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THE USE OF PRIVATE MILITARY AND SECURITY COMPANIES IN SOMALIA

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, Somalia became embroiled in a twenty year civil war that saw the collapse of its ruling administration, the emergence of autonomous regions in the north, and the fight for influence amongst clan-based opposition groups in the power vacuum of the south. The country became characterized as a failed state due to the protracted lack of a permanent central authority, and the United Nations (UN) intervened in an attempt to restore order and provide humanitarian relief. The conflict saw the displacement of over two million people,¹ the rise of fundamental Islamist groups in the south, and the emergence of piracy in the unpatrolled Indian Ocean. Amongst this turmoil, Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) were employed by alliances, governments, humanitarian organizations and other actors from the international community, and benefited from the lucrative investment opportunities presented.

The international PMSC market developed at the end of the Cold War as armed forces around the world downsized personnel and equipment resources, thus creating many regional security gaps.² In Somalia, PMSCs have operated at a global level to achieve the indirect foreign policy goals of contracting states, at the national level to

¹ UNHCR Operational Portal, "Horn of Africa: Somalia Refugee Situation," last modified 31 March 2018, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/horn>.

² Pedro Barge Cunha, "Somalia as a Market for Private Military and Security Companies: Definitions, Agents and Services," in *State and Societal Challenges in the Horn of Africa: Conflict and Processes of State Formation, Reconfiguration and Disintegration* (Lisbon: Lisbon University Institute, 2013), 78.

progress the commercial interests of the ruling government, and at the local level to reinforce the capacities of specific clans.

For some, the presence of PMSCs has been seen to restore public security and order “either by compensating for political unwillingness to intervene militarily in a context of humanitarian emergency, or by serving as ‘force multipliers’ to local forces.”³ For others, they have been regarded as responsible for prolonging or even intensifying violent clashes, often destabilizing situations by creating an environment that is intrinsically militarized.⁴ Through an examination of the types of PMSCs used in Somalia, the perceptions of their use, and their impact on Somali security sector institutions, this paper will analyse the effectiveness of PMSCs in Somalia and illustrate the relevance of their use in the affairs of failing states.

DEFINITION OF PMSCs

PMSCs are often considered in the context of their recent activities in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which provides a limited perspective on their history and the scope of their modern contributions to the private security industry. The armed wings of the British East India Company, the British South Africa Company, and the Dutch East Indies Company during the colonial period are among some of the earliest examples of PMSC use.⁵ Modern PMSCs trace their origins back to ex-Special Air Service veterans

³ Zeljko Branovic, “The Privatization of Security in Failing States: A Quantitative Assessment,” *Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)*, Occasional Paper no. 24 (April 2011), 11.

⁴ Global Policy Forum, “Countries in Which PMSCs Operate,” last accessed 9 May 2018, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/pmscs/countries-in-which-pmscs-operate.html>.

⁵ Dr. Kevin A. O’Brien, “Putting PMSCs in Historical Perspective,” in *Co-operation with Private Military and Security Companies*, Dialogue 7 (London: Doctors Without Borders, 2008), 3.

Sir David Sterling and John Woodhouse, who founded WatchGuard International in 1965 to provide training teams and advise on security matters in Africa and the Middle East.⁶ In the current security paradigm, the number of PMSCs in operation and the range of their services is ever expanding. Defining PMSCs in this environment is challenging.

The vast majority of PMSCs are registered in western countries, predominantly the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), and are largely staffed by ex-military personnel often with Special Forces backgrounds.⁷ Some will only recruit from within their national military pool while others have a more multinational composition. The terms mercenaries, contractors, private and corporate warriors, private military firms, and private security companies have all been used to describe PMSCs. Some companies vary their services from typical military support such as participating in combat, to more traditional security such as providing static guards. PMSCs can offer both offensive and defensive services, with activities ranging from logistic functions to military training and front line combat. Grav characterizes PMSCs as “corporate bodies that specialize in the provision of military skill. [...] they break down what have long been seen as the traditional responsibilities of the government.”⁸

PMSC operational capacities are often difficult to interpret as multiple contracts give rise to overlapping services and lack of oversight makes it difficult to determine the true nature of the activities of many companies. Oversight challenges extend to the United

⁶ William P. Crowell *et al*, *Physical and Logical Security Convergence* (Burlington: Syngress Publishing, Inc., 2007), 51.

⁷ Jethro Norman, “Private Military and Security Companies in Somalia since the End of the Cold War: Historical and Theoretical Implications,” *Leeds African Studies Bulletin* 77 (Winter 2015/16): 115.

⁸ Ivar Grøtta Grav, “The Impact of Private Military and Security Companies on Somali Security Sector Institutions,” (master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2012), 3.

