

## ***Propaganda Mission Command: a comparative social media analysis between the Badri Force 313 and the PMC Wagner***

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### **Abstract**

Between 2021 and 2023 we have witnessed two major military operations, both relating to the field of hybrid conflict: the Taliban conquest of Afghanistan and the Russo-Ukrainian War. Two military units stood out, respectively, the Badri Force 313 and the PMC Wagner. Both units proved the existence of a strong propaganda component combined with operations conducted on the ground. This paper aims to highlight through two comparative case studies, the existence of a new parameter that joins the operational capacity, that is, Propaganda Mission Command. This tool has been observed within the respective digital ecosystems and has had serious tactical-strategic repercussions within

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the combat theatres. The online communication of the two military apparatuses influenced recruitment, funding, and even the public's knowledge of the conflict. Finally, the use of propaganda in both these units contributed to the development of a new concept of *Auftragstaktik* that involves the communicative sphere. The existence of such a phenomenon should stimulate public and academic debates regarding the new nature of conflicts. Conflicts in which, as we observed, the propaganda/communication component is now indivisible from the military one and can result in remarkable operational and/or strategic advantages. The analysis of this hybrid tool is also meant to underline its difference from classic state propaganda. The two case studies show a different kind of "Propaganda Mission Command" that is framed within a military context, is related to "branded" units, and can shift the balance of conflicts towards one specific side through influence and psyops.

**Keywords:** PMC Wagner, Badri Force 313, Hybrid Warfare, Propaganda

## Introduction

The final stages of the Taliban's conquest of Afghanistan and the recent Russian-Ukrainian (since its beginnings in 2014) war have highlighted the nature of hybrid conflicts, in particular the communicative aspect that can also be declined as propaganda. The paper focuses on the propaganda sphere of two specific military units, protagonists of the two conflicts: the Badri Force 313 and the PMC Wagner.

Starting from the binomial hybrid warfare-propaganda and the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, the authors theorised the concept of Propaganda Mission Command as a contemporary declination of *Auftragstaktik* focused on the propaganda-communication component and applied within today's hybrid warfare contexts.

The concept is then tested through the observation and analysis of the two military units, with particular attention to their reciprocal communication apparatus. The entire study is

based on a review of the relevant literature, data collection, and a content analysis of the propaganda material.

Finally, the authors made a comparison between the two military units. The rationale behind the choice of these two units lies in their great media impact and the diversity of the conflicts in which they operated. This last reason contains within itself the need to discover whether there are specific parameters characterising the application of propaganda in hybrid theatres of war.

### **Theoretical framework and literature review**

The literature review is based on two clusters: the propaganda-communication component within the hybrid conflicts with a specific focus on its application by the Badri Force 313 and PMC Wagner, and finally the contemporary implementation of Auftragstaktik within hybrid warfare frameworks.

For instance, hybrid warfare as a method of war has its roots in the combat methods of former conflicts. In the past, different actors such as States and non-state entities, aimed to reach their political and military goals by implementing a mix of conventional and non-conventional, or irregular, methods such as misinforming world opinions or becoming a powerful force multiplier.

According to Munoz Musquera and Bachmann (2016), Hybrid Warfare may use elements taken from several methods and categories of warfare, such as irregular warfare, asymmetric warfare, and compound warfare.

The crucial element to underline is the fluidity, the capacity of adaptation to different scenarios and to a conflict “*in which states or non-state actors exploit all modes of war simultaneously by using advanced conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and disruptive technologies or criminality to destabilize an existing order*”<sup>1</sup>.

The main goals of hybrid campaigns are to create confusion, feed social divisions, and target critical vulnerabilities in terms of national security. In doing so, actors combine coercive and subversive measures, designed to be difficult to attribute because operating under a legal threshold. The specific characteristics of hybrid warfare identified by

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<sup>1</sup> A. B. Munoz Mosquera et al., *Lawfare in Hybrid Wars: The 21st Century Warfare*, Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016, pp. 63–87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18781527-00701008>.

authors in previous years are a non-standard, complex, and fluid adversary combination of conventional and irregular methods and flexible use of mass communication for propaganda<sup>2</sup>.

