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TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROLE OF PMSCs IN THE POST-INTERNATIONAL WORLD AND THEIR CLASSIFICATION

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The evolving landscape of international relations has witnessed a profound transformation in the concept of security. Traditionally, governments held an exclusive monopoly over the provision of security, relying on their military and defense forces to safeguard their interests and protect their citizens. However, the post-Cold War era has ushered in a paradigm shift, with non-state actors emerging as formidable challengers to this traditional monopoly. At the forefront of these non-governmental actors stand private military and security companies (PMSCs), organizations that offer a diverse array of military and security services to governments across the globe. *Methods and materials.* This comprehensive study explores the multifaceted world of PMSCs, categorizing them into three distinct types based on the nature of the services they provide: offensive, reactive, and defensive. Through an analytical-descriptive research approach and the innovative lens of post-international theory, this research delves deep into the role of PMSCs in an increasingly interconnected world. *Analysis.* The central question that underpins this study is the extent of PMSCs' influence in a post-international world and their responses to the evolving global military security environment. It scrutinizes whether governments continue to maintain an exclusive monopoly over security and military operations or if these responsibilities have been increasingly assumed by non-governmental actors like PMSCs. *Results.* The study comes to the conclusion that in the post-international world, governments are no longer the sole arbiters of security, and the role of non-state actors, particularly PMSCs, has grown substantially. Their extensive military and security services, often serving as alternatives to official national armies, have reduced the necessity for government forces in conflict-prone regions. This paradigm shift has effectively transformed security into a "tradable commodity," giving further initiative and importance to the PMSCs across the international arena. *Authors' contribution.* Reza Javadi has outlined the scope, idea, purpose, and objectives of the paper. He has also been engaged in the gathering, classification, and analysis of the documents that make up the main source base of the article. The second author, M. Saeid-Abadi, has helped find the library sources for the study, commented on the materials, and shared ideas about the beginning parts of the study.

Key words: security, post-internationalism, globalization, non-state actors, offensive PMSCs, defensive PMSCs, reactive PMSCs.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ РОЛИ ЧВОК В ПОСТМЕЖДУНАРОДНОМ МИРЕ И ИХ КЛАССИФИКАЦИЯ

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Аннотация. Современная теория и практика международных отношений претерпели глубокие изменения в концепции безопасности. В прошлом безопасность контролировалась исключительно правительствами, которые полагались на вооруженные силы для защиты своих интересов и гражданского населения. Однако эпоха после окончания холодной войны положила начало смене парадигмы, и негосударственные субъекты стали мощными конкурентами этой традиционной монополии. В авангарде этих неправительственных субъектов стоят частные военные и охранные компании, организации, которые предлагают широкий спектр военных и охранных услуг правительствам по всему миру. В этом исследовании рассматривается многогранный мир ЧВОК, осуществляется их типологизация. В зависимости от типа предоставляемых услуг ЧВОК можно разделить на три различные группы: наступательные, реактивные и оборонительные. Благодаря аналитико-описательному исследовательскому подходу и инновационному фокусу постмеждународной теории это исследование представляет роль ЧВОК во все более взаимосвязанном мире. Главный вопрос, лежащий в основе этого исследования, заключается в том, какое влияние ЧВОК имеют в постмеждународном мире и как они реагируют на развивающуюся глобальную среду военной безопасности. Тщательно изучается вопрос о том, сохраняют ли правительства исключительную монополию на операции по обеспечению безопасности и военные операции или же эти обязанности все чаще выполняют неправительственные субъекты, такие как ЧВОК. И наконец, в исследовании делается вывод о том, что в постмеждународном мире правительства более не являются единственными арбитрами безопасности, и роль негосударственных субъектов, в частности ЧВОК, существенно возросла. Их военные службы, возможности обеспечения безопасности зачастую служат альтернативой официальным национальным армиям, и это позволило уменьшить потребность в правительственных силах в конфликтных регионах. Этот сдвиг парадигмы превратил безопасность в «ходовой товар», придав ЧВОК дополнительную инициативу и значимость на международной арене. *Вклад авторов.* Реза Джавади определил объем, идею, цель и задачи статьи, а также занимался сбором, классификацией и анализом документов, составляющих основную источниковую базу статьи. М. Саид-Абади осуществил подбор источников для исследования, комментировал материалы, делаясь идеями о начальных частях исследования.

Ключевые слова: безопасность, постинтернационализм, глобализация, негосударственные субъекты, наступательные ЧВОК, оборонительные ЧВОК, реактивные ЧВОК.

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Introduction. In recent decades, the international world has undergone significant transformations regarding the concept of “security” in the realm of international relations. Historically, the responsibility for ensuring security primarily rested with governments, relying on their military and defense forces. However, in the post-Cold War era, coupled with the emergence of non-state actors, the monopoly of using legitimate violence and force has gradually shifted away from governments. Concurrently, the proliferation of security and military services offered by the private sector has eroded the traditional role of governments in providing such essential services. Among the prominent non-governmental entities shaping the dynamics of military affairs are private military and security companies (PMSCs), which extend a range of services to governments

worldwide in exchange for financial resources. Particularly in the world’s conflict zones, with the existence of such forces, governments no longer show a desire to use their official forces.

Today, by taking the initiative, these private companies proactively assume roughly the lead role in manipulating power dynamics within their operational domains and subsequently influencing global power equations. Despite the exponential growth in the scope of their activities in recent years, it is noteworthy that many academic studies have either overlooked this field or provided only a superficial examination of the subject. Despite the exponential growth in the scope of activities by these companies in recent years, numerous academic studies have either overlooked this field or provided only a cursory examination. Within current discussions surrounding these companies,

there has been a conspicuous absence of in-depth exploration of their internal and functional distinctions, and none have applied the theoretical framework used in this research.

