

The Special Politics and Decolonization Committee



***Measures to Prevent the Misuse of Private Military and Security
Companies in Conflict Zones: The Case of the Wagner Group in
Africa and Ukraine***

-Committee Guide-

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
 - a. Introduction to the Committee
 - b. Introduction to the Topic
- II. Facts and current situation
 - a. Facts
 - b. Current Situation
- III. Definition of key terms
- IV. Major Parties involved
- V. Evaluation of previous attempts
- VI. Possible solutions
- VII. Useful links

I. INTRODUCTION

a. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Fourth Committee (SPECPOL) is one of the six main committees of the United Nations General Assembly. It is dedicated to the work of the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, and as such, it consists of all 193 United Nations Member States. It is a plenary committee, meaning every country with a seat in the General Assembly is a member and can participate in its work. It was formed in 1990 when the Decolonization Committee and the Special Political Committee were combined. The UN established the “International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism” from 1990 to 2000, making an important time for the UN’s decolonization work. When the UN was founded, 750 million people lived under colonial rule. Since 1945, over 80 former colonies have gained independence, thanks to the work of the Fourth Committee. Today, fewer than two million people live in 17 non-self-governing territories, and SPECPOL holds hearings with petitioners, including civil society organizations and private individuals, from these areas. SPECPOL also covers issues related to Palestinian refugees as well as topics like the effects of atomic radiation, peacekeeping operations, space exploration, and international cooperation for peaceful uses of outer space.

b. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

In recent decades, the growing involvement of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) in armed conflicts has transformed the nature of warfare and security operations. These entities provide a wide range of services, including military training, logistical support, intelligence gathering, and direct combat assistance. While PMSCs can contribute to stability and security in regions affected by conflict, their activities have also raised significant concerns regarding accountability, transparency and compliance with international law. The issue has gained particular prominence through the activities of the Wagner Group, a Russian private military organization that has operated extensively in several African states and, most notably, in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Allegations of human rights violations, exploitation of natural resources and

interference in domestic affairs have highlighted the challenges posed by private military actors and the difficulties of regulating their activities. As PMSCs continue to play an increasingly influential role in conflict zones, the international community faces important questions regarding state responsibility, civilian protection and the enforcement of international humanitarian law.



Armored military vehicles operating in a winter environment. Modern military and security operations increasingly rely on advanced armored platforms to protect personnel in hostile and challenging conditions.

https://www.army.mil/article/70140/winter_pmcs_for_mission_success

II. FACTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

a. FACTS

Private Military Companies are private organizations that provide military and security services in exchange for payment. Their activities range from logistical support and intelligence gathering to military training, reconnaissance and, in some cases, direct participation in combat operations.

The Wagner Group represents a distinct model. Closely linked to Russian interests, it has operated similarly to traditional mercenary groups and often financed its activities through access to local natural resources. In contrast, the American model, exemplified by Blackwater, developed as part of the privatization of military services and worked closely alongside state armed forces, particularly in support of logistical roles.

Regulation of Private Military Companies

Despite the growing role of PMSCs, there is currently no comprehensive international legal framework specifically regulating their activities. Existing international law provides only state actors. As a result, governments remain largely responsible for supervising private military contractors through national legislation and administrative oversight. This regulatory gap has become increasingly evident in the case of the Wagner Group, whose operations in Africa and Ukraine have raised concerns regarding accountability, transparency and compliance with international humanitarian law.

The Wagner Group

The Wagner Group is a Russian private military organization that emerged in 2014. It has been involved in military operations, security services and training missions in several conflict areas. Due to its close links to Russian interests, the group has become one of the most prominent examples of modern PMC.

