



# The outsourcing of sovereign functions related to Defence: between international comparison and plurality of approaches

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**Since the 1990s, a new form of paramilitary entrepreneurship has emerged with the proliferation of private security companies. This process of defence outsourcing, initiated by Great Britain and the United States, is now widely used by Moscow and Beijing.**

**The author explains why this is not the case in France, where developing such entities in order to have combat units is neither legitimate nor relevant, and contrary to both our tradition and to our convictions, even if he points out that timid progress is being made, in very specific cases, with the legislation on the use of "contradictors".**

From antiquity to the end of the 18th century, mercenaries experienced a golden age as war professionals while adapting to political and economic changes, when they did not favour them themselves.

With the 1990s, a new form of paramilitary entrepreneurship gradually asserted itself through private companies dedicated to the training and supervision of the National Guard. With the 1990s, a new form of paramilitary entrepreneurship gradually emerged through private companies dedicated to the multifaceted world of security, whether they be private military companies (PMCs) or private security companies (PSCs). SMPs are also called private military and security companies (EMSP) or, as in France, security and defence service companies (ESSD).<sup>1</sup> In any case, all of them are able to offer a plurality of missions for the benefit of public or private authorities, multinational companies and non-governmental organisations.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, have contributed to increasing the influence of the SMPs in connection with the military-industrial complex beyond the United States and Great Britain, the contemporary precursors of paramilitary contractors. As in economic

circles in general, the dynamic is imbued with stock market and speculative logic. Currently, the Defence and Security outsourcing market, in the broadest sense of the term, amounts to nearly \$200 billion worldwide.

However, the process of defence outsourcing raises many questions about how to wage war tomorrow.

Without going back over the historical dimension of the subject, let us insist on the current context and the questions raised by private military companies and the policy of plural outsourcing.

### **Private companies and geostrategic stakes: outsourcing of specialised services**

Multipurpose outsourcing and the quest for efficiency

In both the United States and Great Britain, there has been a renewed interest since the end of the Cold War in PMCs as a substitute for conventional forces, which are considered too expensive for public funds.

In the 1990s, against the backdrop of a reduction in the size of the American army, the Blackwater company, created by Erik Prince, took advantage of a climate favourable to the privatisation of Defence<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, contractors, mostly from the Special Forces, can intervene discreetly in an area of geopolitical tension, without directly involving the country's authorities. It is therefore not surprising to note that nearly 50% of the members of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operational teams thus fall within the contractual sphere.

In the event of combat operations, the Executive's communication strategy even considers that the use of SMPs is a life-saving measure to indirectly preserve the potential of the CIA's operational teams and his government's readership potential, particularly in the event of the death of contractors, which leaves public opinion indifferent, as it is very concerned about the lives of its G. I.

In 2009, 39 per cent of the United States Army's employees were contractors. Their proportion has been rising steadily since then. In Iraq, between 2003 and 2005, there was a ratio of about 1 contractor for every 10 military personnel; thereafter, it was 1.5 contractors for every 1.5 military personnel. In 2010, the American media, such as the Washington Post, reported that nearly 1,931 private companies were under contract with the American government.

Since the 2010's, subcontracting processes to the US and UK Ministries of Defence have become commonplace; between armed operations, coercive or attrition actions, even highly focused and targeted ones, post-conflict and security operations to which are added logistics support missions.

Proponents of the use of PMS often put forward the argument of cost-effectiveness

against the backdrop of ultraliberalism. Erik Prince, former Navy Seal, founder of the very controversial SMP Blakewater, now Academi, explained himself before Congress on 30 November 2017, how the search for optimised efficiency was at the heart of his commercial and operational strategy.<sup>3</sup>

Today, some analysts even believe that SMPs are capable of carrying out resolutely frontal and decisive operations, especially against the Islamic state. This is the case of the British Simon Mann, a former member of the Special Air Service (SAS ), founder with Tim Spincer of Sandline International (1996-2004 ), who later became a real mercenary.<sup>4</sup>

### International Inclination to Geoeconomics and Geostrategy

In any case, the lobbying of MMPs and PHCs is often associated with state positioning strategies in targeted geographical areas for the wealth of the subsoil and lucrative prospects for the exploitation of high value-added raw materials (uranium, lithium, coltan, cobalt, gold, zinc, diamonds). SMP/SSPs thus provide their respective home states in search of markets with local anchorage points and intelligence.

In the Middle East, if only between 2007 and 2012, the British Foreign Office has invested 150 million pounds in signing contracts with private security companies to intervene in Iraq. One of the British SSPs, Aegis Defence Services, has even carried out missions ordered by the United States to instruct, train and equip the Iraqi security forces. The SMPs are also closely linked to the petromonarchies, like Qatar, Kuwait, but also the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup>

The cases of Russia and China also show, here again, policies of using contractors.

<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2012, these were not ESSDs but operational support and support companies (OSS).

<sup>2</sup> In December 1996, Erik Prince even set up a training centre in Moyock, North Carolina, near the Norfolk Naval Base. In 1997, he acquired some 2,000 additional hectares to provide a site dedicated to law enforcement agencies, whether public or government structures.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolas BOURCIER: "Erik Prince, un chien de guerre dans les arcanes de la Maison Blanche" in Le Monde, February 9, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Colin FREEMAN: Simon Mann: "We can use mercenaries to defeat Isis" in The Telegraph, 14 June 2015.

<sup>5</sup> In the Saudi case, a contract between the monarchy and the Vinnell Corporation for the training and supervision of the National Guard was established as early as 1975.

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