

GLOBAL RISE OF PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES AND SUSTAINABLE SECURITY OF AFRICAN STATES: NIGERIA IN FOCUS

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Abstract

The increasing adoption of Private Military Companies (PMCs) globally has created heightened tension, primarily among major powers. The existence and activities of the Russian-linked Wagner Group significantly feed this hostility. Despite the growing adoption of PMCs on the African continent, their utility is hotly debated. With Nigeria in focus, this article which relies hugely on desk research seeks to address two primary questions: First, are PMCs an asset or a liability concerning the sustainable security of African states? Second, should African countries opt for PMCs considering the contemporary major-power rivalry surrounding their operations? The article argues that PMCs should not be seen as nation-builders but as any other profit-seeking private corporation with a limited role in breaking cycles of violence and creating opportunities for long-term political solutions. On the question of the potential impact of great powers rivalries on African states, the article advises Nigeria and other African countries should stay clear of PMCs including the infamous Wagner Group.

Keywords: Private Military Companies (PMCs), Wagner Group, Nigeria, Insecurity, Major-Power Rivalry.

Introduction

The rebranding of mercenaries into multinational security entrepreneurs has been accompanied by a contemporary surge in acceptance and deployment globally. However, this boom in acceptance and patronage has come with attendant challenges. The existence of mercenaries is not a contemporary phenomenon, nonetheless. "Throughout recorded history, mercenary soldiers have appeared as central players in organized warfare" (Taulbee 1998, p. 145). The mercenary trade is as "old as war itself" (Singer 2003; McFate 2014). History points to the extensive deployment of mercenaries in warfare. The establishment of nation-states and the attendant rise of national armies are important factors that have led to a decline in the appeal and acceptance of mercenaries. Even in biblical times, mercenary recruitment was a prominent feature of conflicts. The book of 2 Samuel, chapter 10, verse 6, of the International Standard Version of the Holy Bible, records that "when the Ammonites realized that they had created quite a stink with David, they hired 20,000 Aramean mercenaries from Beth-Rehob and Zobah, along with the king of Maacah and 1,000 men, and 12,000 men from Tob." Following the same dynamics, when Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022, amongst other requests, the government of Ukraine appealed for the assistance of foreign fighters to repel Russian aggression (McKernan, 2022).

Security beyond the state connotes the provision of traditional security and military services by non-state actors. By implication, the state no longer holds the monopoly over providing for its security. In the face of a proximate or remote threat, states have had to resort to hiring mercenaries. It is pertinent at this point to differentiate between Private Military Companies (PMCs) like ACADEMI (originally Blackwater USA), The Wagner Group, the popular (but now defunct) Executive Outcomes, and Sandline International on the one hand, and the comparatively less controversial Private Security Companies PSCs

like the affiliates of the popular G4S Plc (formerly Group 4 Securicor) on the other. While PSCs are private security companies that provide "passive security" (Brooks, 2000) services to clients in high-risk locations or industries (like financial institutions or high-end retail outlets, etc.), private military companies (PMCs) are enterprises that provide conventional military services, including training and active combat. Their clientele base consists of states, multinational organizations (primarily in the extractive industry), and international non-governmental organizations.

In recent years, Nigeria has been confronted with increasing levels of violence and insecurity most notably in the form of an insurgency led by Boko Haram (and related splinter groups) in the north-east, banditry and kidnappings in the north-west and north-central, and separatist agitations in the south-east regions. To address these security threats, there is an alternate security model that proposes an infusion of private contractors to the traditional state-centric approach to tackling insecurity in Nigeria (Kinsey & Krieg, 2021). Here, the PMCs are meant to complement the state's effort. The idea of hiring PMCs in Nigeria is to help the country's military and security forces which have been stretched thin by several security problems, do their jobs better.

The following points must be taken into account when deciding if it's important to think about modern global dynamics in the private market for force in Nigeria. Firstly, security beyond the state thrives to meet security vacuums that traditional military and paramilitary outfits are unable to effectively contain or resolve. These may manifest in the form of protracted civil wars, insurgencies, banditry, regional secessionism, protection needs for weak and unpopular regimes, etc. For Angola and Sierra Leone, a long-drawn Civil War was the factor that compelled them to patronize mercenaries. In the Nigerian case, it was the intractable Boko Haram insurgency, the attendant Chibok kidnapping, and its potential impact on the 2015 general elections. The federal government of Nigeria patronised the services of Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment, and Protection (STTEP) (Adamo, 2020; Kinsey & Krieg, 2021; Varin, 2018; Pfaff & Mienie, 2019). STTEP is a Private Military Contractor founded by Eeben Barlow. The same veteran was the key promoter of the popular, now-defunct Executive Outcomes and Sandline International. The predecessor companies (Executive Outcomes and Sandline International) had a major footprint in the Angolan and Sierra Leone Civil wars. It must be recognized that, despite the prominent military roles the Nigerian Army has played in major Civil Wars on the African continent (particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone), contemporary realities have compelled Nigeria to patronise a PMC. So, it is not out of place to discuss the implications of the global dynamics in the market for force concerning Nigeria, particularly when the country still faces more security challenges than those that compelled it to explore the private market for force in 2015.

