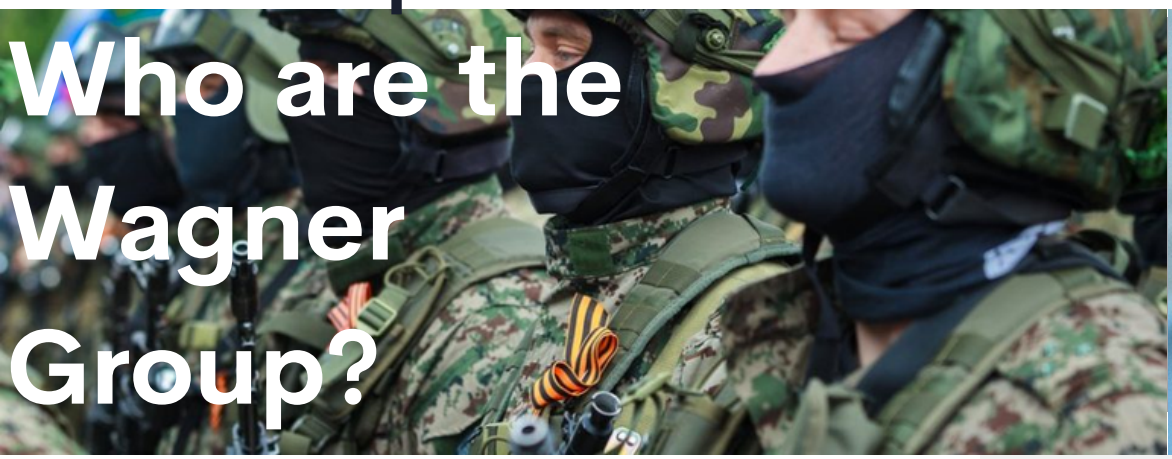
Ukraine update:

www.albanyassociates.com

ALBANY

Who are the Wagner Group?



ORIGINS

- Technically, the Wagner Group does not exist; it is an umbrella term for a number of Private Military Contractors (PMCs).
- PMCs are technically illegal in Russia, which is why the official corporation that "owns" the Wagner entity is registered in Argentina. This corporation is owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin (top right image) a Kremlin-linked oligarch known as "Putin's Chef" for his catering business. He is currently sanctioned by the US for his part in interfering in the 2016 presidential election.
- The first known sighting of the group was in Eastern Ukraine after 2014, as the Kremlin waged a hybrid war against the Ukrainian government for control of the Donbas region. Wagner acted as a deniable instrument through which the Kremlin could enhance its influence.
- Wagner's operations have since gone global.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

- The name "Wagner" refers to the German opera composer Richard Wagner, who's work was a favourite of Adolf Hitler and continues to be idealised by modern Neo-Nazis.
- The PMC's name is thought to have originated with Dimitry Utkin, a former Military Intelligence Colonel and alleged founder of the group; Wagner being his 'call sign' and a homage to the composer, allegedly due to Utkin's ties to Neo-Nazism, which the group maintains.

Wagner's global ops and Prigozhin's business interests. Follow link to interactive map.

EXTENDING THE KREMLIN'S INFLUENCE ABROAD

- Wagner made its international debut during Russia's intervention in Syria. The official military provided indiscriminate airstrikes on rebel positions, while Wagner provided 'boots on the ground' assistance to the Assad regime. It is reported this went beyond traditional military assistance and included participation in war crimes and human rights abuses.
- The group is also alleged to have appeared in Venezuela, assisting the Maduro regime in cracking down on dissent and protests and providing personal protection.
- Wagner primary theatre of operations has been Africa in providing support to embattled dictators and juntas across the continent.
- The group's activities go beyond security; they have also engaged in disinformation and false-flags to undermine rivals in the region, especially France. Most recently, figures believed to be members of the the group were observed burying corpses in a mass grave near a former French base in Mali in an attempt to frame French forces for committing atrocities.

- In exchange for its services, Wagner and Prigozhin - and by extension the Kremlin - gain mining and mineral rights in their theatre of operations, as well as making these countries more susceptible to favouring Kremlin deals and espousing Kremlin narratives. The top image contains a link to Wagner's global security and business connections.
- This has given the Kremlin influence that it has exploited during its invasion of Ukraine. Several African states avoided condemning the invasion. Meanwhile, the Assad regime is reported to have offered military assistance.

SUCCESSFUL FAILURES?

- Wagner's reputation and growing international operations are all the more remarkable considering that its track record is littered with strategic failures. In Syria, it was routed at the Battle of Deir al-Zour, it has provided no breakthrough in Libya, was forced to withdraw altogether from Northern Mozambique and the threats many of its African states face are as acute now as when Wagner was first contracted.
- It is possible that achieving strategic objectives is not the end goal. The Kremlin gains more wealth and influence by maintaining "frozen conflicts" than resolving them (an activity known as "conflict entrepreneurship").
- Ultimately, the main reason the Kremlin uses Wagner is deniability and expandability. If Wagner troops die, the Kremlin does not need to acknowledge them, concerning some former members that in the current war in Ukraine they will be little more than cannon fodder. All they will do is prolong the conflict and suffering.