This article, therefore, aims to conduct a meticulous analysis of the nuanced differences among these private companies. The goal is to categorize them based on the services they offer to recruiting countries, the nature of their operations in the respective regions, and the level of force they employ in conflict zones. The distinct innovation in this article lies in its examination of these companies from the perspective of post-international theory. In this regard, relying on an analytical-descriptive research method and referring to a new theoretical framework in the field of non-state actors, this study aims to answer the key question: What are the roles of these private actors in a post-international world and how do they react to the military-security developments of the world? Furthermore, the article explores secondary questions, including whether governments continue to maintain a monopoly on establishing security and conducting military operations in alignment with their strategic interests or if this monopoly has been challenged by other non-governmental actors, such as private companies.

The hypothesis underpinning this study posits that the government's monopoly in this realm has been transcended, with non-governmental actors, such as private companies, offering various military-security services to governments to further their political, military, or strategic objectives. Consequently, they have exerted a significant influence on the international landscape, encompassing the political, economic, and military domains.

Interstate armed conflicts have undergone a transformation in recent times, giving rise to a new era characterized by "asymmetric," "low-intensity," and "hybrid" wars, which frequently involve the participation of PMSCs [24, p. 77]. Over time, they have become one of the main non-governmental players in their field and are constantly improving their services. These entities, as non-state actors, exhibit a unique blend of independence and interdependence with other state and non-state actors [23, p. 5].

To begin our exploration, it is imperative to establish a clear understanding of PMSCs.

Currently, two internationally recognized mechanisms govern the operations of private military and security companies: the Montreux Document, established in 2008, and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC), ratified in 2010. Synthesizing the essence of these documents, we define PMSCs as privately-owned entities that offer military and security services, either independently or on behalf of other entities, regardless of their self-designation. These services encompass a wide spectrum, notably including armed protection and safeguarding of individuals and assets such as convoys, structures, and various locations, as well as the maintenance and operation of weaponry systems [23, pp. 3-4]. Furthermore, PMSCs engage in activities such as prisoner detention and the training and advising of local forces and security personnel. Essentially, they encompass any undertaking that necessitates the use of weaponry in the execution of their duties [24, pp. 77-78].

In an era marked by the diminishing significance of national borders and the heightened prominence of globalization, non-governmental sectors have undergone a remarkable transformation. As a result, the task of ensuring security is gradually shifting away from the exclusive domain of state authorities [21, p. 122]. This shift is increasingly conspicuous, particularly in light of what Mary Kaldor has termed "new wars" – intricate and irregular forms of warfare predominantly observed in the Global South. Contrary to their seemingly localized nature, these new wars serve as compelling indicators of the globalization of contemporary organized violence, as elaborated upon in Kaldor's work [22, pp. 43-47].

When delving into the literature review on PMSCs, it becomes evident that various approaches are employed to define and differentiate PMSCs and their activities, garnering significant attention in contemporary discourse. The first and most prevalent approach within this body of literature centers around the examination of military corporations through the lens of security privatization or within the context of armed conflict. Works that align with this perspective present an array of motivations, spanning legal, political, and practical considerations. A secondary approach revolves

around the classification of contractors based on their deployment in conflict zones as opposed to those operating in non-conflict areas. While this differentiation holds significance within legal frameworks, it proves less effective as a comprehensive method for categorizing security firms. A third approach hinges on defining these entities by the specific tasks they undertake, occasionally coupled with a distinction between military and security functions. Undoubtedly, this approach offers valuable insights into the study of PMSCs. However, its inherent weakness lies in the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the stakeholders, which in turn overlooks crucial structural aspects of these firms.

There are numerous classifications of PMSCs, typically organized around the primary type of service they offer, such as security, consulting, logistics, and more. However, this typology tends to be rather arbitrary, as intense competition within the industry prompts companies to swiftly adapt and diversify their offerings, making it rare for them to solely or primarily provide a single category of military service [32, p. 54]. This paper approaches the study of these companies from a distinct perspective, highlighting their coercive dimension within the context of globalization. Renowned scholars like Held and McGraw argue that “violence and hubris fuel the process of globalization” as integral facets of this phenomenon. By underscoring the issue of organized violence, these two scholars assert that violence has resurfaced in the era of globalization and constitutes a significant component of this transformative epoch. In their article “Organized Violence in the Construction of Globalization,” Held and McGraw underscore that globalization represents a novel iteration of violence, marking its continuity in a fresh guise [22, p. 28].

One of the primary objectives of this study is to furnish a comprehensive classification system and a specific mechanism that facilitates a deeper comprehension of PMSCs as pivotal actors in the redistribution of power dynamics within global politics. At its core, this research aims to unravel how PMSCs effectively challenge the traditional monopoly on violence and militarism held by governments and cause the shifting of power equations in global politics.

To achieve this overarching goal, a holistic approach is imperative. This study embarks on

an exploration of the general context and conditions that govern PMSCs, laying the groundwork for their systematic classification. The proposed methodology employs a typological research approach designed to construct a classification framework that satisfies these demands. In this type of approach, in order to better understand the subject and find out the nature of the companies in question, a detailed classification is presented according to different variables. This taxonomy seeks to identify operational differences in PMSCs at a fundamental level to identify their potential to directly impact human rights, as well as the implications this may have for accountability and governance.

In order to investigate the accuracy of the proposed hypothesis of the study and to obtain a logical answer to the main question of the paper, the author will clarify the role of the PMSCs in post-international world affairs by providing a detailed classification of these companies under the framework of post-international theory.

