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Master in International Relations

The rise of private military companies and their role in contemporary warfare

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Abstract

The rise of Private Military Companies (PMCs) represents an important evolution in modern warfare, which unfolds as a dramatic change in world security management and supply. Much attention in this paper is paid to the origin and purpose of PMCs with attention to sectors of PMC operations, types, and especially involvement of PMCs in warfare. The main question addressed here is whether states' military forces cannot supply the rapidly growing demand for security, and that is why PMCs were formed. The first chapter lays the ground and defines the PMCs, retracing their historical development and classifying their roles and functions in considerable detail. This forms an indispensable backdrop against which to understand PMC integration in contemporary conflict scenarios, oriented toward warfare, to which the thesis turns. The next chapter proceeds to analyze various types and sectors of Private Military Companies and investigates the causes that have underlined such rapid development, drawing on the complicated interaction of increased demand for security services with limited capability of traditional state military forces. In the third chapter, the thesis undertakes an analysis of Blackwater operations in Iraq; the PMC which later rebranded itself as 'Academi' and merged in 2014 with the PMC Triple Canopy in Constellis Holdings. In the same chapter a second case on the activities of the Wagner Group in Syria will be analyzed. These case studies make it clear that PMCs fill major security lapses in conflict zones by executing functions that conventional military forces either cannot or will not perform. Extensive operations by Blackwater in Iraq, beginning immediately after the invasion of 2003, and functions of the Wagner Group in the Syrian civil war emphasize their contributions toward plugging the heightened demand for security. The final chapter discusses the urgent question: how to regulate PMCs so that negative consequences are kept at a minimum. Valuable though PMCs have been, they have been linked with a rash of allegations and criminal doings related to such problems as lack of accountability, violation of human rights, and legal ambiguities—indeed, going as far as linking them to the Nisour Square massacre by Blackwater and alleged war crimes by the Wagner Group. This chapter will argue that stringent international regulatory regimes have to be constituted to ensure that the operations of PMCs are based on legality and ethicality since, if anything, it would have a delicate balancing between the critical security-providing role they play and the need

for control over their operations. This thesis is supported by the argument that PMCs have evolved in response to increased and unsatisfied demands for security within contemporary conflicts. Their effective integration into global security systems requires robust regulation in order to avoid abuses and ensure adherence to international law. To this end, the above analysis of PMCs has not only underlined their important role in this setting but has also made the case for coherent mechanisms of regulation controlling their future activity.

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Introduction

The rise and growth of Private Military Companies presuppose a shift in the security domain and the global scene of warfare. The state normally holds a monopoly on military force, guaranteeing the control over armed conflict and national defense. Over the last couple of decades, however, world nations have engaged PMCs increasingly¹, pointing to extensive changes across the dynamics of international security. This shift is more prominent in state capacities overstretched or too weak to match the increasingly complex security demands in conflict environments. PMCs have made themselves into indispensable actors of modern warfare with a span of specialized services, hence filling critical gaps left by state militaries.

This new situation heralded an era of transformation, characterized by geopolitical adjustments in alignments, budgetary austerity in defense spending, and increasingly asymmetric threats from terrorism, insurgencies, and transnational crime. Gradually, this evolution outpaced conventional state military forces and has caused security deficits in many regions. PMCs have moved into this breach, offering specialized services ranging from combat support and strategic planning to intelligence gathering and logistical support². This gives rise to a number of important questions relating to the role of PMCs in modern warfare and their implications for global security.

The privatization of military and security functions is not necessarily a new development. Mercenaries have been used by states and non-state actors throughout history as augmenters for military forces. However, this new breed of PMCs, in corporate form and functions, marks a sea change in how military might be used and prosecuted. Currently, PMCs function as business enterprises, a new tool brought to the traditional military form, operating for profit and under contract, not from national loyalty. The business element

¹ Swed, O., & Burland, D. (2020). *The Global Expansion of PMSCs: Trends, Opportunities, and Risks*.

OHCHR – University of Saint Mary, Texas Tech University.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Mercenaries/WG/ImmigrationAndBorder/swe-d-burland-submission.pdf>

² Branović, Ž. (2011, April). The privatisation of security in failing states. Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/OP24.pdf>

transforms the whole framework according to which military force is used and so calls for a review of the ethical, legal, and strategic parameters of war.

The central question of this thesis consequently becomes whether the growth of private military companies is primarily a response to an increased demand for security, coupled with a failure in supply through state-provided military capabilities. Precisely, the question will help in trying to appreciate how PMCs operate in such environments, particularly in those countries where conventional military forces are either unavailable or inadequate. It is against this phenomenon that the present thesis is going to delve into the functions of PMCs and types, especially those involved in direct combat and military operations. The current study will attempt to clarify the main drivers of the proliferation of PMCs with their consequences by interrogating the operational roles, strategic significance, and ethical implications.

In addition, two case studies will be analyzed: Blackwater in Iraq and the Wagner Group in Syria. The extensive involvement of Blackwater in Iraq, especially after the 2003 US invasion, exemplifies how PMCs can provide crucial security functions as supplements to state military forces during times of need. The fact that the company was involved in the protection of diplomats, infrastructure guarding, and high-risk operations underlined the demand for private security solutions against the background of an unpredictable environment. Equally important, the involvement of the Wagner Group in the Syrian civil war explains the strategic role of PMCs in supporting state objectives and stabilizing zones of conflict. Wagner's combat operations, support of the Assad regime, and participation in key battles flesh out the depth and complexity of PMC engagement in contemporary conflicts. It is through these case studies that an attempt will be made to demonstrate how PMCs have filled important security gaps, thereby answering the thesis question in the affirmative.

While PMCs offer crucial services in strongly demanded scenarios, their operations are not immune to controversy. Events like the Nisour Square massacre³ at the hands of

³ (Zeeman, 2023) After a shooting incident in Nisour Square left 17 Iraqi citizens dead, allegedly at the hands of four Blackwater guards, intensive government investigations, private security reform, and criminal charges ensued. In 2014, an American jury found the Blackwater guards guilty of various criminal charges, from murder to weapons offences. In response to widespread public backlash resulting from the incident, Blackwater changed its name twice, changed management, and changed ownership hands.

Blackwater and alleged war crimes by the Wagner Group underline the potential risks and ethical dilemmas emerging from increasing privatization in military functions. Such cases point out the challenges applying accountability and respect for international law when executing actions in military operations by private entities. Such problems are furthered by the lack of clear regulatory frameworks and oversight mechanisms that raise questions to the legitimacy and impact of PMC activities on human rights and international stability. This thesis contends that such regulations are necessary to balance the utility of PMCs with imperatives of ethical conduct and legal oversight.

The importance of the study is that it will represent exhaustive research into the roles of PMCs in modern warfare and their wider implications for international security policy. This research work will define its contribution to the field about knowing the place occupied by PMCs in the security landscape of today by covering a historical contextualization of the problem, operational dynamics, and challenges to regulation. The findings will provide insight not only into the conditions under which PMCs thrive, but also into the necessary measures through which they would become part of global security frameworks in a responsible and effective way. The rise of PMCs relates to a multidimensional phenomenon situated at the crossroads of issues of sovereignty, accountability, and changes in the nature of warfare. The current research aims to untangle these complexities and build a clear explanation of the emergence of PMCs as both a solution to security deficits and a source of new challenges within the international environment.

In other words, this thesis posits that PMCs are just such an answer to the growing demand for security in the case of observably low state military performance. The present research will elucidate how PMCs have become an integral part of modern conflict resolution efforts through detailed case studies of Blackwater in Iraq and the Wagner Group in Syria. In the same breath, this thesis seeks to delve into the pressing need for regulatory frameworks that reduce the risks associated with PMC operations. Ultimately, it is supposed to strike a balance in assessing contemporary warfare with PMCs, thereby acknowledging their contribution to the pursuit of peace and security while advocating at the same time for responsible governance that ensures said actors remain within the confines of international law and ethical requirements.

Chapter 1: Understanding Private Military Companies

1.1 Definition and historical background

The rise and growth of Private Military Companies have come to the fore as part of a new evolution in organizing and conducting military and security operations worldwide. PMCs are legally incorporated private firms offering military and security services to a several clients, including nation-states, international organizations, NGOs, and private enterprise⁴. These services include, but are not limited to, direct combat operations, strategic military planning, gathering of intelligence, logistical support, training of military and security personnel, protection of critical assets, and protection of key individuals⁵. While traditional state militaries operate on national mandates and public funding, PMCs are organizations that work with a focus on profit motive and contractual obligation. The concept of private businesses providing military services is definitely not new, for there have definitely existed historical antecedents since ancient times. There has always been something related to it through the use of mercenaries, hired soldiers offering their military services to the highest bidder in most periods of military history. Mercenaries were enlisted in large numbers by these ancient civilizations, such as the Greeks and Romans⁶. During the Middle Ages, mercenaries played an important role in European warfare, serving various kingdoms and principalities in combat. However, what sets modern-day PMCs apart from these earlier forms is the corporate umbrella under which they operate and the wide range of operations.

⁴ Baum, J. A., & McGahan, A. M. (2009). The Evolution of the Private Military Industry after the Cold War. La Chaire EPPP: Économie des Partenariats Public-Privé. https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf

⁵ Perlo-Freeman, S., & Sköns, E. (2008). The Private Military Services Industry. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/insight/SIPRIInsight0801.pdf>

⁶ McLean. (n.d.). Western civilizations I (HIS103) – biel. Odoacer and the Fall of Rome | Western Civilizations I (HIS103) – Biel. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-fmcc-worldhistory/chapter/odoacer-and-the-fall-of-rome/#:~:text=At%20the%20time%2C%20Rome%20used,476%2C%20and%20granted%20Odoacer%20kingship.>

The geopolitical scene, characterized by the cold-war rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, was fertile ground for several proxy wars and conflicts that occurred all around the globe. Under such conditions, the need for specialized military services increased, in particular to the decolonizing regions of the world, where newly independent states were troubled both from inside and outside their borders. Private firms began to appear in the early post-war period offering military expertise, but these were relatively small in scale compared to contemporary PMCs⁷. The rise of these companies showed how private organizations could offer professional military services, typically considered to be the monopoly of state forces. The growth of PMCs in the post-Cold War period was stimulated by various factors. First, from the wave of downsizing resulting from the end of the Cold War, state militaries created a gap; PMCs were correctly positioned to fill this void. Second, considering that modern warfare took on increasingly complex dimensions characterized by asymmetric threats from terrorism, insurgencies, and organized transnational crime, it added specialized skills and knowhow that PMCs could uniquely provide. Third, and relatedly as a function of neoliberal economic policies, civilian privatization in many sectors extended to the military, where various functions of the military are outsourced to the private sector⁸.

Moreover, the use of PMCs in modern conflict has been controversial and under constant scrutiny by academic, political, and military observers. Some believe that PMCs will bring flexibility, efficiency, and specialized capabilities prerequisite to contemporary conflict scenarios⁹. They insist that PMC firms are capable of quick dispatch to several operations, can adapt to the ever-changing conditions on the ground, and deliver highly specialized skills beyond the immediate capacity of state militaries. However, critics point to accountability and legal control issues, not to mention the morality of buying military

⁷ Baum, J. A., & McGahan, A. M. (2009). The Evolution of the Private Military Industry after the Cold War. La Chaire EPPP: Économie des Partenariats Public-Privé. https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf

⁸ Baum, J. A., & McGahan, A. M. (2009). The Evolution of the Private Military Industry after the Cold War. La Chaire EPPP: Économie des Partenariats Public-Privé. https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf

⁹ Branović, Ž. (2011, April). The privatisation of security in failing states. Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/OP24.pdf>

force. Cases of misconduct by PMC employees, in particular, the Nisour Square massacre committed by Blackwater in 2007, or alleged war crimes by the Wagner Group in Syria, rewound to a higher degree of critique over PMC operations and raised demands with a view to robust regulatory framework. Although some sort of framework for the conduct of private military personnel is detailed in international laws, especially the Geneva Conventions, enforcement is always notoriously difficult; moreover, employees of PMC do not fall within the definition of mercenaries. Additionally, they are typically not seen as members of the opposing military forces. It is for this reason that they are considered civilians rather than combatants¹⁰. Like the majority of the states that employ PMCs, they demand that their employees exclusively take on defensive and supporting responsibilities during any armed conflict. National regulations vary widely, concentrating at one end of the extreme spectrum on strict controls and at the other on laissez-faire. The Montreux Document¹¹ is a voluntary international initiative dating back to 2008, aiming to clarify states' legal duty of PMCs and to promote good practices. It, however, remains a non-legally binding document with no control mechanism. The definition and history of the PMCs reflect how the organization evolved from traditional mercenaries to sophisticated corporate entities offering a wide array of services involving military and security activities. In particular, this change has been impelled by the conservative geopolitical shifts in military doctrine and growing complexity of global security challenges. Understanding how PMCs have developed, what functions they fulfill, and the problems associated with regulating their activities are essential to understanding the impact they have on international security and the future of military operations. On one hand, the success of PMCs in an area of security with shortfalls presents an opportunity, but on the other hand, it is a challenge to make sure that the operation remains within the legal and ethical boundaries. This presents the inescapable need for comprehensive regulatory frameworks at the international level with respect to the activities of these firms.

¹⁰ Rousseau, R. (2012, November 24). Are private military companies (PMCS) exempted from Geneva Conventions? – analysis. Eurasia Review. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/24112012-are-private-military-companies-pmcs-exempted-from-geneva-conventions-analysis/>

¹¹ (The Montreux document: On Pertinent International Legal Obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict 2008)

1.2 Evolution of PMCs over time

The development of the Private Military Company over time contributed to the changing dynamics of global conflicts, shifting state and non-state priorities, and highly complex security needs. From early mercenary forces to sophisticated corporate entities offering a wide range of military and security services, this development is marked by phases, each driven by developments that differed across the periods. There were traditions in the ancient and medieval times on the recruitment of external forces to complement or substitute the conventional military capabilities. Mercenaries were individual soldiers or groups who offered their services to the highest bidder, often motivated by personal benefit rather than loyalty to a given state or cause. Because of this, ancient civilizations like Greece and Rome time and again made use of the services of mercenaries to reinforce their armies, realizing that seasoned and professional fighters are potent instruments of winning the cause in those times ¹². European states also relied so much on mercenaries in times of conflict and war. These mercenaries operated providing essential military support in exchange for payment.

The modern evolution of PMCs began to take shape in the post-World War II era, particularly during the Cold War. This period was marked by a rigid geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, leading to numerous regional conflicts. A complex global security environment developed as a result of an ideological struggle between the superpowers, and both parts of the world increasingly required specialized military. Newly independent states arising through a process of decolonization had to confront internal and external security challenges, also raising the imperatives of external military help. It is in this context that the first modern private military firms developed, which proffered advice and training to the governments in troubled regions. An early model of such a company is WatchGuard International developed by the ex-British

¹² McLean. (n.d.). Western civilizations I (HIS103) – biel. Odoacer and the Fall of Rome | Western Civilizations I (HIS103) – Biel. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-fmcc-worldhistory/chapter/odoacer-and-the-fall-of-rome/#:~:text=At%20the%20time%2C%20Rome%20used,476%2C%20and%20granted%20Odoacer%20kingship.>

Special Air Service (SAS) personnel during the 1960s¹³. The company is still operating today offering several services such as drone security, security risk management, rural security, financial forensic services and more. This participation of PMC companies in training and advising services for the African and Middle Eastern governments was the onset of the modern phase of the PMC business, setting as an example to the privatization of the military sector. A bigger historical development in the PMC business occurred with the end of the Cold War. The dissolution of the Soviet Union reduced global military tension instantaneously. After that event, there was heavy downsizing in terms of the national or state armed forces, more so in the belt of the West. This laid an imperative of a capability gap in the armed forces, as there arose a realization that the state forces will no longer be able to meet the security demand. It has been a time period, that has seen a proliferation of regional conflicts, civil wars, and humanitarian disasters—most of which underscore the growing need for specialized military services that only PMCs can deliver. These geopolitical realignments that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union reshaped world power structures and saw a number of internal, and external, conflicts in states previously held in place by superpower influence or direct control. Security threats were therefore imminent on most newly independent states and those going through transitions of power, such as insurgencies, border disputes, and ethnic conflicts. In Africa, the breakup of Cold War-era alliances and support systems birthed brutal civil wars and genocides such as a recent one being the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, together with the current conflicts in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. All of these conflicts gave way to huge humanitarian crises, involving millions of people who are now displaced and in need of protection and aid. Another vivid example is the violent breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which brought a chain of ethnic wars and cruelties to the

¹³ **Watchguard International Limited** the world's first Private Military Company (PMC), registered in Jersey, UK in 1965 by Stirling and John Woodhouse. Its Headquarters were in London. The first assignment was to go to Yemen to report on the state of the royalist forces when a cease-fire was declared. Watchguard International Limited today in 2024 continues as truly British run company as it was by its founding members of the SAS. They are a unique brand in the security industry, specializing in catering to the needs of affluent clients residing in high value properties, whether they are located in remote or rural areas. Their mission is to provide comprehensive security solutions that ensure the safety and peace of mind of clients.

Balkans, including the Bosnian War and the Kosovo conflict. In the Middle East, long-standing political and religious rivalries were disrupted as a result of the power vacuum caused by the retreat of Cold War superpowers, placing the region on nature's perennial crucible of unrest and conflict. We could state that these events created a fertile ground for the deployment of PMCs, which could have provided immediate and specialized military services that state forces were often unable to deliver because of constraints on their resources or capabilities.

The role played by PMCs in such large-scale military operations was best embodied by the Gulf War of 1990-1991¹⁴. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq drew the prompt and large military response spearheaded by the United States under the flag of the United Nations. Though the coalition troops were powerful, their support needs to fight in the harsh desert condition were broad and long. PMCs were essential to the coalition forces' victory in the Gulf War. These would range from the transportation of troops and equipment, through the servicing and repair of military vehicles and aircraft, on to constructing and operating base facilities, providing food, water, and other medical care. Private firms contracted by the U.S., such as the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program, or LOGCAP¹⁵, did most of this work. These were of strong importance to ensure the coalition forces had adequate support to keep up their operations. Logistics support by PMCs was that comprehensive which enabled the military to focus on strategic and combat missions for the sake of enhanced effectiveness. PMCs proved their strength in modern conflict during the Gulf War through their speed of mobilization of resources, specialized skills and services, and efficiency in complex and hostile environments. The successes of these PMCs in this conflict set the stage for succeeding deployments of PMCs in other military operations and peacekeeping missions around the globe. It further indicated that there is an opportunity for PMCs to fill the deficiencies of state military forces, particularly in the

¹⁴ Scahill, J. (2007, August 1). A Very Private War.

