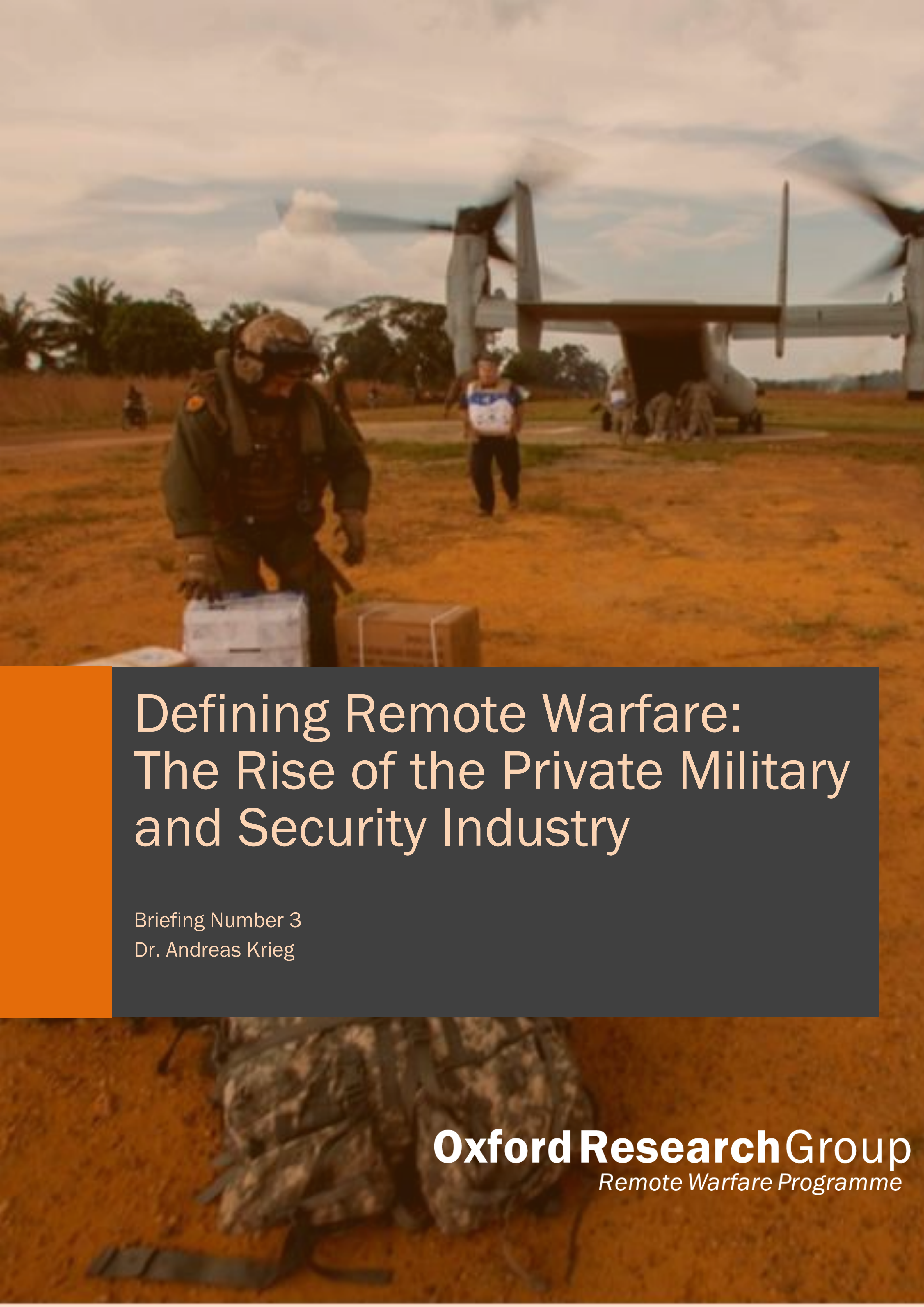

Defining Remote Warfare: The Rise of the Private Military and Security Industry

Briefing Number 3

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Remote Warfare Programme

This report has been commissioned by the **Remote Warfare Programme**, a programme of Oxford Research Group. The programme examines changes in military engagement, with a focus on remote warfare. This form of intervention takes place behind the scenes or at a distance rather than on a traditional battlefield, often through drone strikes and air strikes from above, with Special Forces, intelligence agencies, private contractors, and military training teams on the ground.

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Cover image: US Service Members and civilian contractors unload food, water and supplies (US Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Andre Dakis).

About the Series

The *Remote Warfare Programme* is a research and policy unit analysing the rise of remote warfare: the recent shift away from "boots on the ground" deployments towards light-footprint military interventions abroad.

Among other factors, austerity, budget cuts, war-weariness, and high political risk aversion in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan have all played their part in making large-scale UK military deployments less palatable to the UK Parliament and public.[1]

Alongside this, trends in military engagement such as the increasing use of drones and an increased focus on counterterrorism and building local capacity – evident in, for example, the addition of defence engagement as a core task of the Ministry of Defence – have allowed the UK to play a role in countering threats posed by groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab without deploying large numbers of its own troops.

The emergence of approaches that seek to counter threats at a distance, without the deployment of large military forces, is an umbrella definition of remote warfare. With local troops engaged in the bulk of the frontline fighting, the UK's role has, by and large, been a supporting one, providing training and equipment and, where necessary, providing air and intelligence support, and the assistance of UK Special Forces to bolster local troops.

