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The Wagner group's organised randomness from ascent to fall in light of the sciences' synergistic effect (Ecology, Administration, and Politics)

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Abstract

Aim: The definition of a system, in short, is a group of things that connect and form a coherent whole. In order to avoid randomness, the Wagner Group (W.G.), officially known as the private military company PMC Wagner, attempted to function as an organization inside the national system. Although the fact that the armed group is not recognized by the country (making it simple to deny their actions) is one of its primary benefits, it also requires the nation's logistical support. That dilemma is one of the reasons for the formation of the armed groups and the reason for their destruction, too. Our paper tries to analyze that dilemma from the perspectives of three different sciences: ecology, administration, and politics.

Methodology: To examine and respond to some inquiries concerning the W.G., the paper will employ synergistic thinking (relating to the interaction or cooperation of two or more ideas to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects). Is W.G. a real system/organization on ecological, administrative, and political levels? Why was the W.G. formed and destroyed?

Results: W.G. and any PMCs are not a system or a part of it according to ecology, administration, and political sciences for many reasons, and that might be the reason for the end of that kind of non-state armed groups (NSAG).

Interpretation: The rational reason after applying synergistic thinking to analyze that dilemma is that every system has a structure determined by its components and makeup. Countries have created armed groups to be excluded from their systems to avoid the responsibility; this is why they were destroyed and not sustained, much like the immune system attacks a foreign cell because it is not a part of the body's system.

Keywords: Wagner Group, PMCs, synergistic thinking, political science, ecosystems

Introduction

Regardless of how they identify themselves, private military and security companies (PMSCs) are defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross as private business entities that offer military and/or security services. In essence, PMCs offer a range of services and activities, including operational advice and training, logistical support, intelligence gathering, and personnel supply.

In particular, the provision of armed guards and the protection of persons and objects, such as convoys, buildings, and other locations; the maintenance and operation of weapons systems; prisoner detention; advising armed forces; interrogating detainees; and, on occasion, even engaging in combat.

Since the end of the Cold War, demand for PMSCs has increased to such an extent that a major PMSC industry now exists, offering an ever-wider range of services, with some companies employing more than 10,000 staff. With estimates of \$100 billion in 2003 and \$224 billion in 2020, the global PMC industry is a multibillion-dollar sector that is expected to double by 2030.

From a historical perspective, three main factors can be attributed to the development of PMCs:-

- It developed through the end of the Cold War after the disbandment of ex-military personnel from Central and Eastern Europe.

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- The downsizing of smaller national military armies and the transformation of warfare.
- The market's excess of weapons
- By 2020, there were almost 1,200 PMSCs in operation, compared to less than 200 in 1980. Eighty-one nations, or roughly 41% of all states in the world, have at least one PMSC headquarters and actively use their services. The majority of PMSCs are located in a small number of home states; it is estimated that the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and South Africa together account for roughly 70% of the sector. Despite having a relatively small PMSC sector, Russia has possibly used its contractors for combat more than other countries. Academi (previously Blackwater), MAG Aerospace, Northrop Grumman, Unity Resources Group, Vinnell Corporation WG, DynCorp International, Triple Canopy, Aegis Defence Services, G4S, Erinys International, Defion International, and KBR Inc. (Kellogg, Brown, and Root) are listed as the most well-known PMCs.

On the one hand, the existence of PMSCs is a fact, but what is the distinction between the PMSCs staff and mercenaries besides their rights in international humanitarian law? A mercenary is defined in Article 47 of Additional Protocol I (Additional Protocol I, Article 47(2) (adopted by consensus)) of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which also declares that a mercenary is not entitled to participate in combat or be a prisoner of war. According to the Geneva Convention, a mercenary is any person who has all six conditions:

- Is specially recruited locally or abroad to fight in an armed conflict.
- Does take a direct part in the hostilities.
- Is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially more than that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party.
- Is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;
- Is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and
- Has not been sent by a state that is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.
- On the other hand, an employee of a PMSC must fulfill stringent, cumulative requirements to be considered a mercenary. To begin with, no member of any of the warring parties may serve as a mercenary. Additionally, to be classified as a mercenary, an individual must be employed to engage in direct combat and driven by the desire for personal gain. As a result, the majority of PMSC workers fail to meet all six mercenary requirements.

