

## IR Theory in Practice Case Study: Private Military Contractors

### Section 1: Realist Approaches to Private Military Contractors

*From reading Chapter 6 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Realist International Relations theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

#### Introduction

This case study will look at the topic of private military contractors through the prism of realism, covering **1) Introduction, 2) Do PMCs represent the increasing irrelevance of 'the state' in international politics and 3) Would a realist choose to study PMCs?**

#### 1) Private Military Contractors: a brief introduction

Private Military Contractors (hereafter PMCs) have generated a huge amount of press over the last few years because of their unprecedented and often highly controversial use in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers and military services 'for hire' have been around in various guises for centuries. Machiavelli warned against the use of mercenaries in *The Prince* because, he argued, their national loyalty would be uncertain:

##### Box 1.1: Niccolò Machiavelli on mercenaries

Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous; and if one holds his state based on these arms, he will stand neither firm nor safe; for they are disunited, ambitious and without discipline, unfaithful, valiant before friends, cowardly before enemies; they have neither the fear of God nor fidelity to men, and destruction is deferred only so long as the attack is; for in peace one is robbed by them, and in war by the enemy. The fact is, they have no other attraction or reason for keeping the field than a trifle of stipend, which is not sufficient to make them willing to die for you.

*Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XII, available at:*

<http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince12.htm>

These corporate entities that provide logistical and practical support to the armed forces as 'soldiers for hire' have been used by the USA since World War Two. It was after the end of the Cold War, when a reduction in defence spending and an increase in 'contracting out' by the Reagan and Thatcher governments, that PMCs in their modern incarnation emerged. Despite a small presence in military missions in Bosnia and Somalia, it is the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have seen an unprecedented reliance on contractors. In Iraq in 2003 the ratio of US soldiers to contractors was 1.5:1 (Carafano: 2008, 38).

It is worth noting that as there is greater discussion around these contractors there is a greater degree of sophistication in the dialogue used. Some would differentiate between “mercenaries” as being individual soldiers for hire; “private military companies” as companies that provide military support and “private security companies” as companies that provide security to individuals and to property. In an academic sense it is important to be aware of these potential differences, especially if you want to study the general phenomenon of privatised military further. However, for our purposes it is not necessary to make such distinctions, and on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, such distinctions make very little practical difference (one can see this by reading any number of the numerous journalistic reports on the practice of PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan).

### **1) Do PMCs represent the increasing irrelevance of ‘the state’ in international politics?**

One of the key questions raised by your textbook is whether globalisation has brought about a collapse of ‘the state’ as the primary agent in international affairs. You are probably aware of Max Weber’s classic definition that something is *“a ‘state’ if and insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence in the enforcement of its order (Weber: 1964, 154).”* One might argue that the phenomenon of private military contractors is eroding this monopoly and therefore undermining the state itself.

Realism, being wholly concerned with ‘the state’ as a unitary actor intent on survival and power, can seem unconvincing as an IR theory when we consider the myriad of actors wielding power in the international political system. Some argue that the unprecedented use of PMCs, non-state actors, in Iraq demonstrates the power of globalisation and the increasing irrelevance of ‘the state’ in global affairs.

Private contracting firms have had a hand in US involvement in war since WW2 and so are not in and of themselves a new phenomenon. US governments’ reliance on PMCs, however, has skyrocketed in recent decades facilitated partly by the Internet and fluidity of global corporations. The ratio of soldiers to private contractors during the Vietnam war was 100:1. In Iraq in 2003 this figure was 1.5:1 (*Carafano: 2008, 38*). PMCs in Iraq were intimately involved in all aspects of the war to an extent they had not been before. From logistical planning and guarding high profile targets such as the Green Zone in Baghdad, to highly controversial tactics of interrogating Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib, the coalition military operations in Iraq could not have been implemented without PMCs. Instead of national armed forces, the US and UK governments (they are not the only actors to use PMCs but in Iraq and Afghanistan are certainly the main states to do so) employ private companies as their military muscle.

On the other hand, PMCs are still at the behest of whichever state chooses to employ them on the international stage. Moreover, to make a sharp bifurcation between ‘government’ and ‘private entities’ is to present too simple a picture. Though PMCs may be private corporations they have intimate links to the state (this will also be discussed in the case study on Marxism and PMCs). Most of the managerial employees and owners of military contracting companies are former soldiers and/or close friends of politicians. Indeed not all fully relinquish their political duties and responsibilities before becoming involved in the world of private contracting. The majority of private contractors are ex-

servicemen whose links to the national military don't disappear with their move to the 'private' sector.

