

# The Wagner Group

The Wagner Group is a private military organization that has received extensive news coverage for its work in Ukraine. The news reports suggest that as the Ukrainian war has gone poorly for Russia, the Russians developed a dire need for more soldiers. But Putin

**Joe McGarrity**



has been unwilling to institute a draft to bolster the size of his army. A draft would be so unpopular among Russians that it would cause political problems for Putin. In short, Putin needed an alternative way to raise more troops, so he hired the Wagner Group to do a significant amount of fighting on Russia's behalf.

While the Wagner Group is a Russian-owned operation, it has worked for many nations, although most of these nations were allied with Russia. The Wagner Group has been involved

in conflicts in Syria and in many African nations.

When I read about the Wagner Group, I could not help but think about another mercenary group from long ago. In the 1200s, a great kingdom based in Cairo ruled over much of the Eastern Mediterranean. This kingdom destroyed a crusade army led by France's king, Louis IX. Louis' army was raised to defeat the Egyptian kingdom and eventually win back the Holy Land so that it could again be ruled by a Christian monarch.

As Roger Crowley tells the story in *The Accursed Tower*, Louis IX's forces were crushed in no small part because of the Mamluks. The Mamluks were an elite military force staffed with foreigners, predominantly by Turks, at least originally. After the Sultan's great victory, the Mamluks felt that the Sultan did not reward them properly, so they overthrew the Sultan and took power. And for many years, the Mamluk-run kingdom had many great

military successes. They defeated the Mongols (which few armies were able to do) and they took over all of the Christian-crusader states in the Holy Land – denying the Christians a beachhead to use in future crusades.

The relationship between the Sultan and the Mamluks points to a problem a nation can run into when it uses mercenaries. Namely, it is hard to control mercenaries. When they become dissatisfied, they may seize power for themselves or they may help one faction in a country win a power struggle with the existing rulers. I am not saying this will happen in Russia, but I am saying the Wagner Group is worth watching. Russia, or one of the many nations that chose to hire the Wagner Group, may find that these mercenaries become involved in the nation's politics and power struggles. It seems to be an obvious truth that the people with the guns must be kept happy or they may use those guns to pursue their own interests.