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The Changing Face of the Wagner Group: From Military Adventurism to Venture Capitalism

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Introduction

The face of conflict is changing and as it evolves, it is increasingly more likely that organizations like the Wagner Group will become central to the process of conflict transformation. Founded in 2014 by Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, the Wagner Group got its start on the battlefields of Ukraine as part of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Since then, the Wagner Group has become part of a sprawling multiple-continent enterprise that has engaged in a range of activity, most notably the provision of security services in exchange for access to natural resources amongst other financial or political benefits. As earlier research and this report concludes, the Wagner Group's connections to the Russian state are significant. Advancing Russian foreign and security interests, such as in Ukraine, are a critical component of the Wagner Group's objectives. In the group's early days, these interests were advanced under a very thin veil of plausible deniability. Group members were discouraged from openly identifying themselves as being part of the Wagner apparatus. Despite this, a range of documentaries and investigative reporting have shed light on the scale of Wagner's worldwide activities. Nonetheless, the founder, Prigozhin, did not claim credit for his creation. It took until September 2022, more than eight years after Wagner's inception, for Prigozhin to openly confirm his role as the founder of the organization. During those eight years, the Russian Federation benefited from the undeclared relationship with the Wagner Group, fitting into a defined pattern of states being wary of open support for proxy groups. However, Prigozhin's September 2022 acknowledgement that the Wagner Group exists and that he is associated with it effectively positioned the group as a formal proxy of the Russian state. This change in dynamic within Wagner Group, a known private military company (PMC) that once operated in the gray realm of Russia's foreign operations, significantly alters the nature of the conflict in Ukraine, and potentially the manner in which Russia engages in future conflict.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, the Wagner Group has undergone drastic transformation. Prigozhin's gesture could reflect how the tables have turned against the Russian state in the wake of its missteps in Ukraine. It can also be a result of Prigozhin's, and by extension the Wagner Group's, increasing importance in the wake of the regular Russian military's series of tactical miscues. It is clear from this research that the Wagner Group has been benefiting from Russian military actions in Ukraine from the beginning of the conflict in 2014 and that its influence is growing stronger not only with an expanding international presence but also with building the Wagner Center in St. Petersburg and increasing domestic presence.

The second half of 2022 marked an important turning point for Prigozhin and his Wagner Group. From 2014, when the earliest signs of a new Russian private military group began to emerge, until the beginning of 2022, Prigozhin publicly distanced himself from the infamous PMC through the use of plausible deniability.¹ This was likely done to ensure his own self-preservation, as PMCs are illegal in Russia according to its Criminal Code, article 359.² But on the 26th of September, Prigozhin rejected this

¹ Malkova, Irina, and Anton Baev. "A Private Army for the President: The Tale of Evgeny Prigozhin's Most Delicate Mission." *The Bell*, January 31, 2019. <https://thebell.io/en/a-private-army-for-the-president-the-tale-of-evgeny-prigozhin-s-most-delicate-mission/>; Барабанов, Илья, Светлана Рейтер, Андрей Сошников, Андрей Захаров, and Сергей Горяшко. "Золото Пригожина. Чем Занимались Россияне в ЦАР, Когда Погибли Журналисты." *BBC News Русская служба*. BBC, January 31, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-47005604>.

² Статья 359: Наемничество "Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации" (2022).

tactic and publicly announced his relationship to the Wagner Group, setting in motion a new era in Russian foreign influence by means of private sector security. According to the statement, Prigozhin single-handedly formed Wagner in 2014 to protect the Donbass and Luhansk regions.³ This development illustrates the Wagner Group's evolution from a concealed shadow group to a publicly acknowledged central element of the Russian military's foreign agenda, with strategies ranging from the obtainment of mercenary contracts to influence in domestic and international relations.