Nations (UN), whose efforts to regulate the private security industry have been largely inadequate due mainly to countries who are most likely to use PMSCs not having ratified the 2001 International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries.⁹ Despite its criticism of private security contractors, the UN is increasingly turning to PMSCs in its own missions as it has become targeted in conflict zones, including Somalia. The UN is weary of relying on local police forces and has therefore resorted to PMSCs to protect its personnel and facilities.

Various categorizations of the multiplicity of services offered by PMSCs have been established. Singer's "Tip of the Spear" typology is often used to describe PMSCs according to the range of services provided and the corresponding use of force. *Military provider firms* conduct services at the front line and can engage in actual fighting and the command of forces; *military consulting firms* offer training and advisory services; and *military support firms* provide supplementary services such as non-lethal aid, technical support, transportation, intelligence and logistics.¹⁰ Kinsey more simply classifies PMSCs along two axes: the means they use to secure their objective, ranging from lethal to non-lethal; and the object of their protection, ranging from private to public.¹¹ Shearer expands the grouping of PMSC services to five sectors: I – *direct support to military operators*; II – *military advice and training*; III – *logistics*; IV – *security services and*

⁹ Global Policy Forum, "PMSCs & the UN," last accessed 15 May 18, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/pmscs/50225-pmscs-a-the-un.html>.

¹⁰ P.W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 91.

¹¹ Christopher Kinsey, *Corporate Soldiers and International Security: The Rise of Private Military Companies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

political analysis; and V – *crime prevention*.¹² This paper's analysis of the effectiveness of PMSCs in Somalia will refer to Shearer's categorization of PMSC services to understand their activities in the country.

USE OF PMSCs IN SOMALIA

The phenomenon of PMSCs in Somalia has been stimulated by state weakness, resulting in a market offering security services for a variety of clients. The private security industry in Somalia has grown in conjunction with increased international interest and intervention in the region. PMSCs were first used in a solely logistical capacity as part of the US withdrawal of forces from Mogadishu in 1993, and then used into the 2000s for land-based anti-piracy training of Puntland, Somaliland and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) coastguard forces. After 2003, PMSC use in Somalia grew as the Horn of Africa was designated a key strategic site in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and in 2007 the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was supported by PMSCs, who have since become involved in an increasing array of activities from state-building and development to commercial enterprises.¹³

The totality of this activity indicates four discernible phases in the evolution of PMSC involvement in Somalia: from 1992 to 1995, as part of the humanitarian mission at the outbreak of the Somali Civil War; from 2000 to 2007, in support of anti-piracy training and operations for commercial shipping; from 2007 to 2011, to back AMISOM and

¹² Cunha, *Somalia as a Market for Private Military and Security Companies...*, 82.

¹³ Norman, *Private Military and Security Companies in Somalia since the End of the Cold War...*, 114.

expanding US commitments by the Department of Defence's Africa Command (AFRICOM) against the GWOT, as well as further international commitments to anti-piracy; and from 2011 to the present, to provide growing support to commercial oil and gas sectors.¹⁴

Funding for PMSCs operating in Somalia is derived from several sources. State-sponsored funds largely centre around Somalia's designation as a site in the GWOT. The expanded use of PMSCs in counter-terrorism operations and in support of AMISOM forces broadly correlates with increased US interest in the region, particularly since the creation of AFRICOM in 2007. The UK funds British PMSCs for the protection of its embassy in Mogadishu, and the United Arab Emirates provides significant funding for firms supporting anti-piracy operations. State-owned groups from Norway, China and Kuwait also operate in Somalia and rely on state-sponsored security.¹⁵

PMSCs also receive substantial funding from private companies, aid agencies, local elites, and increasingly through commercial endeavours such as real estate and fisheries investments. Cunha notes that "global actors with regional interests use PMSCs as operational mechanisms generating public and private commitments, in order to achieve political, military and economic goals."¹⁶ The latest wave of commercial expansion in Somalia followed PMSC-backed AMISOM forces ousting Al-Shabab from Mogadishu

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁶ Cunha, *Somalia as a Market for Private Military and Security Companies* ..., 83.

and significantly curbing piracy. In instances like this, the PMSC industry reveals its amorphous nature by profiting from both intervention and reconstruction.¹⁷

PERCEPTIONS OF PMSCs IN SOMALIA

The Somali public is acutely aware of the presence of PMSCs in the country, but little information is shared concerning their parent sponsors or the nature of their business in Somalia. As a result, most PMSCs are negatively regarded as mercenaries that have been given legitimacy by the TFG, AMISOM and the UN.¹⁸ There is general acknowledgement amongst Somalis that armed security is needed, but with Somali security sector institutions not able to provide the required security the prevalence of PMSCs is reluctantly accepted.¹⁹

There is also a perception amongst Somalis that PMSCs lack knowledge of Somalian society and its clan-based culture. Somali Member of Parliament Awad Ahmed Ashereh notes that “using private actors to implement SSR [security sector reform] programmes in weak states involves certain losses such as knowledge of local conditions and the future interoperability of forces.”²⁰ This lends risk to the relationship between PMSCs and the public as lack of political context can exacerbate securing local ownership of state security institutions.