The focus of the *Remote Warfare Programme'*s work has been on a strategic level, asking what the implications of these changes in military engagement are for the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of UK military engagement abroad.[2]

However, to ask these strategic questions, we have often had to put to one side the fact that remote warfare is not an uncontested term, and our broad definitions and analysis often hinge on an assumption that "you know it when you see it". Moreover, while we have been focusing on the use of remote warfare on today's battlefield, we are also aware that future changes in technology, especially the rising importance of cyber and autonomous weapons, will have an impact on how we should understand remote warfare.

This series brings together experts to discuss important aspects of remote warfare to provide some conceptual clarity. It looks at current practice, including reports on security cooperation, intelligence sharing, private security companies and drones, as well as looking to the future of warfare: addressing how offensive cyber operations and autonomous weapons could change the landscape of military engagement.

Over the course of the year, we have been releasing bi-monthly briefings on these subjects by experts in their field, with the eventual aim of exploring common themes, risks and opportunities presented by the evolving use of remote warfare.

About this briefing

The contractor has become a potent commercial surrogate for the state to conduct expeditionary operations across a global battlespace, defined here as the environment, factors and conditions which need to be understood to successfully apply combat power, protect a force or complete a mission. Private military and security companies (PMSCs) act as force multipliers that enhance the state's ability to fight wars remotely. Contractors allow states to achieve military objectives overseas with enhanced discretion, plausible deniability and consequently lower political costs.

In the past two decades, Western states have developed an over-reliance on the market in certain areas such as logistics and the maintenance of high-tech weapons systems or IT infrastructure. Although contractors working for Western states only rarely provide armed services and do not provide combat or combat support services, they nonetheless offer essential military support functions without which Western states could not successfully execute military operations. Consequently, the market has established itself as a critical provider for Western militaries that have widely lost institutional knowledge and in-house capacity to commercial providers. Therefore, the industry has developed from a mere agent of the state to a partner that determines state capacity and capability.

In the non-Western world the industry has created security partnerships between the state and the PMSC market, which complement the state's ability to provide public security. Here, PMSCs provide a range of armed services including combat and combat support services. The market enables these states to buy-in capability and capacity that they cannot domestically generate. With insufficient skilled capacity to conduct counterinsurgency or counterterrorist operations, non-Western states have externalized core military functions to commercial providers.

In light of the increased role of the market in shaping global security agendas, the adequate regulation of the market for force has become an ever more important issue. Although both Western and non-Western states are heavily dependent on contractors to effectively execute military operations overseas, the contractor remains able to evade effectively home, host or contracting state regulation and monitoring.

Author bio

In his research Dr Andreas Krieg has focused on a variety of different subjects relating to the academic discipline of Security Studies. During his graduate studies Andreas' research revolved around Just War theory and conflict studies with a particular focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. During his doctoral studies and beyond Andreas has focused on the changing nature of civil-security sector relations amid a growing commercialization of security, and its impact on security provision in the 21st century. More recently, Andreas has explored the nexus between security and socio-politics in the Middle East after the Arab Spring. He has just completed a monograph on surrogate warfare analyzing new security assemblages between state and non-state actors in 21st century security provision. The monograph will be published with Georgetown University Press later this year and is titled '*Surrogate Warfare - A Mode of War for the 21st Century*'. This monograph is a first attempt to conceptualize the wide-ranging externalization of the burden of warfare from state to non-state actors in recent decades.

Contents

Introduction **1**

The Western model: Supplementing Warfighting **2**

Supplementary Services 3

Logistics 3

Technological Support 5

Security Sector Reform 5

Motivations for Commercializing Supplementary Services **6**

Small armies 6

Specialist skills 7

Troop caps 7

Cost-savings 8

Building local capacity 9

The non-Western model: Direct Warfighting **9**

Combat & Combat Support Services 9

Motivations for Commercializing Combat & Combat Support Services 12

Conclusions **14**

Endnotes **16**

Introduction

The popular debate on the use of contractors in war has revolved around the fear that states could contract out war fighting to armed contractors in an effort to minimize political and operational risks. While contractors have outnumbered uniformed service personnel in Western military operations since the late 1990s, most of these contractors are not operating on the tip of the spear, i.e. are not providing core combat military functions.[3] Instead, contractors accompanying Western armed forces are mostly unarmed support personnel relieving the military from non-core military functions such as logistics, maintenance and consulting.[4] A small percentage of these contractors are armed providing non-lethal defensive security services to bases, lines of communication or high-profile individuals.

Therefore, from at least a Western point of view, popular debates convoluting mercenarism with the increased state reliance on contractors in war are too simplistic. Rooted in Machiavelli's rejection of soldiers of fortune and reinforced by the anti-mercenary norm emerging in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, the academic literature and the media has taken a widely antagonistic stance towards the outsourcing of security and military services to the market. However, unlike mercenaries who operate for private, individual gain in conflicts overseas outside any contractual and organizational framework, the contractor is an employee of a private military and security company (PMSC) as a hierarchically organized enterprise, which is registered locally and trades services openly, driven by business profit not individual profit.[5]

The market for force or the private military and security industry, is a highly diverse, global industry consisting of PMSCs offering a broad range of military or security-related services. Singer most famously distinguishes between