There is an apparent evolution of the Wagner Group from a shadowy mercenary group to a mainstream defense partner and foreign influence broker for Yevgeniy Prigozhin and the Russian government. This paper evaluates the implications of Prigozhin's sudden emergence from the shadows of operating Russia's proxy conflicts by examining the group's history, finances, and new directions, such as building a Wagner Center in St. Petersburg. By analyzing how the private military company grew from conducting security operations on contract in Syria and Africa starting in late 2015, to opening a hyper-modern business center in St. Petersburg in November 2022, we seek to lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of the role that the Wagner Group plays in pushing Russia's foreign policy objectives.

From African gold mines and Syrian oil fields...

The Wagner Group has been extraordinarily successful in embedding itself into and profiting from the less stable regions around the globe. From Mali to Sudan to the Central African Republic, the Wagner Group has maneuvered into an effective partner for authoritarian regimes in Africa, providing hired guns in exchange for lucrative mining rights, and influence for Russian foreign policy.

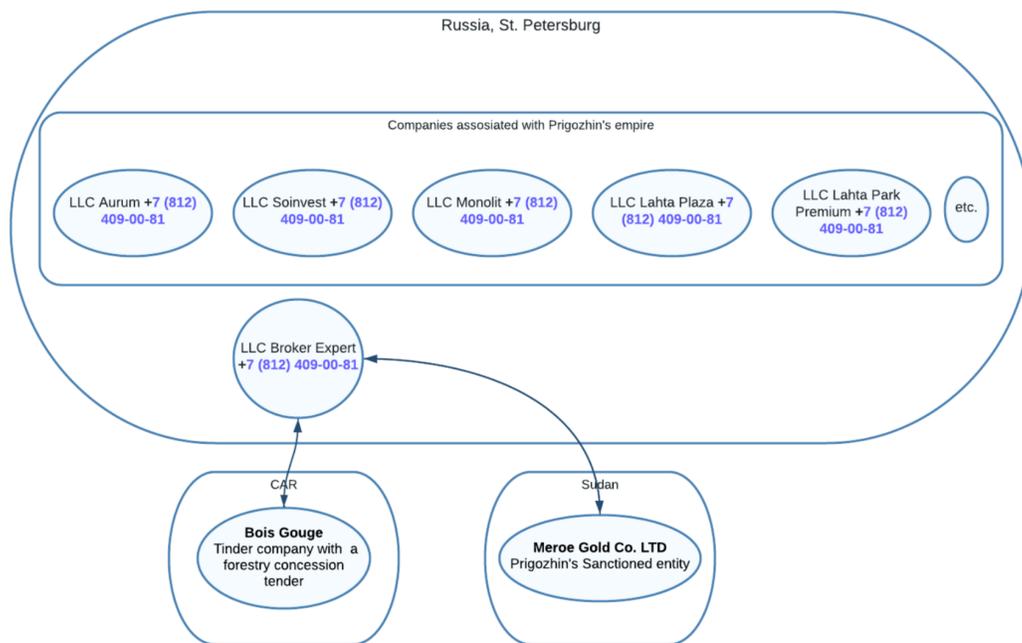
The linkages between the Wagner Group's security operations in Africa and Prigozhin's business empire in Russia are mired in shadowy deals and backroom agreements, making it particularly difficult to directly trace funds from Prigozhin's mining contracts to his companies in Russia. In these cases, there are often many intermediaries and layers of transactions involved to obfuscate the relationship. However, by tracing the network of relationships between these foreign resource extraction activities and Prigozhin's inner circle, there are a few evidentiary findings that suggest a relationship between the two. One such indicator is the presence of common ownership or management, in the case of Prigozhin and the Wagner Group, this is the most substantial indicator.

Companies linked to Prigozhin have been given exploration rights to gold and diamond mines in Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). According to the investigation launched by the European Investigative Collaborations network and OperFacto, around the time the CAR government launched a series of military operations supported by Wagner, a timber company Bois Rouge was awarded the forestry concession tender.⁴ Bois Rouge is affiliated with LLC Broker Expert (ООО Брокер Эксперт), a

³ Викторovich, Evgeny. "Запрос От Редакции Издания «Блокнот» и Ответ." VK. Пресс-служба компании "Конкорд", VK, September 26, 2022. https://vk.com/concordgroup_official?w=wall-177427428_1194.

