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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
PMCs	Private Military Contractors
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSCs	Private Security Companies
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States
VOA	Voice of America
WSJ	Wall Street Journal

Abstract

The research paper aims to unpack the process of news production, particularly the Western Representation of Chinese Private Security Companies in Africa, with a focus on U.S. based news media outlets namely The Voice of America and The Wall Street Journal. The approach for analysis will take account of the Critical Discourse Analysis method along with deploying tools of media analysis such as Focalisation and Framing to assemble a textual and visual analysis of the contents of the two respective news articles. Through the analysis, the research intends to reflect on how news is articulated and what is the larger intention behind the presentation. As part of the analysis, the paper utilizes Hall's Theory of Representation to illustrate the Agenda-Setting phenomenon used by the news media to develop stories. With several studies conducted to understand the cause of rising tensions between the West and China, this paper intends to inspect the aspect of how the news media contributes to serving the pleasure of intensifying the geopolitical relationship with the transnational actors involved.

Relevance to Development Studies

The study of the Western representation of China and its presence in the Global South opens up the possibility of understanding how events of geopolitics relate to bringing about development. Representation can take place through various means, but choosing media representation to elaborate the analysis offers to identify minute details leading to a consequence. Media have been a long-existing source of information and also an agent of influencing serious world events. Research regarding media presentation shows a significant relationship between how the representation of a story has a consequence on how that story will evolve as a reality. It is also no secret as to how the stories portrayed in media directly or indirectly involve the depiction of a specific side of the story and also involve a particular bias. There are always a few things to consider while conducting a media analysis. It is who is speaking, what are they discussing, who are they representing, and why is the representation the way it is. Identifying these lets one look at the broader picture behind the media production to learn how media articulates and also how the presentation brings forth an influence upon the readers.

In addition, considering the involvement of China in the third world and the West taking responsibility to portray the presence, it births the inquisitiveness of why two well-functioning economies seek to mark a connection in Africa. Besides, taking into light the rise of the private military in the modern world ignites the contemplation of how they are an important instrument relating to the factor of conflict in development studies. Therefore, through my research on media representation and the private military, I consider it to be an opportunity to shed light on two crucial aspects of development studies and more importantly be able to establish a connection between the two to validate how developmental factors are in inter-relation to one another.

Keywords

Media representation, Private Military Companies, West, China, Agenda-Setting, Geopolitics, Textual analysis, Visual analysis

Chapter 1

1.1 Research Problem

A study conducted by Peng emphasized analysing how China was being represented by the New York and the Los Angeles Times between 1992-2001. Her research established the occurring of Chinese representation in a largely negative tone especially when it's based on political contexts (Peng, 2004).

The Western media, with high popularity across the world, has made a stage for itself to be heard among readers. The portrayal of several global events through the lens of Western media has been quite crucial in setting opinions among the masses. For instance, when one discusses the Arab world, the first thing to prompt is terrorism. When there are mentions of Africa, it is hunger and poverty come to one's mind. What is important to note here is that although these might be a part of the reality in those regions, specifically having engraved the images of terrorism and poverty to be associated upon remark is how the Western media has exercised "Agenda-Setting" through media representations. One of the presumed reasons behind such an approach of representation is that the West is conscious of its superiority in the global order and therefore tries to take that as an advantage in forming public opinions that adhere to serving their interests. Considering the additional episode involving Chinese PSCs in Africa, the West has chosen to portray them as a threat due to the rise of the Chinese economy and defence, as well as to the fact that the West has conventionally offered assistance to Africa. With China becoming a leading economy and also taking over the African region in the name of development, the West believes it will bring down the global support it has established over the years.

Therefore, the central problem of the research is to take account of the already presented facts, such as the media representation and to understand the process of media production. The issue is that when readers grasp media, they do not usually consider the motives crushed into the media-making process, and they fall into absorbing the narrative that is presented to them. As there has been evidence of media pieces being responsible for altering global events, the research problem is how the production process has not been under consideration and why it should be taken into account. With there being developments since Peng's study on Western representation of China, this research provides a fresh update on how the representation has evolved.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of my research is to unpack the multiple layers present in the representation of a story. Starting from understanding the meaning produced through the text and images to decoding the reason behind the production. The other aspects to be under inspection are finding out whose perspective is being distributed through the news piece and also why they intend to spread that certain "Agenda". Consequently, to understand why the readers will consume the "agenda" is another question to be answered through the research by taking into consideration the social relations of power. The extensive part of the research will be to look into the more prominent quandary of decoding the role geopolitics plays in

representational strategies. In the end, the research aims to bring about a stance of viewing international discord through everyday means of communication and to comprehend the broader meanings in presentation. The purpose is to have the readers question the manufacturing of their consent regarding the opinion they have about the specific geopolitical issue and also for them to understand the production process of the opinion formed.

A key focus of this study is on discovering how texts in news media are used to steer narratives about sector like defence in a political context and also how consumption of that constructed information relates to the emergence of geopolitical contestations, which in turn may threaten peace. The expanded persistence of this research is to unravel the deeper contextualization of the research problem by considering the underlying factors involved in the news-making process. These factors include the language that is being used in the text, taking account of the positionality of the news media house, and elaborating these traits based on the historical relationship between the West, especially the U.S. and China. When all these elements are combined, the analysis may lead to comprehending why the readers choose to absorb the news delivered to them.

The practical implication of this research is to spread consciousness regarding the news-making process, especially to readers. It is imperative to reflect on who is telling the story, what is the background of the story and also with what intention the story is being told. The idea is to make the readers inquisitive of the opinions they form based on the news they are viewing and to develop a critical approach in analysing the motivation behind the manufacturing of a news media piece.

1.3 Research Questions

How does the Western media portray the Chinese PSCs in the African region?

Sub questions:

1. To what extent do historical and contemporary geopolitical relations play a role in the way US media representations of China?
2. In what ways do the media representation strategies condition the agenda-setting of the US foreign policy towards China?

1.4 Positionality

I situate myself as a researcher who believes in the consigning of a multipolar world. I support the notion of having a variety of fast-growing economies that together will be able to help the Global South in overcoming hurdles in the way of their development. Having had a background in defence and security studies, understanding how media portrays the private military and the larger interferences involved in the production process will enable me to familiarise the readers with concepts preparing them to understand how it works in shaping their opinions. In addition, I am driven to learn about this subject through a research analysis to strengthen my knowledge supporting my interest in Conflict Studies. In no way do I endorse or defend the information in both the articles of analysis.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

Both news articles provide diversity in terms of writing styles, content and intent of the information present in the publication. With one of the authors being a woman and the other being two men, it provides a measure for understanding the various lenses of the perspective. In addition, as both articles draw the same point of reference, it has the potential to develop an analysis that contributes to understanding the basis of the representation that China is framed into.

As for limitations, given that the articles do not specify much about the history or background of the context in question, it becomes challenging to link it up to the broader narrative. Also, as the news articles are published digitally, it is not possible to figure out what section of society consumes and also blocks the prospect of exploring the angle of understanding to what extent the consumption of these news pieces has a consequence on shaping public opinion and what exactly do the readers discern from the information provided to them. Also, with regards to the word limit and time constrain to conduct research, the paper was unable to further develop establishing a relation of the gender dynamics present in the narratives under analysis. It was also not possible to explore the subject of how these representations are received by the readers and how their historical conception of the narratives shaped their opinion regarding the portrayal.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research paper will benefit from a variety of approaches, such as the theory of representation, agenda-setting theory and theory of journalism in International Relations.

Representation theory:

The representation theory proposed by Stuart Hall highlights how people make meaning out of language (Hall, p. 3, 1997). It is a process in which people identify the characteristics of a represented narrative by the language used for description. The meaning produced by the people may not be the absolute reality but a version of made-up reality that holds importance among those who perceive it. Meanings that are interpreted through the use of language are often how one understands the concept in relation to how the world views it. Despite people having the autonomy of individual perceptions, meanings are produced when they are in traction of being constructed by the multiplication of multiple perceptions and understanding. Therefore, language is a means of communication that lends a hand in producing meaning. Hall states, "Language, in this sense, is a signifying practice. Any representational system that functions in this way can be thought of as working, broadly speaking, according to the principles of representation through language. Representation, here, is closely tied up with both identity and knowledge" (Hall, p.5, 1997).

Under the concept of representation, there are three theories of representation as well, as presented by Stuart Hall. These three theories explain how the representation of meaning through language works. We may call these the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approaches (Hall, p.24, 1997).

The reflective approach utilises language as an instrument to make aware of what is happening in the real world. It allows one to make sense of real-time events by using language as a medium to learn about them. This approach is mostly used to make meaning out of common narratives, such as agreeing on how one defines a chair, a tree, a dress etc.

The intentional approach, as stated by Hall, translates that "It holds that it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean" (Hall, p.25, 1997). Basically, this measure uses language to make one believe in the values that the author or presenter wants the viewers to perceive. It is a technique to make people agree with the narrative that the presenter abides by.

The third approach, which is the constructionist approach, as defined by Hall is "According to this approach, we must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual

systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others" (Hall, p.25, 1997).

Out of these three approaches presented by Stuart Hall, the best-suited approach to apply in the research paper seems to be the Intentional Approach. To justify the use of this theory of representation approach, other theoretical concepts, such as agenda-setting will be drawn into comparison to establish a correlation. In the course of this research, the intentional approach will provide the opportunity to dissect the larger reasoning behind the U.S.-based newspapers to depict China, its resources and engagements in a way that eventually shifts the presentation to be in alignment with the new media's drafted perception.

Agenda-Setting theory:

As McCombs defines, "The news media have a major influence on the focus of public attention, the specific issues that members of the public regard as most priority at any moment. Beyond this influence, the news media also direct our attention to specific aspects of these issues. This combined influence of the news media on the public's attention to and learning the key details of the major issues of the day is referred to as the agenda-setting role of the news media" (McCombs, p. 351, 2015). In simpler words, the term agenda here is not literally ideal to describe the use of a certain rationale, but instead to utilise the interest of the readers and base that as a motivation to constantly cover the preferred narrative.

McCombs, in his extended work on Agenda-Setting, states there are three levels of Agenda-Setting. The first level is when the public is attracted to a certain narrative. However, the second level of agenda-setting is, "When the media present an object—and when the public thinks about and talks about an object—some attributes are emphasized. Others are mentioned less frequently, some only in passing" (McCombs, p.352, 2015). It tells us how media cherry-picks certain aspects of salience and builds on that to present a narrative that will attract the audience. On the third level of agenda-setting, "The third level of agenda-setting effects theorizes that the salience of the bundled relationships among objects and attributes are also transferred from the news media to the public. Theoretically central to this perspective is an associative network model of memory. Rather than conceptualizing our mental representations as a hierarchical or linear structure as implied in the traditional understanding of agenda-setting theory, this associative network model holds that the representation operates pictorially, diagrammatically, or cartographically" (McCombs, p.353, 2015).

To understand agenda-setting theory further, it becomes essential to identify how news agencies figure which narrative is worth covering. Taking examples from McComb's explanation, it is often found that news media houses, through research surveys and public information teams, investigate what entices the public to be drawn towards a subject. McCombs states that agenda-setting also comes with an expense. "The agenda-setting role of the media has consequences beyond the focusing of public attention. These consequences encompass both attitudes and opinions and observable behaviour. In terms of attitudes and opinions, it is important to distinguish two aspects, first the strength of opinion, beginning with the fundamental point of whether an opinion even exists. Strength of opinion also distinguishes between weakly and strongly held opinions regardless of whether those opinions are positive or negative. Second, is the widely measured direction of opinion, whether some object or attribute is regarded in a positive or negative light. The greater the amount of news coverage, the greater the salience of that person among the public and the greater the likelihood of

having an opinion about them. A strong relationship also was found between the pattern of news coverage and the strength of these opinions" (McCombs, p.355, 2015).