We must also realize that Nigeria is already patronizing the private market for force in the areas of petroleum pipeline surveillance and security. There are three private companies contracted for the surveillance and security of Petroleum Pipelines in the Niger Delta area. The Director General of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited has reiterated the need for Nigeria to hire private contractors to man its oil pipeline network nationwide due to massive oil theft (Izuaka, 2022). Only recently, after the embarrassing attack and kidnapping of passengers, the Federal Government contracted the security of the Abuja-Kaduna Railway to two private security outfits, Messers Al-Ahali Security Guards Limited and Messers Seaguard Security and Protective Company Limited (Aro, 2022). Traditionally, the protection of pipelines and other government facilities has been within the purview of Nigeria's national military and paramilitary outfits. Contracting these responsibilities to private firms raises the prospect of greater privatization of conventional military and paramilitary duties.

Furthermore, statements from military and political players point to the likelihood that the patronage of

PMCs is still under debate. The military has mainly leaned towards reassuring Nigerians of their ability to deal with security challenges while opposing the recruitment of PMCs. The Chief of Defense Staff has assured Nigerians that the military is capable of arresting the array of security challenges the country is grappling with while harping on the fact that the government will not hire mercenaries (Ayeni, 2022). In contrast, political leaders, particularly in the most affected states, have openly called for the deployment of PMCs (Majeed, 2022). The Governor of Borno State has made calls for the involvement of PMCs in the Boko Haram counterinsurgency effort (Olatunji, 2021; Idowu, 2020). After the terrorist attack on the Abuja-Kaduna Railway and the kidnapping of passengers for ransom, the Governor of Kaduna State openly threatened to hire mercenaries to tackle insecurity (Angbulu, 2022). Yet, constitutionally, only the federal government has the power to recruit mercenaries. However misplaced, the threat points to a deep-seated frustration and perplexity concerning the security situation facing the governors.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the mercenary option is still under consideration. This paper is a contribution to the debate on the overall utility of PMCs in African states. It further attempts to unravel the likely impacts of the major power struggle over PMCs, on the national security of PMC-dependent African states as well as the relevance of the model for Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

The term "mercenary" has no universally accepted definition among experts. More often than not, an effort to correctly characterize a mercenary will lead to comparing them with the military. The word "mercenary" derives from the Latin word 'mercnrius' which means "hireling," or a person who would render service for money. The term "soldier" has its roots in the Latin word *solidus*, which is the name of the gold coin used to pay troops who served in the Roman army. Soldier refers to the real monetary payment for combat duty, whereas the term mercenary's etymological root is connected to the act of delivering services (including combat-related services) for financial rewards. Soldiers fight for the interests of their states and the concept of loyalty, as opposed to monetary or material incentives, is what primarily drives them. Mercenaries, on the other hand, are private individuals who are hired to carry out tasks that are historically military, most of the time in regions that are not their own, and largely for the sake of monetary or material benefits (McFate, 2019). This is not to infer that mercenaries are completely politically or ideologically detached from the causes they fight for; it simply means that monetary and material considerations are normally stronger than political or ideological considerations. In the same vein, this does not also imply that soldiers are not concerned with their entitlements. According to McFate (2019), some other distinguishing characteristics of mercenaries are that they are organized in the form of legal business entities and thus they are expeditionary. They often use force in a military style rather than a law enforcement way, and they are an example of the monetization of military conflict. Singer (2008) aptly defines modern-day PMCs as "corporate bodies that specialize in the provision of military skills, including combat operation, strategic planning, intelligence, risk assessment, operational support, training, and technical skills."

National security refers to a country's ability to protect its people, territory, institutions, and principles against internal and external threats such as military aggression, terrorism, espionage, cyber-attacks, economic disruption, natural disasters, and pandemics. It encompasses a wide range of activities and policies, such as intelligence gathering, border security, defense planning and procurement, disaster management, and diplomacy. National security is a fluid and complicated concept that evolves in response to new threats, technologies, and geopolitical circumstances, and it represents a state's evaluation of its strategic interests and aims (Jentleson, 2010). In African states, national security is a

major concern for both domestic and international stakeholders due to the frequent occurrence of internal and external security threats such as political instability, terrorism, insurgency, ethnic and religious conflicts, natural disasters, and infectious diseases (Devermont, 2021). National security and economic development are interconnected. The absence of sustainable national security can hinder economic growth and sustainable development (Ifeoma et al., 2015). To address these threats and promote sustainable development, African states must have robust security policies and strategies that address the root causes of insecurity and build resilience against potential threats.

African states have progressively taken the lead in bringing peace through political efforts like mediation, diplomacy, and, when these fail, the supply of peacekeeping forces over the previous two decades (Cilliers, 2021). However, the growing fragmentation of political authority across societies, as well as the increasing influence of armed sub-state actors, fragmented loyalties of official military and security groups, crises in food security and public health, and growing vigilantism in response to the inability of weakened and often discredited state security agencies to provide protection, have all contributed to the complex security challenges faced by African nations today (Aning, 2007). The use of PMCs by African states has become a controversial topic in recent years, with concerns raised about their effectiveness and their impact on state sovereignty, human rights, and accountability (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2014). As a result, it is essential to appraise the impact of PMCs on African states' national security, taking into account the specific security challenges facing these states and the potential risks and benefits of utilizing PMCs for security purposes.

The 'private market for force' (PMF) refers to the phenomenon of private entities offering military and security services to clients, typically governments, individuals, or corporations. These private actors often employ former military personnel, and the services offered can range from consulting and training to direct military intervention. The rise of the PMF is often attributed to the trend towards outsourcing and privatization of government functions, as well as the increasing complexity and frequency of security threats in the post-Cold War era. The proliferation of private military and security companies risks creating a culture of violence and impunity, as well as undermining state sovereignty and contributing to global instability. Nonetheless, proponents of the PMF argue that it can provide a valuable and cost-effective alternative to traditional state-led military interventions, particularly in conflict zones where the state is unable or unwilling to intervene.