⁴ "Come Follow the Redwood Trees – Tracking Wagner's Forestry Business in Car." alleyesonwagner.org. OpenFacto, July 26, 2022. <https://alleyesonwagner.org/2022/07/26/come-follow-the-redwood-trees-tracking-wagners-forestry-business-in-car/>.

St. Petersburg based trade company⁵ which also trades with the sanctioned MEROE GOLD CO., LTD.⁶ MEROE GOLD is a company linked to Prigozhin and Wagner operations in Sudan.⁷ The Broker Expert, identified in the deal between MEROE and the Sudan business contract, is listed with the following phone number: +7 (812) 409-00-81.⁸ The same phone number is linked to a number of entities founded by or owned in the past by Prigozhin's wife, Lubov Valentinivna Prigozhina⁹ or Prigozhin himself. LLC AURUM,¹⁰ SOINVEST LLC, MONOLIT LLC, LAHTA PLAZA LLC, LAHTA PARK PREMIUM LLC¹¹ are included in this list, all of them part of Prigozhin's empire in Russia. This paper trail significantly implicates Prigozhin as integral to the relationships between the Wagner Group, foreign resource extraction contracts, and Russian domestic companies.



⁵ ImportGenius. "Bois Rouge Sarlu." ImportGenius, April 13, 2022.

<https://www.importgenius.com/russia/buyers/bois-rouge-sarlu>.

⁶ "Treasury Targets Financier's Illicit Sanctions Evasion Activity." U.S. Department of the Treasury, July 15, 2020.

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1058>.

⁷ "Trade Data Reveal Shipments to Sudanese Mining Company Linked to Russian Paramilitary Group." Sayari, February 7, 2022. <https://sayari.com/resources/trade-data-reveal-shipments-to-sudanese-mining-company-linked-to-russian-paramilitary-group/>.

⁸ "Организация ООО 'БРОКЕР ЭКСПЕРТ.'" ООО "БРОКЕР ЭКСПЕРТ", ИНН 7810336185. List-Org, August 2013. <https://www.list-org.com/company/8090549>.

⁹ Вишневецки, Дина. "Санкции До Третьего Колена: Дети Друзей Путина Остаются Без Особняков, Лошадей и Поездок По Миру." КП в Украине | КП в Україні | KP in Ukraine. kp.ua, April 3, 2022. <https://kp.ua/politics/a646937-sanktsii-do-tretho-kolena-deti-druzej-putina-ostajutsja-bez-osobnjakov-loshadej-i-poezdok-po-miru->

¹⁰ "ООО АУРУМ." ООО АУРУМ, Санкт-Петербург (ИНН 7801327032). Spark Interfax, January 31, 2017. <https://spark-interfax.ru/sankt-peterburg-vasileostrovski/ooo-aurum-inn-7801327032-ogrn-1177847038313-c30dc96d766b4456810d93ad9f33e78c>.

¹¹ "ПРИГОЖИНА ЛЮБОВЬ ВАЛЕНТИНОВНА." Пригожина Любовь Валентиновна, ИНН 780107463330. List-Org, August 2013. <https://www.list-org.com/man/4800023>.

... to Prigozhin's business empire in Russia

The Russian government has been accused of using the Wagner Group as a way to skirt international law and regulations, including sanctions; however, the specifics of this relationship remain elusive. The Kremlin has denied any involvement with the group, but circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the Wagner Group is acting on behalf of the Russian government.

The most telling pieces of evidence that tie the Russian government to the Wagner Group are the deep networks of business relationships between Vladimir Putin's regime and Yevgeniy Prigozhin's empire of consulting, catering, and real-estate companies, which he controls via the holding company Concord Management and Consulting.¹² Prigozhin and his subordinate companies have been tied to numerous lucrative contracts for the Russian government, providing catering services to the Presidential Affairs Department and Moscow schools, as well as janitorial services for the Ministry of Defense.¹³ According to the Russian companies' registry, Prigozhin's company has seven government contracts,¹⁴ including a 24 million rubles (roughly 300,000 USD) contract with the Administrative Department of the President of the Russian Federation.¹⁵ The official statements of Concord Catering – Prigozhin's second catering company – did not show any public records of the company bidding for the government contracts,¹⁶ indicating that these contracts were obtained through influence rather than competition. In addition to the companies that work for the Russian government, Prigozhin and his family also control an array of other businesses seemingly unrelated to the Russian government. The list of businesses include real estate,¹⁷ luxury retail,¹⁸ and a chocolate boutique,¹⁹ amongst many others.