From the perspective of humanitarian law, the main legal consequence of being classified as a mercenary is that such individuals do not qualify for combatant or prisoner-of-war status during international armed conflicts. However, mercenaries are still entitled to adequate detention conditions and the right to a fair trial. At the same time, the

employees of PMSCs are civilians unless they are part of a state's armed forces or perform combat duties for an organized armed group that is a party to the conflict. In light of this:

- They may not be targeted.
- They are protected against attack unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.

W.G. between ascend and fall under the control and deniability umbrella

Ascend

Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was a German opera composer known for his significant contributions to the genre. His reputation stems not only from being one of the most important opera composers in the world but also from his controversial association with Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, who was influenced by Wagner's ideas. In the 21st century, Wagner's name has resurfaced in connection with the Russian W.G., officially known as the private military company PMC Wagner, which was led by Yevgeny Prigozhin (Figure 1).

In September 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, for the first time, publicly discussed a Russian PMC1 that had signed a contract with the government in Mali. The mention here was for the W.G., a Russian private military company (PMC) created by Dmitry Utkin and Yevgeny Prigozhin to engage in military operations outside of Russia.

According to the most reliable story, the group was founded by Dmitry Utkin, a former Spetsnaz and GRU officer, and the Slavonic Corps, a transient company. The Slavonic Corps was established in 2013 to aid Bashar al-Assad's government during the Syrian Civil War, but it was defeated in its first battle, which took place in October 2013 outside of Homs against Islamic State (ISIL) combatants. Early in 2014, Utkin was linked to a group supported by the GRU that at least partially recruited from the Slavonic Corps. The group's name, Wagner, was purportedly based on Utkin's previous radio call sign.

The group began operations in 2014 during Russia's proxy war in the Donbas region of Ukraine, enabling President Vladimir Putin to deny the involvement of Russian troops in the conflict (Figure 2). Over the past few years, the W.G. has been aggressively promoting Russian security interests in Syria and subsequently Ukraine, and throughout Africa under the "Blood, Honor, Justice, Homeland, Courage" slogan. Its operations have grown to be a significant way for Russia to interact with Africa, where they are known to provide troops and extract natural resources. The group's activities in the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, and Sudan have been connected to political violence. Along with openly supporting military takeovers in the Sahel, the group has also been in charge of disinformation campaigns and political intervention in other places, such as Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, respectively.

Wagner's organizational structure was more akin to a military formation based on an Airborne Special Purpose (Spetsnaz) brigade than it was to a typical private military company. With the organizational culture and capabilities of elite military units, its core leadership was made up of veterans from the GRU (Russia's military intelligence), VDV (Airborne Forces), and MVD (Internal Affairs).

Wagner was not only a paramilitary force; it also functioned

in accordance with larger Russian military interests, frequently using equipment provided by the state-controlled arms export organization Rosoboronexport. This is demonstrated by the existence of specialized positions within Wagner's ranks, such as tank drivers, anti-aircraft missile specialists, and artillery personnel.