Applying the concept of Agenda-Setting to analyse the findings in my research will help in unpacking how the U.S-based news media houses are choosing to highlight information about China in a preconceived pattern, which in turn is also a narrative that favours the political interests of the U.S. and is an attempt to make the readers side with the drafted perception.

Theorising journalism on International Relations:

Scholar's state, "The dominant paradigm in the field of press–state relations is that news coverage of international affairs follows the lead of the policymaking elite. There are different explanations for why this happens. The indexing theory argues that 'mass media news is indexed implicitly to the dynamics of governmental debate" (Shahin, p.2, 2022). This establishes an argument that the media presentations are used to influence commoners by the elites and policymakers. Such a presumption relates to Chomsky's concept of 'manufacturing consent', which theorises how the elites control the perceptions of the masses to be in alignment with them through the use of news media (Chomsky, 2008). In some cases, it has been shown that news media takes part in government-influenced narratives when nudged by a directive from the government (Shahin, p.3, 2022). Studies have also discovered that news media, when it comes to framing international news, mostly depend on government officials to supervise how the narrative should be presented (D'Angelo, Kuypers, p.267, 2009).

It is also crucial to understand how power plays an important role when it comes to international relations and journalism correlating one another. Scholars distinctly identify the types of power that are relevant to understanding news media representation of narratives about international relations. Therefore, the most relevant theory regarding power in international relations journalism is Productive Power. "A study of productive power draws attention to 'systems of signification and meaning (which are structured, but not themselves structures), and to networks of social forces perpetually shaping one another'. Productive power is thus much more diffuse and concerned with discursive processes and practices that produce identities and interests by giving meaning to them." (Shahin, p.5, 2022).

Robinson's work on "Theorizing the Influence of Media on World Politics", provides the theoretical backing of relating how news media influence can, in turn, also help the elites to work in achieving their values and goals. He states, "this concept enables us to understand how news media texts do not simply replicate reality, but can actually be constructed so as to produce a particular understanding or perception of a problem. In terms of covering elite debates, the extent to which news media coverage adopts one particular framing of a problem can be said to be indicative of the extent to which media coverage has taken sides in that debate" (Robinson, p.532, 2001). The figure below shows how the interaction works.

Table 1 The policy–media interaction model and theories of media–state relations

<i>Level of elite consensus</i>	<i>Media–state relationship</i>	<i>Role of the media</i>
Elite consensus	Media operates within 'sphere of consensus' (Hallin)	Media 'manufactures consent' for official policy
Elite dissensus	Media operates within 'sphere of legitimate controversy' (Hallin)	Media reflects elite dissensus as predicted by Hallin and Bennett
Elite dissensus <i>plus</i> policy uncertainty within government and critically framed media coverage	Media takes sides in political debate and becomes an active participant	Media functions to influence direction of government policy

Table 1 - Robinson's Media-Policy Interaction Model, 2001
Source: [European Journal of Communication](#)

2.2 Methodology

The primary tool utilised for the analysis of the data in the research paper is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA regards language as a social practice. The research technique provides the opportunity to study discreet characteristics of the relationship between society and its aspects. The larger picture is to bring about knowledge regarding the existence of discourse and elements such as politics, economics, culture etc., through the use of language. "CDA particularly focuses on (groups) relation of power resisted by social group members through talk and text." (Salma, p.2, 2018).

Considering that I aim to analyse the concept of "Agenda-Setting" through news pieces, CDA suits as an appropriate research method because "CDA commonly focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimation, the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds (indirect actions) of people in the interest of the powerful. Besides, a school, a subdiscipline, or field of discourse analysis does not characterize by CDA, however it categorize an critical approach, position or the corner of studying talk and text explicitly. It (may) pay attention to all dimation of discourse, such as grammar (phonology, syntax, semantics), schematics organization, strategies of pragmatic, speech acts, interaction, etc. In the other hand, it also pay attention to other dimitions like semiotic (sound, music, picture, film, videos, gesture, etc) on communicative events." (Salma, p.3, 2018).

The other tools for analysis are focalisation and framing. These two tools will be utilised in unpacking the details present in the news articles in question. Both focalisation and framing have been two very essential tools for analysing texts and visuals presented in news media.

"Focalization, a term coined by Genette (1972), may be defined as a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld" (Eff, 2020). In other words, focalization allows one to understand whose worldview is embedded in the story and also who is delivering the story, and to whom is the story intended to reach. Also, as other scholars state, "Focalisation is defined as the connection between the subject of vision, and that which is seen. There is always a subject of focalisation - be it the narrator, or one of the characters- as well as an object of focalisation: that which the focalizer perceives, and thus transmits in an always partial light. The distribution of focalisation determines the distribution of power in the story: who sees, who speaks and who is seen and spoken of? -and thus it determines the sides which the reader takes" (Meijer, p.375, 1993).

Subsequently, for the other tool of media analysis, scholars argue that "Frames can be located in four places in the communication process; within the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture itself. In the context of political and mass communication, frames influence how people understand, remember, evaluate, and act upon a problem" (Papacharissi, Oliveira, p.53, 2008). The standout quality of this tool is to make use of a particular fragment discussed in the news piece and to enhance attention towards it. The interpretation is brought about by highlighting the aspect of a "perceived reality", in this case, the growing Chinese influence in the African region through the use of their Private Security Companies to guard the BRI project. This framework emphasises the ability of a text to form a brand-new reality and to have that particular reality gain importance over other existing realities. For the broader implication, it means when the news media house decides to present a certain story and selectively addresses parts of it in an accentuated way, it is supposed to send a directive to the readers that makes them consume that perceived reality. Frames are meant to alleviate a particular entity's perspective and "reality" and serve it to the readers so that they can be influenced into collaborating with the significance of the narrative.

Visual analysis frames such as Address, Offer and Shot have also been utilised for analysing the photographs in the VOA and WSJ news articles.

2.3 Data Collection

I have conducted my research by analyzing the text and visual content of two news articles. The first news article is titled "How Chinese Private Security Companies in Africa Differ From Russia's" by Kate Bartlett for the Voice of America. "Voice of America (VOA) is the largest U.S. international broadcaster, providing news and information in more than 40 languages to an estimated weekly audience of more than 326 million people. Through World War II, the Cold War, the fight against global terrorism, and the struggle for freedom around the globe today, VOA exemplifies the principles of a free press. VOA is part of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), the government agency that oversees all non-military, U.S. international broadcasting. It is funded by the U.S. Congress" (VOA). VOA has an AllSides Media Bias Rating™ of Center (2023).

The second news article is "How China's Overseas Security Forces Differ From Wagner" by James T. Areddy and Austin Ramzy for the Wall Street Journal. The Wall Street Journal is a U.S.-based news media house specialising in producing news related to

economics around the world. The Journal places special focus on drawing attention to American engagements and also works on tracing the course of globalization and its developments (Wall Street Journal). Statistics show that the Wall Street Journal has a "moderate right" bias overall through having an independent editorial network (Meylan, 2021).

Both articles serve a similar theme, which is to segregate the newly emerging Chinese Private Security Companies from the Russian Private Military Contractor named Wagner, about both their presence in the African region. I have taken the aid of theories, concepts and tools of media analysis such as Hall's theory of Representation, Agenda-Setting etc., as previously illustrated in the preceding sections to build on the research.

In addition, for information relating to government statements, and geopolitical history I have referred to government websites, news media portals, also policy papers from scholarly publications to support the findings of my research.

Chapter 3: Introduction

3.1 The evolution of Western Media representation

Hatchen, in his piece called "Triumph of Western News Communication," states how the popularity of widespread Western media consumption accelerated during the Cold War. "Western versions of the news and Western methods of news reporting (applied with professional standards of objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and right of access, and braced with a healthy scepticism of news from official sources) have become widely accepted. Western news agencies, along with print and broadcast journalists (just a few hundred professionals), have essentially reported the world's news to itself" (Hatchen, p.21, 1993). The remarkable popularity grew to reputation at the cost of the fall of communism, presenting the West to triumph over a unipolar world with sincere values of democracy. The development of Western media to become the leading source of information consumption for the greatest parts of the world then went on to integrate bargains in favour of promoting free speech and a capitalist world order. As Hatchen mentions, "The Western-dominated international news system, despite its inadequacies, moves a great deal of news, data, and pictures at much faster speed and volume than ever before, and this flow will likely increase in the years ahead. Major world news events, enhanced by colour television via communication satellite, frequently generate immense impact on the international system as have, for example, the famine in Somalia and the civil strife in disintegrating Yugoslavia" are some aspects of the reality one lives in today that was predicted decades ago (Hatchen, p.33, 1993).

Western media soon began cracking down on reporting issues diverse than global politics in the early 2000s. News then started to develop around issues of the third world, especially regarding hunger, poverty, climate change, economies, terrorism and much more. With the 9/11 attacks came a wave where the Western media took upon reporting about terrorist groups, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also how the Western militaries were to tackle missions in those regions to eradicate the alarming threat. Subsequently, the popularity of Western media allowed for the carving of certain shaped perceptions regarding various parts of the world. Also, this led to the West utilising all forms of media as a tool to inflict their political and ideological viewpoints upon the readers and viewers.

3.2 Defining "Agenda-Setting" in Media Representation

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw investigated agenda-setting in media studies. According to their analysis, "Agenda setting theory is used in a political ad, campaigns, business news, PR (public relation) etc. The main concept associated with the theory is gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is in charge of and has control of the selection of content discussed in the media. It is assumed that the public cares mostly about the product of media gatekeeping. Editors are the main gatekeepers of the media itself. The news media decides 'what' events to broadcast and show through the media 'gates' based on 'newsworthiness'." (Communication Theory).

There are several types of agenda settings, out of which this paper aims to bring light to the agenda-setting practised by the media. In this type of agenda setting, the media,

through its various forms, be it broadcast, digital or print formats, emphasises stressing a specific subject and aims to draw attention towards it. Media decides which story is relevant or worth telling the readers and perhaps even determines what parts of the story are to be revealed. Such a selective method of presenting a story generates the possibility for readers to evolve a perception that is based on the cherry-picked narrative catered to them. Hence, authorising media to be on a pedestal where their arranged story gets to decide how the public shapes their biases.

The agenda-setting theory has assumptions. First, the media influences what is the "reality". The media does not present the reality or actual scenario through its coverage. Instead, it is a variation or an interpretation of what the actual reality is. The story presented to the readers is a screened version of reality. Second, the media prioritises covering one issue over the other. The constant coverage of a certain subject induces readers to take an interest in that and possibly refrain from learning about other issues that might require more attention (McCombs, Shaw, 1972).

McCombs and Shaw also analysed how the phenomenon of Agenda-Setting takes place in two diverse steps. At the first step, it is how the media decides what story or issue is worth reporting. The media does this by examining how one issue will get more attention over the other upon coverage. This process is called object salience. Therefore, when the media chooses to intensify coverage of one issue over the other, it brings about a greater audience. The second step involves how the media presents the subject to the readers. The method of object salience allows the media to articulate the prioritisation of the story among the readers. Also, it allows the media to influence how and in what ways the readers will react and perceive the story fed to them (McCombs, Shaw, 1972).

