

PUTIN'S PROXIES: EXAMINING RUSSIA'S USE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Serial No. 117-104

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Reform



Available on: *govinfo.gov*,
oversight.house.gov or
docs.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

48-801 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

CAROLYN B. MALONEY, New York, *Chairwoman*

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	JAMES COMER, Kentucky, <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	JIM JORDAN, Ohio
JIM COOPER, Tennessee	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	JODY B. HICE, Georgia
RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY, Illinois	GLENN GROTHMAN, Wisconsin
JAMIE RASKIN, Maryland	MICHAEL CLOUD, Texas
RO KHANNA, California	BOB GIBBS, Ohio
KWEISI MFUME, Maryland	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ, New York	RALPH NORMAN, South Carolina
RASHIDA TLAIB, Michigan	PETE SESSIONS, Texas
KATIE PORTER, California	FRED KELLER, Pennsylvania
CORI BUSH, Missouri	ANDY BIGGS, Arizona
SHONTEL M. BROWN, Ohio	ANDREW CLYDE, Georgia
DANNY K. DAVIS, Illinois	NANCY MACE, South Carolina
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Florida	SCOTT FRANKLIN, Florida
PETER WELCH, Vermont	JAKE LATURNER, Kansas
HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, Jr., Georgia	PAT FALLON, Texas
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	YVETTE HERRELL, New Mexico
JACKIE SPEIER, California	BYRON DONALDS, Florida
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois	MIKE FLOOD, Nebraska
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE, Michigan	
MARK DESAULNIER, California	
JIMMY GOMEZ, California	
AYANNA PRESSLEY, Massachusetts	

RUSS ANELLO, *Staff Director*
DANIEL REBNORD, *Subcommittee Staff Director*
AMY STRATTON, *Deputy Chief Clerk*
CONTACT NUMBER: 202-225-5051
MARK MARIN, *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts, *Chairman*

PETER WELCH, Vermont	GLENN GROTHMAN, Wisconsin, <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR., Georgia	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
MARK DESAULNIER, California	BOB GIBBS, Ohio
KWEISI MFUME, Maryland	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Florida	MIKE FLOOD, Nebraska
JACKIE SPEIER, California	

C O N T E N T S

Hearing held on September 21, 2022	Page 1
WITNESSES	
Kimberly Marten, Ph.D., Professor, Political Science Department, Barnard College, Columbia University	
Oral Statement	4
Catrina Doxsee, Associate Director, Transnational Threats Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies	
Oral Statement	6
Joseph Siegle, Ph.D., Director of Research, Africa Center for Strategic Stud- ies, National Defense University	
Oral Statement	8
<i>Written opening statements and statements for the witnesses are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.</i>	

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

No additional documents were submitted for this hearing.

PUTIN'S PROXIES: EXAMINING RUSSIA'S USE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:36 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom, Hon. Stephen F. Lynch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Welch, Johnson, DeSaulnier, Speier, Grothman, Foxx, and Higgins.

Mr. LYNCH. The subcommittee will now come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Dr. Siegle.

Today, the Subcommittee on National Security will examine Russia's growing reliance on private military companies, or PMCs, to further its strategic objectives and expand its geopolitical influence around the world. Russian President Vladimir Putin's unprovoked and unlawful war against Ukraine is now entering its seventh month. Facing mounting casualties, a severe manpower shortfall, and an enduring Ukrainian military resistance backed by the United States and our allies, Russia is reportedly leaning heavily on private military companies, including the Wagner Group, to supplement its conventional military forces in Ukraine.

Earlier this year, the Department of Defense estimated that at least a thousand mercenary fighters had already deployed to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine to reinforce Russia's frontline troop presence.

Beyond the borders of Ukraine, the past several years have witnessed a marked increase in Russia's reported use of private military companies to provide paramilitary capabilities and personal security services in conflicts around the world, ranging from Syria to Libya, Mali, Sudan, and the Central African Republic, among others.

On paper, Russian law prohibits mercenary activity, but it is clear that the Wagner Group and other Russian private military companies operate as quasi state actors. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, the Wagner Group serves as a, quote, Russian Ministry of Defence proxy force, which is financed by a Russian oligarch with close ties to Russian President Putin.

Press reports also indicate that the Wagner Group entities are closely tied to Russia's intelligence and security agencies and have even established training camps in close proximity of bases used by Russian special force brigades. Other lesser known private military companies, including the anti-terror group the Moran Security Group and the Slavonic Corps, are similarly associated with Russia's Ministry of Defence or state intelligence and security services.

Around the world, Russia's private military companies have engaged in direct combat operations, propaganda and disinformation campaigns, illicit finance activities, and the exploitation of natural resources, all while under the guise of a nonstate corporation and at the expense of human lives and international law.

In the Central African Republic, the United Nations has accused Russian private military companies of carrying out systemic and grave human rights abuses and violations of international law, including arbitrary detention, torture, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, an international crisis monitoring organization, Wagner operative in Mali have targeted civilians in more than 70 percent of the operations they have conducted there since last year. The U.S. and the European Union have imposed multiple rounds of severe financial sanctions against the Wagner Group, its Russian oligarch financier, and several associates and entities in relation to their operations in Ukraine, destabilizing activities in Syria, and human rights atrocities in Africa.

Considering that Russia will continue to rely on private military companies to further its strategic objectives and exert its influence abroad, it is imperative that we examine whether there are additional actions the United States and our international partners can take to degrade the capabilities of the Wagner Group and other similar Russian-backed proxy organizations.

Before I recognize our ranking member, I want to note that, given some of the challenges associated with analyzing Russia's use of private military companies in an unclassified setting, I've also asked the Administration to provide subcommittee members with a classified briefing on Russia's use of private military companies, including in Ukraine, which we plan to schedule in November. That would be in addition to the briefing that we had yesterday in a classified setting.

With that, I look forward to today's discussion, and I now yield to the distinguished ranking member from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for his opening statement.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. First of all, I'd like to thank you, Chairman Lynch, for having this.

Second, it occurs to me this is the first time in two years I've been in a room without anybody wearing a mask. So, first of all, it always makes me feel uncomfortable when I see so many of the staff uncomfortable. So I think it was a big step in the right direction and consistent with the most recent science on the matter, so it makes me—

Mr. LYNCH. [Inaudible.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here in person or on the Zoom. I want to start by urging the Chairman to

ask one more time the administration to make available for subcommittees in the future the witnesses that we originally thought were going to be here today. Their perspective would be interesting with regard to their understanding of the role of private military companies and how the U.S. is dealing with them.

The topic in front of us is important today. Russia and President Putin's use of unaccountable mercenaries to avoid accountability both at home and abroad is deplorable. We know these groups have been deployed in the 1914 invasion of Ukraine, in Syria, and across Africa. There have been numerous reports that Russia has deployed PMCs during the most recent war in Ukraine. And it is hard to judge what's going on there without knowing a little bit more about this.