### Discussion question

Does the significance and power of these non-state actors demonstrate a collapse of the state?

You should consider whether these economically powerful and politically significant non-state actors make Realism more or less convincing as a theory of international politics.

## 2) Would a realist study the use of PMCs?

The US could not have fought the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the way that they did without the heavy reliance on PMCs. Yet one thing that one must consider when using systemic theories of international politics, such as Realism, is what elements *won't* be of importance; not everything will be highlighted by the various theories, even if they are important topics. Just because PMCs are powerful and receive a lot of attention, does not mean that a realist would be concerned with them. Indeed PMCs are domestic, non-state actors that, realists might argue, don't drive foreign policy.

Although they have been used extensively by the US government to pursue state **power** and the perceived **national interest**, PMCs have not significantly altered the way that the state behaves. In the case of the Iraq war, the state is still seeking power and survival in an anarchic international realm.

PMCs have been dogged by controversy – there are some journalism articles on this given in the Weblinks section of this case study– surrounding their ethical practice and legal position. State-centric realists and materialist realists in particular may highlight the issue of PMCs and would argue that states will use these private armies when it is in their interest to do so. States, according to such realism, would not be inhibited by ethical concerns which some of the evidence around PMCs and their actions would appear to bear out. PMCs were given total legal immunity in Iraq by the Coalition Provisional Authority in order that they could more efficiently pursue the states interest and not come under legal scrutiny. Approximately seventy countries ratified *The Montreux Document*, which outlines ethical practice guidelines for those states employing PMCs but this doesn't carry any force other than the signatures on the paper.

(PDF available at: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/montreux-document-170908.htm>).

### Discussion question

Is such a document enough to show that states are concerned with ethical practice as well as national interest?

## Section 2: Liberalist Approaches to PMCs

*From reading Chapter 7 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Liberal International Relations theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

In this section we will look at the aspects of private military companies which liberalism would highlight, which are: **1) PMCs and neo-liberal economic theory** and **2) the potential use of PMCs for humanitarian intervention.**

#### 1) PMCs and neo-liberal economic theory

The incredible rise of PMCs as actors in the international system is largely the result of neo-liberal economic policies. Although mercenaries have been around for centuries and private contractors have been used since WWII, the number of private security companies, and governments' reliance upon them, has skyrocketed since the 1980s. We can trace this explosion of PMCs to the convergence of two major factors: the end of the cold war and the rise of neo-liberal economic theory.

The 1980s was the decade of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and the dominance of neo-liberal economic theory, as made infamous by Milton Friedman. Both Thatcher and Reagan undertook massive 'privatisation' programmes. This involved both selling-off state-owned assets and using the private sector for many activities formerly performed by the government. The guiding economic principle behind these policies is that the invisible hand of the free market, as discussed by Adam Smith, will always produce a more efficient and superior outcome to the government. Thatcher and Reagan aimed to reduce the size of the government leviathan, seen as an inefficient bureaucratic machine, and transfer these services into the realm of privately owned companies.

#### Box 2.1: Thatcher and neo-liberal economic theory

"Thatcher plucked from the shadows of relative obscurity a particular doctrine that went under the name of 'neoliberalism' and transformed it into the central guiding principle of economic thought and management" which translated to "[D]eregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision"

*Harvey: 2005, 1, 3*

When the Cold War ended in 1989 there was far less need in the US for the colossal defence spending and huge national military machine which had been built up over the previous decades. The US was the world's sole remaining super-power with no realistic challenger to this somewhat ominous accolade in sight. It therefore began to downsize the national military significantly and this meant, in part, recruiting fewer soldiers. A niche

emerged in the market, one that was promptly filled by PMCs who began to provide all manner of logistical and practical support for military missions particularly to the US and UK governments. PMCs and neo-liberal economic theory are interlinked and so for some liberals, PMCs are an inevitable result of a gap in the all-powerful 'market'.

## 2) The possible use of PMCs for humanitarian intervention

Despite the fact that they have caused a great deal of controversy, there are those who advocate the increased use of private contractors in order to extend the practice of **liberal interventionism** around the world. For example, one could imagine the use of PMCs to act as peace-keeping troops in Darfur. Sending national troops around the world at the behest of liberal democracies is extremely controversial financially, politically, and ethically. National troops are subject to intense political scrutiny and any government, which sends them abroad for missions which are not perceived as directly in the 'national interest' puts itself at great political risk. As you will know from reading the online case study on Rwanda, UN troops are often vulnerable and inadequate for various reasons. Advocates suggest that PMCs could be used instead of national military troops to extend missions that carry too high a political risk for governments.

