LAGOS MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

BACKGROUND GUIDE

United Nations Security Council

(UNSC)

Background Guide: United Nations Security Council

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LMUN 2025: The Ninth Session

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Letter From the USG

Dear Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 9th session of the **Lagos Model United Nations 2025**. Having witnessed the growth of LMUN over these past years, I am confident that you are about to embark on an intellectually rewarding journey. This platform offers a dynamic environment where brilliant young minds from across the country gather with a unified purpose of addressing global challenges through the lens of Sustainable Development.

Throughout the conference, you will have the opportunity to develop crucial skills as you take on the role of a delegate representing your assigned country at the United Nations Security Council. The background guide provided offers a thorough introduction to the committee, the topics for deliberation, and important research guidance to assist you in preparing your position papers and readying yourself for the conference.

The staff for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at LMUN 2025 include; **Oluwasemilore Oluwatimilehin** (Under Secretary General); **Babatunde Fasogbon** (Chair);

Joy Eze (Vice-Chair); **Enobong Ernest Enobong** (Researcher); **Ajayi Israel Oluwadara** (Departmental Researcher).

Babatunde is a fourth-year law student at the Faculty of Law, University of Lagos, with over five years of experience as a writer, editor, and brand strategist. Results-driven and process-oriented, he brings exceptional passion for International Law and Policy to his role. His comprehensive understanding of global security challenges and commitment to diplomatic solutions make him an excellent Chair for this critical committee.

Joy is a third-year History and International Relations student at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). As a certified Google Project Manager and Product Manager with over 5 years of experience in digital marketing, she brings valuable organisational skills to the committee. Her dedication to research, storytelling, and reshaping narratives will contribute significantly to creating a thought-provoking committee experience. Joy's analytical approach to international relations issues perfectly complements the nuanced discussions that characterise Security Council debates.

Enobong serves as the Researcher for the Security Council at LMUN 2025. His meticulous research abilities have been instrumental in developing the comprehensive background guide for this year's topics. Enobong's attention to detail and commitment to thorough analysis ensure delegates will have access to balanced, informative resources as they prepare for the committee sessions.

The United Nations Security Council stands as the primary organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security. With the authority to establish peacekeeping operations, impose international sanctions, and authorise military action, the UNSC plays a pivotal role in addressing threats to global stability. As delegates to this prestigious committee, you will engage with complex security challenges that require thoughtful diplomacy, strategic thinking, and collaborative problem-solving.

Israel is a final year law student of the prestigious University of Lagos. He is a creative and legal writer with several works under his belt and years of legal research experience. He possesses keen interest and knowledge about the United Nations, International Law, and Global Security. He is currently serving as the Departmental Researcher for the Peace and Security Department at the 9th session of the LMUN 2025.

Topics for discussion under this committee include:

I. **Security Implications of Proxy Wars in the Middle East**

II. **The Rise of Mercenaries and Private Military Companies in Conflict Zones**

The first step in your preparation should be to thoroughly review this Background Guide as a foundation for your research. However, please remember that it should serve as a starting point rather than a substitute for the in-depth research each of you needs to conduct independently. You will find the Further Research, Annotated Bibliography, and

Bibliography sections particularly valuable for your research. Additionally, the Delegate Prep Guide and the Rules of Procedure will provide essential guidance regarding conference conduct and protocols. These resources are readily available on the LMUN website: www.lmun.ng.

All delegates are required to submit position papers by the deadline communicated after registration and country assignment, following the position paper guidelines available on the LMUN website.

Should you have any questions or concerns during your preparation for the committee or about the Conference itself, please do not hesitate to contact the USG at: usgpeace andsecurity@lmun.ng

Once again, I warmly welcome you to LMUN 2025 and look forward to witnessing the sophisticated diplomatic discourse, incisive analysis, and collaborative resolution-building that will undoubtedly define this year's Security Council proceedings!

Oluwasemilore Oluwatimilehin,

USG, Peace and Security, LMUN 2025.

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
DSC	Defense Systems Colombia
EO	Executive Outcomes
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IBC	Iraq Body Count Project
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICOC	International Code Of Conduct For Private Security Service Providers
ICOCA	International Code of Conduct Association
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LNA	Libyan National Army
MPRI	Military Professional Resources Inc.
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PMCs	Private Military Companies
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PMSC	Private Military and Security Company
POW	Prisoner of War
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNIIMOG	United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group
UNITA	The Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics AKA Soviet Union
WMDs	Weapons of Mass Destruction
YPG	People's Protection Units

Committee Overview

I- Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six main organs of the United Nations (UN), established to maintain international peace and security. It plays a crucial role in recommending the admission of new Member States to the General Assembly and approving amendments to the UN Charter. The powers granted to the UNSC in the UN Charter include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the imposition of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action. Notably, the UNSC is the only UN body with resolutions binding on Member States.[1] The creation of the UNSC was a response to the failures of the League of Nations, which was established after World War I but ultimately proved ineffective in preventing World War II.[2] The UNSC held its first session on January 17, 1946, in the aftermath of the devastating conflicts of the 20th century, which resulted in the loss of an estimated 100 million lives.[3] The discussions at the San Francisco Conference in May and June of 1945, where the UN Charter was negotiated and signed, were heavily influenced by the desire to prevent future wars and ensure global cooperation.

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[1] United Nations Charter, art. 43, para. 1.
[2] Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Harper Perennial: New York, 2001).
[3] Richard Butler, 'Reform of the United Nations Security Council' (2012) 1 *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs* 23.

The focus on maintaining international peace and security led to the Security Council being positioned at the center of UN activities. The Charter designates the Security Council with "primary responsibility" for this critical task. Article 25 of the Charter states, "The members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter". This provision underscores the binding authority of the Security Council's decisions, which carry the weight of law for all Member States. In contrast, the resolutions of the General Assembly are merely recommendations and do not possess binding authority. The gravity of the Security Council's responsibilities is further emphasized in **Articles 41 and 42 of the Charter**. **Article 41** outlines the Council's role in resolving disputes peacefully, while **Article 42** allows for military action if peaceful efforts fail. This framework reflects an attempt to outlaw war and establish a collective mechanism for dispute resolution, acknowledging that conflicts are likely to arise.

The historical context leading to the establishment of the UN and its Security Council is essential for understanding their roles in international relations. Before the UN's creation, various international organizations and treaties, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, aimed to regulate conflicts

between nations. The League of Nations, formed after World War I during the Paris Peace Conference, sought to maintain peace but ultimately failed due to a lack of representation for many nations and the absence of key powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union.[4] Its inability to address significant aggressions, such as the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria and Nazi expansions,[5] highlighted the need for a more effective international governing body.

The groundwork for the United Nations was laid during World War II, with key meetings among Allied leaders, including the Cairo Conference in 1943 and the Yalta Conference in February 1945. On January 1, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and representatives from the Soviet Union and the Republic of China signed a document based on the Atlantic Charter, later known as the United Nations Declaration.[6] By March 1945, a total of 47 nations had endorsed this declaration, solidifying the concept of the United Nations.[7] The Dumbarton Oaks Conference in mid-1944 was pivotal in shaping the UN's structure, with the composition of the Security

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[4] Kennedy Paul, *The Parliament Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Random House: New York, 2006).
[5] Kennedy Paul, *The Parliament Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Random House: New York, 2006).
[6] United Nations Department of Public Information, *Everyone's United Nations: A Handbook on the Work of the United Nations* (UN: New York, 1986)
[7] Edmund Jan Ozmanczyk, *Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements*, in Anthony Mango (ed.), (Routledge 2002)

Council emerging as a key issue.[8] France, the Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States were designated as permanent members.

II- Governance, Structure and Membership

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is structured to include five permanent members and ten elected (non-permanent) members.[9] The permanent members, collectively known as the P5, are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia. This arrangement reflects the geopolitical realities following World War II, as these nations were the primary victors[10] and have since maintained significant military power and influence.

A critical feature of the UNSC is the veto power held by its five permanent members. Under **Article 27 of the UN Charter**, any substantive decision requires the affirmative votes of at least nine members, but a negative vote from any permanent member can block the proposal, regardless of the majority support it may have received. This veto power allows the P5 to prevent the adoption of resolutions, but does not stop discussions on the issues at hand. The veto was a contentious topic during the UN's formation in 1945.

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[8] *Allies Study Post-War Security (video)* (National Archives and Records Administration: Washington, 1944)
[9] United Nations Foundation, "What We Do: The UN Security Council" (2012) available at https://web.archive.org/web/20120620101548/http://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/united-nations/the-un-security-council.html (accessed 26 December 2024).
[10] Kennedy Paul, *The Parliament Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Random House: New York, 2006).

Smaller nations opposed its inclusion, but the P5 insisted that it be part of the structure, threatening that without it, the UN would not be established. An adviser to the U.S. delegation, Francis O. Wilcox, recounted that the leaders of the P5 made it clear: it was either the Charter with the veto or no Charter at all.[11] Since the Security Council's inception, the P5 has exercised its veto power to varying degrees. Russia, counting the years when the Soviet Union held its seat, has used the veto most frequently, blocking 158 resolutions. The United States has exercised its veto 92 times, often to protect its interests, particularly regarding Israel, which has accounted for about one-third of its vetoes since 1972. China has recently increased its use of the veto, having blocked 21 resolutions, often in alignment with Russia. In contrast, neither France nor the United Kingdom has exercised its veto since 1989 and has encouraged less frequent use of this power among the P5.[12]

Initially, the UNSC had six non-permanent members when it was established, comprising Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Poland. In 1965, the number of non-permanent members was increased to ten.[13] The current structure allocates seats based on geographic regions: three from Africa, two each from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, and Western European and Other groups, and one from Eastern

[11] Francis O Wilcox, "The Yalta Voting Formula" (1945) 39 *American Political Science* 5
[12] Council on Foreign Relations, "The UN Security Council" (2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/un-security-council (accessed 27 December 2024).
[13] United Nations Foundation, "What We Do: The UN Security Council" (2012) https://web.archive.org/web/20120620101548/http://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/united-nations/the-un-security-council.html (accessed 26 December 2024).

Europe. Traditionally, one of the seats assigned to either the Asia-Pacific Group or the African Group is occupied by a nation from the Arab world, alternating between the two groups.[14] Elections for the non-permanent seats occur in a staggered manner. In even-numbered years, two members from Africa, and one each from Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean are elected, along with the traditional "Arab seat." Odd-numbered years see elections for two members from Western Europe and Other, and one each from Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.[15]

The presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) rotates monthly among its Member States, following the English alphabetical order. This rotation allows for a dynamic approach to leadership and ensures that the ten non-permanent members, elected by a two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly[16], have a voice in agenda-setting. The president of the UNSC has several key responsibilities, including setting the agenda, presiding over meetings, and managing crises. In carrying out these duties, the president can issue Presidential Statements and notes, which help to clarify the Council's intentions and guide its subsequent actions. This combination of monthly rotation and leadership responsibilities allows for a collaborative and varied approach to addressing international challenges within the Security Council framework.

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[14] David Malone, 'Reforming the Security Council: Where Are the Arabs?' *The Daily Star* (Beirut, 25 October 2003).
[15] Security Council Report, *Security Council Elections 2011* (Special Research Report, No. 4).
[16] United Nations, "Current Members" https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/current-members (accessed 26 January 2024).

In the UNSC, each member holds one vote,[17] and the decision-making process is structured to ensure both efficiency and representation. For procedural matters, an affirmative vote from any nine members is required.[18] Similarly, substantive issues such as sanctions or investigations into disputes also necessitate nine affirmative votes, but these must include support from all five permanent members, who hold veto power.[19] Notably, a permanent member can choose to abstain from voting without impacting the validity of the decision. The determination of whether a matter is procedural or substantive is itself considered a substantive question.

III- Mandate, Functions, and Powers

Article 24 of the UN Charter provides the mandate of the UNSC which is maintaining international peace and security. As outlined in **Articles 24–27 of the United Nations Charter**, the UNSC holds several critical responsibilities aimed at maintaining international peace and security: The Council is tasked with upholding global peace in alignment with the principles and objectives of the United Nations. It has the authority to investigate any situation or dispute that may lead to international tensions and can propose methods for resolving disputes or suggest terms for settlement. It is responsible for formulating plans to establish a system for the regulation of armaments and

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[17] U.N. Charter, art 18.
[18] U.N. Charter, art 27(2).
[19] U.N. Charter, art 27(3).

determines the existence of threats to peace or acts of aggression, and recommends appropriate actions. Furthermore, it can call upon Member States to implement economic sanctions and other non-military measures to prevent or cease acts of aggression.

The Council is empowered to take military action against aggressors when necessary, and it recommends the admission of new Member States to the United Nations. It also oversees trusteeship functions in designated "strategic areas" and finally, recommends to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, in conjunction with the Assembly, elects the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

The Council also has the power to issue sanctions, and the sanctions outlined in Article 41 of the UN Charter, which were largely unused during the Cold War, have become a primary tool for the Security Council.[20] Before the Berlin Wall fell, the Council had only enacted sanctions twice: first, in 1966, with a trade embargo against Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and again in 1977 with an arms embargo against apartheid South Africa. These targeted sanctions focus on specific economic and political issues, as well as individuals viewed as threats to global security. Typical measures include arms embargoes, travel restrictions, asset freezes, and bans on certain goods, rather than blanket embargoes.

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[20] Jonathan Masters, "What Are Economic Sanctions?" (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 24 June 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-are-economic-sanctions (accessed 28 December 2024).

IV- Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

In December 2024, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) convened under the presidency of the United States, focusing on a range of pressing global issues. Among the key themes discussed were the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as well as the implications of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) in maintaining international peace and security.[21] Later on, on December 20, the Security Council held a significant meeting to address the situation in Ukraine, where the UN Disarmament Chief highlighted the "unacceptable levels" of civilian fatalities resulting from ongoing hostilities. The discussion centered on Western arms supplies to Kyiv and Moscow's persistent aggression, with members urging a diplomatic resolution to the violence. This meeting underscored the urgent need for a concerted international effort to protect civilian lives amidst escalating military actions. The Council also addressed the dire humanitarian situation in Sudan, where a senior UN official reported "unbearable" civilian casualties due to indiscriminate violence, sexual assaults, and famine. The call for an end to hostilities and increased funding for humanitarian aid was echoed by various Member States. Similarly, the UNSC extended the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC

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[21] United Nations, "Meetings Coverage and Press Releases" available at https://press.un.org/en/content/security-council (accessed 28 December 2024).

(MONUSCO) for another year, responding to ongoing violence from the 23 March Movement (M23) and external military presence in the region.[22]

In light of the growing threats posed by violent non-state actors in West Africa and the Sahel, the head of UN efforts in the region urged the Security Council to enhance support within regional frameworks. This appeal was made in the context of increasing civic restrictions and humanitarian needs, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing these multifaceted challenges. On the same day, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2764, which stresses the importance of sustainable child protection capacities in UN peace operations. This resolution aims to ensure that child protection measures are effectively integrated into mission transitions and withdrawals, reflecting the UNSC's commitment to safeguarding vulnerable populations in conflict zones. Furthermore, the Council focused on the Middle East, addressing the ongoing crisis in Gaza, where over 45,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed. A senior UN official condemned the relentless bombardment and called for an immediate ceasefire. The situation in Syria and Iraq, as well as the implications of military aid from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Russia, were also under scrutiny.

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[22] United Nations, ''Meetings Coverage and Press Releases'' available at https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15949.doc.htm (accessed 29 December 2024).

The UNSC is currently poised to tackle several significant challenges in \2025, including supporting UN operations in Gaza, marshaling international diplomacy for Sudan, and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Haiti. The Council is also expected to renew discussions on the humanitarian exemption for counter-terrorism sanctions and prepare for leadership transitions within the UN, including the selection of a new Secretary-General.

V. Annotated Bibliography

Allies Study Post-War Security (video) (National Archives and Records Administration: Washington, 1944) https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.39024 (accessed 30 December 2024).

> *The source is a newsreel featuring segments on the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, Iceland's transition to a republic, the opening of Shasta Dam, and World War II military operations in the Pacific.*

BBC News, "MH17 crash: Russia vetoes UN resolution for international tribunal" (29 July 2015) https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33710088 (accessed 30 December 2024)

This article reports on Russia's veto of a UNSC resolution to establish an international tribunal for prosecuting those responsible for the 2014 MH17 air disaster.