Wagner Group Operations in Africa

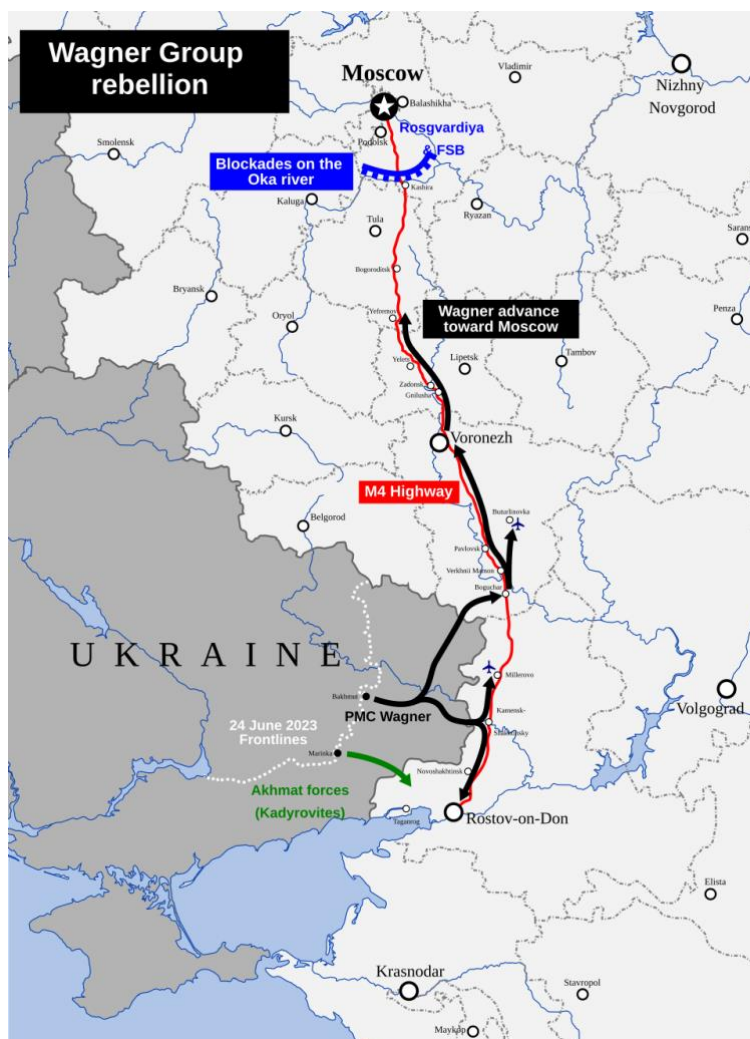
The Wagner Group has established a significant presence in several African countries, particularly the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Libya and Sudan. The organization provides military assistance, security services and training to governments facing security challenges, often in exchange for access to natural resources such as gold and mining concessions.

In addition to combat and security operations, Wagner has been accused of conducting disinformation campaigns and promoting anti-Western narratives to strengthen its influence. These activities have raised concerns regarding state sovereignty, human rights and the exploitation of resources in conflict-affected

regions.

The Wagner Group in Ukraine

The Wagner Group first appeared in Ukraine during Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and later participated in the conflict in the Donbas region. Wagner personnel supported pro-Russian forces through combat operations, reconnaissance and intelligence activities. The group's involvement in key battles, such as the Battle of Debaltseve in 2015, demonstrated its growing role as a private military actor closely aligned with Russian strategic interests.



