CALMUN'25

UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST COMMITTEE

DISEC

STUDY GUIDE

Agenda Item: Impact of Private Military Contractors on Global Security

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1. Letter from the Secretary-General

Esteemed Participants,

As the Secretary-General of Cağaloğlu Model United Nations, it is my distinct honor to welcome you all to the 7th edition of CALMUN, which will take place on May 16th, 17th, and 18th, 2025. It is with great pleasure that we present the study guide for DISEC, which aims to equip you with the essential knowledge and context for the upcoming three days.

After months of preparation and dedicated effort, I am proud to say that we are now just one step away from CALMUN 2025. We hope that, by reading this guide, you will feel as ready and enthusiastic as we are.

Without a doubt, this conference would not be possible without the contributions of our remarkable academic team. I extend my gratitude to our Head of Academy, Özge Öztürk; our Co-Heads of Crisis, Meryem Sultan Çok and Akay Engin; our devoted and hardworking team members; and our motivated trainees. Their commitment and passion have brought this vision to life and elevated CALMUN's academic quality to its peak.

Furthermore, I would also like to extend my best wishes to all delegates participating in CALMUN 2025. Whether this is your first conference or you are a seasoned MUNer, I thank each of you for taking a step forward and joining us. We truly hope that CALMUN will be a special experience that you will remember warmly in the future. From my perspective, MUN is about motivation, enjoyment, meaningful discussion, and connection. I wish each delegate an inspiring, engaging, and memorable experience.

Warm regards,

Ceylin Gürsoy

Secretary-General

2. Glossary

Armed Conflict: A situation of organized violence between states or non-state actors, governed by international humanitarian law.

Ceasefire: A formal agreement to suspend active hostilities temporarily or permanently, often used to create space for negotiations.

Convention: A binding international treaty concluded between states, often establishing legal standards on issues such as armed conflict or human rights.

Conflict of Interest: A situation where personal, financial, or political considerations could compromise an individual's or organization's impartiality or duties.

Hybrid Warfare: A military strategy combining conventional force, irregular tactics, cyber operations, and information campaigns to achieve strategic objectives.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL): The body of international rules designed to protect persons affected by armed conflict and to limit the means and methods of warfare.

Mercenary: An individual recruited to fight primarily for personal financial gain, who is not part of a national armed force or motivated by ideological loyalty.

Multilateral Peacekeeping: International missions, often led by the United Nations or regional organizations, deployed to stabilize conflict zones and support peace processes.

Private Military Company (PMC): A private business entity offering military and security services for profit, including combat support, training, logistics, and the protection of assets and personnel.

Sanctions: Penalties or restrictions imposed by one or more states or international organizations to influence behavior, enforce international norms, or punish violations.

Sovereignty: The authority of a state to govern its territory independently and without external interference, a principle central to international law.

State Responsibility: The legal principle that holds states accountable for actions conducted by their agents, including private actors acting on their behalf.

3. Introduction

Conflicts have existed throughout human history, and the phenomenon of mercenarism has developed alongside them. Although mercenaries have played a central role in shaping the outcomes of numerous conflicts, the privatization of military functions represents a distinct concept. While mercenaries typically operate for financial gain in foreign conflicts, private military firms constitute a modernized, globalized, and industrialized evolution of this idea. Private military contractors (PMCs) have had a considerable impact on contemporary global security. However, it was particularly their involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars that promoted this billion-dollar industry to greater importance on the international agenda.

As warfare has evolved cooperatively with historical developments, hybrid warfare has become increasingly common. Consequently, private military companies have emerged as critical instruments within the strategic frameworks of states, particularly those pursuing global influence. Following the end of the Cold War, the world witnessed a notable rise in mercenary activity. The expanding role of PMCs in global security over the past two decades signals a gradual shift towards the privatization of military forces across many nations. The traditional concept of a state-controlled military is undergoing a transformation, and PMCs are playing a significant role in this process. Their influence is particularly visible in regions such as the Middle East, where their operations during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars had a notable impact.

While private military companies offer several strategic advantages, they also pose significant risks to the states that employ them. The attempted rebellion by the Wagner Group, one of the Russian Federation's most well-known private military companies, underscored the potential threats posed by privatized military forces seeking to expand their political influence. The increasing reliance on private soldiers has attracted considerable international attention, and the challenges they present have become an important topic of discussion within the United Nations.

4. History

The use of mercenaries is a phenomenon that dates back to ancient times. Although the concept of hiring foreign soldiers to supplement national armies has persisted throughout history, the mercenary systems of the past were different from today's private military companies (PMCs), which are now structured, corporatized, and regulated to varying degrees. In earlier periods, mercenaries were primarily utilized to support a state's military capabilities during long or challenging conflicts, especially when national forces proved insufficient. Throughout history, mercenaries have not only supported the military ambitions of states but have also played decisive roles in shaping political and social outcomes in various regions.

a. Ancient Times

Mercenaries held an important position in ancient military affairs. During the 4th century BC, they were notably employed during the Persian conquest of Egypt, where foreign soldiers significantly contributed to military operations. Alexander the Great also encountered organized groups of Greek mercenaries while campaigning against the Persian Empire, reflecting the widespread nature of this practice during the period.

Evidence of the use of mercenaries can be traced as far back as the 6th century BC in Ancient Greece, where rulers of city-states often hired foreign guards to strenghten their power. Mercenaries, particularly those known as raiders from Caria and Ionia, served alongside Psamtik I during his campaigns against the Assyrians. During the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), Athens and Sparta both employed mercenaries from Thrace and other regions. These forces were generally classified into two groups: hoplites, who were heavily armed infantry soldiers, and peltasts, who were lightly armed skirmishers.

Mercenary forces during this period were crucial in shifting the balance of power between warring city-states. Their participation introduced new tactics and diversified the composition of armies, although their loyalty often remained dependent upon financial motivations rather than national or political allegiance.