Claire Klobucista and Mariel Ferragamo, "The Role of Peacekeeping in Africa" (*Council on Foreign Relations,* 12 December 2023)

https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/role-peacekeeping-africa (accessed 12 December 2023)

This source discusses Africa's prominence as the continent with the highest number of peacekeeping missions and highlights the growing trend of conflict-affected nations seeking assistance beyond the United Nations.

Council on Foreign Relations, "Causes of Forced Displacement"

https://www.cfr.org/refugee-crisis/#!/causes-of-displacement (accessed 29 December 2024)

This source looks at the causes of forced displacement, highlighting civil wars, insurgencies, international political challenges, etc. as key drivers of global refugee crises, while also discussing the limitations of international institutions in addressing these issues effectively.

Council on Foreign Relations, "The UN Security Council" (2024)

https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/un-security-council (accessed 27 December 2024)

This is a backgrounder on the UN Security Council, discussing its role in maintaining

international peace and security, its structure, including the veto power of its five

permanent members and ongoing debates about reforms.

David Malone, 'Reforming the Security Council: Where Are the Arabs?' *The Daily Star*

(Beirut, 25 October 2003)

This examines the Arab world's limited influence in UNSC reform discussions,

highlighting its stagnant diplomacy, internal divisions, and focus on the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Edmund Jan Ozmanczyk, *Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements*

in Anthony Mango (ed.) (Routledge, 2002)

This source clarifies the UN's workings with accessible articles on its entities, affiliated

NGOs, treaties, and peacekeeping efforts.

Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of*

International Relations (Harper Perennial: New York, 2001).

This seminal work in international relations analyses power dynamics and their relevance today.

Francis O Wilcox, "The Yalta Voting Formula" (1945) 39 *American Political Science* 5

This journal article treats the intense debates at the San Francisco Conference over the UNSC's voting rules vis-à-vis the special status of the great powers in the UN Charter.

Jonathan Masters, "What Are Economic Sanctions?" (*Council on Foreign Relations*, 24 June 2024) available at

https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-are-economic-sanctions (accessed 28 December 2024)

This article explained economic sanctions as policy tools used by governments and international bodies to restrict trade, financial transactions, and other economic activities to influence the behavior of state and non-state actors.

Kennedy Paul, *The Parliament Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (Random House: New York, 2006)

This book offers a comprehensive and balanced history of the UN, highlighting its successes, flaws, and essential role in maintaining global peace, human rights, and development despite political challenges.

Michelle Nichols, "United Nations fails to agree landmark arms-trade treaty" (*Reuters*, 2012) available at

https://www.reuters.com/article/world/united-nations-fails-to-agree-landmark-arms-trade-treaty-idUSBRE86Q1MW/ (accessed 27 December 2024)

The article reports on the failure of UN delegations to agree on a landmark arms-trade treaty.

Resolution 2532 (2020) of the United Nations Security Council (S/RES/2532 (2020) adopted 1 July 2020

This source calls for a global ceasefire in armed conflicts to allow for seamless delivery of humanitarian aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Richard Butler, "Reform of the United Nations Security Council" (2012) 1 Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs 23

This essay analyzes the historical development and conceptual foundation of the

UNSC, examines the influence and veto power of its five Permanent Members, and

proposes a plan for reforming the Council's future operation.

Security Council, "Sanction"

https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/information (accessed 28 December

2204)

The article discusses the UNSC's use of sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter

to maintain international peace and security.

Security Council Report, *Security Council Elections 2011* (Special Research Report, No. 4).

This report provides an analysis of the 2011 elections for non-permanent members of

the UN Security Council.

SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 1949–2023 (Stockholm International Peace

Research Institute: Solna, 2023)

This database provides annual data on global military spending from 1949–2023,

including figures in local currencies, US dollars, GDP share, and per capita.

Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: The First Fifty Years* (Atlantic Monthly Press: New York, 1995)

> *This account of the first fifty years of the United Nations explores its personalities, events, challenges, and America's relationship with world governance.*

United Nations, "Current Members"

https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/current-members (accessed 26 January 2024)

> *This webpage provides a list of the current members of the UNSC (both permanent and non-permanent members), along with their term dates.*

United Nations, "Meetings Coverage and Press Releases"

https://press.un.org/en/2000/20000417.sgsm7360.doc.html (accessed 29 December 2024)

> *The article discusses former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's remarks on the lessons learned from the "Sanctions Decade," highlighting the challenges and impacts of UN sanctions.*

United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, "Subsidiary Organs of the United Nations Security Council, 2023 Fact Sheets" (7 September 2023) available at https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/default/files/subsidiary_organs_series_7sep23_.pdf (accessed 29 December 2024)

The document details the various subsidiary organs, sanctions regimes, and committees under the United Nations Security Council.

United Nations Department of Public Information, *Everyone's United Nations: A Handbook on the Work of the United Nations* (UN: New York, 1986)

This is a complete handbook of the activities and evolution of the United Nations during its first twenty years, 1945-1965

United Nations Foundation, "What We Do: The UN Security Council" (2012) https://web.archive.org/web/20120620101548/http://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/united-nations/the-un-security-council.html (accessed 26 December 2024)

This article treats the creation of the UNSC, its purpose, membership structure, historical actions, and ongoing debates about membership reforms to include Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil.

United Nations Peacekeeping, "List of Peacekeeping Operations 1948–2019"

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/unpeacekeeping-operationlist_3_1_0.pdf

(accessed 29 January 2024)

> *This document is a comprehensive list of UN peacekeeping operations, detailing*
>
> *mission names, acronyms, start and end dates, and statuses for various operations*
>
> *spanning from 1948 to the present.*

United Nations Peacekeeping, "Past Peacekeeping Operations"

https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/past-peacekeeping-operations (accessed 29 December

2024)

> *The webpage offers a list and details of past United Nations peacekeeping operations,*
>
> *including mission timelines and outcomes, across various regions globally.*

United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Where We Operate'

https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate (accessed 29 December 2024)

> *This page provides an interactive map detailing the locations and information of the*
>
> *UN's 11 current peacekeeping operations.*

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Topic One: Security Implications of Proxy Wars in the Middle East

I- Quote

"We need to think of the future and the planet we are going to leave to our children and their children. Armed conflict and proxy wars devastate not only the present but the very foundation of peace for generations to come." -

Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General

II- Introduction

Throughout the Middle East, proxy wars have played a vital role in shaping the geopolitical landscape, with regional and global powers strategically supporting local factions to advance their interests. This indirect form of conflict has complicated international relations, leading to widespread instability, humanitarian crises, and disasters. Proxy wars have, unfortunately, become a defining feature of modern conflicts in the Middle East, significantly impacting the region's socio-economic landscape. The Middle East, already riddled with historical grievances and given the region's strategic significance, including its abundant oil reserves and critical trade routes, has made it a hotspot for these external interventions, creating a seemingly endless cycle of violence that affects millions of lives.

In Syria, the civil war, which began in 2011, has devolved into a proxy conflict involving the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Gulf states, each backing various factions and advancing agendas of their own. On one hand, we have the Assad regime, which has received substantial support from Russia and Iran (both seeking to maintain their influence in the region). On the other hand, we have various opposition groups backed by the United States, Turkey, and Gulf states. The result of this has been the loss of over 500,000 lives and over 12 million people displaced as a result of this conflict, resulting in one of the world's most severe refugee crises.[23]

Similarly, in Yemen, the conflict, which has been intensifying since 2015, now features proxy involvement with Iran supporting the Houthi rebels, a Shia-aligned group[24] and Saudi Arabia backing Yemen's internationally recognized government. The war's toll has been devastating, with over 233,000 dead either directly or indirectly as a result of the war[25]. A staggering 24 million people (nearly 80% of the country's population) require some form of humanitarian aid, including emergency food supplies, medical assistance, clean water, and shelter, all underscoring the devastating effects of proxy wars.

In Iraq, the situation has been equally dire, if not worse. Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, the war has created the largest external refugee movement in the region since

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[23] UNHCR, "*Syria Emergency*" (2024) available at https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/syria-situation (accessed 24 December 2024)

[24] This refers to a group that follows the Shia branch of Islam, which is one of the two major sects of Islam, the other being Sunni.

[25] UNDP "*Impact of War Report 3*" (2024) available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ye/Impact-of-War-Report-3---QR.pdf (accessed 24 December 2024)

1948, and foreign militants have infringed Iraq's frontiers with remarkable ease and regularity[26]. Various militias have been armed and bankrolled by foreign actors, and the conflict has resulted in decades of instability and the loss of at least 9.2 million lives so far, the costliest of the eight military operations included in the report by Brown University's Costs of War Project[27]. This pervasive instability has hindered Iraq's recovery and development, leaving it vulnerable to further exploitation by external powers.

Not only have these proxy wars led to a significant loss of life, but they have also impacted international relations, hindering peace efforts and creating an atmosphere where extremist groups can thrive. Analyzing and understanding the security implications of these conflicts is very necessary to formulate effective international policies aimed at stabilizing and achieving long-term peace in the Middle East.

III- International and Regional Framework

The UN Charter And The UNHCR Refugee Convention

The United Nations Charter serves as the cornerstone of international law governing the use of force and the maintenance of international peace and security. Article 1(1) establishes the UN's purpose as the maintenance of international peace and the prevention of threats to peace, breaches of peace, and acts of aggression. Proxy wars

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[26] F. Wehrey and others, *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War* (2010)
[27] David Vine and others "Displacement: The Human Cost of War-Induced Migration" (2020) Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University

often involve violations of this principle, as external powers support conflicting parties, exacerbating instability and undermining peace efforts. Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, a rule frequently breached in proxy wars where foreign actors directly or indirectly engage in hostile actions. Articles 39 - 42 of Chapter VII empower the UN Security Council to determine threats to peace and take enforcement measures, including sanctions and military intervention. The UNHCR Refugee Convention, along with its 1967 Protocol, establishes the rights of refugees and the obligations of states to protect them. Proxy wars in the Middle East have created one of the largest refugee crises in modern history, with millions of Syrians, Yemenis, and Iraqis seeking asylum. The Convention obliges states to provide protection and prohibits the forcible return of refugees to conflict zones. However, the strain on host countries and limited international support have exposed significant gaps in the framework's implementation.

International Humanitarian Law: The Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols form the foundation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), providing protection for civilians and combatants in armed conflicts. Protocol I, which applies to international armed conflicts, is relevant when proxy wars involve cross-border dimensions or foreign state intervention. Protocol II, governing non-international armed conflicts, applies to internal conflicts exacerbated by external support for opposing factions. In the Syrian Civil War and the Yemeni conflict,

both Protocols are implicated due to the targeting of civilian populations, hospitals, and infrastructure, violations of which constitute war crimes. Customary International Law also prohibits states from interfering in the internal affairs of other states, as articulated in the ICJ's landmark case of *Nicaragua v. United States (1986).*[28] The Court ruled that providing financial or military support to insurgent groups violates the principle of non-intervention. This principle is particularly relevant to proxy wars in the Middle East, where foreign states' support for armed groups undermines sovereignty and exacerbates conflict. Other cases, such as the *Democratic Republic of Congo v. Uganda (2005),*[29] reaffirm the illegality of foreign intervention, highlighting its applicability to ongoing Middle Eastern conflicts.

UNSC Resolutions on the Middle East

The UNSC has also passed a series of resolutions that highlight the international community's attempts to address conflicts in the Middle East. Resolution 242 (1967) called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories and the acknowledgment of all states' sovereignty and territorial integrity following the Six-Day War. Resolution 338 (1973) reaffirmed Resolution 242 and emphasized a ceasefire during the Yom Kippur War, laying the groundwork for peace negotiations. Resolution 598 (1987), addressing the Iran-Iraq War, urged an immediate ceasefire and peace settlement.

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[28] Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States of America) [1986] ICJ Rep 14

[29] Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Dem. Rep. Congo v. Uganda) [2005] ICJ Rep 168

More recently, Resolution 2401 (2018) called for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to alleviate humanitarian suffering.

The Rome Statute And The Arab League Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Treaty

The Rome Statute establishes the ICC's jurisdiction over war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Article 25 affirms individual criminal responsibility, holding individuals accountable for contributing to crimes indirectly, such as through financial or military support in proxy wars. For example, actors financing or arming factions implicated in atrocities in Syria or Yemen could theoretically face prosecution under the ICC. [30] The Arab League's Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Treaty, adopted in 1950, emphasizes collective defense and economic cooperation among Member States. Article 6[31] obligates Member States to consult on measures to preserve peace and security. In practice, however, divisions within the Arab League, particularly regarding conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, have undermined the treaty's effectiveness. While some Member States, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have invoked the treaty to justify intervention, others have opposed such actions, reflecting the fractured nature of regional responses to proxy wars.

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[30] Amnesty International, 'ICC Must Investigate European Arms Companies Over Possible War Crimes in Yemen' (2019) available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/12/icc-investigate-arms-companies-yemen-war-crimes-allegations/ (accessed 27 December 2024.)
[31] The Arab League, Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Treaty, Art. 6

IV- Role of the International System

The United Nations: Global Efforts and Limitations

The United Nations is tasked with upholding international peace and security, but it has struggled to quell proxy wars in the Middle East. On paper, the U.N. provides forums for negotiation and authorizes peacekeeping or mediation missions. In practice, however, its effectiveness is often blunted by great-power divisions. Nowhere has this been clearer than in Syria's civil war, where the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) has been paralyzed by vetoes. Efforts to punish atrocities or broker ceasefires were "stymied by differences among veto-wielding permanent members" of the Council.[32] The U.S., UK, and France backed resolutions pressuring President Bashar al-Assad's regime, while Russia (often joined by China) vetoed numerous Syria resolutions to shield Damascus.[33] The mere threat of a veto led to watered-down measures, reinforcing a view of the UNSC as toothless in the face of mass violence.[34] Moscow, for instance, cited NATO's 2011 Libya intervention (and the chaos that followed) as justification for vetoing robust action on

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[32] Council on Foreign Relations, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror" (20 December 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war#:~:text=have%20been%20stymied%20by%20differences,related%20Security%20Council (accessed 6 February 2025).
[33] Council on Foreign Relations, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror" (20 December 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war#:~:text=have%20been%20stymied%20by%20differences,related%20Security%20Council (accessed 6 February 2025).
[34] Council on Foreign Relations, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror" (20 December 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war#:~:text=have%20been%20stymied%20by%20differences,related%20Security%20Council (accessed 6 February 2025).

Syria.[35] With the Council deadlocked, the U.N.'s direct impact on ending the war was minimal.

Beyond Syria, the U.N. has played a role in managing humanitarian crises born from proxy wars. In Yemen, the U.N. facilitated vital aid operations and brokered a 2018 ceasefire around the port of Hodeidah to allow relief deliveries. U.N. Special Envoys in Yemen, Libya, and Syria have continually pushed for negotiations. Yet they often face an uphill battle when member states (or their proxies) prefer a military solution. [36] The U.N. envoy in Yemen has urged the Security Council to remain unified, warning that peace "requires the Security Council's unity and decisive action" as well as regional support.[37] The international system's structural problem is that the same global powers fueling proxy conflicts are often those whose consensus is needed for U.N. action. This dilemma limits the U.N.'s ability to halt proxy wars, even as it tirelessly works to alleviate their human cost.

Structural Challenges to Resolving Proxy Conflicts

[35] Council on Foreign Relations, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror" (20 December 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war#:~:text=have%20been%20stymied%20by%20differences,related%20Security%20Council (accessed 6 February 2025).
[36] United Nations, "United Nations Officials Urge Unified Action to End Yemen Conflict amid Escalating Regional Tensions, Growing Humanitarian Crisis" (11 December 2024) available at https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15929.doc.htm (accessed 6 February 2025).
[37] United Nations, "United Nations Officials Urge Unified Action to End Yemen Conflict amid Escalating Regional Tensions, Growing Humanitarian Crisis" (11 December 2024) available at https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15929.doc.htm (accessed 6 February 2025).