PMCs have a long running history of violating international norms and rules of engagement and committing human rights abuses. Although Russia denies being officially linked to the PMCs, particularly in the Wagner Group, the connection's clear. It would be illogical to believe these private companies just happen to be deployed in areas around the world where Russia is attempting to achieve geopolitical superiority.

The U.S. response to these groups has been largely ad hoc and haphazard. It is vital the U.S. use its significant global power and influence to shine light on Russia's use of PMCs, highlight their flaws and failures, and implement a global sanction regime.

Finally, I'd like to discuss the status of the war in Ukraine. President Biden just requested another multibillion-dollar aid package. While helping our allies is important, it cannot come at the cost of ignoring those at home. It is important, particularly given that we're spending \$110 million a day over the past year, that we get more information on exactly just what is going on with these funds, a little more oversight. We cannot simply just assume or assistance is being used in the manner we intend.

We know our economy is in difficult shape. Americans need help too.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

Before I introduce our witnesses, I want to quickly just for the record welcome the gentleman from Nebraska, Representative Flood, as our newest member of the subcommittee, as this will be his first hearing with us. I know there are several hearings going on right now. I look forward to his robust participation and working with him further.

Now I will introduce our witnesses. First, we are joined by Dr. Kimberly Marten, who is a professor of political science at Barnard College at Columbia University. Dr. Marten specializes in international relations and security, including Russian security and foreign policy.

Next, we will hear from Ms. Catrina Doxsee, who is an associate director for the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. In this position, Ms. Doxsee analyzes the irregular warfare activities of countries like Iran, Russia, and China. And she has done extensive examinations of operations of Russian private military companies.

We will then hear from Joseph Siegle, Dr. Joseph Siegle, who is here in person, who is the director of research at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, a congressionally funded research institution located at the National Defense University. Dr. Siegle is an expert in Africa security issues, the stabilization of fragile states, and how U.S. policies toward Africa might generate greater stability on the continent.

Dr. Marten and Dr. Doxsee please, please unmute yourselves. And, Dr. Siegle, please stand so we can swear you in, which is the custom of the committee. Would you all please raise your right hand?

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. SIEGLE. I do.

Ms. DOXSEE. I do.

Ms. MARTEN. Yes, I do.

Mr. LYNCH. Let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative.

Thank you. You may be seated.

Without objection, your written statements will, of course, be made part of the record.

With that. Dr. Marten, you are recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF KIMBERLY MARTEN, PH.D., PROFESSOR, POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT, BARNARD COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Ms. MARTEN. Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify about Russia's Wagner Group. My written testimony contains much more detail. In the five minutes I have here, I will summarize what the Wagner Group, how it serves Russia's strategic interests, how the U.S. might further hold it accountable for its war crimes, but why I do not support labeling it a foreign terrorist organization.

The Wagner Group is not a legally established private military company. It is arguably not a private military company at all. PMCs remain illegal in Russia. Nor is it a true mercenary group since it only serves at the behest of the Russian state.

It is instead a contracting mechanism tied to Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, for recruiting Russian and pro-Russian veterans and now prisoners. In a country where the lines between public and private are blurred, Putin's ally, Yevgeny Prigozhin, is the contractor and recruiter. Everywhere but Ukraine the contracts seem to be funded by foreign countries. The Kremlin helps negotiate the contracts.

Analysts without security clearances have difficulty following the details of Wagner Group activities. It is a product of the GRU, so its actions are cloaked in secrecy and disinformation campaigns. It is not always clear who is a Wagner Group fighter versus a member of the Russian Special Forces or a security contractor for another Russian entity. Disinformation may also come from Russia's opponents, including some U.S. allies, who have incentives to exaggerate or distort Wagner's presence and activities. One purpose of

the Wagner Group, especially early on, was to give the Russian state plausible deniability for its military presence on the ground in locations where it was not supposed to be. By mid-2018, though, the Wagner Group was tracked by journalists everywhere it went, and plausible deniability was no longer really maintained. Even Putin talked about Wagner. By summer 2022, the Wagner Group was openly recruiting on Russian highway billboards.

The Wagner Group has served several additional purposes for the Russian state. It is used for military actions where Putin does not want to risk the lives of ordinary Russian conscripts. This has allowed the Kremlin to expand Russia's military influence without unleashing public unhappiness about casualties.

De facto partial mobilization in Russia today indicates that this effort failed in Russian's invasion of Ukraine.

Wagner has also made Russia a key player in resolving African civil wars at low cost for Moscow. Russian assistance can be withdrawn at any time if Russian goals are not met, making it similar to a Mafia protection racket holding its beneficiaries hostage to Kremlin demand.

The geopolitical benefits to the Kremlin may eventually include new military bases, for example, in Sudan and Libya, which could interfere with U.S. and allied commercial and military operations, but those have not yet been built.

Wagner is already under sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union. And that limits where it can be deployed and where Prigozhin can dock his planes and boats. The only countries willing to contract Wagner Group's services or conduct businesses with Prigozhin are those already under U.S. and EU sanctions or willing to risk them.

The U.S. could increase the financial pressure by working with its partners in Dubai to prevent the Wagner Group from smuggling Sudanese gold into Dubai for remelting. New Russian origin gold is now sanctioned internationally. A logical extension would be to prevent false origin documents from being provided for African gold mined under Wagner Group contracts. Prigozhin and his firms were also indicted by the United States for election interference. The prosecutors had to drop the case when Prigozhin's lawyers demanded the release of classified information. When this is combined with the difficulties researchers have in separating truth from rumor about the Wagner Group's activities, it suggests that further accountability may require reconsidering current rules about declassification of evidence.

Criminal indictments matter, even if they never lead to convictions for foreign actors, because they limit the ability of individuals to travel to any of the 116 countries with which the U.S. has an extradition treaty. Indictments would have even more impact if the U.S. were to amend the War Crimes Act of 1996 as proposed earlier this year in a bipartisan Senate bill to allow universal jurisdiction, which would align the U.S. with international practice. Currently, the War Crimes Act applies only to perpetrators located in or extradited to the United States who are themselves U.S. citizens or servicemembers or whose victims are U.S. nationals. If the act were amended, anyone could be indicted in the U.S. and be subject to extradition and prosecution for war crimes or crimes against hu-

manity regardless of the nationality of the offender or the victim. Asset forfeiture rules could be similarly amended to allow compensation for war crimes victims.

But I do not agree with the proposal to label the Wagner Group a foreign terrorist organization. Wagner Group fighters are temporary Russian state contractors in a system that works over time and geographic location. Wagner is not a permanent entity. Even its name is unofficial and could be dropped. Labeling it an FTO will not incentivize any changes in its operations.

Because the Wagner Group is a tool of the Russian state, labeling it an FTO would also carry a great deal of diplomatic baggage, complicating any cooperation with Russia that the U.S. might find useful in the future. The designation would also blur the distinction between terrorism and war crimes. Terrorism is commonly defined as violence committed by non-state actors against noncombatants done for shock value to gain attention or support for a political cause. That is not what the Wagner Group does. Wagner commits plain old war crimes. Blurring the two categories undercuts the strength of international war crimes laws and makes terrorism a meaningless term beyond the fact that its victims are noncombatants.