Across the ancient world, mercenaries were not limited to Greece and the Persian Empire. Ancient Egypt, Carthage, and later Rome extensively relied on foreign soldiers for military support. Carthage, in particular, is known for having heavily depended on mercenary forces, a dependency that eventually contributed to internal instability, resulting in the Mercenary War following the First Punic War. Similarly, mercenary service provided employment for soldiers in times of peace and economic opportunity for those from less wealthy regions.

b. Middle Ages

Although mercenary forces existed prior to the medieval period, their use became more structured and widespread after the 12th century. Throughout the Middle Ages, mercenaries played an increasingly significant role in the military strategies of European states, especially as the nature of warfare evolved and the demand for professional soldiers grew. During this period, mercenary groups diversified in composition, specialization, and organization, adapting to the shifting political and military landscape.

By the 12th century, organized mercenary companies composed of infantry, archers, and spearmen became a common feature of European warfare. These groups were often referred to by specific names based on the region or their tactics. One notable example is the Routiers, who were mercenaries primarily active in France, Aquitaine, and Occitania, although they also operated in Normandy, England, and territories within the Holy Roman Empire. Routiers fought primarily for financial gain, frequently moving across regions unfamiliar to them, and were notorious for plundering towns and countryside areas. Their activities often provoked fear and resentment among local populations, leading to their condemnation by the authorities and the Church.

Following public outrage over the abuses committed by such groups, councils and royal authorities sought to limit their activities. Nevertheless, the reliance on mercenaries persisted, as their services remained indispensable during prolonged or particularly demanding conflicts. Their actions during the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) are a prime example of their influence. During this period, mercenary companies participated in every major phase of the conflict between England and France, contributing both to military innovation and to the widespread devastation of civilian areas.

In England, the political consequences of employing mercenaries became clear during internal conflicts. King John's extensive use of foreign mercenaries during the civil wars of his reign contributed to the discontent that ultimately resulted in the Magna Carta of 1215, which condemned the practice of employing mercenaries against the kingdom's own people.

Mercenary companies of the Middle Ages were often highly organized. Larger groups developed sophisticated internal structures, featuring commanders, logistics officers, secretaries, and even specialized units distinguished by unique uniforms. These structures allowed them to operate with considerable autonomy and efficiency, sometimes rivaling the effectiveness of national armies.

The demographic composition of medieval mercenary forces was remarkably diverse. In addition to English, French, and German soldiers, many groups included Spaniards, Italians, and even Swiss mercenaries.

c. 17th and 18th Century

The 17th and 18th centuries marked a significant turning point in the history of mercenary use. During this period, the development of strong centralized states and the formation of permanent, professional standing armies led to a decline in the reliance on independent mercenary forces. States increasingly viewed mercenaries as unreliable and destabilizing elements, whose loyalty was often determined by financial incentives rather than allegiance to political causes or national identities.

One of the most critical factors driving the transition towards professional national armies was the devastation caused by mercenary forces during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). This conflict, fought primarily within the Holy Roman Empire, witnessed widespread atrocities committed by mercenary armies. Regions across Germany were plundered and depopulated, leaving lasting social and economic scars. In response to the brutality and lack of discipline exhibited by these forces, many states recognized the necessity of establishing their own trained, state-controlled armies that could be better regulated and held accountable.

In the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, European powers such as France, England, and the Dutch Republic invested heavily in building professional military institutions. These new armies were composed of regular soldiers who were trained, paid, and maintained even during peacetime, unlike earlier periods when military forces were assembled only during wartime. Uniforms, standardized weaponry, and hierarchical command structures became hallmarks of these national forces.

Nevertheless, despite the trend toward professionalization, smaller and less populous states, particularly those in Europe’s fragmented political landscape, continued to depend on foreign soldiers to supplement their military forces. For example, Switzerland, known for its long-standing tradition of providing mercenary soldiers, supplied military units to France and other major powers throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

Prussia exemplified a particularly aggressive approach to militarization during this period. Under rulers such as Frederick William I, known as the "Soldier King," Prussia implemented a semi-obligatory military system and maintained a disproportionately large army relative to its population size. Although foreign recruits formed part of the Prussian military, the state sought to ensure greater loyalty by integrating foreign soldiers into a disciplined and rigorously trained army. Prussia’s methods of forced recruitment, which sometimes led to diplomatic disputes with neighboring states, underscored the decreasing tolerance for purely mercenary armies.

While traditional mercenary groups declined, the employment of foreign military units under formal contracts persisted. Throughout the 18th century, foreign soldiers often constituted a substantial portion of the standing armies of major European powers. In some cases, these foreign units were composed of volunteers motivated by professional aspirations, whereas in others, they were raised through private negotiations between sovereigns. The Hessian soldiers, hired by Great Britain during the American Revolutionary War, are examples of such foreign forces.

d. 19th - 21th Centuries

The 19th century saw a continued decline in the traditional use of mercenaries, as states increasingly established national mandatory military systems and professional armies. However, mercenary activities adapted to new realities, especially in regions where state structures were weak or undergoing transformation.

During the Latin American wars of independence, British Legions composed of Napoleonic War veterans supported revolutionary movements in countries such as Colombia and Venezuela. In Asia, the Ever Victorious Army, led by Western officers during the Taiping Rebellion, assisted the Qing dynasty and defended Western commercial interests. These examples demonstrate how mercenary forces continued to influence regional conflicts beyond Europe.

The 20th century marked the beginning of a new phase, with the emergence of modern private military companies (PMCs). Founded in the 1960s, Watchguard International offered military consultancy and training, primarily to governments in Africa and the Middle East. After the Cold War ended, more private military companies (PMCs) appeared because former soldiers needed jobs and new conflicts increased the need for military skills. Companies such as Executive Outcomes, Vinnell Corporation, and MPRI expanded rapidly during this period.

The establishment of Blackwater in 1997 by Erik Prince signaled a new era for PMCs. Initially providing training services, Blackwater became a major contractor during the Iraq War, although its involvement in incidents such as the Nisour Square shooting drew significant controversy. Similarly, DynCorp International grew into a leading provider of security and logistics services in conflict zones, notably in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans.

5. Current Case Studies and Examples

While the historical use of mercenaries highlights their role in shaping conflicts across centuries, recent developments show that private military companies (PMCs) have become even more influential in modern warfare. Their activities today, particularly in regions such as Eastern Europe and Africa, illustrate how privatized military forces continue to impact global security in complex and far-reaching ways.