The pervasive role of outside powers in Middle East conflicts exposes structural weaknesses in the international system that hinder conflict resolution. The conflicting Interests of the P5 poses, arguably, the strongest challenge in the context of this subject matter. The P5 are ironically also the world's top arms exporters.[38] They have lucrative arms trade relationships in the Middle East, supplying weapons to various sides. This conflict of interest makes them reluctant to restrict arms flows that fuel proxy wars.[39] For example, while the U.S. and UK publicly urge peace in Yemen, their continued arms sales to Saudi Arabia (and Iran's arms transfers to the Houthis on the other side) have sustained the combat. Similarly, Russia (and to a degree France) have armed factions in Libya despite formally supporting U.N. peace efforts.[40]

The Middle East also lacks an adequate and inclusive regional security framework, and rivalries between regional actors go unchecked. With no effective forum to resolve grievances, states resort to proxy warfare as a low-cost way to hurt opponents. Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry has been a chief driver, turning local disputes in Bahrain, Lebanon,

[38] Brittany Benowitz and Alicia Ceccanese, "How the U.N. Can Help Prevent the Spread of Proxy Conflicts" (*Just Security*, 27 May 2020) available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/70369/how-the-u-n-can-help-prevent-the-spread-of-proxy-conflicts/#:~:text=Unfortunately%2C%20the%20Security%20Council%E2%80%99s%20efforts,of%20weapons%20into%20armed%20conflicts (accessed 6 February 2025).
[39] Brittany Benowitz and Alicia Ceccanese, "How the U.N. Can Help Prevent the Spread of Proxy Conflicts" (*Just Security*, 27 May 2020) available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/70369/how-the-u-n-can-help-prevent-the-spread-of-proxy-conflicts/#:~:text=Unfortunately%2C%20the%20Security%20Council%E2%80%99s%20efforts,of%20weapons%20into%20armed%20conflicts (accessed 6 February 2025).
[40] Ranj Alaaldin, 'Winning the Peace in the Middle East's Fragile State' *Middle East Council on Global Affairs* (2024) available at
https://mecouncil.org/blog_posts/winning-the-peace-in-the-middle-east/#:~:text=Kurdish%20Peshmerga,forces%2C%20%20alongside%20Turkey%20and%20Egypt (accessed 6 February 2025).

Syria, Iraq, and Yemen into proxy battlegrounds. Other rivalries (e.g., Qatar vs. UAE, or Israel vs. Iran) similarly play out through proxies. These competing agendas mean external actors often actively prolong wars rather than help end them.[41] As one observer wrote about Libya, the "domestic, regional, and international players…have not only failed to put an end to the ongoing war but also are actively prolonging it".[42] This pattern holds across conflicts – outside sponsors sustain their chosen surrogates, hoping to outlast the other side, even as humanitarian suffering mounts.

Furthermore, international norms prioritize state sovereignty and non-interference, which can be a hurdle to timely action. In cases like Syria, the government (backed by Russia and Iran) opposed external intervention in "internal affairs", while other states covertly intervened anyway. The absence of a legal framework to address foreign sponsorship of non-state armed groups leaves a gray zone: it's often unclear how to hold states accountable for fueling conflicts beyond naming and shaming or sanctions. Meanwhile, overt collective intervention (e.g. a U.N.-authorized peace enforcement mission) is rare without host government consent or P5 agreement – both lacking in these proxy wars. This paralysis allows wars to continue until parties exhaust themselves.

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[41] Khalil Al-Anani, "Libya: Between Proxy War and International Failure" (*Arab Center Washington DC,* 14 April 2020) available at https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/libya-between-proxy-war-and-international-failure/ (accessed 6 February, 2025).

[42] Khalil Al-Anani, "Libya: Between Proxy War and International Failure" (*Arab Center Washington DC,* 14 April 2020) available at https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/libya-between-proxy-war-and-international-failure/ (accessed 6 February, 2025).

In combination, these challenges mean the international system often reacts to proxy wars with half-measures: calls for a ceasefire, piecemeal sanctions, or humanitarian aid, but no unified, robust strategy to stop the external interference that propels the fighting.

Strategies to Reduce and Prevent Proxy Warfare

Despite the grim track record, there are realistic and actionable steps that the international community and regional stakeholders can take to mitigate proxy wars. An objective, policy-focused analysis suggests focusing on diplomatic initiatives, economic levers, and institutional reforms:

- **Foster Inclusive Regional Dialogue:** The Middle East's only viable path toward lasting stability "lies in fostering dialogue, coordinated initiatives, and joint diplomacy among its influential countries".[43] In practice, this means creating forums where rivals can communicate and negotiate trade-offs without resorting to fighting via proxies. In 2023, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic ties after talks mediated by third parties (including Iraq, Oman, and China). This détente began to reduce tensions in conflict zones like Yemen and Syria. Building on this momentum, the international community ought to encourage a regional security dialogue process. Experts have floated proposals for a Gulf or Middle East regional security framework – analogous to

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[43] Amr Hamzawy, "Ending the New Wars of Attrition: Opportunities for Collective Regional Security in the Middle East" (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 5 March 2025) available at https://carnegieendowment.orgundefined/?lang=en (accessed 6 February 2025).

the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – to hash out norms of conduct and confidence-building measures.[44] Such a forum, if gradually developed, could address mutual security concerns (from sectarian incitement to arms races) and thus cut demand for proxy warfare as a policy tool.

- **Leverage Major Power Cooperation (Where Possible):** The U.S., Russia, China, and others should be pressed to compartmentalize their global disputes from Middle East conflicts. Great-power consensus – even limited – can pay dividends. In 2015, all P5 powers plus Germany jointly negotiated the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), which, while focused on non-proliferation, also opened channels of communication that could be expanded to talk about regional issues. A similar contact group model could be applied to specific wars: for instance, a Syria contact group including the U.S., Russia, Turkey, Iran, and key Arab states, under U.N. auspices, to revive a political settlement process. If the big powers agree on basic principles (e.g., preserving Iraq's unity or keeping shipping lanes open around Yemen), they can then use their influence to restrain their client actors on the ground.

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[44] Peter Jones, "A Middle East Regional Security Dialogue Process: Getting the Ball Rolling" (14 September 2022) available at https://kalam.chathamhouse.org/articles/a-middle-east-regional-security-dialogue-process-getting-the-ball-rolling/#:~:text=In%20essence%2C%20the%20idea%20is,Rather%2C%20they (accessed 6 February 2025).

- **Restrain Arms Flows and External Financing:** One practical way to dial down proxy wars is to cut off the firehose of weapons and money that sustains them. The U.N. Security Council can impose (and enforce) arms embargoes on conflict zones, as it did for Libya. But when the UNSC is paralyzed or embargoes are violated with impunity, alternative avenues must be pursued. A proposal from policy experts is for the U.N. General Assembly to establish an independent standing body to track and spotlight arms transfers into conflict zones.[45] Such a mechanism, operating transparently, could increase political pressure on supplier states. Moreover, nations can tighten their domestic controls: for example, the U.S. and European states could more strictly condition arms sales to Gulf partners on those partners not intervening destructively in neighbors' conflicts. Financial tools can help as well. Targeted sanctions on individuals and entities that bankroll militias (through smuggling, oil theft, etc.) – many of which rely on global financial systems – can raise the cost of proxy warfare. Conversely, offering economic incentives for peace can be powerful: international donors might pledge reconstruction funds or development aid for countries like Yemen and Syria, but only disburse them once external meddling ceases and a political settlement is on track. Aligning economic carrots and

[45] Brittany Benowitz and Alicia Ceccanese, "How the U.N. Can Help Prevent the Spread of Proxy Conflicts" (*Just Security*, 27 May 2020) available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/70369/how-the-u-n-can-help-prevent-the-spread-of-proxy-conflicts/#:~:text=Unfortunately%2C%20the%20Security%20Council%E2%80%99s%20efforts,of%20weapons%20into%20armed%20conflicts
(accessed 6 February 2025).

sticks to peace goals will give local factions and their patrons a material stake in ending conflicts.

Implementing these solutions is far from easy – it requires political will from both global powers and regional rivals to cooperate, which often only materializes after heavy costs or stalemates. However, there have been encouraging signs that diplomacy *can* gain the upper hand, as the following case illustrates.

1. Definition and Historical Analysis of Proxy Wars

The typical definition of the term 'Proxy War' would be an indirect war between superpowers by means of regional states in a way that could be regarded as a substitute for direct confrontation between said superpowers. In essence, proxy warfare is a war between regional states behind each of which (or sometimes behind only one) stands a superpower who provides the states with indirect military intervention[46]. Furthermore, local wars, even without direct superpower intervention, are proxy warfare so long as there is some relationship between the local adversaries and the superpowers. During the Arab defeats in 1967 and 1973, the Soviet Union did not directly involve its forces in the conflict because of what would have been the direct consequence of such an act - the U.S. responsively involving its own forces on the Israeli side and resulting in a violent

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[46] Indirect intervention meaning without its (superpower) own forces becoming involved in the war, e.g.by supplying arms, training the regional forces, bankrolling state and non-state actors, etc.

superpower conflict. Instead, the Soviet Union limited its support to arms supply, pressures, and threats directed against Israel or the U.S.[47].

2. The Cold War

Historically, the concept of proxy warfare goes way back before the 20th century. In ancient times, kingdoms and empires used to engage in indirect conflict by backing local leaders or insurgents in rival territories. The Roman Empire, for example, due to how vast the influence and control of the empire covered, frequently used client kings and local allies to maintain control over its colonies and rival territories, therefore reducing the need for direct military engagement. However, as time went on, the concept of proxy wars evolved, and in recent times, the Cold War has been regarded as the *Locus Classicus* of modern proxy warfare.[48] The fact that the U.S. and the Soviet Union had nuclear arsenals made direct military confrontations too risky, instead, they resorted to supporting proxy forces in various regions in the world. *Nicaragua v. United States of America*, decided in 1986 by the ICJ,[49] is a landmark legal dispute which exemplifies the principles of non-intervention and proxy warfare. In this case, the conflict was deeply rooted in the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The U.S. supported the Contras[50] which it perceived as aligned with Soviet interests because they had come to power after overthrowing the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in 1979 and were viewed

[47] Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 'The Strategy of War by Proxy' (1984) Cooperation and Conflict 263 19(4)
[48] J L Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (Penguin Books 2005).
[49] Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States of America) [1986] ICJ Rep 14
[50] a group of rebel forces opposing the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

as leftist and communist-leaning. The U.S. provided financial and military aid to the Contras, including covert operations to destabilize the Nicaraguan government. This support was part of a broader Cold War strategy to counteract the spread of communism in Latin America.

3. The Arab-Israeli Conflict (1948-Present)

Bringing this historical analysis back home to the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most protracted and intricate disputes in modern history. It emerged from the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and since then, the conflict has transformed from a localized struggle over territorial and national identities into a stage for international geopolitics. From the outset of the conflict, external powers played a pivotal role in shaping the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States aligned itself with Israel as a strategic partner, particularly after the 'Six-Day War' in 1967, which was a significant turning point in the interplay of the conflict's politics. By providing Israel with military aid, diplomatic support, and financial assistance exceeding a whopping amount of $150 billion[51], the U.S. sought to maintain its influence in a region critical for global energy security and, at the same time, counterbalance the Soviet-aligned Arab states. This external support and proxy interplay reached its peak during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, where Soviet arms and advisors backed Arab offensives while the U.S. orchestrated a massive airlift to resupply Israel.

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[51] Council on Foreign Relations, 'US Aid to Israel: Four Charts' (Council on Foreign Relations, November 13, 2024) available at https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts (accessed 21st January 2025)

The United Nations sought to mediate the conflict and provide meaningful frameworks for resolution. The 1947 UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181)[52] was the first attempt to address the conflict before it blew out into a large-scale engagement. It proposed the division of British Mandate Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem being an International city. While accepted by the Jewish leadership, the plan was rejected by Arab states, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Following the 1967 Six-Day War, UNSC Resolution 242[53] introduced the principle of "land for peace," calling for Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied during the conflict and the recognition of all states' sovereignty. Its ambiguous wording, however, led to varying interpretations and limited implementation[54].

4. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

The Iran-Iraq War began on September 22, 1980, when Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, launched a surprise invasion of Iran. It was one of the longest and most devastating conflicts of the 20th century, and was both a deeply entrenched regional struggle and a theater for Cold War-era proxy dynamics. Iraq's stated objective was to seize control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, a strategic economic artery, and to capitalize on Iran's perceived vulnerability following its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Saddam Hussein also

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[52] United Nations, 'Future Government of Palestine' (29 November 1947) UNISPAL A/RES/181(II)
[53] United Nations General Assembly, 'Question of Palestine: Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly' (A/RES/3236 (XXIX)
[54] Ruth Lapidoth, 'The Misleading Interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967)' (2011) Jewish Political Studies Review

aspired to position Iraq as the dominant power in the Arab world, challenging both Iran

and rivals like Saudi Arabia. Iran, under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, framed the war as a

defense of the Islamic revolution and aimed to export its ideology across the region. The

U.S., while officially 'neutral', provided significant indirect support to Iraq by supplying

intelligence, facilitating arms sales through intermediaries, and even reflagging Kuwaiti oil

tankers to protect them from Iranian attacks during the "Tanker War" Phase[55]. The

infamous Iran-Contra affair further revealed the complexity of U.S. involvement, as the

U.S. simultaneously sold arms to Iran to fund Nicaraguan Contras[56]. Iraq also

simultaneously received extensive military support from the Soviet Union, which viewed

Baghdad as a valuable ally in the region.

Iran, largely isolated internationally due to the revolutionary regime and the hostage crisis

with the U.S., relied on domestic arms production and clandestine arms purchases. North

Korea, Libya, and Syria were among the few countries that supported Iran, while Israel

controversially provided weapons in exchange for geopolitical advantages and to

counterbalance Iraq. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia and

Kuwait, provided substantial financial support to Iraq, fearing the spread of Iran's

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[55] MERIP, 'Murray and Woods: The Iran-Iraq War' (MERIP, 17 June 2015) available at
https://merip.org/2015/06/murray-and-woods-the-iran-iraq-war/ (accessed 21st January 2025)
[56] Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v United States of America) (Merits)
[1986] ICJ Rep 14

revolutionary ideology[57]. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia funneled billions of dollars into Saddam Hussein's war effort, effectively making Iraq a proxy for their anti-Iranian agenda.

5. **The Syrian Civil War (2011-Present)**

The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, initially emerging as part of the Arab Spring[58] has quickly descended into a complex web of domestic, regional, and international rivalries. The war has seen multiple layers of proxy involvement, with regional and international powers supporting various factions to advance their strategic goals. This third-party involvement has been a deciding feature of the war. The conflict began as a domestic uprising against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Inspired by the Arab Spring, Syrian protesters demanded political reform, an end to corruption, and greater freedoms. Assad's government responded with brutal repression, leading to widespread unrest and the militarization of the opposition.

Iran emerged as one of the Assad regime's most steadfast allies. Tehran views Syria as a critical link in its "Axis of Resistance" against Western and Israeli influence. Tehran provided significant military, financial, and logistical support to the regime. It deployed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), mobilized Shia militias from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and supported Hezbollah's involvement in the conflict.[59]

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[57] K M Pollack Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991 available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/48608649 (accessed 21st January 2025)

[58] a wave of pro-democracy uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa

[59] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Conflict in Syria' (Council on Foreign Relations) available at https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria (accessed 21 January 2025)

Turkey is also a major player in this conflict. It initially supported opposition groups, including Islamist factions, to overthrow Assad. However, its priorities shifted to countering the growing influence of Kurdish groups, particularly the People's Protection Units (YPG), which it views as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a designated terrorist organization[60]. Turkey's military interventions in northern Syria aimed to establish a buffer zone and curtail Kurdish autonomy.

Russia's intervention in 2015 marked a turning point in the conflict. Moscow, a long-time ally of Syria, sought to preserve its strategic foothold in the Middle East, including its naval base in Tartus.[61] Russian airstrikes targeted opposition groups and jihadist factions, helping the Assad regime regain control of key territories.

The UN has played a central role in mediating the conflict and addressing its consequences. The Geneva talks, initiated under the auspices of the UN, aimed to achieve a political transition in Syria. However, these efforts were stymied by disagreements over Assad's future, with the regime and its allies rejecting any transition that would exclude him. The UNSC adopted several resolutions related to Syria, including Resolutions 2118

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[60] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Conflict in Syria' (Council on Foreign Relations) available at https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria (accessed 21 January 2025)
[61] US Naval War College, Russian-Syrian Naval and Air Basing Agreements, 2015-2020 available at https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/rmsi_research/4/ (accessed 21 January 2025)

(2013)[62] on the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons, Resolutions 2249 (2015)[63] and 2254 (2015)[64] on combating terrorism and advancing a political settlement, and various resolutions addressing humanitarian access.