In the interest of this research paper, the best-suited aspect influencing the phenomenon of Agenda-Setting is 'Politics'. Through the representation of a particular factor that determines global relations among countries, it is set to be essential in dispersing a narrative that serves political interests. Maurer states "The central question of political agenda-setting research is whether political actors adopt the issue agenda of the news media in various aspects ranging from communicating about issues that are prominently discussed in the news media to prioritizing issues from the news media agenda in political decision making" (Maurer, 2021). This tells us the usage of news media to support political agendas is a reciprocation of serving political goals through the agenda-setting practises in news media presentations.

Taking the example of the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, its widespread coverage allowed readers to once again focus on the threat of the Taliban that Afghanistan was constantly wavering around. As for most of the world, there is little to no significance in the everyday lives of readers regarding what happens in Afghanistan. Despite that, the withdrawal of the U.S. troops made readers eager to be aware of the situation. Quite surprisingly, even in the U.S., the media chose to cover the atrocities that came along with the Taliban rampage in Afghanistan and disregarded highlighting serious issues such as the COVID crisis, natural disaster crisis etc., happening across America at the same time. "A foregrounding of a particular issue (Afghanistan), and ascribing certain attributes to it (a return to a regressive order) thus formed the first-level and second-level agenda setting respectively in this case" (Drew, 2023).

Similarly, taking into account the recent pieces of evidence of how the Western media, especially the U.S. portrayed China during the Covid-19 pandemic provides a ground to understand the negative presentation of China better. A study conducted by Jia and Lu

in 2021 explains how media acts as a "fourth branch" of the U.S. Government by taking reference to a contentious opinion piece published by the WSJ. The paper states "The op-ed on the *Wall Street Journal* describes China as "the real sick man of Asia." In addition, a cluster of ferociously negative names are slung onto China to describe the coronavirus as "the Wuhan virus," "the Belt & Road Initiative pandemic," "the China virus," and so on. Second, the blaming technique is applied. On top of such negative name-calling, these media tend to blame the Chinese leadership, the political system, and finally Chinese food culture for eating pangolins. Finally, the taming technique is used to constrain, isolate, or quarantine China. One goal behind such a China threat strategy is to fan American or foreign businesses to move (back) to the United States out of China. Another goal is to create a public opinion environment that would be conducive to some American groups' litigations against China." (Jia, Lu, 2021).

Hence, by applying the concept of Agenda-Setting in my research, it will aid in drawing a proportion to understand the representation of China through the lens of defence and economics in the BRI, which, as deduced by Jia and Lu were portrayed in a stern method while discussing the Covid 19 pandemic with a deliberate blame on China by the WSJ.

3.3 Background of Private Military/Security

"Mercenaries were long considered an honourable, albeit bloody trade, and only the past 200 years stigmatized them. As for the previous 4,000+ years, mercenaries were a feature—often the main feature—of war. The word *mercenary* comes from the Latin *merces* (wages or pay) and is no different than the *soldiers* or pay due to fighters, from which the word "soldier" is derived. For much of the past, mercenaries and soldiers were synonymous." The history of the military suggests that it has mostly been private. Therefore, mercenaries have existed for a long time and are believed to be the preferred choice when it comes to fighting wars. Throughout history, it has been assumed that buying a force is easier than maintaining it, and there is reduced liability (McFate, 2019).

PMCs are considered to be a key tool in facilitating remote warfare (Kinsey, Olsen, p.3, 2020). In modern times, the PMC industry boomed with them deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan to fight the U.S. War on Terror. Having already acknowledged the importance of "politics" in setting an Agenda, PMCs work similarly to achieve the identical goals. States use PMCs to support transnational political purposes, which in turn allows for the application of a reduced expense and responsibility over deploying the national armed forces. Over time, the duties of these military entities have expanded beyond just providing defence. Taking the example of the Chinese PSCs, they not only now provide security to the BRI assets but also work towards ensuring humanitarian aid, assisting in the BRI infrastructure projects, and training the local forces of the host nations ect, (Bartlett, 2023).

Imaging the other side, which is the PMCs, their motivation to participate in the endeavours depends on how much they are profiting off the assignment. In addition, their private status under governmental missions allows them to have a certain level of autonomy to function. The increased growth of PMCs in recent years can be credited to the above cyclic reliance between governments and the PMCs. It is a win-win situation for both of these entities. The governments want less liability and expense, and the PMCs get paid highly for their jobs with autonomy.

Scholars state "The rationales behind utilising military and security contractors appear to have changed little over the last 600 years. Today, the most common reason for employing contractors is to improve organisational efficiency by exposing the military to market forces (Uttley 2005). Since the 1980s, contractorisation has been seen as a way of restructuring defence in an attempt to manage budgetary constraints more efficiently. It is also thought to be a more financially sustainable way of maintaining military equipment on operations by drawing defence contractors into the battle space to support their equipment (Kinsey 2014, 5). Advancements in communications and weapon technology are also driving the contractorisation of large sections of the support element of military operations" (Kinsey, Olsen, p.4, 2020). Hence established that instead of letting the PMCs tackle the mission entirely by themselves, they are more of an instrument in supporting the national military forces logistically. To simplify, their functions now are to provide security and support to the national armies and ensure that the national forces can operate smoothly. The other rationale for hiring PMCs would be to have a discount on training the military with sophisticated skills and weaponry techniques. PMCs come in a package consisting of having mastered all the necessary skills required to survive and complete the responsibilities assigned. Additionally, PMC personnel deaths are never a political expense to the government, but national military deaths are.

Two of the most prominent PMCs around the world are the Blackwater (USA) and the Wagner (Russia). Both of which have brought about enough controversies. In 2007, when Blackwater was stationed in Iraq to help support the U.S. in the "War on Terror", one incident in the Mansour District of Iraq where they open fired on civilians in a public space brought about serious backlash from both the Iraqi government and the U.S. Due to a lack of clarity on what provoked the unfortunate incident, Blackwater was brought to shame and immediately had to cease its operations in Iraq (Singer, 2007). Similarly, Wagner had been deployed in Sudan and several other African nations to help with the unrest going on. However, the most interesting instance of controversy related to Wagner is from June 2023, when the group rebelled against the Russian government, and their leader stated, "The defence ministry is trying to deceive society and the president and tell us a story about how there was crazy aggression from Ukraine and that they were planning to attack us with the whole of NATO" in declaring how the Russian attack on Ukraine was a coercion (Al Jazeera, 2023).

3.4 Why China? Why Chinese PSCs in comparison to Russia's Wagner? And why the presence of Chinese PSCs in Africa?

The West, especially the U.S. and China, have been in ongoing competition in recent years, especially since the end of the Cold War and having China rise as a potential global competition. "The United States and China, as the world's first and second-largest economies, top military spenders, leading filers of patents, and elite contenders for Olympic medals, are bound to be in competition for the foreseeable future. But whether this competition can remain rational or drift in a debilitating direction to the detriment of the United States and China's respective interests, and the interests of the world, will depend on the choices and political will of both sides" (Kim et al., 2023). However, the most interesting part is where the US allies through the G7 partnership witness a gap in agreement among all members to classify China as a threat. "Originally, the US and UK wanted to label China a 'risk' or even a 'danger'. But Germany and France opposed this" (Lee, 2022). Therefore, as the

West views China as a threat to their interests and has made attempts to convey that through media representations, it encourages me to base my study on it.

Traditionally, during the Cold War, the West viewed the Soviet Union (now Russia) as a threat to the values preached in the Western world. China's potential to mirror the ex-Soviet Union is acknowledged in the West as the global era of international politics results in bringing China into contention as a major transnational player. Though the West still keeps an eye out for Russia and its move to influence geopolitical scenarios, the rise of China has made the West aware and vocal about its rapid growth. Considering that PMCs have also evolved in the past decades, contemplating the prospects posed by Chinese PSCs, provides an interesting ground for the analysis of the perceived contention. Also, as Russia's Wagner has existed parallel to the Western PMCs, and Russia has a history of rivalry with the West, it seems intriguing to use Wagner as a reference to hold against China.

Subsequently, Africa has a history of Western colonialism. In recent times, countries such as the U.S. and France have established military bases to assist Africa and their interest in taking down radical terrorists and consequent security threats (Neethling, 2020). Apart from these, there have been attempts made by Western nations to aid African countries on humanitarian grounds to reduce poverty and hunger. Both of these efforts seem to be more beneficial for the West as they get to gain their interest by making amends and also to become the "white saviour" that gains appreciation for their initiatives. Therefore, considering China, as an opposition becomes essential. China also may have set up military bases in several African nations, but it has shadowed as an effort to cater to African security interests. Also, China has taken measures to address grassroots-level issues that hinder development in Africa. These include enhancing infrastructure and providing security to ensure that Africa has the structural needs met to be able to coordinate broader social development ambitions.

3.5 Western news media reporting on International Relations with China

Scholars state, "In recent times although the images of China have shifted from being 'unscrupulous' to a rising power, yet the dominant media representations of China remain unfavorable and often negative" (Ali, Bahar, p.21, 2019). Considering that one of the news publication houses is The Wall Street Journal in my paper, scholarly research shows that "The Wall Street Journal from 2011 to 2013 framed China as a global power yet undermined by the structural limitations and a direct threat to the US foreign policy interests" (Ali, Bahar, p.21, 2019). It is also revealed that since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the U.S. news media has significantly shown a growth in covering stories related to China and its rise. Studies related to Western media coverage of China also show how there has been a monotonous portrayal of China using the factors of politics and human rights and less about its culture and society independently.

Ali and Bahar, in their work, also highlight that the "Anti-communist frame seems to remain a constant frame on China in the Western media narratives particularly in the US media." This establishes that the portrayal and framing of the Chinese in the Western media have been subjected to Chinese relations with the West at the specified times of media production. In addition, more scholarly work on Chinese representation shows, "China discourse in the political rhetoric and news in US media pertaining to three crucial areas namely

China-US relations, currency valuation, cyber espionage and East China Sea disputes, Ooi and D'arcangelis (2018) have argued that both in the political rhetoric and media narratives employed Orientalist narratives and constructed China as a "potential enemy Other" posing threat to the US interests." (Ali, Bahar, p.22, 2019).

In a study done by Carpenter in 2020, it was found that given the U.S. population has a stern sentiment towards China, it allows the news media to continue portraying China in a negative tone possibly as an attempt to serve the best interest of their audiences. The piece states "The trend in media perspectives toward more extensive criticism of the PRC is apparent, and if Beijing's behaviour, both domestically and internationally, does not improve, the number and influence of conciliatory stories likely will wane." (Carpenter, 2020). Thus, placing all responsibility on China to earn U.S. trust and appreciation, while the U.S. is unlikely to initiate any action to mend the relationship.

Interpreting the studies on U.S representation of China, "while looking at the dynamics of the US–China relationship facilitated by media discourse, found that the relationship had been constructed from "military allies" to "ideological enemies" and from "moral adversaries" to "strategic partners" in responding to environmental and domestic needs" (Ha et al., p.136, 2020). It is also an attribute that the distinction in the coverage of China in the West is due to differing political and cultural markers and also that the evolving political relationship between China and the West has a serious impact on the illustration of news information by media houses.

Chapter 4: The Voice of America's framing of Chinese PSCs taking comparison of Russia's Wagner as a "necessary evil"

In this chapter, I have applied the media analysis tool, Framing and Focalization to analyze the text and visual content of the news article. The frame used to define Chinese PSCs is "*Anti-China Sentiment*" and for Wagner it is as a "*Necessary evil*".