<https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/contract/2007/0801privatewar.htm>

¹⁵ (US Department of Defense, Logcap Support Brigade) **LOGCAP Support Brigade** (LSB) deploys globally to assist supported commanders with Operational Contract Support and LOGCAP program management during wartime or contingencies in support of multi-domain operations.

rapid deployment needed most by any state and in special expertise that became necessary in such kinds of situations.

Hence, the post-Cold War period not only we could affirm that it raised the demand for PMCs as a result of the greater incidence of regional conflict and humanitarian crises, but it has also shown practical benefits and strategic advantages that these private entities could bring in to supporting state military operations. More importantly, it is the Gulf War that shaped this transformative role PMCs could play in modern conflict, since it set the stage for their expanded involvement in new conflicts and underscored the interdependence of state militaries with private military providers. PMCs became a future imperative in conflict zones by their successful integration in Gulf War military operations.

Afterwards, companies emerged, such as Blackwater, which was renamed as Xe Services and now as Academi, DynCorp International, and Aegis Defence Services which reached fame in the private military industry. Blackwater was established in 1996 by the same former Navy SEAL, Erik Prince, its massive fame erupted during the Iraq War as it had been tasked with training military operations, U.S. diplomats, and Iraqi security forces in everything from small weapons handling to foreign weapons technology and tactics¹⁶. Also, DynCorp International, which had its roots in the 1940s, ran a huge variety of services that ranged from security to aviation support and training for police and military forces in various regions. Aegis Defence Services was formed in 2002 by retired British Army officer Tim Spicer and enjoyed wide contracts for security services in Iraq, thereby cementing the role of PMCs in modern conflict areas¹⁷.

The War against terrorism, initiated after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, ushered in an increased reliance on PMCs. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq brought home the critical need of so many support functions, ranging from protecting diplomatic

¹⁶ *Academi: About Us*. Academi. (n.d.). <https://theacademi.org/about>

¹⁷ Duggan, E., Bertina, A., Cremin, J., Toledano, J. S., & Smith, J. (2023, June 30). Aegis defence services: From Britain to Iraq. Grey Dynamics. <https://greydynamics.com/aegis-defence-services-from-britain-to-iraq/>

personnel to contractors and reconstruction projects to counterinsurgency taskings. What is important here is that PMCs were involved in this sort of operation, providing important services and releasing state military forces to concentrate more on the process of combat¹⁸. The engagement of PMCs in such wars demonstrated their quick deployment, ability to adapt to changing situations, and provide specialized skills necessary for modern warfare.

1.3 Roles and functions of PMCs

The roles and functions of PMCs have evolved through time, setting them apart for their very flexible nature to provide services in line with contemporary warfare and security needs. The diversity of services now includes security services, training and consultancy, logistics support, intelligence services among others. All these roles are crucial for the operational efficiency in contemporary military and security operations, providing necessary and supplementary capabilities to the state military forces.

The security service is the main essence of the operation of PMCs, such as the increasing workload required in the provision of protective measures in the dangerous environments of conflict and non-conflict zones. Most of the time, they are hired to guard high-profile individuals, government officials, and corporate executives with fire support, most especially in volatile regions where the threat of kidnapping, assassination, or terrorism is very high. However, other than this, PMCs offer personal security for key facilities such as military bases, embassies, oil and gas installations, and communication networks¹⁹. Trained PMC personnel present the deterrent effect against many potential threats and certainly ensure that assets and personnel are safe, which puts the client's operation in lesser risk. For example, during the Iraq War, PMCs such as Blackwater was

¹⁸ The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. (2023, August 31). The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. Private Military Companies. Retrieved July 2, 2024, from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf>.

¹⁹ Perlo-Freeman, S., & Sköns, E. (2008). The Private Military Services Industry. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/insight/SIPRIInsight0801.pdf>

involved in the security detail of many U.S. diplomats and high-ranking government officials and allowed them to operate in the said extremely hostile environment²⁰.

Another significant role that PMCs perform is training and consultancy services. These companies hold vast amounts of military experience, often supplied by veterans from special units like the US Navy SEALs, British SAS, and other special forces. PMCs can leverage this experience to provide complete training for state military forces, police units, and private security personnel. Such training programs are made up of combat tactics, counterinsurgency operations, urban operations, and emergency responses. Moreover, PMCs provide consulting services in strategic security planning and advice to government and private institutions in their threat assessment and management procedures²¹. All these are used to help PMCs enhance the effectiveness and operational readiness of customers for enhanced outcomes in security. This has been especially valuable toward post-conflict reconstruction, where newly formed or restructured security forces require extensive training to maintain stability and enforce the rule of law.

In the area of logistics, PMCs play another major support role in large-scale military operations and humanitarian missions. Effective and efficient logistics in supplies, equipment, and personnel in military and disaster response situations in the modern complexity of warfare are required to be carried out in good time. The PMCs provide such logistic services through their transportation, management of supply chains, and maintenance and repair of military vehicles and equipment, as well as the construction and running of base infrastructure. Such services are, therefore, necessary so that military forces and humanitarian agencies may sustain operations in remote or hostile environments. During the course of operations taken by the U.S. military in both Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, companies such as KBR were contracted to give support in a broad range of logistics that would include building bases, food, and water supply, as well as maintaining cords of vital infrastructure. This logistical expertise empowered the

²⁰ Press, A. (2008, July 21). Blackwater plans shift from security business; sets sights on international training, aviation and construction. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/story/blackwater-plans-shift-from-security-business-sets-sights-on-international-training-aviation-and-construction>

²¹ Solutions Group, H. L. (2024, April 23). HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS & GLOBAL OPERATIONS. Hammer Legacy Solutions Group. <https://hammerlegacysolutionsgroup.com/services/humanitarian-logistics-private-security/>

military forces to concentrate on strategic and tactical objectives in the knowledge that their operational support needs were being addressed by specialized private entities.

Another growing and certainly significant aspect of the services provided by PMCs is intelligence services. Collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence form part of the basics for any effective military or security strategy. PMCs have intelligence services that vary from intelligence gathering, signals intelligence²², geospatial intelligence²³, cyber intelligence²⁴, and other pertinent services. The services provide clients with an all-round perspective of the operational environment that, in turn, helps to identify any potential threats and make clear judgments or resolutions. PMCs use state-of-the-art technology to gather and analyze information, thereby generating intelligence information that can be used to assist in mission planning and operations execution. Furthermore, PMCs are regularly involved in counterintelligence, which safeguards their clients against the risks of espionage and other intelligence threats. The provision of intelligence services by the PMCs enhances their situational awareness and strategic capabilities, led by their clients, with effective and more efficiently conducted security operations.

These various roles and functions of PMCs speak for themselves in the relevance they carry in military and security operations today. PMCs provide vital military capacity through the offering of security services, training, and consultancy, logistical support, and intelligence services, as states seem to thrust such vital services upon private entities. Experience in the field of operations and the ability to land and execute the mission in tough environmental terrains with the desired flexibility and speed are some of the aspects that would be crucial for any state, international organization, or private organization to

²² (NSA) - Intelligence derived from electronic signals and systems used by foreign targets, such as communications systems, radars, and weapons systems that provides a vital window for our nation into foreign adversaries' capabilities, actions, and intentions

²³ (SATCEN – European Union Satellite Centre) - a discipline that comprises the exploitation and analysis of imagery and geospatial information to describe, assess, and visually depict physical features and geographically referenced activities on Earth.

²⁴ (CISA – Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) - Acquiring, processing, analyzing and disseminating information that identifies, tracks, and predicts threats, risks, and opportunities inside the cyber domain to offer courses of action that enhance decision making

rely upon in their operations within the security dynamics. As long as there is an increased demand for these highly specialized services in the areas of military and security, the importance played by PMCs is expected to increase even further.

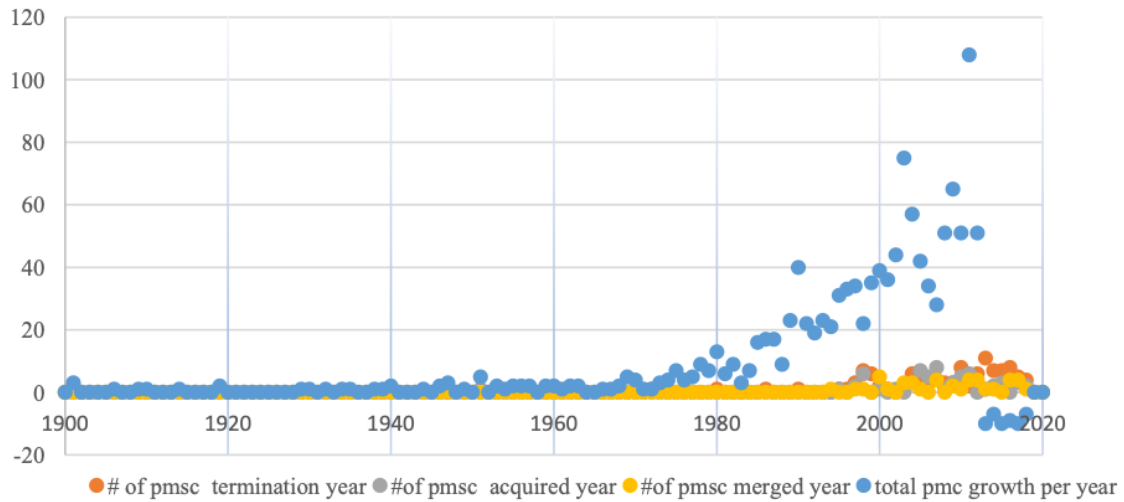


Figure 1: Creation/Termination Balance of PMSCs Over Time (Swed & Burland, 2020)

The roles and functions of PMCs have developed over time, carrying their potentiality toward the current insecurities of conflict and global security demands. Their ability to offer a range of services in a specialized fashion imposes the military capabilities of states that there will be general better and effective security outcomes.

Chapter 2: Types of PMC and the causes of their growth

2.1 Types of PMCs

There are four main types of PMCs, each with its own characteristics and differences. The most known one type is the Combat-offensive PMCs. Combat-offensive PMCs preside over a central and often contested place in present-day warfare. They actively engage in offensive military operations, hence ranking as the most aggressive forms of privatized military services that actively engage in combat to realize strategic objectives in line with the commitment of their clients. That places them front and center in contemporary conflict environments. This might be a direct reaction to the surging demand for military expertise and combat capability presently in short supply in areas where traditional military forces are overstretched, politically constrained, or simply inadequate. Perhaps the most famous example of a combat-offensive PMC is Executive Outcomes, a South African-based firm that came to international notice in the 1990s because of its activities in Angola and Sierra Leone. Executive Outcomes had been contracted to fight insurgencies and bring stability to those regions. In both cases, the organization's engagement went far beyond any traditional form of military advisory function or defensive role; it actively joined the fighting, employing heavy weapons, sophisticated tactics, and highly trained personnel. The accomplishments of Executive Outcomes in the operations served as a precedent for combat-offensive PMCs, in showing that effectiveness in achieving combat objectives could, in fact, be more than that which state militaries would manage. This also underlined the tactical flexibility and rapidity with which PMCs could be deployed, attracting them as increasingly attractive propositions for governments. The advantage of combat-offensive PMCs is to be able to pose with large doses of autonomy from the kind of bureaucracy and the law that one finds so often associated with national military forces. This operational flexibility frees them to respond very quickly to emerging threats and to rapidly deploy special forces. Such PMCs also tend to have a high degree of personnel with years of special forces or elite military unit experience, which confers an advantage in tactics while running complex and risky operations.

However, combat-offensive PMCs, which become directly involved in military activities, are associated with a lot of legal, ethical, and accountability complications. Mostly, such companies operate under the cover of commercial contracts and not any formal state military frameworks, usually putting them in a legal grey area. Furthermore, combat-offensive PMCs raise implications in conventional warfare and state sovereignty. A state, by privatizing its armed services with PMCs, could be seen as giving up its de jure authority through privatization of one of its sovereignties. This de facto authority in a state where PMCs operate de jure or de facto at the national level may translate into state abdication of fundamental sovereign powers in war and peace. The use of PMCs in combat situations muddies the traditional chain of command, raises questions over their loyalty and alignment with national goals, and often leads to complications when trying to align PMC operations with military objectives. These concerns aside, the role of combat-offensive PMCs seems to continue enlarging, especially because of the nature of modern warfare and the global demand for specialized military services on the rise. More recently, with conflict in the Middle East and Africa, combat-offensive PMCs have been used to conduct targeted strikes, offensive raids, and other high-intensity operations, which by tradition would be the domain of state military forces. Their ability to operate within many environments, often hostile, and their competence in traditional and unconventional forms of warfare make them a very valuable asset for governments and corporations intending to achieve military objectives while avoiding the political logistic constraints associated with the use of state military forces.

The second type of PMC can be called combat-defensive private military companies. These are mainly employed for asset protection, personnel protection, and strategic site protection in the theater of conflict. Their core mission is essentially defensive in nature and never offensive. As already said PMCs are hired by governments, corporates, and more to provide security services. The aim of their hiring is to protect their clients without aiming to confront or influence the course of a conflict. In that respect, combat-defensive PMCs play an important role in the current security strategies, particularly in conditions where the state's capability to guarantee security is either limited or restricted.

One of the most well-known examples of a combat-defensive private military company is Blackwater, now known as Academi. This company came to light because of its

involvement in the Iraq War when it was contracted by the United States government to provide security for diplomats and other personnel deemed vital. By providing these services, members of Blackwater were employed to convoy protection duties, installation protection duties, and personal protection duties against perceived dangers posed by both insurgents and terrorists. Although the mission of such companies was to some extent defensive in nature, the character of the conflict in Iraq often enough threw them into combat roles in repelling attacks against convoys or installations. This shows the dual nature of their mission-that while being basically defensive, combat-defensive PMCs will also have to be suitably equipped and trained for armed engagements when needed.

The difference between combat-offensive and combat-defensive PMCs consists, above all, in mission and rules of engagement. Combat-offensive PMCs are contracted for the performance of an active military mission, understood as the taking of some territory or neutralization of combatants. On the other hand, combat-defensive PMCs were contracted to protect people and infrastructure from attack, their engagement in combat only if used to repel the attacks or deter any threat of an attack. This narrower mandate often enables combat-defensive PMCs to function within a less contentious legal and ethical framework than their offensive brethren. Their actions are typically justified as necessary in the protection of human life and other assets of value, which lends them a degree of legitimacy in international law, against broader criticisms of PMCs as a whole.

Combat-defensive PMCs also operate in regions identified by political instability or where the rule of law is fragile. Activities within this range include guarding oil installations in Africa, protecting humanitarian aid workers in war zones, and the provision of security to embassies in countries beset by civil strife ²⁵. The fact that they can operate in most of such regimes, usually under threat, makes them all the more useful to both private and public sectors that require specialized services. Utilization of combat-defensive PMCs on behalf of international companies is also concentrated in resource-rich yet conflict-prone regions of the world where important commodities such as oil, gas, and minerals are at stake. In such a case, the work of PMC provides security and stability,

²⁵ Roberts, R. (2007, February 23). The role of private military companies in African conflicts . SunScholar. <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/86649921-456f-4abf-bab2-34b41235e409/content>

ensuring the continuity of business without any disturbance, while dealing with all kinds of risks involving insurgency, criminal organizations, or political violence.

However, the existence of combat-defensive private military companies can complicate the military and political dynamics in conflict zones. Because these firms operate through private contracts, they may not necessarily share greater goals related to peacekeeping or conflict resolution efforts. Sometimes, the activities of PMCs exacerbate tensions or fuel further violence if they are perceived by local populations as foreign mercenaries acting in the interests of private corporations or foreign governments rather than the well-being of the local populace. Such a situation may deprive the development of trust and stability in post-conflict areas and, generally, make involvement with combat-defensive private military companies a double-edged sword in international security.

Notwithstanding these concerns, combat-defensive PMCs remain in higher demand as time goes on. In many cases, they are a solution to the security imperatives of governments and corporations in conflict areas.

As modern warfare is constantly evolving and the role of non-state actors is becoming much more important, then logically the demand for private security personnel who are readier to operate against such risks will persist.

To that end, combat-defensive PMCs demonstrate potential value in modern security operations, especially within conflict zones where classic state military forces are not available, or even willing, to commit resources. While the mission driving them is essentially defensive, they frequently must fight to achieve this mission. The duality brings out not only added value but also some of the challenges attendant to employing private military companies in modern warfighting. While they perform a vital function in an environment where insecurity is high, their proliferation in conflict zones also raises at once very serious questions about accountability, legality, and the broader implications for international security of such private military activities.

The third type of PMCs are non-combat offensive PMCs; they occupy a strategic niche and, therefore, a valuable position in private military and security operations. While the firms themselves are not involved in combat, they are very effective in making contributions to battlefield dynamics and thereby affecting the outcomes of military

engagements through the various offensive support services provided. Their contributions have become critical in modern military operations, particularly where the advisory role, training programs, and strategic planning are central for the success of state and non-state actors in conflict. Non-Combat Offensive military companies (PMCs) have been hired by Western governments to intervene in Third World countries to train their militaries during conflicts, like MPRI did during the Balkans conflict or MPRI again during the 2003 Iraq War. They have also been employed to support developing nations that are rife with conflict, like Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Sudan ²⁶.

Perhaps one point that defines non-combat offense PMCs is the fact that it concentrates on enhancing military capabilities without the utilization of direct force. These activities run deep, from training in military affairs to advisement on the battlefield, tactical coordination, and even operational planning. The expertise which it supplies provides national militaries with the ability, insurgent forces, and private clients to improve their combat effectiveness without themselves being engaged in the fighting ²⁷. Resultantly these PMCs fall within a more legally acceptable and politically tolerable realm than the combat-oriented variety of their brethren since they neither handle weapons nor use them to inflict harm on anyone.

Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), a US-based PMC that weighed heavily in on many military operations during the 1990s and early 2000s was instrumental in providing strategic advice and military training to various governments, among them the Croatian and Bosnian governments during the Balkan Wars. Although MPRI operatives themselves did not directly engage in combat, their advisory services would form the bedrock of military strategies that proved decisive in the conflict outcome ²⁸. This proves

²⁶ Fulloon, M. (2015). NON-STATE ACTOR: DEFINING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES. In Strategic Review for Southern Africa (2nd ed., Vol. 37, pp. 29–49). essay, Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities.

²⁷ Singer, P.W. (2001). Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry and Its Ramifications for International Security. In International Security (3rd ed., Vol. 26, pp. 186–220). essay, The MIT Press.

²⁸ Fulloon, M. (2015). NON-STATE ACTOR: DEFINING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES. In Strategic Review for Southern Africa (2nd ed., Vol. 37, pp. 29–49). essay, Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities.

that non-combat offensive PMCs can be effective in conflict situations through the exertion of influence on combat operations indirectly. The ability to conduct activities involving training, advising, and coordination of military effort, similar in impact to sending troops into battle, pertains.