Several journalistic investigations have established that Prigozhin is using a corrupt scheme of trade credits between his companies. "M-Finance," "M Invest," "Concord Management and Consulting," "Credo," "Concord Plant," "Concord M," "Business Project," "Megaline," "Service K," "Broker Expert," "Lizena," and "InvestGlobalGroup" systematically send money to each other under interest-bearing loan

¹² Lister, Tim, Jim Sciutto, and Mary Ilyushina. "Exclusive: Putin's 'Chef,' the Man behind the Troll Factory." CNN politics. Cable News Network, October 18, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/politics/russian-oligarch-putin-chef-troll-factory/index.html>.

¹³ "Media: Wagner Group Commander Becomes CEO of Putin's Friend's Catering Business." uawire.org. UAWire, November 16, 2017.

<https://uawire.org/wagner-group-commander-becomes-ceo-of-putin-s-friend-s-catering-business>.

¹⁴ "ООО КОНКОРД МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ И КОНСАЛТИНГ." ООО КОНКОРД МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ И КОНСАЛТИНГ (ИНН 7825100880). Spark Interfax, January 8, 2003. <https://spark-interfax.ru/sankt-peterburg-tsentralny/ooo-konkord-menedzhment-i-konsalting-inn-7825100880-ogrn-1037843002515-8bc0ce484b5544db83152d33fc8fb285>.

¹⁵ "ООО 'Конкорд Менеджмент и Консалтинг'." ООО "Конкорд Менеджмент и Консалтинг" Санкт-Петербург (ИНН 7825100880). Rusprofile, January 8, 2003. <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/2752984>.

¹⁶ "Организация ООО 'КОНКОРД КЕЙТЕРИНГ.'" ООО "КОНКОРД КЕЙТЕРИНГ", ИНН 7813607242. List-Org, February 27, 2018. <https://www.list-org.com/company/1515797>.

¹⁷ Кузьмицкий, Вадим. "Хорошее Место: Супруга Пригожина Попросила у Смольного Побережье Финского Залива." dp.ru. Деловой Петербург, August 26, 2020. https://www.dp.ru/a/2020/08/26/Horoshee_mesto.

¹⁸ "Миллиардер Пригожин Купил Елисеевский Магазин в Петербурге." Миллиардер Пригожин купил Елисеевский магазин в Петербурге. Телеканал Дождь, July 21, 2016. https://tvrain.ru/news/eliseevskij_magazin-413806/.

¹⁹ Иванов, Артур. "Дочь Бизнесмена Пригожина Оказалась Совладелицей Шоколадного Бизнеса." Секрета фирмы. Секрета фирмы, September 18, 2020. <https://secretmag.ru/news/naslednice-biznesmena-prigozhina-peredali-chast-muzeya-shokolada.htm>.

agreements.²⁰ There are dozens of companies linked financially by a system of interest-bearing loan agreements, more than 40 of which are owned by Prigozhin, and six of which are structures of the Russian Ministry of Defense. One documented scheme involves the use of these loan transactions to transfer money from one firm tied to Prigozhin to another of his firms in order to later deposit these funds as security for bids of participation in the auction. In this instance, the company "Concord Management and Consulting" transferred funds to an account called "Megaline", which utilized the funds to secure its bids in tenders and bids from other firms controlled by Prigozhin.²¹