4.1 News media framing of Chinese PSCs

Frames go hand in hand with Agenda-Setting. They complement one another. The basis for Agenda-Setting in this article is how the U.S. population shows interest in learning and forming an opinion about China. A study shows the reasoning behind this appeal, "Polls conducted by Gallup (n.d.), for example, show that Americans' views of China have remained relatively stable for almost three decades, but then dropped precipitously from 53% of Americans who held favourable views of China in 2018 to only 20% who held such views in 2022. This significant drop in positive perceptions of China was likely due to the negative coverage it received in the U.S. news media after the start of the 2018 U.S.-China trade war and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic." (Tang, Willnat, p.55, 2023). Hence confirms that Western news media has an "Agenda" of covering China, especially in a negative frame.

"Anti-China Sentiment":

The general theme of the news article in analysis gives away the insight that the Chinese PSCs are a mere tool of the Chinese government to protect their investments in BRI projects in Africa. Framing of this narrative of Chinese PSCs in Africa seems to be an analogy of "The anti-China sentiment". The basis of this news article is to provide information mostly related to the BRI project in Africa, and it delves intensely into how the development is an attempt at global expansion by the Chinese. There is evidence suggesting that the U.S. is worried about China's growth in world politics. Taking into account the recent statement by the U.S. Department of Defence, "Communist leaders seek "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," by 2049 – the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party's takeover of the world's largest country. Part of this effort is China is increasing military coercion, the official said." (Garamone, 2023). The frameset in this news piece aims to follow a similar notion in parting a narrative that structures the Chinese economic venture in Africa as a challenge to U.S. interests. Though having already designated that China does threaten the values of the U.S., news media has now picked on portioning a continued portrayal as the "Agenda".

Taking into account segments from the news article, the frame is deployed in the following way. The use of the terms "conflict-ridden" and "risks" in paragraph 1 (Annex I) shows the outlook that the news media wants to deploy through the article. It is that the Chinese are desperately pushing for the BRI despite the state of unrest in the African zone,

which may translate to the desperation of the Chinese. Similarly, to emphasise how extensive the BRI project is for the Chinese, the article mentions words like "work closely" to inflict ideas of how the Chinese government is partnering with African governments to spread their persuasion in paragraph 4 (Annex II). It is an essence that through the language used in the article, the message is that the U.S. seems concerned regarding Chinese growth in the African region through the BRI project and PSCs. However, the news article also highlights how, although there is no direct arms usage by the Chinese PSCs, it is a "small footprint", paragraph 21 (Annex III), that uses passive methods of influence to ensure security and local cooperation. This narration seems to impart knowledge among the readers that tells them how the Chinese are seriously capable of expanding their presence despite not hooking weaponised means. In this way, the readers are intrigued to examine China's PSC involvement in Africa through the lens framed by the Western news media. The idea of the representation of the Chinese PSCs here is to construct a reality for the readers wherein they view the development in a way that insinuates curiosity regarding the implication of Chinese advancements as a threat to Western interests.

Scholars argue that "Messages are undeniably attached to the frames chosen to describe them. Thus, frames create a conceptual context that facilitates the apprehension, classification, and understanding of messages in accordance with individuals' ideas previously associated with the frames adopted." (Papacharissi, Oliveira, p.54, 2008). As previously established, the constant negative coverage of China has instilled an "Anti-China" sentiment to be considered as an agenda for news media to keep imparting. The selective use of keywords highlighted previously in the news article constructs a basis for making meaning for the larger public to uphold the production of a negative opinion.

Applying the concept of CDA to the framing of this news article, it can be understood how through the use of language, the news media can form a social reality (Janks, 1997). Both language and media are a social practice (Couldry, 2004). Given that news media holds responsibility in socio-cultural contexts to deploy the use of language and visuals to impart knowledge, the ability to frame narratives and highlight structured segments to dictate a portrayal, reveals how the production of news media is accountable for shaping the meaning of a story. Framing in partnership with CDA exhibits how the text in the news article is formed according to the interest of the Western population's negative perception of China, which was conditioned as a result of steady news media representation of an "Anti-Communist sentiment" with regards to China. The arrangement may not exactly translate to the news media being pessimistic about Communism but considering the political composition of the Chinese government, the theme suggests making aware of the Chinese expansion through a frame that has been forever a worry for the Western world.

4.2 Why is Russia drawn as a point of reference?

The portrayal of Wagner as a "*Necessary Evil*" :

The introduction in Paragraph 11 (Annex IV) starts with labelling Wagner as a "Transnational Criminal Organisation" by the U.S. Treasury (Bartlett, 2023). As Hall's theory

of representation suggests, language can be used to translate one's own opinion upon the others, the author being a channel to pass on the U.S.'s interests through the news piece, straight up sets the characterized perception about Wagner. The news piece continues to remark upon the PMC's direct relationship with Moscow by taking the example of their deployment to fight in the conflict against Ukraine. In similar tones, attempts to highlight Wagner's capabilities to fight wars have been the highlight of the paper. The takeaway here is that as though the title of the article suggests the news will deliver a comparison, the labelling of the section is "Different than Wagner?" The question mark adds a lot to the representation strategy. The segment is framed in a way with contents of Wagner's aggressive capabilities to entice the narrative in favor of acknowledging that perhaps sometime in the future Chinese PSCs will also show a similar shade of action. In addition, the mention of Chinese PSC ties with the PRC is meant to translate how Chinese PSCs would rather stick to a political shed. With regards to the expert's statement, the author highlights how similar to Russia's Wagner, Chinese PSCs also have links with the PRC and mostly follow their directions under discretion in Paragraph 13 (Annex, VI).

Scholars, while establishing the Russian PMC group Wagner's placing on the appeal of U.S interest deduce, "Wagner's twin roles—in other words, to provide the Kremlin with plausible deniability when deploying fighters in war zones and a ready-made capability for building influence with receptive states—pose different problems for the United States." (Reynolds, p.10, 2019). It is perceived that Russia can use Wagner as an accessory to perform "hybrid warfare" and cause a turmoil in the global political sphere especially leaving the West discontented. Russia has forever been keeping up to maintain a presence in the ex-Soviet countries to be able to have control over the domestic politics there. Studies also suggest, "Moscow could use Wagner in a variety of ways—to launch a limited-objective incursion into a neighbouring country, to train proxy forces to destabilize a pro-western government or to hide a secret Russian military presence. Wagner would likely be more organized than the nationalist mélange of irregular fighters that Moscow chaotically pushed into Ukraine. The infrastructure for at least some basic training, deployment, and command and control is now in place, so Moscow could deploy a few thousand mercenaries quickly without significant new investment and recruitment." (Reynolds, p.11, 2019). U.S.'s historical relationship with Russia (and the ex-Soviet Union) has been quite stringent. Despite the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Moscow has been on the drift to make a comeback against the U.S. Though the attempts at the competition have not allowed Russia to make use of its economy, military advancement has been an option to lay direction on the tightening rift among the two powers.

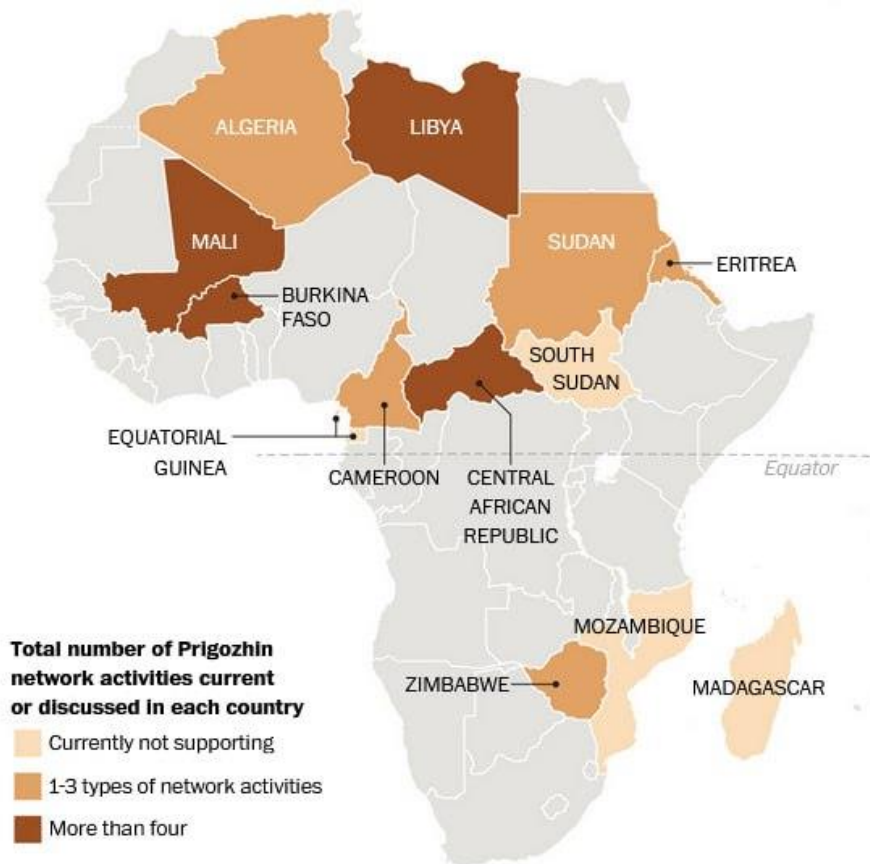
The primary criteria for the comparison made between the Chinese PSCs and Russia's Wagner by the U.S. news media is credited to the fact that Wagner was the first, in contrast to China, to settle in the African region and conduct missions. The map below shows the countries and the types of missions Wagner was involved in Africa until April 2023.

Prigozhin network involvement in Africa

● Ongoing ● In discussions ○ Previously solicited or provided to regime

	Military			Political	Information operations	Logistics	Economic
	Conduct offensive combat operations	Provide training or equipment	Provide personal or regime security	Advise government leadership	Conducted in country	Provide facilitation hub	Explore/extract natural resources
Algeria	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Libya	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Burkina Faso	●	●	●		●		
Mali	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sudan		○		●	●	●	●
South Sudan						○	
Eritrea		●				●	
Cameroon						●	
Eq. Guinea		○					
C.A.R.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mozambique	○	○		○			○
Madagascar							○
Zimbabwe					●		○

Chart 1 Source: The Washington Post (April 2023)



Graphic based on information from leaked classified material that was circulated in a Discord chatroom and obtained by The Washington Post

Map 1 Source: The Washington Post (April 2023)

Wagner has been a worry for the U.S. for quite a while. To direct attention to Africa, Wagner had been deliberately attempting to partner with countries that had an anti-West and non-liberal take. The countries in question were seemingly ones who suffered from intense political instability and underdevelopment, which made them vulnerable to fall into the hands of Wagner. The Russian PMC has been very helpful in maintaining the interests of most authoritarian African governments as they are, “a solution to the kind of problems that African dictators find themselves in: Democratic pushback? No problem. We’ll help you with that, whether it’s tampering with ballots, or whether it’s literally fighting brutal kind of insurgencies like they have in [the Central African Republic] and in southern Libya.” (Miller, Dixon, 2023). Though Wagner officials claim to work towards destabilising countries such as Libya, Mali and CAR, the VOA claims these missions to serve the polar opposite purpose (Bartlett, 2023).