Instead, the U.S. should prosecute Wagner Group actions and Russian actions more generally under existing and amended war crimes laws, reserving the FTO label for true terrorist groups.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Ms. Doxsee, you're now recognized five minutes for your testimony. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF CATRINA DOXSEE, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
TRANSNATIONAL THREATS PROJECT, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Ms. DOXSEE. Good morning. And thank you again for convening this important discussion. In my written statement, I provided a brief overview of Russian private military companies, examples of their activities, and some policy implications. I would now like to take this opportunity to highlight the two major points that I hope you will all will take away from the conversation here today.

These are, first, that it's more accurate to view PMCs such as the Wagner Group as opportunists rather than as masterminds; and, second, Russian PMCs have a variety of weaknesses that the U.S. and its partners are well-positioned to exploit.

First, I'll address the opportunistic nature of Russian PMC deployments. Russia is not picky in choosing countries with which to pursue security cooperation agreements, agreements which are often facilitated by PMCs. For example, representatives of all 54 African states attended the first Russia-Africa summit in Sochi in 2019, including 43 heads of state. Moscow sought agreements with most attendees relatively indiscriminately. Preparations are now underway for the second Russia-Africa summit, which will be held this fall.

As Russia continues trying to expand its political influence, military and intelligence collection capabilities, and economic opportunities in Africa, it will likely continue to cast its broad net and

seize whatever opportunities arise. This may present opportunities to displace or offer alternatives to Russian assistance. Particularly as the U.S. reinvigorates its own strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa.

It is also worth noting that the largest scale PMC deployments in the region have been to countries with weak governance, ongoing security challenges, and abundant natural resources. This is not the result of some altruistic Russian desire to resolve conflict and increase stability but rather is tied to a desire to exploit those natural resources, for instance, through mining concessions.

This leads to the second key takeaway, that Russian PMCs have vulnerabilities and patterns of failure that the U.S. and its partners are well equipped to exploit.

In my remaining time, I'll highlight three such weaknesses. First, Russian PMCs have experienced various operational failures, whether in the form of outright inability to perform the tasks they were assigned, as occurred in Mozambique and to an extent in Madagascar, or similarly an inability or disinterest in facilitating long-term regional stability by addressing the root causes of violence.

Second, Russian PMC activities frequently have negative impact on host countries and their populations. As I mentioned, this includes the exploitation of natural resources. Additionally, in some cases, such as in Mali, Wagner's activities have increased in stability and the threat of terrorist violence.

PMCs have also violated local and international law, including through widespread human rights abuses, such as indiscriminate killings, rape, torture, and the armed occupation of facilities, such as schools and hospitals. Such actions have been widely documented by the U.N. Security Council and various NGO's in places such as the Central African Republic, and they have become increasingly common in other countries, such as Wagner's latest deployment in Mali.

Transparency and information sharing about PMC failures and detrimental effects can inform local actors of the true cost of Russian partnerships and may make PMC agreements less appealing in the future. There is also an opportunity to hold PMCs accountable for their legal violations.

A third major vulnerability is the prominence and growing monopoly of the Wagner Group, including the shadowy web of entities linked to it.

Wagner's dominance makes it a clear target for sanctions and other financial penalties. The U.S., EU, U.K., and others have already taken commendable steps in this area, and an expanded multilateral sanctions campaign against Prigozhin-linked entities, particularly those involved in the exploitation and laundering of natural resources, could impede these profit-driven companies' ability to operate.

Ultimately, although PMCs are just one of many options in Russia's irregular warfare toolkit, Moscow is likely to continue using PMCs to further its geopolitical, military, and economic goals until such time as the costs outweigh the benefits. Therefore, to counter the spread of Russian influence and to hold PMCs accountable, the

U.S. and its partners should take coordinated actions to raise the costs, risks, and consequences of Russian PMC activity worldwide.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Dr. Siegle, you are now recognized for your testimony. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH SIEGLE, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

Mr. SIEGLE. Good morning. I thank the chair, Representative Lynch, as well as Ranking Member Grothman, for the invitation to speak on today's panel about Russia's use of irregular security forces. It is an honor to be here.

My remarks will draw primarily from Africa, which has been the focus of my research of Russia's grand strategy. Russia has deployed the paramilitary outfit the Wagner Group in at least a half dozen African countries in recent years, making Africa one of most active regions of Russia's mercenary deployments globally. With many of its forces comprised of ex-Russian defense intelligence troops working in alignment with Russian foreign policy objective, Wagner operates more like an under-the-radar special operations force than a private military contractor.

In fact, the Wagner Group is not a legal registered entity but an amalgamation of military, business, political, and disinformation organizations linked to Russian Oligarch, Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

Russia uses Wagner to advance its strategic objectives in Africa and elsewhere. This includes to secure access to strategically important territory along the southern Mediterranean and the Red Sea, to displace Western influence, and to reshape the international order to one that is more aligned with Moscow's transactional patronage base and authoritarian model.

Borrowing from its Syria playbook, Moscow has swooped in with irregular forces to prop up politically isolated authoritarian leaders facing crises in Libya, Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan, and elsewhere. These leaders are then indebted to Russia, which assumes the role of regional power broker.

That the entry point for Wagner's deployments is often through an autocratic leader is not a coincidence, lacking legitimacy or popularity, these leaders provide an easy mark for Moscow to expand its influence quickly and cheaply. The resulting partnership of an unaccountable regime hosting unaccountable mercenaries is a recipe for instability. And, in fact, while rationalized on security grounds, in every place that Wagner has been deployed in Africa, it has left a wake of instability for the citizens of the host country, including documented allegations of human rights abuses.

Wagner deployments moreover do not happen in isolation, but they are part of a package of tools deployed by Moscow to keep its allies in power. These include disinformation, opaque arms-for-resources deals, sanctions evasion, election meddling, and political cover at the United Nations. Wagner deployments, therefore, should be seen as a political tool, not just as a security operation.

In considering how to mitigate the destabilizing effects ever Wagner deployments, we should bear in mind that the United States'

diplomatic investment, trade, development, security, and cultural ties with Africa are several orders of magnitude greater than that of Russia. So, mitigating the effects of Wagner's deployments must be nested within the United States' broader Africa strategy, not as a singular end of its own.

So, within such a strategy, I would offer four priorities. First, recognizing that Wagner is a tool to gain political influence, the United States should further incentivize democratic norms in Africa and elsewhere as the strongest antidote to malign Russian influence. This also means condemning coups and isolating coup-makers, denying Russia an easy entry point for influence.

Second, the United States should work with partners to invoke the legally binding African Convention for the Elimination of Mercenaries, which prohibits African states from allowing mercenaries on their territories. Designating Wagner a mercenary force would identify them as an illegal entity, one that should be banned from operating on the continent.