The possibilities for extending this type of military operation could have huge consequences for global politics. Imagine the military presence that the US and 'the West' might be able to have around the world if such military missions could be carried out with relatively little political scrutiny because the soldiers involved were perceived as being 'of choice.'

### Box 2.2: PMCs: an easy solution?

"Private contractors fill the gap between geopolitical goals and public means. The low visibility and presumed low cost of private contractors appeals to those who favour a global U.S. military presence, but fear that such a strategy cannot command public support."

*David Isenberg of the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo in an excellent report entitled "Private Military Contractors and U.S. Grand Strategy, available at: <http://www.prio.no/Publications/Publication/?x=4281>*

### Section 3: Marxist Approaches to PMCs

*From reading Chapter 8 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Marxist International Relations theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

#### Introduction

Marxists focus heavily on the military-industrial complex and the phenomenon of PMCs are thus highlighted by this theory.

#### 1) Shades of grey: the public-private distinction

One of the major critiques of liberal capitalism by Marxist theory is that the clear distinction between public and private is a false creation. PMCs, and all the debates surrounding them, rest on the idea of a public-private dichotomy. Under a capitalist system, 'the state' became the 'public' protector of economic power defined as 'private' so that owners of the means of production could extract the surplus value, i.e. wealth, from these interests. Rather than being a 'natural' form of political organisation and citizen protection, the public-private distinction is an exercise of power. In contemporary society what is normally described as 'public' i.e. government administration, is in fact a function of the private interests of capitalists. The classical image of the state as the possessor of the legitimate monopoly of the 'public' use of force in its borders, capable of mobilizing resources from within the state, was never, according to Marxists, a plausible reflection of reality.

The topic of PMCs highlights this blurred line, or perhaps, more accurately, this completely false distinction, between public and private. Many of the board members of some of the biggest private military and security contractors are current or former government officials and the relationship between government (public) and contractors (private) is dialectical. For example, in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Richard "Dick" Cheney (then US Secretary of Defence) commissioned Brown and Root, a subsidiary of the PMC Halliburton, to produce a study on increasing the role of private contractors at a cost of \$3.9m, and subsequently chose the company to implement this plan (Dobbs, 2003; Scahill, 2008). Cheney then went to work for Halliburton before returning to politics as Vice President for George Bush. Between 2001 and 2005, the number of private firms servicing the Pentagon grew to 96,000, representing a 115% increase in four years (Carafano, 2006). In the UK, Ex-Cabinet Minister Paul Boateng courted controversy when it was announced that he had taken a job with Aegis Defence Services, having previously lobbied for more relaxed legislation and regulation over PMCs (Drury, 2009).

#### 2) PMCs and the military-industrial complex

According to Marxist theory, economic systems are perceived to be the main driver of political change. Marxist theory can seem very persuasive when we use it to analyse the

phenomenon of private military contractors. The private military industry is an extremely well connected, as most of the directors and managers are ex-military and even politicians. Many have benefited handsomely from the huge increase in the use of PMCs. Indeed, the most famous example being former Vice President of the United States and former CEO of Halliburton, Richard Cheney. Halliburton is one of the largest US military contractors and has received billions of dollars from the US government to perform a wide range of functions for the army on various missions abroad but particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Cheney commissioned Brown and Root, a subsidiary of the PMC Halliburton, to produce a study on increasing the role of private contractors at a cost of \$3.9m, and subsequently chose the company to implement this plan (*Dobbs: 2003, and Scahill: 2008, 28*). Cheney then went to work for Halliburton before returning to politics as Vice President for George Bush.

Cheney has received huge financial benefits from this heavy use of Halliburton, but individual benefits are just one small part of the Marxist interpretation of global politics; the systemic interpretation is of greater importance. Many Marxists point to the so-called Military-Industrial complex as an example of theory in action. Companies that produce military equipment and help to service the military make vast profits. As a result they fuel a large and powerful lobbying industry, which pushes for political and legislative decisions to be made in their favour. Moreover, military companies employ huge numbers of people in the US and make billions of dollars a year upon which the economy relies to remain buoyant. Under a capitalist system the more economically powerful a company gets the more political power it can yield. State elites might be more likely to employ military companies of various sorts in order to maintain their economic position.

