedded in Prigozhin's complex structure for interference in the internal affairs of foreign countries, alongside political technologists, sociologists and propagandists. In many cases, the latter were the first to visit the countries of interest to negotiate the terms of cooperation, including the PMC's presence. They are also the ones communicating with the supporting representatives of the Russian MOD as well as the Foreign Ministry, such as Deputy Minister Mikhail Bogdanov.
31. In addition to Syria, Prigozhin's staff have shown interest in 55 African countries ranked into three categories – the first being the countries most vulnerable and beneficial to the Kremlin for implementing cooperation and spreading influence and the third being the least interesting with high levels of cooperation with other foreign powers (according to 2018 internal documents). Since then, more than ten countries listed have hosted Russian mercenaries and political technologists (CAR, Sudan, Mali, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, South Africa, Mozambique, DRC, Angola, Guinea).
32. As in Syria, Prigozhin's people and the CAR government signed strategic partnership agreements in mining, social policy and information and security issues. Among the locations chosen for exploration and mining were Lobaye and Haute-Kotto, their protection justifying the presence of armed Russian specialists. The security arrangements included providing protection for President Touadera and training his local Armed Forces. They have managed to weaken foreign influence, strengthen the armed forces, set up a number of media outlets, and organise meetings between rebel forces and the official Bangui, paying monthly bribes to local authorities for their loyalty.
33. Similar methods have been used in Sudan, South Africa and Madagascar.
34. Wagner's presence in the CAR has led to increased violence. Wagner employees may have been involved in the killing of Russian journalists Kirill Radchenko, Orkhan Dzhemal and Alexander Rastorguev, as well as in the torture, assault and rape of local residents. In January 2019, a CAR national, Mahamat Nour Mamadou, was detained by the national armed forces (FACA) after he was falsely accused of being a Seleka militia member. At the base FACA shared with Wagner, he was questioned and tortured by the Russians. His finger was cut off and he was repeatedly hanged and beaten (statement/photos available).
35. In 2017, Wagner fighters were involved in the torture and murder of a Syrian national Mohammed Taha Ismail. He was beaten to death with a sledgehammer, his head cut off and the body burned. Published footage enabled the killers to be

identified as Russian citizens, as well as establish their affiliation with Prigozhin's projects (documents available).

36. Throughout 2018-2019, Evgeny Prigozhin's political technologists attempted to preserve the regime of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan. A strategy to "strengthen Russian influence" and win Bashir the 2020 elections was created. They proposed "public executions of looters and other spectacular events to distract protesting audiences", "organising clashes and conflicts between protesting groups" and "spreading fake news that protesters are being paid", as well as beating pregnant women. Additionally, Wagner was involved in suppressing anti-government protests.
37. Prigozhin's people were also involved in the 2018 Madagascar presidential elections. Presumably, Wagner protected the political technologists there, and, together with military advisers from the FSB and GRU, were training the local military. A number of fake Russian election observers were identified as Wagner fighters or members of Prigozhin's Security Service.
38. Prigozhin's employees were also trying to benefit financially (with little success) in Madagascar. A Prigozhin-associated company, Ferrum Mining, was producing chrome and negotiating for gold deposits, being locally represented by a former Defence Ministry official [Valery Karyavkin].
39. According to Dossier sources, Wagner representatives are currently in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. In Prigozhin's internal documents in Dossier's possession, Equatorial Guinea is in the second echelon of interest. However, as noted by his staff, the local government has "tense relations with the U.S. and France. It is rich in oil. The president suffers from cancer and consideration is being given to his successor. Scenario: transfer of power to Theodore Obiang Jr (son of the President)".
40. Theodorin Obiang, the country's vice-president and minister of defence, regularly visits Moscow. As [reported](#), in September 2021 he flew to Moscow for secret negotiations on a contract with Wagner.
41. In addition to other projects, Prigozhin's people were aiming to train US black extremists at militant camps located on African soil.

Funding

42. Dossier evidence points to the following financing scheme for Wagner and other influence projects. Multiple Prigozhin-affiliated Russian companies receive government contracts for cleaning, construction, catering etc., typically obtained in a

non-competitive manner which goes unpenalized. From 2011 to 2018, they were awarded five thousand contracts worth almost £2bln. A big part of the profits then funds projects involving the Wagner Group and political technologists abroad.

43. Due to the legal simplicity of registering Russian companies, Prigozhin's affiliates have managed to evade sanctions through continuous turnover. From internal documents on African/Syrian projects, it can be seen that Prigozhin easily moves money between hundreds of companies to pay project costs.
44. Prigozhin also profits from oil and mining concessions in Syria and Africa. In 2019, the Syrian parliament signed contracts for the development of three blocks of gas/oil fields with two Prigozhin-affiliated Russian companies, Velada and Mercury. In 2018, they received approximately \$20 million monthly.
45. According to a former Wagner employee, Prigozhin's office was located in central Damascus (address available) and kept cash for local expenses (salaries, recruitment of locals). After receiving the payroll, a Wagner battalion commander would go to that office and collect about \$200,000 in cash.

