

YOUNG ACADEMICS

Politikwissenschaft

10

Florian Kiebel

The Accountability and Legitimacy of the Wagner Group

An Analysis Based on Critical Security Theory

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With a Foreword by Prof. Dr. Manuel Fröhlich

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Foreword

The activities of the ‘Wagner Group’ in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Mali or the Central African Republic have established the reputation of an equally dubious and dangerous military actor. From early manifestations of its influence in the Donbas region in 2014 to the self-proclaimed, and ultimately aborted rebellion against Moscow as well as the death of its leadership in a mysterious plane crash in 2023, the group had become a factor in national and international affairs. And yet, the tools and theories of the discipline of International Relations have had their difficulties in grasping the nature and essence of this peculiar entrepreneur of violence: At first sight, the concept of a ‘private military company’ offers a fitting description of this actor. But the concept may also obscure specific features of the group.

Against this background, Florian Kiebel has ventured to undertake the task of more specifically categorizing this special actor. His research question is centered on the twin concepts of accountability and legitimacy. Kiebel derives these concepts from current debates in International Relations, Critical Security Studies as well as International Law. While his study combines and operationalizes these two concepts, it also tries to apply them systematically to different levels and relationships relevant to the understanding of the ‘Wagner Group’: accountability and legitimacy are discussed and analyzed with regard to the level of the states in which ‘Wagner’ is operating, on the level of the state in which it originates (Russia) and the level of the international system where different national and multilateral actors try to deal with the group.

The two-pronged conceptual strategy to deal with both accountability and legitimacy reveals a remarkable juxtaposition: While legiti-

macy is presumed by actors on the level of host and sending state and denied by actors on the international level, calls for accountability are more or less neglected on the national but reinforced on the international level. This juxtaposition hampers efforts to more closely regulate the ‘Wagner Group’ and it also seems to be a constitutive feature of its operations which are characterized by a mix of formal and informal agreements as well as the provision of deniability and the diffusion of responsibility.

The relevance of Kiebel’s productive study is not limited to this conceptual work. It also offers a concise empirical mapping of available information on the activities of the ‘Wagner Group’ in various conflict settings and thus contributes to a growing but still relatively small body of academic work on this actor. I am happy to see that Florian Kiebel’s topical research is now being published as part of the ‘Young academics’-series. It originated from the interdisciplinary master program ‘International Relations and Diplomacy’ at Trier University that combines perspectives from International Relations, International History and International Law. It documents an effort to keep track of emerging actors in international security that, on purpose, try to operate on the margin and outskirts of established categories and wisdom. Trying to bring some light into the conceptual and empirical shadows that accompany these actors should not only be of interest to scholars of Critical Security Studies or Peace and Conflict Research but to the broader public at large.

Trier, August 2024

Prof. Dr. Manuel Fröhlich

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I. List of Abbreviations

ADF	Africa Defense Forum
CAR	Central African Republic
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CPC	Coalition of Patriots for Change
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CSS	Critical Security Studies
DW	Deutsche Welle
EO	Executive Outcomes
EU	European Union
EUAM-RCA	European Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic
EUTM-RCA	European Training Mission in the Central African Republic
FACA	Forces Armées Centrafricaines
FADM	Forças Armadas de Defesa de Moçambique
FAMa	Forces Armées Maliennes
GNA	Government of National Accord
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ISS	International Security Studies
LNA	Libyan National Army
LPR	Luhansk People's Republic
MINUSCA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCCRP	Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PSC	Private Security Company
PMC	Private Military Company
PMSC	Private Military Security Company

I. List of Abbreviations

RSF	Rapid Support Forces
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US/A	United States of America
USD	US Dollar

II. List of Tables

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