In his now infamous and prescient warning when departing from office, President Dwight Eisenhower gave this warning of the dangers of a powerful military industry:

**Box 3.1: President Eisenhower on the dangers of PMCs**

“We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

*Dwight D. Eisenhower, Military-Industrial Complex Speech 1961, Public Papers of the Presidents, available at: <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/indust.html>*

The production of vast defence technological systems has reduced in recent years, since the end of the Cold War and especially with the pressure of the recent recession. However, as Mary Kaldor points out, one could argue that PMCs have replaced such now-defunct elements of the military-industrial complex. She argues that these are “*new companies whose income essentially depends on the ongoing war*” (Schouten, 2009) which gives them immense power and influence under a capitalist system.

### **3) The use of PMCs to maintain oil and colonial economic interests**

It is not only state governments which use PMCs. Some multi-national corporations employ PMCs to guard their economic interests, such as oil fields, around the world. Shell, for example, employ PMCs to guard their oil fields in Nigeria, a practice which has caused a great deal of controversy given the often brutal nature in which the PMCs work in relation to the local environment.

Marxists would argue that oil is an especially pertinent example, as its economic value to Western states makes it the primary driver behind global political strategy. This is why, Marxists argue, companies such as Shell are able to act without political scrutiny or regulation in their use of PMCs. Furthermore these major Western corporations, such as Shell, often work in under-developed and politically and economically weak countries, such as Nigeria. The local population have little or no control over the people working in their country and they are often placed at a severe disadvantage, both economically and physically, as a result of the work of these companies. Often Westerners are employed rather than local people, which means that the local economy benefits little from the profits being enjoyed by the multi-national corporation.

Although PMCs do employ many Westerners for vast sums of money to work in dangerous war zones, they also employ people with little or no training from countries in the global south for far less money. These employees not only earn far less but also have little or no power to demand fair working practices, employment rights and legal representation etc. As a Marxist would argue they are placed in to a system of dependency, which perpetuates the global inequalities already existent in the international system.



## Section 4: PMCs and Social Constructivism

*From reading Chapter 9 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Social Constructivist International Relations (IR) theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

This case study looks at: **1) The dissolution of a norm?** and **2) Legitimacy of PMCs and international law.**

#### 1) The dissolution of a norm?

The 1989 UN International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries is an extensive document which sets out a definition for what constitutes a mercenary and also attempts to forbid any state from using, supporting or allowing mercenaries (see <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r034.htm>).

Under the Geneva Convention, and therefore under international law, mercenaries are illegal. As has already been discussed, mercenaries have been around and in use for centuries. Soldiers who were hired to fight were considered by Machiavelli to be prone to disloyalty and a risky option for leaders of the Italian city-states to employ. Machiavelli therefore advises in *The Prince* that a national conscripted army, fighting for patriotic allegiance, and honour, be used instead of mercenaries if a political leader wanted to be truly successful. The negative connotations associated with mercenaries are also pointed out by the infamous quote from Shakespeare:

#### Box 4.1 A Shakespearean warning

“Cry ‘Havoc!’, and let slip the dogs of war.”

*William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, (Act 3, Scene 1) 1601*

Many people use this quote when referring to the use of PMCs, which are in their essence mercenaries, in order to demonstrate the negative associations surrounding the use of such groups.

Social Constructivist theory would suggest that the norm against the use of mercenaries, which accounts for their negative perception and facilitated the establishment of an international law against their use, seems to be collapsing given the level of their use in Iraq and Afghanistan. PMCs have received a great deal of negative attention in the press and they are coming under an increasing amount of public and legal scrutiny. There have been several law-suits brought against PMCs in the US as a result of their actions towards Iraqi civilians and the companies' treatment of their employees who have been killed in action. Yet it is a relatively small portion of the population calling for PMCs to be banned.

Although Public officials and the governments by which they are employed steer clear of the word 'mercenary', and thus avoiding the associated connotations, they continue to use entities which are hired military (so in essence mercenaries). In using such hired militia they ignore much of the controversy surrounding actions of many of these individual private soldiers and of the companies by which they are employed.

## 2) Legitimacy of PMCs and international law

Perhaps it seems at first glance that a norm against the use of private military companies would be both hard to develop and unlikely to be enforced because of the pressure in the opposite direction. PMCs have thus far largely escaped legal regulation, in part by avoiding the international definition of a 'mercenary'. Yet law, both international and domestic, generally grows from the development of norms and precedents. There are an increasing number of law-suits being brought against PMCs by civilians who have been injured or by the families of those killed by PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some families of private contractors themselves are bringing lawsuits against the private military companies for the practices they have employed. International law is famously hard to enforce and many, particularly those of the realist persuasion, would argue that without an arbiter to police and enforce international law that it is largely redundant. The development of international and domestic laws attempting to regulate the PMC industry could, however, place a serious question over the legitimacy of PMCs and make governments question whether they *should* use PMCs rather than whether they *can* use PMCs.