In addition to their traditional engagement in direct combat, private military companies (PMCs) have significantly expanded the range of services they provide in contemporary conflicts. According to recent analyses, including the Council of the European Union's 2023 report, PMCs today perform a variety of functions such as infrastructure protection, VIP security, intelligence gathering, operational planning, cyber operations, and logistical support. This variation allows PMCs to influence multiple dimensions of conflict environments beyond the battlefield itself. Their ability to operate across military, political, and economic spheres enhances their strategic value for client states while simultaneously complicating efforts to regulate their activities under existing legal frameworks.

a. The Use of PMCs in the Ukraine Conflict

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which escalated significantly in 2022, has highlighted the increasingly central role of private military companies (PMCs) in modern warfare. Russian-affiliated PMCs, most notably the Wagner Group, have played an active role in key battles, providing direct combat support, intelligence gathering, and logistical operations. Wagner's participation in the siege of Bakhmut and other contested regions demonstrated the extent to which PMCs could supplement or even replace regular state military forces on the battlefield.

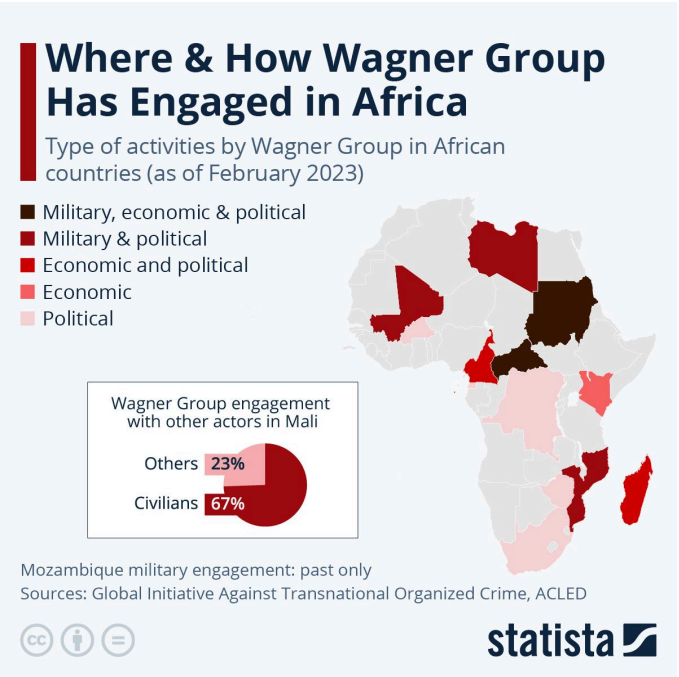
Beyond their tactical involvement, Wagner's activities in Ukraine have revealed the strategic use of PMCs to achieve political objectives without direct attribution to the Russian government. By employing Wagner forces, the Russian Federation was able to extend its military reach while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability. This operational model has complicated international efforts to enforce accountability and to uphold the norms of state responsibility under international law.

In 2023, Wagner's internal rebellion against the Russian military leadership further exposed the risks associated with the reliance on private armed groups. The rebellion, led by Wagner's founder Yevgeny Prigozhin, temporarily challenged the authority of the Russian state and demonstrated how PMCs, if not firmly controlled, could destabilize national governance and create significant internal security threats. Although the rebellion was ultimately suppressed, it raised serious concerns among the international community regarding the political unpredictability of powerful private military organizations.

The Wagner Group's involvement in the Ukraine conflict shows both the increasing power of PMCs and the wider problems they create for security and governance. Their presence makes international law harder to apply, blocks diplomatic efforts, and helps prolong conflicts through scattered and uncontrolled violence.

"Fighters of Wagner private mercenary group cross a street as they are deployed near the headquarters of the Southern Military District in the city of Rostov-on-Don, Russia"

b. Wagner Group Activities in Africa



Beyond Eastern Europe, the Wagner Group has significantly expanded its operations across the African continent. In Sudan, Wagner-linked forces have been accused of supporting various factions amidst political instability and securing control over strategic resources such as gold mines. In Mali, Wagner personnel were deployed following the withdrawal of French forces, with their activities linked to both stabilization missions and allegations of human rights violations against civilians. In the Central African Republic, Wagner agents have provided security for government officials and training for national forces, reportedly gaining mining concessions in exchange for their services.

c. Broader Implications

The increasing presence of PMCs in contemporary conflicts presents significant challenges for the international community. Their operations often occur in legal grey areas, making accountability for violations of international law more difficult. Additionally, the strategic use of PMCs can alter local power dynamics, influence political outcomes, and complicate efforts to achieve long-term stability. These developments underline the urgent need for stronger international frameworks to regulate the activities of private military actors and to ensure that their presence does not undermine peace and security efforts

6. Timeline of the Important Events

a. Congo Crisis (1960 - 1965)

The Congo Crisis was a politically turbulent period that the Democratic Republic of Congo experienced shortly after seceding from Belgium and gaining independence. The Congo Crisis, which also consisted of civil wars, was a proxy conflict during the Cold War in which the United States and the Soviet Union supported opposing forces. One of the most important factors in resolving this crisis was private mercenaries. They were used by many different military groups and occasionally assisted the United Nations for peace. In 1960 and 1961, the mercenary army led by Mike Hoare was very effective in secession of a province from the Congo, and Mike Hoare included this period in his book. In 1964, due to Mike Hoare's success with the private mercenary army, Tshombe, the President of the Congo at the time, appointed Mike Hoare as the head of an army of 300 people from South Africa to command. The real purpose of the president doing this was to train trained soldiers and take a stand against the group that had taken over two-thirds of the country from Hoare. Mike Hoare's army was called "5 Commando". During the operation, Belgian and Cuban troops and mercenaries brought in by the CIA assisted 5 Commando. The real purpose of the operation was to retake some of the provinces that the rebels had seized and to rescue a few hundred innocent people that they had taken hostage. Although this operation saved a significant portion of the population, President Tshombe's reputation and authority were damaged by the white mercenaries who had returned to Congo. In addition, many different military groups like 5 Commando were led by foreign private mercenary commanders. Tshombe, his mercenaries and gendarmes, who had been overthrown from power in 1966 and 1967, had revolted and returned to the agenda.