Part of the peculiar features characterizing hybrid threats have been detected by literature and have been widely discussed in the academic debate. Among them, it is possible to mention pervasive, diffuse, interconnected, and de-localised<sup>3</sup>.

Firstly, “pervasive” is used to indicate the capacity to permeate different dimensions of social life, as it relates to security, economy, politics, and culture, for example, affecting both private actors and public institutions. Secondly, “diffused” stands for the ability to overcome not only the geographical boundaries (national and international) but also the temporal and sociocultural ones. The territorial element, or the loss of it, is a crucial element in the identification of hybrid warfare, explaining the attribution of “de-localized” as a specific feature of the phenomenon. It suggests that hybrid threats may take place at multiple levels in different areas of the world, waged by different actors, “*with diverse weapons, attributable, for instance, to different manifestation of power*”<sup>4</sup>. At last, “interconnected” highlights the peculiar consequences produced by hybrid threats. In a world characterized by its interconnectivity, an event occurring in a specific context inevitably produces repercussions beyond the boundaries of that context. In fact, according to Simons (2021), even though the informational and cognitive realms belong to the intangible world, they do affect events, processes, and outcomes in the tangible physical realm, and the current world’s interconnectivity is enhanced even more the effects.

Over the last few years, the enormous technological developments on the media front have broadened the possibilities of increasingly expanding the horizons of hybrid warfare on the communication and propaganda side. The emergence of social media and the possibility of reaching an ever-wider audience to influence, have made it possible to transform narratives into real tools that can be used in the context of hybrid conflicts by a

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<sup>2</sup> F. G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, December 2007, 72.

<sup>3</sup> M. Maiolino, *Geopolitics of Information, Aids and Vaccines make Sense in the Framework of COVID-19 and Hybrid Conflicts*, 2020, vol.12, no. 2.

<sup>4</sup> ibidem

plurality of actors, both state and non-state. In this landscape, propaganda becomes a fundamental tool in the implementation of hybrid warfare, given the necessity to control the population, inspire divisions among the rivals, and eliminate those who have different ideas and identities. Propaganda is intended as a deliberate effort made through mass media to shape public opinion. Such activities have evolved and exploded in modern times, thanks to new technologies and social media, and are conducted to achieve Hybrid Warfare objectives by a multitude of actors. Propaganda on social media has proved to be extremely effective since “*social media, which is made up of a multitude of trust-based networks, provides fertile ground for the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation, and the manipulation of our perceptions and beliefs*”<sup>5</sup>. The effectiveness of the Propaganda tool has made it appealing also to the Military side of Hybrid Warfare. As a result, the core of a military effort is now made not only of its kinetic side but also of communication and propaganda tactics implemented at both institutional and single army-unit levels.

The above definitions place the war in Afghanistan and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the category of hybrid conflicts. According to Farooq Yousaf & Moheb Jabarkhail, in 2021, the Taliban became a massive public-relation multi-lingual militant group efficiently fighting within the communicative sphere through social media propaganda, lawfare, and narrative<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the deployment of Badri Force 313 (formerly known as Badri Battalion 313) and its propaganda coverage by Haqqani mediatic houses<sup>7</sup>, can be considered a hybrid war maneuver<sup>8</sup>. On the other side, the theoretical framework of Hybrid Warfare has been used by the US Army War College and other experts during the Afghan War defining the counterinsurgency strategies<sup>9</sup>. The Russo-Ukrainian war as far

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<sup>5</sup> S. Svetok et al., *SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL OF HYBRID WARFARE*, Riga, Latvia, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> F. Yousaf et al., *Afghanistan's Future under the Taliban Regime: Engagement or Isolation?*, Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, vol. 17, no. 1, 2022, pp. 117–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2021.1982139>.

