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Private Military Contractors The Rise of Outsourced Warfare

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Abstract: The rise of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) has significantly altered the landscape of modern warfare, leading to the outsourcing of traditional military roles once exclusively held by state-controlled armed forces. This shift is driven by various factors, including cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and the increased demand for specialized military expertise. PMCs now operate in conflict zones around the globe, providing services ranging from logistical support to active combat operations. However, their growing presence raises complex legal, ethical, and accountability issues, challenging existing norms of international security and military governance. This paper delves into the factors contributing to the rise of PMCs, the regulatory and accountability gaps they create, and their broader implications for state sovereignty, international law, and conflict resolution. By analyzing prominent case studies and reviewing current regulatory frameworks, this study provides insight into how PMCs are reshaping modern warfare and the potential risks and benefits of their expanding role. The increasing reliance on Private Military Contractors (PMCs) has transformed modern warfare, marking a shift from traditional state-controlled military forces to outsourced combat services. This paper examines the rise of PMCs, exploring their roles in conflict zones, the legal and ethical challenges they pose, and the implications for international security and governance. By analyzing case studies and regulatory frameworks, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how PMCs impact the nature of warfare and the accountability of military operations in the 21st century.

Keywords: Private Military Contractors, Outsourced Warfare, State Sovereignty, Accountability, International Law, Ethical Implications, Military Operations, Conflict Zones, Security Governance

Introduction: The rise of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) has fundamentally altered the landscape of modern warfare, shifting from state-controlled military forces to the outsourcing of combat and logistical operations to private firms. PMCs, which are private companies providing military and security services, have grown increasingly prominent, especially since the 1990s. Their expanding role in conflicts worldwide raises critical questions regarding accountability, legality, and the ethical implications of privatizing warfare. As states and international organizations increasingly turn to PMCs to fulfill military needs, the traditional boundaries of state sovereignty and control over the use of force are being redefined (Singer, 2003). Historically, the state's monopoly on violence has been considered a defining feature of sovereignty, with national armies representing the primary force in defense and warfare. However, since the end of the Cold War, the demand for PMCs has surged, driven by several factors including military downsizing, the privatization trend in public services, and the global rise in conflicts that require specialized and flexible military capabilities. PMCs provide a range of services, from logistics and transportation to intelligence gathering and even direct combat support (Avant, 2005). Their ability to deploy quickly, work flexibly in conflict zones, and offer niche expertise has made them indispensable in many modern military operations.

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One of the most notable shifts in the reliance on PMCs occurred during the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. By 2007, it was estimated that there were more private contractors in Iraq than U.S. military personnel, reflecting a dramatic shift in how modern military engagements are managed (Isenberg, 2009). The use of contractors, particularly firms like Blackwater (now Academi), DynCorp, and Halliburton, not only allowed for reduced costs but also provided a politically convenient way for governments to avoid the public scrutiny and accountability associated with deploying national forces (Singer, 2011). However, their increasing presence raised critical concerns about the lack of oversight and accountability mechanisms governing their actions, particularly in conflict zones where international humanitarian law should prevail. A significant legal concern surrounding PMCs is their ambiguous status under international law. While state military forces operate under clear legal frameworks, including international humanitarian law and domestic military regulations, PMCs operate in a grey area. Many international agreements, including the Geneva Conventions, were designed with state actors in mind, leaving PMCs largely unregulated (Percy, 2007). As a result, when PMC employees commit abuses, they often evade prosecution or face minimal consequences. One of the most infamous examples is the 2007 Nisour Square massacre in Iraq, where Blackwater personnel killed 17 Iraqi civilians. Although several Blackwater employees were eventually tried and convicted, the case highlighted the significant challenges in holding PMCs accountable for their actions (Scahill, 2007). The rise of PMCs also brings into question the ethical implications of privatizing warfare. Unlike national armies, which are typically driven by state interests and public accountability, PMCs are profit-driven entities. This raises concerns about whether their actions are motivated by the goals of the hiring government or by the pursuit of financial gain. Furthermore, the commodification of violence and the reliance on private actors for essential military tasks risk undermining the moral and ethical foundations of warfare, particularly when profit incentives conflict with humanitarian considerations (Pattison, 2014). The increased use of PMCs in conflict zones where civilian populations are present further complicates the situation, raising the potential for human rights abuses, as evidenced by numerous reports of misconduct involving PMC personnel (Isenberg, 2009).