b. Cold War

The private company Watchguard International, which is the foundation of today's modern private military companies, was founded during this period. Watchguard International was founded by David Stirling and John Woodhouse, founders of the Special Air Service. The main purpose of establishing Watchguard International was to recruit soldiers who could be contracted for money in the military and provide security. The first mission of Watchguard International was to go to Yemen to report on the royal forces positioned in the region after the ceasefire was signed. In addition, David Stirling used his political connections to hold talks with the Iranian government and try to expand business opportunities in Africa. Soon after, the company's area of competence expanded and he began to recruit soldiers in Zambia and provide training and consultancy. As time went by, Stirling continued to make different agreements and thus increased the sale of weapons and military personnel to foreign countries. The contracts were mostly made with countries located on the coast and the Gulf countries. The main content of the contracts was to provide training and supply weapons to military units in the region. Watchguard International played an effective role in the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 1971. John Woodhouse, one of the founders and the active Director of Operations, resigned after some disagreements. Stirling also left his post in 1972. After leaving his post, Stirling founded KAS Enterprises and worked with the World Wide Fund of Nature to prevent smuggling off the coast of South Africa. Other private military companies founded by former Special Air Service officers began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s. The most prominent examples of these are Control Risks Group and Defence System.

There was a significant increase in private military companies in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. During that period, approximately 6 million foreign soldiers emigrated as a result of the decrease in wars. This increased the shortage of paid military personnel. Due to this increase in job opportunities, Vinnell, Military Professional Resources Inc. were founded in the USA; G4S, Keenie-Meenie Services in the UK; Lordan-Levdan in Israel; and Executive Outcomes in South Africa. The domestic operations of these companies were carried out under state or federal institutions, and their foreign operations were carried out under the State Department. The turning point for private mercenary military companies for the land forces as well as the naval forces, came after the USS Cole bombing in 2000. This situation was effective in signing a contract between Blackwater and the United States.

c. Nigerian Civil War (1967 - 1970)

This incident, also known as the Biafra War, was a conflict between the state of Biafra, which declared independence from Nigeria in 1967, and Nigeria. One of the main reasons for this conflict was the differences in political, religious and cultural views within the country before the British took Nigeria under their complete colonial rule about ten years ago. The real trigger for this incident in 1966 was the anti-Igbo military coup attempt in the north of the country. The unwanted Igbo wanted to migrate from the north of the country to the east, but the migration movement was less than expected because they thought the Nigerian federal government would not protect them. In the meantime, the Nigerian government had completely surrounded Biafra and taken over the oil cities. Unable to resist Nigeria's military pressure, Biafra resorted to foreign mercenaries. The private mercenaries, who had previously taken part in the Congo Crisis, did not hesitate to fight for Biafra this time. A German mercenary was put in charge of Biafra's 4th Commando army, and this commander led an army of about 3,000 men throughout the Biafra War. Smaller units (100-man armies, 1,000-man armies, etc.) were also manned by American, Italian, and German mercenaries. Biafra's irregular air force was also manned by Portuguese and Swiss mercenaries.

d. Angolan Civil War (1975 - 2002)

This war was a civil war that took place immediately after Angola gained independence from Portugal. It was a power struggle between the communist and anti-communist parties of Angola and continued for many years. Although both sides wanted to end the colonial situation, their understanding of governance was quite different. Private mercenaries were foreigners who sided with the communists or rebels in the Angolan civil war. The most common foreign national private mercenaries came from Western countries and first world countries. However, by the 1990s, many of them were removed by the Soviet Union. In 1975, a British commander recruited mercenaries for the national liberation movement and advertised in magazines and called for more.

e. Establishment of Blackwater

Blackwater is a private military company founded in 1997 by Eric Prince, an American naval officer. In 2009, its name was changed to Xe Service. In 2011, it was purchased by a private investor group and its name was changed to Academi. In 2014, it merged with Triple Canopy to form its current state, Constellis Holdings. This company works under contract with the United States government. It has been providing its own mercenary services to America's Central Intelligence Agency since 2003. Blackwater became quite well-known in 2007 when Blackwater employees participated in the massacre in Baghdad. In this massacre, a group of soldiers working for Blackwater killed 17 innocent Iranians and injured 20 others. The 4 personnel involved in this massacre were found guilty and punished, but when Donald Trump came to power in 2020, they were pardoned and released. The main purpose of establishing Blackwater was to provide national security and to assist military law enforcement in terms of training. Eric Prince purchased 7,000 acres of land from North Carolina to provide training. In fact, the 7,000 acres that Eric Prince purchased were the first form of the Blackwater company, or even its foundation. He established all the necessary training facilities and turned it into a large private military company.

f. Establishment of DynCorp

California Eastern Airways, which started as an aviation company in 1946, was founded in Delaware. In the first 2 years of its establishment, it was responsible for transportation between the East and the West. Although it was the most popular air transportation company of its time, the business they were doing was not making them as profitable as they wanted. In 1948, the company was on the verge of bankruptcy, but when they stopped the transportation business and started renting their planes, they were able to save the company within 2 years. The company started to provide transportation for the United States in 1950. The company started to have personnel in many places around the world such as the Korean War, the Philippines, Hawaii and Tokyo. In 1960, the company was sold to President Airlines. The roots of DynCorp are based on two companies. These two companies are Land - Air Inc. and California Eastern Airways. In 1951, Land - Air Inc. was purchased by California Eastern Airways. Land - Air Inc. signed a contract with the United States and was the company that employed the first contracted field teams for the state.

These contracted employees were aircraft technicians who maintained the state's planes. The current DynCorp still holds this contract. In 1952, California Eastern Airways merged with Air Carrier Service Corporation (AIRCAR) under one roof. The company had grown considerably over the years and needed a new structure in terms of both its name and its corporate divisions. In 1976, its name was changed to Dynalectron. In the 30 years since its founding, the company has acquired 19 companies, acquired $88 million in assets, maintained a $250 million business, employed 7,000 people and made $300 million in sales. Between 1976 and 1981, the company went public for the first time and by 1981, it had become the largest mercenary military company in North America.