Methods and materials. While the fundamental framework of global politics adheres to an anarchic system composed of independent nation-states, it is crucial to acknowledge that states do not stand as the sole actors on the world stage. Furthermore, state authority has significantly diminished across various tiers within the nation-state structure. In this evolving landscape, a multitude of diverse actors have risen to prominence in the international arena [21, p. 118]. These actors, unburdened by traditional notions of sovereignty, have forged their own distinct structures and legal frameworks. Individually or in concert, these non-state entities engage in a spectrum of activities, including competition, conflict, cooperation, and interaction with counterparts who remain tethered to the state-centric paradigm of global governance [31].

The theoretical framework of any research is a cornerstone, encompassing a set of propositions designed to elucidate or categorize the primary or dependent variables within the study. These propositions are meticulously interwoven and substantiated by the researcher. In the context of the present study, it draws its theoretical foundation from post-international theory, initially introduced by the esteemed international relations scholar James Rosenau and

subsequently refined by Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach. This theory delves into a historical epoch commencing after World War II and extending to the contemporary era. Post-internationalism theory was introduced to the realm of political science in the 1990s and continues to serve as an explanatory framework for current global policy trends [29, p. 25]. Rosenau’s work highlights the emergence of a novel “post-international” paradigm, underscoring that today’s global landscape transcends the realm of interstate relations. It acknowledges the significant role played by non-state actors, who wield substantial influence on international politics [30, p. 191].

Rosenau’s analysis juxtaposes two world order paradigms: the realist approach and the post-internationalist approach, as detailed in Table. In the realist paradigm, leadership is predominantly state-centric, while the post-international polycentric world is guided by “innovative actors with extensive resources” [31, p. 41]. In the contemporary world, governments find themselves grappling with diminished control over the flow of capital, information, people, and goods, both within and beyond their borders.

Furthermore, the diminishing reliance on excessive military power by major world powers contributes to a more balanced distribution of power among an array of state and non-state actors.

During the Cold War era, while the primary arena of competition remained among the great powers, a profound shift occurred in international politics, transitioning from a state-centric focus to the increasing prominence of non-state actors. This transformation witnessed the rise of non-governmental activists, including international NGOs, women’s organizations, professional associations, peace advocacy groups, ethnic factions, private security firms, terrorist organizations, and various other non-governmental entities. Some of these entities not only expanded their influence but also engaged in competition with governments. These actors, on the one hand, pursued objectives and interests that sometimes clashed with those of governments, thereby challenging the government’s monopoly on security provision. On the other hand, they fostered networked relationships through the establishment of national, transnational, and multilateral cooperation agreements [25].

Structure and process in two worlds of world politics

	State-centric World	Multi-centric World
Number of essential actors	Fewer than 200	Hundreds of thousands
Prime dilemma of actors	Security	Autonomy
Principal goals of actors	Preservation of territorial integrity and physical security	Increase in world market shares and maintenance of integration of subsystems
Ultimate resort for realizing goals	Armed force	Withholding of cooperation or compliance
Normative priorities	Processes, especially those that preserve sovereignty and the rule of law	Outcomes, especially those that expand human rights, justice, and wealth
Modes of collaboration	Formal alliances whenever possible	Temporary coalitions
Scope of agenda	Limited	Unlimited
Rules governing inter-actions among actors	Diplomatic practices	Ad hoc, situational
Distribution of power among actors	Hierarchical by amount of power	Relative equality as far as initiating action is concerned
Interaction patterns among actors	Symmetrical	Asymmetrical
Locus of leadership	Great powers	Innovative actors with extensive resources
Institutionalization	Well established	Emergent
Susceptibility to change	Relatively low	Relatively high
Control over outcomes	Concentrated	Diffused
Bases of decisional structures	Formal authority, law	Various types of authority, effective leadership

Note. Source: [31, p. 58].

Consequently, the once unquestionable “absolute authority” and “legitimacy of power” vested in governments came under gradual scrutiny [31, p. 39].

To contextualize this evolution, it is imperative to trace the historical roots of hiring military forces and procuring other private military services on a commercial basis. While the practice of employing warriors and outsourcing security has a centuries-old history, the modern form of private military companies emerged in the aftermath of World War II [32, p. 53]. After World War II and during the Cold War, significant developments in military technology and shifts in warfare methods paved the way for the burgeoning private security industry and the rise of contemporary private military and security companies. On one hand, the great power rivalry of the Cold War era subsided, blurring the lines between national and international conflicts. On the other hand, technological advancements reduced the need for conventional national armies on battlefronts, emphasizing the necessity for specialized expertise [45, p. 4]. Furthermore, the conclusion of the Cold War era led many major powers to abstain from involvement in conflicts within the developing world, previously arenas of superpower competition [5, p. 6]. Additionally, the scaling back of military aid to sensitive regions globally, particularly in developing countries, left beneficiary governments feeling abandoned and vulnerable [11, pp. 9-11]. Consequently, they sought alternative means to secure their interests, often turning to private military security companies [5, p. 6]. Nevertheless, the true zenith of PMSCs’ influence came in a subsequent period – the late 20th century and early 21st century – marked by the United States and its allies launching protracted military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan [32, p. 53].

Malcolm Rifkind, the former Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs of the UK and President of Armor Group, one of the largest private security-military companies in the United States, articulated in one of his speeches: “Our world is rife with danger and threats, and individuals spanning the spectrum from businessmen and diplomats to workers and ordinary citizens must feel secure. Armor Group has been a steadfast presence in volatile regions, providing this essential security,

as safeguarding lives and well-being is an imperative mission in the modern world” [7, p. 64]. The growing inclination of governments to engage the services of private military and intelligence firms in the 21st century, particularly the specific types of security companies utilized to advance governmental interests, will be explored in subsequent sections.