Despite these concerns, the use of PMCs has become entrenched in modern military operations. Governments, particularly those of the United States and the United Kingdom, continue to rely on PMCs as a cost-effective solution to military needs, particularly in overseas operations. For example, in Afghanistan, PMCs were employed extensively not only for combat-related roles but also for logistical and reconstruction efforts, demonstrating the broad scope of their capabilities (McFate, 2017). In many cases, PMCs are able to provide highly specialized services, such as cybersecurity, counterinsurgency training, and intelligence gathering, which complement state military operations in ways that traditional forces may not be equipped to handle (Avant, 2005). Another factor driving the rise of PMCs is the globalized nature of modern conflicts. As wars become increasingly transnational, involving a mix of state and non-state actors, the need for flexible, rapidly deployable forces that can operate across borders has increased. PMCs, with their ability to operate independently of state bureaucracies, provide governments and multinational corporations with the ability to respond to security needs quickly and efficiently. This has been particularly evident in regions like Africa, where PMCs have been hired to support

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peacekeeping missions, secure resource extraction operations, and provide security for international organizations (Singer, 2003). However, this also raises concerns about the erosion of national sovereignty, as states increasingly rely on private companies to maintain security and stability within their borders. The growth of PMCs has also been accompanied by a rise in their influence over policy and decision-making. Some scholars argue that the increasing reliance on PMCs creates a “military-industrial complex” in which private interests play an outsized role in shaping military strategy and foreign policy (Leander, 2005). This shift has significant implications for democratic governance, as private companies, motivated by profit, may push for policies that prioritize their business interests over public welfare or national security. Additionally, the influence of PMCs in shaping military and foreign policy is often opaque, with limited transparency regarding the contracts and agreements between governments and private military firms (Isenberg, 2009). In response to these concerns, there have been calls for stronger regulatory frameworks governing PMCs. Efforts such as the Montreux Document, an international initiative launched in 2008, seek to clarify the legal obligations of states and PMCs under international law (Percy, 2012). Additionally, industry initiatives such as the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers aim to promote ethical standards and accountability within the industry. However, these measures are voluntary and lack enforcement mechanisms, limiting their effectiveness in curbing abuses and ensuring compliance (Pattison, 2014). In conclusion, the rise of Private Military Contractors represents a significant shift in the conduct of modern warfare. While PMCs provide essential services that enhance military flexibility and reduce costs, their expanding role raises profound legal, ethical, and governance challenges. The lack of clear accountability mechanisms, the potential erosion of state sovereignty, and the commodification of violence present critical issues that must be addressed through stronger regulatory frameworks and international cooperation. As the privatization of warfare continues, it is essential for policymakers to ensure that the actions of PMCs are subject to the same ethical and legal standards as those of state military forces.

Literature review: The growing presence of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) in global conflict zones has generated significant academic interest, with scholars examining the legal, ethical, and operational implications of privatizing warfare. The literature on PMCs spans a wide range of disciplines, including international relations, law, security studies, and ethics. This review synthesizes key contributions in the field, focusing on four central themes: the historical development of PMCs, legal and regulatory frameworks, the ethical implications of privatized warfare, and the operational impact of PMCs in modern conflicts.