<sup>7</sup> M. G. Weinbaum et al., *The Tenacious, Toxic Haqqani Network*, 2021, 18.

<sup>8</sup> T. Joscelyn et al., *Taliban's Special Forces Outfit Providing "Security" at Kabul Airport*, FDD's Long War Journal, 2021, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/08/talibans-special-forces-outfit-providing-security-at-kabul-airport.php>.

<sup>9</sup> I. Käihkö, *The Evolution of Hybrid Warfare: Implications for Strategy and the Military Profession*, The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters, vol. 51, no. 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.3084>;

back as 2014<sup>10</sup>, although hostilities had not yet broken out directly, also possessed all the characteristics of hybrid conflicts<sup>11</sup>. Even after 26 February 2022, these characteristics, again regarding the communicative sphere, were observed<sup>12</sup>. In particular, the case of the PMC Wagner is an example of a hybrid fighting unit deployed in different war realms including the propaganda realm.

Finally, the last part of the literature review is focused on the concept of *Auftragstaktik* and its application/adaptation within the hybrid war. The “*Auftragstaktik*” doctrine that “*allowed subordinate leaders independence to interpret the situation and execute actions that fulfilled the commander’s intent rather than the letter of the order*”<sup>13</sup>. In other words, the single unit can therefore autonomously implement propaganda tactics and operations to achieve the commander’s goal. The concept originally developed in 1869 by Gen. Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the Prussian General Staff during the Franco-Prussian War<sup>14</sup>, comes under the umbrella of the US armed forces under the definition of Mission Command and then fully adopted in 2019 with the ADP 6-0 Mission Command<sup>15</sup>. The definition states that in *Auftragstaktik* (Mission Command), commanders issue subordinates a defined objective and the necessary resources to accomplish the mission. Furthermore, subordinate commanders are then given the flexibility to plan and execute their mission within the higher commander’s strategy. To operate effectively under this style of command requires a common approach to operations and subordinates who are specialized in their field and trained in independent decision-making<sup>16</sup>. This practice empowers single units’ decision-making and decentralized

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C. Bockstette, *Taliban and Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication*, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* vol. 08, no. 3, 2009, pp. 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.08.3.01>.

<sup>10</sup> M. Galeotti, *The “Gerasimov Doctrine” and Russian Non-Linear War*, In *Moscow’s Shadows* (blog), 6 July 2014, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

<sup>11</sup> Saessalo and Huhtinen, *The Information Blitzkrieg — “Hybrid” Operations Azov Style*.

<sup>12</sup> F. Borgonovo, *Putin’s Hybrid Army*, *European Eye on Radicalization* (blog), 7 April 2022, <https://eeradicalization.com/putins-hybrid-army/>.

<sup>13</sup> M. J. Gunther, *Auftragstaktik: The Basis for Modern Military Command?*, 8 December 2012, 68.

<sup>14</sup> R. A. Herrera, *The Auftragstaktik Infatuation*, *MILITARY REVIEW*, 2022, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Army Doctrine Publication, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Army Doctrine Publication.

execution across different battlefields proving that the practice of *Auftragstaktik* can be implemented on the contemporary communication-information-heavy battlefield<sup>17</sup>.

Taking into consideration the two blocks of literature, we can enucleate the research question of the paper: Is it possible that the new hybrid conflicts have generated a new declination of the *Auftragstaktik* including the propaganda tool?