In 1987, the company's name was changed from Dynalecton to DynCorp. In 1988, DynCorps went private to avoid a takeover that would have been unfavorable to the company. By 1994, the company's revenue had reached $1 billion. In 1997, the company partnered with Porton International, a British company, to form the DynPort Vaccine Group. Daniel R. Bannister, who led the company until 2003, employed 24,000 people and increased the company's revenue to $2.5 billion. In addition, DynCorp built and tested missile test sites for the U.S. Department of Defense, developed vaccines for the National Institutes of Health, and oversaw security contracts at embassies for the State Department. The company's military spending decreased in the 1990s. However, DynCorp moved into the technology market, purchasing 19 digital networking and services companies and signing contracts with government information technology departments. In 2000, the company transferred its international business to DynCorp International LLC, which it founded.

7. Critical Dimensions of the Issue

While private military companies (PMCs) have become increasingly important actors in global security, their operations raise challenges that extend beyond battlefield effectiveness. In order to fully address the impact of PMCs on international peace and stability, it is necessary to explore their legal status, ethical implications, and economic effects.

a. Legal Challenges and Loopholes

Modern private military companies (PMCs) often operate in a legal environment that was not designed to regulate their activities. Existing instruments, such as the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions and the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, primarily address individual mercenaries and do not adequately regulate corporate military entities. Consequently, many PMCs avoid classification as mercenaries by framing their activities as "security services" or "logistical support" rather than direct participation in hostilities, allowing them to operate without falling under existing legal prohibitions.

In addition to definitional gaps, enforcement mechanisms remain weak and inconsistent. Responsibility is often fragmented between the host state, the home state of the company, and the client contracting the services, creating significant obstacles to accountability. Moreover, many contracts between PMCs and their clients include immunity clauses that further complicate judicial proceedings against PMC personnel. In practice, this means that even when violations of international humanitarian law occur, the pathways to legal remedy are limited and unclear.

According to the European Union's 2023 report, The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies, the increasing activities of PMCs have challenged traditional understandings of state sovereignty and the regulation of armed conflict. PMCs frequently act in areas where local governance is weak, often outside the scrutiny of international mechanisms, leading to a vacuum of accountability. Their presence can undermine national and international legal orders by complicating the identification of responsible parties during conflicts and blurring the distinction between state and non-state actors.

b. Ethical and Humanitarian Dimensions

The widespread use of PMCs also raises serious ethical concerns. Traditional state militaries are, in theory, accountable to their governments and, by extension, to their citizens. By contrast, PMCs are driven primarily by contractual obligations to their clients and financial incentives, creating potential conflicts between commercial interests and humanitarian principles.

Instances of human rights abuses by PMC personnel, such as unlawful killings, torture, and exploitation of vulnerable populations, have been documented in multiple conflict zones, including Iraq, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, and Mali. In many cases, victims have struggled to obtain justice due to legal immunities, jurisdictional ambiguities, and lack of transparency surrounding PMC operations.

Furthermore, the increasing reliance on private military forces risks undermining the principle of state monopoly over the legitimate use of force. When security becomes a service that can be purchased, the distinction between public good and private profit becomes blurred. This trend may lead to a normalization of violence as a commercial activity, weakening efforts to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilian populations.

From a broader ethical perspective, the privatization of military force raises questions about democratic oversight. Decisions regarding the deployment of force, which should be subject to public scrutiny and legislative approval, may be outsourced to private actors operating without meaningful public accountability.

c. Economic Aspects

The economic factors driving the expansion of PMCs are significant and multifaceted. For client states, PMCs offer the promise of flexible, specialized military capabilities without the long-term financial and political costs associated with maintaining large standing armies. This model is particularly attractive during long-standing conflicts or interventions that are politically sensitive or unpopular with the public.

PMCs also contribute to the global economy by creating employment opportunities, offering services in post-conflict reconstruction, and assisting in the protection of critical infrastructure projects. In fragile states, the presence of PMCs can, under certain conditions, enhance security and support the rebuilding of basic government functions.

However, the economic impact of PMCs is not uniformly positive. In resource-rich but politically unstable regions, PMCs have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources. Companies providing security for mining operations, oil fields, or agricultural estates may become entangled in corrupt practices, reinforcing existing inequalities and undermining sustainable development. In some cases, PMCs have been accused of prioritizing the protection of commercial interests over the welfare of local populations, contributing to long-term grievances and instability.

Moreover, the outsourcing of military functions can disturb local economies by inflating wages for security services while neglecting investment in broader economic development. In conflict zones, reliance on PMCs may create parallel structures of power and authority that operate independently of the legitimate government, complicating efforts to establish lasting peace and security. In these regions the risks of economic dependency and political manipulation are heightened. Powerful private actors may exert disproportionate influence over local political processes, further weakening fragile states and perpetuating cycles of conflict and underdevelopment.