### Discussion question

Does this possibility make the social constructivist theory seem more persuasive?

Or, do you think that states are still the most powerful entity in the international system which can and will do whatever they want and ignore international law?

### Box 4.2: Peter Singer on private soldiers

"A more important question, which basically puts your question in a wider way, is whether they are legitimate or not? It's not about their action, or if they commit a crime (many companies or peoples commit crimes, including in the military field of course), but it's literally: are they legitimate or not? And a related question would be: when do you hire them, and when do you not? It's not a question anymore "can contractors can do it?" It's rather: "should they?" We've been focused on the can part, and we should shift our attention to the should, which is a more fundamental question. Now, you see this sort of patchwork of regulation being built and expanding in different areas, from the US to Iraq, and that is how international law ultimately gets built. But we know there's an extreme lag-time."

*Schouten, P., 2009a.*

## Section 5: Post-Colonial Approaches to PMCs

*From reading Chapter 11 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of Post-Colonialism as International Relations theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e.).*

### Introduction

This case study looks at: **1) PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan to maintain imperialism** and **2) PMCs employing ill-trained and vulnerable individuals from the Global South**

#### 1) PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan to maintain imperialism

As discussed in your textbook chapter on Post-colonialism (see ch.11), much of the debate is focused on whether modern day military ventures by the West into countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan constitute a continuation of imperialism by informal/alterred means. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could not have been fought without the heavy reliance on PMCs – as has been previously mentioned the ratio of soldiers to contractors in 2003 was 1.5:1. The motivation and justification for the war in Iraq was initially to remove weapons of mass destruction held by Saddam Hussein. Once none could be found, however, the project became a much larger and more loosely defined one of bringing “democracy” to this conflicted area much blighted by the tyrannical rule of Hussein and his corrupt government. Yet it can be argued that “democracy”, in the form that the coalition forces were trying to institute, was Western liberal democracy. Extending from this argument is that Western forces were trying to rebuild an entire nation-state in the Western model and one which would serve Western political and economic interests. PMCs were a vital part of this program. The length of time that PMCs have been and continue to be working in Iraq means that they have become something of a permanent fixture in the country, working to protect and further Western interests.

Perhaps the war in Iraq – and as an integral part of the war, the phenomenon of PMCs – makes post-colonial theory seem persuasive as a theory of global politics. Though we may debate this in an academic setting, there were (and still are) many Iraqis who have testified to the fact that they saw private military companies as the personification of Western imperialism on the ground. This was in large part because of the particularly ostentatious way in which many of the contractors went about the country: they drove large, blacked-out humvees, and wore ‘Rayban’ sunglasses and black uniforms. Just as importantly, there were many instances of PMCs behaving in ways which were directly contradictory to Islamic and Iraqi culture, such as openly drinking alcohol in bars in the Green Zone.

#### 2) PMCs employing ill-trained and vulnerable individuals from the Global South

As was briefly mentioned in the section on Marxism, private military contractors employ workers from countries of the global south such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and the Philippines. Ex-servicemen from the UK and the USA are highly trained and highly skilled, which is reflected in their high salaries. However, those employed from developing countries are often given very little information about the work they are about to embark on, given little training, and are paid a fraction of what those earn from Western nations.

Consider this example: Juan Nerio, an El Salvadorian, was reportedly offered \$1200 a month by a US security firm, and was sent to Iraq just six weeks later with an AK-47 assault rifle to guard a U.S. diplomatic complex in Iraq. El Salvador has become a target for recruiting cheap security personnel. Geoff Thale, from the Washington Office on Latin America, calls this the “Equivalent of a poverty draft.” The political consequences of the increased number of civilians on the ground in Iraq are diverted from the U.S. (Sullivan, 2004).

In 2007, a UN working group on the "use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination" travelled to Chile to undertake a fact-finding mission. This mission was prompted by the consistent use of cheap labour from the global south to work as PMCs/mercenaries. The aim of the working group, and subsequent meeting of officials, was to establish legal regulation and legislation to outlaw the use of mercenaries and prevent the exploitation of those from the global south.