## Case Studies and Methodology

The criteria that led to the selection of the Badri Force 313 and the PMC Wagner were threefold. Firstly, the hybrid nature of the conflicts in which they operated. Secondly, the media impact of the two units influenced the communicative and cognitive spheres of their respective conflicts. Thirdly the propaganda spread in the theatres of war of these two units is even more relevant since they are strongly marked by extremist ideologies linked to terrorist groups or extremist organizations. In particular, the Haqqani network, founder of the Badri Force is strictly linked to al-Qaeda<sup>18</sup> and the PMC Wagner networks consolidated across Europe among extreme right organizations<sup>19</sup>. And these make propaganda<sup>20</sup>, especially the online component, one of their main weapons<sup>21</sup>. The two case studies were conducted through a content analysis of the propaganda material disseminated by the main social platforms related to the units.

## Badri Force 313

The Taliban faction known as Network or Clan Haqqani has its military-propaganda apparatus<sup>22</sup>: the media house Manba al-Jihad is the mediatic apparatus that presented the Badri Battalion 313<sup>23</sup>. The connection between Manba and al-Qaeda was also

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<sup>17</sup> M.J. Gunther, *Auftragstaktik: The Basis for Modern Military Command?*

<sup>18</sup> Weinbaum and Babbar, *The Tenacious, Toxic Haqqani Network*.

<sup>19</sup> M. Townsend, *Russian Mercenaries in Ukraine Linked to Far-Right Extremists*, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/russian-mercenaries-in-ukraine-linked-to-far-right-extremists>.

<sup>20</sup> A. V. Lieberman, *Terrorism, the Internet, and Propaganda: A Deadly Combination*, vol. 9, 2017, pp. 31.

<sup>21</sup> M. Conway, *Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2017, pp. 77–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408>.

<sup>22</sup> D. Ressler, *Multinational Mujahidin: The Haqqani Network between South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula*, Pan-Islamic Connections: Transnational Networks Between South Asia and the Gulf, Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.) and Laurence Louer, Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190862985.003.0006>.

<sup>23</sup> B. Roggio, *Taliban Promotes Its "Preparation for Jihad"*, FDD's Long War Journal, 14 August 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/08/taliban-promotes-its-preparation-for-jihad.php>.

observed thanks to the data collection concerning the Badri Force as during the research, the official page of Manba al-Jihad was found within the Chirpwire platform, a well-known social media platform created and populated by Qaeda media houses <sup>24</sup>.

The first reference to Badri 313 dates to 2020 with a video, compiled by Manba al-Jihad, entitled 'Badri Strike'. In the video, the suicide operation conducted in 2018 against the compound of the British oil company G4S is extolled, making explicit reference for the first time to a Taliban unit called Badri 313. The video shows how the attack was carefully planned and then carried out by a trained and specialised unit. The video once again confirms the tactical-ideological link to al-Qaeda; it shows a speech by Usadh Mohammad Yasir, a key figure in the alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, praising the suicide operations carried out by Taliban special forces.

In May 2020, the Twitter (now X) channel of the Badri Battalion 313 unit was created. In April 2021, Manba al-Jihad disseminated photo reports of Taliban forces with advanced equipment and vehicles. The propaganda slant is no longer focused on martyrdom and the use of the suicide weapon, but instead focuses on training, technology, firepower, and the use of vehicles. The image produced shows a unit with an offensive set-up but with a propaganda slant closer to a Western special force. With this video, the foundations are laid for the process of 'distancing' from al-Qaeda to build a new image of the Taliban, starting with their soldiers. In the same year in July, the Haqqani media house published a second photo report; in this case, the Graduation of the Badri 313 Battalion is presented. Like the April photos, a special military unit with first-rate equipment is presented, but in this case, the brandification process is perfected. A universally recognisable military nomenclature ('Battalion') and a logo identifying the unit are shown. The Badri Battalion 313 is portrayed as a special unit increasingly similar to its Western counterparts and at the same time assumes its own identity that is recognisable from the outside. The propaganda operation is not limited to presenting the battalion but aims at appropriating or downplaying American military symbolism; the July photo reportage

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<sup>24</sup> M. Lakomy, *Why Do Online Countering Violent Extremism Strategies Not Work? The Case of Digital Jihad*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2022, pp. 1–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2038575>.



features a photograph depicting Taliban soldiers in the act of hoisting the flag of the Afghan emirate, recalling the US seizure of Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima in 1945 (figure 1).