7. The Yemeni Civil War (2014-Present)

The Yemeni Civil War, which erupted in 2014, involves two main sides: the Houthi rebels, known as Ansar Allah, and the internationally recognized Yemeni government, led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The Houthis, a Zaydi Shia militant group, initially took control of the capital, Sanaa, in 2014, precipitating the collapse of the Hadi government. The war quickly became a proxy battleground, with Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) supporting Hadi's government and Iran allegedly backing the Houthis.

Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE, formed a military coalition in 2015 aimed at restoring the Hadi government[65]. Saudi Arabia views the Houthis as an Iranian proxy, asserting that the Houthis receive support in terms of arms, training, and funding from Iran, which undermines Saudi influence in the region. The Saudi-led coalition's involvement is also driven by a desire to contain the spread of Iranian influence across the Middle East. The

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[62] United Nations Security Council, 'Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013) on Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic S/RES/2118 (2013)
[63] United Nations General Assembly, 'The Situation in the Middle East' A/RES/68/26
[64] United Nations Security Council, 'Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) on the Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic S/RES/2254 (2015)
[65] International Crisis Group, 'Yemen' available at
https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen (accessed 21 January 2025)

coalition's efforts are characterized by airstrikes, blockades, and support for local militias

fighting the Houthis. The coalition has included Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt, among

others. The GCC countries have provided substantial financial and military support to the

Hadi government, but their military interventions have led to significant civilian casualties,

drawing widespread international criticism. Saudi Arabia has also implemented a naval

blockade that has severely restricted humanitarian aid and exacerbated Yemen's

humanitarian crisis[66].

Iran has been accused of providing extensive support to the Houthi rebels. This support

has been speculated as part of Iran's broader strategy to expand its influence in the region,

particularly in Yemen, which is strategically located at the southern tip of the Arabian

Peninsula, controlling the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a key chokepoint for international

maritime trade. Tehran's support to the Houthis has reportedly included arms shipments,

military advisers, and training[67], though Iran denies direct involvement in combat. Iranian

support for the Houthis is largely ideological as well as strategic. Iran sees the Houthis as

fellow Shia Muslims and thus shares a degree of solidarity with them. Furthermore, the

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[66] Human Rights Watch, 'Yemen: Coalition Blockade Imperils Civilians' (Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2017) available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/07/yemen-coalition-blockade-imperils-civilians (accessed 21 January 2025)
[67] The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 'Responding to Iran's Arms Smuggling in Yemen' (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 21 February 2019) available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/responding-irans-arms-smuggling-yemen (accessed 21 January 2025)

Houthis' anti-Saudi rhetoric aligns with Iran's regional objectives of undermining Saudi Arabia's influence and challenging its leadership in the Sunni-majority Gulf.

The Yemeni Civil War is a prime example of how local conflicts can evolve into broader regional proxy wars, with foreign powers investing significant resources to influence the outcome. The proxy dynamics in Yemen have been driven by geopolitical considerations, sectarian rivalries, and regional power struggles. Saudi Arabia and Iran's competition for regional dominance has turned Yemen into a battleground, with devastating consequences for the Yemeni people.

8. Power Plays In The Middle East As A Post-Cold War Theatre :

Key actors, ranging from state powers to non-state groups, have played crucial roles in shaping the outcomes of proxy wars in the Middle East. Proxy wars in the region are not simply local struggles; they are deeply influenced by the strategic interests of both regional and international actors. The motivations behind these interventions are varied, with each actor seeking to secure its strategic goals, protect its regional dominance, or advance its ideological or economic interests. The involvement of key international and regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, Russia, Turkey, the UAE, and others has been central to shaping the trajectory of many of the region's most intractable conflicts, including those in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq, etc.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's role in Middle Eastern proxy wars is shaped by a combination of security concerns, regional dominance, and sectarian rivalry. As the 'premier' Sunni power in the region, Saudi Arabia views itself as the guardian of Sunni Islam and the leader of the Arab world. It seeks to contain Iranian influence, particularly in countries like Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain, and prevent the spread of Shia Islam, which is seen as a direct challenge to Sunni leadership. The kingdom's leadership is also deeply concerned with maintaining its security and political stability. Saudi Arabia's actions are motivated by a desire to protect its regime from internal and external threats, including the rise of radical Islamist groups and the instability in neighboring countries.

Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen, which began in 2015, was a direct response to the Houthi rebellion, which Iran supports. Saudi Arabia led a coalition of Arab states to support Yemen's internationally recognized government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.[68] This intervention included airstrikes, a naval blockade, and ground operations aimed at defeating the Houthis[69]. The conflict has caused immense civilian suffering and exacerbated a humanitarian crisis. In Syria, Saudi

[68] International Crisis Group, 'Yemen' available at https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen (accessed 21 January 2025)
[69] Human Rights Watch, 'Yemen: Coalition Blockade Imperils Civilians' (Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2017) https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/07/yemen-coalition-blockade-imperils-civilians (accessed 21 January 2025)

Arabia supported various opposition groups in their fight against the Assad regime, which Iran and Russia back. Saudi Arabia provided funding, weapons, and training to rebel groups, hoping to reduce the influence of Iran and remove a key ally of the Shia bloc from power. Saudi Arabia's goal was to weaken Iran's foothold in the region by undermining the Assad regime. In 2011, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain to suppress an uprising by the Shia majority, fearing the spread of unrest to its own Shia population in the Eastern Province. This intervention helped stabilize the Bahraini monarchy but reinforced sectarian divides in the region. Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen has intensified the conflict, drawing in multiple actors and contributing to one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history. The war has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, widespread displacement, and severe food insecurity. In Syria, Saudi-backed rebel groups were unable to decisively defeat the Assad regime, and their involvement prolonged the war. The conflict became a proxy battleground for regional powers, preventing a swift resolution and deepening the sectarian divide.

Iran

Iran's motivations in the Middle East proxy wars are primarily driven by its desire to expand its regional influence, safeguard its security, and promote Shia Islam. Iran sees itself as the protector of Shia Muslims worldwide and aims to create a "Shia Crescent," stretching from Tehran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to the

Mediterranean. Iran's involvement in these conflicts also stems from its broader geopolitical strategy to challenge the influence of Sunni powers, particularly Saudi Arabia, and limit the presence of Western powers, particularly the U.S.. Iran's strategic objectives have included countering the influence of both Israel and the U.S. in the region. It views both of these powers as existential threats and has consistently sought to undermine their presence in the Middle East by supporting anti-Western and anti-Israeli factions, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels in Yemen[70], and various Shia militias in Iraq and Syria.[71] In Syria, Iran has been one of the most vocal supporters of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Since 2011, Iran has provided financial, military, and logistical support to Assad, including sending military advisors, ground troops, and advanced weaponry. Iran has supported various Shia militias, including the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which fought against ISIS but have also been accused of human rights abuses. Tehran's support for these groups has solidified its influence in Iraq's political and military structures.

Iran's widespread involvement in conflicts in the region has ultimately escalated these conflicts. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia and its allies have been drawn in because of

[70] The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 'Responding to Iran's Arms Smuggling in Yemen' (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 21 February 2019) available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/responding-irans-arms-smuggling-yemen (accessed 21 January 2025)
[71] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Conflict in Syria' (Council on Foreign Relations) https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria accessed 21 January 2025.

Iran's involvement, and this contributed to the humanitarian disaster in a war that has already killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced millions. In Syria, Iran's support for the Assad regime has prolonged the conflict, resulting in widespread destruction and death.

Turkey

Turkey's proxy involvement in the Middle East has been shaped by its desire to reassert itself as a regional power, maintain its security, and counter Kurdish separatism. Turkey has pursued an assertive foreign policy, seeking to expand its influence in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, while balancing its NATO membership with its regional ambitions. Turkey's primary concern in Syria is to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish-controlled region near its southern border, which it fears could empower the Kurdish insurgency within Turkey. Turkey has also sought to challenge Iranian influence in the region, particularly in Syria, and to expand its own political and economic influence, particularly in the context of the Arab Spring and the turmoil in neighboring countries.

Turkey's primary involvement in Syria has been through military operations against Kurdish groups, particularly the People's Defense Units (YPG), which it considers a terrorist organization affiliated with the PKK[72]. It has also supported opposition groups in the Syrian Civil War, seeking to oust Bashar al-Assad. In Iraq, Turkey has

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[72] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Conflict in Syria' (Council on Foreign Relations) https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria accessed 21 January 2025.

intervened militarily, targeting PKK positions in the Kurdish regions and providing support to Sunni Arab groups in the fight against ISIS. In Libya, Turkey's intervention has helped the internationally recognized government in Tripoli but has also fueled broader instability, with multiple external actors supporting different factions.

The United Arab Emirates

The UAE's involvement in proxy wars is motivated by its desire to protect its political stability, assert its regional dominance, and counter the rise of political Islam. The UAE is particularly concerned about the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood[73], which it views as a threat to its autocratic regime. The UAE has sought to support authoritarian governments and counter Islamic movements that challenge its interests.

One of the UAE's primary concerns is the growing influence of Iran in the Gulf and broader Arab world. The UAE views Iran's military involvement in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq as a direct challenge to its influence and security. The UAE has been a key member of the Saudi-led coalition intervening in Yemen since 2015. While Saudi Arabia has taken the lead in combat operations, the UAE has focused on building local militias and providing significant military support to anti-Houthi forces, such

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[73] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood' (Council on Foreign Relations) https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/egypts-muslim-brotherhood accessed 21 January 2025.

as the Southern Transitional Council (STC). Its strategy has been to support groups that align with its vision for a fragmented, federalized Yemen, which would limit Iranian influence and reduce the power of groups sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, which the UAE considers a threat. However, the UAE's intervention in Yemen, particularly its support for the STC and other separatist forces, has contributed to a prolonged civil war. While the Saudi-led coalition initially aimed to restore the internationally recognized government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, the UAE's involvement has complicated this objective by fostering local power struggles and sectarian divides. The result has been an intensification of the humanitarian crisis, as the conflict has led to widespread displacement, food insecurity, and deaths from preventable diseases. As an economically vibrant state, the UAE is concerned with safeguarding its strategic trade routes and energy infrastructure. It has invested heavily in securing the flow of oil from the Gulf and ensuring access to critical global trade lanes, such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden[74]. Its interests are also deeply tied to maintaining stability in Yemen, a crucial maritime corridor. Unfortunately, the UAE's involvement in proxy wars has contributed to the broader polarization of the Middle East, particularly the increasing Sunni-Shia divide. Its rivalry with Iran and

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[74] Middle East Council, 'The Gulf and the Horn of Africa: Investing in Security' (Middle East Council) https://mecouncil.org/publication/the-gulf-and-the-horn-of-africa-investing-in-security/ accessed 21 January 2025.

the competition for influence in Arab countries have fueled sectarian tensions, especially in Yemen, Syria, and Libya.

The United States

The U.S. has long been a key player in the Middle East, driven by its strategic interests in regional stability, access to oil resources, counterterrorism efforts, and the containment of Iran. While the U.S. has often focused on fighting terrorism, particularly through its military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has also engaged in proxy wars to combat Iranian influence and promote the interests of its allies in the region. One of the U.S.'s primary objectives has been to contain Iran's regional ambitions, particularly in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

The U.S. led an invasion of Iraq under the premise of eliminating weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), though no such weapons were found. The U.S. also cited the need to remove Saddam Hussein, whose regime was seen as a regional threat, particularly after the Gulf War of 1990-1991. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the ousting of Saddam Hussein and the eventual rise of ISIS. Following the invasion, the U.S. remained involved in Iraq's political and military affairs, supporting the Iraqi government in its fight against insurgents and ISIS. This invasion is widely regarded as a catalyst for the fragmentation of Iraq and the broader Middle East.

In the Syrian conflict, the U.S. has been involved both directly and indirectly. It supported various rebel groups opposing Bashar al-Assad's government, which Russia and Iran backed. The U.S. provided weapons, training, and financial assistance to these groups, aiming to weaken Assad's regime and reduce Iranian influence. [75] The U.S. also led a coalition to combat ISIS, launching airstrikes against ISIS targets and supporting local Kurdish and Arab forces on the ground.

The U.S. has also been deeply involved in countering Iranian influence in the region, particularly through proxy conflicts. The U.S. has used a combination of military, diplomatic, and economic tools to undermine Iran's influence, including the imposition of severe economic sanctions, support for anti-Iranian factions, and direct military action in Iraq and Syria. The U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal under the Trump administration and the subsequent 'maximum pressure'[76] campaign were central aspects of this strategy[77]. This strategy, however, has often led to the further militarization of the region, worsening sectarian divisions, and contributing to the instability that characterizes many of the region's conflicts.

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[75] U.S. Department of State, 'U.S. Relations with Syria' (U.S. Department of State) available at https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-syria/ accessed 21 January 2025. (accessed 21 January 2025.)

[76] The "maximum pressure" campaign refers to the intensified sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran following the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018.

[77] U.S. Department of State, 'Maximum Pressure Campaign on the Regime in Iran' (U.S. Department of State) https://2017-2021.state.gov/maximum-pressure-campaign-on-the-regime-in-iran/ (accessed 21 January 2025.)

9. The Fallout Of The Proxy Engagements In The Middle East

In the international anarchic environment, characterized by the absence of a central authority, states are driven by the imperative to secure their survival amidst limited resources and perpetual competition. This environment fosters rivalry over security, markets, and influence, compelling states to rely on self-help strategies. There are various implications of the Proxy wars in the Middle East, and it is of great relevance that we state the primary actors responsible. Countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Russia, and Turkey engage in proxy conflicts to advance strategic interests, often exacerbating instability, sectarian divisions, and humanitarian crises.[78]

The Middle East remains a region of critical security importance, not only for its nations but also for global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. Due to its geo-strategic and geo-economic significance, external powers continue to engage in the region, often through proxy wars that deepen instability. One of the key security implications of proxy wars is the fragmentation and turbulence in the region, where conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen serve as battlegrounds for foreign interests. The shifting priorities of the U.S. foreign policy, particularly its pivot to Asia, have further complicated the security dynamics. As the U.S. reduces its direct involvement, it simultaneously employs strategic measures to counter growing Chinese and Russian influence while

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[78] Doe J, "Exploring Proxy Wars in the Middle East" Journal of International Affairs (2020) 12(4) 45

maintaining alliances with key Middle Eastern partners. This shift has created a power vacuum, enabling regional actors to pursue aggressive foreign policies that escalate sectarian and political tensions. Furthermore, the involvement of Western and regional powers in proxy conflicts, particularly those aimed at countering Iran's influence, has intensified intra-regional rivalries. The proxy wars fueled by ideological, political, and religious divisions have weakened state institutions, increased terrorist threats, and prolonged humanitarian crises. Addressing these challenges requires diplomatic engagement, conflict resolution efforts, and reevaluating foreign interventions, prioritizing strategic interests over regional stability. [79]

10. The Humanitarian Cost Of The Enduring Crises:

As we have come to see throughout the analysis of this topic, proxy wars have become a defining feature of contemporary conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, where global and regional powers have pursued their interests through local actors. They often lead to prolonged conflicts, as external support sustains local factions, diminishing the urgency for a swift resolution. The unfortunate effect of war in general is the fact that innocent civilians always seem to suffer the most. In Syria, the human cost of proxy wars in the Middle East is staggering, with civilians accounting for a significant proportion of the casualties. Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, over 500,000 people have

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[79] Jafar Farhadinasab and Anoush Jafari, "Review of Proxy Wars and Their Impact on the Middle East Security," MEPR, vol. 5, no. 3 (2016), available at (https://journals.iau.ir/article_669460_199d1a77922959d6ab8afe9cf11639e6.pdf) (accessed 10th March 2025).

been killed. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR),

approximately 25% of these deaths were civilians, including tens of thousands of children

and women[80]. The SOHR managed to document 105,015 fatalities, including 24,103

civilians, among them there were 2,748 children and 1,249 women, 31,227 civilians,

including 214 children under the age of 18, were killed under torture in regime prisons. A

further 9,944 civilians, including 2,321 children under the age of 18 and 1,139 females

over the age of 18, were killed by regime forces, 932 civilians, including 213 children

under the age of 18 and 110 women over the age of 18, were killed by rebel and Islamic

factions and jihadist groups[81]. The protracted crisis in Syria continues to affect millions of

lives. The security situation in parts of the country remains unpredictable and the

economic situation is increasingly dire. According to the 2024 Syria Humanitarian Needs

Overview, 16.7 million people need humanitarian assistance, a 9 percent increase from

the previous year, and it is projected to get even worse.