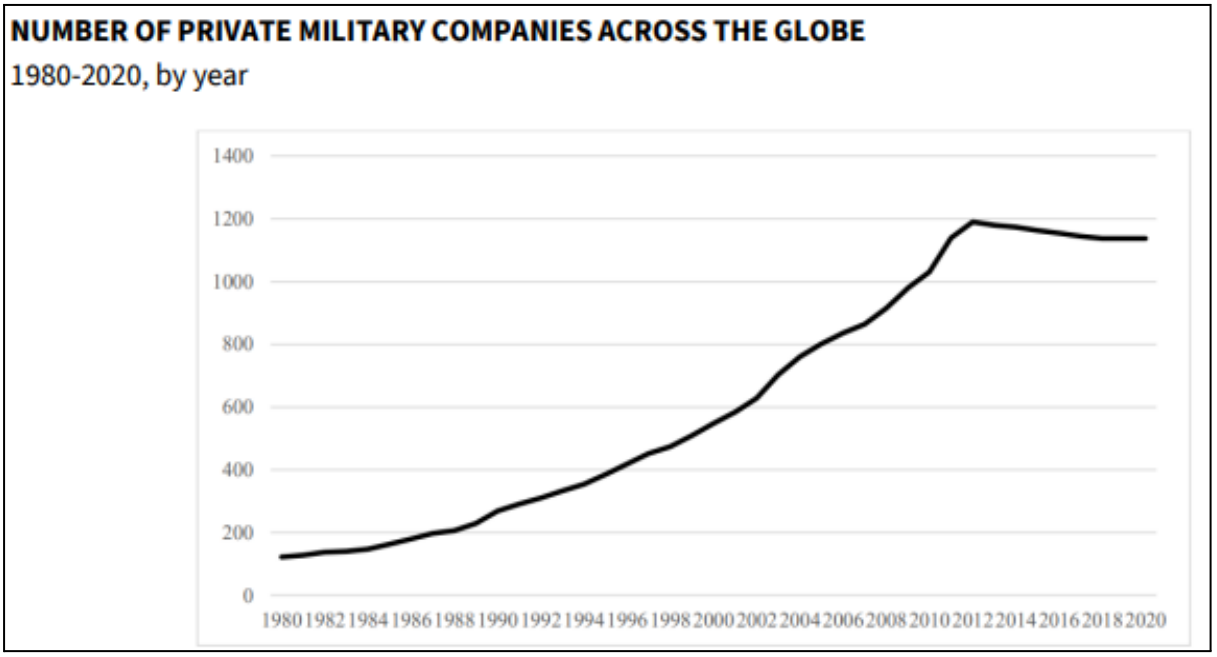
d. Political and Security Implications

The increasing reliance on private military companies (PMCs) has significant political and security consequences at both the national and international levels. In fragile or conflict-affected states, PMCs can undermine state sovereignty by establishing themselves as alternative sources of power, often operating independently of national authorities or even influencing government decisions. Their presence can weaken state institutions, erode public trust, and complicate efforts to rebuild legitimate governance structures following conflict.

At the international level, the use of PMCs by powerful countries such as the United States and the Russian Federation can alter local and regional balances of power. PMCs are often employed to advance strategic interests without direct attribution to the sponsoring state, allowing governments to engage in military operations while minimizing political risks. However, this practice can prolong conflicts, hinder diplomatic resolutions, and contribute to regional instability.

The activities of PMCs also pose challenges to multilateral peacekeeping operations. Their presence can complicate coordination between national forces, international peacekeepers, and humanitarian actors, leading to fragmented security environments. For example, in Mali, the deployment of Wagner Group personnel by the transitional government was reported to have undermined the effectiveness of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), complicating efforts to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable peace settlement.

The proliferation of private military companies further complicates international peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives. Their involvement introduces additional actors who may not adhere to international norms or the strategic objectives of peace missions. In many cases, PMCs prioritize the interests of their clients over broader humanitarian or diplomatic considerations, making it more difficult for peace operations to achieve consensus among local stakeholders.



8. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions: The Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which entered into force in 1977, was adopted to update and expand the law of armed conflict in light of developments following the original Geneva Conventions of 1949. Its primary aim was to strengthen the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, particularly those arising from foreign occupation and racist regimes. Comprising 102 articles, the protocol largely reaffirms and supplements the principles established in the earlier Geneva Conventions, while also introducing several new provisions to address evolving forms of warfare.

One of the most significant additions for the purposes of this discussion is Article 47, which formally defines the concept of a mercenary for the first time within clear and precise legal boundaries. Article 47 establishes that mercenaries are not entitled to the rights of lawful combatants or prisoners of war under international law. According to the article, a mercenary is defined as any person who meets all of the following criteria:

1. A mercenary shall not have the right to be a combatant or a prisoner of war.
2. A mercenary is any person who:
    a. is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict
    b. does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities;
    c. is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party;
    d. is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;
    e. is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and
    f. has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.

For further research: Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949

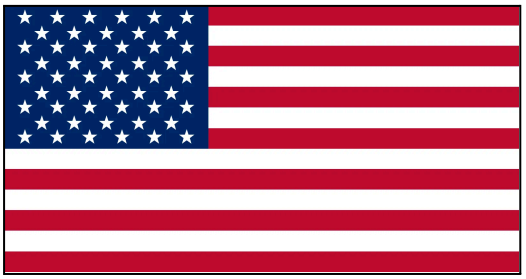
Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977): The Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa was signed in Libreville on 3 July 1977 and entered into force eight years later, on 22 April 1985. This agreement holds particular significance in addressing the role of mercenaries in Africa, where their involvement, often linked to the legacy of colonialism, had serious and lasting impacts on regional stability and the well-being of local populations. Signed shortly after the adoption of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, the Convention provides one of the most comprehensive definitions of mercenarism in international law. Unlike the Geneva Protocol, however, it does not include provisions regarding the protection of mercenaries under international humanitarian law. Instead, the Convention takes a clear and condemnatory stance, characterizing mercenarism as a serious threat to the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of African states. It explicitly condemns the recruitment, financing, and use of mercenaries, reflecting the continent's collective experience with external interventions and the destabilization that mercenary activities often caused.

For further research: OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa

UN Mercenary Convention (1989): The United Nations Mercenary Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 4 December 1989 through Resolution 44/34 and entered into force on 20 October 2001. It addresses the issue of mercenarism within a broad and detailed framework, building upon earlier efforts such as Article 47 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions and Article 21 of the Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. While the definition of a mercenary was first formally introduced in the 1977 Protocol, the 1989 Convention offers a more comprehensive approach by reaffirming the definition and addressing related activities, such as the recruitment, financing, training, and equipping of mercenaries or their involvement in destabilizing actions. The Convention establishes that both attempts to engage in these activities and their direct execution constitute criminal offenses, aiming to close legal loopholes that had previously allowed such practices to persist under ambiguous international standards.

For further research: International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries | OHCHR

9. Major Parties and Stakeholders Involved



United States of America: The United States is currently the largest user of private military companies (PMCs) globally. American PMCs perform a wide range of tasks, including assisting foreign defense ministries in developing strategic and conceptual documents, advising on the reform of armed forces, and conducting reconnaissance operations. Additionally, they are employed to protect diplomatic missions, commercial organizations, and critical infrastructure abroad, ensuring the security of American personnel and facilities operating in high-risk regions.