Theoretical Framework

There is scarcely a single comprehensive theory that exhaustively explains the growth and increasing acceptance of PMCs in contemporary times. An attempt at drawing up a theoretical framework that suffices for this task would draw on a few different theories and perspectives. For this paper, the theoretical framework constitutes a synthesis of the theories of privatization and the 'security dilemma' which is a cardinal concept in structural realism.

The philosophy of privatization has its origins in the works of Adam Smith, who maintained that the private sector is more effective and efficient at supplying goods and services than the government (Smith, 2018). This line of thought is known as "classical liberal economy." Key proponents of neoliberalism, a political philosophy that favors free-market economy, limited government intervention, and the privatization of public services, include Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. They further expanded and popularized this notion by arguing that privatization is the key to economic progress and prosperity and that government interference in the economy is ineffective (Friedman & Friedman, 2009; Hayek,

2007). Many governments throughout the world started putting privatization plans into place in the 1970s and 1980s as a strategy to lower public debt and boost the effectiveness of public services (Megginson & Netter, 2001). Particularly in nations undergoing structural adjustment programmes mandated by the IMF and World Bank, this trend was noticeable. As a result, the privatization hypothesis developed as a means of addressing the political and economic problems of the late 20th century, and it continues to be a key concept in modern economic policy.

The neoliberal privatization revolution is widely regarded as the most important cause of the current boom in the PMF. It is a subset of a broader normative shift toward the commercialization of components in the traditional public sphere (O'Brien, 1998). For Abrahamsen and Williams (2010), security privatization is part of a larger process of partial unbundling of the state and the attendant emergence of global structures that merge national and global structures and birth new security institutions and practices that blur the boundaries between the national and global as well as the public and private. In some ways, the surge in PMC patronage is an extension of the general wave of privatization of functions that were previously the sole preserve of government. In this view, the privatization of military functions should not be interpreted as having the potential to erode state sovereignty in the same way that public-private partnerships on infrastructure projects such as seaports, airports, bridges, and so on, or the outright privatization of electricity distribution, are not regarded as eroding state sovereignty. A PMC is no different from a multinational corporation that exploits the existence of a security gap to fill during a general wave of privatization.

The "security dilemma" is a core concept in the defensive strand of the realist theory of international relations. It explains why governments that desire security can sometimes degenerate into conflict (Glaser, 2010). The first scholar to introduce the idea was John H. Herz in a paper that was published in 1950 (Herz, 1950). The British historian Herbert Butterfield referred to the same circumstances as an "absolute predicament and irreducible dilemma" in his 1999 book *History and Human Relations* (Roe, 1999). Kenneth Waltz thinks the main reason why states do what they do is to stay in existence since there is no good global government and, by implication, the world is "anarchic." Because nations have such little faith in the motivations of one another, they must endeavor to bolster their security (Baylis, 2017). The security dilemma explains why nations that desire security may find themselves at odds with one another, even though they have good intentions (Montgomery, 2006).

The security dilemma plays out in the conflict between the world's great powers over PMCs thus: in an anarchic international system with no central authority to guarantee security, states are always trying to make themselves safer. Other states may think that the first state is getting stronger militarily and may become more aggressive when a state relies on private military companies (PMCs) for a lot of its security needs. This may compel other governments to beef up their militaries or form an alliance to sanction or fight the perceived threat. Deploying PMCs can lead to a spiral of more military buildup and more tension between the great powers, even if the deploying state's goals are not hostile. This is true even if the state that started the violence did not mean to be violent. The security dilemma plays out when efforts made to secure a state inadvertently lead to a perceived or real reduction in the safety of others and ultimately result in reactions from other states.

Contemporary Mercenary on the Global Stage

The contemporary private military company is a significant leap forward from its immediate predecessors, which lacked the same level of organization, skill, and scale of operation. The forerunners of today's private military companies were often composed of wandering "soldiers of fortune" who used

aliases. Two important personalities on the African continent can trace their ancestry back to two major colonial powers on the continent (Britain and France). The nickname "Mad Mike" was given to Major Michael Hoare, who served in the British Army. Gilbert Bourgeaud, also known as Bob Denard, was a citizen of France. They were ready to carry out the orders of whoever offered the most compensation. It is well known that Bob Denard switched allegiances multiple times during the several coups that occurred in the Comoros (Hassan, 2009).