Typically, every research endeavor grapples with a central question or problem that the author seeks to address. To reach a resolution to the posed problem, it becomes imperative to employ an appropriate methodology and problem-solving tools that facilitate the collection of information or data to validate or invalidate the underlying hypothesis. In this study, the chosen research method is the analytical-descriptive approach, designed to investigate and interpret the relationships among variables across historical and contemporary contexts. To clarify, this method encompasses two interrelated components: the historical-descriptive and the historical-analytical. While the descriptive component provides an overview of company activities, the descriptive-analytical component conducts an in-depth analysis, delving into various facets of the subject matter. Consequently, within this research method, the pursuit is not centered on establishing a “cause and effect relationship” among phenomena but rather on arriving at a comprehensive response to the core research question through thorough analysis.

Throughout the application of this methodology, while keeping Harold Lasswell’s communication formula in mind, the author elucidates the dynamics between private companies and their clients, subsequently assessing the roles and impacts of these firms in the post-international world. Harold Lasswell’s communication model, dating back to 1948, extends beyond Aristotle’s triadic elements to incorporate “means” and “effect.” In simpler terms, this model can be summarized as follows: who says what to whom, in what channel, and with what effect? In the context of the present study, “military and security companies” and the “post-international world” represent the “who” and “whom” in this relationship, respectively. The focus shifts to discerning what roles these companies play and through what channels within a world that comprises numerous governmental

and non-governmental actors. In essence, this formula serves as the conduit for determining how a company's interactions with its clients impact the international arena. While this method has primarily been used to structure discussions pertaining to communication, the current research endeavors to investigate communication dynamics between various components. In the following section, we will embark on the main body of the study, presenting the findings and classifications of the companies under scrutiny.

Analysis: Classification of private military contractors. 1. Offensive contractors. Within the spectrum of military and security companies, "offensive contractors" represent the most assertive category, often exhibiting aggressive tendencies in contrast to their counterparts. Rather than merely reacting to provocations, these firms proactively employ military force to achieve their objectives. In certain instances, they may even resort to the use of violence against local populations as a means to advance or solidify the interests of their employers. To ascertain whether a private enterprise qualifies as an offensive contractor, this study adopts an approach akin to that employed by the Red Cross when determining an individual's direct participation in hostilities. While the legal ramifications of violence typically pertain to cases occurring during military conflicts [22, p. 2], this article broadens its scope to encompass instances of violence employed in civilian operations [41, p. 458].

Drawing from available data related to direct participation in hostilities, individuals or groups who are not affiliated with a country's armed forces are considered to have directly engaged in conflicts if they meet a three-step criterion. First, their actions must have a detrimental impact on the capabilities of the opposing group or, alternatively, result in casualties, injuries, or damage to objects safeguarded against direct attack [15, p. 17]. Second, a "direct causal link between the act and the injury" must be established. Third, these actions should be intentionally designed to directly inflict the requisite harm while being "directly aimed at protecting the employer" [15, p. 17]. Applying these criteria to the classification process allows researchers to pinpoint contractors who employ violence as a means to further their employers' objectives.

Subsequently, this article delves into various subcategories within the realm of aggressive contractors, a discussion that will be expounded upon in the subsequent sections.

1.1. Mercenaries. In general, mercenary groups or individuals share certain common characteristics that separate them from other categories: they are used to provide services in military conflicts inside or outside the country; they are directly involved in wars; their purpose of participating in conflicts is only based on ideological or financial benefits; they are not the members of any of the warring groups; and also, in many cases, they have not been sent by the third country as a military force for an official mission [40, pp. 8-9]. The term "mercenary companies" within this classification refers to private entities characterized by their aggressive operational model, irrespective of other attributes. In this subcategory, these mercenaries can be employed by both private and public organizations. Nevertheless, two common criteria unite these so-called mercenary groups, warranting their placement into a singular category.

The first criterion is that local mercenaries do not serve local governments; rather, local governments use foreign companies to suppress internal opposition or carry out military and security affairs. For instance, the government of Bahrain enlisted foreign mercenaries from Jordan and Pakistan to suppress domestic dissent in 2011, instead of relying on local mercenaries, in order to mitigate potential sympathies with the local population [1, p. 25]. Moreover, there is no recorded instance of hired mercenaries rebelling against the state that employs them, and thus, they have not posed any threat to the foreign government's legitimacy. This group of companies fundamentally changes the state monopoly on violence and undermines the social contract by importing coercive violence, circumventing public accountability, and exerting dominance over the population.

The second criterion pertains to the use of violence against the local population, underscoring the violent nature of these groups and their alignment with oppressive regimes to further their objectives. In such cases, employers distance themselves from any responsibility for the violence committed by these mercenaries. Consequently, governments frequently achieve their objectives

through these mercenary companies, effectively “purchasing security” without assuming accountability for potential war crimes. Many experts view these companies as “hired weapons” that receive compensation and benefits from wealthy nations [5, p. 8]. These mercenaries are unequivocally not formal members of any country’s armed forces or any of the conflict parties and are solely driven by financial interests [26]. Although these groups primarily seek monetary gains and do not aim to shift power dynamics intentionally or unintentionally, their operations in sensitive regions can occasionally alter the balance of power, shifting leverage toward the employing government. Thus, these two defining characteristics – the contractors’ place of operation and the level of violence employed – are sufficient to establish the category of “mercenary PMSCs.” Consequently, in this typological study, the use of the term “mercenary” for foreign agents engaged in aggressive actions is practical, precise, and apt, given its alignment with common practice and reference to the international convention recognized by the United Nations.

1.2. The warlord militia. The second subcategory within this classification pertains to local PMSCs that exhibit an aggressive demeanor, but they distinguish themselves from other branches due to their inherent characteristics. Much like mercenaries, this category is defined independently of their employer’s nature – be it public or private – and their status as contractors. However, what sets them apart from mercenaries is their operation within their own country of origin, rendering them a domestic entity. Consequently, they occupy a distinct subcategory referred to as “warlord militias.”