The real number of government contracts and companies controlled by Prigozhin is reported to be significantly higher. In an investigation by BBC, FBK (Russian Anti-Corruption Foundation founded by Alexey Navalny), Current Times, and others, the number of government contracts totals 5,393 for an estimate of 209.23 billion rubles (approximately 3 billion USD).²² This number was calculated by reviewing the public information of companies that were attributed to Prigozhin's empire by journalistic investigations. These companies include "Moskovskiy Shkolnik," "Ecobalt," "Shkolnik-YUZ," "Spetsresurs," "SPb-Culinaria," "Social'noe Pitanie," "Center," "RestaurantService Plus," "ProdFoodService," "Pishchevik," "Mercury," "Component," "ASP," "TKS," "Teplosnab," "Evrogroup," "Teplosintez," "ProfTechUslugi," "Prometheus," "Public Catering," "NordEnergo," "Msk, Moscow Culinary," "Concord Plus," "Concord Management and Consulting," "Concord M," "KDP-Ketering," "AVK," "MedStroy," "Preschool Nutrition Combine," and "Vito-1."

Wagner's activities in transferring profit into Russia from abroad is exemplified by its operations in the Central African Republic. The Wagner Group is typically paid in concessions from the local government to explore valuable resources in the country. For instance, "Midas Resources", a Wagner-affiliated company, was awarded contracts to explore gold mines in CAR, in particular the Ndassima mine, after the CAR government expropriated Axmin, a Canadian company operating in the mine since 2006.²³ Similarly, the Russian company Diamville applied for a permit for the purchase, importation, and exportation of diamonds, according to an interview with Léopold Mbolli-Fatran, the Central African Minister of Mines and Geology.²⁴ De Standaard estimates that Diamville exported €132,000 (approximately 140,000 USD) of diamonds to Belgium in November 2022.²⁵ Multiple sources from the diamond sector in Bangui have confirmed Diamville's ties with Wagner. Notably, Tom Neys' (a spokesman for the Antwerp World Diamond Center in Belgium) commented: "As far as we know,

²⁰ Маглов, Михаил, Тимур Олевский, and Дмитрий Трещанин. "Часть 3. Не 'ЧВК Вагнера', а Армия Пригожина." *Настоящее Время*. Настоящее Время, February 26, 2019. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/yevgeny-prigozhin-investigation-chapter-3/29789949.html>.

²¹ "Больше Не Главный Уборщик: Пригожин Потерял Армейские Контракты." *BBC News Русская служба*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-43239626>.

²² "Грубо Говоря, Мы Начали Войну Как Отправка ЧВК Вагнера На Фронт Помогла Пригожину Наладить Отношения с Путиным - и Что Такое 'Собянинский Полк'. Расследование 'Медузы' о Наемниках На Войне в Украине." <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/07/13/grubo-govorya-mu-nachali-voynu>.

²³ Навальный, Алексей. "ФБК Раскрыл и Доказал Крупнейший Картель: Повар Путина и 23 Миллиарда." *Алексей Навальный*. Алексей Навальный, May 19, 2017. <https://navalny.com/p/5382/>.

²⁴ Маглов, Михаил, Тимур Олевский, and Дмитрий Трещанин. "Часть 2. Котлетки Псов Войны." *Настоящее Время*. Настоящее Время, February 26, 2019. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/yevgeny-prigozhin-investigation-chapter-2/29789942.html>.

²⁵ Moller-Nielsen, Thomas. "Russian Mercenary Group Wagner Allegedly Exporting Diamonds to Belgium." *The Brussels Times*. The Brussels Times, December 2, 2022. <https://www.brusselstimes.com/belgium/331154/russian-mercenary-group-wagner-allegedly-exporting-diamonds-to-belgium>.

Diamville trades exclusively with Dubai.”²⁶ It is known that most of Russia’s sanction evasion activities goes through shell companies in Dubai and further research is suggested to better surface actions that are possible violations of international sanctions.