*Figure 1: Photo taken from the “Graduation Day”*

Directly linked to the Badri 313 Battalion is a Twitter page (already active since May 2020), within which we can distinguish two different propaganda productions before and after the conquest of Kabul. In the pre-conquest phase, updates from the front provided by Manba al-Jihad operators and pictures depicting the Badri 313 Battalion are disseminated. In the phase following the conquest of the capital, the page began to spread bulletins and photo reports on operations conducted directly by the unit, adding more and more visual elements specifically designed to create the external image of the battalion. An image that, even more than before, attempts to portray the Taliban as a militarily professional actor and, above all, capable of autonomously guaranteeing the security of its citizens. It is the need for security (from actors like IS and its Wilayah Khorasan) that pushes the Haqqani leadership to re-brand Badri Battalion 313, which changes its name to Badri Force 313 and transforms itself from a special assault battalion (figure 2) to a SWAT unit (figure 3) placed to defend nerve centres. At the same time, the Twitter page fueled the construction of the increasingly 'Western' image of Badri Force

313. The account's profile picture itself no longer showed a militiaman in camouflage with a covered face, but in June 2022 it shows well-equipped, and smiling soldiers can be seen as if they wanted to convey a sense of security and serenity (figure 4). Finally, the profile photo and banner were changed again and those now show a soldier with the Taliban Flag and the official symbols of the Taliban Emirate (figure 5).



Figure 2: first official logo of Badri 313



Figure 3: second official logo of Badri 313



Figure 4: Twitter page Badri 313 06/2022



Figure 5: Twitter page Badri 313 09/2022

## PMC Wagner

The PMC Wagner is an independent group of private mercenaries, but according to various testimonies, it would be a unit used by Russia in conflicts where the possibility of declaring oneself not involved (plausible deniability) is required<sup>25</sup>. Wagner has been regularly mentioned as a front for a Russian proxy war plan, particularly in Africa<sup>26</sup>.

From the use of social media, we noticed a long-lasting and well-established online presence. The PMC maintains a considerable online presence with multiple Telegram channels, RuTube, YouTube, VKontakte (VK), and TikTok<sup>27</sup>. The core of the PMC Wagner propaganda apparatus is focused on promoting its ideology, fighting spirit, and recruiting new members. In its promotional videos, the PMC is portrayed as taking part in training,

<sup>25</sup> C. Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare*, New America, November 2019; N. Reynolds, *Putin's Not-So-Secret Mercenaries: Patronage, Geopolitics, and the Wagner Group*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019; R. Parens, *The Wagner Group's Playbook in Africa: Mali*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, March 2022; J. Stanyard et al., *The Grey Zone Russia's Military, Mercenary and Criminal Engagement in Africa*, February 2023.

<sup>26</sup> ibidem

<sup>27</sup> G. Porrino, *Pro-Wagner Gaming Subculture: How the PMC Gamified Recruitment and Propaganda Processes*, Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società, vol. 17, 2023.

and demonstrations, as well as combat. Given the hybrid nature of the PMC, the communication techniques adopted by the Wagner propaganda machine are aimed at recruitment, radicalization, and financing.

The symbolism of the PMC Wagner combines various neo-Nazi elements with the classical symbols tied to Russian nationalism. On PMC Wagner profiles on Telegram and VK, the mercenaries often published their images with the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) flag, a white supremacist paramilitary group that the US designates as a terrorist organization (figure 6)<sup>28</sup>. Even the symbol of Rusich, a reconnaissance, sabotage, and assault group formed in 2014, directly attached to the PMC Wagner, shows the colors of the RIM flag with the Black Sun, an icon found on the floor of Wewelsburg Castle, the ideological and spiritual center of the SS since 1934 (figure 7). The main "uniting" factors of Rusich, a multi-national group that includes Poles, Norwegians, Bulgarians, and probably Serbs, are national socialism and adherence to native European faiths. We note how the ideological spectrum depicted in the PMC Wagner symbol is at once specific but broad enough to reach different communicative targets. In this spectrum, we find Russian nationalists, anti-Ukraine, white supremacists, and accelerationists.