Consequently, in brief, the motivation for using Wagner as a comparison, Miller and Dixon deduce it as a cause, "After the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the United States fueled proxy wars in Africa, Russia retreated from the continent, leaving China to forge in with offers of infrastructure and cheap loans, free of the usual Western pressure for progress on human rights or democratic institutions." (Miller, Dixon, 2023).

4.3 Focalisation: Foundation of the Frames

The news-making process in this article can be unpacked by utilising Hall's Theory of Representation, especially by the intentional approach (Hall, p.25, 1997). Referencing the statement of values from VOA, the possibility of assuming whose worldview is embedded in the narrative can be decoded. By using the **focalization** lens of analysis, one can unpack the perspective as to whose worldview is being discussed through the narration. Evaluating the information presented by the article, it can be deduced that the U.S. government, through their state-owned media house is trying to convey information regarding the Chinese PSCs. Traditionally, since the Cold War, the then Soviet Union (now Russia) was one of the contenders against the U.S. in world politics. In recent times, it has been China, rapidly growing its economy and influence, thanks to globalisation, which is presumed as a threat to the U.S. hegemony in world politics. Therefore, this article can be assumed, to as an initiative taken by the U.S. to influence the minds of readers against China to retain its ranking and popularity worldwide. Having previously furnished evidence regarding how the Western media has constantly been installing negative coverage of China and presenting it to the widespread population, the stern articulation of information in this article serves the same vision.

The presentation in this article elaborates that as the VOA is funded by the U.S. federal government, it illustrates a correlation between the U.S. foreign policy outlook and the news service. In the content of the text, there is a mention of an interview with a U.S. State spokesperson in paragraph 19 (Annex V), which goes like this, "We respect the ability of countries to decide for themselves whether to partner with the PRC. However, we echo the long-standing calls from African capitals that the PRC must respect host country laws and international obligations." (Bartlett, 2023). The statement holds substantial importance in imparting an understanding of the subject. By the statement, the author conveys a message on behalf of the U.S. that the U.S. considers the involvement of Chinese PSCs in Africa just as an accessory of the BRI business venture. In case there is an attempt made by

China to deploy its resources and violate the governance of African nations, the U.S. will take the help of international laws and hold China accountable. Similarly, the statement also sheds light and provokes the possibility of China attempting a violation of sovereignty.

The author, to intensify the outcome of this article to make the Chinese potential look like a negative element, takes the support of statements by scholarly experts to boost the agenda. One of the main brackets of the story was to establish how the "private" security is not private at all in Paragraph 13 (Annex VI) and also to substantiate how the PSCs are a puppet of the Chinese government to work in fulfilling political goals. There is a possibility that either of the narratives, whether the PSCs are not private or private is always lingering. But, as the news media holds direct relations with the U.S. state and, also supports their assertions with testimonials from several established scholars and officials, the author drives the argued possibility among the readers and establishes it as a reality for those who support the agenda.

4.4 Visual Analysis

Photograph 1: Decoding the visual presentation using tools gives out the attributes of "Address". Considering that there is no direct eye contact made between the subjects of the photograph and the lens, it is a piece of "offer". The photograph seems to be presenting the opportunity for the viewers to identify the perceptions themselves instead of feeding any direct agendas. Similarly, applying other concepts of visual interpretation, such as shot, it can be identified that the photograph has a close-up shot that allows for the identification of the subjects present in the frame. The close shot provides the opportunity to understand what is happening in the photograph and how it can be translated with context to the narrative. Also, the spatial position of the photo is frontal and gives a clear idea of interpreting how the story in the photograph evolves.



Photo 1 Source: VOA

FILE - Chinese national Jack Wang, a security trainer at the Chinese-run DeWe Security Service, leads Kenyan security guards in martial arts combat training at their company compound in Nairobi, March 13, 2017

The news article starts with a display of the above image before beginning with the textual content. As the theme of the article is well stated, it becomes clearer to understand the image. The primary idea is to draw a comparison between the Chinese PSCs and Russia's Wagner's presence and functions in Africa. With the size of the image, it becomes a given that the essential emphasis will be laid on the Chinese presence throughout the article. The caption of the image suggests that the person in focus is a Chinese national who is training the Kenyan security guards in martial arts. This very description, along with the accuracy of the pictorial depiction, is meant to send out a message that the Chinese are using their soft-power influence in the region. The idea is to portray that although the term "security" often attaches itself to the use of violent and extreme use of weapons to exert force, it can also be associated with dispersing in softer ways, which may not necessarily include the use of weapons. As the narrative compares Chinese PSCs with Russia's, and there has been shreds of evidence of Wagner's violent methods of operation, it is an indication through the image to notify the readers that China has adopted an improvised way of exerting its presence and has diverse ways of employing their PSCs. The photograph illustrates that China is opting for a more temperate policy by broadcasting its ability to educate African security forces about unarmed security practices. It can also be understood that China is not trying to monopolise the security aspect by solely deploying their PSCs, but is also aiding the African security forces by teaching them how to cope with security threats on their own.

Photograph 2: Applying the visual tools of analysis, the size of the photograph provides a basis. The portrayal of a training session shown in such a squeezed frame translates how confidential China is about its security training and operations. The composition of the photograph shows trained men in uniforms with strict postures and possibly unarmed (difficult to figure out from the size) participating in programs that probably hold immense importance to the government. Also, the shot seems to be taken from a higher platform, giving a top-angled view of the parade, it might translate to an attempt to show how disciplined the private security forces are. Consequently, the fact that the photograph was taken in China, distils why the photograph is defined in a smaller size, given how reclusive the Chinese government can be especially when it comes to media censorship and withholding sensitive information regarding state matters.



Photo 2 Source: VOA

FILE - Chinese private security guards take part in a 7,000-strong annual parade in the southern city of Shenzhen, Aug. 20, 2001. Private security companies are growing significantly in China.

The second image in the news piece is placed right when the discussion about the comparison starts between the two private securities. It is explained in the paragraphs adjacent that the U.S. finds Wagner's acts to be violations of human rights and illegal in some African countries of their operation. It alleges that Wagner instigated conflict and unrest in those countries, which turned out to be the polar opposite of what Wagner was supposed to do. Chinese private security presence in Africa is reflected in the following section. One of the possible reasons to place the photograph of marching Chinese PSC personals next to this text is to highlight the capacity of the Chinese. Throughout the article, it is precise that the emphasis is laid on how the Chinese PSCs are using a passive and non-violent approach in expanding their presence in the African zones and, also that their primary focus is to thrust the BRI project. However, as the photograph labels that the Chinese PSC industry has been growing since 2001, which is long before the orientation of BRI, it can be a possibility that the Chinese government is strengthening the PSCs for a broader motive and has already built a comprehensive capacity regarding them. Similarly, after detailed observation of the photograph, it seems to be conceivable that the Chinese security guards were carrying weapons during the march. Accordingly, the placing of the photograph next to the stated text could be an attempt to convey to the readers the potential that although the Chinese PSCs in Africa now refrain from using arms, given the situation they could adapt to armed strategies and might show similar traits as the Russian Wagner.

Chapter 5: The Wall Street Journal's framing of Chinese Security Firms as an advanced version of Russia's Wagner

5.1 Textual representation of Chinese PSCs and comparison to Wagner

The WSJ frames the information regarding Chinese PSCs in a slightly nonaligned tone in comparison to VOA. The news piece starts by labelling Chinese PSCs as "overseas security forces" (headline), which provides space for the perception of these PSCs to be in favour of a less hostile mode of operation. However, the subheading of the news article reverts to describing the PSCs as "private, military-style" forces. Therefore, by applying the concept of framing, through the work of Schwalbe, one can understand the reasoning behind such a description. Schwalbe, through their work, mentions how the news media identifies and highlights "**aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient**". (Schwalbe, p. 269, 2006). The wording used to define the PSCs will provoke a narrative of how one understands "military". The general perception revolving military is that of an aggressive combat mechanism. Hence at the very beginning of the news article, the authors subjugate a reference point for the readers to abide by. Unlike the VOA, the WSJ attempts to draw a constant parallel with the Russian PMC. Though most of the detailing revolves around the Chinese BRI project and the PSCs being an accessory, it can be viewed as a measure to establish how Chinese economic transactions with Africa have been militarized.

"Militarization of BRI":

The basic theme of the WSJ piece suggests how Chinese PSCs, unlike the Wagner, serve a larger purpose. The narrative is built around the fact that Wagner assisted in providing military support to the countries in Africa with a hostile political environment and often administered in those countries to execute economic transactions by taking advantage of political hostility. In the context of the news piece, it is evident how the media house has decided to present the story and which aspects are put in the spotlight. The presentation reflects a systemic review of how the Chinese PSCs can be compared to the Russian Wagner and how the Chinese government (PRC) is using the PSCs to safeguard its broader political ambition of securing Chinese global presence through the BRI project. The article also goes on to predict the uncertainty that the Chinese may use arms to gain control over the security in the African regions of BRI investments. Such a thorough assertiveness indicating China's broader ambition of marking a global presence is what the Western media wants to portray to the world. The critical idea is to make the readers acquainted with considering the possibility that the Chinese influence may not necessarily be something positive for global development and its true potential compared to that of Wagner. The frame used in this narrative is time and space-specific. It is a given that the West wants to impart its perception regarding world politics to the readers and deliberates that the rise of Chinese influence is not a sound development. The fundamental reasoning behind the West to impart an agenda as such is that it hopes to hold onto its hegemonic spot and try to suppress any opposition it may have.

To further analyse the representation strategy by WSJ, it is crucial to note how, in Paragraph 6 (Annex VII), the comparison of Wagner to Chinese PSCs, starts by labelling Wagner a "paramilitary" but not using a term to define the Chinese PSCs. The following section goes on to list how the Chinese government might use these technologies and the cover of BRI to serve larger political goals and also lists some of the previous attempts like "cyber espionage" and "territorial claims" (Areddy, Ramzy, 2023). Drawing a similarity between the VOA and WSJ articles, it is evident that both authors have taken the aid of statements from experts on the subject to intensify their claims. Importantly, to establish how much importance the Chinese PSCs hold in the whole narrative of their presence in Africa, the author of WSJ notes that Chinese PSCs are "gap fillers" when it comes to restraining the Chinese government from meddling with the domestic affairs of their African host nations (Areddy, Ramzy, 2023). This inscription takes back to the section in VOA linking how the U.S. state expects China to respect the preservation of sovereignty in the African region. Therefore, the link here is how the U.S. hopes that China refrains from coercing into African domestic affairs, but the deployment of their PSCs is an attempt to justify the interference. The frame here in this context follows the "episodic" lane where the attributes of China as an aggressive meddler are brought to light for the public to read (2017).

In the assessment of the VOA news article, the WSJ has carefully maintained a constant comparative tone when it comes to using Wagner as a reference to elaborate on Chinese PSCs in Africa. However, the selective use of phrasing regarding previous Chinese endeavours displays a pattern of intensely creating a "reality" for the ones who are to read the piece. Additionally, the most markable sense for the WSJ article to stand against VOA is that the WSJ was published after Wagner's rebellion against the Russian government in Moscow. Though it may not have been an explicit statement throughout the article, the basis of representing Chinese PSCs as an ally of the Chinese government shows how the authors believe that the Chinese PSCs will not follow Wagner's footsteps, but that does not mean they will limit the scope of militarizing themselves and become as armed and equipped as the Wagner from Russia. Perhaps the insinuation is to make the readers consider that the Chinese PSCs will expand their potential regarding serving similar missions in the Global South as the Wagner have, in the past.