- **Military provider firms**: PMSCs in this category provide offensive combat and combat support roles.
- **Military consultant firms**: These companies provide training and advisory functions as well as defensive security services.
- **Military support firms:** These PMSCs generate the bulk of turnover in the industry by providing a diverse range of supplementary services such as logistics, intelligence gathering or technical support services.[6]

Amid the agenda to privatize formerly publicly provided services, the private military and security industry emerged on the fringes of the military industrial complex in the 1980s. As a service industry, the market for force was initially comprised of military provider firms offering a range of armed services in the developing world. Companies such as Executive Outcome (EO) and Sandline were prominent outliers in what was to become a more security services-oriented industry. Throughout the 1990s, the United States and the British military began to increasingly outsource support services to the market as the numbers of military personnel declined in the post-Cold War era. The demand for smaller, more agile militaries not only paved the way for an increased investment into technological warfare but opened the door for a variety of different support and consultant firms to emerge.

The real boom for the industry began after 9/11 when the interventionist agenda of the Bush administration created a demand for levels of capacity, capability and expertise that the military was unable to generate at short notice. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq caused the annual turn-over of the market for force to, grow from an estimated 55 billion USD in the late 1990s to over 100 billion USD in 2003 to 220 billion USD in 2014.[7] The industry has established itself as an integral component of warfare and a key player in international security in the 21st century.

Amid the globalized, securitized and privatized security environment of the 21st century, the increased commercialization of military and security services appears to have evolved. As the state is under pressure to deliver on an ever wider and deeper security agenda against less tangible threats in a global battlespace, the industry provides the state with an important force-multiplying role. Contractors allow states to conduct military operations overseas with a light footprint, minimizing human, financial and political costs. Augmenting existing capacity and capability and achieving levels of discretion and deniability, the contractor has become an integral part of 21st century warfare in the Western and

An Afghan National Police officer meets a British special security agent (image: Wikimedia Commons, 2009)

non-Western world, without which military operations can no longer be conducted effectively and sustainably.

This report will show how, amid a new global security environment shared by state and non-state actors, the market for force has developed into a strategic partner for the state in both the Western and non-Western world. Globally, the private military and security industry has filled voids that the state and its armed forces can no longer fill. As a consequence, Western and non-Western states alike have developed a dependency on commercial providers of security and military services.

The Western model: Supplementing Warfighting

In the West, the private military and security industry has evolved as part of the military-industrial complex of the 1980s and is dominated by British and American companies. Both the United States and the United Kingdom have produced professionals with particular military expertise and skill sets who, amid military downsizing, have been released into the market since the 1990s. The self-perception of these individuals as professionals in the military rather than merely military professionals has contributed to a 'revolving door' between military and law enforcement on one side and the industry on the other. An increased contractual flexibility within the armed forces of both the UK and the USA has allowed these military professionals to transit between the public service in uniform and the commercial service for a company.

Even though the focus on the market for force appears to be mostly military in nature, it is important to highlight that this market is dominated by companies providing supplementary services to the military – services, which on the tip of the spear fall into the category of security rather than defence. That is to say, the private military and security industry provides services for Western governments that, even on the higher end of the scale, are far removed from high-intensity warfighting. Instead, commercially provided security services, even if delivered by armed contractors, are set in supposedly more benign environments and involve tactical operations to secure objects or individuals. At the peak of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq when the US Defence Department had 202,100 contractors deployed in the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area only 30,000 in Iraq and 24,000 in Afghanistan provided armed services.[8] These armed contractors were not directly involved in hostilities and were only to use force defensively in protection of their own lives or those they were meant to protect. Armed contractors at the tip of spear delivering security services for Western governments in hostile environments are either involved in providing static security for installations, stations or compounds or dynamic security for high profile personnel, diplomatic staff or convoys.

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Cases where armed contractors deliver direct combat support services in high intensity combat situations have been rare. The reason is that in the Western world the state monopoly on violence and the anti-mercenary norm remain very potent concepts, which make it morally unacceptable to outsource actual warfighting to privateers. The former South African PMSC Executive Outcome and the former British PMSC Sandline are exceptions to these norms – norms which came about in the 20th century. Disregarding the history of privateering and commercializing security and defence, these norms are a product of Western thought over the past century.[9]

Nonetheless, in spite of the Western aversion to armed contractors providing direct combat support services in hostile environments, the market for force has had a tremendous, albeit indirect, impact on the delivery of force by Western militaries in combat operations since at least the late 1990s. Contractors, whether armed or unarmed, allowed Western states to fight wars remotely by minimizing the operational, financial, human and political costs of war. This section looks at three supplementary services that PMSCs provide for Western militaries: first, logistical support; second, technological support; and third, training and education. Although these services fall within the military support functions of the private military and security industry, they have a direct impact on how Western militaries fight wars, as the second half of the section illustrates.