Map showing the Wagner's advances towards Moscow during the insurgency

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagner_Group_rebellion

b. CURRENT SITUATION

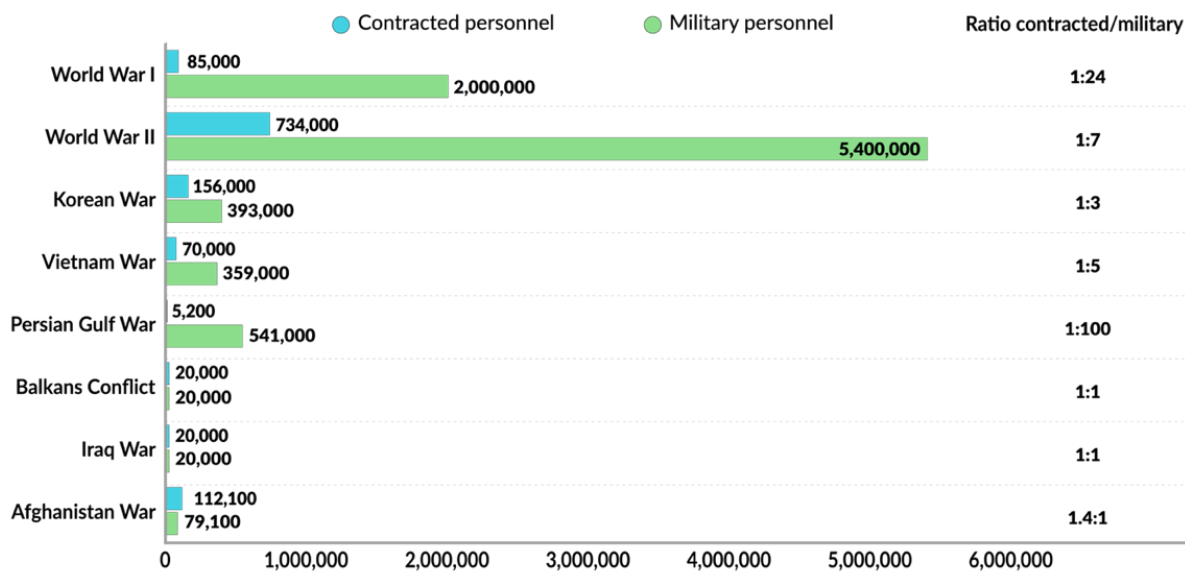
The Montreux Document: One of the most important international initiatives concerning the regulation of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) is the Montreux Document, developed jointly by the Government of Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Adopted in 2008, the document outlines existing obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law that apply to states that employ or host PMSCs during armed conflicts.

Although the Montreux Document is not legally binding, it provides a widely recognized framework of good practices for the oversight and regulation of private military actors. As PMSCs continue to play an increasingly significant role in conflict zones, the document serves as an important reference for states seeking to ensure accountability and compliance with international law.

Current Challenges:

Despite existing initiatives such as the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers, significant gaps in the regulation of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) remain. Concerns persist regarding transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights, particularly in conflict zones where oversight is limited.

Furthermore, the increasing use of emerging technologies, including surveillance systems and artificial intelligence, has created new challenges for international regulation. As a result, many UN Member States continue to advocate for a stronger and more comprehensive international framework governing the activities of PMSCs.



<https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/private-military-companies/>

III. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Mercenary: Mercenary is a hired professional soldier who fights without regard for politics, nations and issues. Mercenaries have been in use from the beginning of warfare up until the creation of political armies, governments would usually supplement their forces with mercenaries.

Unlawful combatants: Unlawful combatants are persons who are directly engaged in an armed conflict and are not protected by the Geneva Convention either as civilians or soldiers.

9/11 Attacks: 9/11 Attacks are a series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks committed in 2001 by Islamic militant extremists associated with al-Qaeda targeting New York City and Washington, D.C.

War on Terrorism: The war on terrorism is a term used to describe the global counterterrorism effort led by the United States of America as a response to the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001.

Coup d'état: The sudden and violent overthrow of an existing, legitimate government. However, unlike revolutions where a large part of the population is required to bring social, economic and/ or political change, a coup requires control of a part or the entirety of a nation's armed forces and can be executed by a small group.

Insurgency: A term historically linked to rebellious and violent activity that does not reach the size of a revolution in popular support but is orchestrated by smaller usually armed groups. An insurgency is usually conducted through asymmetrical warfare by disorganized forces in order to combat the much larger and better organized forces of a recognized government.

IV. MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

United States of America

The United States have heavily involved themselves and became reliant on private military companies during the War on Terror specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their reliance on private contractors reached a point where contractors at some points similar in number to U.S. troops stationed in conflict zones, taking a plethora of roles either as logistics support, convoy and base construction protection, training local armed forces as security for diplomatic missions. However, the US has signed neither the Montreux document nor the 1989 United Nations mercenary convention incidents leaving no accountability and oversight, regarding the use of PMSCs which can often lead to incidents like the Nisour Square massacre in Baghdad with often draw global criticism.