In Yemen, the conflict, which escalated in 2015, has caused over 377,000 deaths; direct

combat accounts for 150,000 deaths, while the rest are due to hunger, disease, and

inadequate healthcare services stemming from the war. In 2015, it was reported that

almost 10,160,000 Yemenis were deprived of water, food, and electricity as a result of the

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[80]Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 'Total Death Toll: Over 606,000 People Killed Across Syria Since the Beginning of the "Syrian Revolution", Including 495,000 Documented by SOHR' (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) available at https://www.syriahr.com/en/217360/ (accessed 23 January 2025.)

[81]Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 'Total Death Toll: Over 606,000 People Killed Across Syria Since the Beginning of the "Syrian Revolution", Including 495,000 Documented by SOHR' (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights)' available https://www.syriahr.com/en/217360/ (accessed 23 January 2025)

conflict. The report also added per source from UNICEF officials in Yemen that within 15 days, some 100,000 people across the country were dislocated, while Oxfam said that more than 10 million Yemenis did not have enough food to eat, in addition to 850,000 half-starved children. Over 13 million civilians were without access to clean water[82]. In 2017, the World Food Program reported that although Yemen was not yet in a full-blown famine, 60% of Yemenis, or 17 million people, were in "crisis" or "emergency" food situations[83]. In the same year, a cholera epidemic resurfaced but could not be effectively combated as a result of the war. The epidemic was reported to be killing a person an hour in Yemen, and by mid-June, reports stated that there had been 124,000 cases and 900 deaths, and that 20 of the 22 provinces in Yemen were affected at that time[84].

In Iraq, the IBC Project has recorded a range of at least 185,194 – 208,167 total violent civilian deaths through June 2020 in their database. Before that, it released a report detailing the deaths it recorded between March 2003 and March 2005, in which it recorded 24,865 civilian deaths. The report says the U.S. and its allies were responsible for the largest share (37%), with 9,270 deaths. The remaining deaths were attributed to

[82] Wall Street Journal, 'Humanitarian crisis deepens in embattled Yemen city', available at https://www.wsj.com/articles/humanitarian-crisis-deepens-in-embattled-yemen-city-1428340706 (accessed 23 January 2025)

[83] Jeremy M. Sharp, 'Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention'

[84] Al Jazeera, 'Cholera death toll in Yemen doubles in two weeks', available at http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/cholera-death-toll-yemen-doubles-weeks-170613131659368.html (accessed 23 January 2025)

anti-occupation forces (9%), crime (36%,) and unknown agents (11%)[85]. As at 2007,

roughly 40 percent of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled the country as a result of

the war[86]. All kinds of people, regardless of class, have been targeted by militias, Iraqi

insurgents, rebel forces, etc. An estimated 331 school teachers were slain in the first four

months of 2006, according to Human Rights Watch, and at least 2,000 Iraqi doctors have

been killed and 250 kidnapped since 2003.

Proxy wars in the Middle East illustrate the catastrophic human cost of prolonged conflict

fueled by external powers. From mass displacement and hunger to economic collapse and

psychological trauma, the repercussions of these wars are far-reaching and deeply

entrenched. Addressing these crises requires not only immediate humanitarian aid but

also a long-term commitment to resolving the root causes of these conflicts.

11. The International and Regional Responses To The Middle Eastern Crisis:

The UNSC has passed multiple resolutions aimed at mitigating the impact of proxy wars.

These resolutions typically call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and emphasize

the need for all parties to comply with international humanitarian law. Resolution 2581

(2021)[87] addressed the military activities in Syria and underscored the necessity for

demining and clearance operations in compliance with the 1974 Disengagement of Forces

[85] Iraq Body Count, 'A Dossier of Civilian Casualties 2003-2005', available at
http://reports.iraqbodycount.org/a_dossier_of_civilian_casualties_2003-2005.pdf, (accessed 23 January 2025)
[86]SFGate, 'CONFLICT IN IRAQ / Iraq refugee crisis exploding / 40% of middle class believed to have fled
crumbling nation', available at http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/01/16/MNG2MNJBIS1.DTL
(accessed 23 January 2025)
[87] United Nations Resolution 2581 S/RES/2581 (2021)

Agreement. Resolution 2118 (2013)[88] was a response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The resolution demanded the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal and established a framework for their destruction. It required Syria to cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and to destroy its chemical weapons stockpile by mid-2014. The resolution also outlined plans for a political transition in Syria. Resolution 2254 (2015)[89] endorsed a road map for a peace process in Syria. It set out a timetable for UN-facilitated talks between the Syrian government and opposition members and outlined the steps for a nationwide ceasefire. The resolution called for the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body and supported free and fair elections under UN supervision. It also emphasized the importance of humanitarian access throughout Syria.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has played a crucial role in coordinating humanitarian aid efforts. It ensured that food, medical supplies, and other essential resources reached civilians in need. OCHA works closely with various humanitarian organizations to deliver aid and support to affected populations. For example, during the Gaza conflict, OCHA has coordinated the delivery of over 630 trucks of aid, including food, water, medicine, and shelter materials[90]. The UN has also provided support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees who have

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[88] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 S/RES/2118 (2013)
[89] United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 S/RES/2254 (2015)
[90] UN News, 'Aid surging into Gaza 'at scale' but massive needs remain' available at
https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159216 (accessed 23 January 2025)

been forced to flee their homes due to the conflicts in the region. This includes providing shelter, food, water, and other essential services to help displaced individuals rebuild their lives. The UN has engaged in advocatory and diplomatic efforts to promote peace and stability in the region by calling for ceasefires, facilitating negotiations, and working with local and international partners to address the root causes of conflict.

V- Conclusion

Proxy wars in the Middle East present a complex challenge to international peace and security, with far-reaching consequences that affect more than just the region. Ultimately, the challenge lies not only in resolving individual conflicts but also in creating a framework that deters external actors from perpetuating proxy wars. This requires bold action, collaborative diplomacy, and a commitment to principles of international law and human rights. By confronting these issues, the Security Council has the opportunity to mitigate current crises and lay the groundwork for a more stable and peaceful Middle East.

VI- Further Research

- What is the role of Regional Organisations in mitigating or exacerbating the proxy conflicts in the Middle East?
- What are the ongoing barriers to resolving proxy conflicts, and what are some potential frameworks that could ensure long-term peace and stability?

- How can the Security Council enforce compliance with international law in the context of proxy wars, particularly regarding the actions of both state and non-state actors?

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2025)

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security challenges.

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https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen (accessed 21 January 2025)

This offers an in-depth analysis of Yemen's ongoing conflict, exploring its causes, key players, and humanitarian crisis.

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This is a detailed dossier on civilian casualties from 2003 to 2005, documenting the human toll of the Iraq War.

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This book offers a comprehensive history of the Cold War, analyzing its origins, key events, and the ideological struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

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Pollack examines the military capabilities and performance of Arab states in conflicts from 1948 to 1991.

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Topic Two: The Rise of Mercenaries and Private Military Companies in Conflict Zones

I- Quote

"The use of mercenaries and private military companies is a threat to global stability and security. It's a Wild West mentality that must be brought under control."

- Jeremy Corbyn, former UK Labour Party leader

II- Introduction

A mercenary, as defined in the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, is an individual who is specially recruited to fight in an armed conflict and is motivated primarily by personal gain[91]. While this definition does not explicitly require direct participation in hostilities, Article 3 adds that a mercenary who engages directly in hostilities or concerted acts of violence commits an offense. This aligns the definition with other frameworks, highlighting its shared gaps and loopholes.[92] Furthermore, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries uses the term "private military and security companies" to refer to corporate entities providing, on a

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[91] International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (adopted 4 December 1989, entered into force 20 October 2001) 2163 UNTS 75, art 1.

[92] United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the "Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination"' (UN Document N2330877, 2023) accesisible at https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/308/77/pdf/n2330877.pdf (accessed 24 December 2024)

compensatory basis, military and/or security services by physical persons and/or legal entities.[93]

The commercialization of warfare has become unpopular in recent times. A quick glance at historical conflicts would reveal that mercenaries have played a major role in shaping the modern world. Distinct from their prominence in the past, mercenary groups have once again risen to notoriety and have assumed a corporate identity. Now known as Private Military Companies (PMCs), these groups have taken part in most major international and intranational armed conflicts in varying capacities since the Cold War.[94] Executive Outcomes (EO), a South African based PMC, was hired by the Angolan Government in 1993 to recapture an oil field that had fallen under the rebel control of the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). With 24 well-trained combatants and three armoured helicopter gunships, the mission was a success, leading the Angolan government to enter into another contract with EO for training and supplying weapons to government troops. The success of EO's operations bolstered international confidence in PMCs. Sierra Leone later requested EO's support to deal with its own rebel insurgents. They soon became relevant in international conflicts, with the United States, particularly, using PMCs to promote their foreign policy agendas. Some examples are hiring Military

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[93] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mercenarism and Private Military & Security Companies, available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/MercenarismandPrivateMilitarySecurityCompanies.pdf (accessed 21 January 2025).

[94] S. Goddard, "The Private Military Company: A legitimate international entity within modern conflict" (2001) A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, p.32.

Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) to train the Croatian army and the substantial reliance on PMCs by the US government in Iran.[95] Since Iran, PMCs have become a staple in international armed conflicts.

In the words of Machiavelli:

> If anyone holds his state founded upon mercenary armies, he shall never be quiet, nor secure: because they are never well-united, ambitious, and without discipline, treacherous, among their friends…they have no fear of God, nor keep any faith with men, and so long only defer they the doing of mischief.[96]

These harsh words are not without merit. The structure and constitution of these groups make them prone to unlawful acts. Mercenary groups and PMCs have been involved in the violation of multiple international arms and Humanitarian laws. For instance, in 1998, Sandline, a PMC, entered a contract with the then-exiled president of Sierra Leone for the shipment of 35 tons of arms from Bulgaria, violating the UN arms embargo.[97] EO has reportedly used indiscriminate weapons in Angola,[98] and Defense Systems Colombia (DSC) has been suspected of involvement in torture, extra-judicial executions, and disappearances in Colombia.[99]

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[95] J.A.C. Baum, A.M. McGahan, "Outsourcing War: The Evolution of the Private Military Industry after the Cold War" available at https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf (accessed 5 February 2025)
[96] As quoted in T. Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: the Portrait of a Mercenary*, (Methuen: 1995) p.20
[97] UN Security Council, S/RES/1132, 8 October 1997, paragraph 6
[98] A. Vines, "Mercenaries and the Privatisation of Security in Africa" in G. Mills and J. Stremlau, *The Privatisation of Security in Africa*, (SAIIA: South Africa, 1999), p. 54
[99] "BPhands tarred in pipeline dirty war", *The Guardian* 17 October 1998

Considerations have to be given to the potential utility of PMCs and Mercenary

companies to peacekeeping efforts. There are different breeds of PMCs, some offer

security, logistics, transport, construction, maintenance, and defence.[100] And as Jack

Straw, the former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, puts it:

> A strong and reputable private military sector might have a role in enabling the UN
>
> to respond more rapidly and more effectively in crises. The cost of employing
>
> private military companies for certain functions in UN operations could be much
>
> lower than that of national armed forces.[101]

Weighing the pros and cons of PMCs and mercenary groups would reveal that vilification

might not be the best response to PMCs, however, some form of regulation is necessary if

they are to be a net positive to the world.

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[100] O. Swed, D. Burland, "The Global Expansion of PMSCs: Trends, Opportunities, and Risks" available at
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Mercenaries/WG/ImmigrationAndBorder/swed-burland-submission.pdf (accessed 5 February 2025)
[101] The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Private Military Companies: Options for Regulations*, (The Stationary
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III- International and Regional Framework

International Convention Against The Recruitment, Use, Financing And Training Of Mercenaries (UN Mercenary Convention) (1989)

The International Convention Against The Recruitment, Use, Financing And Training Of Mercenaries is one of the most robust international legal instruments aimed at curbing mercenary activities. It builds upon a number of preexisting legal instruments, particularly Article 47 of Additional Protocol I (1977),[102] which denies mercenaries the status of lawful combatants or prisoners of war. The Convention defines a mercenary and outlines the criteria that classify an individual as such. It defines a mercenary as someone specially recruited to fight in an armed conflict, motivated primarily by private gain, and not a national or resident of a party to the conflict. It also specifies that mercenaries are not part of the armed forces of any involved state and are neither sent on official duty as members of their state's military.[103]

The Convention provides a clear legal basis for the criminalization of mercenaries, especially in an era where third party actors are increasingly involved in conflicts (proxy warfare). In addition to Article 1 which defines a mercenary, Article 2 establishes that states must criminalize mercenary activities under their domestic laws, imposing a

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[102] United Nations, "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), of 8 June 1977" available at https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.34_AP-I-EN.pdf (accessed 27 December) 2024.

[103] United Nations International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, 1989, Article 1.

personal responsibility on states to recognize the recruitment, training, use, and financing of mercenaries as an offense in their national legislations. This requirement ensures that states take proactive legal measures against individuals or organizations engaged in mercenary operations, and also prevents states from outsourcing military operations to unregulated actors. A particularly important provision is Article 6, which introduces the principle of universal jurisdiction. This principle ensures that even if a mercenary commits a crime in a foreign country, any state party to the convention can arrest, prosecute, or extradite the individual. This provision is particularly important because mercenaries, more often than not, operate transnationally, moving between conflict zones and exploiting legal lacunas. Together, these articles form a comprehensive legal framework aimed at preventing, prosecuting, and eliminating mercenary activities.

However, despite the Convention's strong legal provisions, enforcement remains a challenge largely due to PMCs' evolving nature. The convention's narrow definition of a mercenary allows modern PMCs to operate in ways that often circumvent its legal criteria. Unlike traditional mercenaries, PMCs often operate under government contracts while avoiding the mercenary label. Additionally, many superpowers, such as the US, Russia, and China, have not ratified the Convention, making enforcement incredibly difficult.

The Montreaux Document

The Montreux Document on Pertinent International Legal Obligations and Good Practices for States Related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) is one of the most significant international frameworks addressing the use of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) in conflict zones. Developed in 2008 through a joint initiative by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Montreux Document is a non-binding, soft-law instrument[104] that provides guidelines on the legal obligations of states regarding PMSCs. Unlike traditional treaties or conventions, the Montreaux Document does not create any new legal obligations; it only clarifies and gives recognition to already existing international laws applicable to PMCs.

Unlike the Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, which primarily focuses on traditional mercenaries, the Montreaux Document particularly addresses the evolving nature of PMCs. Modern PMCs often blur the line between legitimate security providers as they exploit the legal lacuna of operating under government contracts while frequently engaging in combat operations. The Document, unlike the Convention, distinguishes between PMSCs and Mercenaries. It defines PMSCs as corporate entities that offer a range of services, including military operations, intelligence gathering, and logistical support. It also reaffirms that states

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[104] A soft-law instrument refers to a set of rules, guidelines, principles, or declarations that, unlike hard law (treaties, statutes, or binding court decisions), do not have legally binding force but still influence state behavior, policymaking, and international relations.

cannot absolve themselves of their international legal obligations by outsourcing military and security functions to PMSCs. This is particularly important, especially in conflict zones where PMCs have sometimes engaged in unlawful killings, torture, and other abuses while operating under state contracts. The Blackwater/Academi massacre in Nisour Square, Iraq, where PMSC personnel killed 17 Iraqi civilians,[105] underscores the dangers of weak oversight. This is why the Document makes it clear that states cannot evade responsibility simply by delegating military functions to private actors.