5.2 Processing the production of WSJ news

To understand the incentive for improving resources such as PMCs, scholarly work suggests that "Private military companies (PMCs) and private security companies (PSCs) provide policymakers with attractive ways to project power, including low-profile alternatives to uniformed military deployment and significant cost savings. Moreover, in the current era of strategic competition among the United States, China, and Russia, the struggle for influence is playing out deliberately at a level below the threshold of armed conflict, and such companies are a useful instrument to expand regional and global influence and to create new dilemmas for competitors." (Markusen, 2022). Several PMCs have existed over the years, including the U.S. and other Western PMCs from the U.K., South Africa etc, Wagner has also been recognized for significant research, having conducted several operations. As for the Chinese PSCs, they are comparatively new to the game. Their operations have usually been quite secretive and haven't yet made it to any controversies, when put against comparison to that of the U.S. Blackwater or Russia's Wagner. Therefore, one of the reasons for the Western news media to highlight the operations of Chinese PSCs can be

credited to the fact that they expect to shed light on the newly emerging actor in the domain of security, that is China and its PSCs.

With the limited studies done on Chinese PSCs, it becomes imperative for the Western news media to keep an eye out and to report every minute of development linked to the PSCs. As the media houses do seek to establish that the Chinese PSCs are not "private" at all and are instruments of the Chinese government to serve broader political goals, the media seeks to highlight how the "security" forces are slowly working towards becoming "militarised". Taking comparison with the Russian PMC, the Western media intends to highlight how the traditional enemy seems to be a reference point while describing the recent competitor in the global political sphere. Furthermore, the rationale to distinctly engage in covering Chinese PSCs's presence in Africa serves another interest of the West. Africa's volatile politics, rich natural resources, and underdevelopment make it vulnerable to engaging with Chinese BRI and, henceforth their PSCs (U.S Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, 2022). Not only that, investments made by China in Africa allow it to enjoy immense geo-strategic benefits such as expanding its global presence, economic advancements and "military footprint". Therefore, for the Western news media, bringing up narratives of global politics especially involving Chinese presence in their areas of interest is something the West strategizes enormously to make sure that the labelling of China comes across correctly, as per the perception of the West. The main idea is to bring out a "reality" that supports the Anti-China narrative and wraps Chinese actions as a step towards directing the values that the West stands by.

Production Process and how the story is placed:

Decoding the presentation through Hall's theory of representation, the portrayal works as a catalyst to instil a negative image of the Chinese PSCs. As Hall stated, there is no fixed interpretation of a narrative but, one can decide how to situate the elements in a story that will help in altering the meaning imparted. There is no one true meaning. Subsequently, taking the concept of power, the news media attempts to deploy the embedded power in themselves to create a reality through the story that is, "one of the versions of the reality".

The news piece begins with the very primary subject stated in the headline, which is to relate the Russian Wagner to the Chinese PSCs. The introduction is brief, listing the positives of both the private militaries, Chinese and Russian, and, also how they appear to be independent of their respective national government's influence. This shows how the news piece is starting to subtly portray the private military's reasonable side towards the readers. However, the positive introduction remained short, and the news piece continues to list the other attributes negatively entailing the Chinese PSCs.

The news continues to record how, unlike the Wagner, the Chinese PSCs do not engage in using arms, let alone battling in an armed conflict. Furthermore, there are direct mentions of the multi-layer functioning of the Chinese PSCs putting them at an advantage against the Wagner. The placing of this segment in the story plays a crucial role in narrating to the readers an instalment regarding the magnified capabilities of the Chinese PSCs. To support this induced perception, the news immediately backs its claim by enumerating the historical instances of the Chinese putting their political motives to work through various economic activities. The particular segment also goes on to provide specific details of prior Chinese interests, such as occupying foreign territories and espionage to strengthen the West's emphasis on Chinese capabilities.

The body of the news piece contains an explanation about how the Chinese government is trying to spread its presence across the globe and is using the BRI project to support that goal. Interestingly, the news piece also takes the support of statements from scholars to emphasise the severity of the claim. The segment continues the comparison with Wagner, stating that given how Wagner went rogue against the Russian government, there is a possibility that countries now might be unwelcoming towards the Chinese PSCs. Soon, in the following strings, the story builds on China's role in globalization and how it partners with their private security firms (which do have government ties). Further, the news piece then proceeds to draw attention to the fact that Chinese investments face a similar threat as that of foreign American capitalistic ventures. This comparison and its positioning in the story mark an attempt to make the perception wander about the distinctions between the West and China and how they have similar interests in foreign zones which lead to become a point of contention.

The penultimate fragment of the news piece attempts to elaborate on the needs of the PSCs and the specific challenges faced by the Chinese governments through the BRI investment in the vulnerable African region. With grave details of instances when Chinese nationals were affected during their deployment in Africa, the WSJ article emphasises the PSCs as the last resort for the Chinese government to protect its citizens. However, in the final and concluding section of the news piece, the texts seem to display a pattern of repeating the initial mensuration, which is that the PSCs have close ties with the Chinese national government and are composed of ex-military. The article ends with a dilemma regarding whether the PSCs will ever implement armed operations. Hence, imparting the narrative that there is always a possibility.

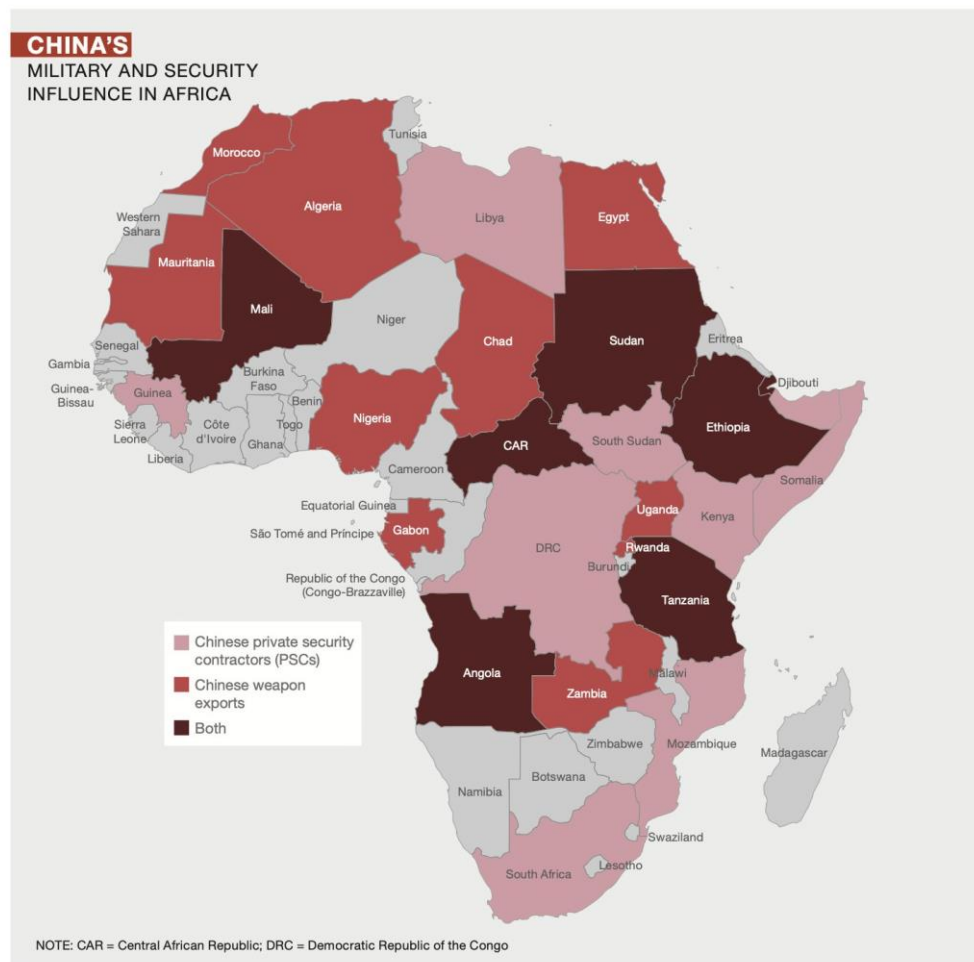
5.3 Focalisation embedded in the news

The Wall Street Journal is a U.S.-based news media house specialising in producing news related to economics around the world. The Journal places special focus on drawing attention to American engagements and also works on tracing the course of globalization and its developments (Wall Street Journal). Statistics show that the Wall Street Journal has a "moderate right" bias overall through having an independent editorial network (Meylan, 2021).

The foremost thing to consider while using the focalization lens of analysis is to understand whose perspective is being distributed through the news article. The main theme of the article is to simply present the Western media's take on the Chinese PSCs. In the respective case, the one in power is the Western media, who gets to narrate their perceived reality. The key subject of the article is the Chinese PSCs, and it has been compared to the Russian Wagner. The underlying intention of the article is to portray the contrast between these two private militaries because traditionally it was Russia (Soviet Union) that was a contender to the West's hegemony, and now China poses a challenge through its rapidly growing economy and influence all over the world. The choice of language, the pattern and placing of the story have all been an attempt by the media house to make the perceived reality as conceivable as possible so that the readers side with the author's/ news outlet's beliefs.

As CDA aims to "analyzing hidden, opaque, and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Jiang, p.1, 2023), decoding the aspect of focalisation embedded in this news piece becomes crucial to understand how it contributed in the production of the presented story. The narrative presented includes imparting knowledge regarding geo-political developments. The key actors in the narrative are China, Russia and Africa. The element of emphasis is the Private Military and the Private Security but, when one starts reading the article, Paragraph 2 (Annex VIII) lays the focus on how these entities have broader goals and that the goals should be placed at the centre of attention. The authors selectively have decided to make the narrative explicit from the very start of the article. The idea is to centralise the dominant story of the rise of the Chinese through their economic ventures hidden behind their cause to deploy the PSCs. The articulation of language, that is the words used, the placing of the text, and the accumulation of the story in each section, exhibits how the power embedded in the authors is employed to design the story. Understanding the broader implication, as it is a Western news media outlet, the U.S. engages their interest and bias in Chinese developments through the authors to impart a predilection that will influence the readers to buy the narrative as controlled by the power that lies in the hands of the U.S. state.

Below is a map showing the stretched presence of Chinese PSCs in the African continent (updated 2022).



Map 2 Source: RAND, 2022

China's rise as an economic power and its flourishing military and security domain has been critically covered quite intensely in the Western media. Scholars state, "In the coverage of outlets like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, China is presented as being on a form of probation, as in the U.S. being the ones to determine China's participation in economic agreements as long as "an open and transparent partnership" is maintained" (p. 7). This notion of the U.S. and other Western nations being the ones to determine the appropriate criteria for China's global membership is steeped in what Vujakovic (2018) terms as the long-standing myth of Orientalism, where the U.S. engages in: making statements about [China], authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, the Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient...Orientals are cast as living by different rules. (p. 14)" (Rubin, Wilson, p.21, 2021). Hence, translating from the inferences made by scholars, it is noticeable how the West categorises China as an alien that follows a diverse set of applications than the West when it comes to advancing in aspects of international diplomacy.