A third priority is to help strengthen African capacity to counter Russian disinformation by enhancing African fact-checking, social media forensics, digital literacy, and media professionalism—proficiencies.

And a final priority is to increase the reputational and financial costs on Russia for its malign actions by further employing the United States' robust menu of legal and financial tools to penalize Wagner and its enablers. While such actions may not immediately curtail Russia's bad behavior, they do increase the cost of doing business. And by giving heightened attention to these issues, the United States can help Africa become less of a permissive environment for Wagner deployments at the expense of African stability, sovereignty, and democracy, and this is in both African and U.S. interests.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Dr. Siegle.

The chair will now recognize himself for five minutes for questions.

Dr. Marten, in your written testimony, you describe how the Wagner Group has evolved from a shadowy paramilitary and security force to now an overt contractor network that is actively recruiting fighters to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In fact, just last week, a video emerged of someone who appears to be Yevgeny Prigozhin, the alleged founder and financier of the Wagner Group, speaking to prisoners in a Russian penal colony trying to recruit them to fight in Ukraine. In a statement following the video's release, Prigozhin told the Russian people that the war in Ukraine will be fought, quote, either by private military companies and prisoners or your children; you need to decide for yourself, close quote.

So it's clear that, while the Kremlin may have once been able to claim a degree of plausible deniability about Wagner Group's activity, those denials are becoming increasingly implausible.

Let me ask, so the idea that Russian foreign mercenaries would provide open support and security for, say, any regime in Africa that contracts with Wagner Group, you would think that that would undermine the legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Mali

or any other country on the African Continent; the knowledge that foreign mercenaries are propping up these leaders would be a way of undermining or making more transparent and exposing this practice and thereby make it less attractive to either African leaders or others who might use those services. So is exposure and publicizing this practice and this use and stopping it from operating in the shadows, is that in fact a weapon against this?

Ms. MARTEN. Thank you for those very detailed and really well-thought-out questions, Chairman Lynch.

One thing to keep in mind is that the Wagner Group and Prigozhin have already acted to try to undermine the reputation of France in both the Central African Republic and in Mali. And so, what we are doing if we are fighting a disinformation campaign is dealing with a legacy of colonialism in Africa and a suspicion of other actors who might also come in to provide security. And so that is one of the reasons why they might feel that Russia—and I think that these actors are seen as Russian on the ground in these areas—that Russia may provide an alternative to what was a colonial history.

Something else to keep in mind is that there have been rumors—I have not seen many facts to support them—that one of Russia's intentions is to take fighters from the Central African Republic who were trained by the Wagner Group who are French speakers and who are dark-skinned and send them to Mali as trainers because they might be more acceptable to the local population there than having White-skinned Russians who do not speak the local language and do not speak French.

And so I think that Russia is very clever in the way that it is approaching things. I think the more that we can publicize what the Wagner Group is doing, the better chance we have of turning people against it. But I think people know what the Wagner Group is doing and still see it as perhaps an alternative to what the history has been in Africa, and so that is what we are up against.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Dr. Siegle, I know you spent a lot of time on the African question. Our committee was in Mali not that long ago, and there appeared to be a transition going on where heretofore French Special Forces were very active there, but, as Dr. Marten pointed out, there's been a point of friction between the current administration there in Mali and the French Government, perhaps from the prior colonial history there.

What can you tell us about the Wagner Group's activities or any other PMC operating on behalf of Russia in Mali and what the future holds there?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, I think Mali provides a very good example of how Russia is using Wagner as a political tool. You know, Russia disinformation in Mali started in 2018, 2019 and was very—sorry about the feedback here. And it was very anti-French, anti-West, pro-Russia, and it effectively built up a lot of dissent against the city democratic-elected government. The issue of colonialism in Mali has been there for 60 years. It's not a new thing. But Russia used that leverage to try to buildup antipathy toward the government. And it ultimately did lead to protest and the military coup

that brought the junta to power, some of the leaders of which, it should be noted, were trained in Russia. Russia was the first country to recognize the military junta and quickly formed a close alliance and has been the prime international backer of the junta since then. So it wasn't a surprise when, a year later, the junta struck a deal to bring in a thousand Wagner forces. As in other places, they are not there as a security mechanism; they are there to help keep the junta in power, protecting the junta and controlling access to different natural resource locations.

The political dimension is playing out too in that, in the face of an actively growing jihadi insurgency in Mali, the junta has in fact agitated and alienated for the removal of French forces. So we've seen the withdrawal of 4-to 5,000 French forces who have been fighting in Mali, as well as EU forces, and now they are going after the United Nations peacekeeping forces, a contingent of 15,000 forces. So we have this hugely unstrategic dynamic of a country that's facing a rapidly ramping up jihadist attack that's pushing out partners that could help them fend this off. Really the only one who is benefiting from this is Russia, who is displacing Western influence, and it is really creating a vacuum in the Sahel that could lead to another Afghanistan-style takeover by an extremist group.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

I now yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin, our ranking member, Mr. Grothman, for five minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Sure.

This is for whoever feels capable of answering the question, I guess. As I understand it or as you just explained that they recruit these people, billboards, prisons, wherever. But do we have some feeling of who they are? How many are ethnic Russians? How many are not? Are some of them Muslim? And, just in general, how many people are members of the Wagner Group?

Mr. SIEGLE. Is that directed at me or—

Mr. GROTHMAN. Anybody who wants it. If you feel you are the sharpest of the bunch, jump right in.

Ms. MARTEN. So I can't give you the overall number, but I can tell you that the composition has changed very much over time. There were rumors early on that there were no Muslims. But then it became clear that there actually are Chechens that have been involved with the Wagner Group. It is not just Russians. It is also pro-Russian people who are citizens of places like Serbia, Belarus, and eastern Ukraine. What they are engaged in, what they are training in has varied over time. I think 2022 was the first time we saw them recruiting from prisons.

But we do know that Prigozhin has gone across Russian territory to recruit tough guys who are, for example, fighting in extreme fighting tournaments. And we also know that exactly the type of training that they've had has varied with time. So, for example, in Libya, we saw people who were not very well trained at all, not very well disciplined. And we also saw extraordinarily well-disciplined sharp shooters. And there also appears to have been cases where the Wagner Group may have engaged people who were veterans of the Russian Air Force to engage in bombing raids. And so it has really varied over time and space. There does not seem to be one component of exactly what the Wagner Group is.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Does one have any idea how many have been killed or captured, say, in the last—and the overall number, overall number of members of the Wagner Group and how many have been killed or captured in the last five years?

Ms. MARTEN. If I may, again, I think that that's maybe a question for people who have access to intelligence and classified information.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I have another question. When they go abroad, are they paid by those countries? I mean, when Russia's in Mali, I mean, you know, if—or French troops are in Mali, I assume they don't take money from Mali to be there. But if the Wagner Group shows up, is the host country, if I can call it that, expected to pay for them?

