Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Grado en Relaciones Internacionales

Trabajo Fin de Grado

A force for Human Security?

The impact of private military contractors (PMCs) in the conflicts of Colombia and Sierra Leone

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Madrid, Junio 2022

Table of content

Introduction

When the USSR fell in 1991, the world went from a security structure that was defined around bipolar confrontation to a much more fluid environment under the unipolar influence of the United States. The disappearance of the previous order created a new horizon were new possibilities seemed attainable. The early 90s saw advancements like the signing of the Oslo accord between Israel and the Palestinian PLO, the pacific dissolution of apartheid in South Africa and the transition towards democracy of many states that had been ruled by military dictatorship in Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Francis Fukuyama's seminal work, *the End of History and the Last Man* (1992), encapsulated the optimistic belief of the times that free-market liberal democracy had proven to be the best possible system for humanity, and that it was a matter of time before it was adopted in the rest of the world.

The end of superpower rivalry and the democratization of authoritarian regimes meant that there was a smaller need for costly military assets. Worldwide numbers of active military personnel went from 6 873 000 in the year 1990 to 3 283 000 in the year 1997, more than a 50% drop caused by drastic cuts in military budgets (O'Brien, 2000). This rapid contraction resulted in high quantities of military equipment and professionals becoming redundant, especially in countries that had supported a large military apparatus like South Africa, many of these persons sought to offer their skills to those state and non-state entities that might hire them. Although the business model for private military corporations existed from the late 60s and was created as a consequence of de-colonization and its aftermath[1] (Baum & McGahan, 2009), this market grew considerably after the contraction of military budgets resulted on the surplus of military equipment and personnel.

In addition, the end of the Cold War served to promote democracy and stability in some regions, other areas suffered because of the vacuum of power that ensued. Not only had the USSR collapsed, depriving many regimes of their support, but in countries like

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[1] It is important not to conflate these corporate structures with the freelance mercenaries that offered their services during their same period. The difference between these two types of actors will be explored in more depth in the following sections.

the United States there was an increasingly vocal opposition to supporting egregious dictatorships in the developing world (Afoaku, 2000). As a result, the period between 1989 and 1999 witnessed "more than 120 local conflicts that have killed millions of people" (Krastev et al., 1999) in areas like former Yugoslavia, Central Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Caucasus. The strong component of ethnic or religiously motivated violence in many of these conflicts led authors like Samuel Huntington and Robert Kaplan[2] to argue that the new form of warfare would be determined by intractable and inescapable ethno-religious rivalries and socioeconomic inequality. The work of both authors makes for a bracing reading, but Kaplan's *The coming of anarchy* (1994) went further in his fatalistic description of a world overrun by "skinhead Cossacks and juju warriors" that would engage in a semi-constant and –it was implied– irrational state of warfare, creating "conflicts that ripple across continents and intersect in no discernible pattern, meaning there is no easy-to-define-threat".

The combination of the growth of the private military industry with the rise in intra-state conflicts, often portrayed as intractable and barbaric, caused considerable worry in some circles, to the point that O'Brien (2000) claims that the rise of private military contractors was one of the most discussed issues on the security studies in the early years of the post-Cold War world. The market for force, which was on the ascendant at the closing of the century (O'Brien, 2000), grew significantly as a result of the massive deployment of PMCs on the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was the first time that military contractors were employed a such a scale and given such degree of responsibility over security aspects of the occupation (Cotton et al., 2010). Their performance was mixed, for it involved incidents of abuse of power as well as a positive contribution to the security of humanitarian missions (Mayer, 2009). The debate on the validity and efficacy of these actors is still unfolding, and while there seems to be an agreement that the lack of oversight over these actors leaves space for negative disruption (United Nations General Assembly, 2018), the increasing demand for their services suggests that polemic as it might be, these actors will become increasingly commonplace. Can they be harnessed for good? And in what circumstances?

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[2] See *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington, 1996) and *The coming anarchy* (Kaplan, 1994).