Other responsibilities of U.S.-based PMCs include training foreign law enforcement and military personnel, creating and coordinating paramilitary units and specialized detachments, clearing minefields and unexploded ordnance, and providing transportation, technical, and logistical support for foreign armed forces. Their involvement in various aspects of military operations has allowed the United States to maintain a substantial overseas presence while reducing the direct deployment of national forces.

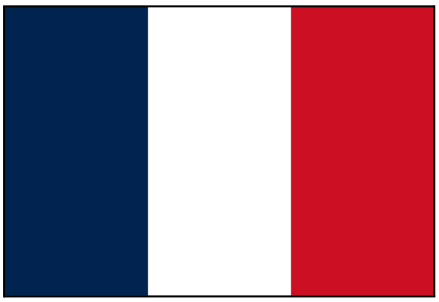
During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, American PMCs such as Blackwater (later known as Academi), DynCorp, and Triple Canopy played a significant role in supporting military and logistical operations. These companies provided not only security services but also transportation, supply chain management, and private security for convoys, embassies, and governmental facilities.

Regulation of PMCs within the United States is indirect and limited. The Arms Export Control Act establishes certain restrictions on the export of military services, including those provided by private companies. However, the United States has not signed the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, which entered into force in 2001. As a result, there is no comprehensive legal framework at the federal level specifically regulating the activities of American PMCs abroad. This legal ambiguity continues to raise concerns about accountability, oversight, and the adherence of private military actors to international humanitarian standards.

Russia: Although the operation of private military companies (PMCs) is officially considered illegal under Russian law, in practice, numerous PMC groups operate with direct or indirect support from the Kremlin. Due to their close ties to state institutions, Russian PMCs and their personnel are generally not subjected to legal or criminal sanctions domestically. However, when a PMC falls out of favor with the Kremlin, it may face penalties, including sanctions or disbandment.

Currently, there are approximately 37 Russian PMCs operating across 34 countries. A significant concentration of these companies (approximately 67 percent) is active in Ukraine, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict. Nearly half of the Russian-affiliated PMCs present in Ukraine focus primarily on offensive operations against Ukrainian forces. Beyond Ukraine, Russian PMCs have been active in several conflict zones, including Syria, Iraq during the Iraq War, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria.

Among the most prominent Russian PMCs, Wagner Group operates in at least 18 countries, Patriot Group in 7 countries, and E.N.O.T. Corporation in 6 countries. While the majority of these entities are financed directly by Russian state institutions, a notable portion receives funding from influential businessmen with close ties to the government. This structure enables the Russian Federation to project military influence abroad while maintaining plausible deniability regarding direct state involvement.



France: France has historically maintained a significant military, political, and economic presence in Africa, particularly in its former colonies. Through operations such as Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane, France sought to combat terrorism and insurgencies across the Sahel region. However, following growing anti-French sentiment and shifting regional alliances, French forces withdrew from Mali in 2022, creating a security vacuum that was soon filled by the Wagner Group and other private military actors.

France has publicly criticized the increasing reliance on private military companies (PMCs), particularly those operating with minimal transparency and direct ties to foreign

governments. French officials have argued that PMCs operating without international oversight undermine established peacekeeping efforts, contribute to human rights violations, and weaken the sovereignty and stability of host nations. France has also voiced concerns that the involvement of PMCs may fuel further regional instability by exacerbating conflicts and hindering political solutions. As a result, France actively supports initiatives aimed at strengthening international regulation of PMCs, emphasizing the need for greater accountability, transparency, and adherence to the principles of international humanitarian law in conflict-affected regions.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom is home to some of the largest and most influential private security and military companies globally, including G4S, Control Risks Group, and Aegis Defence Services. British PMCs have operated in various conflict zones, providing a range of services such as facility protection, intelligence support, training of military and police forces, and logistical assistance. These companies have often played key roles in military operations alongside national forces, particularly during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Domestically, the United Kingdom regulates PMC activities primarily through national legislation, including licensing requirements under the Export Control Order. However, there is no specific law directly addressing the use of PMCs as combat forces abroad. The UK government has historically preferred self-regulation within the private security industry, encouraging companies to comply with voluntary standards such as the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC). Internationally, the United Kingdom adopts a pragmatic approach to the use of private military and security companies. While recognizing the strategic utility of PMCs in providing flexible, specialized services, the UK has also acknowledged the risks associated with their operations, particularly concerning potential human rights violations. British officials advocate for responsible use and better oversight mechanisms but have not actively promoted comprehensive international treaties targeting PMCs. Instead, the United Kingdom emphasizes balancing operational flexibility with strengthened accountability frameworks to prevent abuses without restricting legitimate security services.

Ukraine: Ukraine has been one of the primary states affected by the activities of private military companies (PMCs), particularly since the outbreak of conflict in 2014. Russian-affiliated PMCs, including the Wagner Group and other private forces, have played a significant role in destabilizing Ukraine's eastern regions, supporting separatist movements, and escalating hostilities. These groups have operated alongside irregular forces and, at times, conducted operations indistinguishable from those of regular Russian military units, further complicating the legal and political dimensions of the conflict.

In response to the growing involvement of PMCs, Ukraine has consistently advocated for stronger international regulation, emphasizing the need to classify mercenary activities as violations of international law. Ukrainian authorities have called for the establishment of clearer accountability mechanisms to address crimes committed by private actors in armed conflicts. Ukraine also supports broader initiatives aimed at banning or heavily regulating private military operations, arguing that their activities undermine national sovereignty, prolong conflicts, obstruct peacebuilding efforts, and violate the principles of international humanitarian law. Beyond national initiatives, Ukraine has raised concerns in international forums, including the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), seeking greater global attention to the destabilizing effects of private military companies in modern warfare.

Central African Republic: The Central African Republic (CAR) has openly engaged private military companies, notably the Wagner Group, to support national security operations and protect government institutions amid ongoing internal conflict. Wagner operatives have been involved in providing military training to local forces, securing strategic locations such as mining sites, and assisting government troops in combat operations against various armed groups. Their deployment began in earnest around 2018, following a agreement between the CAR government and Russian authorities.