Russian Federation

Russia has only recently started using PMSCs after the 2010s with the creation of the Wagner Group and other Russian based PMCs, however unlike other western countries Russia uses their PMCs mainly as frontline combatants which has often led to altercations between PMCs and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Additionally, Moscow often uses PMCs as an unofficial extension of Russian foreign policy and interests, a

problem which can blur the lines between state forces and private contractors.

Wagner Group

Blackwater / Constellis

Blackwater was founded by former U.S. Navy Seals Eric Prince and Al Clark as a military and law enforcement trainer. Initially focused on military training, the company later became a major private military and security company for the U.S. government. Following the 2007 Nisour Square incident in Iraq, Blackwater underwent several name changes and eventually became part of Constellis in 2014.



Watchguard International

Founded in 1965 by former members of the British Special Air Service (SAS), Watchguard International is considered one of the first modern private military companies. The company provided security and military services for profit but faced criticism after its alleged involvement in a failed coup attempt against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 1971.

Executive Outcomes

Executive Outcomes (EO) was a South African private military company founded in 1989 by former military officer Eben Barlow. The company became known for its involvement in conflicts such as the Angolan Civil War and the Sierra Leone Civil War, where it directly participated in combat operations. Due to its effectiveness on the battlefield, EO became one of the most influential early PMCs before dissolving in 1998 and later being reestablished in 2020.

V. EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

Geneva Conventions Protocol 1 Article 47

International treaties signed between 1864 and 1949 in Geneva with the goal of creating boundaries that protect civilians and soldier accordingly during times of war. An additional protocol was signed in 1977 which prohibited the use of mercenaries. The Geneva conventions made major contributions to prevent war crimes and the use of mercenaries in conflicts but had little to no changes when it came to private military companies.

United Nations Mercenary Convention

Officially known as the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of mercenaries, the convention was adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and entered into force in 2001. It aims to restrict the use of mercenaries in armed conflicts. However, its impact remains limited because several major states have not ratified it and many modern PMSCs do not legally qualify as mercenaries.

Human Rights Resolution 2005/2

Adopted by the UN Human Rights Commission in 2005, this resolution addressed the use of mercenaries as a threat to human rights and self-determination. While it highlighted concerns regarding private military actors, it did not establish binding regulatory mechanisms.

Montreux Document (2008)

Developed by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Montreux Document outlines legal obligations and good practices for states regarding PMSCs during armed conflicts. Although widely recognized, the document is non-binding and cannot be enforced internationally.

International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (2010)

The International Code of Conduct (ICoC) was created to promote compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law among private security companies. Participation is voluntary, making the code an important but limited tool for improving accountability and professional standards.

VI. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Several measures have been proposed to address the challenges posed by Private Military and Security Companies. One approach involves strengthening international humanitarian law through additional agreements or protocols that would more clearly regulate the role of private military actors in armed conflicts.

Another proposal is the development of a legally binding international convention based on existing frameworks such as the Montreux Document and the International Code of conduct for Private Security Service providers. Such a convention could establish common standards for accountability, transparency and compliance with human rights law.

Furthermore, Member States may consider creating international monitoring mechanisms to improve oversight of PMC activities in conflict zones. Other proposals include mandatory licensing and training requirements focused on human rights and international humanitarian law to ensure greater professional standards and accountability.

VIII. USEFUL LINKS

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf> (Aug 2023)

<https://www.hofstra.edu/sites/default/files/2021-02/model-un-background-specpol.pdf> (2021)

https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0996-montreux-document-private-military-and-security-companies?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Nov 2020)

<https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/private-military-companies/> (Feb 2024)

https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/SSR_PAPER_3.pdf

<https://journals.uni-goettingen.de/gojil/article/view/1968/1666>