In the realm of political science, “warlords” are defined as actors who employ coercive violence to assert a degree of authority. This authority is typically exercised in situations where traditional power structures, especially those within fragile states, have disintegrated [20, p. 30]. Furthermore, the term “militia” signifies a military force raised from the local population. Both of these definitions encapsulate the fundamental operational characteristics of PMSCs in this group, where aggression and localization are key traits.

This category of military and security companies bears a resemblance to Hannah

Arendt’s concept of a “terror regime.” The commonality lies in the substitution of “the gun barrel” for legitimate power to enforce “total obedience” [2, p. 98]. Any attempt to wield power through coercive violence poses an immediate threat to human rights [2, p. 97].

It is noteworthy that the presence of such PMSCs often signals the weakness or complete breakdown of governmental functions in the regions under their influence. Consequently, regardless of whether the employer is a recognized state or a private entity, they cannot assert legal authority over the local population. In such cases, it is the warlord militia that assumes the role of governance, seizing control and authority in areas where formal governments have faltered. Recent instances of warlord militias are exemplified by Sudan’s paramilitary forces, known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). These forces were initially aligned with the Government of Sudan but subsequently staged a revolt against it.

Initially, the RSF fought on behalf of the Sudanese government during the War in Darfur, and their involvement was marked by numerous atrocities against civilians. Human Rights Watch has classified their actions in Darfur as crimes against humanity. During the Sudanese political crisis of 2019, the military junta that assumed control of the country enlisted the RSF to brutally suppress pro-democracy demonstrators. More recently, on April 15, 2023, conflict erupted between the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) due to a power struggle involving General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the army chief, and his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemetti), who leads the paramilitary force. There have been allegations of a potential connection between Hemetti and the Russian PMC Wagner Group. These developments illustrate the evolving dynamics of warlord militias, which can shift allegiances and play pivotal roles in complex political crises and conflicts.

2. Reactive military contractors. This second category in our classification encompasses PMSCs that engage in reactive violence, occupying a position between defensive and offensive PMSCs. Similar to defensive PMSCs, reactive violence only emerges in response to provocation from various variables and factors. It is noteworthy that the intensity of this violence

is directly correlated with the level of provocation. While a defensive organization is primarily tasked with protecting public property against outright violence, a reactive organization is also capable of responding to nonviolent provocations. The second distinguishing characteristic between these two types lies in the extent of violence employed following provocation. Consequently, even though both types of organizations are equipped with armed forces, if a company resorts to potentially lethal violence in situations beyond direct self-defense, it should be categorized as a reactive PMSC. In practical terms, this means that contractors who respond to nonviolent provocations with a disproportionate degree of force fall under the umbrella of reactive companies. An illustrative example of this category is the deployment of reactive (or reactionary) PMSCs to suppress nonviolent protests or strikes by labor forces. These contractors represent a distinct class of PMSCs defined by the level of violence they employ and their role in fulfilling traditional state functions, particularly those of a “military or quasi-military” nature. They often function as auxiliary military forces, providing services to bolster the police, guards, and security units of the state. Their legal status under national law varies depending on the recruiting state. Many states prohibit the use of foreign forces to suppress their own population. However, a hiring state, prioritizing its survival over quelling local uprisings, often disregards such prohibitions. Although their scope of operation may be limited, in repressive regimes, for instance, these companies play a critical role in sustaining the government, effectively suppressing dissent, and consolidating their influence in international politics.

2.1. Private Military Companies (PMCs).

Within our classification of reactive companies, the first group comprises entities that serve as supplements to national military services. These entities are commonly known as “private military contractors” on the international stage. They are hierarchically structured, possess legal personhood, and freely compete and trade in global markets. Unlike their predecessors, these entities are driven by financial incentives [19, p. 5]. While mercenary forces have a historical lineage, modern military security companies represent a more specialized, professional, and organized

phenomenon [5, p. 6]. Notably, these companies adhere more closely to legal principles compared to their more aggressive counterparts, thus disqualifying them from being classified as mercenaries. In essence, the evolution of moral standards, globalization, and international policies has led to the transformation of former mercenary forces into legal entities in most cases [5, p. 78]. Prominent examples of such Western companies include Blackwater and Aegis, both of which were contracted by coalition forces during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars [12].

2.1.1. Russian PMCs. Russian PMCs have garnered significant attention in recent years. For instance, during the Syrian War, the most notable PMCs employed by Russia included the Wagner Group and the Slavonic Corps. The Slavonic Corps was established in Hong Kong in 2013 by two former employees of the Moran Security Group, a conventional Russian PSC. The Moran Security Group had been contracted by the Syrian government to assist Syrian forces in combating ISIS. However, as the Moran Security Group proved inadequate for the task, the decision was made to establish a new entity, which became the Slavonic Corps.

The private military company Wagner Group emerged shortly after the dissolution of the Slavonic Corps. According to a report by the British news agency The Telegraph, Wagner Group was registered in Argentina and was believed to have a membership of around 1,000 mercenaries by December 2015. However, their numbers fluctuated, at times exceeding 2,000 members. According to interviews with three Wagner commanders, the group had around 2,000 forces in Syria as of 2018. Accounting for force rotations, the total number of Russian fighters engaged in Syria under Wagner ranged between 3,600 and 6,000 personnel.

Redut-Antiterror, also known as Redoubt or Centre R., controlled by the GRU (Russian military intelligence agency), is considered a potential successor to the Wagner Group [9]. It has been linked to the Russian military’s involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, particularly in Kharkiv Oblast. The Antiterror Orel Group, connected to Redut-Antiterror, has forged strong ties in Serbia and established itself as a node within a Balkans-based network of recruitment and training centers [28].