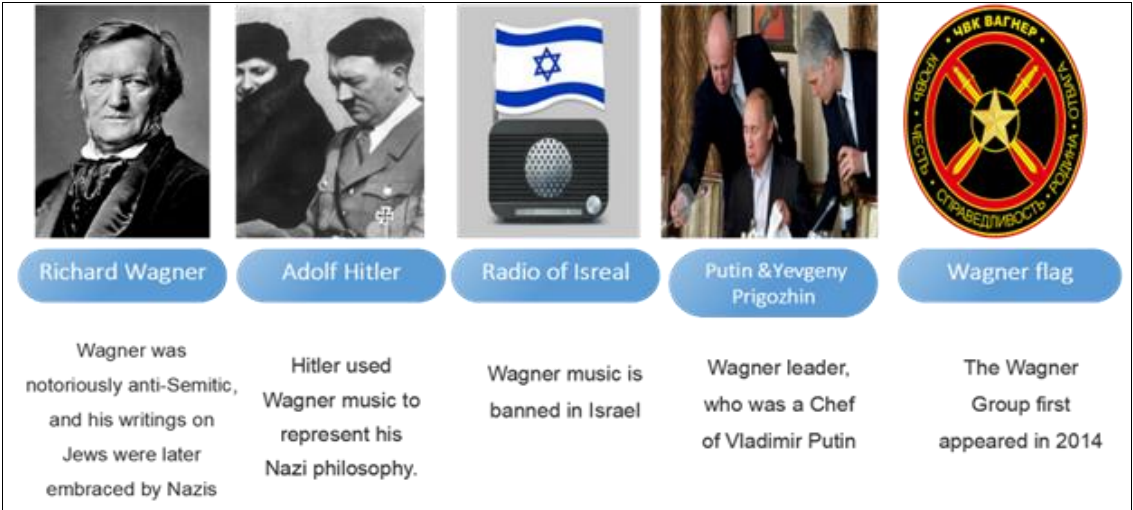


Fig 1: Wagner over time

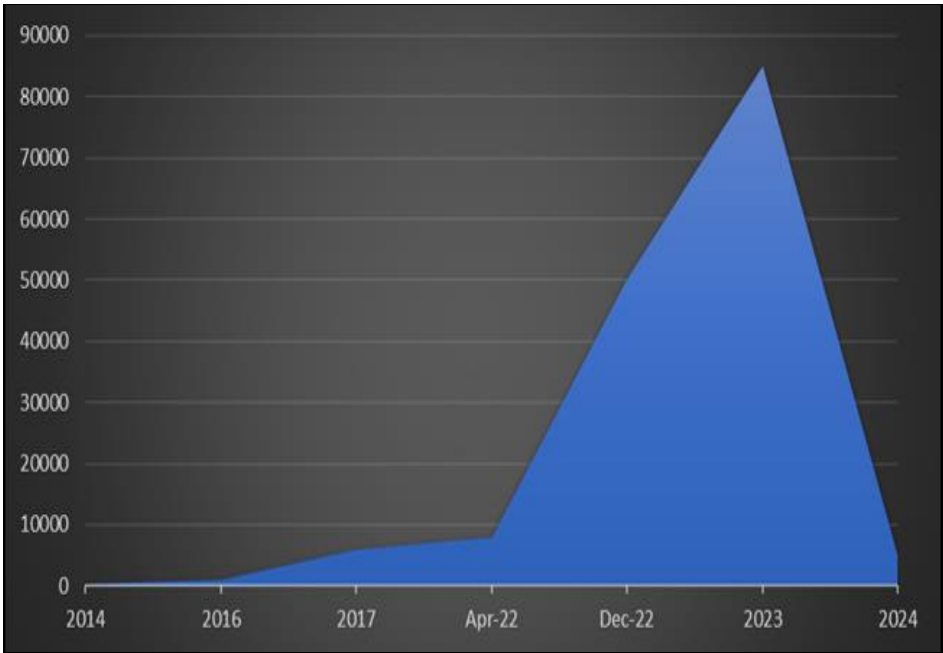


Fig 2: Wagner personnel

The fall

In September 2022, Prigozhin made his position as the founder of the W.G. publicly known. The W.G. was already actively participating in Russia's war in Ukraine and recruiting in Russian prisons. Additionally, it had long been a defining feature of Russia's foreign policy in Africa. Prigozhin and the Ministry of Defense had a long-standing disagreement, and in 2022, he publicly chastised the ministry's top brass for living opulent lives in "parallel realities," not serving on the front lines, and not sending their kids to fight in the conflict. He accused Sergei Shoigu, the Minister of Defense, and Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of Staff of Russia, of sitting in "expensive clubs," believing they were "masters of life," and having the authority to determine the fate of diligent soldiers. The conflict reached an unexpected height in June 2023 when Prigozhin began advancing his forces in the direction