Mr. SIEGLE. In that case, yes. The understanding is that they are paid about \$11 million a month. It's not an official contract, of course, but that's the understanding. They also—in Mali and other places, there is an understanding that they are—as part of the deal, they are giving access to natural resource reserves.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Mr. SIEGLE. So it is seen as a self-funding operation.

Mr. GROTHMAN. We say they commit war crimes. Can you guys give us some specific examples which might be good for causing my colleagues to care or the public in general to care?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, as my colleagues have pointed out as well, the instances of Wagner abuses are becoming relatively well publicized now. And in fact the United Nations has conducted investigations that have specifically called out Wagner and Russian forces for human rights abuses and war crimes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Could you describe what those are?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, in Moura, in Mali, earlier this year, the Russians, working with the military junta, cordoned off the village of Moura, separated out the men from other family members and are alleged to have executed 300 men. So, in Central Africa Republic, there are again allegations of intimidation, extrajudicial killings, rape, and other forms of intimidation against local communities.

Mr. GROTHMAN. We hear that rape is something that Russian soldiers do or have done in Ukraine. Is this a common thing with the Wagner Group too?

Mr. SIEGLE. I can't speak more generally, and I welcome input from either panelists, but rape has been specifically called out for as part of their mode of operation in Central African Republic in particular.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I will give you one more question, I hope. This is something I kind of wonder about, and we of course had a private briefing yesterday. All of you I am sure follow what's going on in Ukraine. Do any of you know, do we have a goal in Ukraine? Is there a point at which we feel this will end or, when we accomplish such and such, it will end? Any of the three of you under the impression of what our goal is over there?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, that's a much bigger question than here what we are talking about with Wagner so I'll defer to my colleagues to add to that. But obviously a much bigger geo or strategic question there.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I'm just a Congressman. I don't know exactly what the end game is, but I will ask you guys. Do you have any idea what the end game is? The other witnesses? No? You can say no. Or you can say nothing, I guess.

Ms. MARTEN. I hesitate to speak on behalf of the Administration so I don't think I'm competent to answer that question.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Nobody knows. OK. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from California.

Welcome and you're recognized for five minutes. Thank you.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for shedding light on the PMCs, particularly the Wagner Group.

I want to followup on the ranking member's question and ask all of you, are you of the impression that rape has become a weapon of war? I'd like to ask each of you that.

Ms. DOXSEE, would you just begin?

Ms. DOXSEE. Yes. Thank you. So I think that we have seen rape being used in a widespread way by PMCs such as the Wagner Group. And I would call this out in two contexts. One is in the context of warfare and combat operations. This is certainly something that we've seen in Ukraine by Russian soldiers, including some who have been identified as being affiliated with the Wagner Group or other private military contractors. It's something that's also been documented in locations such as the Central African Republic.

But then the second category I would highlight is not just rapes that are occurring during combat operations but also just during the tenure in which PMCs are present in a country. So, for example, in the Central African Republic, while we have widespread documentation of human rights abuses by the U.N. Security Council and NGO's, such as Human Rights Watch, particularly after Wagner became engaged in direct combat operations, if you dig into local reporting and conversations with locals, particularly in the villages surrounding areas such as Berengo, where Wagner established training bases early on, from the time that Wagner troops arrived in the country, local villages reported these Russian mercenaries coming into their villages, kidnapping women, raping their wives and daughters. And, to some extent, that's one way that we can sort of have a harbinger of what's to come when Wagner arrives in a country. These are the types of local crimes that Wagner and other PMCs commit when they arrive in a country even before thorough combat operations begin. And I think it is something that we can certainly expect to see.

Ms. SPEIER. OK. Thank you.

Let me ask your other colleagues because I'm going to run out of time here. Yes.

Ms. MARTEN. Hi, I think that's a great question. And I should just point out that the Wagner Group in this sense is not really acting any differently from Russian and regular troops. And this actually goes back into deep history. It is something that the Soviet Union did when— it is very well documented— when it occupied Eastern Germany at the end of World War II. So there is a long history of it, and it is not unique to Wagner, but certainly Wagner is doing it.

Ms. SPEIER. And we can say pretty clearly that the Wagner Group is proxy for the Russian Government. And we need to call them out. Should we identify them as a terrorist group?

Ms. MARTEN. I think we need to keep separate the notions of war crimes and terrorism, not even just for this case but more broadly for U.S. interests. And I think if we were to instead amend our War Crime Act from 1996 to allow more prosecutions and more indictments to happen, that might be the best way to approach this.

Ms. SPEIER. Dr. Marten, in a recent piece, you argued that PMCs like Wagner Group are out of control. How do you think we can hold Russia accountable for sexual violence that these mercenaries commit?

Ms. MARTEN. It's both a war crime and it is a crime against humanity. It is an example of torture, and so there are laws on the books that we could expand so that it is not merely U.S. citizens who are the victims or U.S. citizens who are the perpetrators. And we could therefore hold Russia accountable in those ways. And I think we could also convene war crimes tribunal in which the Russian state as a whole was held accountable for what was helping, similarly to what we did at the close of World War II with the Nuremberg trials.

Ms. SPEIER. One of the things we found in the buildup of the Ukrainian war by the Russians is that, when we declassified information, it shed a great deal of light and it unified the alliance to come together to support Ukraine.

Ms. DOXSEE, how would you declassify intelligence about the Wagner Group and other PMCs and making that information publicly releasable, undermining Russia's ability to use them as a proxy force?

Ms. DOXSEE. I can't speak to information that we have currently classified, but I think that, even with information that's publicly available, there's wide evidence of these human rights abuses, of the failures that Wagner has experienced in countries like Mozambique, where they had outright combat failures, not just because of their inability to repel the local Islamist insurgency but because of fundamental planning and operational failures, such as inexperience operating in local terrain and the inability to even communicate with the local troops in which they were embedded.

So I think there's a wide variety of open-source information already about the direct harms that Wagner causes, as well as the failures, the inability to actually achieve their goals, that could certainly make them less appealing to future countries who are considering agreements with them. And I'm sure that this information is only supplemented by more on the high side.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Chairman, I know I'm over my time. I have just one last question. Do we know if there are any members of the Wagner Group in the United States? Does anyone know? Yes.

Ms. MARTEN. I would say that that's highly unlikely just because they would be afraid to travel to the United States, but also because they are going to be very anti-American. They are all very loyal to the Russian state, and so I think, at the moment, they would not be attempting to cooperate with the United States. Again, I think you would need someone who had an intelligence clearance to answer that question —

Ms. SPEIER. All right. Thank you. And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the distinguished gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for five minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank Chairman Lynch and Ranking Member Grothman for holding today's hearing.

Russia is a brutal regime. It should be no surprise to us that they are using private military companies and mercenaries as part of their military standard operating procedures. While the private use of private security groups has a long history in our world, the Russian usage of groups like the Wagner Group is common and horrific. Most private contractors they use for security purposes, but Russia's tendency to allow and embrace human rights violations and lack of responsibility certainly calls for the world's attention. And it's appropriate that Congress discusses this today.