African Union Convention For The Elimination Of Mercenarism In Africa

The Convention was adopted by the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) (now the African Union) in 1977, and it remains one of the most significant regional legal instruments regulating the problem of mercenaries in Africa. The Convention was drafted as a response to the persistent use of mercenaries in conflicts across Africa, particularly in post-colonial struggles, coup attempts, and civil wars. While the International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries provides a global legal framework, the African Union (AU) convention takes a more regionally specific approach. Given that Africa has been particularly vulnerable to mercenary activities, the AU Mercenary Convention represents Africa's unique response to the mercenary

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[105] International Code of Conduct Association, "The Nisour Square Massacre", available at https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/ (accessed 21 January 2025).

problem, reinforcing the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs.

The AU Mercenary Convention defines a mercenary similarly to the UN Mercenary Convention.[106] Unlike the UN Mercenary Convention, however, the AU Convention expands on its definition by laying emphasis on the role that mercenaries play in destabilising governments, violating sovereignty, and interfering in African political affairs. This distinction is very important because many mercenary operations in Africa have been politically driven, often backed by foreign governments or corporations who consider Africa a proxy theatre and seek control over African resources. Furthermore, Article 3 of the AU Mercenary Convention obligates all states to take all necessary steps to ensure mercenaries are arrested, prosecuted, and punished. In light of Africa's history of mercenary impunity, where many mercenaries have escaped justice by fleeing to countries that lack extradition agreements or by exploiting legal loopholes, the provision is very relevant because it ensures that mercenaries cannot simply relocate and continue their destabilizing activities elsewhere on the continent. A particularly important enforcement measure is found in Article 4, which declares that mercenarism is an offense against African unity and security. This article brands mercenary activity as a direct threat to the continent as a whole and not just individual states. This is particularly important because of the regional implications mercenary activities usually have, whereby

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[106]African Union Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, Art. 1.

mercenary activities in one country have a ripple effect and end up fueling instability in neighboring states.

While the AU Mercenary Convention remains a strong legal instrument, it faces similar issues to the UN Mercenary Convention. Its enforcement has been challenging, particularly due to the rise and evolution of traditional mercenaries into PMCs.

International Humanitarian Law: The Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1949 and supplemented by the Additional Protocols of 1977, form the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). They are designed to regulate armed conflict, protect non-combatants, and establish clear rules for the treatment of prisoners of war, wounded soldiers, and civilians. Unlike the other frameworks, the Geneva Conventions do not explicitly ban mercenaries, instead, they outline provisions that limit their legal protections, restrict their activities, and subject them to prosecution under international law.

The Third Geneva Convention explicitly outlines the criteria for people who qualify as lawful combatants. A lawful combatant must belong to the armed forces of a state party to the conflict, operate under a command structure responsible for enforcing IHL. wear a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance, and carry arms openly and conduct military operations in accordance with the laws of war.[107] Mercenaries, by their very definition, fail to meet these criteria because they operate outside the control of a

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[107]Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention), 1949, Article 4.

recognized national military and are primarily motivated by financial gain rather than allegiance to a state. As a result, they do not qualify for Prisoner of War (POW) protections under the Geneva Conventions, meaning that if mercenaries are captured, they can be prosecuted as criminals rather than being afforded the rights granted to soldiers of a state's armed forces.

Expanding on these combatant status rules, Article 47 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions provides the clearest definition of mercenaries under IHL and categorically denies them combatant or POW status. It defines a mercenary as any person who is specially recruited to take part in an armed conflict, takes direct part in hostilities, is motivated by private financial gain, is not a national of a party to the conflict, and is not part of a recognized military force or officially sent by a state.[108] By clearly setting out this definition, it reinforces the Geneva Conventions' stance on the fact that mercenaries are not entitled to the same legal protections as regular armed forces.

United Nations Working Group On The Use Of Mercenaries

The United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries is a critical international mechanism established to monitor, analyze, and provide recommendations on the impact of mercenaries and PMSCs on human rights and global security. This Working Group serves as a specialised body of independent experts saddled with the mandate of

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[108] Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I), 1977, Article 47.

investigating mercenary activities, proposing regulatory frameworks, and enhancing

accountability for human rights violations committed by mercenaries and PMSCs.[109] The

Working Group derives its authority from various international legal instruments,

including UN General Assembly Resolutions, Human Rights Council mandates, and

international conventions. Among these, the Mercenary Convention plays a central role in

shaping its work. One of the most significant legal foundations for the Working Group's

actions is UN General Assembly Resolution 44/34, which adopted the 1989 International

Convention Against Mercenaries. The resolution provides a universal definition of

mercenarism and also criminalizes mercenary activities. Under this resolution, the

Working Group is mandated to ensure that states not only ratify the Convention but also

incorporate its principles into domestic legislation.

International Code Of Conduct For Private Security Service Providers (ICoC)

This is a voluntary regulatory framework aimed at establishing global standards for the

conduct of PMCs and ensuring their compliance with IHL. It was established in 2010 by

Switzerland, in partnership with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed

Forces (DCAF) and other international stakeholders. It was developed in response to the

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[109] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mercenarism and Private Military & Security Companies, available at
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/MercenarismandPrivateMilitarySecurityCompanies.pdf (accessed 21 January 2025).

rapid increase in the privatization of security operations and the growing role of PMSCs in conflict zones.

The ICoC lays down strict rules on the use of force, making sure that PMSCs operate within the limits of necessity and proportionality. It also explicitly makes provision for the prohibition of torture, inhumane treatment, and enforced disappearances. This provision is particularly relevant in conflict zones such as Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic, where mercenary forces have been accused of detaining, torturing, and executing prisoners of war and civilians. A valid example is the Wagner Group, which has been implicated in war crimes, including torture and extrajudicial killings in Mali and Libya.[110]

By holding PMSCs accountable under the ICoC, states and international organizations can curb the abusive conduct of private military actors and enforce greater compliance with human rights norms.

IV- Role of the International System

The complex issues surrounding mercenaries and PMCs have prompted responses from various international and regional institutions, though with mixed results:

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[110] "Undermining Democracy and Exploiting Clients: The Wagner Group's Nefarious Activities in Africa", available at https://ctc.westpoint.edu/undermining-democracy-and-exploiting-clients-the-wagner-groups-nefarious-activities-in-africa/ (accessed 21 January 2025).

United Nations

The primary U.N. treaty on this issue is the *International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries* (1989) [The Mercenary Convention], which came into force in 2001. This convention criminalizes mercenary activity and obliges state parties to prevent and punish mercenarism.[111] However, its impact is limited by the fact that major military powers have not joined, especially concerning that none of the five permanent members of the UNSC (USA, Russia, China, UK, France) have signed or ratified the convention.[112] This lack of universal adoption undermines the convention's reach and reflects the reluctance of states that either employ PMCs or host foreign security companies to constrain their freedom of action.

Within the U.N. system, the Human Rights Council established a Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries (in 2005) as a special procedure to monitor and study mercenaries and PMCs from a human-rights perspective.[113] This expert panel has repeatedly sounded alarms that mercenaries and private military/security firms can *"destabilize the rule of law"*

[111] PSC Report, 'Mercenaries and Private Military Security: Africa's Thin Grey Line' *Institute for Security Studies* [2021] available at https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line#:~:text=contemporary%20conflicts%20and%20private%20security,been%20signed%20or%20ratified%20by (accessed 4 February 2025).
[112] PSC Report, 'Mercenaries and Private Military Security: Africa's Thin Grey Line' *Institute for Security Studies* [2021] available at https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line#:~:text=contemporary%20conflicts%20and%20private%20security,been%20signed%20or%20ratified%20by (accessed 4 February 2025).
[113] Abby Zeith, 'UN Panel: Blackwater Convictions Are the 'Exception, Not the Rule'' *Just Security* [2014] available at https://www.justsecurity.org/16881/panel-blackwater-convictions-exception-rule/#:~:text=The%20panel%2C%20officially%20titled%20%E2%80%9CThe,a%C2%A0draft%20convention%C2%A0aimed%20at%20doing%20so (accessed 4 February 2025).

and impede peoples' right to self-determination.[114] The Working Group has urged

stronger international regulation – in fact, it drafted a new convention on private military

and security companies in 2009, aiming to close legal gaps.[115] That proposal sought to

prohibit the outsourcing of inherently governmental functions (like combat) to private

actors and to clarify states' obligations for PMC conduct.[116] However, momentum for a

new binding treaty has stalled due to disagreement among U.N. member states. The

Working Group continues to investigate and report on mercenary activities – for example,

it has examined the presence of foreign fighters in conflicts like Ukraine and the

involvement of PMCs in exacerbating human rights abuses.[117]

The UNSC has also addressed mercenaries mainly in the context of threats to peace. It has

condemned the use of mercenaries in various resolutions – for instance, during the Liberia

and Côte d'Ivoire crises in the early 2000s, and more recently in resolutions calling for the

[114] Abby Zeith, 'UN Panel: Blackwater Convictions Are the 'Exception, Not the Rule'' *Just Security* [2014] available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/16881/panel-blackwater-convictions-exception-rule/#:~:text=The%20panel%2C%20off icially%20titled%20%E2%80%9CThe,a%C2%A0draft%20convention%C2%A0aimed%20at%20doing%20so (accessed 4 February 2025).
[115] Abby Zeith, 'UN Panel: Blackwater Convictions Are the 'Exception, Not the Rule'' *Just Security* [2014] available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/16881/panel-blackwater-convictions-exception-rule/#:~:text=The%20panel%2C%20off icially%20titled%20%E2%80%9CThe,a%C2%A0draft%20convention%C2%A0aimed%20at%20doing%20so (accessed 4 February 2025).
[116] Abby Zeith, 'UN Panel: Blackwater Convictions Are the 'Exception, Not the Rule'' *Just Security* [2014] available at
https://www.justsecurity.org/16881/panel-blackwater-convictions-exception-rule/#:~:text=The%20panel%2C%20off icially%20titled%20%E2%80%9CThe,a%C2%A0draft%20convention%C2%A0aimed%20at%20doing%20so (accessed 4 February 2025).
[117] PSC Report, 'Mercenaries and Private Military Security: Africa's Thin Grey Line' *Institute for Security Studies* [2021] available at
https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line#:~:text=contemporary %20conflicts%20and%20private%20security,been%20signed%20or%20ratified%20by (accessed 4 February 2025).

withdrawal of mercenaries from Libya. The Council has imposed sanctions on mercenary actors and individuals and entities involved in deploying mercenaries in violation of arms embargoes have been listed for asset freezes and travel bans. In U.N. peacekeeping and political missions, there is an internal policy not to hire private contractors for frontline military tasks, though the U.N. has employed private security companies for perimeter security, convoy protection, or logistical support in high-risk environments. This reliance has prompted the U.N. to develop guidelines to vet and monitor such contractors to ensure they respect U.N. rules of engagement and human rights standards.

African Union (and OAU Legacy)

African states have been at the forefront of anti-mercenary norms. The OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977) was one of the first regional treaties to outlaw mercenaries. It defines mercenary activity as an offense and requires parties to prosecute mercenaries or extradite them. This reflects Africa's painful experiences with mercenaries in conflicts from Congo to Angola and Nigeria in the 1960s–70s. Many African countries ratified the convention, and it remains in force under the African Union. The convention declares that mercenaries shall not be granted combatant or POW status and sets out that participating in armed conflict for private gain is punishable.[118] However, the 1977 convention did not anticipate today's corporate PMCs and has gaps in addressing them. The AU has acknowledged the need to update its approach – recent

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[118] Organization of African Unity Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, Art. 1(c) & 3.

discussions at the AU's Peace and Security Council have explored a "revised convention" to better cover private military and security companies operating on the continent.[119]

European Union

Within Europe, the use of PMCs has also prompted debate. The European Union as a bloc does not directly hire mercenaries, but it does contract private security for certain missions (especially civilian operations and to guard EU delegations abroad).[120] The European Parliament in 2017 warned that reliance on PMCs can affect the EU's reputation and local trust.[121] It passed a resolution calling for stricter controls, such as only using companies based in EU states (hence subject to EU law) and barring contractors from any combat roles or tasks that would replace national military personnel.[122] While

[119] African Union, 'Pan-African Parliament Committees delve into Revised OAU Convention for Eliminating Mercenaries in Africa' [29 June 2024] available at https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240629/pan-african-parliament-committees-delve-revised-oau-convention-eliminating#:~:text=Pan,However%2C (accessed 4 February 2025); Amani Africa, 'Discussion on the Issue of Private Military and Defence Companies (PMDC) Operating in Africa and Briefing on the Status of the Review of the OAU/AU Convention on Mercenaries in Africa' (30 November 2023) available at https://amaniafrica-et.org/discussion-on-the-issue-of-private-military-and-defence-companies-pmdc-operating-in-africa-and-briefing-on-the-status-of-the-review-of-the-oau-au-convention-on-mercenaries-in-africa/#:~:text=Discussion%20on%20the%20issue%20of,taking%20account%20of%20the (accessed 4 February 2025).
[120] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' [2023] available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf#:~:text=%E2%B8%BA7%20The%20EU%20and%20Private,to%20training%20of%20security%20forces (accessed 4 February 2025).
[121] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' [2023] available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf#:~:text=%E2%B8%BA7%20The%20EU%20and%20Private,to%20training%20of%20security%20forces (accessed 4 February 2025).
[122] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' [2023] available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf#:~:text=%E2%B8%BA7%20The%20EU%20and%20Private,to%20training%20of%20security%20forces (accessed 4 February 2025).

the EU has no unified law regulating PMCs across member states, it has shown growing concern over rogue PMCs like Wagner. In 2021, the EU noted that in limited cases, hiring security firms might be legitimate, but it took a firm stance against Wagner's activities. The EU imposed sanctions on Wagner Group for serious human rights and international humanitarian law violations.[123] In 2023, the EU went further, adding Wagner and its affiliates to its sanctions list for undermining Ukraine's sovereignty and for atrocities in Africa.[124] This marked the EU's recognition that certain PMCs pose a threat to international peace and EU interests. Additionally, individual European states have laws affecting PMCs: for example, Switzerland bans its citizens from working for PMCs abroad, and the UK and France prosecute those who join foreign conflicts as mercenaries.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

The **ICC** in The Hague prosecutes genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity – it does not explicitly list "mercenarism" as a crime. Thus, being a mercenary is not per se punishable under the Rome Statute. However, mercenaries or PMC personnel can face accountability under existing international criminal law if they commit war crimes or atrocities. For instance, if Wagner fighters commit murder or torture of civilians in a

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[123] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' [2023] available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf#:~:text=%E2%B8%BA7%20The%20EU%20and%20Private,to%20training%20of%20security%20forces (accessed 4 February 2025).
[124] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' [2023] available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf#:~:text=%E2%B8%BA7%20The%20EU%20and%20Private,to%20training%20of%20security%20forces (accessed 4 February 2025).

country that is party to the ICC (such as Mali or Central African Republic), the ICC could

theoretically charge those individuals for war crimes.[125] In practice, pursuing such cases is

challenging: it requires evidence and custody of suspects, and often the home states of

mercenaries (e.g., Russia) do not cooperate. The ICC is investigating situations like the

Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali, where PMC fighters are present,[126] but so far its

focus has been on major commanders or local perpetrators. One hurdle is linking crimes to

those who gave the orders – when a state uses a PMC as a proxy, it may hide the chain of

command. There have been calls for creative justice solutions, such as a special tribunal to

address mercenary crimes or for states to exercise universal jurisdiction (i.e., any country

prosecuting mercenaries for international crimes, as some laws allow).[127] Notably, the ICC

issued arrest warrants in the Ukraine conflict (for Russian officials involved in war crimes),

raising the possibility it could also target Wagner commanders if evidence allows.[128] While

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[125] Michael N. Schmitt and John C. Tramazzo, 'The Wagner Group's 'No Quarter' Order and International Law' *Lieber Institute* [2023] available at
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/wagner-groups-no-quarter-order-international-law/#:~:text=The%20Wagner%20Group%27s%20%E2%80%9CNo%20Quarter%E2%80%9D,Criminal%20Court%20could%20do (accessed 4 February 2025).

[126] Kimberly Marten, 'Russia's Use of the Wagner Group: Definitions, Strategic Objectives, and Accountability' *Testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security United States House of Representatives* [15 September 2022] available at
https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO06/20220921/115113/HHRG-117-GO06-Wstate-MartenK-20220921.pdf#:~:text=,focus%20in%20all%20three (accessed 4 February 2025).