Why We Fight, Why They Marched - Exclusive Interview with Wagner PMC & Soldier, Wounded In Ukraine

**Figure 6:** Frame of a video published on YouTube by a well-known Russian influencer in which two PMC Wagner mercenaries are interviewed. In the background the RIM flag 09/2023

<sup>28</sup> A. Kruglova, *The Russian Imperial Movement, the War in Ukraine and the Future of Russian State*, 1 September 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/russian-imperial-movement-war-ukraine-and-future-russian-state>.



*Figure 7: Rusich Symbol*

The PMC Wagner has built an impressive online propaganda apparatus that has further expanded the recruitment pool by tapping into international European far-right circuits. The network of far-right and alt-right actors in Europe, especially in North and Western Europe, thanks to football communities and mixed martial arts tournaments was linked to the recruitment apparatus of the PMC Wagner. The data collection shows that the content of propaganda varied before and after the outbreak of hostilities. Football ultras and drills in rooms adorned with neo-Nazi symbols during wartime were added to war bulletins, video messages from commanders, bank details, and crypto wallets for funding. Finally, the affirmation of a media house formed by PMC Wagner veterans, deployed also in Africa and the Middle East, was observed.

Among the actors in this network, we find several parallel units orbiting around the PMC Wagner as embedded support groups. Among them: Rusich; Española, a parallel battalion of Russian ultras led by Alexander Shum and with a special training centre near San Petersburg (figure 8); Serb members, active since the deployment in Syria. Those are linked with several ultras communities and Nidhogg, a little unit near the Scandinavian right-wing militia funded by an actual Wagner member<sup>29</sup>.