Recent developments in Prigozhin’s empire

On November 4, 2022, which is also a Unity Day holiday in Russia, Wagner opened a business complex not far from the city center of St. Petersburg. The building has 23 floors and consists of two glass towers connected by a passage, outwardly resembling the ostentatious campuses of Silicon Valley technology giants. Beyond simple aesthetic similarities, the Wagner Group appears to be positioning themselves as an angel investor, accelerator, and legal protector for the portions of the technology sector that serve Russian defense and foreign policy interests. The center’s website has a submission portal for ideas and projects to improve Russia’s defense capabilities. Wagner is looking for IT solutions, engineering projects, media and news start-ups, and military ideas. Anyone can submit an outline of their project and potentially receive office space, financing, and other help from the organization.²⁷ Upon the center’s opening, there were a number of discussions in Russian media, including lamentations of Russia’s loss at the information war and the need of development of media technologies.²⁸

Given Prigozhin’s established reputation for influencing foreign elections, this development is a significant inflection point for several reasons. First, this development streamlines Russia’s existing capabilities to influence public opinion at home and abroad. Second, by aligning these activities under the Wagner Group, Prigozhin has positioned the group as a central broker of Russian foreign influence. Finally, using the publicity around the opening of the campus in St. Petersburg, the Wagner Group appears to be expanding its membership from mercenaries seeking riches to a wider audience. From the photos posted by the center’s official VK group, it is clear that there were a lot of young people attending the opening. The Wagner Center certainly has attracted the attention of the people of St. Petersburg and has also become a place to promote Wagner culture.

The new Wagner Center is also contextualized by the wider picture of highly-educated Russians with means fleeing the country. Thousands of workers in the technology sector have left the country for political and economic reasons following February 2022. Given that most developed countries, like Russia, have experienced an increased demand for skilled IT talent, this acceleration in brain drain may have set the country decades back.²⁹ There have been a couple of measures introduced by the Russian government to combat this trend. In Russia, a rule for granting a deferment from the military for male IT specialists has been approved. The government drafted a resolution that was signed by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. The deferment from conscription to the army is given to Russian IT specialists of military age (from 18 to 27 years old) by decree of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin,

²⁶ Moller-Nielsen, “Russian Mercenary Group.”

²⁷ Вагнер-центр. Вагнер-центр, November 2022. <https://wagnercentr.ru/>.

²⁸ Ярмула, Надежда, and Екатерина Рязанова. “Дети с Активной Гражданской Позицией.” Коммерсантъ. Коммерсантъ, November 4, 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5651465#id2290298>.

²⁹ Prince, Todd. “A Nail in the Coffin’: Tech Workers Are Fleeing Russia and the Impact Will Last for Years.” Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, April 27, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-it-workers-brain-drain/31783558.html>.

issued in early March 2022. This should be seen as an attempt by the Russian government to support the domestic IT industry, which has faced headwinds due to numerous sanctions on Russia's economy.³⁰



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С 20 по 23 декабря 2022 года состоится Хакатон в «ЧВК Вагнер Центре»! Масштабное мероприятие, на котором каждый может попытаться свою удачу, забрав призовой фонд!

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У участников будет время на решение кейса, после чего они продемонстрируют системы позиционирования БПЛА через распознавание видео, поиск путевых точек по ориентирам в условиях отсутствия спутниковых систем навигации и внешнего управления на финальной питч-сессии.

По итогам Хакатона будут определены победители, которые получат денежный приз: 1 место - 1 000 000 руб., 2 место - 300 000 руб., 3 место - 200 000 руб.

Для участия необходимо зарегистрироваться на сайте: <https://hakaton.wagnercentr.ru>

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At the same time, Prigozhin's Concord Management proposed to force Russian IT specialists to inform the FSB about plans to leave for an “unfriendly state” at least a month in advance and be provided an exit permit. This document will need to be obtained from the FSB, after a background check on the potential employer company with the purpose of determining whether the company is involved “in extremism or terrorism”. In the case of non-compliance, Concord suggests a punishment: a fine of 100 thousand rubles (about 1,000 USD) and a restriction on leaving Russia. For reporting false information about oneself when filling out documents, there is also a fine of 100 thousand rubles and travel restrictions.³¹ In order to actually pass such a bill it will have to be officially submitted to Russia's legislative bodies and backed by a significant number of proponents. While it is unlikely that Prigozhin would go through the official process, this excessive involvement in the emigration rules of ordinary Russians underscores how important it is to Prigozhin to secure top technology talent in Russia. The Wagner Center promises free offices, legal and information services, and potential cash grants to those who are willing to work on the projects to increase Russia's defense capabilities.³² Therefore, the services housed by the Wagner Center can be seen as an incentive to mitigate brain drain.