Besides military training and advisory services, the non-combat offensive PMCs also provide a number of important services in operational support, particularly in the areas of intelligence and threat analysis. Through providing intelligence reports, tactical plans, and operational risk analyses, the PMCs support the military in their combat readiness and operations. Intelligence services are especially in high demand for non-combat offensive PMCs due to the fact that good and timely intelligence can totally change the outcome of a military engagement. This non-violent approach to military actions ensures that clients are better armed to make an informed decision in context to the combat scenario.

Non-combat offensive PMCs exert influence on national militaries, non-state actors, multinational corporations, and international organizations. In states or regions embroiled in conflict, they provide important advisory services to governmental and non-governmental actors as a means of operationally deciphering the intricacies of conflict environments. For example, non-combat offensive PMCs could be contracted by multinational corporations operating in conflict zones to advise on security risks, develop contingency plans, or help in negotiations with local power structures. Such services are especially in demand in conditions where corporations should take care of their assets and personnel without showing their active involvement in conflict. The expertise supplied by the non-combat offensive PMCs enables these companies to maintain operations in unstable environments with very little risk of being directly involved in hostilities.

Non-combat offense PMCs are also instrumental in any follow-on reconstruction and stabilization initiatives. Quite often in post-conflict situations, such PMCs may be contracted to conduct training and advisory activities to revitalize the forces of national

security and establish the military infrastructure²⁹. This role is particularly important in countries coming out of civil war or insurgency where the state's capacity to maintain security and enforce the rule of law has been severely weakened. Non-combat offensive PMCs work to train local police, military, and security forces in a bid to build a stable security environment that fosters political and economic recovery. Their activities often relate to advisory services concerning the restructuring of military structures, working out defense policies, and professionalizing personnel.

Even as they do not engage directly in combat, these PMCs have not been without controversy. The ambiguities of legal and ethical accountability for such companies arise because the line between advisory and direct combat is blurred. In certain cases, non-combat offense PMCs have been criticized for involvement in conflicts where their advice and training may have exacerbated violence or contributed to abuses of human rights. In many cases, the legislation around such PMCs is not that strict compared with that of combat forces, and thus, they are often working in a gray legal zone in which the line separating advice from military engagement gets blurred. Besides, the privatization of military knowledge also raises questions about the extent to which the power of private companies reaches the determining of national military policies and plans, especially in weak countries that may be highly dependent on outside forces for their security needs. Non-combat offensive PMCs are an important element of contemporary military operations, pulling together skill, training, and strategic planning that is committed to optimizing military effectiveness without engaging combat. From shaping military strategy to advising on tactical operations, guiding toward objective achievement, and furnishing intelligence, they emerge as an indispensable force multiplier for state and non-state actors alike. Also, their influence and reach are bound to grow with the increasing demand for specialized military services around the world, thus laying the requirement for an increased need for a regulatory framework that is necessary to condition their contribution to international norms and standards.

²⁹ Schreier, F., & Caparini, M. (2005, March). *Privatising Security: Law, Practice and Governance of Private Military and Security Companies*. GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF ARMED FORCES (DCAF).

https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/op06_privatising-security.pdf

The Non-Combat Defensive PMC is at the other end of the spectrum and is mostly responsible for non-lethal military logistical missions. The PMCs that provide these kinds of military services typically don't participate in the actual combat and could not even be organized or of military heritage. Therefore, these PMCs would still be used to give the host army a military edge, including allowing the deployment of their own logistical forces for combat operations. This would include KBR, formerly known as Brown and Root, as a Non-Combat Defensive PMC ³⁰. Non-combat defensive PMCs form a big part of the private military and security industry. While several others might be engaged in combat, the non-combat PMCs have carved out niche areas of providing critical support services in a non-violent manner to protect personnel, assets, and infrastructure, especially in high-risk environments. They perform critical functions that do not necessarily necessitate direct military action or offensive initiatives but may, instead, be established to provide logistical support, maintain infrastructure, ensure supply chain management, gather intelligence, or even offer technological support. By this avenue, non-combat defense PMCs take core loads from state militaries and other agencies to center their resources on core combat and strategic operations, as non-core combat functions are being outsourced to external specialists.

Logistical support itself is a primary role undertaken by non-combat, defensive PMCs. Modern warfare and peacekeeping depend upon complex logistical chains that ensure a constant flow of food, water, ammunition, medical supplies, and equipment to the troops in the field. This management entails careful planning, organization, and execution of these logistics-related activities, which most national military forces may not be resourced or experienced to handle themselves. Non-combat defense PMCs are particularly effective in this domain because they can hire specialized personnel with expertise in supply chain management, transportation logistics, and inventory control. This capability proves very important in combat zones where the traditional supply routes are highly

³⁰ Mursitama, T. N., & Setyawan, W. (2012). Emerging Role of Multinational Corporations as Private Military Companies: Converging International Relations and International Business Perspectives. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(23), 205–212. <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbss>

vulnerable to disruption and where rapid readjustments become essential for maintaining preparedness for operations.

Apart from logistics, other activities of non-combat defense PMCs involve the maintaining and repairing of key military equipment and facilities. For example, these PMCs are involved in the reconstruction to heavy lift and aircraft, weapon manufacture, information technology (IT) hardware and software, mine clearance activities, communications, medical, storage, maintenance, and disposal of unexploded bombs³¹.

Among other very significant roles, non-combat defensive PMCs would also provide security for critical infrastructure, including military bases, airfields, supply depots, and communications networks. Although these companies cannot be regarded as conducting offensive operations, their presence is nevertheless indispensable in deterring an attack, effectively providing security for key logistical and operational infrastructure. This level of protection by this kind of PMCs becomes highly germane within the asymmetric warfare³² environment, wherein an adversary that is usually in the form of insurgents or other non-state actors would normally adopt logistics hubs or other key infrastructure as the point of attack in any strategy to disrupt and bring military operations to their knees. Indeed, the ability of non-combat defensive PMCs to prevent sabotage or attack of key assets can have quite significant impacts on the success of the military mission within such environments.

Other than logistics, infrastructure security, and most of the non-combat defensive PMCs, intelligence gathering forms part of their services. These companies collect, analyze, and disseminate critical information from within the environment for use by military forces to create situational awareness and make informed decisions. This is with no combat engagement themselves and so contributes to the overall security in military operations

³¹ Fulloon, M. (2015). NON-STATE ACTOR: DEFINING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES. In Strategic Review for Southern Africa (2nd ed., Vol. 37, pp. 29–49). essay, Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities.

³² (Sexton, 2024) - **asymmetrical warfare**, unconventional strategies and tactics adopted by a force when the military capabilities of belligerent powers are not simply unequal but are so significantly different that they cannot make the same sorts of attacks on each other.

by the identification of potential threats or vulnerabilities within the operational environment. The work of non-combat defensive PMCs for intelligence enables the military forces to focus their resources on combat operations while reaping from the expertise and technological capability of private contractors in intelligence gathering and data processing. Where reliable intelligence is hard to come by in these theaters of conflict, such contributions by non-combat defensive PMCs may prove priceless.

Probably one of the most principal advantages of the non-combat defensive PMCs is their flexibility and ability to act in conditions when classic military structures have certain limitations. Very often, such companies are contracted to provide services in politically sensitive or volatile regions where it would not be possible to deploy national military forces because of diplomatic or legal considerations. By making use of private contractors, governments and international organizations can project presence and protect their interests without declaring direct military presence. This is in particular relevant in the case of non-combat defense PMCs, which are highly crucial in post-conflict scenarios where regional stabilization and rebuilding of infrastructures and institutions need to be facilitated. As such, their contribution to these processes often goes to the very core of providing enabling conditions for long-term peace and security.

Non-combat defensive PMCs are still eminently part and parcel of modern military and security operations. Critical support services in high-risk environments, technical expertise in both maintaining and securing infrastructure, and flexibility with which PMCs adapt to the complex operational environment-all these make them extremely valuable to state and non-state actors alike. Global military operations are ever more dependent on sophisticated logistical networks and infrastructure; as such, demand for the specialized services of non-combat, defensive PMCs will likely continue to rise.

The four types of PMCs are, in a nutshell, combat-offensive, combat-defensive, non-combat offensive, and non-combat defensive. Each plays its role in the military operational landscape. The combat-offensive private military companies are those that actively participate in offensive military operations, wherein they are more visibly engaged in combat for the accomplishment of specific military objectives. Combat-defensive private military companies are formed to secure personnel and infrastructure

and assets, thus engaging in active combat strictly in response to an attack intended to nullify these facilities or structures. The difference between these two categories lies in the extent of their direct participation in combat-offensive PMCs act proactively against enemies, whereas the role of defensive PMCs is more reactive in nature and protective.

While the non-combat, offensive PMCs are not involved in direct combat, such PMCs still have a significant effect on military operations through substantial advisory, training, intelligence, and strategic planning. They bring competitive advantages to their client's military capabilities without actually fighting. Non-combat defense PMCs do not fight but are involved in supporting the military to provide logistics and security for infrastructural and technological assistance in order for military forces to operate successfully without the need to use force.

These different types of PMCs thus vary in relation to combat: those directly involved with violence and those supporting the operations without active participation in armed conflict, hence underlining the diversity of services they can offer within modern military and security contexts.

2.2 Sectors of PMC Operations

The military and defense sector are probably the most important and highly visible domain in which PMCs are operative. The individual services in this setting range from direct participation in combat to acting in an advisory capacity, logistics, intelligence, and even peace enforcement. This is because in this sector, PMCs have grown to be touted as essential in state-led and multinational military efforts, which have specialized capabilities that state military forces may lack or provide extra capacity when forces are overstretched. With the changing nature of warfare, the emergence of PMCs is seen as an indispensable actor in support and at times substitution of the traditional state military forces; their contributions to the defense sector are not only significant but transformative in nature as well. Among all PMC functions in the military and defense sector, one of the important roles is to support the state militaries in combat and non-combat operations. PMCs are contracted by governments to provide security in conflict zones, protection of military installations, and offensive/defensive military actions. In Iraq and Afghanistan,

for example, PMCs have been used extensively to provide security for critical infrastructure, secure diplomatic missions, and assist in peace enforcement endeavors ³³. The potential for PMCs to provide services that include rapid deployment and specialized military services makes them a necessary element in military operations where traditional forces may be overwhelmed either by the scale of conflict or constrained by political considerations.

PMCs have also become deeply integrated into multinational defense operations, particularly within the frameworks of coalitions or alliances such as NATO or the United Nations ³⁴. This would involve services that range from intelligence gathering to logistical support, where PMCs work in cooperation with national militaries to guarantee that large-scale military campaigns function smoothly and effectively. In this context, they are part of an enlarged operation representing the growth of the role of PMCs beyond the strict boundaries of state military services to integral actors within the wider international defense architecture. The strategic importance of PMCs lies in the fact that they can operate across national boundaries, providing services with uniformity in a multinational context.

Another critical factor explaining the growth in prominence of PMCs within the military and defense is their flexibility and responsiveness. While large-scale operations may be undertaken by state militaries, these are usually slower to deploy and often constrained by bureaucratic and logistical limits in their ability to adapt quickly in rapidly changing environments. Operating privately, PMCs are not constrained by the same kind of institutional limitations that can significantly hold back such forces from responding swiftly to emerging threats and operational challenges. This flexibility has proved to be of great value in zones of conflict where the dynamics of warfare can change in a very short and unpredictable period and highly specialized personnel and resources may be required in large numbers with very short notice. For example, PMCs are sometimes contracted to provide on-spot security for military supply routes or to mobilize quick reaction teams immediately after insurgent attacks. Indeed, these capabilities make PMCs

³³ Isenberg, D. (2007). A government in search of cover: Private military companies in Iraq. In Oxford Academic (pp. 82–93). essay, Oxford University Press.

³⁴ Østensen, Å. G. (2011). UN Use of Private Military and Security Companies - Practices and Policies. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

complement the effectiveness of state military forces, bolster their potential, and make them a very important component in the security sector.

PMCs also offer vast logistical support within the military and defense sector. The modern military operations, often in very remote or hostile environments, are completely dependent on very sophisticated structures of logistical support, which guarantee the constant resupply of food, water, ammunition, fuel, and other such consumables to the troops in the field.

Another vast area of contribution that PMCs have given to the military and defense is in intelligence and strategic analysis. Intelligence is an indispensable element of any military operation: providing necessary information about where to deploy forces, when the best time will be to attack, and how to take advantage of weaknesses in the enemy's positions. With the sophistication of surveillance technologies and expertise from former intelligence personnel, PMCs are also contracted for intelligence gathering, analysis, and dissemination. This heightens situational awareness for state militaries and strategically provides them with an advantage over adversaries in such environments where access to quality intelligence remains limited. The value of PMC intelligence services within military operations also extends to their application within the framework of a modern defense strategy, wherein their contribution to intelligence gathering and analysis is salient in both offensive and defensive military operations.

PMCs also train and professionalize national security forces. In many cases, PMCs are contracted by governments or international organizations for the training of local militaries and police forces in order to build their capacity to maintain security and stability. This function is particularly valuable in states emerging from civil war or insurgency where national security forces are usually badly equipped, poorly trained, and undisciplined. Indeed, PMC training helps to professionalize local forces and equip them for challenges with regard to providing security in unsafe environments.

The second sector in which PMCs operate is in private sector security. This activity has increased significantly over recent decades, which corresponds to an overall increasing demand for specialized security services from large multinational corporations, private entities, and individuals. It is this growth in international commerce, particularly into unstable and resource-rich areas of the world, that has produced a security environment

not amenable to traditional state-based security provisions. Drawing from their expertise in risk management, threat mitigation, and security operations, PMCs have come to play key roles in the effective provision of security solutions tailored to meet the needs of the private sector. Their services have become increasingly vital to protect corporate interests and ensure the security of personnel.

The rise of PMCs as private sector actors is complementary to the globalization of markets and the associated necessity for companies to operate in parts of the world that are politically unstable or embattled. These would include industries such as oil and gas, mining, construction, and telecommunications, among others, that are expanding into territories where the risks of violence, sabotage, or political instability are greater. Private corporations would have much more requirement than standard security services in these countries; they would need experts who can address these security challenges, which range from employee protection to operational continuity in dangerous settings. Because they can provide the required protection, PMCs have become attractive as a way to decrease exposure to business risks in hostile areas. Among the primary roles of PMCs within private security, it counts the protection of strategic infrastructures. As already said the infrastructure in oil and gas extraction, energy, and mining industries is often located in some of the most remote and unstable regions of the world, making them particularly vulnerable to attack by insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and sometimes even terrorist-like populations. In fact, oil pipelines in areas like the Niger Delta in Nigeria are constantly the target of militarized actions to disrupt production or extort corporations for resources³⁵. For instance, in such cases, security solutions are contracted to the PMCs, including not only physically safeguarding the infrastructure but also ensuring that operations can continue uninterrupted. This may be in securing transport routes for supplies and personnel, managing access to key facilities, and implementing systems to monitor for potential threats.

The role of PMCs in critical infrastructure protection goes beyond armed guards in that many of them are involved in strategic planning and implementation that involves an elaborate denial strategy to limit the chances of sabotage, theft, or any form of

³⁵ BBC. (2016, November 16). Nigeria militants “bomb” oil pipelines in Niger Delta. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37999388>

interference with corporate operations. These may involve the assessment of risks with a view to identifying possible vulnerabilities, advice on the design and fortification of infrastructure, and elaboration of contingency plans in view of security breaches. It incorporates the use of technology such as surveillance drones, electronic monitoring systems, and cybersecurity to further enhance PMCs' capabilities in offering robust protection for private sector assets. This approach to security will mean corporations operating in high-risk environments can protect their investments while limiting security threats that might affect them.

Besides guarding infrastructures, PMCs protect corporate personnel in volatile regions. This makes the safety of their employees of paramount importance to the multi-national corporations whose risks, taken from kidnapping, extortion and attacks in conflict zones are high. PMC services include highly specialized personnel protection, from close protection of high-value executives to convoy security for employees who must travel through hostile regions. Most of these services include the deployment of trained security teams, many with wide experience in special forces or law enforcement, for the protection of individuals and groups. These teams are not only involved in providing physical security, but also in managing the logistics of transportation, ensuring secured accommodation, and liaising with local authorities to deal with any emerging threat.

In this respect, PMCs are considered very effective in protecting personnel, particularly in those regions where the rule of law is weak and local security forces are either unreliable or incapable of providing security. In most cases, companies working in such environments do not have any hope for effective response from the local police or military forces to security incidents, making the services offered by PMCs rather indispensable in securing their personnel. This being said, PMCs often liaise closely with local security personnel, training and mentoring them to enhance their capacity to deal with threats while allowing corporate employees to remain immune to harm. This collaborative approach helps strengthen the overall security environment in which corporations operate and decreases the likelihood of violent incidents.

It also remains common to see PMCs contracted for crisis management and evacuations of corporations where sudden political instability erupted. While less well known, there were those PMCs that designed and executed evacuation plans for corporate personnel

that would take them out of dangerous situations in time. This may involve liaison with local governments, securing transportation routes, and sending specialized teams to assist in an evacuation process. They are also involved in post-crisis recoveries, which means they help the corporations in the resumption of operations once the danger is over. The fact that these firms can manage complex crises, a combination of their logistical ability, makes them indispensable partners for corporations experiencing unpredictable security challenges.

Besides direct security provision, other forms of involvement by PMCs in private sector security are consultancy services in security. In fact, most PMCs offer risk assessment and security planning to corporations intending to venture into new markets or operate in politically sensitive regions. These would include detailed analysis of the security environment, rating threats associated therewith, and recommendations with regard to security interventions that would be fit for a particular corporate need. The PMCs thus provide actionable intelligence and strategic guidance that allow corporations to make informed decisions regarding their security needs and reduce risk exposure.

The last main sector in which PMCs operate is humanitarian and peacekeeping operation. Such operations represented areas of activity solely concerning international organizations such as the United Nations and state-led military forces. The increase in the scale, complexity, and risks of humanitarian crises in modern times has been matched by a rise in the use of PMCs for services that support the implementation of peacekeeping missions and facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance in unstable areas. This places PMCs in a position where logistical, security, and advisory services are being offered to international organizations or NGOs that face resource or expertise limitations in trying to navigate such complex dynamics on the ground.

The primary motive behind the incorporation of PMCs in humanitarian operations has to do with the nature of most of the humanitarian crises encountered today, which is generally put amidst regions characterized by ongoing conflicts. Humanitarian workers and convoys are often threatened with attack by armed groups, criminal networks, and unstable local environments. The resulting challenges in these regards make effective aid delivery; these risks also make the protection of personnel precarious, to say the least. Demand for security in these contexts has outstripped the capacity of traditional humanitarian organizations, which generally do not have either the expertise or the

mandate to provide armed protection of workers or facilities. PMCs fill in the resultant gap left by the expertise of applying their skills and knowledge acquired in a high-risk environment to rapidly deploy personnel with specialized security training to provide the required security framework for humanitarian operations in hostile areas.