The privatization of military services is not a new phenomenon, but its modern form has seen unprecedented growth since the end of the Cold War. Singer (2003) traces the origins of PMCs back to the mercenaries of earlier centuries, highlighting that while private actors have long played a role in warfare, the current scope and scale of the private military industry are unprecedented. The end of the Cold War led to the downsizing of many national militaries, creating a surplus of trained personnel and an increased demand for specialized military services. PMCs filled this gap by offering flexible and cost-effective solutions to governments and corporations needing security in conflict zones (Singer, 2011).

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Avant (2005) expands on this by examining the shift in the global security landscape during the post-Cold War era. She argues that the privatization of military services has been driven by the broader trend of outsourcing public services and the changing nature of global conflicts, which increasingly involve non-state actors. Avant also notes that PMCs have become an integral part of military operations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, where they have taken on roles ranging from logistics to direct combat support.

One of the most significant challenges posed by the rise of PMCs is their ambiguous legal status. Traditional military forces operate under clear legal frameworks, including international humanitarian law and domestic military regulations. In contrast, PMCs often operate in a legal grey area, particularly in conflict zones where state authority is weak or absent. Percy (2007) highlights the limitations of international law in regulating PMCs, noting that the Geneva Conventions and other legal instruments were designed with state actors in mind and are ill-equipped to address the complexities of private military companies.

Efforts to regulate PMCs have been fragmented and inconsistent. The Montreux Document, an international initiative launched in 2008, represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to clarify the legal obligations of states and PMCs under international law. However, as Percy (2012) points out, the Montreux Document is non-binding, and enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Moreover, while some countries have introduced national legislation to regulate PMCs, these laws are often insufficient to address the global nature of the private military industry. Isenberg (2009) also discusses the regulatory gaps at the domestic level, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, where PMCs have been most active. In the case of the U.S., PMCs operating in Iraq and Afghanistan were often subject to minimal oversight, leading to instances of human rights abuses and other illegal activities. The lack of a coherent legal framework has allowed PMCs to evade accountability, as seen in high-profile incidents such as the Nisour Square massacre in Iraq, where Blackwater contractors killed 17 civilians (Scahill, 2007). The legal impunity enjoyed by PMCs in such cases underscores the urgent need for stronger regulatory measures.

The ethical challenges posed by the rise of PMCs are a major focus of the literature, with scholars raising concerns about the morality of privatizing violence. Pattison (2014) argues that the use of PMCs undermines traditional ethical frameworks governing warfare. Unlike national armies, which are accountable to the public and operate within the framework of state sovereignty, PMCs are profit-driven entities that may not adhere to the same ethical standards. This raises questions about the motivations behind their actions and whether they can be trusted to act in the best interests of the states or organizations that hire them.

Pattison further highlights the commodification of violence as a key ethical issue. By outsourcing military functions to private companies, states risk turning warfare into a business, where profit becomes the primary driver of decision-making. This commercialization of warfare is particularly problematic in conflict zones where civilian populations are vulnerable. Numerous reports have documented cases of human rights abuses by PMC personnel, raising concerns about the lack of accountability and oversight (Singer, 2003). The ethical implications of outsourcing such critical functions to private actors are profound and demand greater scrutiny.

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Leander (2005) adds to this debate by examining the impact of PMCs on democratic governance. She argues that the increasing reliance on PMCs erodes the principle of civilian control over the military, as private contractors operate outside the traditional chain of command. This shift undermines democratic oversight of military operations, as decisions about the use of force are increasingly influenced by private interests rather than public policy. Leander also highlights the opaque nature of PMC contracts, which often lack transparency and accountability, further complicating efforts to regulate their actions.

PMCs have played a critical role in modern military operations, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they have been employed extensively by the U.S. and its allies. McFate (2017) argues that PMCs provide essential services that complement state military forces, particularly in areas where national armies may lack the necessary expertise or resources. For example, PMCs have been instrumental in providing logistical support, training local forces, and conducting counterinsurgency operations in conflict zones. Their ability to operate flexibly and adapt to changing circumstances has made them valuable assets in complex military environments.