As we've seen in the Middle East and Africa and now Ukraine, Russia's reliance on PMCs shows two things. This is what I'd like to get to— Ms. Doxsee, I'm going to be asking you questions, ma'am— it shows two things that they are using PMCs, mercenaries. One, the Russian military is not as formidable as they would have the world believe; and, two, that certainly regarding Ukraine, Russian soldiers commonly agree that unprovoked aggression against Ukraine is wrong. So this should be discussed deeply. We should look at ways to sanction nations that utilize this type of military aggression, private mercenaries unaccountable. And I look forward to working with fellow members on the committee about this.

Ms. Doxsee, in looking through our panelists, I believe you may be most capable of responding to this question. Ukraine is mounting successful counter attacks. On many fronts, they are pushing Russian forces back and regaining ground that they had initially lost. And certainly, any reasonable observer would argue that the Ukrainian people have fought the Russians to a standstill. I have been to Ukraine and met with those people, and they are incredibly focused on defending their country. And they should be commended for that. They have driven the morale of Russian troops down, down into a point where desertion is common amongst the Russian troops, I'm advised. The combat capabilities of the Russian troops, the weaknesses thereof, have been exposed, and Russian capabilities continue to deteriorate.

So, Ms. Doxsee, given all the facts that we're discussing today, I'd like you to address for the committee and the world that's watching, what is your opinion on how—like, what is the situation with Russia's potential use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine? Given the fact that they've lost ground, they've been pushed very hard, they are a brutal regime, what are your thoughts there, ma'am?

Ms. DOXSEE. Thank you, sir. And thank you for, you know, highlighting both the commendable actions of the Ukrainian people and the continued struggle and, frankly, security concerns that we should all have regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

I think that, you know, while certainly I cannot pretend to know what happens inside Putin's brain—I don't think any of us can—I think that we are certainly seeing Russia recognizing the low mo-

rale amongst its troops, the risk even domestically for continually having Russian troops on the front lines, and I think this was one area where Russia's continued use of private military contractors in Ukraine is also a way that we can get insight into the Kremlin's mind-set around where things stand.

So, as my colleagues and I have mentioned, Moscow often uses private military contractors such as the Wagner Group in situations in which they want a force that's more expendable, that they can't be held accountable for, not only on the international stage but among their people at home.

We had stories during the first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 of villages in Russia where young men would suddenly be dropped off dead, their bodies full of shrapnel, with no explanation as to what happened to them and how they died. And the truth was that they were private contractors, operating in Ukraine, but because they were not officially Russian soldiers, the Kremlin had no obligation to their families. And so we—

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank you for your response. It was very thorough and insightful.

Mr. Chairman, I'll leave for your due consideration, sir, the observation that an increased concentration of mercenaries I fear could indeed signal preparatory events for the use of tactical nukes in Ukraine. And I am thankful that you have chaired this committee hearing today on this particular topic.

I yield, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields. Thank you.

I am told that the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Johnson, may be available for the next question.

All right. He's not on yet.

We will go to the gentlelady from North Carolina, Ms. Foxx, for five minutes. Welcome.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for convening the hearing.

For Dr. Marten, how many Wagner Group contractors are currently fighting in the war in Ukraine? Do we know?

Ms. MARTEN. Thank you for the question.

I am sure there are people who have intelligence clearances who know the answer to that, but I would hesitate to guess because it would just be guessing.

Ms. FOXX. OK. Well, I've been working on the War Crimes Rewards Expansion Act, a bill to improve the U.S. State Department's War Crimes Rewards Program so that it can offer rewards for individuals wanted for war crimes or genocide under U.S. law or another country's law. Is there evidence that Wagner Group contractors are committing war crimes in Ukraine?

Ms. MARTEN. Yes, there is. I mean we have very credible media reports of torture committed by the Wagner Group. And, as some of the other witnesses have talked about, that is typical of how the Wagner Group acts. So, for example, one of the things we know they did in Libya was that, when they withdrew from the areas that they had been occupying, they left booby traps behind, IEDs in habitable areas that were actually causing injuries among the people who were just going back to their homes. So we know that everywhere it has been, the Wagner Group has committed these

war crimes. But, as I said earlier, we also know that regular Russian forces have been committing very similar war crimes.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

Again, Dr. Marten, as you noted in your opening testimony, recent reporting indicates that the Wagner Group has been recruiting convicted criminals to refill their ranks. Is this a practice that the Wagner Group has utilized in the past? And is it something other private military groups have done? And what about the Russian military? We've heard this morning that there's going to be a call up of 300,000 more troops for Russia. So what do we know about where they are going to be getting those troops? What kind of people are going to be attracted into the army?

Ms. MARTEN. I think those are really good questions. The evidence that we have is that the Wagner Group had started recruiting in prisons in about March when it became clear that the Russian military was facing difficulties that it had not predicted in advance in its invasion of Ukraine. To my knowledge, there is no evidence before March 2022 that Wagner was doing this. We do have evidence that Prigozhin was going around to various festivals in Russia and trying to recruit people who weren't necessarily veterans but who were extreme fighters. And so that personality type who may not have veteran's experience have also been in the Wagner Group before. I'm not sure it's clear whether the Russian military as a whole has been recruiting in prisons or whether it has all been done through the Wagner Group.

Ms. FOXX. Dr. Marten, also in your opening testimony, you noted that the Wagner Group is not a legally established group and that PMCs are illegal in Russia. Despite that fact, it has been reported there have been statues built that commemorate the service of military contractors and that contractors have been awarded military medals. Can you explain how PMCs are technically illegal in Russia but are still honored with statues and medals?

Ms. MARTEN. Yes. Thank you for that question. It is something that I explored in a 2019 article and in my earlier congressional testimony on this subject in 2020. By keeping these groups illegal, Putin gets to control which of his network cronies are the ones who make a profit from their activities. Any time that they do something that Putin doesn't like he can say, "Oh, you're being mercenaries," and throw them in prison. He actually did that to an earlier group that ended up morphing into the Wagner Group. And what that means is that they are not really private military companies the way that other countries have used private military companies. One of the things that sets Russia apart is that it is one of the only countries that has not signed the Montreux accords, which were private military companies that are reputable, working with states and working with nongovernmental organizations to set up a code of conduct for how private military companies should behave in the field. And what's really noteworthy is that even China signed on to the Montreux accords, but Russia chose not to do so.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

Ms. Doxsee, in your report, you discuss increasing Russian and international awareness of PMCs may be an effective tactic to counter private military companies, PMCs. However, in that same section of the report, you note that reporting on PMCs comes with

risks and discuss the murder of three Russian journalists who were looking into the Wagner Group's activities.

Considering the risk to journalists who report on the issue and Putin's lack of transparency and use of propaganda to push messages, how do you believe the Russian people can become more informed on PMC operations?