Perhaps one of the largest roles for PMCs in humanitarian operations is the act of providing armed protection both for the workers themselves and for the facilities they operate³⁶. Since humanitarian organizations usually operate on the principles of neutrality and impartiality, it is becoming difficult to work accordingly in those regions where warring factions, militias, or other criminal groupings are posing direct threats to the operations of the organizations. PMCs come into play, being contracted to offer security for aid distribution points, refugee camps, and medical facilities against potential attacks and looting. Their very presence discourages any form of violence and allows aid to flow smoothly to the weakest and most vulnerable populations without disruption by outside elements. With their provision of this type of protective service, PMC contractors allow humanitarian organizations to operate without fear of their mission being compromised in any way³⁷. In addition to this aspect, PMCs do facilitate coordination of humanitarian logistics³⁸. Today's humanitarian crises, call for an increasingly logistics network, ensuring that the delivered aid reaches the affected populations. Such logistics would need to consider difficult terrains and the presence of armed groups which make the delivery of food, medicines, and other forms of assistance very challenging. PMCs are often contracted to oversee the transportation and distribution of humanitarian aid³⁹. They manage to ensure that aid reaches its intended destination by managing all risks associated

³⁶ Lauder, A., Neu, K., & Avant, D. (2024, February 21). PMSCs and humanitarian security: What the data do and do not tell us. ICoCA Blog. <https://blog.icoca.ch/pmscs-and-humanitarian-security-what-the-data-do-and-do-not-tell-us/>

³⁷ Dall'Asta, G. (2024, April 24). The impact of private security companies employed by ingos on humanitarian operations. ICoCA Blog. <https://blog.icoca.ch/the-impact-of-private-security-companies-employed-by-ingos-on-humanitarian-operations/>

³⁸ Solutions Group, H. L. (2024, April 23). HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS & GLOBAL OPERATIONS. Hammer Legacy Solutions Group. <https://hammerlegacysolutionsgroup.com/services/humanitarian-logistics-private-security/>

³⁹ Østensen, Å. G. (2011). UN Use of Private Military and Security Companies - Practices and Policies. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

in the transit of dangerous areas, arranging secure transport routes, and providing armed escorts for the aid convoys where necessary.

In fact, logistical capacities are the most treasured capabilities of PMCs during humanitarian operations at regions where the infrastructure of the state has collapsed and has limited access to basic services. In such regions, PMCs normally have to build and maintain operational infrastructures that will support humanitarian missions, such as temporary shelters. Because they can offer this support, humanitarian organizations can remain in the field in areas that would be too dangerous or inaccessible without it, to sustain operations for any prolonged period.

PMCs are called on more and more for peacekeeping operations as well, often under circumstances in which traditional peacekeeping bodies, like those of the United Nations, are either insufficient or not an option⁴⁰. Peacekeeping missions generally comprise most military support functions of a peace deal such as ceasefire agreements, border monitoring, and disarmament of combatants alongside their more traditionally understood role of peacemaking. Although these functions have typically belonged to the state militaries in operation under the mandate of regional organizations, PMCs have proven to be partners in providing these peripheral services to peacekeeping forces. It would be to look after personnel security from an international background, to train local security forces in peace agreement maintenance, and to advise how to implement strategies for conflict resolution.

The role of PMCs in peacekeeping operations reflects the increasing complexity of modern peacekeeping missions. Moreover, contemporary conflicts are more likely to be characterized by non-state actors, from militias and insurgent groups to criminal networks. That is something that often complicates a traditional peace operation. That being said, PMC companies can operate in such environments with their adaptability and specialized expertise, not only in those where the capacity of state-led peacekeeping forces is low. PMC's provide additional personnel, equipment, and expertise that enhance the efficiency of peacekeeping missions in regions where the security situation is still precarious and implementing peace treaties proves to be an uphill task.

⁴⁰ Østensen, Å. G. (2011). UN Use of Private Military and Security Companies - Practices and Policies. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

One of the leading examples in the involvement of a PMC in peacekeeping was in Sierra Leone after the end of the conflict. In the late 1990s, after a devastating civil war, the UN and the British government conducted long peacekeeping and stabilization efforts within the country. The PMCs, for example Sandline International ⁴¹, were compensated to offer military training and assistance to the government of Sierra Leone against local security forces ⁴². While the practices of such mechanisms in any way remain discussed, their contribution to the stabilization of the country and the process of peace cannot be denied. Thence, in this case, PMCs demonstrate that, in conjunction with the classical forces of peacekeepers, they provide a range of essential services whose outcomes are likely to ensure the long-term stability and recovery of post-conflict societies.

However, the engagement of PMCs in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations has raised a number of ethical and legal issues. One of the main issues is that private companies' profit motives might sometimes greatly conflict with the humanitarian principles that the international organizations and NGOs will have in place to guide their operations⁴³. Humanitarian organizations work with guiding principles like neutrality, impartiality, and independence to guide their scope, and are meant to assure access to persons in need without any partiality or political-military interference. Sometimes, the involvement of PMCs, which are commercial entities, muddles the line separating the humanitarian principles from the profit attributes of private military companies. This has led to a number of concerns that their presence in a humanitarian operation compromises

⁴¹ Butler, L. B. (2019). Natural Resources and Private Military Security Companies: How Do They Affect Civil War Duration?. School of Advanced Military Studies US Army Command and General Staff College. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1083202.pdf>

⁴² Josephides, M. (2014, December 1). How private military services saved Sierra Leone: The contracting out of military duties came from necessity but help ensure long-lasting security. IOA. [https://www.inonafrica.com/2014/12/01/how-private-military-services-saved-sierra-leone-the-contracting-out-of-military-duties-came-from-necessity-but-help-ensure-long-lasting-security/#:~:text=The%20next%20large%20PMC%20to,in%20collaboration%20with%20the%20RUF\).](https://www.inonafrica.com/2014/12/01/how-private-military-services-saved-sierra-leone-the-contracting-out-of-military-duties-came-from-necessity-but-help-ensure-long-lasting-security/#:~:text=The%20next%20large%20PMC%20to,in%20collaboration%20with%20the%20RUF).)

⁴³ The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. (2023, August 31). The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. Private Military Companies. Retrieved July 2, 2024, from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf>.

the perceived neutrality of an aid organization and puts it at risk of armed groups that perceive it to be aligned with foreign or corporate interests.

These processes of privatization in military functions have already stirred similar debates on issues of accountability and erosion of state sovereignty in peacekeeping operations⁴⁴. However useful PMCs might be for peacekeeping missions, these evocations raise critical legal questions regarding the frameworks within which they would act and the extent of accountability for their conduct in conflict zones. Military personnel, unlike those of state, will ultimately be tried in military justice systems and therefore be subject to international conventions while many operatives of PMC act under private contracts for which there are ranging levels of oversight. This can sometimes lead to legal gray zones, which in a way cover and allow violations of international law in the form of the excessive use of force or abuse against civilians by unchecked opportunism⁴⁵.

Be that as it may, demand for the services of PMCs in both humanitarian and peacekeeping operations is likely to increase, given the increasing complexity of the current global crises and the related demands on having specialized security and logistical support in conflict-affected regions. The effectiveness and added value of their effort lies in the very fact that at this particular moment humanitarian organizations and international structures face the most serious problems in their security guarantee-the challenge of modern conflicts. PMC provides the ways of adequate security without establishment of cumbersome bureaucratic machines and therefore upgrade safety and efficiency of delivery of aid and peacekeeping operations. Such skills make them valuable allies in dealing with a number of the most important humanitarian and security tasks in the world today.

⁴⁴ Schreier, F., & Caparini, M. (2005, March). Privatising Security: Law, Practice and Governance of Private Military and Security Companies. GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF ARMED FORCES (DCAF).
https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/op06_privatising-security.pdf

⁴⁵ Cameron, L. (2006). Private military companies: their status under international humanitarian law and its impact on their regulation. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 88(863), 573–598.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383106000683>

2.3 Do PMCs rise in response to a growing demand and an insufficient supply for security?

The central question of this thesis, “whether PMCs arise in response to a growing demand for security and, therefore, an insufficient supply”, deserves special mention because it has to do with the most critical aspect of global security dynamics in contemporary times. PMCs have remained actors for the last several decades in addressing security challenges in various settings. Their emergence and growth and embedding into the global landscape of security are explained by the reason of change in the nature of conflict, and the widening gap between the demand for security and actual supply by traditional security providers. The explanation for the growth of PMCs as a response to this sort of imbalance demands in-depth scrutiny of developing changes in global political, economic, and military power together with the structural constraints placed upon state actors to deal with security problems.

The first of the main causes responsible for the rise of PMCs is the new look that warfare and security threats take whereby specialized military and security services' demand is logically increased. In the post-Cold War period, the international security environment became far more complex and fragmented. While the end of the bipolar order dissolved many traditional state-centered security arrangements, new conflicts emerged, often in the form of civil wars, insurgencies, and transnational terrorism. These conflicts, often part of failed or fragile states, imposed security demands on those states that conventional state military forces were sometimes badly equipped to meet. This created growing demand for non-state actors able to offer security solutions in areas where state militaries could not or would not intervene due to lack of capacity, resources, or political will.

This landscape was further complicated by the proliferation of asymmetric warfare ⁴⁶, wherein the main actors are mostly non-state ones: insurgents, terrorists, and criminal organizations. Tactics so traditionally and characteristically able to be employed by these groups in combat, such as guerrilla warfare⁴⁷, suicidal bombings, and even cyber-attacks, have often been extremely difficult to counter effectively. Moreover, the conflicts are usually localized and fragmented; hence, state militaries, especially for Western countries, are often very reluctant to engage in such protracted conflicts that may not be in their national interest. This has resulted in a global security gap, especially in areas of strategic or economic interest where local security forces are weak or compromised. It is in this environment that PMCs began to play significant roles in the provision of security services through offering experience, flexibility, and speed of deployment against asymmetric threats.

Another factor that creates an enabling environment for the rise of PMCs is the decline in state military capacity; the fiscal and political compulsions toward the scaling back of military forces have led to such a development in the West⁴⁸. Since the end of the Cold War, most Western countries, and in particular the United States and European powers, began to reduce their defense spending and subsequently had smaller, leaner armed forces. For example, according to US Department of Defence, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, the number of US military personnel decreased from 2.1 million in 1989 to 1.3 million in 2001. Analogously, other NATO members made decreases. From 5.2 million in 1987 to fewer than 1.0 million in 2001, the troops of the Soviet Union/Russia decreased. The number of troops in affluent countries decreased from 11.9

⁴⁶ (Sexton, 2024) - unconventional strategies and tactics adopted by a force when the military capabilities of belligerent powers are not simply unequal but are so significantly different that they cannot make the same sorts of attacks on each other.

⁴⁷ (Asprey, 2024) - **guerrilla warfare**, type of warfare fought by irregulars in fast-moving, small-scale actions against orthodox military and police forces and, on occasion, against rival insurgent forces, either independently or in conjunction with a larger political-military strategy

⁴⁸ Baum, J. A., & McGahan, A. M. (2009). *The Evolution of the Private Military Industry after the Cold War*. La Chaire EPPP: Économie des Partenariats Public-Privé. https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf

to 6.0 million, while in developing countries it decreased from 17.0 to 14.7 million (U.S. Department of State). In contrast, the number of military interventions required mostly in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia increased and put great demands on already overextended state military forces. The widening gap of peacekeeping missions, counter-terrorism operations, and humanitarian interventions between demand from the international community for security and supply of military personnel and resources grew.

PMCs filled in the gap by making available to governments the capacity to outsource military functions that had always remained the responsibility of state-controlled forces. The outsourcing of military functions to PMCs is also not only part of a response to the shortage of state military resources but also part of a wider trend toward the privatization of security. To date, a growing number of governments regard the use of PMCs as an economical and flexible way to have their security requirements met without having to tie down the much-needed political or financial capital in sending the state military forces. Private sector too has done its part in augmenting the demand for PMCs. While expanding their operations into a region of political instability, conflict, or poor governance, companies would require specialized security services that could help protect their assets and employees. As already stated in the previous chapters, companies operating in oil and gas, mining, and construction are highly susceptible to the risks posed by the insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and local unrest. Indeed, in many cases, state security forces are either unwilling or unable to provide adequate protection for private sector interests, whereby the quest for PMCs takes over. Such companies are seeking from PMCs comprehensive security solutions. PMCs have the ability to offer a level of expertise and operational flexibility unmatched by traditional state forces, making them the preferred security provider for corporations operating in high-risk environments.

The humanitarian sector has also contributed to the high demand for PMCs, with international aid organizations and NGOs falling under higher risks in conflict zones. Humanitarian operations often occur in areas where state security forces are either absent or compromised, putting aid workers in a position of vulnerability to attacks, kidnappings, and extortion. This has, in turn, made humanitarian organizations increasingly dependent upon PMCs for a variety of security functions, such as securing personnel, facilities, and

lines of supply, thereby guaranteeing the safe and effective delivery of aid. The fact that PMCs can handle such operations in risky environments, has made them a partner for humanitarian organizations intent on prosecuting their missions in hostile environments.

This also encourages the growth of PMCs giving a benefit for governments that want to avoid the political cost of military intervention. Deployment of state military forces in foreign conflicts is very politically sensitive, especially in the most democratic countries where public opinion can shape policy decisions. Large-scale military interventions, or those causing casualties, are bound to cause political backlash and a decrease in the support for a government. PMCs offer a shortcut from this dilemma in that they allow governments to conduct military operations without the same level of public accountability. In this respect, contracting out combat and security functions to private operators provides a government with ways to limit its political risk in military intervention while continuing to achieve strategic objectives. This has been particularly evident in conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, in which the PMCs were instrumental in supplementing U.S. and NATO forces⁴⁹, thus allowing these governments to reduce their various troop deployments while still sustaining a presence in the region.

The expansion of PMCs as a result of higher security needs can be also seen as a matter of the failure of international organizations, such as the United Nations, to provide sufficient security solutions. While the UN may play a leading role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, its peacekeeping operations have been shaped all along by its political constraints, resource limitations, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. For one, UN peacekeeping forces are mostly made up of troops from several different countries, each with their own rules of engagement and respective political interests that coordinate military action⁵⁰. Also, the UN usually depends on voluntary contributions from the

⁴⁹ Turzi, M. (2019). The effects of Private Military and Security Companies on local populations in Afghanistan. Centro Ricerca Sicurezza e Terrorismo. <https://www.dirittopenaleglobalizzazione.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Michele-Turzi-The-effects-of-private-military-and-security-companies-in-local-populations-in-Afghanistan.pdf>

⁵⁰ United Nations, (2024). How we are funded peacekeeping. United Nations. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>

member states ⁵¹, which have always turned out to be too little to undertake the high demands for security that the complex peacekeeping missions require. PMCs, on their part, can easily be deployed, operate with a lot of autonomy, and be more flexible and responsive in their ways of undertaking peacekeeping. This has led to the growing dependence on PMCs to support UN peacekeeping missions, especially in those areas where the UN's traditional capabilities are too weak to keep peace and security.

The emergence of PMCs relates directly to increased demand for security amidst a complex and fragmented global environment, coupled with short supply of traditional state-based military resources. PMCs have emerged as key players in response to the complex and specialized needs of governments, companies, and humanitarian organizations by providing highly specialized services that range from combat operations through to logistics and crisis management. As developments on international security continue to evolve, demand for PMCs will only be likely to increase against a continuing gap between security needs of the global community and what state and international institutions can provide. But in any case, the PMCs have come to prominence as a structural response to compensate for those shortcomings in their traditional counterparts and to meet the multi-spectral nature of conflict and instability in present times.

⁵¹ (United Nations, 2024) - The UN has no military forces of its own, and Member States provide, on a voluntary basis, the military and police personnel required for each peacekeeping operation. Peacekeeping soldiers are paid by their own Governments according to their own national rank and salary scale.

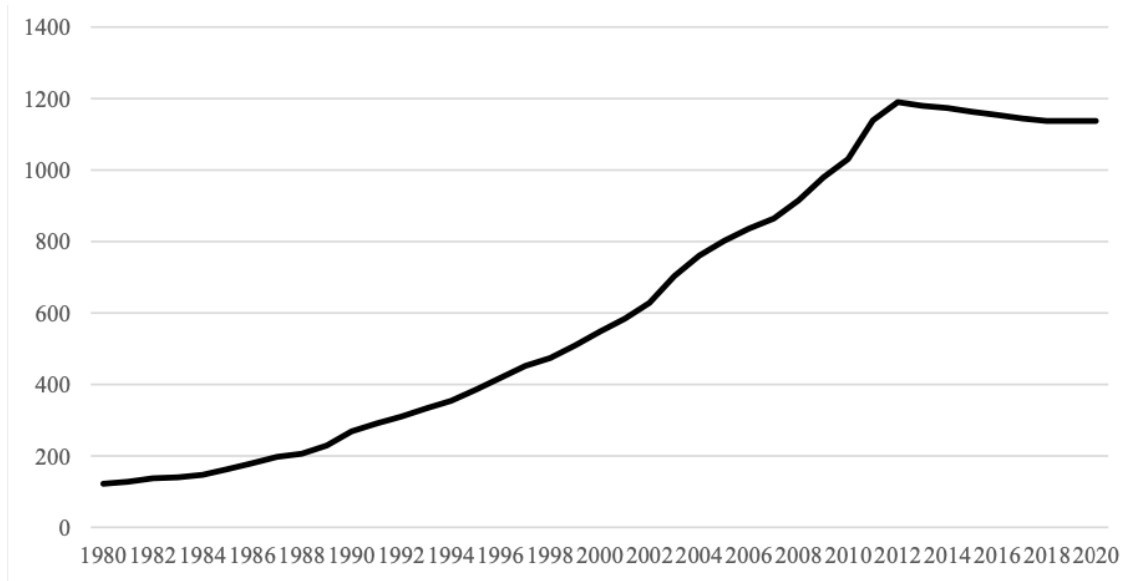


Figure 2: The Number of PMCs Across the Globe, By Year (Swed & Burland, 2020)

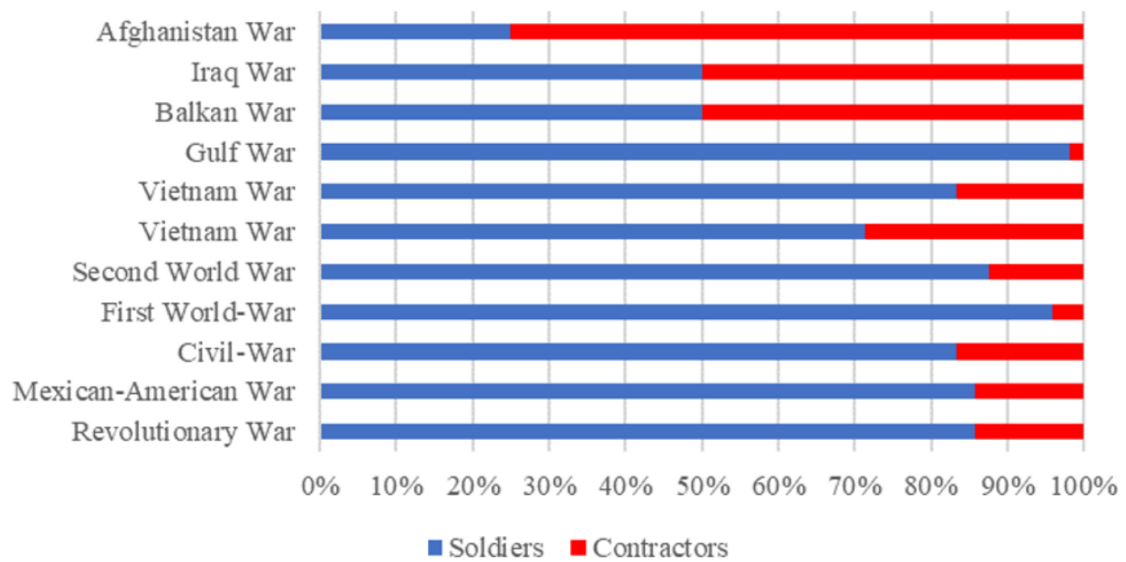


Figure 3: Contractors to soldiers' ratio in American Wars (The Economist)

Chapter 3: Case Studies Analysis – Blackwater and Wagner Group

While pursuing the thesis question that PMCs have risen due to the increase in demand for security and its insufficient supply, this chapter proceeds to examine two major case studies: the first one will be an analysis on the operations of Blackwater in Iraq, a PMC that known as Academi and together with the PMC Triple Canopy converged into Constellis Holdings group⁵²; while the second case study will analyze Wagner's Group activity in Syria. These two case studies broadly illustrate how PMCs have been integrated into modern warfare, especially when the traditional state military resources have either been stretched thin or politically bound. This chapter will identify and discuss the critical role that PMCs have played in mitigating security demands within zones of high conflict through a review of their involvement, operations, and the greater implications from said activities.