In Africa, the 1990s were a time when mercenaries changed from being mostly unorganized individuals to a more modern PMC structure. Eben Barlow's Executive Outcomes (EO) blazed the trail (Musah&Fayemi, 2000). EO represented the transformation from individual-based, poorly organized, often brutal, ragtag soldiers of fortune to a more organized, sophisticated, and legally incorporated entity with a range of services that has earned them the patronage of governments and international organizations. It must be noted that, though a modern-day PMC (Silvercorp USA) has been fingered in an attempt to execute a coup d'etat in Venezuela (Ramsey &Smilde, 2020), compared to their predecessors, modern PMCs are less predisposed to engaging in such activities. They are more unlikely to take up contracts on the side of insurgents against established governments, except on occasions where major powers have deployed them to pursue their interests. An example was the case of Russian mercenaries fighting on the side of the separatists in eastern Ukraine (Rondeaux, 2019; Sukhankin, 2018). Overall, the modern mercenary plies its trade under legally recognized business structures to deliver an array of traditional military services that appeal to a broad clientele. While their predecessors could be likened to cheap imitations of national special forces. According to McFate (2019), private military companies (PMCs) are superior to state armies because they are more analogous to highly armed multinational corporations than they are to carbon copies of national special forces. This makes PMCs an attractive alternative to state armies. This point of view is supported by Anthony and Edward (2019), who argue that in contrast to national armies, PMCs are better able to adapt their support to specific customers. This is because PMCs can not only choose employees (from a global pool) who have the ideal blend of technical and cultural skills, but they can also more easily and effectively integrate equipment into client operations. PMCs strategize, recruit, and arm themselves around the unique nature of the conflict they are contracted to deal with. They raise an efficient private army to match the client's unique security needs.

The contemporary demand surge for PMCs on the African continent is partly traceable to the effects of the withdrawal of foreign patronage occasioned by the end of the Cold War (Howe, 1998). Because of the reduced interest of Western powers in the developing world since the end of the Cold War, many fragile or failing states have emerged, unable to maintain robust armed forces to match new threats and maintain internal order (Kaldor, 2012). In the more militarily advanced countries, it is becoming more difficult to gain public support for interventions in complex, volatile, and sometimes distant terrains. PMCs become the final resort for regimes in this category to maintain a semblance of order and political authority. Put differently, most African leaders and nations that had previously received the backing of major powers lost strategic relevance in the absence of the East-West struggle. As a result, there was increased pressure from disgruntled groups, particularly within their states (these elements were previously discouraged from violence due to strong power backing for their governments). This meant an increase in overall violence in the affected states. The nations' incapacity to successfully manage the violence and/or attract meaningful foreign involvement has created a vacuum that PMCs are filling today.

On the supply side, the end of the Cold War, the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the consequent military downsizing that followed created a large pool of highly trained military personnel for hire (Avant, 2013). Lessons learned from the failed U.S. intervention in Somalia and the sad inability of the U.N. to act decisively in the lead-up to the Rwandan Genocide gave more reason for hired guns to play

a bigger role especially in Africa.

The patronage of PMCs is no longer a 'third-world' affair. Major powers, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and even the United Nations Organization have patronized PMCs (Archibong, 2021). In 2021, the PMC market was valued at USD 241.7 billion. The global private military security services market is predicted to be worth USD 366.8 billion by 2028, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.2% expected throughout the forecast period (Research, 2022). To put this in perspective, the market value of PMCs in 2021 amounted to 59.4% of Nigeria's GDP for the same year (Nigeria: Quarterly GDP 2019-2022 | Statista, 2022).

There is the thesis that the lessor nearly absent "political risk" (O'Brien, 2000) associated with PMC deployment, in comparison with conventional troops is a consideration for the increasing preference for PMCs. This comes into play, particularly when there is limited domestic support for intervention in the conflict in question. The return of the remains of soldiers usually attracts negative attention (Vietnam Syndrome) and carries a huge diplomatic and political cost. PMCs are now great vehicles for projecting national interest overseas with low diplomatic backlash, making them well-suited to the dynamic nature of superpower proxy conflicts. Tasks that may provoke diplomatic tensions if undertaken by national forces can be delegated to PMCs instead. In this respect, PMCs are useful in helping nations avoid responsibility and maintain clean armed forces (Sandbox, 2021).

PMCs are a less risky substitute for covert state operations previously conducted by the likes of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB). While leaving a government agent behind in an operation may be unthinkable, the backlash from abandoning a contractor is comparatively more bearable. There is also the plausibility of the outright denial of contractors altogether (Roth, 2019). The Western media has repeatedly accused Russia of sending mercenaries into the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine to assist pro-Russian separatist movements. Russia has consistently denied this accusation (Ilyushina, 2022).

On the economic side, there is the question of the cost-effectiveness of "warfare on the cheap," which is arguably another attraction for the patronage of PMCs and, by implication, their growing popularity. Statistics prove that contractors are cheaper compared to national combatants during wartime and much cheaper in peacetime because they are usually disengaged (and, by implication, cost nothing). On average, EO budgeted \$40 million each year in Angola and significantly less in Sierra Leone. This is modest when compared to Angola's and Sierra Leone's national military budgets in the same period. In 1994, Angola spent an estimated \$515 million on the military, while Sierra Leone spent \$41 million (Howe, 1998). The logic is that it is much cheaper to rent than to own. A significant chunk of defense spending goes toward the training and overall welfare of troops. Even in death, the government still has financial obligations to the families of fallen soldiers. In the case of mercenaries, the government is not responsible for their training; nor do they have any posthumous financial liability. The overall liability is limited to the negotiated amount for the service agreed on. Typically, upon contract expiration or termination, the responsibility of both parties ceases.

The deployment of private contractors can significantly diminish civilian control and monitoring. The issue of secrecy is of concern because, while the legislative branch of government could set up committees that compel Generals to reveal classified details of their operations and activities, this whole process can be bypassed when private contractors are deployed. Contractors can also be deployed to evade troop caps imposed by the government (Cusumano, 2016) since the number of contractors does not necessarily have to be revealed by law. Deploying PMCs gives Generals more liberty in the classification of information regarding military operations.