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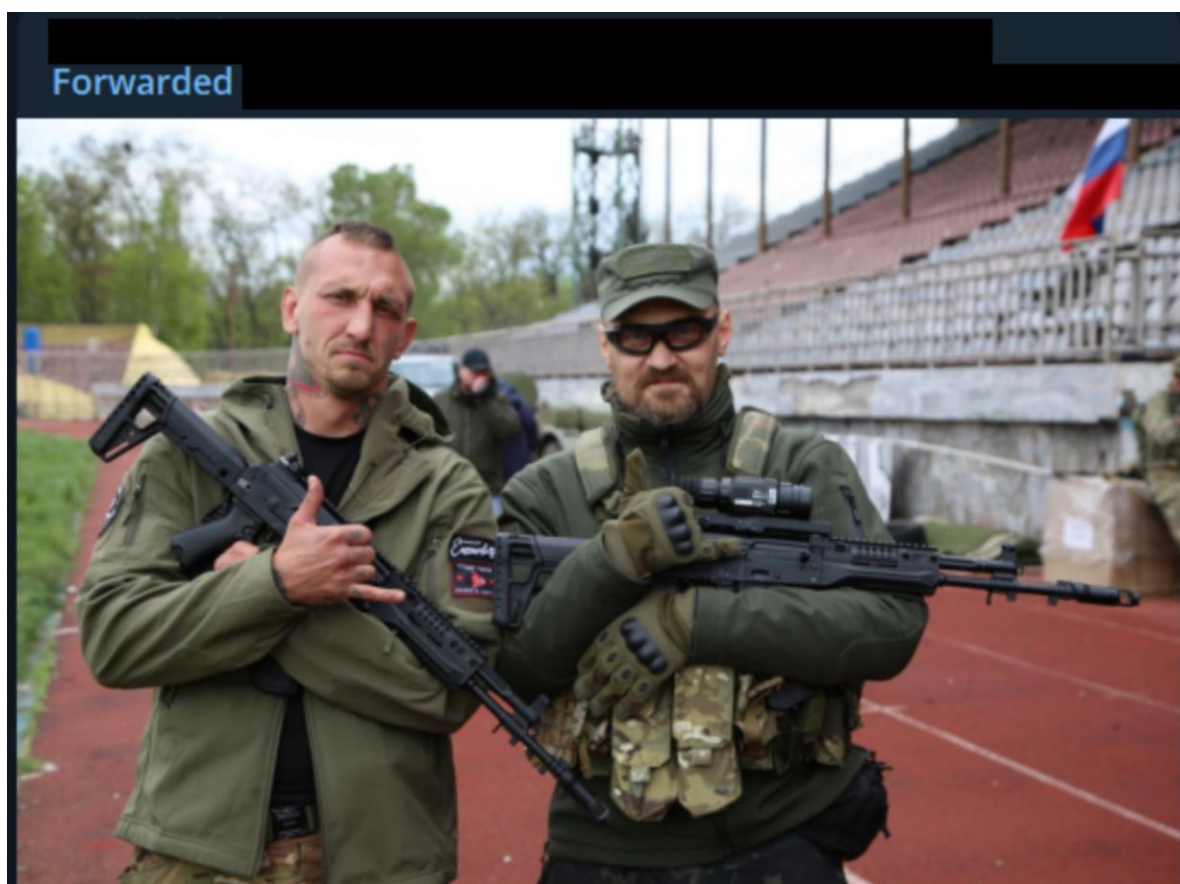
<sup>29</sup> F. Borgonovo et al., *PMC Wagner and Allied Mercenaries, Aftermath of the March*, 26 June 2023, <https://www.itstime.it/w/pmc-wagner-and-allied-mercenaries-aftermath-of-the-march-by-federico-borgonovo-giulia-porrino/>.

What this network of supporters reveals is a spontaneous system of European far-right militarisation. In other words, a soft propaganda and training operation that opened the doors of PMC Wagner to the world of the European extreme right and to all those supporters willing to fight against Ukraine under ethnonationalism ideology (figure 9).

The functioning of the network was observed in the days immediately following the Russian invasion in February 2022. Following the Russian attack, the actors organised themselves as a spontaneous infrastructure to support operations in Ukraine. The network of groups and organisations, being already well structured, became active in a short time and immediately provided support for the recruitment, propaganda, and financing of the PMC Wagner. The network of far-right, alt-right, and supremacist actors rooted over the years organised itself as a spontaneous infrastructure to support operations.



*Figure 8: Espanol propaganda banner*



*Figure 9: Espanola fighters training with PMC Wagner mercenaries inside a football stadium (published on Telegram) 05/2023*

## Comparison

Based on what has been gathered so far, it is possible to draw some elements from the comparison between the forms of propaganda observed in the two previous case studies. As for Badri 313, it is a military unit founded and created by the Haqqani network, by the media company Manba al-Jihad. The latter has not activated specific recruitment or financing systems related to propaganda, characterizing itself more in a demonstrative key. By this we mean the purpose of showing to the world, through Twitter channels, online sites, and ChirpWire, a special military unit that visually resembles Western ones, thus enhancing its affinities with military units considered elite. The aim was therefore almost entirely "aesthetic", that is military propaganda disconnected from the Taliban regime and other factions but aimed at underlining the professionalism and ability performed usually linked to the Western world. The *Auftragstaktik*, therefore, resides in the Haqqani network's characteristic of acting as a sort of Taliban Military Staff, thus

allowing Manba al-Jihad to implement its self-centred propaganda. At the same time, it is subservient to the Taliban's global communication strategy, aimed at showing their status and power both inside and outside the country.