3.1 Blackwater in Iraq

Blackwater's involvement in Iraq represents one of the most important examples of PMC in modern warfare. Founded in 1997 by former U.S. Navy SEAL Erik Prince, Blackwater originally provided training to law enforcement and military personnel at its state-of-the-art facility in North Carolina⁵³. However, the role of the company rapidly developed after September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the ensuing U.S. led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Its turning point came when Blackwater began to emerge as one of the key private security contractors that worked for the U.S. government and other organizations within Iraq.

⁵² Constellis. Home. (2024).

<https://www.constellis.com/#:~:text=The%20Constellis%20family%20of%20companies,Strategic%20Social%20and%20Edinburgh%20International>.

⁵³ Private military companies: Blackwater. Silent Professionals. (2020, December 23). <https://silentprofessionals.org/blackwater/>

The situation in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003⁵⁴ looked very grim. Due to the dissolution of the Iraqi military, civil unrest, and emergence of insurgent groups, a vacuum was created which coalition forces and America could not replace at that point in time. The decision of the Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 2⁵⁵ to disband the Iraqi army, plus occupation's ineptitude to stabilize the country in time, provided a heady environment for an anarchic era of looting, violence, and the rise of insurgencies like Al-Qaeda⁵⁶ that later metamorphosed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. As the security environment deteriorated, the overstretched U.S. military and coalition forces could only provide security to diplomats, reconstruction projects and civilian personnel, hence, the U.S. government was compelled to subcontract many of its security functions to private contractors like Blackwater.

Blackwater got its first contract in Iraq for the job of providing personal security for the U.S. diplomats among other high-ranking officials with the U.S. State Department⁵⁷. This contract was won in 2003 and was part of the State Department's Worldwide Personal Protective Services program⁵⁸, set up to protect American personnel in high-threat environments. Many highly trained personnel of the company were veterans of U.S. special operations forces; they were tasked with protection duties related to diplomats, government officials, and all key personnel involved in Iraq's reconstruction process. The Blackwater operational footprint inside Iraq grew very quickly, and at the height of its involvement, it had thousands of employees inside the country providing not only

⁵⁴ Wedgwood, R. (2003). The fall of Saddam Hussein: Security Council mandates and preemptive self-defense. *American Journal of International Law*, 97(3), 576–585. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3109842>

⁵⁵ **Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 2:** Dissolution of Entities signed by Coalition Provisional Authority on 23 May 2003, disbanded the Iraqi military, security, and intelligence infrastructure of President Saddam Hussein

⁵⁶ broad-based militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s and became one of the world's most notorious terrorist organizations after carrying out the attacks of September 11, 2001. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, August 31). al-Qaeda. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Qaeda>

⁵⁷ Private military companies: Blackwater. Silent Professionals. (2020, December 23). <https://silentprofessionals.org/blackwater/>

⁵⁸ Worldwide security protection. US Department of State. (2011). <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/137787.pdf>

personal security but also logistic support, convoy protection, and security for critical infrastructure.

More specifically Blackwater's operations in Iraq played a critical role in dominating the security challenges that surfaced following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. During the deterioration of the security environment, the U.S. government and coalition forces were tasked with ensuring military dominance, protection of diplomats and personnel engaged in the reconstruction process. One of the major operations that Blackwater engaged in within Iraq was the protection of U.S. diplomats along with other high-ranking U.S. officials. This section of their operation was at the very core and center of their contract with the United States. It was a State Department requirement that the company assume responsibility for protecting American personnel engaged in diplomatic and governance work. Hundreds of the best-trained security personnel were mobilized by Blackwater to give close protection to American officials such as ambassadors and senior diplomats operating in Baghdad and other key areas. This operation cannot be overemphasized, as the ability of U.S. diplomats to move around the highly insecure Iraqi environment was crucial for the advancement of the American policy objectives concerning reforming governance and reconstruction, hence facilitating a transition to a stable Iraqi government.

Besides protection for diplomats, Blackwater was very important in securing key infrastructure and providing convoy protection in high-risk zones⁵⁹.

Blackwater's convoy protection contributed a lot to the operability of the U.S. mission in Iraq. It was important that personnel and supplies could be moved around safely in support of the everyday business of the U.S. embassy, the reconstruction effort, and the military supply chain⁶⁰. The fact that these convoy protection missions were successful, in spite of the ever-present threat of an attack, speaks volumes about Blackwater's tactical

⁵⁹ Fulloon, M. (2015). NON-STATE ACTOR: DEFINING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES. In Strategic Review for Southern Africa (2nd ed., Vol. 37, pp. 29–49). essay, Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities.

⁶⁰ (DAU, 2024) - Military supply chain management is the discipline that integrates acquisition, supply, maintenance, and transportation functions with the physical, financial, information, and communications networks in a results-oriented approach to satisfy joint force materiel requirements.

prowess and to what extent it contributed towards maintaining continuity of operations in such a hostile environment.

Another major operation that Blackwater undertook in Iraq was guarding key infrastructures, more so oil installations and reconstruction sites. Considering that the oil sector in Iraq rested on the keys of Iraq's post-war recovery process and economic stability, the pipelines, refineries, and the oil production houses were of prime importance, first and foremost to the Iraqi government and then to its international partners. It was their security that was entrusted with Blackwater professionals, who were responsible for this key infrastructure against acts of sabotage and attacks by different extremist elements that would damage the economy of the country. The company's ability to secure infrastructure in a conflict zone where insurgent groups frequently targeted economic assets was crucial in safeguarding Iraq's economic lifelines during the early phases of reconstruction.

Blackwater's role in securing infrastructure extended to reconstruction projects funded by both the U.S. government and international organizations. Most of these projects from reconstruction of schools and hospitals to road construction and rehabilitation of key services-were in areas normally inflamed with heavy insurgent activities⁶¹. Blackwater's security teams protected the engineers, contractors, and aid workers during their work. As a matter of fact, without such measures, many of these reconstructions might have been abandoned or never pursued since the risks from insurgent attacks were too high. By facilitating these projects, Blackwater contributed to the broader objective of the stabilization of Iraq and creating an environment for long-term peace and development to take root.

On a tactical operation level, the security provided by Blackwater was characterized by highly specialized personnel and equipment. The company's employees included many veterans of U.S. special operations forces, such as Navy SEALs and Army Rangers, who

⁶¹ Østensen, Å. G. (2011). UN Use of Private Military and Security Companies - Practices and Policies. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

brought immense expertise in combat tactics, threat assessment, and close protection. That professional background gave Blackwater an ability to operate in hostile environments with a degree of proficiency that many traditional security forces could not match⁶². Moreover, Blackwater had an array of advanced weapons systems, armored vehicles, and cutting-edge surveillance technology that few other private military companies had in operation during the early parts of the Iraq War. The fact that these technologies would be brought to bear redeployed its core reliance on personnel with elite military training, setting the company apart from other private security firms operating in Iraq during that time.

However controversial Blackwater may be, the truth is that it actually filled a very critical security gap in Iraq. The U.S. government was faced with an inordinate task pressure of securing Iraq while at the same time was supposed to conduct the much-maligned reconstruction tasks, all this with not enough personnel to guard the vast array of civilian and military targets across the country. In this context, Blackwater's capability to offer rapid, flexible, and effective security was important in filling the gap created by overstretched coalition forces. Despite a number of high-profile incidents marring its operations, it contributed to the overall security framework that enabled the U.S. mission to proceed in a highly unstable environment. Without Blackwater and the other PMCs, the security situation would indeed be more sensitive and the efforts at rebuilding following the fall of Saddam Hussein far more difficult to undertake.

However, the aggressive use of force that characterizes the way Blackwater operates has also put a spotlight on the methods of this company and the long-term impact those methods might have on the security situation in Iraq. This focus on rapid, forceful responses to perceived threats led to a spate of violent encounters, some of which killed civilians. Most notably, the shooting at Nisour Square⁶³ in 2007 caused severe damage to

⁶² Fulloon, M. (2015). NON-STATE ACTOR: DEFINING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES. In Strategic Review for Southern Africa (2nd ed., Vol. 37, pp. 29–49). essay, Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities.

⁶³ Zeeman, M. (2023, June). The Nisour Square massacre - ICOCA - international code of conduct association. ICoCA. <https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/>

the company's reputation, raising many questions about the general oversight and accountability of PMCs operating in conflict zones.

The presence of Blackwater - later Academi - starting in 2003, has left a certain indelibility upon the landscape of international security and private military contracting, indeed the greater narrative of U.S. involvement in post-invasion Iraq. While their work can undoubtedly be credited as having been done to protect U.S. personnel, especially those from diplomatic missions, the outcomes of their activities entailed multidimensional and long-term impacts on Iraq's political stability, U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations, and the global debate on the privatization of military force. The section shall critically analyze the implication of these on manifold dimensions, from its short-term impact that occurred within the immediate post-war period, to its longer-term impacts on how PMCs function and operate within a theater of conflict.

Perhaps one of the most immediate and long-lasting effects that Blackwater had on Iraq was a worsening of relations between the U.S. and Iraq, specifically within the context of incidents that caused the death of innocent civilians⁶⁴. That all came to a head in the 2007 massacre at Nisour Square. The event proved a tipping point and massively exacerbated relations between the Iraqi government and the United States. Although Blackwater was contracted by the U.S. State Department, charged to protect American diplomats, the seeming callous disregard for Iraqi sovereignty and human life was seen as emblematic of general U.S. indifference.

The Iraqi government joined in outrage to the incident by calling for Blackwater's expulsion from the country⁶⁵. It was a growing tide of anti-American sentiment within the party leadership and civilians alike. Iraqis saw the brutal methods of Blackwater and other PMCs as representative of the general strategy of occupation conducted by the United States, which was increasingly seen by Iraqis as brutal and contemptuous of Iraqi sovereignty. That Blackwater's contractors seemed to act with impunity due to legal

⁶⁴ Singer, Peter W. (2007, October 2). The Dark Truth about blackwater. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-dark-truth-about-blackwater/>

⁶⁵ Formanek, I., Karadsheh, J., & Labott, E. (2008, February 14). Iraqi leader wants answers for Blackwater "massacre." CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/04/07/iraq.main/index.html>

provisions which made them immune from prosecution under Iraqi law only further solidified such resentment.

The long-term impacts increased the pressure on the U.S. to reduce its reliance on private military contractors in Iraq. The Iraqi government signaled that they would no longer tolerate the activities of companies such as Blackwater⁶⁶. Although the company rebranded itself through name changes - first to Xe Services, later to Academi⁶⁷ - it had lost its “good” name in Iraq. This diplomatic fallout bore a broader brunt on U.S.-administered policy in the region, forcing a reevaluation of both the method through which security operations were conducted and the degree to which private companies had involved exposure to such sensitive roles.

Events of civilian casualties at the hands of PMCs, dulled the attempts of the U.S. military to gain favor among Iraqi communities. The Iraqis could not differentiate between the US military personnel and private contractors, such as Blackwater, since they all fell into the category of an occupying force responsible for the violence and instability in the country.

The erosion of trust between the U.S. military and the civilian population had significant consequences for the broader counter-insurgency effort. In real counterinsurgency operations, the key factor lies in cooperation with people who can help provide good intelligence, point out the insurgents, and help bring stability to unruly areas. Blackwater's actions only served to alienate those very communities without whose cooperation the mission could never have been accomplished and, by extension, probably strengthened the hand of the insurgent groups who took advantage of anti-American sentiments to gain new recruits and sympathy within the local communities⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ (Singer, Peter W. (2007, October 2). The Dark Truth about blackwater. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-dark-truth-about-blackwater/>

⁶⁷ African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. (2020). Open-ended intergovernmental working group mandated to elaborate on the content of an international regulatory framework on the regulation, monitoring and oversight of the activities of private military and security companies (Human Rights Council Resolution 45/16). OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGMilitary/Session2/CFI/ACCORD.pdf>

⁶⁸ (Zeeman, M. (2023, June). The Nisour Square massacre - ICOCA - international code of conduct association. ICoCA. <https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/>

The use of private military companies in Iraq raised very serious legal and ethical issues that continue to have resonance in debates over the privatization of military force today. One important issue highlighted by the role of Blackwater in Iraq was the ambiguous legal status of PMCs operating within areas of conflict. The employees of Blackwater were not held to the same legal standards as regular military personnel, who are under the Uniform Code of Military Justice⁶⁹, and they were not fully accountable to Iraqi law because of the immunity provisions embedded in the Status of Forces Agreements⁷⁰ between the U.S. and Iraq.

This legal area almost invited private contractors to exercise a great level of impunity. While U.S. military personnel were subject to the prospect of court-martial for breaches of the UCMJ, Blackwater contractors enjoyed immunity from similar consequences for their actions, even when the result was civilian deaths⁷¹. The immunity that the U.S. provided to its contractors fostered resentment among Iraqis.

Legal dilemmas created by Blackwater's operations in Iraq fired up a broader debate within the international community about the kind of regulation toward PMCs operating in war zones. The document from Montreux⁷², adopted in 2008, tried to bring some clarity into the obligations of states and private companies involved in the hiring of PMCs. The fact that it was a voluntary document, together with the lack of binding international legal frameworks, has the implication that most of the issues raised by Blackwater's operations in Iraq remain closed. Ethically, too, the employment of private contractors in war zones is also cited to pose a number of concerns regarding commodification of violence or profit motives in decisions on the use of force. But by their very nature, PMCs are businesses,

⁶⁹ (Library of Congress, 2024) - The **Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)** took effect in 1951 and the foundation for military law in the United States.

⁷⁰ (Fürtig, 2009) - A **Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)** is a legal framework that defines the position and the modus operandi of a foreign military force in a host state's territory. Often bilateral, it can also be of multilateral character, such as for instance the NATO SOFA between all member states

⁷¹ Zeeman, M. (2023, June). The Nisour Square massacre - ICOCA - international code of conduct association. ICOCA. <https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/>

⁷² (The Montreux document: On Pertinent International Legal Obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict 2009)

and their presence in war zones carries with it the specter that decisions to use force will be based at least partly on financial motives rather than military necessity or humanitarian need. Indeed, the tactics of Blackwater in Iraq, with its emphasis on protecting its clients above all else—including noncombatants, speak to some of the moral dilemmas that come with the privatization of military functions.

The controversies surrounding Blackwater's time in Iraq have deeply influenced U.S. military policy and the future of security contracting. In the years since the massacre at Nisour Square, a series of reforms was forced by the US government in order to increase oversight and accountability among private military contractors⁷³.

The Blackwater experience shaped not only the path of the U.S. government with regard to military privatization generally but also how policymakers conceive of the extent to which private firms should be utilized during the course of their endeavors in conflict zones. Even though the demand for the services offered by PMCs has not disappeared and it is increasing, PMCs remain in a position where they play a significant role in many of the world's conflict zones, there is now a much greater understanding of the possible negative consequences linked to outsourcing military functions to private actors.

The extent to which Blackwater operations were able to have a long-term impact on the internal security and stability of Iraq is difficult to quantify, though it is clear that its presence exacerbated some of the challenges faced by the Iraqi government in rebuilding the country after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Since Blackwater left Iraq, violence and insurgent activity have persisted, and the Iraqi government has continued to struggle with building a stable and secure environment. Particularly, Blackwater contractors have probably contributed to the increasing polarization and rise of anti-government militias that could exploit such actions' anger and resentment felt by many Iraqis after the U.S. occupation. The Blackwater legacy also contributes to how outsiders could play a role in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

⁷³ Watson, I. (2008, December 9). Iraq Forces Agreement Ends Contractor immunity. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2008/12/09/98045131/iraq-forces-agreement-ends-contractor-immunity>

While PMCs may perform many needed services right after a conflict, their long-term effects on the stability and security of the host nation are often much more complex.

3.2 Wagner group in Syria

The Wagner Group is a Russian private military company; the supposed founder of this group was Dmitry Utkin, a former Russian military-intelligence officer⁷⁴. After 2016, nobody ever saw him in public. It is also revealed that Yevgeny Prigozhin is considered to have founded the Wagner Group. The company has remained in the global spotlight because of its involvement in conflict zones-most predominantly Syria. Its involvement in Syria, starting with the official intervention of Russia in 2015, has had implications for the results of the Syrian Civil War⁷⁵ and the broader Middle East geopolitical landscape. The Wagner Group, therefore, represents an important evolution in the use of PMCs within modern conflict; a non-state actor operating with implicit backing from the Russian government. The activities of the group in Syria raise vital questions in view of private military forces' role in conflict resolution, state sovereignty, and international law.

This case study will examine the Wagner Group's involvement in Syria in terms of background on the group, its key operations, and its role in meeting the security demands of the Assad regime. We will also consider debating the general implications and consequences of the group's actions in Syria, from the short-term military goals to the long-term political, legal, and ethical consequences.