Supplementary Services

Logistics

The most important supplementary military service outsourced to the market is **logistics** – the very foundation upon which a military operation is based.[10] In 2015 75% of all contractors employed by the US CENTCOM were involved in providing logistical support.[11] While sustaining lines of communication has always been a challenge in warfare, it is the rising demand for expeditionary out-of-area operations, which puts a strain on lines of communication and logistics. In the era of 'everywhere wars', simultaneous deployments overseas to theatres where local facilities are limited have become more frequent.[12]

As a consequence, the military commander in the 21st century requires logistical support with maximum flexibility, reach and depth across a global, multidimensional battlespace. Therefore, operational planning turned to the market as a force multiplier to ensure greater flexibility and reach beyond in-house capabilities. Western military logistics organizations had experienced overstretch in the 1980s, lacking the capacity and capability to provide support and sustainment across a range of ongoing operations. This overstretch was exacerbated by the multitude of protracted conflicts the US military was engaged in during the 1990s when the market had already assumed a leading support role in the supply chain. To overcome logistical shortfalls and fill sustainment requirements, the market provided a multitude of support services ranging from transportation over construction to base support.[13]

Organic capability has since been systematically outsourced to contractors to an extent that many analysts have recently warned of the Western militaries' overreliance on the market in the field of logistics.[14] The overdependence on contractors in sustaining military operations has led to an atrophy in the military's logistical force, not just in the United States but also in the United Kingdom and other NATO states. Due to this degradation of organic logistical capability, contracted logisticians have been ever more important in sustaining Western military operations. Today, as the military supply chain is dominated by commercial providers who are involved in logistical requirements planning, oversight and implementation,[15] Western militaries are no longer able to sustain military operations solely based on in-house capability and capacity. Decades of institutional knowledge and expertise have been lost to commercial providers that can tap into a truly global supply network.

An Afghan national army soldier receives medical care from a Department of Defense contractor during the M240B machine gun range, Forward Operating Base Thunder, Paktya province, Afghanistan (image: Wikimedia Commons, 2009)

Although contractors in this capacity are not employed to fight, they nonetheless provide a core means to supply the soldier on the battlefield to do so. With military downsizing, uniformed personnel today is specialized on core military functions leaving non-core military functions, even services as essential as logistical support functions, to commercial providers. By contracting out logistical support to the market, servicemen and women in uniform are free to concentrate on war fighting. Thus, without the essential logistical support for the soldier by the market, Western militaries, particularly those of middle powers such as the United Kingdom or France, would no longer be able to conduct expeditionary operations.

Technological Support

Another vital supplementary service provided by contractors is **technological support** for information technology (IT) infrastructure and complex high-tech weapon systems. In the Information Age, amid network-centric warfare, the security of networks has become integral to a seamless conduct of military operations across a global battlespace. The maintenance of IT networks has developed into a core capability that just like logistics is a force enabler. Information sharing as well as the synchronization of operational and tactical action has made 21st century military operations more effective than ever before.[16]

From the early 1990s when network-centrism was pioneered in the US Department of Defence, commercial providers helped build and maintain IT infrastructure in Western militaries. The lack of sufficiently trained and experienced servicemen and women in uniform made it necessary for militaries to outsource these functions to the market.[17] As in the commercial world, militaries rely heavily on contractors to administer networks and ensure that information sharing and synchronization operate smoothly. Unlike in the commercial world, however, these outsourced IT services constitute centres of gravity for the potential delivery of force. The surrendering control of networks wholly or partially to contractors has created a military dependence on the market, particularly in the field of cybersecurity.[18]

Technological support services delivered by PMSCs have also extended to the maintenance and operations of complex high-tech weapons systems. Drone warfare in particular rests increasingly on the foundations of contractor support. While in the past unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were merely serviced by contractors as part of wider procurement deals, contractors provide much wider support today. In the United States drones are launched and landed by contractors due to the shortage of qualified manpower.[19] While contractors are not yet involved in the actual 'kill chain', they do nonetheless set the drone pilot up to make the decision to drop ordinance. In the United Kingdom the launch and landing of UAVs is still conducted by uniformed pilots. However, contractor support in the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance cycle becomes an important component of the drone pilot's course of action.[20] Due to the fact that drone pilots make decisions of capture or kill based on specialist contractor assessment and analysis, the argument that contractors are not involved in the 'kill chain' appears increasingly weak.[21]

Security Sector Reform

Another supplementary service provided by contractors in an effort to free uniformed personnel from non-core military functions, is **security sector reform (SSR)**.[22] As part of international development and defence engagement, Western states tend to export military training and education to the developing world via the market. Due to the fact that PMSCs can employ a range of ex-military and ex-law enforcement officials, PMSCs are able to assemble requisite expertise and experience in a way that the military cannot. Most importantly, PMSCs can do this flexibly and in direct response to the client's demands. Consequently, PMSCs become crucial in building Western surrogate militaries overseas, which can be employed remotely as force multipliers in Western-led military operations.

When training or educating foreign militaries or restructuring security sectors in the developing world, commercial companies can bring together highly qualified personnel from different professional and national backgrounds, ranging from practitioners to management consultants. In particular, the ability of PMSCs to rely on subcontractors for specific tasks of SSR allows contractors to more comprehensively and inclusively cater to the reform effort than uniformed personnel. The range of private contractors involved in SSR is highly diverse, including traditional PMSCs, management consulting firms, risk management companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[23]

Although SSR is removed from the actual application of force by contractors, it is nonetheless a critical function in the era of state and nation-building where commercial providers shape the norms, values and operational procedures of security sectors in the developing world. Contractors therefore determine how security sectors apply force in highly contested environments. The United States infamously employed the PMSC Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) in 1995 to train and prepare the Croatian military for an operation against the Serbs. In the subsequent Operation Storm, the PMSC-trained and possibly directed Croatian military was accused of having committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.[24]

Particularly in Iraq[25] and Afghanistan,[26] the United States has relied extensively on private contractors to build entire militaries after widely disintegrating the security sector of the ousted regimes. Billion dollars – contracts were awarded to PMSCs like Vinnell Corp, DynCorp or Raytheon, to train and educate recruits as well as reorganize the armed forces and law enforcement. Effectively, PMSCs helped create force multipliers that could be integrated remotely into Western military and security operations.