of Moscow. Prigozhin dubbed it the "march of justice," which lasted less than twenty-four hours and brought the W.G. forces as close as 200 kilometers from Moscow. The march marked the beginning of the group's demise as it was perceived at the time, and the conclusion of Prigozhin's dispute with the Ministry of Defense. Prigozhin canceled the "march of justice" with W.G. forces about 200 kilometers from Moscow, claiming he was doing it to save "Russian blood." On August 23, 2023, two months later, Prigozhin lost his life in a private plane crash (Figure 3). Since then, the PMC which is increasingly being called Africa Corps has been led by notable individuals in the Russian Ministry of Defense. Although the terms W.G. and Africa Corps are frequently used to describe a single, cohesive organization, they actually refer to a sophisticated network of private military forces that receive assistance from the Russian government.

For a number of reasons, the group continues to be a significant global player. First of all, the group's enormous manpower is what sets it apart from its forerunners and other private military firms. It is a fully functional armed unit that can fight on the ground, in the air, and at sea. Furthermore, the group is actively involved in conflicts in Libya, Syria, Sudan, Mali, and Ukraine, and it appears that

its involvement in those conflicts has not changed despite the death of its leader, Evgenij Prigožin, in a plane crash following the rebellion. Last but not least, despite having historically had the support of the Kremlin, Wagner continues to function independently of the Russian military forces, promoting Russian ultranationalism and nostalgia for the Soviet Union.



Fig 3: The fall of the Wagner Leader

The dilemma is accountability

Notably, there are differences in opinion about what constitutes a private military company (PMC) and a private security company (PSC). Nonetheless, we could contend that because PMC is not defined by international law, it is controversial and of interest because it provides nations with the advantage of avoiding direct involvement in the conflict; private contractors' losses do not cause the same emotional outpouring and domestic pressures as if members of a national army were killed in an external conflict. Hence, from that view, the dilemma was born: how to control and deny?

Admittedly, it is unclear exactly what law applies to the military and security industry. The issues include no clarity about the exact relationship between governments and the private military. There are various reasons for and against PMC regulation under existing international law. The United Nations General Assembly has stated on numerous occasions that it opposes certain PMC operations, such as the employment of mercenaries, especially when those activities pose a security risk (even though the United Nations has, in regular use, PMCs by some of its agencies, the UN General Council has signaled its persistent concern by the appointment in 1987 of a Special Rapporteur on the use of mercenaries as a means of impeding the exercise of the rights of peoples).

The accountability: The level of state responsibility for the actions of private military contractors (PMCs) varies, ranging from direct sponsorship to a negative duty of not supporting them, or even a positive duty to investigate, prosecute, and punish their actions. The involvement of PMCs in conflicts raises several legal issues, particularly regarding accountability for war crimes or other illegal

activities. While some international treaties and conventions, such as the Rome Statute, hold PMCs accountable for war crimes committed during armed conflicts, many countries lack specific laws to address the issues related to PMCs.

For example, due to its close ties to the George W. Bush administration, Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR), which Halliburton owned until April 2007, was one of the most contentious PMCs. Dick Cheney, Bush's vice president, was Halliburton's chief executive officer before entering politics. Some claimed that the Bush administration had favored KBR due to the company's ties to Cheney, and Halliburton was given multiple lucrative no-bid contracts for security services in Iraq (Both the Iraq War (2003-11) and the War in Afghanistan (2001-21) saw the US continue to use PMC contractors. In 2020, the year before the US withdrew from Afghanistan, 22,562 PMC contractors were working in the country; at that time, there were twice as many US military personnel stationed there. In contrast to at least 3,500 PMC contractors, 2,402 US soldiers had lost their lives while serving in Afghanistan between October 2001 and August 2021.

Furthermore, it is challenging to pinpoint the precise amount of work that Blackwater Security was performing because CIA and other intelligence and security contracts are "black contracts." Robert Van Pelton said in 2006 that Blackwater "established a pattern of doing about 15% of 'black' contracts assumed to be CIA which today would add up to nearly \$100 million in annual revenue for the company. Blackwater President Gary Jackson once boasted, "Blackwater's contracts were so secret that the company couldn't tell one federal agency about the business it was doing with another agency".