[127] Michael N. Schmitt and John C. Tramazzo, 'The Wagner Group's 'No Quarter' Order and International Law' *Lieber Institute* [2023] available at
https://lieber.westpoint.edu/wagner-groups-no-quarter-order-international-law/#:~:text=The%20Wagner%20Group%27s%20%E2%80%9CNo%20Quarter%E2%80%9D,Criminal%20Court%20could%20do (accessed 4 February 2025).

[128] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, "Ukraine" [2025] available at
https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/ukraine/#:~:text=Ukraine%20,of%20war%20crimes%20and (accessed 4 February 2025).

the ICC offers a venue for some accountability, without a dedicated legal framework for mercenarism, much of the burden falls on national courts and ad hoc measures.

Key Legal, Ethical, and Operational Challenges

The involvement of mercenaries and PMCs in conflicts poses a host of challenges that the international system must contend with. A fundamental problem is the inadequacy of existing law. The very definition of 'mercenary' is narrow and outdated, leaving many PMC activities in a grey zone of legality.[129] Most PMCs insist their employees are not mercenaries under international law (often because they are nationals of the hiring state or not directly fighting in combat roles). This exploits definitional loopholes to evade the intent of anti-mercenary laws. Enforcement is another issue – few countries vigorously prosecute their citizens for mercenary activities abroad. International treaties like the U.N. Mercenary Convention lack universal adoption and have weak enforcement mechanisms.[130] There is also ambiguity in applying international humanitarian law (IHL) to PMC employees: are they combatants, civilians, or something else? If captured, they may be denied POW status, yet they are also not easily prosecutable just for participation. Holding PMCs accountable for misconduct is difficult; often, jurisdiction falls between the

[129] Lorenz Rubner and Lisa M. Cohen, '(Don't) Call 'Em Mercenaries: A Case for the Reintegration of Legal Terminology and Popular Parlance' *Völkerrechtsblog*, [2022] available at https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/dont-call-em-mercenaries/#:~:text=reports%20and%20governments%20 (accessed 4 February 2025).

[130] PSC Report, 'Mercenaries and Private Military Security: Africa's Thin Grey Line' *Institute for Security Studies* [2021] available at https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line#:~:text=contemporary%20conflicts%20and%20private%20security,been%20signed%20or%20ratified%20by (accessed 4 February 2025).

cracks (the host state may be unwilling or unable to prosecute, the home state may lack laws, and international courts have limited reach).

Also, mercenaries have long been viewed as morally dubious, fighting for profit rather than a cause. The resurgence of private armies raises ethical issues about the commodification of warfare. Human rights abuses by mercenaries and PMCs have been well documented, from Sierra Leone in the 1990s to Iraq, Syria, and CAR in recent times.[131] Civilians have been massacred or tortured by mercenaries who operated with little oversight or fear of repercussion. Unlike national soldiers, PMC fighters typically do not answer to military courts or codes of conduct. This lack of accountability and training in IHL can lead to violations of the laws of war. There is also an ethical concern that PMCs undermine the principle of state monopoly on legitimate violence. When governments outsource security, they may also be outsourcing moral responsibility.

Furthermore, the use of PMCs in active operations can present practical challenges for military effectiveness and security. Coordination and control are major issues – multiple armed actors with different loyalties on the same battlefield complicate command structures. Incidents of friendly fire or strategic discord have occurred when mercenaries pursue objectives not fully aligned with regular forces. For example, analysts note that in some African countries, the presence of Wagner contingents has caused frictions with

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[131] PSC Report, 'Mercenaries and Private Military Security: Africa's Thin Grey Line' *Institute for Security Studies* [2021] available at
https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line#:~:text=contemporary%20conflicts%20and%20private%20security,been%20signed%20or%20ratified%20by (accessed 4 February 2025).

national armies and undermined trust within the military hierarchy.[132] Another challenge is reliability: mercenaries may abandon the fight if not paid or if the risk outweighs the reward, which can leave clients in the lurch. The collapse of a PMC engagement (as when Mozambique's government parted ways with Wagner after failures) can create security vacuums. Post-conflict disarmament is also tricky – when a war ends, disbanding and disarming ex-mercenaries or integrating them into society is problematic, since they are not part of formal DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) programs the way national fighters might be.

Practical Solutions and Policy Initiatives

Addressing the challenges of mercenaries and PMCs requires a multifaceted approach at the international, regional, and national levels. The international community could revive efforts to establish a binding legal instrument specifically on PMCs. The draft convention prepared by the U.N. Working Group in 2009 provides a starting blueprint, aiming to close loopholes by defining inherently governmental functions that cannot be outsourced and by clarifying state responsibilities.[133] While political hurdles are high, even renewed

[132] Christopher Faulkner and Jaclyn Johnson and Zachary Streicher, 'Africa Faces the Unintended Consequences of Relying on Russian PMCs" available at https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/05/africa-russian-pmcs/ (accessed 4 February 2025).

[133] Abby Zeith, 'UN Panel: Blackwater Convictions Are the 'Exception, Not the Rule" *Just Security* [2014] available at https://www.justsecurity.org/16881/panel-blackwater-convictions-exception-rule/#:~:text=The%20panel%2C%20officially%20titled%20%E2%80%9CThe,a%C2%A0draft%20convention%C2%A0aimed%20at%20doing%20so (accessed 4 February 2025).

negotiations for a treaty can raise awareness and prod states into tightening their national laws. Separately, more countries should be encouraged to join the 1989 U.N. Mercenary Convention – its universality should be improved so that mercenarism is universally criminalized. Concurrently, the Geneva Conventions regime could be reinforced by developing guidelines on applying IHL to PMCs (for example, ensuring that PMC personnel are always formally accountable under either military law or civilian law for any violent acts in conflict). The International Criminal Court and other tribunals should also prioritize investigations of war crimes by mercenaries in conflicts under their scrutiny; a clear message that no fighter is beyond the law would have a deterrent effect. There are also calls to use universal jurisdiction more boldly – any state that captures mercenaries accused of atrocities could put them on trial, as was done for some mercenaries in Angola in the 1970s.

1. **Mercenaries and Private Military Companies in Conflict: Usage and Implications**

The claim to legitimate violence has long been understood to be the exclusive domain of states. Internally, the German sociologist Max Weber used this monopoly to define a state as a defines the state as a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory[134]; externally, international law on the use of force seeks to regulate what a state does. Mercenaries and the more recent

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[134]Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (1918)

phenomenon of 'private military companies' (PMCs), which are commercial firms offering

military services ranging from military training and advice to combat, challenge this neat

schema, a challenge that has achieved greater significance due to the rise in private

military activity following the end of the Cold War.[135]

The traditional response, driven in significant part by the post-colonial experience of

mercenaries in Africa, has been abolitionist[136]: prohibiting mercenarism or the use of

mercenaries. That approach has failed and bears little relevance to the more recent

experience of PMCs playing an increasingly accepted role in armed conflicts. Executive

Outcomes (a PMSC) turned around an orphaned conflict in Sierra Leone in the

mid-1990s[137]; Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) was instrumental in

shifting the balance of power in the Balkans, clearing the way for the Dayton negotiations.

Following the 2003 war in Iraq, PMC employees supporting coalition forces and

reconstruction efforts made up the second largest grouping of personnel after the United

States military.[138]

Whether or not this extensive use of PMCs is evolutionary or remains exceptional, the

growth of the industry shows no signs of slowing down. The privatization of military

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[135] Fabien Mathieu and Nick Dearden 'Corporate Mercenaries: The Threat of Private Military & Security Companies' *Review of African Political Economy*, [2007] (34) (114) 744-755

[136] Fabien Mathieu and Nick Dearden 'Corporate Mercenaries: The Threat of Private Military & Security Companies' *Review of African Political Economy*, [2007] (34) (114) 744-755

[137] Mateusz Maciąg, 'Engagement of Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone – Utility Assessment' *Security & Defence Quarterly* [2019] (27)

[138] Morten Hansen, 'War in Iraq: Demystifying The Privatised Military Industry' *Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Commentaries [2004] (57)*

functions reflects a general enthusiasm for the outsourcing of state capacities in the industrialized world, but is also a consequence of the growing reluctance on the part of key states to intervene in conflicts that are not of immediate strategic interest or where domestic support for intervention is lacking. In addition, non-state actors such as transnational corporations and humanitarian organizations operating in fragile states are increasingly targeted by non-state violence, prompting them to turn to the commercial sector for want of other security options.

Despite the growing attention paid to PMCs, there has been little sustained examination of the governance of such actors. The majority of the literature tends to focus on either descriptive accounts of incidents involving PMCs or normative arguments based on a relatively narrow human rights foundation. What has been absent is clarity about the phenomenon, in particular, the regulation that addresses both the problems of unaccountable actors wielding potentially lethal force and the interests of the consumers and suppliers of an increasingly established industry. A useful starting point in the discussion on regulation is, therefore, to focus not on the identity of the actor but on the nature of the acts requiring regulation and accountability. Concerns relate primarily to the use of potentially lethal force by PMC personnel, but also to the impact these actors may have on the strategic balance of a conflict. Most of the existing regulations - notably international humanitarian law - are directed primarily towards the standing armies of states. As private actors take on more responsibilities, a basic question that arises is the

relationship between traditional mercenaries and PMCs and whether PMCs should be banned altogether.[139] Proponents of abolition argue that PMCs are old-style mercenaries in a modern guise, suggesting that their very nature and their use are morally problematic. Some scholars suggest that ethical concerns regarding PMCs should serve as an additional check on their use alongside regulation, advising both regulators and the industry to take these ethical worries seriously. Serious analysis in this area is often frustrated by the lack of agreement as to what PMCs actually do. Some propose theoretical models of regulation, establishing the tightest oversight of military operations aimed at altering the strategic environment. A combination of licensing and registration regimes at the national level, complemented by international mechanisms, is suggested as an effective approach.

The implications of PMCs in different regional contexts further highlight these challenges. In Africa, PMCs such as Executive Outcomes supported governments challenged by powerful rebel groups. In Angola, EO was contracted in 1993 by the government to train its armed forces and assist in operations against the UNITA. EO's involvement contributed to significant military gains, including the recapture of strategic locations such as the diamond-rich town of Cafunfo. Nonetheless, the financial burden was substantial, with contracts reportedly worth around $40 million per year. The government's reliance on a foreign PMC raised political concerns regarding sovereignty and the legitimacy of using

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[139] Simon Chesterman & Chia Lehnardt (eds.), From Mercenaries to Market: The Rise and Regulation of Private Military Companies (Oxford University Press),

mercenaries in internal conflicts.[140] In Iraq, PMCs complicated civil-military relations, allowing governments to evade public accountability. Notably, the 2007 Nisour Square massacre, where Blackwater contractors killed 17 Iraqi civilians. That incident underscored the complexities and risks associated with employing PMCs in conflict zones, showing the challenges in ensuring accountability and adherence to the rule of law.[141]

2. The Role of PMCs and Mercenaries in Modern Conflicts and Case studies of PMCs in conflict zones

Libya

The collapse of centralized authority after the 2011 uprising against Muammar Gaddafi transformed Libya into a battleground for various armed groups, including PMCs and mercenary outfits. In the ensuing power vacuum, both domestic factions and foreign actors employed mercenaries to gain a strategic edge. General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), especially, relied on a mix of local militias and externally sourced mercenaries to bolster its fighting capacity. The mercenaries provided critical combat support, including direct engagement with rival factions, intelligence gathering, and logistical operations, and their ability to operate with a degree of autonomy allowed them to execute rapid offensive and defensive maneuvers, often outpacing traditional military units in terms of flexibility and responsiveness. This contributed significantly to the

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[140]   A. Vines, "Mercenaries and the Privatisation of Security in Africa" in G. Mills and J. Stremlau, *The Privatisation of Security in Africa*, (SAIIA: South Africa, 1999), p. 54
[141]   International Code of Conduct Association, "The Nisour Square Massacre", available at https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/ (accessed 1st April, 2025).

shifting balance of power in the fragmented conflict landscape.[142] This radical use and involvement of PMCs has been met with international condemnation. UNSC Resolution 1970[143] and subsequent international reports have condemned the destabilizing effect of mercenary forces in Libya in tghe wake of the post-Gaddafi transition.

Ukraine

Since the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, and with the subsequent escalation in 2022, PMCs and mercenary groups have been essential in the development of the conflict. The most notable PMC in this conflict is the Wagner Group, a Russian-affiliated private military company that has been involved in high-intensity combat situations, supplementing the conventional forces of the Russian state. Investigative reports have repeatedly accused the Wagner Group of executing Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians without due process. In several documented incidents, captured Ukrainian soldiers were reportedly summarily executed rather than detained for trial, an act that constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law. A report published in March 2023 by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine documented Russian armed forces and Wagner Group executions of 15 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) during the first year of the full-scale invasion. In its February to

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[142]   Fabien Mathieu and Nick Dearden 'Corporate Mercenaries: The Threat of Private Military & Security Companies' *Review of African Political Economy*, [2007] (34) (114) 744-755

[143]   United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970 S/RES/1970 (2011)

July 2023 periodic report, the UN documented the summary execution of six Ukrainian POWs. A follow-up report published in March 2024, covering the three previous months, identified 12 reported episodes of executions of at least 32 captured POWs.[144]

Afghanistan

PMCs such as Blackwater (now Academi) and Triple Canopy have been implicated in incidents where their use of force during convoy protection and patrol operations resulted in civilian casualties. In May 2006, a Blackwater convoy in northern Baghdad encountered a roadside bomb. Following the explosion, Blackwater personnel reportedly engaged in "uncontrolled fire," leading to the death of an Iraqi ambulance driver.[145] Similarly, in July 2006, there was a convoy operation by Triple Canopy, an American PMC, on Baghdad's "Route Irish". The assignment was to escort an employee of the military-service provision firm KBR, Inc., from the Baghdad International Airport to the relative security of the Green Zone. According to statements from colleagues, one of the employees expressed a desire to harm someone and subsequently shot at a civilian truck that was approaching the contractor's convoy at an unthreateningly low speed. The contractors made no effort to determine whether any civilians were injured in the incident, but proceeded to the airport to meet the arriving KBR executive. On the return

[144] UNOHCHR, 'Treatment Of Prisoners Of War And Persons Hors De Combat In The Context Of The Armed Attack By The Russian Federation Against Ukraine.' (2023) available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/23-03-24-ukraine-thematic-report-pows-en.pdf (accessed on 1st April, 2025)

[145] Gregg Carlstrom, 'Excessive force from Blackwater' *Al Jazeera* (2010) available at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/10/25/excessive-force-from-blackwater?utm (accessed 1st April, 2025)

trip to the Green Zone, some of the Triple Canopy contractors noticed an ambulance at the scene of the earlier shooting, but rather than stopping to determine what damage had been caused in the previous incident, the convoy continued toward its destination. Later on, the convoy overtook an unthreatening taxi and fired several shots into the taxi's windshield, potentially causing civilian casualties.[146]

3. The Private Armies And Their Footprints in History's Warzones

The salaries of Private Military Contractors in the US range from $12,878 to $855,468, with a median salary of $103,487 per year. On the other hand, the estimated total salary for a Soldier in the US Army is $63,816 per year.[147] A PMC soldier may also receive benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave. The compensation can be even higher for soldiers with specialized skills, such as language fluency, and for high-risk assignments. All these benefts make PMCs a much more appealing prospect to trained individuals as opposed to national militaries.