In a demonstration of these new capabilities of the Wagner Group, the Wagner Center was host to a hackathon (see image on the Left) in December 2022.³³ Offering significant financial prizes (with a reward of 1 million rubles for first place), the hackathon sought “students, developers, analysts,

³⁰ Касми, Эльяс. “Кто Не Пойдет в Армию? В России Утвердили Правила Отсрочки Для ИТ-Специалистов.” CNews.ru. CNews.ru, April 3, 2022. https://www.cnews.ru/news/top/2022-04-03_kto_ne_pojdet_v_armiyu_vlasti.

³¹ Пёс_анон, Дружеский. “Что За Идея ‘Ограничить Выезд Айтишников’ - Кто Её Придумал и Что Думают в Правительстве.” vc.ru. vc.ru, March 25, 2022. <https://vc.ru/legal/387433-chto-za-ideya-ogranichit-vyezd-aytishnikov-kto-ee-pridumal-i-chto-dumayut-v-pravitelstve>.

³² Курагина, Ася. “От Идеи До Производства. Как ‘ЧВК Вагнер Центр’ Поможет Бизнесу и ВПК.” Информационное агентство "Политика Сегодня", November 4, 2022. <https://polit.info/23733717-ot-idei-do-proizvodstva-kak-chvk-vagner-tsentr-pomozhet-biznesu-i-vpk>.

³³ ЧВК Вагнер центр. Telegram. (n.d.). Retrieved February 3, 2023, from <https://t.me/centrwagner/46>

IT-specialists” to compete in the design of UAV guidance systems that could function independently of satellite guidance systems like GPS. Directly relevant to the modernization and adaptability of the Russian military, this hackathon represents the integration of several strategic objectives, from efforts to slow brain drain through domestic financial incentives to the advancement of Russian military capabilities. Open-source reporting by Molfar Global confirms that the company whose team won third place in the hackathon, Artistrzh LLC, is owned by Igor Turashev, who is wanted by the FBI in connection to a hacker group known as Evil Corp.³⁴ More than coincidence, Prigozhin’s own connections to interference in the 2016 Elections³⁵ present clear synergies to develop relationships for new opportunities in the cyber domain. The contemporary Wagner Group has been taking every opportunity to evolve into an effective tool of both foreign and domestic policy in Russia.

Conclusion

From a shadowy and formally illegal private military company with primary foreign operations, the Wagner Group has recently metabolized into a strong voice at home as well. With the financial support and infrastructure offered by Prigozhin’s extensive business empire in Russia and abroad, the Wagner Group has made considerable strides into diversifying its activities from security operations for foreign natural resources to other Russian foreign policy objectives, such as its current conflict in Ukraine.

The Wagner Group has transformed beyond providing the Russian military with further kinetic options and plausible deniability abroad to include a professional caliber of personnel in information services and finance among its ranks of mercenaries. By providing operational flexibility in conflict spaces, the new Wagner Center is a symbol of Prigozhin’s success in laundering the once illicit Wagner Group into a legitimate accelerator for Russian military technologists and entrepreneurs. For Prigozhin, the Wagner Group is slowly providing a foundation for his ambitions to eclipse the traditional pillars of domestic power.

³⁴ *Hackathon of the "PMC Wagner Center": Molfar announces the names of the winners.*
<https://www.molfar.global/en-blog/wagnercentr-hackathon>

³⁵ MacSwan, A., & Heinrich, M. (2022, November 7). *Russia's Prigozhin admits interfering in U.S. elections.* Reuters. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/russias-prigozhin-admits-interfering-us-elections-2022-11-07/>

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