Other Russian PMCs – Redut

46. Former employees of Wagner move from one PMC to another as different projects appear. The desire of Russians to take part in illegal mercenarism is due to low wages and lack of jobs.
47. The Kremlin unofficially supports various PMCs. PMC Redut (Redoubt), for example, appeared in the early 2000s and is still, according to several sources, fully supported by the Defence Ministry. It also operates in the Middle East and Ukraine.
48. According to Dossier sources, representatives of Redut in Syria protect Stroytransgaz facilities, a gas mining company affiliated with a longtime friend of Vladimir Putin, Gennady Timchenko. Stroytransgaz has been contracting with the Syrian government for more than a decade, including during the war. Redut also participated in the training of local military personnel in Iraq.
49. Leading roles in PMC Redut were taken by former military personnel from the 45th Special Forces Regiment of the Airborne Troops (now Brigade), including Konstantin Mirzayants (accused of murdering journalist Dmitry Kholodov) and Evgeny Sidorov (sentenced for mercenarism in the Slavonic Corps).

50. Dossier research shows that Redut mercenaries entered Ukraine at the beginning of the 2022 invasion in four squads of 250 men from the direction of Chernobyl moving towards Gostomel and Kharkiv. Allegedly, the fighters each received a net salary of 217,000 rubles. 50 men refused to participate in further combat operations because of no increased combat pay and no bonuses for captured and destroyed enemy equipment and manpower. Battalion commanders include Sergei Mironov and Kirill Tikhonovich – former commanders of Wagner’s 3rd and 2nd companies.
51. According to Dossier sources, Redut withdrew from Ukraine in early April. We identified more than 50 Redut fighters that participated in the 2022 Ukrainian campaign.
52. Redut's temporary base is located at: 94 Levoberezhnaya Street, Rostov-on-Don.

Measures to curb Russia's aggressive policies and the limits of sanctions

53. Western countries are actively fighting the expansion of Kremlin-adjacent geopolitical projects, however, these measures are not enough. To date, the main mechanism is sanctions against Prigozhin, his employees and affiliated companies. There are, however, several problems with this measure:
 54. 1) The speed with which Prigozhin’s employees and companies can be added to sanctions lists is comparatively slow, whereas it takes no time at all for Prigozhin to register new Russian companies to nominal directors and transfer the financial flows for illegal projects abroad.
 55. 2) Some of Prigozhin's employees change their names and surnames, thus avoiding restrictions. For example, Wagner's employee Aleksandr Sotov, one of the suspects in the murder of three journalists in the CAR, changed his documents and his name to Volkhonskii after it became public.
 56. 3) Officials in the countries where Wagner conducts operations are also actively helping Prigozhin's people cover their tracks. They are allowed to register companies with local nominees and receive documents themselves. For example, Valery Zakharov, a former official security adviser to the president of the CAR and "head of the group of military instructors", received CAR citizenship. It also becomes difficult to conduct independent investigations into their activities and possible law violations. For example, in the CAR murder case, local authorities, in cooperation with Wagner, did everything to derail the investigation. Additional support was provided by the Russian Embassy, whose employees, for example, coordinated the responses to a relative’s letter with Prigozhin’s representative Dmitry Sytii.

57. 4) PMC Wagner cannot officially exist because of the legal ban on PMCs in Russia.

This unofficial status of Prigozhin's projects, as well as measures employed by his staff to disguise their activities and companies, make it almost impossible to identify and subsequently sanction all those involved.

Recommendation: Declare Wagner Group a terrorist organisation

58. Given these challenges, in order to curtail the activities of the Wagner Group and associated structures, they should be declared a terrorist organisation. If Wagner and similar PMCs are declared terrorist organisations then those supporting them in host countries will also be subject to punishment. Moreover, it would restrict the use of European, African and Middle Eastern companies as vehicles for the movement of money, without which Wagner cannot operate. It would also impose greater responsibility on those countries that cooperate with and hire such organisations. It would also make it difficult for employees affiliated with Prigozhin to move around the world.

Recommendation: Create a special unit

59. The UK government should create a special cross-departmental unit to monitor and report on the activities and possible threats posed to British interests by PMCs with ties to hostile states/non-state actors.

Recommendation: Raise the issue with relevant governments and outline negative consequences on their relationship with UK

60. The FCDO should raise the issue of hosting and cooperating with the Wagner Group and other Russian PMCs with relevant governments. The FCDO should outline to relevant governments possible negative consequences for their bilateral relationships with the UK, in fields such as aid, development and trade, should such cooperation with Russian PMCs, or those of other hostile states, continue.

May 2022