#### **Box 5.1: The UN targets mercenaries**

“Chile has been a country of concern to the UN Working Group (UNWG) since 2004, when it was reported that 124 former Chilean soldiers were in Iraq. Sources in Santiago estimate that there are currently 500 Chilean mercenaries there, while Navarro says there are 1,000. The university experts at the meeting said that Chile has copious legislation on private security services, but mercenaries are not outlawed, so that it is essential for the country to ratify the UN Convention and adjust its domestic legislation accordingly.”

*Daniela Estrada and Gustavo González, ‘UN on the Offensive Against Iraq Mercenaries’, Global Policy Forum (Inter Press Service, July 2007), available at:*

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/173/30569.html>

This issue may prompt you to consider that, although formal colonialism has supposedly come to an end, domination and exploitation by the rich ‘West’ continues over those people and nation-states in the global south. Refer back to Chapter 11 in the textbook which uses **postcolonialism** instead of **post-colonialism** to denote the continued age and reach of colonialism.

## Section 6: Post-structural Approaches to PMCs

*From reading Chapter 10 of The Globalization of World Politics (7e.), you should now be familiar with the basic tenets of post-structuralism International Relations theory. You are advised to consult this key chapter if you haven't done so already as its contents will not be repeated here.*

*Bracketed chapter references, for example (see ch.2), refer to the relevant chapter in The Globalization of World Politics (7e).*

### Introduction

This section of the case study focuses on: **1) Are PMCs mercenaries?** And **2) Description and discourse: PMCs in New Orleans**

#### 1) Are PMCs mercenaries?

As has previously been discussed, there is significant debate surrounding the labelling of PMCs and mercenaries. For some theorists, especially 'paradigm' theorists, it is not especially important how these soldiers are defined. Instead, it is their policy implications or their effects which are of significance. However, to post-structuralists, there is a great deal of significance in the name. Mercenaries, as we have already mentioned, generally have negative connotations. Historical and academic references to them conjure images of greedy, amoral, and barbaric fighters. On the other hand, national armies have been created as patriotic, noble warriors fighting on behalf of a moral purpose bigger and more significant than themselves.

Framing the debate:

You will notice that those who oppose the use of PMCs always refer to them as mercenaries. This is because they are aware of the negative connotations in people's minds and they hope this name will lead to a reduction in their use and influence. On the other hand, those who are proponents tend to prefer the PMC label for the very same reason: the negative image conjured up by the use of the word mercenary. Post-structuralists would argue that this labelling then extends a step further, as how the entities employed by states are defined in turn contributes to the definition of the state/government by which they are employed.

#### 2) Description and discourse on PMCs

Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, the military and security contractor Blackwater was employed by the US government to send personnel to New Orleans. In an interview with one journalist, employees described their work as "*securing neighbourhoods*" and "*confronting criminals*" (Scahill, 2005). By framing the **discourse** in this way, PMCs are able to present a radically different picture of themselves and of their work than if they were to use different language.

Moreover, post-structuralism would emphasise that their language as enables them to create a particular picture of the world in which they work. Phrases such as "*securing*

*neighbourhoods*” and “*confronting criminals*” create distinct identities for those in New Orleans in need of protection; the ‘criminals’ being confronted; and the Blackwater personnel who enforce the rule of law. This discourse, if persuasive, creates certain identities and situations for those involved. It does not highlight, for example, that the ‘criminals’ were by and large those impoverished and marginalised groups of society worst affected by the hurricane, disproportionately African-Americans, looting for food and products to survive. It also does not reflect that those in the ‘neighbourhoods’ being secured were generally the richer white populations, on whom the devastation inflicted by the hurricane was considerably less.

Post-structuralists would further argue that whoever dominates the information and the discourse gains legitimacy, which is vital to maintaining and pursuing power. PMCs are legitimate, as are those who employ them, when they are ‘protecting neighbourhoods’ and ‘enforcing the rule of law’. This provides a stark contrast to when they are “*one of the most feared professional killers in the world and they are accustomed to operating without worry of legal consequences*”, as one article describes them (Scahill and Crespo, 2005).

This is one way to illustrate that, as the chapter in the textbook discusses, language for post-structuralists doesn’t merely *transmit* meaning, it *creates* meaning, identity, and power. Post-structuralists seek to question and undermine the very premise on which other theories (Realist, for example) rest. Indeed, as demonstrates in an argument by **R.B.J Walker** ‘the state’ is not a ‘natural’ starting point; it is itself created and re-created through discourse and actions of all relevant actors’.

## Weblinks

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/mercenaries/>

Homepage of the UN Working Group on Mercenaries and Global Research

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