

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**AS RUSSIA'S WAGNER GROUP EXPANDS ITS GLOBAL REACH, A NEW REPORT ASSESSES HOW TO
CONTAIN THE GROUP AND HOLD IT ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS ACTIONS**

The private military company exchanges access to commodities for its security services, while displacing Western influence and presence in many strategic parts of the world.

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

(New York, NY – June 25, 2023) With its explosive schism with the Russian military, the Wagner Group last week catapulted itself from a reliable Kremlin ally to an imminent threat to Russia's war prospects, the national leadership, and domestic peace and stability. A new special report from The Soufan Center [Wagner Group: The Evolution Of A Private Army](#) explores the group's evolution and operations, and its implications for wider peace and security efforts – and offers recommendations to contain and counter the organization. Given the volatility between Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Russian political establishment, the future of the private military company may be uncertain, but its role in conflict zones around the world, and the lessons it could offer other private military companies and predatory states, remains more relevant than ever.

Prior to its break with the Russian state, the Wagner Group's infamy and the long list of crimes associated with the group has only grown in recent years, from Ukraine to Syria to sub-Saharan Africa. What started in 2014 as a small mercenary force has grown to more than 50,000 members, with its ranks bloated by the conscription of criminals from Russian prisons and deployed to the front lines in Ukraine.

"The Wagner Group adds a volatile element to an already precarious global security landscape," cautions Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Executive Director of The Soufan Center and co-author of the report. "The group's brutality against civilians and its support for predatory governments prolongs and even expands the instability and insecurity that led governments to seek their assistance in the first place." Reflecting on recent developments within Russia, Ms. Fink says, "current events may leave Prigozhin's fate uncertain but the impact of the group is undeniable and raises questions about who takes on the reins of their global business ventures and operations."

Diversifying its portfolio

Wagner's ascendance is taking place at a time of monumental geopolitical shifts. The private military company supports efforts to displace Western influence in strategic hotspots, to Russia's benefit. In recent years, the Wagner Group has joined the burgeoning ranks of violent non-state actors that include insurgents, rebels, transnational organized criminal groups, and terrorist groups that play critical roles in shaping the nature of contemporary conflict.

"In many ways, Wagner functions like a Swiss army knife," explains co-author Colin P. Clarke, a Senior Research Fellow at The Soufan Center. "The group is versatile and adept. Alongside military training and

conducting offensive combat operations, Wagner advises governments, conducts information campaigns, and undermines international peacekeeping missions,” says Dr. Clarke.

Further, the Wagner Group is involved in a range of illicit activities beyond security services, from commercial and extractive industries that reportedly support sanctions evasions, to facilitating the trafficking and destruction of cultural property. “This group operates like a conglomerate made up of different security and commercial entities, with an extensive focus on extractive industries. Wagner poses a real challenge to national and international investigators to track how it raises and moves funds,” says co-author and TSC Senior Research Fellow, Jason Blazakis.

Even should Wagner fall, this remains an important analysis, as Wagner may offer a highly attractive model for other countries to emulate as their opaque structure allows them carry out Russian foreign policy objectives while insulating the Kremlin from significant blowback. Wagner also often operate in states suffering from chronic instability and insecurity, high rates of corruption, poor governance, porous borders, and a deep trust deficit between citizens and the state. The group’s presence fosters instability and creates the conditions that justify its prolonged operations. Above all, the Wagner Group has been linked to accusations of torture, sexual violence, and mass killings, and associated with campaigns of disinformation that discredit Western actors and international organizations. The group’s ties to the Kremlin may deter some governments from holding Wagner to account for alleged crimes so as not to be seen as waging a direct challenge to Russia.

The report sets out a series of recommendations that focus on ways to counter and contain the group, should it continue to exist after its current act of armed rebellion: 1) The United States government and allies should consider designating Wagner a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). 2) States should impose sanctions on Wagner-affiliated businesses where possible. 3) Pursue accountability for war crimes and core international crimes in conflict zones. 4) Strengthen support to civil society organizations engaged in documenting Wagner’s activities and human rights violations and providing support to their victims. 5) Pursue an accountability call from UN experts. 6) Strengthen international efforts to implement existing international PMC frameworks. 7) Develop guidance and protocols for peace operations in complex contexts that involve non-state armed actors, like designated terrorist groups and PMCs. 8) Pursue accountability for the Wagner Group’s involvement in the destruction of cultural heritage.

ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER (TSC)

Based in New York, The Soufan Center (TSC) is an independent non-profit organization offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on foreign policy challenges with a particular focus on global security, conflict prevention and resolution, and the rule of law. Follow [@TheSoufanCenter](https://twitter.com/TheSoufanCenter) and visit <http://thesoufancenter.org/>

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