⁷⁴ Agostoni, M. (2023, August 24). Dmitry Utkin, Chi Era Il braccio destro di prigozhin Ossessionato Dal Terzo Reich. *Quotidiano Nazionale*. <https://www.quotidiano.net/esteri/dmitry-utkin-chi-era-braccio-destro-prigozhin-k5rs3lej>

⁷⁵ Laub, Z. (2023, February 14). Syria's war and the descent into horror. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

However, we need to go back to an important conflict in order to understand this private military company.

Originating in 2011, the Syrian Civil War was part of the greater Arab Spring movement, which turned out to be one of the most complex and destructive wars of the 21st century. It began thirteen years ago after protests erupted against the Assad regime. Since then, hundreds of thousands have died and over half the population of the country has been displaced. The country is fractured: a number of different actors are in control of different regions, their conflicting interests often overlapping in a particular area. Opposition forces are overshadowed by extremists who advocate for a Sunni theocracy⁷⁶, while regional powers such as Turkey, Russia, Iran, and the United States have supported different factions while pursuing their own geopolitical ambitions⁷⁷. Bashar al-Assad⁷⁸, who took power from his father in 2000, promised reforms but has done little to cure the problematic economics and social ills of the country. The Syrian uprising erupted in 2011 along with the Arab Spring, when people protested initially for modest reforms. Violence from the regime has resulted in armed resistance, the formation of the Free Syrian Army⁷⁹,

⁷⁶ The name 'Sunni Islam' derives from the term *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a* ('people of the prophetic tradition and the community'). Sunni Islam claims to represent the Muslim consensus concerning the teachings and habits of the Prophet. It originated among those Muslims who denied that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, had been chosen as Muhammad's only legitimate successor. Immenkamp, B. (2016, February 15). *Understanding the branches of Islam: Sunni Islam*. Think Tank | European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)577963](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2016)577963)

⁷⁷ Laub, Z. (2023, February 14). Syria's war and the descent into horror. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>

⁷⁸ Bashar al-Assad is the Syrian president from 2000. Bashar al-Assad largely continued his father's authoritarian methods. Beginning in 2011, Assad faced a major uprising in Syria that evolved into a civil war. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, September 9). Bashar al-Assad. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bashar-al-Assad>

⁷⁹ The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has evolved significantly since its emergence in the summer of 2011. Initially established with the grand objective of representing a nationwide resistance organization formed to protect peaceful protesters and to initiate military operations against the Assad regime, the FSA has struggled to live up to these goals. decentralization, the FSA remains the cornerstone brand of Syria's. Lister, C. (2016, November 26). The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/iwr_20161123_free_syrian_army1.pdf

and foreign involvement. The Islamist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra⁸⁰ and the Islamic State, came to the fore and sharpened the character of the conflict. The Assad forces, aided by intervention from Russia and Iran, have regained much of the country during the war. Today, it has stabilized into a standoff with no successful result out of the peace negotiations. The regime of Assad is in power, opposition is fragmented, and regional powers like Turkey, the U.S., and Russia remain significant players in conflict dynamics. This has been compounded by the growth of extremist groups like ISIS⁸¹. Even though that group was defeated militarily, it remains a presence. The humanitarian situation is catastrophic, characterized by broad displacement, poverty, and suffering.

What started as peaceful protests against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad escalated into an all-scale civil war, engaging multiple domestic factions, foreign fighters, and international powers. Since Assad's Syrian government was progressively unable to contain most of the country, the opposition had taken the lead. By 2015, the Assad regime required an influx of foreign assistance if it were to regain lost ground in territorial integrity. It was against this backdrop that the military intervention by Russia marked an important turning point in the war. Although the official involvement of Russia came through airstrikes and in logistical support, unofficial actors such as the Wagner Group played a critical role on the ground in helping tip the balance of power in favor of Assad's government.

⁸⁰ Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), the official al-Qaeda (AQ) affiliate in Syria is a strategic actor in the region and continues to enjoy a dangerous freedom to operate in Syria. JN is following AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's method of fomenting a religious and social revolution by embedding itself within an indigenous insurgency. Cafarella, J. (2014, December). Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/report/jabhat-al-nusra-syria>

⁸¹ ISIS is a Salafi-jihadist group that has conducted and inspired terrorist attacks worldwide, resulting in thousands killed or injured. In 2004, an Iraqi extremist network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi merged with al-Qa'ida to form ISIS's predecessor group, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), which Zarqawi led until his death in 2006. Now-deceased amir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the group in 2010 and began to expand its operations into eastern Syria in 2011. ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND ASH-SHAM (ISIS). National Counterterrorism Center. (2022, September). https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos/isis_fto.html

The Wagner Group is a Russian private military company that emerged during the conflict in Ukraine, in which its operatives took part in the annexation of Crimea⁸² and the fighting in Eastern Ukraine. While Wagner is a private company, many observers believe that the group has close ties to the Russian government and military and has served as a proxy force in areas where Russia seeks influence without the direct involvement of regular military forces⁸³. Over time, the Wagner Group would become integral to Russia's foreign policy. Officially, Russia's intervention in Syria began in September 2015, when the Russian government, following a request from the Assad regime, launched a series of airstrikes against the opposition⁸⁴. Moscow framed the intervention as a counter-terrorism effort to prevent the spread of jihadist groups, especially the Islamic State (ISIS)⁸⁵. However, most of Russia's strategic objectives were much larger: sustaining its influence in the Middle East, maintaining access to military bases in Syria-notably the naval base at Tartus, but also the airbase at Khmeimim and securing the survival of an allied regime in Damascus⁸⁶. While the air campaign and logistical support were important elements of the overall Russian strategy, at its core, success in intervention requires intensive ground operations. This is where Wagner proved to be indispensable. Working with the Syrian government forces and other pro-regime militias, Wagner provided much-needed

⁸² Center for Preventive Action. (2024b, May 20). War in Ukraine . Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine?ref=readtangle.com>

⁸³ Mohamedou, K. (2024, March). The Wagner Group, Russia's Foreign Policy and Sub-Saharan Africa. Geneva Centre for Security Policy. <https://www.pam.int/sites/default/files/2024-03/geneva-paper-32-2024.pdf>

⁸⁴ Center for Preventive Action. (2024a, February 13). Conflict in syria . Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria>

⁸⁵ Wilson Center. (2019, October 28). Timeline: The rise, spread, and fall of the islamic state. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state#:~:text=The%20Islamic%20State%20-%20also%20known,began%20to%20reemerge%20in%202011.>

⁸⁶ Borshchevskaya, A. (2024, March 9). How the Middle East became an arena for Putin's power struggle with the US. The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-middle-east-became-arena-putins-power-struggle-us>

manpower and thus the ability to conduct the offensive operations necessary for securing strategically important areas⁸⁷.

Moreover, unlike regular military forces, PMCs like Wagner, operate in a gray zone that allows states such as Russia to retain a plausible deniability about their activities. In the early times, Wagner's role in Syria was restricted to tactical support for the pro-regime forces, especially in their conflict against ISIS and other opposition forces. Wagner operatives directly involved themselves with combat operations, training, and advising Syrian forces, and securing critical infrastructure such as oil fields and military installations⁸⁸. By its involvement, the government was able to recapture certain areas-the largest part of which is in the east of the country-where most of the oil and gas reserves of Syria are located. For Wagner, the assets were important militarily and economically insofar as control of Syria's energy resources was considered a matter related to the survival of the regime.

Starting with the involvement of the Wagner Group in Syria, a number of key operations can be listed that have been instrumental in turning the war in favor of the Assad regime. One of the biggest early commitments by the group involved the fight over Palmyra, the ancient city overrun by ISIS in 2015. Wagner mercenaries then took part in the second capture of Palmyra in March 2016, pushing out the ISIS jihadists with the help of Syrian government forces and Russian air power to take control of the strategically and symbolically important city⁸⁹. Moreover, Wagner also participated in the campaign to retake Aleppo, one of Syria's largest cities and a key battleground in the civil war⁹⁰. Aleppo had been opposition forces' largest stronghold, and its recapture in December 2016 marked one of the turning points in the war. While the lion share of the fighting was made by Syrian forces and other pro-regime militias, Wagner's operatives reportedly

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ Katz, B., Jones, S. G., Doxsee, C., & Harrington, N. (2020, September). Moscow's mercenary wars: The expansion of Russian Private Military Companies. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://russianpmcs.csis.org/>

⁸⁹ (Westcott, 2016)

⁹⁰ (Lavrov, 2018)

participated in combat in the urban environments and in covering the positions of importance inside the city⁹¹.

Another big operation in which Wagner took part was the fight over Deir Ezzor, the city in eastern Syria which had been besieged for several years by ISIS. In 2017, Wagner operatives participated in the campaign to break the siege and regain control of the city due to its strategic importance, with proximity to Syria's oil fields. The role of Wagner in this operation was of no small importance not only from the viewpoint of military achievements but also from an economic one because control over Syria's oil resources was a critical objective pursued by both the Assad regime and its Russian backers⁹². Moreover, Wagner operatives trained the Syrian soldiers in urban warfare, counterinsurgency tactics, and the use of heavy weaponry. This training came in particularly handy for the Assad regime, whose military had been depleted to a great extent as a result of years of attrition and defections that occurred within the context of the civil war.

From a tactical point of view, Wagner contributed much to the security in Syria. The operatives within the group had indeed been very well trained and experience-rich in a variety of military disciplines, including but not limited to city battles, counterinsurgency, and the use of heavy armament. Such expertise turned out to be priceless in the Syrian context, where much of the fighting took place in densely populated urban areas and involved complex, multi-faceted insurgent groups. The Wagner Group involvement in Syria is to be assessed against the background of the wider involvement of Russia's strategic interests in the Middle East. Officially portrayed as counter-terrorist intervention, Russian intervention in Syria has been at least partly driven by the intent to maintain Russian influence and safeguard military and economic interests within the region. In this sense, Wagner's role in Syria was not just one of providing security but also

⁹¹ (Simpson et al., 2022)

⁹² Rondeaux, C. (2019, November). Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare. New America. https://d1y8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/Decoding_the_Wagner_Group.pdf

of helping to secure Russia's long-term strategic position in the Middle East⁹³. Operations by Wagner in Syria closely complemented Russia's broader military strategy centered on maintaining a balance of power in favor of the Assad regime with minimal direct Russian casualties. In this way, by deploying Wagner operatives for dicey ground operations, Russia was able to accomplish what it needed in the way of military objectives on the cheap and without the political costs of deploying regular troops. It was thus enabled to have power in Syria while, at one and the same time, maintaining a degree of plausible deniability about its direct involvement in combat operations⁹⁴.

Yet another crucial aspect of analysis lies in the efficiency of conducting Wagner counter-insurgency operations in Syria. The Syrian Civil War was highly characterized by a fragmented opposition where many types of rebel groups, jihadist factions, and foreign fighters have operated in different parts of the country. This created a very complex and dynamic battlefield where traditional military strategies were often ineffective. With many of its operatives boasting experience in asymmetric warfare from conflicts past, Wagner was peculiarly fitted for the challenges of counter-insurgency operations in Syria. The ability of Wagner operators to operate in small, highly mobile units allowed them to engage insurgent forces in a much more flexible and adaptive manner than the regular Syrian or Russian forces could.

Among the big operations of Wagner's forces in Syria was the protection of vital infrastructure, such as oil and gas fields. In fact, control over Syria's energy resources was a key role for the Assad regime and its Russian backer, since the regime derived a very important source of revenue from this area, while Russia secured its economic interest in the region. However, Wagner's contribution to securing these assets was not confined to military operations. It took the lead in managing and securing oil and gas infrastructure to ensure such facilities remained operational and in the hands of pro-regime forces. This became significant in the context of a broader geopolitical struggle for control over Syria's

⁹³ Ilnicki, M. (2015). On Russia's motives behind its military intervention in Syria. *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 9(4), 56–77. <https://doi.org/10.5604/23008741.1209148>

⁹⁴ Koçak, M. (2023, October). Status-seeking motivations through intervention to Syria. *Dergipark*. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3622662>

energy resources between domestic factions and international actors with competing interests.

Another critical dimension in the role that Wagner plays in meeting security demands involves its interaction with local forces and the civilian population in Syria. This relationship, though close, with government forces of Syria was substantially different when it came to local militias and civilian populations. In a few instances, Wagner did constitute a force for stability, especially in those areas where pro-regime militias were unable to enforce control. Other reports also suggested there was an ongoing human rights abuses among other negative impacts on civilians due to Wagner operations⁹⁵.

Its *modus operandi*, especially in urban centers, implied collateral damage, thus contributing to the displacement and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Although Wagner's main mission was indeed ASSAD security, his activities had wider repercussions on the civilian population; this again brings us to questions about ethical use of PMCs in the zones of conflict. Wagner's involvement in Syria has brought significant diplomatic and geopolitical consequences both for Russia and for the Middle East as a whole. The Syria operations helped seal Russia's influence in the region, guaranteeing that Moscow stays a key player in the ongoing conflict and any future negotiations⁹⁶. At the same time, the appearance of Wagner brought latent tensions to active status in the relationship between Russia and other international players, above all the United States, which viewed the activities of the group with suspicion and alarm.

Wagner's activities in Syria have had larger repercussions concerning the role of PMCs in modern conflict. The very fact of the group's continuing success in securing key military objectives for the Assad regime has demonstrated the effectiveness of using private military forces as a tool of state policy, where the commitment of national militaries would be politically expensive or logistically difficult. It has also raised the

⁹⁵ Syria Justice & Accountability Centre. (2022, July 22). The case against Russia's Wagner Group and what it means for Syria. <https://syriaaccountability.org/the-case-against-russias-wagner-group-and-what-it-means-for-syria/>

⁹⁶ Goncharenko, R. (2020, January 10). Russia in Syria: In for the long haul. dw.com. <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-and-the-war-in-syria-in-for-the-long-haul/a-55112506>

question about a lack of accountability and oversight from the PMCs involved in conflict situations where human rights abuses could be common⁹⁷.

The use of PMCs like Wagner in Syria raises profound legal and ethical questions. It remains that their activities are often little controlled or overseen in conflict. In the case of Wagner, numerous reports were about killings, torture, and other abuses committed by its operatives⁹⁸. These claims remain extremely hard to verify due to the secretive nature of the operations in question. Legally speaking, there is also another concern as far as the use of PMCs in areas of conflict involves inquiries into the responsibility of states that employ or support these groups. In the case of Wagner, the Russian government has maintained consistent denials of any official links to the group to preserve plausible deniability in Moscow about their involvement in certain operations⁹⁹. Yet that lack of accountability has raised calls for stricter international regulation of PMCs and closer oversight of their activities in conflict zones. Wagner's involvement in Syria has had consequence on the Russian military strategy, both within the Middle East but also beyond. The success in securing key objectives for the Assad regime serves to demonstrate how PMCs can be an effective tool of Russian foreign policy in projecting power in conflict zones without the political costs associated with deploying regular troops. That has been part of a wider shift in the direction of Russian military strategy, in which PMCs such as Wagner are increasingly playing leading roles in Russia's activities abroad. In addition to Syria, Wagner has fought in Ukraine, Libya, and the Central African Republic, among other places, showing great flexibility and effectiveness across a range

⁹⁷ Williams, W., & Maddocks, J. (2023, February 23). Ukraine symposium – The Wagner Group: Status and Accountability. Lieber Institute West Point. <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/wagner-group-status-accountability/>

⁹⁸ Doxsee, C., & Thompson, J. (2022, May 11). Massacres, executions, and falsified graves: The Wagner Group's mounting humanitarian cost in Mali. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/massacres-executions-and-falsified-graves-wagner-groups-mounting-humanitarian-cost-mali>

⁹⁹ Egbejule, E. (2024, May 21). More control, less deniability: What next for Russia in Africa after Wagner?. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/21/what-next-for-russia-in-africa-after-wagner-moscow-influence>

of conflict environments. The involvement of the Wagner group in Syria is a development to which the consequences are still unfolding.

The Wagner Group's intervention in Syria has been a development in how private military companies have been employed in modern-day war. The impact caused by the operations of the group in Syria went as far as to affect the very outcome of the Syrian Civil War: key military objectives were secured for the Assad regime, and Russia's long-term influence in the region was helped. But as already said, Wagner's behavior has also raised very significant legal, ethical, and geopolitical questions regarding, among others, the use of PMCs within conflict zones and the lack of accountability associated with their operations.

3.2 Similarities and differences between Blackwater and Wagner Group

It's crucial to analyze the two private military companies to understand the similarities and differences between them. Blackwater and Wagner emerged within the context of changing world military when state armies were increasingly resorting to private contractors in conditions of growing conflictive demands. The appearance of PMCs like Blackwater and Wagner correlated with the general line of development related to the privatization of security services, determined by a growing demand for flexible and deniable forces that could act in high-risk environments.

The invasion of Iraq by the U.S. in 2003, followed by occupation, formed a niche that had never been occupied before by private security contractors. The U.S. military was overstretched in maintaining order in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq and thus turned to PMCs to fill this void¹⁰⁰. Blackwater became one of the biggest and largest PMCs operating in

¹⁰⁰ Jiménez, M. M. (2020). The Intervention of the United States in Iraq and the presence of Private Military and Security Companies: The case of Blackwater. Universidad Europea. https://titula.universidadeuropea.com/bitstream/handle/20.500.12880/339/MOLINO_MARTA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Iraq, providing security for U.S. diplomats, government officials, and key infrastructures. Similarly, the Wagner Group emerged at the time when Russia intervened in Syria-where the Assad regime barely held on in a civil war. While Russia provided air support and logistics, it depended very much on Wagner for ground operations and security of critical infrastructure, most especially in areas where direct involvement by the Russian military would have been politically sensitive.

In both cases, Blackwater and Wagner have filled a strategic gap that has given them a force capable of operating with more freedom than traditional state militaries. Their emergence reflects broader global trends in the privatization of military functions, whereby states are contracting security to private military companies as part of strategic goals themselves-in ways that avoid many of the political and logistical limits of regular military deployments¹⁰¹.

In this regard, Blackwater and Wagner increasingly played important roles in securing the strategic interests of their states. In that respect, Blackwater's operations in Iraq reflected the broader U.S. goal of stabilizing Iraq following the defeat of Saddam Hussein. The primary mandates assigned to the group involved the protection of U.S. diplomats and contractors and the safeguarding of vital infrastructures. By offering security in high-risk areas, Blackwater allowed the personnel of the U.S. government to continue with their work, whether in a diplomatic or reconstruction capacity, without any need for a direct military presence.

Equally, Wagner's operations in Syria served the broader strategic interest of Russia in the Middle East. Its operatives took part in securing vital infrastructures such as oil fields and military bases, which played a very fundamental role in the very survival of the Assad regime and Russia's long-term presence within the region. Its operations stabilized the Assad government and made sure that Moscow maintained at least one key ally in the Middle East. In neither of the two cases were the PMCs simple private companies acting

¹⁰¹ Hoppe, C. (2008). Passing the buck: State responsibility for private military companies. *European Journal of International Law*, 19(5), 989–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chn074>

for profit; they were instrumental in fulfilling the geopolitical ambitions of the relevant governments.