The most unsettling and arguably disruptive contemporary dynamic is the Russian venture into the PMC space and the claimed ambiguous linkage between the Kremlin and the Wagner Group. This has brought about suspicion of a hidden imperialistic agenda. The Wagner group appears to be building a strong clientele base on the continent of Africa, amongst other locations (Ramani, 2020). There have been strong condemnations of their activities on the continent. At various times, the United States and European Union member states have harshly criticized and sanctioned the Wagner Group, as have countries that have patronized them (Blinken, 2021). The European Union has imposed financial and travel sanctions on the Wagner Group for committing "serious human rights abuses," including torture and extrajudicial executions in Mozambique, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine (Barigazzi, 2021). A plausible explanation for these hostile dynamics may reside in the fact that most of Africa was colonized by allies of the USA (the United Kingdom and France) and that a Russia-linked PMC expansion is considered imperialistic to these former colonial masters, who hitherto had significant influence in the resolution of conflicts in their former colonies.

In this sense, it can be considered imperialism because Russia is changing the power balance in its favour, at the expense of the UK and France. On closer observation, most of the crimes the Wagner Group has been accused of and sanctioned for are not *sui generis*. It is most likely that the real issue is that Russia as a country is projecting its national interest on the African continent at the expense of the USA and the former colonial powers. They are gradually becoming the guarantors of fragile regimes on the African continent. The Russian threat becomes more apparent when combined with China's significant inroads in Africa, primarily through soft-power projection. Taken together, the cordial relationship between Russia and China, and their collective inroads on the African continent, in particular, point to a progressive decline in the relevance of Europe and America to Africa. If regimes can secure financial assistance from China and military assistance (in the form of PMCs) from Russia, they will have less need for the USA and its allies. On the cultural side, Russia is recording some gains. For instance, the language has been made compulsory in the school curriculum in the Central African Republic (Flanagan, 2022).

Considering the contemporary rivalry in the market for force, there may be a proxy war on the continent of Africa if a major regional power like Nigeria decides to contract the Wagner Group. The US has openly expressed concerns over the growing influence of China in Africa (Taylor, 2022; Turse, 2019). Washington was openly opposed to Mali employing the services of Russian mercenaries (Seldin, 2021), who have made significant inroads in Libya and Syria. America was also fingered in the termination of the PMC contract in Nigeria following the assumption of power by President Buhari (Barlow, 2020). Russian mercenaries are becoming the preferred military contractors in the troubled Sahel region. As it stands, the choice of the PMC to patronize is no longer free. Efficiency cannot be said to be the primary consideration for patronizing the market for force anymore, as the subject of mercenary recruitment is now steeped in great power rivalries. A disgruntled great power can withdraw some form of existing support as a sanction (Mali is a case in point) and, in extreme cases, pursue regime change altogether.

Concerning the third world and Africa in particular, PMCs originating from the West have become tools for diplomacy in resource-rich and security-challenged countries. Russian PMCs like Wagner Group seem to be making a good name for themselves in Africa, and they may soon become the most important players there. On the one hand, this may be due to the stiff opposition to homegrown PMCs on the continent. Executive Outcomes and Sandline faced significant opposition from the South African government. Russian PMCs may be gaining an advantage over other PMCs owing to their efficiency, which is predicated on brutality and less consideration for human rights. Whether they will ultimately turn out to be helpful or not, African countries may face a political and economic backlash if they opt for PMCs that do not originate from their former colonial masters or their close allies. Just like foreign loans,

PMCs are now tools for more developed countries to pursue their strategic interests on the African continent.

The Nigerian Security Situation and the Mercenary Experience

Although the existence of Boko Haram predated the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, it was under his administration that the group metamorphosed into a formidable national and transnational threat. Due to the poor management of the crisis, Boko Haram was significantly emboldened, to the extent that it effectively held territories within Nigeria. At the height of the insurgency, Boko Haram and its splinter groups, ISWAP, and Ansaru controlled twenty-six (26) local government areas (LGAs) in the three north-eastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. This included 14 LGAs in Borno, seven in Adamawa, and five in Yobe (Agora Policy, 2022). The most embarrassing incident associated with Boko Haram to date is what is now known as the Chibok Kidnapping, when 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from their school by Boko Haram fighters on April 14, 2014 in the town of Chibok, located in Chibok Local Government, south of Maiduguri. The incident sparked a global outrage at the time, with the now-popular #BringBackOurGirls campaign receiving significant media coverage (BBC, 2017).

In response to the global outcry over the Chibok kidnapping, President Jonathan indicated an interest in recruiting a PMC to rescue the kidnapped Chibok girls but did not follow through with the plan. The founder of Blackwater offered to extinguish Boko Haram for a fee of \$1.5 billion, but President Jonathan declined the offer (Cole & Scahill, 2016). It was in early 2015, as the general election approached, that the administration of Goodluck Jonathan finally contracted a PMC for a three-month contract to help the Nigerian military build a counterinsurgency "strike force," specifically the 72 Mobile Strike Force (Nielsen, 2016). Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment, and Protection (STTEP), a PMC founded by South African Defense Force veterans, was Nigeria's PMC of choice. Eben Barlow (the chairman of STTEP) was made a major general in the Nigerian Armed Forces, and his men were absorbed into the Nigerian military. The first aim was to prepare a squad to assist in the liberation of the kidnapped schoolgirls. According to Barlow, this objective evolved into an offensive role to stop Boko Haram's rapid advance and provide the government with a buffer to conduct general elections (Freeman, 2015).