Although the government of CAR officially defends its collaboration with PMCs as necessary for restoring stability, international observers have raised significant concerns regarding the long-term implications for state sovereignty, governance, and human rights. Reports from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations have documented serious allegations of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, linked to Wagner operatives. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on foreign private forces has raised questions about the erosion of national control over security policies and the influence of external actors over domestic political developments. The situation in CAR reflects a broader trend of fragile states turning to private military actors to address internal security challenges, despite the considerable risks of external dependence and diminished governmental accountability.

Mali: Following the deterioration of relations with France and the withdrawal of French military forces in 2022, the transitional government of Mali entered into security arrangements with private military actors, most notably the Wagner Group. Wagner personnel have been deployed to assist Mali's national forces in counterinsurgency operations, to secure key government institutions, and to conduct operations in regions where jihadist groups are active. This move signaled a significant shift in Mali's international alignments and security strategies.

Malian authorities have defended the decision as an assertion of national sovereignty and a necessary step to address persistent security threats without reliance on traditional Western partners. However, the presence of PMCs has drawn widespread international criticism. Observers, including the United Nations, the European Union, and regional organizations such as ECOWAS, have expressed concerns that the involvement of private military forces complicates multilateral peacekeeping missions like MINUSMA, undermines international efforts at conflict resolution, and increases the risk of human rights violations against civilian populations. Mali's engagement with PMCs illustrates the challenges transitional governments face when traditional security arrangements collapse and highlights the broader implications of outsourcing national security to private actors.

Wagner Group: The Wagner Group first emerged in 2014, operating in support of Russian interests during the conflict in Ukraine. Initially financed by Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, the group functioned as a private military company closely aligned with the objectives of the Russian state, although officially operating outside formal military structures. In 2023, following internal instability and leadership changes, the Wagner Group came under direct control of the Russian government and is now officially financed by state institutions.

Wagner's initial deployment involved supporting Russian-backed forces in Eastern Ukraine, where it played a significant role in military operations. Throughout the conflict, Wagner forces were heavily engaged on the front lines, contributing to key territorial gains. The group became notorious for recruiting prisoners from Russian penal institutions, offering them early release in exchange for frontline military service. By the end of 2022, Wagner's personnel in Ukraine were estimated to number approximately 50,000 fighters.

Beyond Ukraine, the Wagner Group has been active in several other conflict zones, including civil wars in Libya, Syria, the Central African Republic, and Mali. In these operations, Wagner agents have provided a range of services, including direct combat support, military training for local forces, and the protection of strategic assets. However, their activities have been accompanied by serious allegations of human rights abuses, including reports of rape, murder, torture, and other violations of international humanitarian law.

10. Possible Solutions

- The definitions made in the contracts signed today are always within the framework of mercenaries. However, these definitions do not include the definition of private military companies. Therefore, it is important to define the private military company in detail. In addition, the articles in the contracts signed so far, such as the additional protocol to the Geneva Convention and the contract signed in Africa, do not comply with the structure in which the private military company operates. The activities of private military companies can be regulated and supervised with a new and more comprehensive contract that includes articles for private military companies that are suitable for the systems and structures of organizations that have undergone privatization and corporatization in recent years, and to which many countries around the world are party.

- Private military companies operating in many countries today generally operate on the basis of secrecy. Their members and even who is in charge may not be clearly known. The fact that the actions of PCMs are carried out with such secrecy makes it difficult to monitor and supervise them. However, threats of rights violations arise for PCMs. In order to facilitate the monitoring of PCMs in the international arena, information such as the contracts of all private military companies, the tasks they perform, their presence and the operations they support can be collected in a database to be established by an international commission. This commission can be established by the United Nations or by independent individuals to be impartial and work with monthly or annual reports.

- An internationally valid license can be introduced for private military companies to continue their activities. Private military companies that continue their activities without a license or that act against human rights and conduct illegal activities can be subject to financial sanctions. An international commission can also be established to monitor these activities. The license conditions determined for private military companies can be created by taking into account international ethics, morality, humanitarian law and security provisions. In addition, banks, insurance companies and business people who invest in private military companies that do not have a license and conduct illegal activities can also be subject to sanctions.

11. Points to Cover

1. How has the use of private military companies (PMCs) evolved from traditional mercenary activities, and what challenges does this evolution present for international law?

2. How do PMCs influence the sovereignty and internal political stability of fragile or conflict-affected states?

3. In what ways do PMCs contribute to or complicate peacekeeping operations and multilateral conflict resolution efforts, as seen in cases such as Mali and the Central African Republic?

4. What mechanisms currently exist at the international and national levels to regulate PMCs, and where do major legal and accountability gaps remain?

5. Should the international community pursue new binding agreements specific to PMCs, or can existing frameworks such as the Geneva Conventions and the UN Mercenary Convention be expanded to cover these actors more effectively?

6. How do the activities of PMCs affect civilian populations, particularly in terms of human rights, humanitarian law, and long-term political stability?

7. To what extent should the actions of states that sponsor or contract PMCs be considered when addressing accountability for violations of international law?

8. How can the international community ensure greater transparency, oversight, and accountability in the operations of PMCs without impeding legitimate security services?

12. Resources and Links for Further Research

Catalog of Russian PMCs: 37 private military companies of the Russian Federation – Molfar

9 Largest Private Military Contractors in the World

Private military and security companies (PMSCs) | How does law protect in war? - Online casebook

International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. New York, 4 December 1989

International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, 4 December 1989.

https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wagner-Group

https://thesentry.org/2023/01/27/7585/politico-op-ed-russias-bloody-sledgehammer/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw782_BhDjARIsABTv_JCzQ1_E-7R9DtB1L9P6vFizztZ3fjvA_yp0925V7BGBt7ektIXPNlQaAsuLEALw_wcB

Private military companies in the US - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

Moscow's Mercenary Wars

Private military company (PMC) | Britannica

Mercenary | Private Military Contractors, Conflict Zones & Insurgency | Britannica

The Business of War – Growing risks from Private Military Companies ——