To further investigate the factors facilitating the focalisation, the authors conclude, "However, it becomes harder to maintain the stance of global superiority in the face of the ascendancy of the Chinese economy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China began to fill the void in the competing superpower narrative and has sustained that spot. As Okuda (2016) notes, "the world is keen to speculate on China's future because China's rapid ascent is without historical parallel" (p. 134). It is against this backdrop of imperial decline, anxieties about globalization, and neoliberalism's grip that the media has continued to shape the narrative of China" (Rubin, Wilson, p.22, 2021). As Meijer decodes focalisation, there is the establishment of the factor that is to create a narrative that separates "self" and the "other" which seems to be very apparent in the narrative presented by the WSJ (Meijer, p.369, 1993). The apprehension presented in the news article over the developments made by China raises the elements to identify how the Western news outlet is anxious about China's growth and attempts to shift the plot in a way that makes China look like an aggressor. The focalisation lens here provides the readers with a transparent comprehension regarding whose side they should pick and clearly, the WSJ journal has articulated the story to have them side with the Western directions.

5.4 Visual analysis



Photo 3 Source: The Wall Street Journal

Special patrol officers drilled earlier this year in Zhoushan in Zhejiang province. PHOTO: CFOTO/ZUMA PRESS

The first photograph in the news article shows an ariel view of the Chinese Security Forces training in Zhoushan, China. The shot tries to show through the wide-spread angle how the Chinese PSCs train in their home country. The officers seem to be in training while in tidy uniforms, showing that despite the security forces being labelled "private", they follow a similar intensity of training as that of the national defense forces. In addition, the photograph intends to tell a narrative that the "private" security forces follow a strict training procedure which makes them worth more than just providing security to the BRI projects. The photograph in actuality, supports the narrative presented in the WSJ news article. The ariel view also shows how the frameset to the photograph is "detached" as if the subjects are not aware that they are being captured. Hence, the photograph imparts an understanding that the subjects in the frame are unaware of the documentation and the matter of address in the photo is that it was taken candidly, showing what exactly goes on in the training camps and activities conducted for the Chinese private forces.

The second photograph is an excellent sample for applying the framing tool of analysis. The main subject in priority is the Chinese leader, President Xi Jinping, surrounded by other state officials discussing the employment opportunities for Chinese nationals through BRI. In the photograph, the people on the left seem to have their heads bowed down and taking notes, while the ones on the right are paying attention to the leader's words. The two actions combined can draw up the message that it is the Chinese President who holds the authority over most of the Chinese engagements, and it might be a passive indication that the government also holds power in influencing the PSCs' operations.

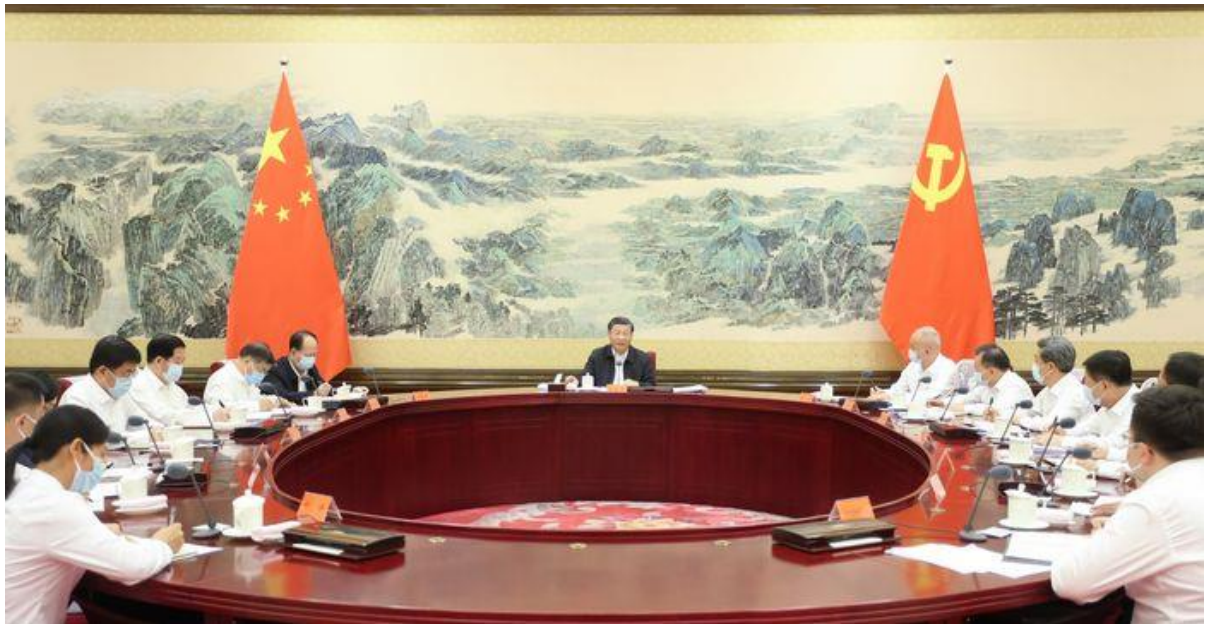


Photo 4 Source: The Wall Street Journal

Chinese leader Xi Jinping's Belt and Road infrastructure construction drive has created jobs for Chinese professionals abroad—and the need for security forces to protect them. PHOTO: JU PENG/ZUMA PRESS

Apart from the above derivations, the shot is wide-angled, providing all the subjects in the photograph with a proper space in the frame. The Chinese President's position in the

photograph, attracts a central angle, signifying him as the primary centre of the frame. Similarly, the frame includes six people on each side of the tables to signify how the Chinese government balances their motivations accurately. Also, it is crucial to note the Chinese flags in the background that send the message of how the discussion recorded in the photograph might be in the best interest of the Chinese government and state.



Photo 5 Source - The Wall Street Journal

Chinese commercial entities often have close links to state political priorities, leading some observers to predict that the role of private security forces might be expanded. PHOTO: CFOTO/ZUMA PRESS

The above respective photograph is of one of the ports in Africa that the Chinese have utilized to facilitate their BRI project. There is a disconnect between the description and the caption for the image, however. It is stated that the Chinese businesses may have an agenda to serve the political priorities of the Chinese government through their engagement and, hence there might be a flourish in the operations of the PSCs. Considering the texts adjacent to the photograph, one can deduce that the idea to be distributed is that the Chinese government, through Chinese business projects, will be using the PSCs to pursue broader political goals, including expanding Chinese presence in foreign lands and acquiring foreign territories.

Applying the concept of visual analysis, the shot gives an interpretation of what goes on regarding the Chinese engagement in Africa. Despite there being no PSC personnel visible in the photograph, the motivation for the captured view is to draw a parallel with the narrative presented. As the article mentions of the BRI project, the photograph supports the narrative. Also, the top-angled view of the cargo and shipments gives an idea of how broad and widespread the BRI project is in terms of its capacity and economic influence in the African region.



Photo 6 Source: The Wall-Street Journal

Special officers drilled with weapons in Zhoushan in Zhejiang province; most Chinese police officers don't carry weapons. PHOTO: CFOTO/ZUMA PRESS

The above photograph is the last visual in the news piece. It does not directly relate to the content of the article. However, there is a mention of ex-special force officers being a part of the PSCs in the news piece. The perceived message from the photograph is that although the PSC personnel are unarmed, given their historical experiences there can be a shift in the dynamic and perhaps opens the chance for them to be using arms to fight in combat missions as a part of the PSCs. In combination with the segment of text, the image is to signify how the rise of private security is meant to bring about war.

The low-angle shot shows how armed security officers hold a lot of importance for the Chinese government. Their heavy weapons with protection gear signify that the officers are training themselves to serve in diverse and aggressive operations. This means that the Chinese PSCs are capable of armed warfare and security tasks. The lowered glance at the photograph instills the viewer's comprehension of how superiorly dominant the Chinese PSCs are. Also, as it is evident, the officers in the photograph are not looking towards the lens. This frame interprets that they are in a position of "authority" and "demand" to accomplish what they aim for.

Chapter 6: Considerations and Conclusion

To understand the analysis of the findings from the VOA and WSJ news articles, here are a few historical and contemporary aspects of the relationship between the U.S. and China that will facilitate understanding the motivations behind the Western representation of China in a negative tone.

6.1 U.S.- China relationship - A look into the past

With the formation of the PRC in 1949, China appreciated the U.S. non-involvement in the Chinese civil war. With the Cold War going on, the PRC-Soviet Union split in 1961 made way for the U.S. to contemplate improving relations with China. Though the relations were flimsy for most parts, the U.S. levied economic sanctions on China in 1989 over the military invasion in Tiananmen Square. "Over the coming years, the U.S. and China will continue to have a diplomatic relationship, avoiding serious aggression towards one another" (U.S. State Department). In 1998, Clinton's support of the "One China Policy" in turn nudged China to support the U.S.'s "War on Terror" in 2001. Soon, in the coming years, Obama and Xi Jinping got together on board to address Climate Change and agree on the Paris Agreement in 2014. With Trump announcing a trade war with China in 2018 and the U.S. labelling China as a "currency manipulator", the relationship took a hit, witnessing the wrath of two well-established economies competing against one another. Subsequently, with Biden in power, the U.S. has openly criticised China for its human rights abuse in Xinjiang and banned all goods imported from the province. The Biden administration has been keeping a constant check on Chinese commercial companies by either banning exports from them or imposing tariffs (China Briefing, 2023).

6.2 How the fall of the Soviet Union paved way for China

China's rise in the global sphere and as a competitor against the U.S. can be credited to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the loss of its political and economic strength, China saw the opportunity to establish itself as a known power in Central Asia and spread its clout towards the West (Standish, 2021). One of the reasons that the PRC states as a lesson for them to learn from their ex-Communist counterpart is that the Soviet Union stressed a little too much on imposing their political ideology, which China has been cautious about. "The collapse of the Soviet Union, whose actions had helped fuel a rapprochement between Beijing and Washington during the 1970s, also prompted fears that China could be next as the United States and its allies revelled in the end of the Cold War and efforts to roll back communism." (Standish, 2021). Rather than push Communist ideologies to gain international popularity, China opted to focus on its economic growth and started by gaining allies close to home, especially in East Asia. Over the years, China has expanded its economic influence to Eurasia in an attempt to compensate for the extended U.S. presence and partnership with the East Asian region. China's economic capabilities have allowed it to become militarily and politically competent in the global political space to have a strong footing of survival, unlike that of the Soviet Union (Armitage, 2021).

6.3 Economic investments, China's greatest strength

China has strategically managed to empower two of the most crucial aspects required to achieve global dominance. One is its economy, and the second is its defence and security sector. China's motivation in doing so lies in the fact that it wants to become a central political actor in international institutions and to be able to decide on matters of world politics. The intention for China to do so is to counter the Western dominance in these institutions. President Xi of the PRC calls for China's intention to "lead the reform of the global governance system" and to value Chinese interests and work on them. As a permanent member of the United Nations, China's emerging ties with Russia reflect the possibility that through a joint ally, they will be able to impose a more authoritarian structure of governance in these institutions. The most remarkable phase of China's growing economic influence is during the 2008 financial crisis. "Beijing introduced a \$580 billion stimulus plan for its economy. Beijing then used state media and other tools to advertise to other countries China's role in helping the recovery of the world economy" (CFR). Also, counting the BRI project will enable China to spread its footprint across the globe and germinate support from multiple economies to keep fuelling its global dominance strategies.