¹⁷ Harun Maruf, “AMISOM Launches Attack Against Al-Shabab in Somalia,” last modified 6 November 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/amisom-launches-attack-against-al-shabab-in-somalia/4103604.html>.

¹⁸ The Economist, “Somalia: Most-failed state,” last modified 10 September 2016, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/09/10/most-failed-state?zid=304&ah=e5690753dc78ce91909083042ad12e30>.

¹⁹ Grav, *The Impact of Private Military and Security Companies on Somali Security Sector Institutions...*, 47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

The risk of PMSCs crowding out Somalia's state security institutions is omnipresent, with concerns that the state is prevented from establishing a monopoly on its own effective use of force. Observers argue that PMSCs who operate in support of multilateral peace missions and aid agency operations can offer promise, but only if utilized as international security advisors to provide training and build state capacities.²¹ Foreign forces used in an attempt to stabilize Somalia are seen to undermine the function of the government and its institutions, with fears that PMSCs involved too deeply in the political process are designed to replace certain functions within the Somali security sector.

Security critics regard the PMSC industry in Somalia as lacking in accountability and transparency, thus stimulating corruption as officials make personal gain from security contracts. Peter Cross of the United Nations Development Programme maintains that priority should be given to develop the capacity of state security institutions, but notes that a PMSC presence in Somalia will remain a "necessary evil" until proper auditing is established to address mismanagement, and that for the interim it is better for PMSCs to be hired by international organizations rather than directly by the TFG.²²

Conversely, proponents of PMSCs in Somalia acknowledge the TFG's challenge in needing to accept whatever security assistance is offered to the country, noting that financial constraints on state resources make the hiring of private security services an attractive option to quickly address security issues. While the UN recognizes that weak

²¹ Caroline Holmqvist, "Private Security Companies: The Case of Regulation," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, Paper no. 9 (2012), 55.

²² Grav, *The Impact of Private Military and Security Companies on Somali Security Sector Institutions...*, 48.

states contract PMSCs on the basis of getting immediate results rather than fundamentally restructuring standing security forces, it states that most private actors hired by the international community are assets to stabilizing Somalia and have so far not hindered the ability for Somali institutions to build their capacities.²³

EFFECTIVENESS OF PMSCs IN SOMALIA

The debate on the effectiveness of PMSCs in Somalia is divided along two lines. The first accepts that PMSCs restore public security by serving as force multipliers to break the cycles of violence and deny warlords access to resources that are crucial to continuing the fight. The second believes that PMSCs undermine national sovereignty by serving rival warlords who are competing for power, thus impacting the state's role as a guarantor of security.²⁴ This paper's analysis of the effectiveness of PMSC activity is performed at two levels, global and local, using Shearer's categorization sectors to compare and understand PMSC activities.

At the global level, international actors use PMSCs to reduce the political and financial cost of achieving foreign policy goals. Following the *Black Hawk Down* incident during the Battle of Mogadishu in October 1993, the US instituted a zero casualties policy in Africa and centred foreign policy efforts on the development of

²³ United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1853 (2008)," last modified 26 February 2010, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/91.

²⁴ Branovic, *The Privatization of Security in Failing States...*, 11.

country capabilities.²⁵ The outsourcing of AMISOM training programs to PMSCs such as DynCorp International, PAE and AECOM to strengthen the operational capabilities of Somali TFG forces is evidence of fulfilling direct commitments while avoiding political cost. Furthermore, territorial governments are attracted to the foreign stabilization process because it allows for low-cost engagement of its own security. By allowing PMSCs to operate in Somalia, the TFG avoids considerable political and economic investment while benefitting from the efficient and effective delivery of services. The provision of assistance to the internationally recognized government of Somalia satisfies sector II – *military advice and training* - of Shearer’s categorization. However, the activities of other PMSCs such as Selected Armor to provide *direct military support* – sector I of Shearer’s scale – to the government against insurgents does not reinforce state capacities and instead contributes to delegitimizing the TFG’s power.

At the local level, the contracting state and territorial state are the same, with a local entity contracting a foreign agent to reinforce its capabilities. PMSCs leave a considerable footprint in this regard, directly influencing the balance of power by developing the operational capabilities of specific Somali clans rather than recognized authorities. This thereby boosts what Rotberg refers to as the *collapsed state*, where “political goods are obtained through private or ad hoc means,” and “security is equated with the rule of the strong.”²⁶ Clan dynamics are illustrated in the 2002 case where Puntland coastguard forces were trained by Hart Security, but a dispute between clans led

²⁵ Rod Thornton, *Asymmetric Warfare: Threat and Response in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 10.

