Hybrid Security Regimes in Practice

22 JULY 2026

Oezlem Has



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Dr Özlem Has

Conceptualising Hybrid Sovereignty and Hybrid Security Regimes

As the contemporary security landscape becomes increasingly blurred—collapsing distinctions between state and non-state actors, public and private sovereignty, and even war and peace—it has given rise to what many scholars describe as hybrid security regimes, where coercive power is shared among formal institutions, informal networks, private intermediaries, and ideologically aligned auxiliaries operating in flexible and overlapping ways (Luckham & Kirk, 2013; Schroeder et al., 2014; Lawrence, 2017; Stojanović & Pavlović, 2021). In these systems, sovereignty is seem-

ingly exercised not only through formal hierarchies but through shifting, relational, and often opaque networks of authority.

Swati Srivastava's conceptualisation of "hybrid sovereignty" captures this dynamic well, demonstrating how the state's supposedly indivisible authority coexists with highly divisible practices of governance enacted by state and nonstate actors (Srivastava, 2022). Viewed through this lens, hybrid security regimes can be described not simply by the presence of multiple coercive actors but by how they are orchestrated within the state's coercive architecture, particularly through ambiguity, deniability, and institutional layering that expand executive authority while minimising political, legal, and diplomatic constraints.

Building on this conceptual foundation, in what follows, I will briefly analyse the emerging hybrid security regimes of Russia and Turkey as two illustrative contexts that provide a rich backdrop for examining the interplay between formal and informal coercive structures and the fragmentation and strategic orchestration of authority. Given the breadth of the phenomenon, I will focus specifically on each state's relationship with private military companies (the Wagner Group in Russia and SADAT Defence in Turkey) as analytical entry points into their respective hybrid security configurations.

Rusia: Patronage, Informality, and Hybrid Coercive Power

Russia's hybrid security architecture is best understood through the broader political ecology that emerged in the early 2000s, when Vladimir Putin began orchestrating a system in which formal institutions operate alongside informal patronage networks and personalised loyalties. Within this ecology, the official security services—most notably the FSB, SVR, GRU, and other branches of siloviki —occupy a dominant role, exerting influence that far exceeds their bureaucratic remit. As existing research bluntly demonstrates, their activities routinely intersect with business interests, political elites, and irregular armed formations, allowing the Kremlin to advance strategic aims while preserving deniability (Goode, 2010; Taylor, 2011; Meakins, 2018; Gomza, 2023). As Potočňák and Mareš succinctly note, in this hybrid system, "[...] all significant businesses [...] do business as usual, but they are also willing and prepared to be summoned by the state authorities any time and for any specific reason" (Potočňák & Mareš, 2022, p. 188). The system's effectiveness thus stems not only from the dense entanglement of formal agencies and informal coercive networks operating under, alongside, or even against official structures, but also from its capacity to swiftly neutralise any individual or entity that challenges its boundaries.

The rise and fall of the Wagner Group provides the most vivid contemporary illustration of this hybrid dynamic. Between 2014 and 2023, Wagner emerged as a key instrument of Russian power projection in Africa, the Middle East, and Ukraine, largely facilitated by the close alignment of

interests among Vladimir Putin (the ruling elite), Dmitry Utkin (a GRU-affiliated intelligence officer), and Yevgeny Prigozhin (a business oligarch) (Bellingcat, 2020; House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2023). When this alignment collapsed in early 2023 over Prigozhin's dispute with military leaders over the war in Ukraine, it revealed the vulnerability of this patronage-driven model (lacking legal foundations) to the rapid removal of non-compliant actors (Has, 2025). The result was the controversial 23 August 2023 plane crash that killed Wagner leaders and the incorporation of its forces into the Defence Ministry as Africa Corps (Al Jazeera, 2023).

These patterns make clear that Russia's hybrid security regime is not a by-product of institutional weakness, but a deliberate strategy for sustaining personalised rule. By dispersing coercive power across opaque networks of security elites, business patrons, and irregular armed actors, the Kremlin appears to maintain flexibility while evading responsibility for violence carried out in its name. The abrupt dismantling of Wagner underscores how this system ultimately operates as a hierarchy of loyalty, where actors exist only so long as they serve executive interests and disappear the moment they cease to be useful.

Turkey: Ideological Framing and the Reconfiguration of Security Governance

Parallel to Russia's early-2000s political reconfiguration, Turkey entered its own period of transformation during the same decade. With the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, the long-dominant military bureaucracy was gradually weakened and replaced by a more centralised and executive-driven security structure shaped by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Sözen, 2010; Cop & Zihnioğlu, 2017; Oğuzlu, 2022). The failed 2016 coup further accelerated this process, allowing the presidency to consolidate control over the armed forces and the National Intelligence Service (MIT) and to construct networks of defence-industry actors (such as ASELSAN, ROKETSAN, BAYKAR) and private military companies (such as Akademi Sancak, SADAT Defence) that became extensions of Turkey's hybridised strategic identity (Intelligence Online, 2018; Bastian, 2024; Jaklin, 2024; Seren, 2025).

Nevertheless, unlike Russia's reliance on covert informality, Turkey's hybrid security configuration operates openly while remaining strategically ambiguous, drawing coherence as much from ideology as from institutional design. Neo-Ottoman, nationalist, and Islamist-conservative themes have played a particular role in shaping this vision. The state's engagement with SADAT Defence illustrates how such ideological frames become operationalised within the country's hybrid security governance. SADAT's ideological proximity to the AKP largely emerges from overlapping discourses of Islamic conservatism, military resurgence among Muslim states, and neo-Ottoman strategic imaginaries (SADAT, n.d.; Has, 2025). The appointment

of SADAT founder Adnan Tanrıverdi as Erdoğan's chief military adviser after the 2016 coup marked the integration of this explicitly Islamist-nationalist worldview into the state's security apparatus. During Tanrıverdi's tenure from 2016 to 2020, various reports alleged that SADAT provided training and logistical assistance to armed groups in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh, suggesting a role in extending Ankara's ideologically driven hybrid security posture into several conflict theatres (Spyer, 2018; Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, 2020; Powers, 2021).

SADAT's role within this architecture thus provides a window into the deeper logic of Turkey's hybrid security model, one in which ideological alignment becomes a means of structuring coercive capacity beyond formal institutions. Seen in this broader frame, Turkey's trajectory demonstrates how hybrid security governance can serve as a tool for deepening authoritarian control. By dismantling the autonomy of formal coercive institutions and replacing them with networks of defence-industry partners and ideologically driven auxiliaries, the regime has seemingly created a multilayered coercive apparatus that operates both within and beyond the state.

Conclusion

Viewed through the lens of hybrid sovereignty, Russia and Turkey illustrate how contemporary states renegotiate coercive authority across multiple institutional and informal domains. While Russia exemplifies a model in which informal patronage networks, security elites, and deniable armed actors are deliberately mobilised to sustain personalised rule, Turkey illustrates how ideology can be used to legitimise similar hybrid arrangements operating openly yet with strategically ambiguous boundaries. Within this landscape, actors such as Wagner and SADAT Defence appear to function as integral components of each state's broader hybrid security apparatus, enhancing flexibility and extending the reach of state-aligned coercive practices. These configurations ultimately underscore that hybrid security regimes are not symptoms of institutional weakness but deliberate political strategies that blend opacity, ideological framing, and institutional layering to reinforce authoritarian control and extend state power across domestic and regional arenas.

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