In view of political science

The organization of armed forces is mainly examined in political science from the perspective of civilian control and its deference to political authority in order to keep the military from endangering the state. In order to effectively carry out their security mandate without intruding too much into political decision-making, this entails creating professional, apolitically neutral armed forces that are answerable to the government through transparent chains of command, parliamentary oversight, and adherence to human rights principles.

Therefore, what about a group of armed forces, which is born to be unaccountable and uncontrolled, doing their mission under the denial of political responsibility?

The purpose of that question is to shed light on the dangerous situations that are affected by PMCs' presence in the state or in other countries.

The majority of studies, investigations, and publications including those published by the UN did not discover a political or legal justification for PMCs, and the answer is straightforward since it has nothing to do with the state's organizational structure or its position within any political hierarchy. If we take into account the effect of PMCs, it will only affect the state; what about it affects other nations? Here, the International Court of Justice has clearly stated that a State will breach the international law principle of non-intervention against another nation 'by organizing or encouraging the organization of irregular forces...for incursion into the territory of another state.'

Therefore, states are required by international law to regulate PMCs and are responsible for their actions in conflict and terrorism, whether or not they are state-directed, and that definitely will lead to a vicious cycle because it is not one of the objectives of PMC formation, where the state needs the advantages of ownership and control without any political responsibility for their crime. This is particularly reflected in the situation in Africa, where the General Assembly has raised concern, seeing the rapid

growth of markets in small arms and a rise in the use of all weaponry.

The conclusion is that the W.G., or any other private military company (PMC), did not and will not have any political backing, even if the United Nations utilized some of their services. Their illegal existence cannot be justified, as it contradicts the essential political role of state armed forces; hence, sustainability is impossible.

In view of administration science

In the realm of public administration, the armed forces stand as the foremost guardians of a nation's defense, security, and the assertion of national power. Operating under a steadfast framework of civilian oversight, they are guided by the principles of the rule of law and accountability. Their mission encompasses both internal and external security, safeguarding the integrity of the state. Moreover, the armed forces adhere to specific legal and administrative controls, ensuring they remain legitimate and effective in their commitment to serve the public interest. This meticulous balance of strength and responsibility underscores their vital role in upholding the nation's core values.

Also, the definition of any system in the administration science is a collection of elements that, when combined, form a single, interconnected whole. Therefore, any element that is not connected to any of the system's other components cannot be considered part of that system. Besides the loss of political cover, W.G., like other PMCs, lost another element of its legitimacy; it is not a part of the state system, either legislative, executive, or judicial, or the private or public sectors, because there is still no transparent system for its responsibility and accountability. That was clear as the sun from Blackwater PMC (the most famous PMC in the world); president Gary Jackson once boasted, "Blackwater's contracts were so secret that the company couldn't tell one federal agency about the business it was doing with another agency".

