

A photograph of three soldiers in full combat gear, including helmets and goggles, holding rifles. The image is dark and moody, with the soldiers' faces partially obscured by shadows and their equipment. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

PRIVATE MILITARY & SECURITY COMPANIES

LECTURE SUMMARY DOCUMENT

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RATIONALE

Private Military & Security Companies (PMSCs or PMCs) occupy a number of diverse roles within the security sector, with their services being contracted by both private and public entities for the purposes of intelligence, security, and analysis. With the growing presence of PMSCs in conflict/post-conflict zones around the world since their normalisation in wars post-9/11, there is a need to critically assess the role that these private entities play in global governance and the potential benefits and harms they may offer.

Lecturer: Dr. Sean McFate is a foreign policy expert, author and novelist. He is a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, and a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Additionally, he serves as an advisor to Oxford University's Centre for Technology and Global Affairs.

WHAT IS A PMC?

Private Military Contractors are armed civilians who undertake para-military actions on behalf of a client. These individuals are often ex-military and hold expertise in direct action, military training and reconnaissance, alongside the growing field of cyber-operations.

The networks and companies are centred around three primary **command languages**, English, Russian, and Spanish. These command languages are not to be confused with nation state affiliation but rather to ensure a standardisation of the language in which **orders** are given and **training** undertaken.

Q: What is the difference between Mercenaries and PMCs?

A: There is actually no difference between mercenaries and private military contractors, these terms are interchangeable and are mostly used for **political expediency**. This interchangeability is exemplified by the United State's terming of Black Water as a PMC, while the rest of the world classified them as a mercenary group (the same being true for Russia and the Wagner Group).

WHY ARE PMCS GROWING?

There are 8 reasons for the growing use of PMCs by governments.

For **strong countries**, PMCs offer:

- They create a fog of war and plausible deniability in an era where deniability is preferred to firepower, sometimes termed '**shadow warfare**'.
- "**Bloodless wars**" for the modern casualty averse societies. Lowers the barriers for entry into conflict.

For **wealthy weaker countries** and **non-state actors**;

- **Participation in armed conflicts** (oligarchs, extractive industry)
- Rent **expensive niche services** (MI-24s, Special Operations Forces)

There are also a number of benefits that apply to **all actors** wishing to enlist PMC services;

- Renting is **cheaper** than owning.
- **Apolitical** nature of a PMC can sometimes create loyalty via prolonged patronage.
- **Supply and demand are increasing** and diversifying every year.
- **Lack of regulation** because International law cannot stop this trend.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU PRIVATISE WAR?

The privatisation of war turns conventional modern strategy on its head. It creates a nuanced nexus between Clausewitz (traditional military strategist) and Adam Smith (strategies of the marketplace), which results in a supply and demand paradigm that many military commanders have yet to fully recognise.

Demand Side (Client)

- Provides maximum plausible deniability for politically risky missions via "zero footprint" operations.
- Enemy mercenaries can be bribed for numerous benefits.
- Economic power can allow for one actor to retain all PMCs in a region.
- PMCs can be used to enact false flag attacks, allowing for greater manipulation of the enemy.
- The plausible deniability aspect of a PMC can be exploited in that enemy PMCs can be attacked without any legal blow-back.

Supply-Side (PMC)

- Can elongate conflict to maximize profits.
- Play clients off one another to foster mistrust, and increase the number of war contracts in a region.
- Create warlord kingdoms that enable shakedown strategies.

Both

- Treachery is present on all sides.
- Mercenary proliferation + lateral escalation = security dilemma = more contracts.

CASE STUDY: THE WAGNER GROUP

The Wagner Group is one of an unknown number of Russian PMC groups believed to be controlled by Yevgeny Prigozhin via the umbrella company Concord. It is important to note that they are not the little green men seen in Ukraine, nor an AstroTurfed Russian "separatist" or other proxy militia. The Wagner Group is an independent entity of mercenaries within the Russian command language network who is currently working for the GRU, primarily carrying out Russia's ambitions in Africa and the Middle East.

While they have so far been working closely with the GRU, the Wagner Group holds no substantial political loyalty to Russia.

The Wagner Group exemplifies the Clausewitz/Smith nexus which is allowing modern PMCs to foster nuanced relationships between themselves and their patrons, partially resolving the Machiavellian issue of contract enforcement. This has been seen through the creation of a symbiotic relationship between PMC services rendered and the financial gains said services provide their patron(s).

This relationship is excellently displayed in the deployment of the Wagner Group to Syria where in exchange for eliminating Islamic State fighters from oil fields, Prigozhin's energy company (Wagner Group's patron) Evro Polis received license to exploit said deposits, thus paying the PMC. This relationship has been exported to all regions in which the group operates, especially within Africa.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

- [GOLIATH: WHY THE WEST ISN'T WINNING. AND WHAT WE MUST DO ABOUT IT.](#)
- [THE MODERN MERCENARY: PRIVATE ARMIES AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR WORLD ORDER](#)
- [SHOULD PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES BE USED IN UN PEACE OPERATIONS?](#)
- [CNN SPECIAL REPORT: PUTINS PRIVATE ARMY](#)
- [THE 'HYBRID' ROLE OF RUSSIAN MERCENARIES, PMCS AND IRREGULARS IN MOSCOW'S SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA](#)
- [THE FIGHT AGAINST BOKO HARAM: ARE PMC'S THE BEST OPTION?](#)

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