STTEP accomplished the task of repelling Boko Haram to allow for the successful general elections by introducing a sound counterinsurgency doctrine known as "relentless pursuit," which entails confounding and scattering the enemy with small, efficient mobile assaults, applying pressure to it until it retreats, and then relentlessly chasing it to exhaustion and possible annihilation. The chase adopted an "unconventional mobile warfare" strategy that mirrored Boko Haram's hit-and-run tactics (Freeman 2015). However, shortly after President Buhari assumed office, STTEP's contract was abruptly terminated. If we construe the main utility of PMCs as that of breaking cycles of violence to allow the government to tackle the issues that triggered the violence, we can safely say that they did accomplish their objectives in Nigeria in 2015.

The current security situation in Nigeria is, in the authors' opinion, worse than what was obtainable in 2015. In 2015, the major security challenge was the Boko Haram insurgency. Currently, Nigeria has added the equally concerning activities of terrorists, euphemistically labelled "bandits." The activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) are also ravaging the south-east. The predominantly farming communities in the Middle Belt of Nigeria are grappling with perennial farmer-header clashes that have claimed lives and property in farming communities across the nation (Yusuf et al., 2022; Ikezue & Ezeah, 2018). It is arguably the South-West and the South-South

geopolitical zones that can be said to enjoy relative peace at the moment. In the authors' opinion, what these regions enjoy is "negative peace" when we realize that the Niger Delta militants still raise concerns from time to time and that there is a subtle agitation within the Yoruba Nation and the O'odua People's Congress that can mobilize on short notice if warranted. The majority of the ungoverned territories in the country's northeastern portion, especially the forests, are ruled by bandits. They routinely raid neighboring villages, especially in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, and Sokoto states.

Despite escalating violence and insecurity in Nigeria, there have been arguments for and against the use of PMCs. Some popular arguments go as follows:

Mercenaries mainly deliver unsustainable peace

It has been argued by academics that the benefits of PMCs are at best temporary. They further contend that the solutions prioritize maintaining the status quo rather than addressing the underlying issues that lead to conflict in the first instance (Musah&Fayemi 2000). As a consequence, brief periods of calm are followed by a return to violence. This argument is strengthened by the examples of EO in Sierra Leone and Angola. A total breakdown of law and order occurred in Sierra Leone within one hundred days after EO's departure. The Lusaka Protocol is proof that Executive Outcomes' efforts in Angola helped secure a precarious peace. After Jonas Savimbi refused to recognize the results of the elections, the nation descended into chaos once again (Leander 2004). The implication is that PMCs either are not capable of providing long-term solutions to the unique security issues they have been tasked with or else they purposely provide only temporary fixes to keep these failing regimes reliant on them.

A counterargument is that the PMCs were hired as "force multipliers" to end cycles of violence. Their responsibilities were confined to securing military accords that may pave the way for political compromise (Howe, 1998). The fact that EO was able to get the Revolutionary United Front to the negotiation table in Sierra Leone and pave the way for general elections in Angola suggested that they did a good job within the bounds of their mission. Neither the unwillingness of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) to recognize election results nor the subsequent violence in Sierra Leone can be directly blamed on EO. EO has said that its employees are not nation-builders and instead work only to secure a military settlement that would, in turn, facilitate political reconciliation (Howe, 1998).

A closer look reveals that an ineffective approach of relying too much on military might while ignoring the underlying causes of conflict is more to blame for the repeated failures to establish lasting peace. This defect is responsible in part for the overall ineffectiveness of interventions in general (not limited to PMCs). The United States' engagement in Somalia was less than successful because the underlying plan was weak and could not address the root causes of the conflict. It has been argued by Regan (1996) that a strategy that focuses only on military or economic initiatives would be less successful than one that employs both. It is important to remember that PMCs are only accountable for results within the bounds of their charter. Since, in an ideal world, the client nations would be in charge of the overall strategy, they bear a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the unsustainable character of these interventions. There may have been cases of overreliance on PMCs instead of other, more viable methods of establishing lasting peace being considered (Olonisakin, 1998). Evidence from Africa suggests that PMCs contribute relatively little toward establishing lasting peace in conflict settings. From this, we can reasonably conclude that PMCs can only serve as force multipliers in the military suppression of Nigeria's various security threats, but they cannot guarantee that these threats will not reappear if the underlying issues are not addressed. Even in the best-case scenario, PMCs cannot take responsibility for nation's building or sustainably guarantee security in perpetuity.

Patronage of Private Military and Security Companies will ultimately weaken existing security structures, making African states more vulnerable

It has been said that PMCs in unstable African countries make the already fragile security situation in the region even worse. As a result, it will supposedly be easier to challenge existing security orders (Leander, 2005). The market's diversion of human resources (due to the allure of better working conditions in PMCs as opposed to national armies) and financial resources (due to the greater allure of profit over public security) that might otherwise be used to build public security institutions into the private market contributes to the problem (Leander, 2005). Private Multinational Corporations (MNCs) with the financial means to hire security guards would likely choose to hire PMCs from their native country for reasons of efficiency and patriotism. The long-term result will be a worsening of the national security structures due to an ever-increasing dependence on the private sector for security, while the public security apparatus gradually declines. There have also been instances of PMC sponsorship leading to the dismantling of military hierarchy and the marginalization of the armed forces.