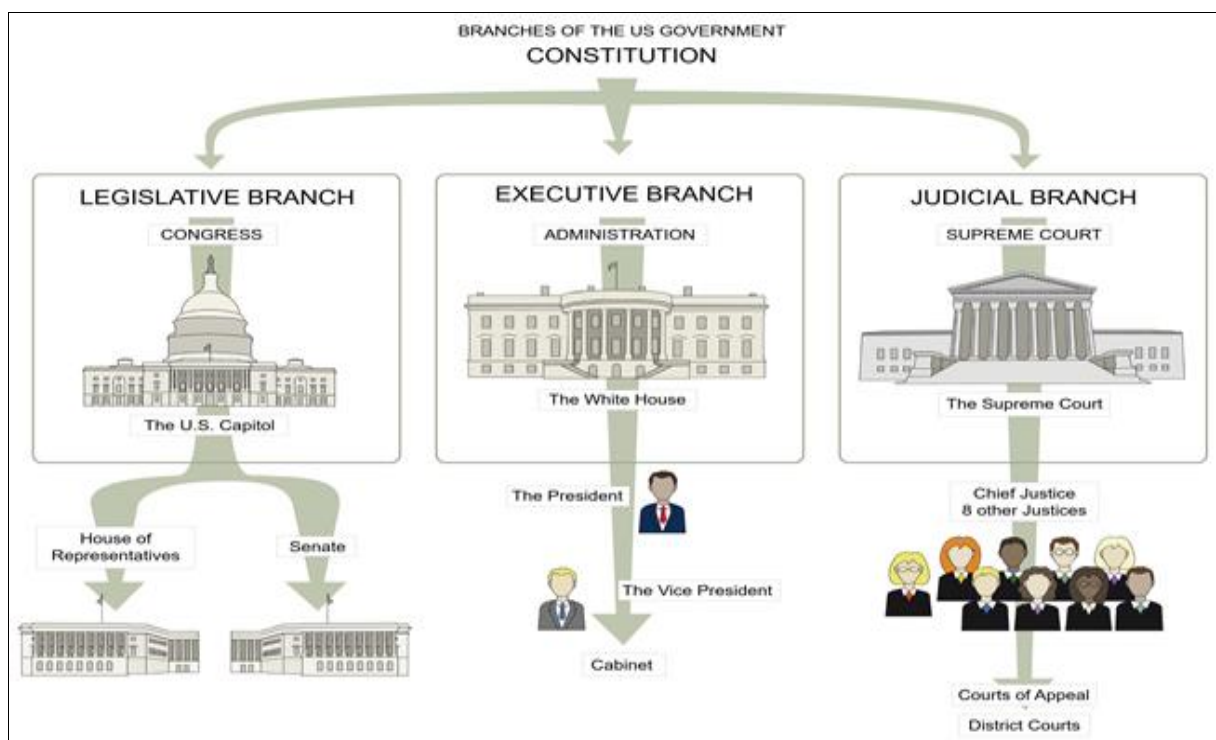


Fig 4: Authorities in the United States.

The conclusion is that the owners of PMCs claim that their goals are to be unrecognized, not included in the military, and not answerable to any democratic government authorities, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

These goals, in addition to the covert funding, will undoubtedly result in any PMCs including those in the US-institutional state (Figure 4) being viewed as not being a part of any state administrative system; hence, sustainability is impossible.

In view of ecology

For the first time, the social sciences will employ ecology, one of the fundamental fields of biology, as a tool to analyze a conundrum and demonstrate the synergistic effect of applying diverse perspectives and theories from other disciplines. Ecology is the study of the interactions that occur between living organisms and their surroundings, including interactions within and between species as well as with the inanimate (abiotic) environment. As a simple description of the levels of organization in any ecosystem.