Other Russian PMCs have also operated on the ground. For instance, Anti-Terror Eagle was a prominent private military company in Russia that operated from 1998 to 2016. The organization, financed by Serhiy Isakov, a former co-owner of Vnukov Airlines, comprised reserve military personnel and veterans of the GRU, VYMPEL, and the Navy. Anti-Terror Eagle engaged in facility protection, military personnel training, and sapper work in locations such as Iraq, Nigeria, India, Sierra Leone, and Angola, with its peak activity during the Iraq war in 2014 when coalition authorities authorized the company to conduct security operations and employ weapons [44].

E.N.O.T. Corp., originally established by Igor Mangushev of the Russian nationalist movement Svetlaya Rus, has been involved in paramilitary operations in Tajikistan and Nagorno-Karabakh [13]. Recent reports suggest E.N.O.T. Corp. has been running military-style training camps for right-wing activists from foreign countries [33].

Ferax is another private military company in Russia that provides a comprehensive range of security and armed security services both within Russia and abroad. Its personnel reserve consists of reserve officers with combat experience in various global hotspots, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Kurdistan. These Russian PMCs represent a complex and evolving landscape within the private military industry, with various entities fulfilling diverse roles and operating in a range of conflict zones.

2.1.2. Weaponry and Equipment. These private military and security companies (PMSCs) typically deploy a wide array of sophisticated and heavy military equipment, which sets them apart from mercenaries, who primarily rely on light weaponry. While some contractors affiliated with Western militaries primarily serve as unarmed support personnel, providing civilian services such as logistics, equipment maintenance, and consulting, others are heavily armed and specialize in delivering comprehensive security services ranging from safeguarding bases and lines of communication to deploying on the front lines alongside regular armies. The renowned authority in the field of PMSCs, Peter Warren Singer, delineates three distinct categories of private military companies (PMCs) [36]:

- Military Service Provider Companies: PMSCs that fulfill offensive warfighting roles and provide combat support;

- Military Consulting Companies: Private entities offering training, consulting, and defensive security services;

- Military Support Companies: PMSCs that generate substantial industry revenue by delivering an array of supplementary services, including logistics, intelligence gathering, and technical support.

2.1.3. Difference between ‘PMSCs’ and ‘PMCs’. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the military and security services provided by PMSCs include “the provision of armed guards and the protection of persons and places, such as convoys, buildings, and other places; maintenance and operation of weapon systems; detention of a prisoner; and consulting or training local forces and security personnel” [16].

The two terms PMC and PMSC are often used interchangeably because they have very similar functions. However, one of the main differences between the two is that PMSCs may perform more intelligent operations because they have access to security information sources and classified information that PMCs are not able to access. Furthermore, the distinction between PMC and PSC is like the difference between a military contractor with a combat approach versus a security team that merely protects a fixed location such as a military base, embassy, or port. Therefore, the function of a private military company is much broader than that of a private security company. According to post-international theory, both of these companies and other types of them are among the non-state actors that exercise power in the multi-axial world and sometimes play a role.

2.1.4. Difference between ‘Private Companies’ and ‘Mercenaries’. A historical examination reveals that PMSCs and mercenaries share common origins and exhibit numerous similarities. However, fundamental distinctions set them apart. To begin with, a PMSC is a legally recognized and registered private military and security entity that operates within the bounds of the law. Its employees are official staff members who, through employment contracts, receive salaries, pay applicable taxes, and enjoy the same

social benefits as regular office workers – something that is particularly prevalent in PMSCs where administrative roles are as numerous as operational personnel directly involved in field activities. Larger PMSCs maintain extensive global networks of offices and their stocks are traded on stock exchanges. Additionally, some entities that fall under the category of offensive corporate warriors can also be classified as PMSCs [32, pp. 54-55].

Moreover, information pertaining to PMSCs is readily accessible through official state registration authorities and legal entity registries. These companies operate in compliance with the legal frameworks of their home countries, host nations, client states, and international law, despite the ambiguity surrounding their status. Importantly, none of the diverse array of services offered by PMSCs, even those with offensive elements, are inherently illegal. No international legal document explicitly prohibits the existence or activities of PMSCs, although their operations are often shrouded in controversy and frequently draw criticism for alleged human rights violations [32, p. 55].

For a comprehensive comparison between PMSCs and traditional mercenaries, reference should be made to Article 47 of the First Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Within this article, paragraph 2 outlines the definition of a mercenary as follows: “A mercenary is any person who: (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) actually takes a direct part in hostilities; (c) takes part in hostilities motivated primarily by a desire for personal gain, and who is in fact promised by or on behalf of a party to the conflict a material reward substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of the same rank and function who are members of the armed forces of that party; (d) is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a permanent resident in 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) not sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict to carry out official duties as a member of its armed forces” [32, p. 55].

2.2. Private social militias. The second category within the classification of reactive PMSCs encompasses those PMSCs whose operations are reliant on local private contractors

and are contracted by local private employers. Two salient commonalities differentiate this category of contractors and establish it as a distinct segment within the overarching PMSC classification system.

Firstly, both the contractors and employers in this category are rooted within the local community. Unlike previous iterations of PMCs and PMSCs, community-based private militias maintain significantly closer ties with the communities in which they operate. In this context, both the contractor and the employer organizations are integral parts of the local community fabric. Consequently, the strong connections to the local community often serve as a deterrent for contractors to employ violence in the execution of their duties. Moreover, local employers, deeply embedded in the community, are less likely to encounter opposition from the community. This fusion of local contractors and employers implies that the use of violence pertains to more localized segments of society, where reactive violence becomes a necessity due to the prevailing levels of violence faced by these militias.

These types of militias are prevalent in numerous countries, with South America experiencing a significant surge in such enterprises over the past two decades. Notably, in countries like Brazil and Argentina, where local law enforcement agencies frequently struggle to provide adequate security for local businesses, social militias have become extensively active [27]. In instances where local police authorities falter in their duties, local government officials often turn to these groups to restore order within their communities. This tendency is particularly prominent in regions afflicted by the Boko Haram insurgency, where local councils prefer the services of local militias as security enforcers rather than relying solely on federal police and military units, which are occasionally known for their inability to withstand adversity [35].