Motivations for Commercializing Supplementary Services

Small armies

The motivations for Western states to outsource supplementary military and security services to the private military and security industry are multi-fold, ranging from the lack of capacity and capability to discretion, cost-saving and legitimacy.

Since the end of the Cold War, global military spending has been in decline, particularly in the Western world. Amid military austerity and downsizing, non-core military functions have to be brought in externally to compensate for the **atrophy of in-house capacity**. While in the 1990s the ratio of soldier to contractor used to be on average 6:1, since the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan contractors have widely outnumbered regular uniformed personnel.[27]

A reduction of personnel providing non-core military functions in the United States and in the United Kingdom, has created a void that was filled by commercial contractors. As part of efforts to create more dynamic, light footprint militaries, Western armed forces have been reduced to their smallest size since World War II.[28] In an effort to make militaries leaner, quicker to mobilize and deploy, uniformed personnel have widely been specialized on core military functions such as war fighting.[29] As a consequence, the force structure of Western militaries has changed so as to accentuate smaller, more agile army units, Special Forces units and new technological solutions in air power. Supplementary functions enabling these agile forces to operate have been widely outsourced to the industry. Even announcements by the Trump administration to increase the defence budget will not fundamentally change the US military's force structure, let alone reverse the trend of turning to the market for supplementary services.[30]

Specialist skills

Apart from the lack of capacity, supplementary services are externalized to contractors due to the **lack of skills, expertise and know-how** among uniformed personnel**.** The growing requirements of non-military functions in the military relating to the administration of IT infrastructure, the maintenance and operation of sophisticated technology and state or nation-building, necessitate militaries to buy-in external expertise, which is not indigenous to the military profession.[31]

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The maintenance and operation of high-tech weapons systems such as unmanned platforms, cyber platforms or missile defence systems requires civilian technicians who are often contracted as part of the procurement deals of specific platforms.[32] Many of the requisite specialist skills are either difficult to develop or maintain among uniformed personnel due to the niche character of such skills. In fact, Western militaries as public sector employers are no longer able to afford training and maintaining career progression for what are low-density skill sets.[33] At the same time, the military as the public sector is in constant competition with a private sector, which by manufacturing these products acquired a monopoly on life time support for these systems – systems that are integral for a seamless execution of military operations.

Troop caps

Related to the aspects of capacity and capability, is the aspect of **force management levels**, which has contributed to the outsourcing of supplementary military services from Western militaries to the market. In liberal democracies, the executive and legislative branches of government put in place "force management levels to guide the execution of certain overseas…military operations."[34] Thereby,

> *"Force management levels, sometimes also described as troop caps, troop ceilings, or force manning levels, establish bounds on the number of military personnel that may be deployed in a country or region"*[35]

Meaning that military planners in Western states have to develop operational plans within the limits of force management levels determined by the legislative and executive branch. As a consequence,

operational planning is not only guided by the aim of achieving strategic outcomes but also constrained by doing so within the *a priori* set boundaries. Planners and commanders need to explore ways to maximize military capability to achieve mission requirements within force management levels. In so doing, uniformed personnel falling under force management levels are being deployed to provide core military functions of war fighting while non-core functions are externalized to local surrogates, coalition partners or the market.[36] Looking at Afghanistan, where US force management levels have been set by the executive branch to below 10,000 troops since 2015, 72% of the personnel deployed by the US Department of Defense (DoD) to the theatre are contractors. The market as a force multiplier ensures that mission objectives are achieved by a small, capped contingent of 9,800 uniformed personnel, who supported by contractors providing essential supplementary services to the US DoD.[37]

In essence, the market allows Western states to conceal the real costs of war by presenting the public with distorted troop levels. Considering that sometimes two thirds of personnel deployed are contractors who do not fall under force management levels, Western governments are able to disguise the full extent of military commitment to a specific conflict. Contractors are able to free uniformed personnel from supplementary functions and provide operational planners with the opportunity to commit a larger amount of authorized troop personnel to actual warfighting. Without logistics contractors alone, the military footprint of Western militaries in out-of-area operations would have to almost double.[38]

Cost-savings

Another important motivation to outsource military services has long been the **costs argument**. Arguably the market can rely on economies of scale to bring costs down in comparison to a professional standing army. Private contractors only need to be paid when on duty and when providing services. Uniformed personnel need to be paid in war and peace time. Therefore, the argument goes, while contractors might bring up costs in the short-term, in the long-term contractors are cheaper than uniformed personnel.[39]

However, as Isenberg highlights, it remains difficult to conclusively determine the actual and hidden costs of outsourcing to the market[40]. A comparative calculation of the costs of the contractor versus uniformed personnel depends on the variables considered. Factoring in long-term costs such as pensions, welfare programs, insurances etc., uniformed personnel seem to cost a lot more than private contractors who though might often benefit from high monthly base pay, are not being provided the same long-term benefits.[41]