As far as the PMC Wagner is concerned, on the other hand, it has set up its online propaganda apparatus without any intermediary and without resorting to media houses, unlike what was found for Badri 313. PMC Wagner has its channels, also in the light of its genesis as a voluntary unit. This allows it to have its channels whose purpose is not just to implement propaganda aimed at showing off its capabilities. On the contrary, a more complex purpose emerges which also includes financing, recruitment, and radicalization. It is a paramilitary unit that is ideologically well-deployed and well-rooted in far-right Western European networks.

In light of what has been found, therefore, it emerges that on the one hand, there is experimentation of Propaganda Mission Command with extreme flexibility and independence by both leaders and individual military units and at the same time experimentation of a form of tense propaganda to show warfare. On the other hand, there is an effective implementation of Wagner's tactics, tools, and individual communicative propaganda initiatives, which implemented the Auftragstaktik in a complete and all-encompassing form for military reasons. This is due in particular to the very nature of PMC Wagner as a private military company unofficially framed in the army but at the same time characterized by a hybrid nature, that is, capable of incorporating the most diverse shades of war spheres. Also, in light of the foregoing in terms of changing the nature of conflicts in a hybrid key, the communication and propaganda sphere stands out, in particular, to fight by attracting recruits and funding at the same time.

## **Conclusions**

The nature and forms through which conflicts manifest and develop are undergoing profound change, now revealing the characteristics of Hybrid Warfare that the doctrine has long identified and debated. These processes of hybridization of the conflict are now firmly placed alongside the military component of other forms of conflict, which insinuate themselves through the legal loopholes that are the result of a determination of war that has now profoundly changed. This allows a plethora of actors, both state and non-state,



to use the countless recent technological transformations to conduct hostile actions of various kinds.

Among the most relevant possibilities in the course of this research, there is the use of propaganda no longer as an ancillary tool of military action, but as an autonomous form of warfare and a weapon in its own right. In conducting this analysis, the focus was concentrated on two specific actors who are of particular interest due to their peculiar characteristics and the scenarios in which they operate, namely the Badri Force 313 and the PMC Wagner. The comparative analysis of the two units reveals the use of Propaganda Mission Command with different purposes and means. The Badri force set up a muscular propaganda based on the use of aesthetics and aimed at targeting the West. PMC Wagner (and its alliance system) in addition to reporting news from the conflict engaged in massive online and offline recruitment campaigns. The materials found on the social platforms make it possible to appreciate the specificity of this new form of conflict management, now full of a hybrid nature as in the present cases in which the two actors considered were involved. In addition, their extremist nature is also relevant (see Table 1). The propaganda conducted in the war theatres considered by these two units allows us to appreciate the extremist nature of these two units. In addition, their extremist ideologies are linked in a more or less structured form to extremist groups which now make propaganda and the communicative sphere one of their main weapons. This phenomenon is of even greater interest in the framework of studies on the nature of conflicts and the future of warfare as it underlines on the one hand the ramification of propaganda activity that benefits from technological innovations to reach an ever-wider audience and provide increasingly sophisticated content. On the other hand, the contribution highlights the fragmentation of propaganda as far as its authors are concerned, and the use made of it. Indeed, the role of non-state actors is increasingly emerging, not necessarily linked to state authorities in the Weberian sense of the term, who play no longer a marginal role in the framework of modern conflicts, exploiting propaganda as an autonomous and independent tool of warfare.

**Table 1:** Propaganda mission command categorization

Unit	Type of unit	Social Media	Ecosystem	Affiliation	Propaganda	Symbology
Badri Force 313	Special operation force	Multiple platforms linked to the institutions	Centralized and institutional	Haqqani network and government	Muscular Propaganda	Jihadism and al-Qaeda
Wagner PMC	Private military company	Multiple platforms linked to soldiers, influencers, and leadership	Decentralized and semi-institutional	Yevgeny Prigozhin	Recruitment propaganda	Neonazism and Russian right-wing extremism

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