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# Russia's Private Military Contractors: Cause for Worry?

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Defence & Security Foresight  
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## RUSSIAN PMCs: ROOTS OF THE WAGNER GROUP

The contemporary Russian Private Military (PMC) industry, which began with the Soviet collapse in 1991, grew out of three (intertwined) groups.



# 1

Volunteers who were drawn to Russia's territorial "grey zones" – including South Ossetia, Chechnya, and Bosnia – to build combat resumes and later joined Western or Russian PMC structures.

# 2

Private armies – organized in the 1990s as a result of the expanding Russian criminal web – which rendered security services to powerful individuals including Vladimir Putin. With the strengthening of the Russian state, these were disbanded, with members either killed or moved to other PSCs.

# 3

PMCs that were entities organized by and composed of highly qualified professionals. The Moran Security Group – which provided security services to Bashar al-Assad – consisted, for example, of a "consortium" of smaller companies and even had a marine branch, which owned a number of vessels.

## RUSSIAN PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES THE WAGNER GROUP



When deployed by the state, Wagner Group personnel were mostly used as cannon fodder in Syria and given the most arduous tasks with the maximum risk of danger.

Although some future members of the group took part in the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the Wagner Group's actual emergence dates to May 2014, and the outbreak of armed conflict on the Ukrainian Southeast where the group took part in all major engagements. Its use of non-linear/asymmetrical principles including sabotage and guerilla/partisan warfare raised Wagner Group's profile among third parties.

Wagner Group pursued operations with more lucrative gains such as forcefully seizing oil and gas fields away from anti-Assad groups. Russian neoconservative nationalists condemned the Wagner Group for betraying Russia's national interests.

Wagner Group are confirmed to have been deployed in Libya, Central African Republic, and Mozambique (and suspected to be deployed in other countries).



# RUSSIAN PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES THE THREAT TO NATO



Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs) will pose a threat to NATO and Western powers mainly through distracting and disruptive action. The following are areas of particular concern:

# 1

Irregulars, forces including PMCs and hackers, could use the Crimea annexation to expand operations beyond the borders of post-Soviet Russia in the Balkans, Latvia, or Lithuania. Though direct engagement with NATO is unlikely, Russia might provoke NATO to try to undermine the Alliance's cohesion and resolve.

# 2

In western Russia (Kaliningrad Oblast), Russian Cossacks (and other irregulars) are holding para-military exercises and take part in strategic military exercises (such as Zapad-2017). They are also trying to cooperate with pro-Russian forces in Poland.

# 3

While remilitarizing the Arctic, Russia is actively rehearsing operations with small, and highly maneuvering groups.