Regarding the operations, both PMCs were able to deploy into high-risk areas to provide security for key personnel and assets, engaging in direct combat operations where and when required. Both Blackwater and Wagner's activities took place in gray zones¹⁰², legally and ethically, creating huge concerns about modern warfare PMCs. The actual lack of clear legal frameworks governing PMC actions in both Iraq and Syria created an environment where accountability was often lacking, and human rights abuses could take place with relative impunity.

The Blackwater operatives in Iraq were not under the same legal constraints required of the U.S. military personnel, who were bound by the Uniform Code of Military Justice¹⁰³. Instead, Blackwater contractors worked based on a legal agreement that provided them with immunity from Iraqi law (up until these agreements ended), hence allegations of excessive use of force and other abuses.

On the other side, Wagner falls into a legal gray zone in whose activities are not checked by the very same oversight and accountability mechanisms as regular Russian military

¹⁰² Robertson, A. (2022, July 18). What is Grey Zone confrontation and why is it important?. The Cove. <https://cove.army.gov.au/article/what-grey-zone-confrontation-and-why-it-important#:~:text=Grey%20zone%20confrontation%20is%20the,other%20measures%20including%20military%20action>.

¹⁰³ The **Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)** took effect in 1951 and the foundation for military law in the United States. Congress created the UCMJ and periodically makes changes to it through legislation, usually as part of the National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA. As constitutionally mandated, Congress creates the laws contained in the UCMJ. The president with the constitutional power of the execution and enforcement of those laws creates and maintains the Manual for Courts Martial or MCM, which contains the penalties for breaking any of the laws prescribed by Congress.

If a service member commits an offense that involves the civilian or international community, the military may choose to let civilian authorities handle the case. However, a military member may be tried for the same crime in both a civilian and military court under separate charges.

forces. However, due to the secrecy surrounding this group and its ties with the Russian government, very little accountability for these actions is assumed. Generally, the lack of transparency in the operations performed by Wagner has made accountability by the group or its sponsors extremely difficult.

In particular, both Blackwater and Wagner have had a high impact on civilian populations within the conflict zones in which they operated.

In Iraq, Blackwater used excessive force in all urban areas, causing numerous civilian casualties. The most exemplary is the Nisour Square massacre already stated in previous chapters, but there were many other instances of excessive use of force by these contractors. An action of this nature was completely against the U.S. strategies that were aimed to win the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people and instead infuriated the people against the U.S. occupation and fueled the bigger insurgency.

The implication of Wagner's operations in Syria has been deadly for the civilians- especially in areas where the group is engaged in securing critical infrastructure. The instances of Wagner defense of oil fields and other assets were often at the expense of the local population, who have faced displacement or violence due to its operations¹⁰⁴. That makes any assessments of the full impact Wagner has on civilians so complex; accountability for the group's actions will also be complexly layered.

Where Blackwater's involvement in Iraq and Wagner's involvement in Syria once gave way to serious diplomatic consequences and geopolitical fallout for both their patron states and the wider international community, this has now changed.

The massacres, particularly the massacre in Nisour Square, precipitated one of the major diplomatic crises between the U.S. and the Iraqi government. The result was a raft of calls for Blackwater's expulsion from Iraq, with the Iraqi government even going as far as to revoke the company's license to operate in that country in 2009¹⁰⁵. We could say that this

¹⁰⁴ Bouzo, E. (2023, July 21). The Wagner Group in Syria: Profiting off failed states. The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/wagner-group-syria-profiting-failed-states>

¹⁰⁵ (The Associated Press. (2009, January 30). Blackwater's Iraq deal won't be renewed. NBCNews.com. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna28938974>

probably increased anti-American sentiments in Iraq, continuing to plague the U.S. effort to stabilize Iraq and provide some form of functional government.

Similarly, Wagner's involvement in Syria has also brought geopolitical consequences in the context of Russia's relations with other actors in the region. While Wagner's operations contributed to securing Russia's influence in Syria, they have also raised tensions with other international actors, particularly the United States.

In both cases, the involvement of PMCs had wider ramifications in terms of the international norms of the use of force and the role of private actors in conflict. Indeed, the use of PMCs like Blackwater and Wagner blurs even more the border between state and non-state actors in warfare and raises critical questions about accountability of private military contractors and their influence on the outcomes of conflicts.

Furthermore, one of the critical differences between Blackwater and Wagner has to do with the geopolitical contexts in which the two operated. Blackwater was contracted by the U.S. government in order to provide security services in Iraq-a country that the United States invaded in 2003 as part of its wider strategy of combating terrorism and promoting democracy in the Middle East. Its role was highly attached to U.S. efforts to stabilize Iraq and rebuild the country's political institutions following the fall of Saddam Hussein.

By contrast, Wagner operates in the context of Russian intervention in Syria, where a civil war sees the Assad regime struggling to retain power. In fact, the official intervention of Russia in Syria was framed as one against terrorism, but we could see that its strategic objectives included maintaining influence in the Middle East.

We must underline that while both private military companies have been employed to protect state interests, the nature of their missions and the political ends that each serve are decidedly different. While Blackwater was primarily involved in providing security for U.S. personnel and infrastructure in a country that the latter tried to rebuild, Wagner's mission in Syria comes closer to securing Russia's strategic interests in the region and supporting a regime battling for survival.

Apart from the ownership structure, another critical difference between Blackwater and Wagner pertains to the underpinning legal frameworks that provide and sustain the legitimacy of their operations. Blackwater was under contract-an official one with the US

government-so it had some constituent elements of oversight and accountability. Nevertheless, as discussed above, because of legal immunity provisions in most cases, Blackwater contractors evaded the local Iraqi law, which largely closed the space for abuses' accountability.

On the other hand, Wagner is a far less transparent legal context: the group is not legally recognized by the Russian government, and its activities are shrouded in secrecy. Wagner's contractors are not constrained by the same legal controls as regular Russian military personnel, nor is their activity significantly policed or subject to accountability. This lack of transparency has impeded attempts to hold Wagner or its backers accountable for human rights abuses and other violations of international law in Syria.

Chapter 4: The Necessity for Regulation of PMCs

4.1 Lessons learned from Blackwater and Wagner

The cases of Blackwater in Iraq and Wagner in Syria are illustrative of the role that private military companies are playing in modern war. Both Blackwater and Wagner have illustrated the capability of PMCs to operate in high-risk environments, securing any environment, conducting direct combat operations, and protecting key infrastructure.

However, the use of PMCs has also generated some very pertinent questions regarding the future of war and about the involvement in conflict of non-state actors. In this chapter we will analyze what we can learn from the case studies and analyze the necessity for regulations of PMCs.

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However, the use of PMCs has also generated some very pertinent questions regarding the future of war and about the involvement in conflict of non-state actors. The interventions of PMCs into Iraq and Syria have managed to blur the line separating state from non-state actors, leading to a scenario where private military companies have military power without carrying the same level of accountability as regular military forces. This now raises critical questions about the future of warfare and how PMCs shape its outcomes.

This would therefore suggest that stronger regulatory mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that PMCs are held liable for committing atrocities against human rights, among others. In both case studies, the diplomatic consequences and long-term geopolitical fallout resulting from unregulated PMC activity come to the fore.

These lessons outline the need for the elaboration of comprehensive international regulatory frameworks on PMCs so as to ensure that their activities are carried out under international law and international standards on human rights. Lack of regulation will only increase the risks that PMCs pose, thereby continuing to hinder efforts at conflict

zone stabilization, civilian population protection, and upholding the rule of international law.

The case studies on Blackwater and Wagner show possible results of outsourcing military functions to private companies and how much governments are putting their military objectives in the hands of these agents. From the previous case studies, we notice that governments hire PMCs for several reasons, but mainly because the more conflicts in different parts of the world provide the more demand is requested for security that governments are unable or unwilling to meet. Often, PMCs are in a position to offer security services cheaper than traditional state militaries¹⁰⁶. PMCs can provide some specialized skills and training which are more difficult to have or require time to have within state forces. This reasoning favors the thesis for which private military companies rise in response to growing demand and insufficient supply for security.

Despite the controversies, there is certainly a case for PMCs continuing to play a part in conflict zones around the world today. PMCs offer a range of services which state militaries are often quite incapable of providing. For Iraq, too, from the moment Blackwater began its work protecting US diplomats and contractors, the US military was free to focus on combat operations and counterinsurgency. On the ground in Syria, Wagner's operations freed Moscow to support the Assad regime and secure key infrastructure without having to commit large numbers of regular troops.

Nevertheless, the strategic utility of PMCs needs to be balanced against the risks resulting from an absence of accountability and transparency. Consequent demands for security, then, must be matched by arguments for PMCs supplemented by corresponding acknowledgments of a requirement for strong regulatory frameworks that ensure the companies conduct their work within the rule of law and respect for human rights.

¹⁰⁶ African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. (2020). Open-ended intergovernmental working group mandated to elaborate on the content of an international regulatory framework on the regulation, monitoring and oversight of the activities of private military and security companies (Human Rights Council Resolution 45/16). OHCHR.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGMilitary/Session2/CFI/ACCORD.pdf>

The existing frameworks regulating PMCs are inadequate to handle the legal, ethical, and operational complications thrown up by such companies. In Iraq, Blackwater was working under U.S. government contracts but enjoyed immunity from prosecution under CPA Order 17¹⁰⁷, which immunized contractors against prosecution under Iraqi law. The immunity from accountability made the Blackwater operatives act without restraint. Gross abuses followed, seriously denting U.S.-Iraq relations. Similarly, the activities of Wagner in Syria remain unregulated; it has operated in a gray zone where it was neither under full Russian law nor accountable to international legal standards.

Regulatory regimes at present only underline the need for a more robust international mechanism governing PMC activity. Such a system could include well-defined legal frameworks that impose accountability on PMCs for any violations of human rights, along with oversight mechanisms ensuring full transparency in contracting and operations by PMCs. In the absence of such reforms, reliance on PMCs in conflict areas will only perpetuate the problems in the legal and ethical realms as a result of their functioning.

PMC has grown to be an actor in modern war and international security, between the operation areas of state military forces and private businesses. As security challenges evolved, PMC adapted to play important supplementing roles to regular military forces in modern conflict zones. However, this increasing reliance has significantly concentrated the focus on legal, ethical, and operational concerns, as borne out by their involvement in assorted controversies lately. The complexity of their operations, the lack of an efficient regulatory regime, and difficulties in making the PMCs accountable for their acts all create a confluence to make regulation of these companies an urgent priority item for policymakers, international organizations, and governments alike.

One of the key findings from the study of PMCs has to do with the duality of their roles in modern warfare. While they have been found to be very effective on many occasions, responding to security needs in conflict zones, such flexibility of operation, ease of deployment, and specialized abilities are often acquired at a great cost. Able to operate in

¹⁰⁷ Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 17 of 2004 (Revised), Status of the Coalition Provisional Authority, MNF - Iraq, Certain Missions and Personnel in Iraq, 27 June 2004, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/2004/en/66949> [accessed 10 September 2024]

conflictual areas, safeguard key infrastructure, and support diplomatic endeavors, their value has been crucial for the states, especially in places where conventional forces have been stretched thin. Among the goals which PMCs serve governments so well, include but are not limited to protection of diplomats, conducting counterinsurgency, securing resource extraction, and even supporting state militaries in active combat situations. This versatility lets them project power, sustain presence in conflict zones without commitments from regular troops, thereby reducing political and economic costs directly associated with military intervention.

On the contrary, the case studies of Blackwater in Iraq and the Wagner Group in Syria elucidate significant risks and challenges posed by PMCs. The proliferation of these two companies epitomizes all the potentials for abuse, lack of accountability, and ambiguous legal standing in which many PMCs operate. In Iraq, this involvement culminated in the tragic and highly publicized Nisour Square massacre. The Blackwater incident demonstrated the dangers of granting PMCs immunity from local laws and highlighted the lack of specific oversight mechanisms that could ensure accountability for their actions. Likewise, the Wagner Group's operations in Syria, often associated with allegations of war crimes and human rights abuses, point to the operational nature of a PMC: existing in a legally gray zone with little concern for the consequences of their actions for civilian populations and the wider dynamics of the conflict. Though offering critical services, PMCs-owing to their lack of regulation-often resort to violations of international law, human rights abuses, and destabilization of conflict zones. A lack of appropriate legal structures on the use of PMCs has contributed to a situation of uncontrolled powers and impunity. While in Iraq, Blackwater operated under U.S. government contracts, it was shielded from accountability by provisions placing it above the law, such as Coalition Provisional Authority Order 17, granting it immunity from Iraqi law. The Wagner Group operates in Syria as a proxy force for Russian interests; however, its lack of formal recognition by the Russian government has allowed the group to evade both Russian and international legal scrutiny. Both cases demonstrate the challenges of holding accountable the actions of PMCs through the legal system, considering that their activities occur in conflict zones where the rule of law is either absent or very fragile.

Among the many messages that may be distilled from these case studies is the idea that the operational advantages gained from the use of PMCs need to be juxtaposed with the

risks they present when allowed to operate unchecked. While states may turn to PMCs to address immediate security needs, the longer-term implications of allowing these companies to operate in legal and ethical gray spaces are profound. Human rights abuses, violations of international law, and erosion of trust between host nations and the international community make the unregulated use of PMCs a dangerous proposition. The lack of transparency in PMC operations is further worsened in areas such as the contracting process, thus making it more difficult to hold these companies accountable for their actions. The need for balanced regulation probably comes full circle when weighing the strategic value of PMCs with the risks associated with them. It would be important for governments and international organizations to establish a legal framework that regulates PMC operations and ensures accountability for human rights abuses, among other abuses. These frameworks should establish rules of engagement, clarify the legal status of PMC operatives, and provide mechanisms for prosecuting those who violate international law. Also, the process of contracting private military companies should be made much more transparent so operations by PMCs are open to public inquiry and the companies held accountable, with at least the same standards as regular military forces. With such challenges, the strategic utility of PMCs, particularly in conflict zones where traditional military forces are overstretched or politically constrained, means they are here to stay and will continue playing an important role in modern warfare and security operations. This dependence needs, however, to be leavened with the realization that PMCs, no less than any military force, should operate within the rule of international law and be accountable for their activities. Unless appropriately controlled, the risks that PMCs pose will continue unabated in thwarting efforts toward conflict zone stabilization, civilian population protection, and rule of law maintenance.

What are some key trends likely to shape the future of PMCs in global security? With states in their military capabilities, under increasing duress from multiple conflicts and new security challenges, PMCs will be able to capitalize on the high levels of demand. This trend has recently been more pronounced in the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, where protracted conflict, resources security, and political instability have given way to significant opportunities for PMCs to step in to fill in security gaps. What is more, flexibility and ease of deployment of PMCs may be very attractive for the states willing

to outsource some of the military and security functions in situations when direct military intervention is critically sensitive or logistically challenging.

Whereas security dynamics and technological changes are likely to ensure in the future that PMCs continue to evolve, the character of war itself, as it increasingly evolves through informatization, artificial intelligence, and other related emerging technologies, also makes the activities of PMCs apt to further diversify into cybersecurity, intelligence gathering, and other non-traditional security roles. In fact, further integration of PMCs in the operations of state and non-state actors is likely to continue increase the gap separating private and public security functions.

This expansion also points to the increasing authority of private actors in global security. Privatizing military and security functions, particularly in conflict zones, threatens the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force and risks the greater militarization of private forces. This trend is bound to complicate international peace efforts because, being driven by profits, gains are likely to influence or be highly biased towards some areas without considering broader strategic or humanitarian objectives. In this respect, as these PMCs continue with their evolutionary journey, what is especially critical is that appropriate strong measures are timely taken so their activities avoid abuses and remain within the limits of the law.

However, we have also analyzed that the demand for PMCs is increasing also for an insufficient supply of security and we have seen that there are several reasons for this. Among the most important reasons linked to the growth of PMCs is the increasing prevalence of asymmetrical warfare and the widening of the combat zone in places previously considered beyond the scope of large-scale military operations. The rising spread of civil wars, insurgencies, and terrorism throughout the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Europe has outstretched the capacity of state militaries for security threats. In many cases, national armed forces, already stretched thin with multiple international and domestic commitments, simply cannot stretch their resources further in the protection of foreign diplomats, multinational corporations, or key infrastructure, especially when these happen to fall within an area surrounding countries ridden with political instability, corruption, and weak state institutions. Consequently, PMCs have filled this gap and are currently providing varied services from personal security for diplomats and government

officials to protection for strategic assets. The case of Blackwater in Iraq well serves to show that even the most powerful state militaries encounter trouble in managing large-scale combat operations with the micro-level security demands part of complex counterinsurgency campaigns.

Besides the expansion of conflict zones, the nature of modern warfare has become increasingly specialized and technically demanding. The developing threat of cyber warfare, intelligence operations, counter-terrorism activities, and various, intricate supply chain management demands skills that state militaries may not possess in sufficient numbers. While organized state forces are conceptualized around large-scale conventional conflict and peacekeeping, the character of contemporary security challenges often requires much smaller, highly specialized units able to act quickly and decisively in response to fluid dynamic ground conditions. It is in respect to this that PMCs, as private enterprises, would be aptly placed to provide such a degree of flexibility in such an environment. They can further quickly draw from such massive sources of well-trained ex-military personnel, quickly dispatch forces and ensure flexible service delivery that caters to the most precise of client requirements.

To states, therefore, PMCs become an attractive alternative for dealing with complex security challenges without eroding resources from another military.

Moreover, in many democratic and semi-democratic nations, the political environment has also played a contributory role. From just a personal opinion, states can show reluctance to deploy national troops abroad owing to their dread of domestic political backlash, especially if such deployments incur high casualty rates or when the strategic value of the intervention is not readily evident to the public. In essence, more dainty sensitivities of the state will be protected by outsourcing some of the military functions to PMCs and, consequently, lowering the political cost that comes with such direct military engagement. PMCs allow states to pursue interests in foreign policy with a minimum level of visibility and, subconsciously, even political consequences that are connected with military involvement. An example is the Wagner Group in Syria, where Russia has used private military contractors in an effort to achieve geopolitical goals it has set out for itself without overtly committing large numbers of Russian troops to the conflict. In this way, states can maintain deniability, control the optics of military

intervention, and shape the domestic narrative on foreign conflicts while following through with strategic interests.

Besides, globalization and its related burgeoning interconnectedness of the global economy increased the demand for private security, especially regarding the protection of transnational business interests¹⁰⁸. The instabilities of the area in which some corporations operate, along with concerns about the protection of supply chains, personnel safety, and investment, that has driven many corporations to seek out PMCs as their chief security agents. These companies accordingly receive from PMCs a level of protection and mitigation of risk that local security forces cannot afford them; this allows businesses to operate in high-risk environments with relative security. In this respect, the rise of PMCs is at least as much a consequence of economic globalization as it is of military and political developments.