Ms. DOXSEE. Yes. So I think that's a really important question, and it's one that puts a lot of these media organizations in a lot of danger, such as the murder of the journalist that we saw in the Central African Republic.

I would note that a lot of the information that we have about PMC operations in many of these countries, notably countries like Madagascar or Central African Republic, is really the result of brave, independent journalists, many of them Russians themselves, who have undertaken great personal risk to bring these activities to light and to sort out what is going on.

I think there's immeasurable importance of journalists on the ground and journalists who are able to, you know, operate in combat zones, operate under [inaudible] coming to light. And I believe that, as they risk their lives to bring this information out open, transparently into the light, we owe it to them to continue to share that information and make those risks worth it and really making clear the costs of working with Russian PMCs and the costs that they impose on local civilian populations.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the distinguished gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Johnson, for five minutes. Welcome.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for holding this very important and timely hearing. Private military companies such as the Wagner Group, according to Russian leaders, operate autonomously from the Russian state while building military cooperation in foreign nations.

But instead of providing security that helps civilians remain safe, multiple reports from the European Union, the Department of state, and other U.S. agencies show that these groups, these PMCs are responsible for increased violence, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa but not limited to sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Siegle, the Kremlin deployed groups like Wagner to Africa in the name of regional stability and to help local governments allegedly defend against insurgencies and terrorist threats. The record shows that, instead of improved security, however, Wagner forces have left behind a trail of human rights atrocities and exacerbated violence in the Central African Republic and led assaults on several towns and villages, indiscriminately killing local civilians.

Are Wagner activities in the Central African Republic reflective of their operations in other African nations, like Mali and Sudan?

Mr. SIEGLE. Thank you for the question, Representative Johnson. I think the short answer is yes. Wagner has been operating with impunity in Africa, and that lack of accountability allows it to undertake all kinds of human rights abuses against civilian populations in Africa.

And, you know, they're doing it as a form of intimidation and as a means of helping to prop up the proxies, the proxy governments that Moscow is supporting.

Mr. JOHNSON. What would be the percentage of PMCs operating in African nations versus the numbers of Russian troops, military troops operating in Africa, in the continent? Is there a ratio that you can point to or any information you can give us, in terms of numbers?

Mr. SIEGLE. The vast majority of power that Russia is projecting in Africa is through their use of these irregular forces. They are not deploying very many statutory forces.

Really, we see some of that in Libya, but really it's Wagner that is the key coercive tool that Russia is using. And, you know, it varies from 1,000 to 2,500 in each context where Russia is active. It may not seem like a lot, but in these fragile countries, they can be a highly destabilizing force.

Mr. JOHNSON. Which country in Africa has the most Russian PMCs on the ground?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, again, we don't have exact numbers, but the expectation or the understanding is there's about 2,300 Wagner forces in Central African Republic currently. And, again, the numbers are fuzzy, but there's probably about the same number operating in Libya.

Mr. JOHNSON. Uh-huh. What other countries in Africa have relatively large numbers of Wagner Group storm troopers, if you will?

Mr. SIEGLE. Well, in addition to those two countries, Mali has about a thousand Wagner forces, and there are also Wagner forces supporting the military junta in Sudan. I think those are the four main countries.

But Wagner is also linked to having operations in Mozambique, Madagascar, and then is using some of its noncoercive tools in other African countries, you know, like Burkina Faso, the Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo. So there's an expectation that Russia is looking to expand its influence in Africa and another half a dozen countries.

Mr. JOHNSON. Was there something you wanted to add, Dr. Marten?

Ms. MARTEN. No. I think that covers it very well. And to keep in mind the distinction that Dr. Siegle raised between those who are active fighters and those who are working with Prigozhin on disinformation campaigns, who are a different group of people and who, again, complicate the question of how many Wagner Group forces are actually on the ground.

Also, in the Central African Republic, we know that there were a few Russian active military servicemembers who were at least originally deployed when the Wagner Group first went into the Central African Republic in late 2017 and 2018.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

Dr. Doxsee, anything you wanted to add?

Ms. DOXSEE. Yes. I would just add on top of what my colleagues on the panel have said that it's notable that, in some of these deployments, in addition to having formal Russian soldiers helping to facilitate action, there have also been, for instance, GRU operatives in places like Madagascar helping some of the political operations.

And I would also highlight that, while a lot of the focus is typically on these large-scale and combat-focused operations, Russia has also employed private military contractors in much smaller numbers in some African countries to simply facilitate things like arms transfers, training on using that equipment.

We have reports in some countries, such as Nigeria, where there maybe 10 or 15 PMC troops present really to help facilitate those arms transfers and training operations. And so that is another dynamic at play here where PMCs are not conducting these large-scale combat operations necessarily in all of these countries, but they are helping to continue to forge this relationship with the Russian Government.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence. And I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. The gentleman yields. I yield myself five minutes for questioning.

Let me ask, since there's such well-documented cases of intervention by the Wagner Group in all of these countries and at least a half dozen have been named in addition to Ukraine, all these countries in Africa, are there any ongoing actual prosecutions of Wagner Group personnel or people associated with them in any of these local countries, or are there any cases of war crimes prosecutions happening in any international forums? Dr. Siegle?

Mr. SIEGLE. Not to my knowledge. Again, there have been some U.N. investigations that have named Wagner. But I think this touches on part of the insidiousness of how they're operating through these deals with autocratic governments or military juntas.

There isn't any incentive at all on the part of the so-called governments in these countries to actually prosecute Wagner. You know, Wagner is operating on their behalf to keep them in power. And so we have this, you know, perverse arrangement where the host country is not taking an active role in investigating it.

Mr. LYNCH. All right. Dr. Marten or Ms. Doxsee, any thoughts on that, any prosecutions that you might be aware of? Dr. Marten?

Ms. MARTEN. One thing we have to keep in mind is that Russia has a veto on the United Nations Security Council, and so that means that it's going to very much limit the ability of something that is done through the United Nations to engage in prosecution.

And that might be a reason why the United States might be interested in amending its own domestic War Crimes Act, giving the United States more flexibility to engage in these kinds of indictments and prosecutions, because it's going to be very difficult for the international community to do so.

Mr. LYNCH. Ms. Doxsee?

Ms. DOXSEE. I'm not aware of any ongoing prosecutions along these lines, but I would just highlight that there has been substantial evidence compiled by bodies, such as the United Nations, as well as NGO's, such as Human Rights Watch, that I think more than substantiates action being taken. And I think that's an important avenue for the U.S. and its allies to consider.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. I am aware that, in Ukraine, there is a prosecution for targeting killing. I'm not quite sure if it's, you

know, specifically to Wagner Group or I'm told, and you've reinforced that, that some of these atrocities are being conducted by Russian regular forces. So that's problematic as well.

Is there—I mean, we've received in this committee as early as yesterday, as recently as yesterday reports of widespread atrocities in Ukraine. Is there—in your study of this, would it be helpful to ask the administration to declassify some of the information that right now is not available to the public in an effort to, you know, put pressure on some of these incumbent leaders in other countries and also put pressure on these individuals if they were named and identified who are associated with Wagner Group and some of these other private military companies?