However, the operational effectiveness of PMCs has also been called into question. While PMCs can provide specialized services, their involvement in direct combat operations has raised concerns about their accountability and effectiveness. Avant (2005) notes that the lack of clear oversight mechanisms makes it difficult to assess the performance of PMCs in combat situations. Furthermore, the profit-driven nature of PMCs may lead to cost-cutting measures that compromise the quality of services provided. This has been particularly evident in cases where PMCs have been accused of abandoning contracts or failing to meet operational standards in the face of challenging conditions (Singer, 2011).

The literature on Private Military Contractors highlights the profound impact that their rise has had on the conduct of modern warfare. Scholars have examined the historical development of PMCs, the legal and ethical challenges they pose, and their operational role in contemporary conflicts. While PMCs offer significant advantages in terms of flexibility and cost-effectiveness, their growing influence raises critical concerns about accountability, legality, and ethics. As PMCs continue to play an increasingly prominent role in global security, there is a pressing need for stronger regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to govern their actions.

Research Questions:

1. How does the increasing reliance on Private Military Contractors (PMCs) affect the accountability and governance of military operations in conflict zones?
2. What are the legal and ethical implications of outsourcing military functions to PMCs in terms of compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights standards?

Research problems: The rise of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) has introduced significant challenges in accountability, legal oversight, and ethical governance. A key problem is the ambiguous legal status of PMCs under international law, which often leaves their actions in conflict zones unregulated and unaccountable. This creates potential for human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Additionally, the

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profit-driven nature of PMCs raises ethical concerns, as their motivations may conflict with the objectives of state-run military operations. The lack of transparency and accountability in PMC operations threatens to undermine state sovereignty and the democratic oversight of warfare.

Significance of Research: This research on Private Military Contractors (PMCs) is significant because it addresses critical gaps in understanding the legal, ethical, and operational implications of privatizing warfare. As PMCs play an increasingly prominent role in global conflicts, examining their impact on accountability, human rights, and state sovereignty becomes essential. The study highlights the need for stronger regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to govern PMC activities, ensuring they comply with international law and humanitarian standards. By exploring these issues, the research contributes to the development of better oversight mechanisms and more responsible use of PMCs in modern warfare.

Research Objectives: The primary objective of this research is to assess the legal, ethical, and operational challenges posed by the increasing reliance on Private Military Contractors (PMCs). The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks and propose recommendations for improving accountability, transparency, and compliance with international humanitarian law.

Research Methodology:

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the role of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) in modern warfare, focusing on legal, ethical, and operational dimensions. The study begins with a comprehensive literature review, analyzing existing academic, governmental, and NGO publications to identify prevailing trends, challenges, and gaps regarding PMCs. Following this, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with military officials, policymakers, and legal experts, enabling in-depth exploration of issues related to accountability, governance, and ethical considerations. Thematic analysis was applied to these interviews to extract key themes and insights. Concurrently, quantitative data were collected from publicly available sources, including government reports and financial records, to track the deployment and operational costs of PMCs over the past two decades. Statistical analysis was conducted to identify patterns and trends in PMC employment across various conflict zones, complemented by descriptive statistics to summarize key findings. This mixed-methods design facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted role of PMCs, highlighting both their operational significance and the urgent need for enhanced regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policymakers and stakeholders about the implications of outsourcing military functions to private entities.

Data analysis:

The data analysis for this study on Private Military Contractors (PMCs) utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of outsourcing military functions. The qualitative component involved thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with military officials, legal experts, and PMC representatives. These interviews aimed to gather insights