The second distinctive feature of private social militias is that contractors must be privately employed, a requirement stipulated by the host government or the country in which these companies operate. Another noteworthy distinction from previously introduced companies is that these entities are obliged to adhere to the laws of the host country, with the host government

assuming direct responsibility for legislating and overseeing the accountability of these military companies.

3. Defensive Private Military and Security Companies. Defensive private military and security companies, commonly referred to as “defensive PMSCs,” constitute the majority within the PMSC industry. Their operations primarily involve limited violence, in line with significant advancements in security and private guard services. Violence is utilized solely in a defensive capacity, with their primary responsibility being the protection and, if necessary, the notification of public law enforcement agencies. According to the guidelines of the International Code of Conduct, “Employees must take all necessary measures to avoid violence” [14, p. 3]. Similarly, the Sarajevo Code of Conduct for Private Security Companies [34], a collaborative effort between the European Union and the United Nations Development Program, permits the use of force and firearms only as a last resort.

Both the United Nations Code of Conduct on the Use of Force by Law Enforcement Officials [38] and the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials [39] offer comprehensive guidelines for the judicious application of force and firearms. Article 3 of the UN Code of Conduct states that “authorities may use force only when necessary and to the extent necessary to fulfill their duties.” In addition, according to this code, violence or force may be used in cases such as “prevention of a crime, or to arrest” [39]. The basic principles of the United Nations are also based on the fact that personnel should “use non-violent means as much as possible before resorting to force and firearms.”

Both regulations also state that the use of firearms should be avoided, except when “the attacker shows armed resistance or endangers the lives of others” or in cases of “self-defense or defense of others against threats such as imminent death or serious injury” [39]. Accordingly, this approach to classifying defense PMSCs shows that although the use of force is not completely prohibited, it is only relatively used in the direct protection of their property and personal security. Therefore, it is expected that the use of physical force will be minimal as a deterrent. When violence becomes necessary, it is anticipated to be used with extreme restraint

and without causing harm, except in rare and exceptional circumstances. Within this framework, several groups of PMSCs, including most European security guards, clearly fall into the defensive category. Other companies, such as security officers in shopping malls, private residences, and banks, as well as cashiers, actually make up a large part of the private security sector. There are various subcategories for defense contractors, which we will cover in the following sections.

3.1. Privately Seconded Security Contractors. Within this classification, the initial group of contractors encompasses local public security forces engaged in contracts with or funded by private entities. While this arrangement is more prevalent in South and Central America, it is noteworthy that, unlike PSPs, such contractors are also increasingly prevalent in the Global North. Typically, these companies are enlisted by various organizations to bolster security and protection measures. In contrast to their counterparts, the contract durations of these entities are generally shorter, and their scope of services is more confined.

3.2. Outsource public security contractors. The second subset within the realm of defense companies comprises private contractors, whether domestic or foreign, enlisted by government authorities to execute public security services. This category is one of the fastest-growing segments within the PMSC spectrum. Governments and local authorities worldwide are increasingly turning to these contractors to bridge gaps in their security provisions. For instance, in previous years, the US Department of Homeland Security employed more than 20,000 private security guards to protect federal buildings across the US, but the use of private contractors to protect foreign embassies has now become a new trend and is considered universal. The outsourcing of public security to private corporations raises several significant questions regarding the fundamental functions of sovereign governments. Governments’ decisions to involve private entities in the exercise of legitimate coercive force have generated ambiguities regarding the government’s role in the 21st century security landscape. Consequently, the government-centric security paradigm has waned, with private corporations and organizations

assuming prominent roles. However, this shift also poses human rights concerns, as private companies often disavow responsibility for human rights abuses [8, pp. 25-44]. In particular, in some cases, entrusting public security to private entities by the government may lead to difficulties in holding the government accountable for any violations [8, p. 45].

It is worth mentioning that, regarding the supervisory body over the PMSCs, there seems to be no consensus among countries in general. Legislative norms on the regulation of PMSC activities vary from state to state. Even the normative regulations that were adopted in the US or UK do not guarantee compliance and human rights observance by PMSCs. In some states, such as Denmark, Hungary, and Slovakia, the bodies overseeing PMSCs are local police; in others, they are ministries of interior (such as Slovenia, Poland, and Italy). Meanwhile, in Luxembourg, the Ministry of Justice is acting as the supervisory body over the PMSCs.

3.3. Private security guards. The last group in this classification is private security guards. These are contractors owned by private companies, whether domestic or foreign, who are hired by private organizations to secure their operations, either in the community in which they are based or in a completely foreign community. Since these guards rely only on defensive violence, their type can be distinguished from companies that use reactive violence, as the location of the employer and contractor is not very important in this classification. In particular, the use of defensive violence alone does not pose a direct threat to the local population. Meanwhile, the challenge posed by these security guards is that the government (not the private sector) is responsible for protecting the local population, and in a local community, citizens rely on government officials (and not the private sector) to provide the necessary level of security they require [17, p. 17].

The role of PMSCs in the post-international world. In the evolving post-international world, security dynamics have undergone profound transformations, leading to a reevaluation of traditional national security priorities. Historically, military threats have consistently occupied a paramount position in national security strategies, given their potential

for widespread devastation through the application of violence [6, p. 141].

Throughout history, “organized violence” has stood as a dominant force shaping human societies and influencing the course of events. The establishment of internal stability and the expansion of foreign influence have often hinged on military endeavors and the orchestration of organized violence [4, p. 42]. As American sociologist Charles Tilley aptly emphasizes, ‘If war caused globalization, globalization has also caused war interchangeably.’ In other words, organized violence is one of the factors that create contemporary globalization, and globalization is part of the construction of contemporary methods of organized violence [43, p. 124].