Also, the cost-efficiency of PMSCs depends on the existence of a free and competitive market. At the height of the commercialization of security and military services to the market during contingency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early 2000s, billions of dollars were wasted on corruption.[42] Tenders by Western governments were not always freely issued, and contracts were often awarded without actual competition. A US Commission on Wartime Contracting stated in their final report in 2011 that waste, fraud and abuse in the awarding and management of contracts might have cost the US taxpayer up to $60 billion.[43] At the same time, PMSCs have been in a race to the bottom where they have overcharged the customer while outsourcing services to subcontractors employing inexperienced, unprofessional and unqualified personnel.[44]

Building local capacity

Finally, the market allows Western militaries to contract out supplementary services to local contractors. Thereby, Western militaries can build bonds with the local population and help the reconstruction process as salaries and investments support local economies. In counterinsurgency and stabilization operations, a public-commercial relationship provides the Western military as a counterinsurgent with **legitimacy** as they can operate through local surrogates contracted into the workforce.[45]

The non-Western model: Direct Warfighting

Outside the Western world, remote warfare by contractor takes a different shape. The non-Western state has been more inclined to use contractors more extensively across a much wider range of services, including combat and combat support services. The reason is that outside the West, the anti-mercenary norm, which is founded on the Western concept of the state's monopolization on violence, does not apply.

In the non-Western world, the market for force exists in a hybrid environment where force is used by both state and non-state actors, sometimes competing with each other and sometimes supplementing each other. Without a clear distinction between public and private security providers, PMSCs have played an important role in the security sectors of this region in the past two decades. Many non-Western states have often created security assemblages between non-state actors to increase security capacity and capability – public-private partnerships, which generate both positive and negative externalities to local communities.[46]

Thereby, the partnership between the non-Western state and the PMSC is more far reaching than contractual relationships between the Western state and the PMSC. For some, having been more extensively exposed to commercial security providers through Western stabilization and nation-building operations, the sight of an armed guard not operating in national uniform is more common. Through SSR alone, states in the developing world have learned about the extent to which Western states have come to embrace the market for security and military services.[47] Further, the example of Executive Outcome being employed by the government of Angola in 1995 and Sierra Leone in 1999 to quell insurgencies, has set a precedent of private contractors providing warfighting capabilities in a commercial capacity.[48]

Today, the private military and security industry has become an integral force multiplier for the public security sector across the non-Western world providing a range of armed services from static security to direct combat support services. In countries like South Africa, the police and law enforcement cooperate with 9,000 private security companies employing 500,000 active security personnel in public spaces.[49] Most remarkable has been the more recent use of private contractors in warfighting capacities, which substantially distinguishes the market of force in the non-Western world from that of the Western world.

Combat & Combat Support Services

Nowhere is the line between private security contractor and mercenary more blurred than in the case of a contractor providing combat or combat support services. While combat services involve contractors actively engage in offensive military action, combat support services involve the remote engagement in hostilities by providing air support or artillery support for indigenous forces on the ground. In both cases, the contractor's actions deliberately involve the direct use of force against enemy combatants.

The modern historic precedent for commercial combat services is Executive Outcome (EO) and its operations in the 1990s, which employed armed personnel carriers and helicopter gunships to seize territories previously lost by African governments to local insurgency groups. In both Angola and Sierra Leone the PMSC did not only train local forces but acted as a spearhead of their military operations against local non-state actors. EO employed a mechanized Special Forces contingent of several hundred contractors supported by close air support and local forces to seize large parts of Angola and later also Sierra Leone from rebel groups.[50]

Subsequent media campaigns in the West against the extensive use of EO contractors by the governments of Angola and Sierra Leones undermined any further efforts to develop a market for combat and combat support services until the 2010s. The establishment of Reflex Responses LLC (R2) by infamous Blackwater founder Erik Prince in Abu Dhabi in 2010 opened a new chapter for commercialized combat and combat support services in the non-Western world.[51]

Erik Prince's company was initially hired to secure infrastructure in the wealthy Gulf monarchy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Reflex Responses LLC hired predominately battle-hardened South American contractors to provide the Emirates with both capability and capacity to protect critical infrastructure amid the Arab Spring. Situated within Zayed Military City outside Abu Dhabi, R2 was initially contracted to "conduct special operations missions inside and outside the country, defend oil pipelines and skyscrapers from terrorist attacks and put down internal revolt."[52]

This role expanded over time as the Gulf state, dubbed by US Secretary of Defence Mattis as 'Little Sparta', increased its expeditionary military activity across the region.[53] Over time, the base manned by foreign contractors did not only train Emirati troops for warfighting but became a base for the recruitment and training of a contractor brigade of 1,800 experienced South American contractors, which in 2015 would be sent as a force multiplier to the UAE's war in Yemen.[54]

By October 2015, six months into the Saudi-led war against the Houthi-Saleh alliance, several hundred, mostly Colombian, contractors had allegedly arrived on the ground in southern Yemen taking the fight to jihadist rebels affiliated with Al Qaeda and Houthi rebels.[55] The fact that local media have repeatedly reported on South American contractors being killed in combat, suggests that contractors have been, and still are, employed by the UAE to provide direct combat services in a complex counterinsurgency environment.[56]

Erik Prince speaking at a Miller Center gathering on April 15, 2015 (image: Wikimedia Commons, 2015)

Beyond Yemen, the UAE have allegedly also employed contractors in Libya, where the Emirates support Haftar's Libyan National Army in the civil war.[57] In conflicts already flooded with armed non-state actors, the United Arab Emirates have taken the lead in commercializing remote warfare to supplement for the lack of in-house capacity and capability in the Gulf.[58]