Are there specific things that this committee could do in creating more transparency about these atrocities and the conduct of Wagner Group and these other companies? Ms. Doxsee?

Ms. DOXSEE. Yes. I would say, first, it's hard to say without being familiar with the specific classified evidence, of course, weighing the benefits of transparency with the risks to intelligence sources and collection methods.

But I do think that one area in which the United States has the ability and certainly can do more is having a mechanism to have comprehensive information collection and distribution, whether that's already open-source information or strategically declassifying information to track data and to track qualitative accounts of the violence and of the actions of Russian private military companies, both to make that transparent and for different agencies across the U.S. Government to be able to access that information and act accordingly.

I think one of the struggles that I've heard a lot about from talking to individuals in the military, the intelligence community, the State Department, one of the big struggles is that we have many different areas of government that are [inaudible] or those involved in intelligence collection, and there's not a comprehensive approach to compiling, analyzing, and acting upon this data.

And so, really, what's missing, in my view, is not necessarily getting more evidence of their bad activities. We have plenty of that in the open source. But it's really building up that coordinated mechanism by which we can compile, analyze, and act on that information in a unified way, both across U.S. agencies and also with our partners internationally.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

I did see briefly the gentleman from Vermont, Mr. Welch. You would be recognized if you're available. OK.

With that, I will yield to the gentleman, the ranking member, the gentleman from Wisconsin for any further questions and closing remarks.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. One of the things that at least I'm getting out of this hearing—and it's primarily Ms. Doxsee's testimony—is the sheer number of countries that these organizations are playing around in. And it's not just the Wagner Group, right? They have other similar things.

You kind of wonder what they're doing and what progress they're making. I notice, in your written testimony, you make reference to something called the Dyck Advisory Group, which is apparently

playing around in South Africa, which I know is a country filled with valuable minerals and such.

Do you want to elaborate on what's going on in South Africa?

Ms. DOXSEE. So thank you for flagging that. I would just clarify that the Dyck Advisory Group is actually a South African private military company rather than a Russian private military company.

And the highlight there is that, after the Wagner Group experienced substantial operational failures in Mozambique, they were actually essentially fired by the local government and replaced by the Dyck Advisory Group, which is not affiliated with Russia and which has real experience in the region.

They actually were initially underbid by the Wagner Group, which is why Wagner got the contract in the first place, but I think the government in Mozambique quickly learned that you get what you pay for. Even though, on its surface, Wagner might have a lower price tag than more experienced contractors like the Dyck Advisory Group, that lower price tag comes with inexperience, propensity to failure, and a variety of other detrimental impacts that we've discussed on this panel today.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Your map here is a very nice map. I have a hard time reading it; it's so small.

Am I right reading it to say that the three countries that the Wagner Group is involved in in Europe are Ukraine, Belarus, and Serbia? Is there anybody else?

Ms. DOXSEE. Yes. Those are the three that we've detected here.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. And what are they—

Ms. DOXSEE. And—

Mr. GROTHMAN. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Ms. DOXSEE. I just also wanted to flag that, of course, on this map this documents countries in which Russian PMCs operated during the five-year span from 2016 to 2021 and does not reflect the scale of those operations.

So, of course, in a country like Ukraine, we obviously see much larger scale operations than in some of the others noted.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I was just going to comment on Serbia because it kind of stands out. Do you want to comment on what's going on in Serbia?

Ms. DOXSEE. I don't have information in front of me to go into extensive detail, but this was pulled from different open-source tracking of countries in which PMCs operated to some extent. In Serbia, there were much smaller presence and operations than in some of these other countries such as Ukraine.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Are they—I know what's going on in Syria is always of interest to this country. Could you comment on the military situation there and how many? I take it that is the Wagner Group in Syria. How many troops are there and what success or influence they're having?

Ms. DOXSEE. In terms of numbers, I would defer to colleagues in the government who can speak to intelligence estimates on the high side, but in countries like Syria, similar to the use in Ukraine or even countries like Libya, the PMC deployments have been much more along the lines of direct combat operations and directly achieving Moscow's military goals.

I think the one thing that's interesting is to see how Russia has really evolved its PMC model from activities in countries like Ukraine and Syria, where it really is about combat objectives, to what we're seeing now increasingly widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and even extending potentially to other regions like Latin America, which is really this model of targeting countries with weak governance and ongoing security challenges and specifically aiming to get out of it not only the geopolitical military intelligence gains but those economic gains and really that access to natural resources.

And I kind of think of it as a version 2.0 of this PMC model that they're increasingly honing in sub-Saharan Africa. And, to that end, I would note that Russia's use of private military companies is something that is evolving over time. I've highlighted today many of the failures they've experienced and many of their weaknesses, but they are certainly learning from these different deployments, learning from things like encounters with U.S. troops in Syria several years ago.

And so I think that it's important that the United States and its partners continue to monitor and analyze what's going on, particularly because these PMCs exhibit a variety of vulnerabilities now, but if we were to wait 5, 10 years down the line until they are posing an insurmountable challenge, many of these vulnerabilities may have been ironed out, and they may learn from their past failures.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes. I think it was fairly well-publicized. It was still probably not publicized enough. There was quite a number I guess of—quite a number of Wagner troops killed in a confrontation with American troops in Syria.

Is there anywhere else around the world where American troops have literally fought these PMCs around the world?

Ms. DOXSEE. So thank you for noting that. I think that is a very important example of where we had U.S. troops engaged in direct fire with PMC troops. I think one of the challenges we're seeing is that, while that certainly grabbed headlines and became more well-known, where we're seeing U.S. forces, both military and intelligence, encountering PMCs now is often in noncombat situations. So we have troops in places like sub-Saharan Africa who are on the ground and seeing the impacts of these PMC operations. They're seeing PMC troops carrying out, you know, different influence operations, training operations.

And there is an ongoing question, even from talking to our servicemembers, of what happens if we have a repeat of what happened in Syria. What is their guidance in terms of engaging with these Wagner or other PMC operatives that they often witness in the field?

And, moreover, what happens when PMC presence starts to threaten U.S. ability to collect intelligence, whether that's HUMINT or SIGINT? What happens when PMC intelligence collection starts to overlap or encroach on areas where the United States and U.S. troops are present?

I think that that is one of those areas that's maybe less flashy and less headline grabbing than direct combat and direct fire, but I think that we are continuing to hit upon that tension where U.S.

servicemembers are coming into contact in differing ways with Russian private military contractors in the field, and the United States needs to be able to have a comprehensive plan and direction to be able to give them.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

In closing, first of all, I want to thank all our witnesses. Thank you for your willingness to testify and for informing our decision-making process.

I want to commend my colleagues for their participation throughout this hearing and their important questions.

With that, without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

I ask that, if witnesses do receive such questions, please respond as promptly as you are able.

Thank you all again for your attendance. This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:58 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