Purpose and motives

The role of PMCs in intra-state conflict societies is an area of study that is often undertaken from a critical position. PMCs are assumed to be disrupting and counter-effective to the consolidation of public security (Leander, 2005), not to mention that they might contribute to activities that might feed conflict and instability such as resource extraction (Musah and Fayemi, 2000; Chojnaki et al., 2009; Petersohn, 2014). However, the last years have seen an increase of factors that are correlated with an increased likelihood of conflict, including the spread of jihadist insurgencies (von Einsiedel et al., 2015), economic stagnation and extreme climatic events (Koren, 2022). The presence of PMCs might not solve many of these structural long-term issues, but it might contribute to stabilize the situation and allow for a more effective response to these challenges.[3] On the other hand, their organizational incentives might make them poorly suited to this complex task, suggesting that alternatives such as UN-led –or sanctioned– interventions might be more effective.

When we consider the nature of political communities, the capacity to differentiate between insider and outsider is one of the basic indicators that said community exists. Hand in hand with it comes the capacity to react as a group to outside threats. Douglas P. Fry (2007) believes that humans respond in a wide variety of ways to these communal threats, from avoidance to confrontation, and that their cultural, social, and even environmental circumstances determine the response they are most likely to give to a certain threat. When it comes to creating a group of armed people –almost always men– to defend the community from an outsider's aggression, the way and scale in which this is done provides us with deep insight about the political structures, logistical capacities, social expectations, and even potential fault lines of this society. Warfare has evolved significantly from the roving bands of hunter-gatherers to the mechanized armies of today, but these considerations –Who will fight? Why? Under what conditions? – are always at play regardless of the time and place we choose to analyze. By studying the employment of PMCs in weak states and the ways in which they contribute to the stabilization or de-stabilization of these societies, we might gain valuable insight on the

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[3] According to von Einsiedel et al. (2015), 60% of conflicts in the early 2000s relapsed after only five years. This reality makes the lack of consolidation one of the biggest challenges of post-intra-state-conflict societies.

political dynamics and security needs that could be contributing to the chronic instability of these areas.

Another source of interest in this area of study is the influence that these weak states will have in the security of the world. According to the criteria set by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN (2017), the category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) encompasses "low-income countries that are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets". In the present, 46 countries make up this category[4], from Senegal to Cambodia, and although by 2019 they comprised 14% of the world population, they contained 50% "of the world's extremely poor" (UNCTAD, 2020). COVID did not cause the same degree of mortality as in more developed countries due to the average youth of the population, but it has caused economic damage that seems set to reduce growth for these countries in the medium to long term and reduce the living standards of their population (United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2021). This will lead to conflict, which impacts the already fail governance and economy of the territory, reducing living standards and increasing the opportunity of relapse (Goodhand, 2001). Since conflicted territories are ideal bases for transborder criminal activities, including terrorism, arms trade and people-smuggling, studying these countries –and other similar countries that might not be part of the LDC denomination but whose territories face similar challenges, such as Colombia– is vital for addressing this human tragedy and understanding the security challenges of our world.

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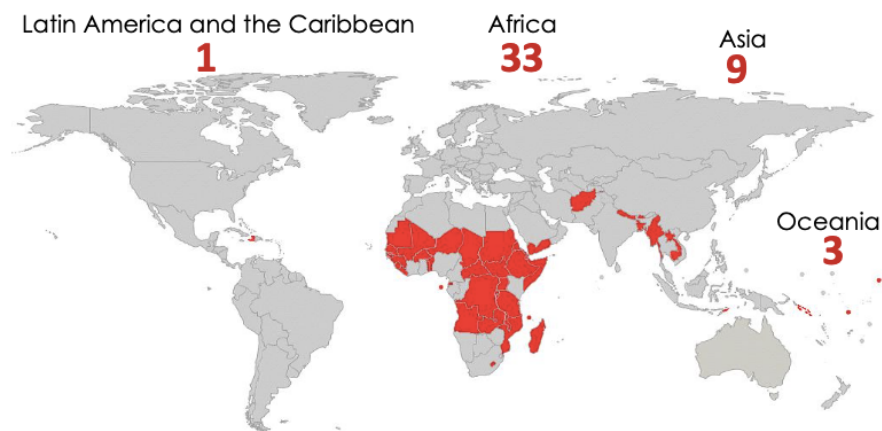
[4] See figure 1 for more information.