In the modern era, alongside globalization’s advance and the emergence of new actors armed with mass destruction weapons and advanced technologies, governments face asymmetrical and disproportionate threats [10, p. 164]. The very nature of warfare has shifted to what is now termed “new wars,” which occur within the framework of the monopoly of organized violence, and thus the government’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force is eroded by the trans-nationalization of military forces and privatization [42, pp. 39-40]. In this context, military corporations have emerged as key players alongside governments, offering a wide array of military and intelligence services, including nuclear capabilities. Notably, in the course of the Iraq war, these contractors provided support operations for systems such as Air Force and Patriot technology and played a prominent role in the post-war reconstruction [3, p. 157].

One of the effects of military contractors on international security is that the outsourcing of military security services has actually resulted in the states’ increasing reliance on these types of services. And as long as the provider companies have a monopoly on the essential services, this dependence will surge. For instance, in Iraq, private contractors are responsible for the maintenance of 2-B bombers and Apache helicopters. In some cases, the monopoly may not be in the hands of a particular company, but it is often difficult to replace another company due to the high costs of transactions and contracts [18, p. 810]. The ongoing influence of these companies on the circulation of security around the world is inevitable, and therefore it can be said that since

the defense sector is highly dependent on private military-security companies, preventing the private military sector from entering the defense and security field is very difficult [37, p. 224].

Furthermore, the presence of military and security companies in sensitive and conflict-prone areas has led to a reduced need for government forces in these regions. The agility and rapid deployment capabilities of these private forces have convinced governments to outsource security, effectively transforming “security” into a tradable “commodity.” A private company receives financial resources in exchange for intelligence, military, or security services.

Beyond their economic and political influence, these companies exert considerable influence on security matters. Their extensive range of military services occasionally positions them as viable alternatives to official national armies. Many of these companies, by interfering in elections and internal conflicts, have, in some cases, reduced negative results and, in other cases, increased unrest. Apart from the tremendous economic and political impact of these organizations, the security ramifications of these entities are greater than other factors. Sometimes, due to the wide range of military services provided by these companies, they are considered a suitable alternative for the official army of a country. Therefore, the international world has witnessed the presence of these forces in the fields of war and conflict every day, and in this way, as the post-international theory states, these groups have caused the role and effectiveness of governments in the world to diminish and have established themselves as one of the main non-governmental actors in the world.

Results. The main purpose of this study has been to present a comprehensive classification of PMSCs to unravel their operational world and the shifting balance of power across the globe. In different parts of this study, by examining various types of private military firms, the activities and nature of PMSCs were discussed. In this regard, the unique nature of each company was measured in relation to the society or the situation in which it operated. This paper presents an innovative classification of PMSCs based on their approach (reactive, aggressive, or defensive) and believes that this classification system offers several distinct advantages over previous studies, grounding itself in empirical evidence rather than

relying solely on generalized discussions. By identifying the behavioral patterns of PMSCs, this approach enables a more nuanced evaluation of contractor performance. Moreover, by discerning the intricate relationships between contractors and employers, this taxonomy provides a theoretical framework to gauge the potential impacts of these agencies on global power politics.

Highlighting PMSCs’ capacity to reshape power dynamics within communities and challenge traditional mechanisms of public accountability, this study underscores their potential to achieve their employers’ benefits. From the point of view of Ferguson and Mansbach, who have expanded upon Rosenau’s post-internationalist theory, the political environment has always hosted various actors who have layering, overlap, interaction, or alliance with one another. Many types of actors, such as empires, regional actors, cities, kinship groups such as tribes or ethnic nations, corporations, and even families, have persisted over the centuries, while the sovereign state was the only central actor during the relatively brief Westphalian period. In recent centuries, especially during the last 100 years, many important actors have appeared in the international arena. Among them, private military and security companies occupy a prominent role, not only garnering government attention but also piquing the interest of researchers. The classification of private military industries helps researchers in the field properly distinguish between different groups of this industry.

Among the types of private contractors, proxy groups, and mercenaries presented earlier, this study centered its attention on PMSCs as the main category of groups in the private military industry. Although these companies may have different nationalities and headquarters in different countries, this study sought to examine companies that offered comprehensive military services to governments and wielded substantial influence in reshaping power dynamics. The changing concept of security over time and the existence of constant threats to governments have led them to use other tools, such as private military companies, apart from their official armies, to establish security. However, these companies do not have continuous and independent financial resources for survival, and in this sense, they are dependent on governments, but their level of influence in military and strategic affairs is on par with governments

and sometimes more than governments. If we assume that these companies are dependent on the government, they are in fact a tool to achieve the goals of the government and are not defined as independent, but if they have their own independent financial resources like the government, they can be considered independent.

After all, in line with the initial hypothesis of this article, the monopoly over security establishments and military operations has shifted away from governments. Particularly in conflict zones, a significant portion of these tasks have been outsourced to the discussed military companies. Consequently, the activities of these companies have reverberated across the post-international world. One notable consequence is the increasing dependence of governments on the outsourcing of military-security services, further strengthening the grip of PMSCs. Furthermore, the presence of military and security companies, especially in conflict-ridden regions, has diminished the necessity for the formal forces of states, granting these companies a leading role.

Beyond this, the discussed companies have been able to become an influential element in the international system with their influence in the political field, and sometimes by interfering in elections and internal conflicts, they have in some cases reduced negative results and in some other cases exacerbated unrest. In addition to their security and military ramifications, these companies have wielded considerable economic and political clout worldwide. Their influence on global security is bound to expand, given the heavy reliance of some governmental sectors on the private military sector. Consequently, preventing these firms from infiltrating the defense and security domain presents a formidable challenge.

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