Nigeria and Sierra Leone are notable instances of how private security outfits (hired by multinationals) have been incorporated into official security forces. The security system of Koidu Holdings in Kono is three-tiered. The mines are secured by unarmed G4S guards assisted by Armed Operational Support Division (OSD) policemen, with overall supervision in the hands of Koidu Holdings-hired expatriate professionals (Abrahamsen & Williams 2009). A similar arrangement exists for international oil drilling and exploration corporations operating in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region. To a lesser extent, this is also true in most private organizations, such as commercial banks. While it is impossible to say that the inclusion of private security is weakening the police force, it is undeniable that if the resources channeled to these private security outfits are strategically invested in local security forces while mitigating internal corruption, there will be a significant improvement. Overall, it is still the responsibility of hiring governments to ensure they are not over-relying on PMCs and PSCs to neglect traditional state security structures. In the same way, the states regulate the activities of multinational corporations to ensure they don't cannibalize local industry, they must manage their relationships with PMCs and PSCs to avoid cannibalization of the state military and paramilitary outfits. The responsibility for striking this balance rests with the state and not the PMCs, which are primarily profit-seeking entities and not nation-builders.

Private Military and Security Companies are re-colonizing forces.

The argument that PMCs are agents of re-colonization may be traced back to their foreign origins and the intricate links with Western economic interests (particularly in the extractive industry). Apart from monetary payments for security contracts, income in Angola and Sierra Leone was largely in the form of long-term diamond and oil concessions (Musah&Fayemi 2000). The now-defunct Executive Outcomes and Sandline International were at the core of this argument. In recent times, Wagner Group has received mining concessions in exchange for its services. There were rumors both inside and outside Africa that EO was getting "dirt cheap" long-term agreements that mortgaged a country's future in return for its services (Howe, 1998). Concessions of this kind have the long-term effect of restricting future government income sources, perpetuating underdevelopment.

The strongest justification offered by EO and similar corporations was that their operations did not endanger the state's future. They believe they are no different from other private firms that assist a nation to flourish in exchange for profit (Howe, 1998). This seems rational given that PMC's major purpose, like that of other organizations, is profit. The difficulty seems to be that these already weak governments were forced to trade mining concessions in exchange for services (Vines, 2000). In some instances, some of the

mining fields battered were already under rebel control when the concessions were granted, as was the case in Kono, Sierra Leone. In this instance, they were trading something they did not have control over at the time. They bartered long-term concessions with negative economic consequences that stretched into the future while bargaining from a weaker position and under pressure. This justification has some weight since it is a typical practice among multinational corporations on the African continent. In the absence of conflict, they pay political officeholders to obtain extremely favourable concessions that jeopardize host countries' economic prospects.

Possible Erosion of Sovereignty

The major powers, who host the majority of PMCs, are less concerned about the loss of state sovereignty caused by security outsourcing. It cannot be said that the United States of America's sovereignty is under threat because it no longer has a monopoly over the use of force; rather, the popularity of PMCs is part of the process of redefining and rebuilding modern security governance. As highlighted earlier, it is a subset of the general trend in modernization. This cannot be entirely true for weak African nations since PMCs are largely imported, and it is well known that PMCs seldom go against the strategic interests of their home countries, which are sometimes their principal employers. Following that, a PMC in developing countries will work in the hiring country's interest to the degree that it fits with the interest of its host country. It is unthinkable for the Wagner Group to work against the interests of Russia. In the case of a strong conflict of interest, PMCs are likely to decline offers or terminate contracts. According to the authors, this rationale is mostly to blame for the United States and NATO nations' mistrust of Russian-linked PMCs. However, rather than constituting a danger to or diminishment of state power and authority, security privatization should be seen as a component of a reworking of the public-private divide and state rebuilding.

PMCs can only act as force multipliers to help the army win on the battlefield. They can do this by giving the government and other interested parties a place to talk about the real problems that started the fighting in the first place. They are not nation-builders but rather work to break the cycle of violence. Because they are business-driven, they will often extract the most profit for the services provided, just as conventional multinational corporations do. They are conflict entrepreneurs in the purest sense, as opposed to international non-profit conflict groups. Overreliance on PMCs for lengthy periods due to the neglect of the state's military, as well as improper integration of them into national armies, will most certainly erode state sovereignty on the one hand and the integrity and competency of national armies on the other. In severe circumstances, this may result in consequences from the army in the form of protest, sabotage, or a coup d'etat. It is entirely the responsibility of the hiring country to ensure the protection of its sovereignty in the first place. It is most likely that the conflict that prompted the consideration of PMCs already poses a threat to the sovereignty of the country ab initio.

If not adequately integrated into the military organization, elements of the Nigerian military might sabotage a PMC's work. There have been allegations of military complicity with insurgents, bandits, and kidnappers in ongoing counter-insurgency operations (Eruke, 2018; TVC News, 2022; Sahara Reporters, 2020). From the military's standpoint, the degree of collusion and sabotage might rise if the PMC is not seamlessly incorporated into the regular military structure.

There have been concrete allegations of military corruption under the previous administration and the current one (Reuters, 2017). These allegations have come from both inside and outside the military. If a PMC is successfully grafted into the military architecture, there is no guarantee that the existing inefficiencies and corruption in the military will not dilute the PMC's efficiency. Soldiers, for example,

have consistently complained about poor welfare and motivation (Oriola, 2022), and if their welfare is not significantly improved, their output is unlikely to improve when fighting alongside better-paid foreign fighters. Another implication of financial corruption within the military is that elements are benefiting from the prolongation of insecurity; as a result, these internal "pseudo-conflict entrepreneurs" are unlikely to be invested in the speedy resolution of the conflict and may sabotage the effort.