As for the other aspect of military domination, "Beijing asserted that its sovereignty over disputed areas of the South China Sea was a "core interest," and "non-negotiable," despite participating in negotiations with other claimants. Beijing also expanded its footprint in the South China Sea: it built military facilities on disputed islands and artificial features." (CFR). Scholars also suggest that China is more interested in expanding its military capabilities to explore geo-strategic opportunities instead of working on a national defence setup. "For the CCP, a wartime manufacturing boon could also have the added benefit of providing needed fiscal stimulus – and one that would not jeopardize its statist economic model. A protracted economic slowdown could, however, minimize this gap and limit such possibilities" (Tirziu, 2023).

6.4 U.S. concerns over growing Chinese presence

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, while stating the Chinese threat mentions that "The counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States. The threat comes from the programs and policies pursued by an authoritarian government. The Chinese government is employing tactics that seek to influence lawmakers and public opinion to achieve policies that are more favourable to China. At the same time, the Chinese government is seeking to become the world's greatest superpower through predatory lending and business practices, systematic theft of intellectual property, and brazen cyber intrusions. China's efforts target businesses, academic institutions, researchers, lawmakers, and the general public and will require a whole-of-society response. The government and the private sector must commit to working together to better understand and counter the threat" (FBI). The above statement from the FBI sums up almost all the elements as to why the West perceives China as a threat and is adapting methods such as news media representation to create a discourse assisting in tackling the Chinese expansion.

China, over the years, has slowly expanded its presence in Africa. Through Chinese support to liberate colonised African nations in establishing the BRI project in 2013 and

advancing it, scholars say "Over the decades since the Cold War, Chinese influence in Africa has increased significantly, while U.S. influence has flatlined." (Sheehy, 2022). With a heavy Chinese presence in quite a few parts of Africa, China's attempt to become a conflict resolution actor in the region makes the U.S. worry. Although China has not interrupted diplomatically, but deployed special envoys in the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia and also has political and economic investments in those regions. Therefore, "Washington should be prepared if China moves away from its traditional "non-interference" policy to assume a larger diplomatic role in African conflicts." (Sheehy, 2022).

6.5 Question of democracy vs. Communism

Despite China's one-party system, it claims to be a democracy. However, the political structuring of China is well known to the world, and it shows characteristics of an authoritarian regime. Most of the West believes that democracy and economic growth have a symbiotic relationship and are the only ways to go forward. Though, on the contrary, China is a living example of how that theory is wrong. An expert states, "U.S. President Bill Clinton declared, "By joining the WTO, China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products, it is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values: economic freedom. When individuals have the power...to realize their dreams, they will demand a greater say." But this argument overlooks some fundamental differences between China and the United States, Japan, Britain, Germany, and France." (Mitter, Johnson, 2021). China expresses the belief that they have been able to achieve tremendous economic prosperity, reduce poverty and induce development because they have an authoritarian form of government that believe in the welfare of all. Although China has an authoritarian form of governance, its capitalistic ways of churning economic growth are possibly what spooks the democracies.

Scholars also take the example of President Xi's motivations, "Xi announced, in 2017, that the "three critical battles" for China's development would fall in the areas of reducing financial risk, addressing pollution, and alleviating poverty, he also made it clear that the objective of these reforms was to solidify the system rather than to change it. The truth, then, is that China is not an authoritarian state seeking to become more liberal but an authoritarian state seeking to become more *successful*—politically as well as economically." (Mitter, Johnson, 2021). China may support Western parallels to sell their advancements on technology and consumerism but in the end, it stays limited to a business tactic attracting more economic growth.

6.6 Conclusion

Many experts and scholars have deemed Chinese political, military and economic endeavours as a neo-colonial strategy, which also has fretted the U.S. Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, a scholar on China states, "the general features of China's relations with many countries today bear close resemblance to the European colonial powers' relations with African and Middle Eastern countries in the 19th and 20th century. Among other things, we witness countries exchanging their primary products for Chinese manufactured ones; China dominating the local economy; countries becoming heavily indebted to the PRC; China exerting greater weight on local political, cultural, and security dynamics; and Chinese abroad living in their own 'expat enclaves.'" (Etzioni, 2020).

Taking reference to the BRI project, experts argue that China is acting like a neo-colonial agent in the African region. China promises the countries with infrastructural development and, in turn, with the advancement of its inexpensive supplies of resources, hampers the local economy of the host country. The scholars further elaborate "Africa is depicted as the major victim of this new Chinese global abuse drive. China is said to propping up its own industries by extracting raw materials, such as minerals, fossil fuels, and agricultural commodities, from all over the world, with Africa as its main target. China is "present" in 39 African countries and is the continent's biggest trade partner. China's tens of billions of dollars in investments and loans are readily accepted by cash-starved African states". (Etzioni, 2020). China uses these money lending mechanisms to make the countries fall into debt traps and then makes them either repay the loans with huge interest or have them support China in the global arena. The economic assistance the Chinese have provided to many parts of Africa has enabled them to develop the local infrastructure. This has opened up a lot of potential for Africa when it comes to accepting Chinese funds.

The research compiles the aspects responsible for the agenda-setting presented in the news pieces by the Voice of America and the Wall Street Journal. Both articles express their views on the development of Chinese PSCs in Africa as a "geo-strategic" weapon, which in turn is an instrument deployed to influence geopolitics. The geopolitical aspect is the primary basis for the whole portrayal to be in place. The U.S., being the dominant hegemon since the fall of the Soviet Union, is anxious about China's rise. There are two main reasons for the U.S. to be so first, it is that the Chinese have a super-fast-growing economy and are threatening the dominant economic position that the U.S. enjoys in the current world order. The second reason is that China, despite being a nation thriving based on communist ideologies has been able to fast-track its way as a leading economy while the U.S. has preached democracy, and it has taken them long years to install liberal values, and ways of politics worldwide. Geopolitically speaking, China has also embarked on its presence in territories of the U.S. interest, in this case, Africa, and has been able to establish a deeper footprint by adapting means that facilitate their association in the African continent. The broader implication of increased Chinese involvement worldwide translates to the U.S. missing out on acquiring natural resources from foreign allies, monopolising foreign conflict, losing international support etc., which are all the other essential factors that the U.S. has to be aware of since China has made attempts at marking a global presence.

As the research aimed to understand the production of news, applying the tools of analysis, which are framing and focalisation, the investigation discovered a more comprehensive understanding regarding the individual factors that are responsible for forming a story and also the ones in charge of imparting "meaning" to the readers. By applying concepts of framing, it was made to comprehend how the authors/ the news media houses decided to draft the articles. Consequently, focalisation complemented the application of framing by unpacking the voices of the article and also how one perceives the information fed to them. The study found that despite both articles basing their argument on the same theme had diverse ways of presentation. The VOA decided to draw a constant parallel between Wagner and the Chinese PSCs throughout the news piece with expressions of aggression while describing Wagner. The news piece also cautiously included dispersing the political interest of the U.S. state. On the other hand, the WSJ, despite having been published post the Wagner Rebellion in June 2023, has shown patterns of criticism for Wagner without actually bashing it to extremes. This may have been inspired by the notion that Wagner's going rogue entails a self-explanatory hurdle and therefore the Russian PMC does not require any more negative adjectives added to its description. Instead, the authors laid more emphasis on highlighting the

potential of China to improve the functioning of their PSCs to serve larger state interests such as global expansion and economic advancements. It is also interpreted through the article that Chinese PSCs have visioned farther than just protecting commercial growth, and that is to serve as a link to meddle with the host country's political affairs.

Agenda-setting, as defined earlier, is the phenomenon by which the news media selects and organises a story in a way that serves the readers to become more lured into learning about it and also to side with the narrative presented in the news piece. Taking into consideration the geopolitical aspect to define the ties between the U.S. and China, the constant coverage of China in a negative tone has led to readers being influenced into buying the narrative. Hence, the interest expressed by the readers in ingesting the fed narrative has motivated the news media to continue fuelling a similar tone when it comes to producing news about China. By using an agenda-setting tone in the news articles, the media aims to attract readers who either already side with the presented narrative or to have readers with different beliefs transform into biasing with the narrative dispersed through the news pieces. Either way, it proved to be an essential tool in decoding what goes on within and behind the production of a news piece. Agenda-setting with regards to Hall's theory of representation unpacked the chronology that exposed what factors contribute to producing meaning from consuming a story. Subsequently, meaning can not only be made from identifying the underlying information presented in a story but also in cases where there is already a set perception, the addition of new learnings also works towards intensifying the "meaning production" and understanding the process of knowledge production.

In conclusion, it was also intriguing to understand the basis for the comparison of the Chinese PSCs to Russia's Wagner. As the news media houses dominantly side with the West or simply the U.S., it evolved in a crystal clear parallel as to why Wagner was chosen. Considering the traditional enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union, and now with Russia, the newly emerging competitor China poses similar threats. On the surface level, the U.S. assumes China to be a threat economically, politically and militarily. All of these three factors were the basis of emphasis presented to express discontent over China's development in Africa. The reason for the U.S. to be wary of China's growth takes back to the Cold War times, linking similar reasons for the U.S.'s discontent over the Soviet Union's establishment. As the Cold War has had enough imprints on the minds of the public, and also not to forget the U. S's win against the Soviet Union, using Wagner as a basis of comparison provided a background for readers to derive a link and reference to why China's development is a menace. In addition, to further simplify the U.S. motivation, the comparison is also to make the readers aware of the risk of "rising communism" with China's growth, which, of course, is viewed as a challenge for the liberal West. Also, thanks to the recent rebellion by Wagner, the U.S. did not let go of the window of opportunity to warn the readers how, given the similarities between the Soviet Union and China, there might be always the dangling risk of the PSCs to insurge against state orders and take part in missions that advance conflict.

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Annexure: (In order of mention)

VOA – Voice of America

- I. Paragraph 1 - The killing of nine Chinese gold mine workers in conflict-ridden Central African Republic this month highlighted the risks some Belt and Road development projects face in volatile areas.
- II. Paragraph 4 - “The foreign ministry will continue to work closely with other government agencies concerned and subnational governments to do everything possible to protect the safety and security of Chinese nationals and companies in Africa,” ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters after the incident.
- III. Paragraph 21 - “The Chinese, it’s a small footprint. According to Chinese law, Chinese contractors are not allowed to go into operations with weapons, so they have to work very closely with host nation security forces. They do a lot of training, they do a lot of capacity building, they supply equipment, they supply intelligence, they supply surveillance and so on,” he said
- IV. Paragraph 11 - But analysts stress there is a huge difference between Chinese security firms and companies like Wagner Group — which the U.S. Treasury this year designated a “transnational criminal organization” — or even disgraced and disbanded U.S. company Blackwater, which committed abuses during the Iraq war.
- V. Paragraph 19 - Asked by VOA whether the U.S. has any concerns about Chinese security contractors operating in Africa, a State Department spokesperson replied: “We respect the ability of countries to decide for themselves whether to partner with the PRC. However, we echo the long-standing calls from African capitals that the PRC must respect host country laws and international obligations.”
- VI. Paragraph 13 - Paul Nantulya, a China expert at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, told VOA that Chinese private security companies are not really private at all.

WSJ – Wall Street Journal

- VII. Paragraph 6 - Unlike Wagner paramilitary fighting forces that are equipped for war, China’s security companies primarily handle guard duties that don’t require lethal weaponry. For more dangerous jobs overseas, China’s security companies function like consultants, hiring and managing local staffs who might be armed.
- VIII. Paragraph 2 - Private, military-style security companies are an increasingly visible element of China’s expanding global footprint—hunting pirates from the decks of cargo ships in the Gulf of Aden, guarding a railway in Kenya and protecting a fuel depot in Sri Lanka.