In parallel with the UAE-sponsored offensive PMSC operations in Yemen, Russia has defied the anti-mercenary norm by deploying contractors to Syria in late 2015 to expand their on-ground contingent of uniformed personnel. Like in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Kremlin largely relies on private contractors to not only provide supplementary services but also to provide direct combat and combat support services in Syria.[59] Unmarked Russian soldiers fighting in support of pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine were initially thought to be Russian soldiers volunteering while 'on holiday'.[60] In reality, Russian PMSCs with ties to the Kremlin absorbed both former Russian soldiers and Russian Special Forces on sabbatical, to allow Russia to intervene remotely in crises overseas – all that with plausible deniability.[61]

Russian President Putin stated in 2012 that the market for force could be "indeed an instrument for promoting national interests without direct participation of the state."[62] Ever since, the Kremlin has developed a more open-minded approach to building a domestic private military and security industry, which would not only provide employment for former military and law enforcement personnel, but more importantly would ensure that Russia can protect its interests overseas with a degree of deniability.

Most famously, Russia seems to have relied on a PMSC called CHVK Wagner (also referred to as the Wagner Group), which is believed to employ thousands of former and serving Russian military on lucrative short-term contracts.[63] Wagner contractors were hired for guerrilla style infantry operations in Ukraine and Syria as well as to provide combat support services such as handling tanks and artillery against Syrian rebels and Islamic State militants.[64] Images that surfaced in 2016 suggest that contractors working for the Russian PMSCs Wagner and the Slavonic Corps, were embedded with pro-regime militias across the Syrian battlespace. Contractors were photographed in full battle gear and dozens were reportedly killed on the frontline, which implies that Russian contractors were directly involved in combat.[65] This gained further credence, and publicity, when it was revealed that Wagner was part of a pro-regime group who attacked the US and their allies near Deir al-Zour on 7th February 2018 – and many of its mercenaries were killed in the US counterattack.[66]

In 2015 another case of contractors providing combat and combat support services caught the public's attention. The Nigerian Armed Forces had employed a PMSC called Special Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) International Ltd, run by former Executive Outcome CEO Barlow, to push back advancing Boko Haram fighters in northern Nigeria. Without any prior counterinsurgency experience, the Nigerian Armed Forces had been unable to withstand the pressure from Boko Haram.[67]

STTEP Ltd provided the Nigerian government with training support, operational direction and most importantly with combat and combat support services. Former South African Special Forces, some of whom had already worked for EO in the 1990s, were contracted to embed within local forces to operate armoured personnel carriers and fly helicopter gunships at low altitude to provide close air support for forces on the ground.[68] STTEP seems to have employed a similar strategy as EO did almost 20 years earlier. A vanguard of well-trained contractors, familiar with the African terrain and experienced in mobile bush warfare, provided a crucial force multiplying role to the Nigerian military.

According to Barlow, the contract with the Nigerian military was prematurely cancelled due to the pressure from the United States who did not want to see South African mercenaries getting directly involved in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations.[69] Overall, the advances made in the six months of STTEP's presence in northern Nigeria have been quite significant, widely expelling Boko Haram fighters from Borno State.[70]

Motivations for Commercializing Combat & Combat Support Services

Like in the West, the motivations to outsource military services to the market vary in the non-Western world. Primarily the lack of capacity and capability make it necessary to buy-in professional armed services.

The market for force has allowed states to transform financial wealth into military power even when indigenous **capacity** is absent. Particularly in the wealthy small states of the Arabian Gulf, the small indigenous populations do not generate enough human capital to effectively staff their security sectors. With extensive security sectors per capita of the indigenous population, especially in countries like Qatar and the UAE are unable to generate sufficient recruits from the relatively small pool of citizens.[71] While security sectors in the Gulf have long been staffed with foreign loan servicemen from the Middle East and Asia, the market for force provides access to a pool of more sophisticated and experienced military professionals from other parts of the world.

As the UAE's contract with Reflex Responses LLC stipulates, the Emirati Armed Forces as a client, were interested in 'obtaining manpower' and 'personnel', to be assigned to relevant units.[72] Based on its wording, the contract seems to revolve around procuring capacity and capability the UAE Armed Forces could not independently generate.

Capability is another reason many states outsource services to the private military and security industry. The industry can commercialize and procure almost any capability; most importantly the professional capabilities of an infantry soldier. Whether the UAE in Yemen or the Nigerian Armed Forces in their fight against Boko Haram, the client state in the non-Western world lacks effective counterinsurgency capability. Contractors with years of experience, e.g. Colombians fighting against FARC rebels or South African Special Forces with experience in bush warfare, can be hired to provide the necessary skill and expertise in training, planning and executing counterinsurgency operations. Instead of investing years into generating an indigenous capability, the market for force allows capabilities to be procured instantly. A small contingent of several dozen or at most several hundred contractors hired for combat or combat support services, can provide essential force multiplying roles, which boost the performance of indigenous forces.

Moreover, PMSCs providing combat and combat support services offer the client state both **deniability** and discretion. In particular Russia's use of contractors in Ukraine and Libya was influenced by the Kremlin's need for plausible deniability. In Ukraine, it supported pro-Russian separatists with capacity and capability, while in Libya, Russia worked through contractors to prop up General Haftar's Libyan National Army in the ongoing civil war.[73] Russia was able to deliver combat and combat support services to its proxies in both conflicts with a degree of deniability. Remote warfare by contractor allows states to achieve objectives without incurring the political costs of violating international law.