When we consider the United States (Seldin, 2021) and European Union's (Reuters, 2021) opposition to Mali's recruitment of the Wagner Group, as well as the subsequent sanctions, and contrast this with Nigeria's comparatively superior regional strategic importance in West Africa, we can safely conclude that Nigeria will not be allowed to choose a PMC objectively without the influence and or opposition of the United States and European Union. The United States of America played an active role in the exit of the PMC after the 2015 election (Barlow, 2020). If Nigeria chooses the Wagner Group, the United States and its allies may retaliate economically and/or politically. This will directly place Nigeria in the global power struggle between Russia and China on the one hand and the United States/NATO on the other.

If the deployment of a PMC proves successful, there is the tendency that there will be an overreliance on PMCs to the extent that less attention will be paid to the armed forces, and this may erode their capacity. This may in turn have a ripple effect on the subcontinent, prompting other countries to resort to PMCs to tackle their security challenges. Regional arrangements for collective security, such as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the multilateral Joint Task Force against insurgency, may also lose their effectiveness over time.

Concluding Remarks

In terms of age rating as a vocation, mercenaries may be second only to prostitution. However, this age-old profession has evolved into well-organized corporate entities, comparable to international businesses. This newfound refinement and attractiveness have earned it the support of a diverse spectrum of clientele, including corporate organizations, governments, international non-governmental organizations, and even the United Nations Organization. This widespread acceptance has resulted in excessive competition among great powers (primarily between NATO countries and the United States on the one hand, and Russia on the other). In a way, this dynamic has trapped developing nations that patronize PMCs in the global superpower PMC rivalry.

There have been criticisms of their effectiveness and efficiency, along with their tendency to be overtly costly economically to client nations. However, when PMCs are viewed as merely force multipliers intended to break cycles of violence to allow for more robust handling of underlying issues and profit-motivated business concerns, most of these criticisms lose their tenacity.

The recruitment of PMCs is now the norm, and as such, it does not imply that national armies are weak or decaying. As was highlighted earlier, it is almost inconceivable for great powers to go to war without the infusion of private contractors. Nigeria's recent stint with a PMC and the lingering security challenges put her in a position to consider recruiting PMCs. However popular, PMCs should only be recruited strictly on a need basis and their role limited to that of force multipliers' (not nation builders). To avoid a backlash that ranges from the systemic weakening of the military and paramilitary outfits and sabotage to a coup d'etat in the extreme case, care must also be taken to ensure proper integration into or cooperation with the national armed forces.

A detailed security audit (concerning the nature of the threats) is recommended. This should be

undertaken by a team comprising elements drawn from the military and paramilitary outfits in the country and anchored by a foreign PMC with significant experience on the African continent. Care should be taken not to swing in the direction of the Wagner Group or any other PMC with glaring affiliations to the USA or NATO member countries that may compromise the output of the audit.

Based on the report of the security audit, we recommend a holistic review of the country's security architecture to reposition it to match the established contemporary threats it faces. The current security architecture in Nigeria may have been effective against the dynamics of threats that existed at its inception. However, because the nature and scale of threats have evolved, a strategic reform should be carried out in the defense and security sectors. Insurgent groups now have affiliations with transnational terror groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda that pose formidable challenges to great powers. Small arms and light weapons are more available today than ever before.

The smuggling of these weapons has evolved in scale and sophistication over the years. These groups have leveraged technology and social media for internal communication, propaganda, and spreading terror. Previously local groups have evolved into well-armed, transnational insurgent groups that pose more formidable challenges compared to their predecessors. For instance, it is a fact that Boko Haram and its associated splinter groups are better armed, organized, and more lethal compared to Maitatsine. The security and defense structure that worked in prior dispensations is visibly incapable of keeping up with the evolving security threats. This makes the need for strategic security sector reform urgent and imperative. If there is still a gap or a strategic need for the infusion of PMCs, care must be taken to realistically envision and limit their roles to mere force multipliers rather than stretching them to nation-builders.

In addition, due consideration must be given to the establishment of the state police to leverage local knowledge and complement the efforts of the national police and the military. In addition to state police, the existing vigilante networks across the country must be effectively regulated and integrated with the existing military and paramilitary outfits in the country. Spirited effort should be made to effectively mitigate corruption in the armed forces.

Wherever there is a real need for private contractors to be deployed, the military should not construe it as an indictment. They should rightly accept the deployment of PMCs as a welcome contemporary dynamic in global security governance. If major powers are deploying PMCs, there is no shame or risk if Nigeria patronizes PMCs, provided it is based on an objective assessment and the pitfalls are taken cognizance of and intelligently mitigated.

Although the government has also explored nonmilitary measures to tackle the problem of insecurity in the country, this is the idea behind the creation of the North East Development Commission, the Niger Delta Development Commission, and the Amnesty Programme. In our opinion, the government has over-emphasized the military option in comparison to the soft approach. Issues like poverty and unemployment, which are identified as drivers of insecurity in Nigeria, must be given concerted attention by the local, state, and federal governments. Governments at all levels must establish skill acquisition centers with the strategic goal of creating jobs, particularly among the youth population, which is the primary target for insurgent recruitment. Infrastructure and amenities must be put in place to support local businesses. For instance, the government should assist farmers with machinery and fertilizers during the planting season and with storage and transportation facilities during times of harvest. Small and micro-credit schemes should also be created by the government at all levels.

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