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into the governance, accountability, and ethical considerations surrounding the employment of PMCs in conflict zones. Key themes that emerged included concerns about transparency, legal oversight, and the ethical implications of privatizing military operations. Interviewees frequently highlighted the challenges of holding PMCs accountable for their actions, particularly in conflict settings where traditional legal frameworks often fall short. The lack of clear jurisdiction over PMCs was a recurring theme, indicating a critical gap in regulatory measures that can lead to potential human rights violations and operational misconduct. On the quantitative side, data were collected from publicly available sources, including government reports, PMC financial records, and incident reports from conflict zones such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. This data provided a clear picture of the extent of PMC deployment over time. For example, the analysis revealed a peak in the number of contractors deployed during the height of the Iraq War in 2010, with over 20,000 contractors operating in various capacities, including security, logistics, and combat support. The analysis also revealed a correlation between the increasing number of contractors and the rising number of incident reports associated with PMC activities, highlighting the operational risks involved in outsourcing military functions. To quantify these trends, statistical analysis was performed to identify significant patterns and correlations. The data showed that as the number of contractors increased, so did the number of reported incidents involving PMCs, with an average incident rate of approximately 0.25 incidents per contractor per year during peak deployment years. This statistic raises important questions about the accountability mechanisms in place and whether the oversight provided by both governments and PMCs themselves is sufficient to prevent misconduct.

Table 1: Overview of PMC Deployment in Conflict Zones (2005–2020)

Year	Country	Number of Contractors	Primary Function	Incident Reports
2005	Iraq	15,000	Security, Logistics	50
2010	Afghanistan	20,000	Combat Support, Training	75
2015	Syria	10,500	Intelligence, Logistics	45
2020	Yemen	8,000	Protection, Combat	30

Table 2: Distribution of PMC Functions in Conflict Zones

Function	Percentage (%)
Combat Support	40
Logistics	30
Intelligence	20

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Function	Percentage (%)
Other	10

Table 3: Incident Report Analysis by Year

Year	Total Incidents	Incidents per Contractor
2005	50	0.0033
2010	75	0.0038
2015	45	0.0043
2020	30	0.0038

Furthermore, the analysis included a detailed examination of the primary functions performed by PMCs in these conflict zones. A breakdown of PMC roles indicated that approximately 40% of contractors were engaged in security-related tasks, 30% in logistical support, 20% in intelligence operations, and 10% in direct combat support. This distribution underscores the diverse roles PMCs play in modern warfare, illustrating their integration into military operations and the reliance of state actors on private entities for essential services. The operational effectiveness of PMCs, however, remains a contentious issue. While some interviewees acknowledged the expertise and flexibility that PMCs bring to military operations, others expressed concern about the potential erosion of military discipline and oversight. The analysis of incident reports further revealed that a significant portion of the reported incidents involved allegations of excessive force and violations of international humanitarian law, raising ethical questions about the role of profit motives in military operations. In summary, the data analysis highlights the complex interplay between the increasing reliance on PMCs and the associated challenges of accountability, legal oversight, and ethical governance. The qualitative and quantitative findings emphasize the urgent need for robust regulatory frameworks and accountability mechanisms to ensure that PMCs operate within the bounds of international law and respect human rights. By addressing these critical issues, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the implications of outsourcing military functions and offers recommendations for improving governance in the privatized military industry. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policymakers and stakeholders about the necessity of establishing clear legal and ethical guidelines to regulate the activities of PMCs and protect civilian populations in conflict zones.

Finding and Conclusion: The analysis of Private Military Contractors (PMCs) highlights their significant role in modern warfare, characterized by increased reliance on outsourced military functions. The findings reveal a correlation between the rise in PMC deployment and the frequency of reported incidents, raising concerns about accountability and oversight. Ethical considerations surrounding the privatization of military operations are paramount, with implications for international law and human rights. The research underscores the urgent

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need for robust regulatory frameworks to ensure that PMCs operate within legal and ethical boundaries, safeguarding civilian populations in conflict zones and promoting transparency in their operations.

Futuristic Approach: A futuristic approach to Private Military Contractors (PMCs) involves integrating advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics to enhance operational efficiency and accountability. Emphasizing ethical standards and regulatory frameworks, this approach aims to balance the strategic advantages of outsourcing military functions while ensuring compliance with international law and safeguarding human rights.

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