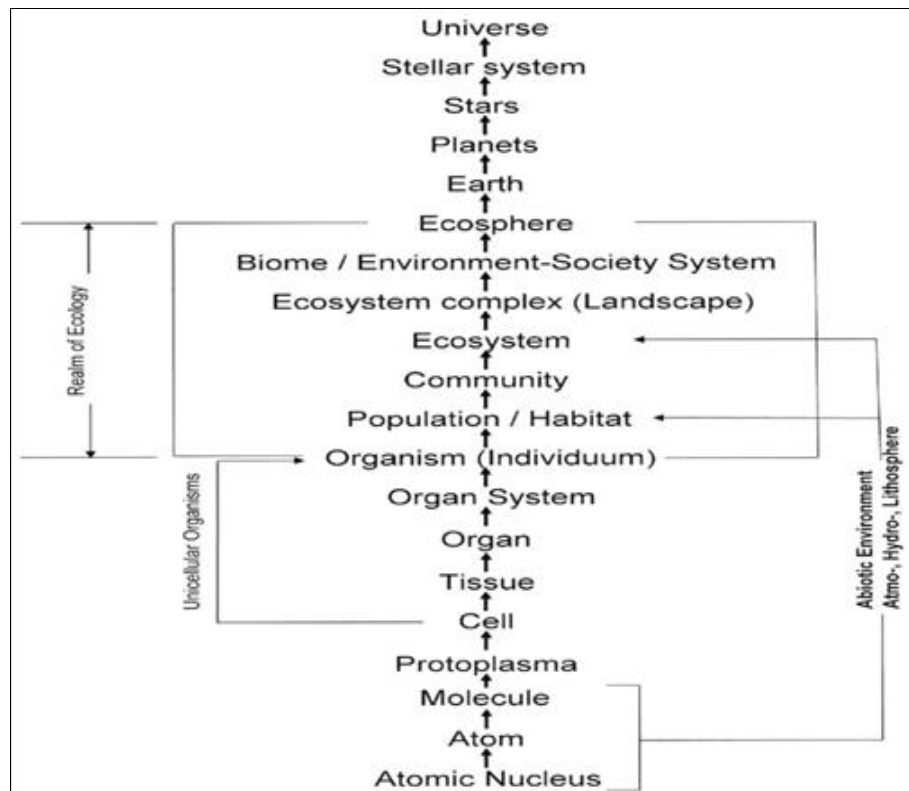


Fig 5: Complete hierarchy of organization levels of matter, each one understood as a system (From Miller 1975, modified by Haber 1993) ^[3].

As a straight forward explanation of the various organizational levels within an ecosystem:-

- **Species/Individual/Organism:** Any living thing capable of exchanging genes or interbreeding is considered an individual.
A population is a collection of members of a species that are present in a particular location at a particular time.
- **Community:** A community is made up of populations of various species of organisms that live in a certain place at a certain time.
- **Ecosystem:** It includes more than a community of living organisms (biotic) interacting with the environment (abiotic).

Similarly, an individual or species is primarily made up of cells that form organs, which in turn form systems that make up the organism's body (Figure 5).

After describing the levels of organization in an ecosystem, it stands to reason that neither the W.G. nor any PMCs would be a part of the body or ecosystem. If the W.G. is a population that consists of the same individuals, they did not live in a specific area at a given time; hence, they will not be a part of any community, even if they are considered an invasive species (an invasive species is a non-native

organism that spreads rapidly in a new environment, causing significant ecological, economic, or health harm) because their behavior conflicts with the animal behavior that searches for sustenance and safety. As a result of the Wagner population's refusal to follow the rules and be governed by abiotic factors in the same ecosystem, both the community at its level and the ecosystem at higher levels will rebel, as the population will rebel on the community and ecosystem too.

It's the same as the body system: The W.G. or any PMCs are regarded as cancer cells that don't belong to any organ, tissue, or system in the body, but they want to perform a crucial function as a particular cell (the armed forces) without any guidance or oversight from the body (responsibility and accountability). This will undoubtedly cause the body to attack it; hence, sustainability is impossible.

Lastly, even though PMCs (the W.G. or others) do exist as fact and have been used by a UN agency, they also appear as private organizations in the US, and international humanitarian law has distinguished between mercenaries and PMC employees; they still lack the legal justification to be armed in their home country or elsewhere in the world. Escaping from responsibility and accountability as an important part of PMC's formation is the main reason that

destroys them, either by rebellion or through loss of legitimacy as an armed non-state group (disintegration, merger with another, or name change).

Conclusion

Conclusively, the utilization of various scientific aspects, parameters, definitions, and perspectives from political and administrative science and ecology provides a new horizon for examining the sustainability of PMCs. The presence of PMCs has created a complex dilemma with significant implications for international conflict and security. The ambiguous relationship between governments and PMCs has led to a concerning lack of accountability, raising questions about the protection and targeting of PMC employees during conflict. The case of the Russian W.G. exemplifies the blurred lines between state military operations and private entities, highlighting the potential for deniability and the use of PMCs in proxy wars. Moreover, the sustainability of PMCs is under research due to their lack of integration into existing legal and governance systems, leading to potential disintegration, rebranding, or rebellion. The resolution of this dilemma lies in the ecology, which may be crucial for ensuring the sustainability of PMCs despite the potential for misuse in both peaceful and terrorist contexts.

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