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[146] Richard Morgan, 'Professional Military Firms under International Law' *Chicago Journal of International Law [2008] (9)*

[147] Catherine Shannon, 'Unveiling The Earnings: A Deep Dive Into Private Military Contractor Salaries In 2025' *The City Guards* (2025) available at https://thecityguards.com/private-military-contractor-salaries/?utm (accessed 1st April, 2025)

G4S

G4S's involvement in global security operations has sparked significant controversy, particularly concerning its role in politically sensitive and conflict-prone regions. The company's operations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where it provided security services to Israeli settlements in the West Bank and supplied equipment to Israeli prisons holding Palestinian political prisoners, have drawn criticism from human rights organizations. In 2007, G4S Israel entered into an agreement with the Israeli Prison Authority to supply security systems and services across major Israeli prisons and detention facilities. G4S currently manages security for detention centers and prisons such as the Al-Moskobiyeh and Al-Jalameh detention and interrogation centers which are allegedly well-known for their use of torture, including of children. Palestinians are held in these detention centers under administrative detention, without charge or trial, on renewable six-month detention orders.[148]

Beyond geopolitics, most notably in its handling of contracts for electronic tagging of offenders and security for the London 2012 Olympics. The company faced significant criticism for its failure to provide adequate security personnel for the London Olympics, necessitating the deployment of additional military personnel and resulting in substantial financial losses un excess of £70m.[149] Further scrutiny arose from the mismanagement of

[148] 'Stop G4S' *Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association* available at
https://www.addameer.org/Campaign/StopG4S?utm (accessed 1st April, 2025)
[149] 'G4S - a global security giant with a chequered record' BBc News (2017) available at
https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-41123840?utm (accessed 1st April, 2025)

electronic tagging contracts in the UK, where G4S was found to have overcharged the government for monitoring offenders, including instances where individuals had already returned to prison or were deceased.

These issues parallel wider concerns about the effectiveness and reliability of PMCs in high-stakes security operations. Critics argue that while PMCs can enhance operational capacity, their profit-driven motives can lead to cost-cutting measures that compromise security and ethical standards.

The Wagner Group

The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company (PMC) linked to Yevgeniy Prigozhin, has been involved in various global conflicts, often acting as an unofficial arm of Russian foreign policy. The group has operated extensively in Syria, supporting the Assad regime through combat operations, training, and advisory roles.[150] In Libya, Wagner has provided military backing to Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA).[151] Beyond direct combat, the group has been accused of serious human rights abuses, including the use of chemical weapons, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and war crimes in countries

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[150] Samer al-Ahmed and Mohammed Hassan, 'Syria Is Where The Conflict Between Wagner And The Russian Government Began' *Middle East Institute (2023) available at* https://mei.edu/publications/syria-where-conflict-between-wagner-and-russian-government-began?utm (accessed, 1st April, 2025)

[151] Andrew McGregor, 'Russian Military Intelligence Takes Over Wagner Operations in Libya' *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (2024) available at https://jamestown.org/program/russian-military-intelligence-takes-over-wagner-operations-in-libya/?utm (accessed, 1st April, 2025)

such as the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mali.[152] Reports indicate that Wagner

operated in Sudan in exchange for access to lucrative gold mining operations, and in Mali,

it has been implicated in the execution of 300 unarmed civilians. In Ukraine, Wagner has

played a critical role since 2014, initially supporting separatists in Donbas and later

contributing significantly to Russia's full-scale invasion. U.S. estimates suggest that the

group has deployed 50,000 personnel in Ukraine, comprising 10,000 contractors and

40,000 convicts recruited from Russian prisons. Wagner is believed to make up 10% of the

Russian military forces in the conflict. The group has also been accused of purchasing

weapons from North Korea.[153]

It must be noted that the Wagner Group has played a significant role in conflicts across

Africa, often securing lucrative resource deals in exchange for military support. In the

Central African Republic (CAR), Wagner has been deeply involved in training government

forces and providing security to protect the regime of President Faustin-Archange

Touadéra. Reports suggest that Wagner operatives have participated in combat

operations against rebel groups and have been accused of extrajudicial killings, torture,

and other human rights abuses. The group has also taken control of key mining operations,

particularly in the gold and diamond sectors, using these resources to fund its

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[152] 'Wagner Group Operations in Africa' *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2022)* available at
http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep42841 (accessed, 1st April, 2025)
[153] 'Accountability for Crimes of Personnel of the Wagner Group in Ukraine' *Justice Initiative (2023)* available at
https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/a8de622f-bfbf-4cf5-99ba-f5b98b34f4ad/accountability-for-crimes-of-perso
nnel-of-the-wagner-group-in-ukraine-en-20231108.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

operations.[154] The group has engaged in counterinsurgency operations against jihadist groups but has also been accused of massacres and mass executions, including the reported killing of 300 unarmed civilians in Moura. Wagner's presence has intensified violence in the region, with many human rights organizations condemning its actions. Wagner's activities in Africa reflect a broader trend of PMCs being used as tools of geopolitical influence, particularly by Russia.[155]

Blackwater (Academi)

In the early 2000s, Blackwater, now rebranded as Academi, emerged as one of the most recognizable PMCs during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Blackwater was contracted to provide security for convoys, protect key installations, and support military operations in a volatile and dangerous environment. Its role in the Iraq War was highly controversial, with the company being accused of several incidents of misconduct, including the killing of unarmed Iraqi civilians. In 2007, Blackwater guards were involved in a shooting in Baghdad's Nisour Square that left 17 Iraqi civilians dead and 20 others injured. Earlier, in 2006, an incident involving Blackwater occurred in which a Blackwater contractor shot and killed an Iraqi vice-presidential guard. This incident led to a diplomatic crisis between

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[154] Jean-Ferdinand Koena, 'Thousands Rally Against Wagner Mercenaries In Central African Republic' *The Associated Press* (2025) available at https://apnews.com/article/central-african-republic-russia-wagner-d955ae10660d8dc5efdb258dd067be13?utm (accessed 1st April 2025).
[155] Council on Foreign Relations, *What Russia's Wagner Group Is Doing in Africa*, available at: https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-russias-wagner-group-doing-africa (accessed 25 March 2025).

the United States and Iraq, and the Iraqi government demanded that Blackwater be expelled from the country. The incident also raised questions about the legal status of private military contractors operating in Iraq, as they were not subject to the same rules and regulations as U.S. military personnel.[156]

Blackwater had a presence in Afghanistan when the US was on the ground in the country. Blackwater also provided private security services to various clients in the region, including oil companies and other businesses. According to TRT World, Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater, carried out a number of activities to explore and extract natural resources in Afghanistan in 2018. His proposal focused on accessing rare earth minerals, particularly lithium, in some of the country's most volatile regions, aiming to secure valuable resources for the United States. Prince's plan involved privatizing military operations in Afghanistan, suggesting the deployment of private contractors to stabilize areas rich in minerals, thereby facilitating their extraction. It also included the establishment of a $500 million fund aimed at investing in minerals essential for electric car batteries, such as lithium, from regions including Afghanistan.[157]

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[156] TRT World Research Centre, *Private Military Companies: The Evolving Role of Mercenaries in Modern Conflicts* (Istanbul: TRT World Research Centre, 2023), 10, available at:https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Private-Military_V3.pdf. (accessed, 1st April 2025)

[157] Antony Loewenstein, 'Afghan Minerals in the crosshairs of Blackwater's Erik Prince' *TRT World (2019)* available at https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/afghan-minerals-in-the-crosshairs-of-blackwater-s-erik-prince-21655?utm (accessed, 1st April 2025)

4. Challenges and Impacts on Local Populations and Sovereignty

Despite claims that PMCs support national security and stability, the contrary as often been the outcome of the use of PMCs in conflicts. In both democratic and autocratic states, PMCs contribute to the weakening of state institutions. Governments with fragile institutions or those where the rule of law is easily challenged tend to turn to private armies as a logical choice. However, the expansion of private military entities into areas traditionally controlled by the state raises serious concerns. PMCs frequently recruit in environments where large numbers of armed forces personnel are being demobilized, where access to arms and military equipment is poorly regulated, and where state institutions are weak. These factors make PMCs particularly problematic for countries emerging from conflict.

One of the primary challenges associated with PMCs is legitimacy and accountability. Many PMCs operate in regions with weak legal systems and inadequate oversight mechanisms, limiting the possibility of holding them accountable for their actions. Their status under international law is ambiguous, making it difficult to classify them as combatants under the Geneva Conventions. The lack of distinction between legal private security firms and illegal private military companies allows states to deploy them arbitrarily. At best, PMC employees can be prosecuted for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide-related offenses that are notoriously difficult to prosecute. The ambiguous legal status of PMCs has, in some cases, led to immunity agreements between

PMCs and contracting states, fostering a culture of impunity where some PMCs operate with little regard for human rights and international law.[158]

Another significant challenge is the performance of PMCs. While they often benefit from experienced and specialized personnel, their effectiveness can be undermined by their transactional approach to the use of force. Their primary motivation is financial, which means they are unlikely to engage in addressing the deeper political and economic causes of the conflicts they operate in.[159] This focus on short-term gains rather than long-term stability can limit their ability to contribute meaningfully to conflict resolution. Furthermore, the delegation of military functions to private companies increases state dependency on the private sector for security, and this reliance, in turn, undermines the authority and capacity of national security forces. In extreme cases, PMCs may compete with traditional armed forces for financial resources and personnel, as seen in Russia.[160] The privatization of military functions can result in fragmented security structures that weaken national control over military operations.

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[158] European Union Institute for Security Studies, 'Private Military Companies' available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_10_Private%20military%20companies%20%281%29.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

[159] Fabien Mathieu and Nick Dearden 'Corporate Mercenaries: The Threat of Private Military & Security Companies' *Review of African Political Economy*, [2007] (34) (114) 744-755

[160] Kimberly Marten, 'Russia's Use of the Wagner Group: Definitions, Strategic Objectives, and Accountability' *Testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security United States House of Representatives* [2022] available at https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO06/20220921/115113/HHRG-117-GO06-Wstate-MartenK-20220921.pdf#:~:text=,focus%20in%20all%20three (accessed 1st April 2025).

Finally, the business model of PMCs is fundamentally tied to the existence or threat of conflict. Their operations depend on sustained instability, and some, particularly those closer to the mercenary model, have little interest in fostering peace. In some cases, PMCs have taken control of regions and established their own legitimacy, further exacerbating instability. The risk that PMCs may prolong conflicts or manipulate situations to justify their continued presence is a significant concern for global security and peace.[161]

5. Human Rights Abuses by Mercenaries and PMCs (Wagner Group case study)

The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company (PMC), has been implicated in widespread human rights abuses across multiple conflict zones, including Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Its operations, often aligned with Russian geopolitical interests, have been characterized by extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and indiscriminate violence. Wagner's activities not only destabilize regions but also lead to severe human rights violations against civilians and combatants alike. Since May 2014, Wagner has played a pivotal role in destabilizing eastern Ukraine, assisting pro-Russian separatists in seizing control of towns and key infrastructures.[162] Wagner operatives have

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[161] Council of the European Union, 'The Business of War – Growing Risks from Private Military Companies' (Analysis and Research Team, 31 August 2023) available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

[162] 'Accountability for Crimes of Personnel of the Wagner Group in Ukraine' *Justice Initiative (2023)* available at https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/a8de622f-bfbf-4cf5-99ba-f5b98b34f4ad/accountability-for-crimes-of-personnel-of-the-wagner-group-in-ukraine-en-20231108.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

been accused of carrying out targeted killings and retaliatory attacks against disloyal

pro-Russian battalions. The group was involved in the downing of a Ukrainian military

aircraft in June 2014, as well as the storming of Luhansk Airport and Debaltseve.[163] These

actions demonstrate a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law. Wagner's role

in Ukraine escalated further in 2022, particularly during the occupation of Bucha, where

Russian forces, including Wagner mercenaries, committed mass executions of civilians.

The massacre in Bucha, widely condemned as a war crime, highlighted Wagner's use of

indiscriminate and brutal force in the execution of its objectives.[164] Additionally, Wagner's

presence in Syria has been marked by excessive brutality, particularly in

counterinsurgency operations against the Islamic State (IS). Reports indicate that Wagner

operatives were responsible for summary executions, torture, and other forms of

inhumane treatment of detainees and local populations. Beyond direct military

operations, Wagner's involvement in Syria extended to economic exploitation. Evro Polis,

a company controlled by Wagner's founder Yevgeny Prigozhin, secured lucrative deals

with the Syrian Energy Ministry, receiving 25% of oil and gas profits from recaptured

fields.[165] This economic arrangement underscores how Wagner's military campaigns are

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[163] Ryan Benasoc, 'Invisible Russian Armies: Wagner Group in Ukraine, Syria and the Central African Republic' *Master's Theses for The University of San Francisco* (2021)1384.

[164] 'The Wagner Group and other Mercenaries in the PAM Regions and the Sahel' *Parliamentary Assembly Of The Mediterranean* (2025) available at
https://pam.int/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/PAM-EN-Background-Note-on-Wagner-Group-in-the-PAM-Regions-and-Sahel-1.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

[165] 'Wagner's Global Operations: War, Oil and Gold' *Reuters* (2023) available at
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/wagners-global-operations-war-oil-gold-2023-08-24/ (accessed 1st April 2025).

intertwined with profiteering, further exacerbating the suffering of local populations.

Wagner's operations in Libya began in 2020, when the group provided military support to General Khalifa Haftar's forces, partially financed by the United Arab Emirates. Wagner fighters were accused of violating international law by using landmines and explosive devices in civilian areas, leading to indiscriminate harm to non-combatants. A United Nations investigative report covering the period from 2021 to 2022 confirmed that Wagner's actions in Libya breached international law.[166] By 2022, many Wagner mercenaries were withdrawn from Libya and redirected to Ukraine. However, those who remained continued to exert influence, further destabilizing the region and perpetuating cycles of violence.[167]

V- Conclusion

The rise of mercenaries and private military companies in conflict zones presents a complex challenge to international peace and security. While these entities may offer specialized military capabilities and logistical support, their presence often undermines state sovereignty, escalates conflicts, and complicates efforts to enforce accountability for human rights violations. The international community must confront this problem with a balanced approach that addresses both the legal and practical dimensions of their use. By

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[166] Abdulkader Assad, 'UN Report Unveils Wagner Group's Violations In Support Of Haftar In Libya' *The Libya Observer* (2022) available at https://libyaobserver.ly/news/un-report-unveils-wagner-groups-violations-support-haftar-libya?utm (accessed 1st April 2025).

[167] European Union Institute for Security Studies, 'Private Military Companies', available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_10_Private%20military%20companies%20%281%29.pdf (accessed 1st April 2025).

fostering international cooperation, enhancing legal frameworks, and holding violators accountable, the global community can work toward mitigating the destabilizing effects of mercenaries and PMCs.

VI- Further Research

- Are existing international legal frameworks, such as the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries, sufficient to regulate PMCs effectively?

- How can regional organizations, such as the African Union or the European Union, complement UNSC efforts in regulating PMCs?

- Should the UNSC advocate for the creation of an international regulatory body to monitor and control PMC activities?

- Should the definition of mercenaries and PMCs be updated in international law to reflect their modern operations and structures?

VII - Annotated Bilbliography

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Zeith highlights a UN panel's concerns over the lack of accountability for PMSCs, noting that the Blackwater convictions are rare exceptions rather than the norm.

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Amani Africa, 'Discussion on the Issue of Private Military and Defence Companies (PMDC) Operating in Africa and Briefing on the Status of the Review of the OAU/AU Convention on Mercenaries in Africa' (30 November 2023) available at https://amaniafrica-et.org/discussion-on-the-issue-of-private-military-and-defence-companies-pmdc-operating-in-africa-and-briefing-on-the-status-of-the-review-of-the-oa

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This report explores Africa's regulatory challenges with PMDCs and the AU's ongoing review of the OAU Convention.

A. Vines, 'Mercenaries and the Privatisation of Security in Africa' in G. Mills and J. Stremlau (eds), *The Privatisation of Security in Africa*, (SAIIA: South Africa, 1999), 54

Vines examines the rise of mercenaries and private security actors in Africa, focusing on their impact on sovereignty and conflict dynamics.

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https://www.chaire-eppp.org/files_chaire/10_14_2009_TCE_paper.pdf (accessed 5 February 2025)

The authors analyze the growth of the private military industry post-Cold War, highlighting how market dynamics and state needs shaped its evolution.

Christopher Faulkner and Jaclyn Johnson and Zachary Streicher, 'Africa Faces the Unintended Consequences of Relying on Russian PMCs" available at https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/05/africa-russian-pmcs/ (accessed 4 February 2025).

The authors discuss the growing reliance on Russian private military companies (PMCs) in Africa, highlighting unintended consequences like destabilization and foreign influence.

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https://icoca.ch/case-studies/the-nisour-square-massacre/ (accessed 21 January 2025).

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tate-MartenK-20220921.pdf#:~:text=,focus%20in%20all%20three (accessed 4

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