²⁶ Robert Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10.

the coastguard to split along tribal lines. The ruling President, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, won his position with the support of the Tarr family, who owned coastguard vessels, and Yusuf Ahmed changed service supplier from Hart to Somcan, a company preferred by the clan.²⁷ This is an example of services in sector II – *military advice and training* – of Shearer’s categorization where PMSC involvement was able to change the local balance of power and reinforce the capacities of the incumbent power.

RELEVANCE OF PMSCs IN THE AFFAIRS OF FAILING STATES

During the past decade, more than one hundred PMSCs have operated in over one hundred countries around the world, with the current industry valued at \$150 billion USD and growing at an annual rate of seven to eight percent.²⁸ PMSCs have become important tools in returning order and stability to conflict-affected scenarios, yet holding companies accountable for their actions has been challenging. Following the Blackwater incident in Iraq in 2007 where 17 innocent civilians were killed, policy makers began to consider the importance of regulation, the protection of human rights, and the impact of PMSC operations on a territorial state’s legitimate use of power. These ideals notwithstanding, the relevance of PMSCs in the affairs of failing states rests in the results they provide.

During the 1990s, African civil wars tended to end more quickly with the involvement of PMSCs, though usually with increased fighting intensity and numbers of

²⁷ Christopher Kinsey, Stig Hansen, and George Franklin, “The Impact of Private Security Companies on Somalia’s Governance Networks,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2009), 154.

²⁸ Nicolas Florquin, “A Booming Business: Private Security and Small Arms,” in *Small Arms Survey 2011: States of Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 103.

casualties than could be expected with the intervention of regular forces.²⁹ The use of the South African company Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone in 1995 was instrumental in achieving a negotiated peace, and became an encouraging precedent for PMSC advocates. However, the structure of the conflict environment is critical to the success of PMSCs and local conditions must also be considered in determining relevance. In Sierra Leone, the adversaries and their respective military capabilities were known, and Executive Outcomes gained the support of a brutalized local population not just by providing security, but by providing basic medical services as well.

In the current conflict in Syria, on the other hand, multiple regional and world powers are involved and are in disagreement over who to support. The Islamic State commands considerable military experience and resources, and has even introduced a degree of order and healthcare services to the areas they control. Although a Russian PMSC is reportedly operating tanks and artillery in support of the Russian-Syrian operation against the Islamic State,³⁰ western governments who are hesitant to put “boots on the ground” and who may consider using PMSCs in Syria will likely be challenged in this environment.³¹

²⁹ Ulrich Petersohn, “Private Military and Security Companies, Military Effectiveness, and Conflict Severity in Weak States, 1990-2007,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 5 (May 2017), 1058.

³⁰ John Sparks, “Revealed: Russian’s ‘Secret Syrian Mercenaries,’” *Sky News*, last modified 10 August 2016, <https://news.sky.com/story/revealed-russias-secret-syria-mercenaries-10529248>.

³¹ Ulrich Petersohn, “Private military companies don’t stand much of a chance against Islamic State,” *The Conversation*, last modified 21 February 2017, <https://theconversation.com/private-military-companies-dont-stand-much-of-a-chance-against-islamic-state-68953>.

CONCLUSION

Somalia is a rare and extreme variation of a failed state, as it has little control over its peripheral regions and its expression of power is limited to its capital city, Mogadishu.³² The state's inability to rebuild after the Somali Civil War is hampered by the authority of local elites and their unwillingness to invest in institutional reconstruction when parallel clan-based structures can perform the same functions. Clans have effectively become self-governing entities who have carved out spheres of influence across the country.

This paper has examined the types of PMSCs used in Somalia, the perceptions of their use, and their impact on Somali security sector institutions to analyse the effectiveness of PMSCs in Somalia and illustrate the relevance of their use in the affairs of failing states. PMSCs have increasingly been used in Somalia by foreign, national and local actors to provide protective security, security training, peacekeeping training, and counselling. They have proven to be a cost-effective alternative to providing traditional security services due to an increasing lack of human resources and skills in local forces, and they offer clients the advantage of a degree of dissociation and avoidance of responsibility for their actions.

The employment of PMSCs in Somalia has been problematic in the sense that their actions are largely unregulated. They generally function in the absence of regulatory frameworks to vet the recruitment of their employees, control their weapons and monitor their activities. As the provision of security in Somalia is shifted to commercial markets, decreased transparency will continue to make PMSCs difficult to distinguish from other

³² Rotberg, *When States Fail...*, 6.

state actors, agencies, and private or hybrid organizations that provide security. This will continue to challenge the international community's traditional ways of thinking of security when responsibility no longer rests with Somalia's principal government.

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