The rise of PMCs as a response to growing security demands could also constitute a manifestation of the broader trend toward privatization of state functions. The privatization of military and security functions could represent an extension of this trend, whereby the governments look toward private companies to provide a service that was monopoly of state militaries and law enforcement agencies. The outsourcing of military functions to PMCs is part of a broader ideological shift towards market-based solutions for public services, where the private sector is perceived as efficient, flexible, and capable of meeting demand, in opposition to traditional state institutions¹⁰⁹.

That being said, the future of PMC regulation could be marked by the existence of comprehensive legal frameworks developed at the international level on the governance of private military and security contractors. The Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers are important first steps

¹⁰⁸ Richey, M. (2024). The global impact of private security companies. Texas Defense Force Security. <https://www.txdf.org/resources-and-articles/industry-news/the-global-impact-of-private-security-companies-ensuring-safety-and-economic-growth>

¹⁰⁹ The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. (2023, August 31). The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies. Private Military Companies. Retrieved July 2, 2024, from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf>.

towards reaching common standards for PMC operations, but these efforts must be refortified and boosted with legally binding mechanisms. It is only through international cooperation that PMCs can be held answerable for dangerous risks thrown up by the unregulated PMCs.

4.2 Issues and Controversies Surrounding PMCs

As already said, private military companies raise lots of issues in their operations. Without good and efficient regulation, PMCs can cause serious human rights violations, ethical problems, and long-term consequences on international relations and state sovereignty.

However, one of the most significant issues is their lack of accountability and transparency. Indeed, the work of PMCs in Iraq and Syria was barely controlled; therefore, they could afford what regular forces could only dream about. But the immunity from prosecution accorded Blackwater under CPA Order 17 rendered its operatives immune from accountability for these actions-when civilian deaths resulted-in particular. This lack of accountability undermined the legitimacy not only of U.S. operations in Iraq but also contributed to a broader sense of impunity among PMC operatives.

Similarly, operations by Wagner are not really transparent. Furthermore, the group is a proxy for Russian interests but is not officially recognized by the Russian government. It is this lack of official status that allows Wagner to operate in a gray zone of legality, where its activities fall neither under Russian law nor under the norms of international law. The group's involvement in war crimes and other human rights abuses in Syria underlines even more the dangers of allowing PMCs to operate without effective oversight.

This lack of transparency in the operations also reflects in the way PMCs are contracted. Quite often, the contracts for PMC are awarded through non-transparent procedures that impede public scrutiny and prevent accountability. Besides undermining the legitimacy of PMC operations, the lack of transparency could increase suspicion of corruption and private interests influencing military and security decisions.

The other issue regarding PMCs is that of human rights abuses. Both Blackwater and Wagner have been accused of serious abuses in Iraq and Syria, respectively, including killing civilians, torture, and other forms of mistreatment. The lack of accountability for these actions underlines the need for stronger international mechanisms to govern PMC operations and ensure that they comply with international human rights standards.

The involvement of PMCs in conflict areas brings about a lot of legal and ethical dilemmas. Probably one of the most severe legal dilemmas is the lack of clear frameworks that govern their operations

If we analyze from an ethical perspective, the use of PMCs has caused violence to be privatized and profit-driven actors to involve themselves in military actions. PMCs are profit-making firms, and in most cases, their prime intention could be just a monetary award rather than greater strategic objectives or humanitarian objectives of hiring states. The fear is still there that, more often than not, PMCs will put profit before human rights and ethical considerations, especially in conflict zones.

It also complicates the traditional understanding of war; wherein state actors are supposed to be responsible for the use of force and are accountable both under domestic and international legal frameworks.

The use of PMCs in conflict zones also shows a great impact on international relations and state sovereignty. In Iraq, the actions of Blackwater damaged U.S.-Iraq relations and undermined the legitimacy of the U.S. occupation.

Equally in Syria, Wagner operations have complicated any effort at reaching a political settlement to the conflict. The involvement of this group in securing key infrastructure for the Assad regime has lengthened the conflict and further destabilized the region. A very serious issue raised by Wagner's operations, too, is the erosion of state sovereignty: Wagner functions as a proxy for Russian interests in Syria, de facto undermining the ability of the Syrian government to manage its own territory.

This use of PMCs in conflict zones also has broader consequences for international relations, as it creates a situation where states can project power without the political and diplomatic costs associated with deploying regular military forces. It opens up a possibility where PMCs may be used as an instrument of statecraft in ways that undermine international law and diplomatic norms.

4.3 Need for regulation

One of the most critical issues in PMC lies in the ambiguities within the legal frameworks that regulate their activities. In many instances, PMCs find themselves within war zones where they are not fully subject to the domestic legislation of the countries in which they are operational, neither are they fully liable under international standards of law. It is this legal ambiguity that generates an enabling environment for atrocities and inhibits accountability in the case of such companies.

Clear legal frameworks with respect to PMC operations are vital in ensuring that these companies operate within international law and respect basic human rights. They will include explicit rules of engagement for PMC operatives, mechanisms for holding PMCs accountable in cases of violation of human rights, and a transparent way in which contracting and operational processes are conducted.

Various efforts have been carried out over the years in coming up with international regulations and standards for PMC operations. Probably the most significant of these has been the Montreux Document, a nonbinding international agreement on the responsibilities of states and PMCs in conflict areas. The Montreux Document sets out a framework for regulating the operations conducted by PMCs so that this firm can ensure it operates under international law and standards on human rights¹¹⁰.

Another important initiative is the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers¹¹¹, which sets forth a series of principles regarding the behavior of PMCs in conflict zones. The ICoC spells out how force should be used, how human rights should be protected, and mechanisms for responsibility from PMC activities. Although not legally binding, the ICoC does focus on one of the most viable frameworks through

¹¹⁰ Directorate of International Law, The Montreux document: On Pertinent International Legal Obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict (2009). Geneva, Switzerland; ICRC.

¹¹¹ International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers. ICOCA. (2021, December). https://icoca.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/INTERNATIONAL-CODE-OF-CONDUCT_Amended_2021.pdf

which PMC operations could be regulated to make these companies operate with a sense of correspondence with international legal standards¹¹².

Notwithstanding all these efforts, there are significant challenges for effective regulation on PMCs. The most basic level of these challenges is the lack of enforcement mechanisms for existing international agreements-such as the Montreux Document and ICoC. While both documents provide key guidelines for PMC operations, their non-binding nature entails that there is little consequence for companies or states that breach their provisions. Another challenge arises from the lack of political will to develop appropriate and efficient regulation of PMCs. For example, too many states, relying heavily on PMCs in carrying out military and security activities¹¹³, tend to be reluctant to impose stringent regulations on such companies. They do so for fear that stringent regulations would hamper their flexible operation and raise the cost of military interventions.

A lack of transparency in PMC contracting and operations also means a problem in effective regulations being implemented. Many such contracts are awarded through nontransparent procedures that limit public scrutiny and prevent accountability. This lack of transparency not only undermines the legitimacy of PMC operations but also makes it hard to hold them accountable for their actions.

Despite all that, some progress has been made regarding controlling PMC activities. At the national level, the United States government passed the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act¹¹⁴, also known as MEJA, which permits the prosecution of U.S. contractors accused of committing crimes outside the country. It provides a limited legal

¹¹² Amstel, N. V., & Rodenhäuser, T. (2016). The montreux document and the International Code of Conduct: Understanding the relationship between international initiatives to regulate the global private security industry. DCAF. https://www.montreuxdocument.org/pdf/DCAF-PPPs-Series-Paper_The-MD-and-ICoC-Understanding-the-Relationship.pdf

¹¹³ Swed, O., & Burland, D. (2020). The Global Expansion of PMSCs: Trends, Opportunities, and Risks. OHCHR - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Mercenaries/WG/ImmigrationAndBorder/swe-d-burland-submission.pdf>

¹¹⁴ (US Congress, 2000) - The "**Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act**" extends the jurisdiction of US criminal law to military personnel and their dependents outside the US. It allows for the prosecution of individuals who commit crimes abroad that would be punishable in the US, unless the offender is already being prosecuted by a foreign government

framework for holding PMCs liable for human rights abuses. On the regional level, a number of European Union states drafted national regulations on activities of PMCs in places where force could be used, including several provisions making such organizations accountable for human rights abuses.

However, these are still limited regulatory efforts which remain narrow in scope and effectiveness. In many places, PMCs continue to manifest a lack of supervision and accountability, especially in the zones of conflict where the domestic legal frameworks are either weak or non-existent. The absence of international coordination on PMC regulation makes it difficult to develop comprehensive and enforceable standards for PMC operations.

Moreover, one of the big problems in PMC regulation is ensuring that such companies are able to continue effectively operating while being held accountable for their actions. PMCs provide critical services in conflict zones: security for key personnel and infrastructure. Inverse to that, however, their operations are often in environments where oversight is limited and lines between combatants and civilians are blurred.

One solution could be to include the development of clear rules of engagement for PMC operatives and mechanisms of accountability in case of human rights abuses. Such mechanisms would involve independent oversight bodies competent to investigate allegations of abuse or other malpractices in PMC operations, and legal mechanisms that facilitate prosecution of PMC operatives for violations of international law and standards on human rights.

The challenge in regulating PMCs is the balancing act of the states' strategic interests and the need for respect of human rights and ethical standards. States often operate PMCs to provide security services in conflict zones where the deployment of regular military forces is politically or logistically not feasible. Under these circumstances, reliance on PMCs creates enormous ethical concerns, especially when such companies show a greater interest in profit than humanitarian goals or commit activities violating international standards on human rights.

This requires the creation of regulatory frameworks, which stress human rights and ethical concerns in PMC operations. Such a framework would include the use of force, rules of engagement, and accountability for human rights abuses by PMCs. Further, states hiring

PMCs should have an added responsibility to ensure that their actions are congruent with strategic goals and that they are not using PMCs in an effort to bypass international legal standards or evade accountability for their actions in conflict zones.

Indeed, the formulation of strategies that guarantee transparency in the contracting process and accountability for PMC operations should be the focus. This would involve increasing transparency in PMC contracting by making all contracts, operational details, and rules of engagement for PMC operatives open to the public. This would therefore allow the people to monitor closely the operations of these companies with the necessary degree of efficiency, hence ensuring that such firms become answerable for their activities or acts.

A second possible solution could be to develop the systems of independent oversight that could monitor operations by PMCs and investigate abuses. These oversight bodies shall be empowered to independently investigate the activities of PMCs, including the use of force, human rights abuses, and adherence to international legal norms. Also, these oversight bodies shall be in a position to apply disciplinary penalties or other sanctions against PMCs violating international law or failing to act in accordance with regulatory standards.

Finally, regulating PMCs necessarily implies cooperation among states, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. PMC regulations are a global issue since these companies operate in multiple conflict zones around the world and are often employed by states that have different legal and ethical standards.

This would involve crafting international agreements related to common standards in operating PMCs and mechanisms in holding PMCs accountable for their actions. Such an agreement should be implemented under international organizations such as the United Nations, along with provisions for independent oversight and accountability mechanisms that ensure its implementation.

Accordingly, states using PMCs would follow a common standard for PMC contracts and activities with regard to, among other things, the use of force, protection of human rights, and accountability mechanisms. Such collaboration could allow states to find a balance between the possibilities of keeping PMCs within the limits of the law on the one hand and respecting human rights on the other hand, thereby contributing to supplying much-needed security in an area of conflict on the other.

Conclusion

The use of Private Military Companies has changed the nature and characteristics of modern warfighting and security operations around the world. These companies, involved into both the world of private enterprise and that of military force, have become key players in conflict zones as they meet the swelling demand for security services in locales for which regular state militaries and law enforcement agencies cannot or will not operate effectively. The research into PMCs within this thesis has made it clear: PMCs are strategically important, operationally flexible, and singularly capable for just those reasons, they are indispensable in addressing the 21st century security challenges. Yet, greater reliance on PMCs is fraught with profound legal, ethical, and geopolitical implications-especially without robust regulatory frameworks able to ensure accountability and adherence to international law.

The emergence of PMCs is the sum of several interlinked global trends, which include the spread of conflict zones, the nature of modern warfare, political and economic pressures, and globalization of security needs. State militaries are overburdened, crippled with multiple obligations, and stretched thin to address security needs both domestically and internationally. This has created a vacuum that the PMCs have stepped into, providing services that range from protection for diplomats and key infrastructure to strategic resource security, and combat operations. The flexibility of PMCs, combined with their readiness for immediate deployment and unique skill sets, has drawn the attention of states and multinational corporations conducting business in high-risk environments. The use of Blackwater in Iraq and the Wagner Group in Syria are illustrative examples of the ways in which PMCs have been used in pursuit of strategic objectives, sometimes circumventing the political and economic costs of deploying conventional military forces.

However, the advantages that PMCs enjoy have to be weighed critically against the risks they subsequently pose when operating in an unregulated or poorly regulated environment. Throughout the thesis, it has been established that accountability and transparency deficits in PMC operations bring about dire consequences for both the countries where they operate and the entire international order. The massacres in Nisour

Square, Iraq, in 2007, involving Blackwater, and the alleged war crimes in Syria committed by Wagner are just a couple of poignant examples of the dangerous consequences brought about by allowing PMCs to operate in gray zones of legality. In all of those cases, the actions of PMCs caused devastating harm to civilian populations and seriously undermined the legitimacy of state and international interventions. Moreover, diplomatic relations were definitely damaged between the parties concerned. These incidents arise as a direct consequence of the pressing need to reinforce regulatory mechanisms regarding PMC activities so as to ensure that such activities are within the boundaries of international law and standards on human rights.

The thesis articulates that the emergence of PMCs means an answer to changes in the global security structural arrangement. The increasing asymmetrical warfare, civil conflicts, and insurgencies in modern military engagements have cast the state militaries in positions where demand for security services is no longer equated with supply. In this regard, governments and the private sectors have turned to PMCs as alternatives to fill in the breach of security provision. Privatization of security services also reflects broader trends in the outsourcing of state functions to private actors, with market-based solutions seen as more efficient and less costly than traditional state institutions. As private enterprises, PMCs offer governments and MNCs the opportunity to secure their interests without many of the political, economic, and logistical burdens associated with large standing armies or direct military intervention.

While the utility of PMCs in modern warfare cannot be contradicted, their involvement in conflict zones does occasion various serious legal and ethical problems. In the absence of clear legal frameworks that might clearly outline the activities of PMCs, it has occasioned an environment where these companies can act with impunity, especially in regions where the rule of law is either weak or nonexistent. This has resulted in wide-scale human rights abuses, violations of international law, and further destabilization of already fragile states. The case studies of Blackwater and Wagner draw out vividly the risks of allowing PMCs to act without effective oversight and accountability mechanisms in place. In each case, lack of a clear rule of engagement, plus immunity from prosecution

bestowed upon PMC operatives, created extensive harm to civilian populations and damaged the legitimacy of the state and international interventions in the long run.

Moreover, the regulation of PMCs is definitely needed, and it is urgent-an argument that has emerged throughout this thesis. While PMCs provide vital security services in theatres of conflict, their activities need to be framed within strong legal frameworks that can help provide accountability for human rights abuses, transparency of contracting, and adherence to standards imposed by international law. Ineffective regulation of PMCs risks undermining international law, eroding the sovereignty of host nations, and further militarizing conflict zones. As PMCs continue to be at the core of security operations internationally, responsibility for developing appropriate and comprehensive regulatory mechanisms that factor in the peculiar challenges posed by these private actors in conflict lies with governments, international organizations, and civil society.

The future of PMCs in global security is likely to be characterized by a number of major trends: the growing complexity of security threats, the continued outsourcing of state functions to private actors, and an increasing reliance on specialized security services in conflict zones. Given the expansion of PMC activities in cybersecurity, intelligence gathering, and counterterrorist interventions, regulation will have to be even more effective. This has led to the establishment of international documents such as the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers, in an attempt to set common standards of operation for PMCs. However, these are rather weak and broadening them through effective legal mechanisms is needed to make PMCs liable for their actions. The emergence of PMCs in a nutshell reflects the trend of war's nature in these modern times and the growing demand for security services when state militaries cannot cope with such demand. PMCs have been quite effective in addressing the security needs of many, but if their operations remain unregulated, they carry with them formidable risks to international law, human rights, and global stability. These case studies of Blackwater and Wagner epitomize both the utility and the dangers of relying on PMCs in conflict zones. If PMCs are to continue playing a constructive role in global security, there is a real need for governments and international organizations to develop robust regulatory frameworks that ensure accountability, transparency, and

protection of human rights. It is only under comprehensive regulation that the international community could tap the strategic benefits that PMCs may avail, while minimizing any possible risks to peace, security, and the rule of law.

In my opinion, research areas on PMCs are increasing since their roles in modern conflicts are complicated and have, to some, part had evolved. An interesting area for research about could be the impact of PMCs on the sovereignty of the states, in particular, weak or fragile states where the PMCs too often function with little oversight. One area of interest might be the way that the presence of PMCs impacts a host state's ability to govern and police itself. Moreover, interestingly, it looks into the relation that exists between PMCs and the state military in respect to their effect on the cohesion, professionalism, and effectiveness of state armed forces.

However, another interesting topic could be the changing in modern warfare in increased use of technology in conflicts. With the integration of PMCs in cybersecurity and intelligence, other high-technology areas, an analysis of how these companies would adapt their methods to meet the new security challenges is important, and how these actions may pan out to set the trend for international security.

A final area of recommended research would relate to the continued examination of the legal and ethical implications of PMC operations, particularly with respect to international human rights law and the laws of armed conflict. The employment of PMCs in war zones has generated major concerns about their adherence to international legal norms and standards, and further research is required to comprehend how existing legal frameworks may be adapted in order for them to cope with the unique challenges created by PMCs. It would include the efficacy and efficiency of the currently available regulatory mechanisms like Montreux Document and ICoC and the root level and procedural lacunae in such regulatory mechanisms, which need attention by international cooperation and legislation.

To conclude, the emerging scenario presents boons for PMCs in the global security domain. PMCs perform a critical function in providing essential services in conflict zones and other hazardous environments, but owing to a lack of accountability and transparency, become highly risky for international law, human rights, and global security. The cases of

Blackwater in Iraq and the Wagner Group in Syria underpin the danger of letting PMCs work without effective regulation and emphasize in urgent terms the need for a full-fledged comprehensive legal framework regulating their operations. Whereas the role and adaptation of PMCs continue to change with the ever-evolving security environment, it is of increasing importance that governments, international organizations, and researchers work hand in hand in such a way that PMCs would keep themselves accountable and within the ambit of international law. The future of PMCs in global security would, therefore, be where the international community can strike a proper balance between strategic utility and the imperatives of robust oversight, accountability, and support for human rights.

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