In Syria, Russia's involvement has been less obscure as its armed forces operated openly using heavy armour and air power. Nonetheless, contractors were able to provide the Kremlin with **discretion** as to the real costs of war. In front of a domestic public sensitive to rising casualty figures, Putin was able to outsource casualties to the market without attracting public attention. While the Russian Ministry of Defence has admitted in 2017 that 41 soldiers have been killed on operation in Syria, the real death toll is higher. At least 73 Russian contractors have been killed in action across the country – a number that so far has not been acknowledged by the government and might actually be a lot higher with contractor casualties mounting in 2018.[74]

Finally, PMSCs in the non-Western world are often means to **expand existing patrimonial networks**. In non-liberal states where security sectors are subjugated to regime interests through favouritism, coercion or structural means, the market for force often becomes a means for elites and regimes to either extract financial resources from the state or provide alternative means for regime security. PMSCs can develop into loyal forces of contractors under arms, which directly answer to regime elites, bypassing regular command and control structures.

Vladimir Putin visited the airbase Khmeimim in Syria (Image: President of Russia, 2017)

In African countries such as Angola or Nigeria, PMSCs are often owned by elites in the military with links to the ruling elite. PMSCs serve as a means to further enrich these elites as they can provide services to the military or law enforcement at a heightened cost. Contracts within the ministries of defence are often awarded to companies with links to elites in the military building extensive patrimonial networks of corruption.[75] In the Nigerian Navy, senior leadership has used funds designated for the procurement of boats and equipment to support their own maritime security companies. Instead of investing funds into the navy's capability, funds were used to buy-in capability from PMSCs owned by senior military leaders.[76]

In Lebanon, PMSCs, although only supplying security and guarding services, have often taken the appearance of a commercialized militia securing sectarian interests in a highly polarized sectarian environment. Many private security companies in Lebanon tend to exclusively work for clients of the same sect as the patron. Sometimes, PMSCs owned by Sunni patrons act as de facto armed neighbourhood watches for Sunni neighbourhoods.[77]

Conclusions

The market for force has to be understood within the context of a rapidly globalizing world where security shifts increasingly from being a public to becoming a private good. In a multipolar world where state and non-state actors compete in battlespaces that are ever more physically remote, the market for force provides the state with an effective force multiplying capability.

As states have to respond to global, geographically dispersed insecurities, the demand for effective expeditionary capabilities has substantially increased. Private military and security companies offer the state in the Western and non-Western world the additional capacity and capability to engage in the 'everywhere wars' of the 21st century – wars to protect vaguely defined interests against intangible, opaque opponents in remote localities. Consequently, as the modern, Clausewitzian ideal of war over national wills appears to be increasingly archaic, the state increasingly relies on commercial actors to deal with the insecurities of a globalized world. In an effort to bring the war to violent non-state actors in remote areas overseas, the state itself outsources military support functions to commercial non-state entities. Thereby, the state has contributed, since the 1980s, to a top-down erosion of the state monopoly on violence.

The market for force enables the state to externalize the burden of war to commercial providers of security and military support services. In the West, the push to outsource services to the market for force has been driven by considerations of cost minimization. Apart from financial costs, commercial providers appear to minimize the human and political costs for Western policy makers. As war has developed into a mediatized phenomenon where both the decision to go to war as well as the conduct of war are under immense public scrutiny, Western policy makers have discovered the private military and security industry as a means to conduct warfare more discreetly. Vis-à-vis a widely war-averse Western public, policy makers are able to keep force management levels down and consequently achieve more with less uniformed personnel on the ground. Therefore, policy makers are able to intervene remotely overseas with less visibility and with a distorted public image of human costs.

Outside the West, the market for force has enabled states to translate financial power into expeditionary capability despite shortages in skilled and experienced personnel. Here, the market for force often functions as an extension of patrimonial regimes to secure regime interests. Private military and security companies act as surrogates allowing states in the non-Western world to militarily engage violent non-state actors.

Especially in counterinsurgency warfare, the market can provide capacity and capability at the tip of the spear. Moreover, regimes in the non-Western world employ commercial contractors in war to achieve high levels of plausible deniability.

In conclusion, the commercialization of security and military support services is an irreversible global trend as states have developed a considerable dependency on the market. The new assemblages between state and market are mutually beneficial and have prepared the state for warfare in the 21st century where new skill sets and capabilities are required that states can sometimes no longer generate. The further warfare moves towards smaller footprints, new technologies and non-kinetic means, the more the market can provide force multiplying roles, potentially increasing overall military effectiveness and efficiency.

Nonetheless, the loss of control over the market and the insufficient regulation of PMSCs confront the state with new challenges. The loss of institutional knowledge and the atrophy of organic in-house capacity confront the state with a dilemma of having to over-rely on a provider who might overcharge or underperform. Particularly in the field of logistics, state militaries are no longer able to successfully self-perform and are dependent on external capacity and capability to manage the globalized supply-chain of war. Therefore, public-commercial partnerships in war should be able to harvest the efficiencies of the market, generate profits for the supplier and allow the state as the client to exercise sufficient command and control over the industry.

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