Lastly, the presence of PMCs in these challenged regions is growing and unmistakable. According to Nasir Mahmood (2005), of the Pakistan Times, there were at least 90 such corporations operating in up to 110 countries by 2005. The Peace, War and Social Conflict Laboratory in Texas University (PWSCL-TU) has carried built a dataset with 1700 registered Private Military and Security Contractors (PMSC)[5], a label that defines a somewhat wider concept than will be used for this work, but which is still useful to appreciate the extensive growth, diversity, and specialization of this relatively young industry (Swed & Burland, 2020)[6]. This means that we can find PMCs operating in virtually of parts of the developing world, working for the government and private entities such as resource extractors and NGOs. In addition to that, PMCs have been involved in high-intensity fights against insurgencies in Nigeria (Malik, 2016) and Mozambique (Feller, 2021), not to mention the maintenance of the armed forces of Afghanistan (Detsch, 2021). The lack of detailed and unbiased analysis on how these corporations and their employees interact with the environments where they operate represents a gaping hole in our shared understanding of security dynamics in developing countries. With the rise of entities like the Russian group Wagner, which operate under a similar façade but lack the corporate structure of traditional PMCs (Reynolds, 2019), it becomes even more vital than before to understand the structural motivations and shortcomings of PMCs when it comes to having them involved in these environments. A lack of understanding of the value they might offer, or the extent of damage they might cause, is likely to result in poor public discussion on their effectiveness, creating policies that might potentially undermine the development of fragile LDCs.

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[5] The following sections will contain a more in depth discussion of the conceptual definition of mercenary, PMC, PMSC and similar labels that are prominent in this debate.

[6] The databases related to such an opaque and multifaceted industry present interest dilemmas and inherent limitations on themselves. To understand these in the case of the data collected by the PWSCL-TU, readers are encouraged to read Swed &Burland, 2020.

State of the art

Terminology: Foreign fighters, mercenaries, contractors.

As we argued in the previous section, the measures taken to defend the community is one of the richest sources of insight about the characteristics of a particular group. As a result, the recruitment of outsiders to the community, or insiders that participate through alternative channels, represents a truly fascinating phenomenon. On the surface, the community comes to trust its protection fully or partially to these actors which, by virtue of not belonging to it, have no intrinsic interest in its wellbeing. At the same time, said actors are performing many undesirable tasks and taking a high degree of risks, including death, for serving in the defense of a community that is not their own. The prevalence of this phenomenon throughout history and the present day shows that there is a combination of incentives, preferences and needs that explains the existence of supply and demand of military –or military-like– capabilities from community outsiders, as counter-intuitive as this phenomenon might appear on a first glance.

Due to the old origins of this practice, many labels have emerged over the centuries to refer to these outside warriors. Some of these labels, like "mercenary", are politically loaded and generously applied, and therefore their conceptual boundaries have become blurred. That makes it complicated to trace the evolution of this practice, and requires a clear criteria to define each of these terms in order to have a productive discussion.

For the purposes of this research, **foreign fighter** refers to any person who is fighting for a certain community, empire, or state of which it is an outsider, or at least of which it is not fully considered a citizen or subject. This definition encompasses those who might be fighting as an act of ideological solidarity, as part of a mercenary or corporate contract, or as of fully structured and integrated units like the *auxilia* in the times of the Roman Empire or the Gurkha Regiments in present day United Kingdom. As it can be inferred, this denomination encompasses all forms of motivations from ideological conviction to the expectation of personal reward. The status of foreignness is one of the traditional components of the concept of mercenary, but automatically assigning this label to all persons that proactively seek to form part of a foreign military represents a poor assessment of the motivations and circumstances of many of these individuals (Percy, 2007).

Mercenaryism, or the activity of being a **mercenary**, often refers to the practice of taking up military employment in a foreign theatre of war with the primary motivation of personal profit (O'Brien, 2000). The exact definition of the term, however, remains strikingly vague in spite –or maybe because– of its prominence in everyday discourse. Scholars like Singer (2003) and legal documents like the 1989 International Convention Against the Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries attempt to provide comprehensive definitions; however, as pointed out by Ettinger (2014), all of these interpretations of the mercenary moniker are influenced by specific realities, environments and agendas that would not apply to what, in other times and circumstances, might also be defined as a mercenary person –not to mention the much more vague "mercenary behavior" that some other authors have used. He demonstrates that, rather than being an objective label, the term "mercenary" serves to emit a negative judgement on the illegitimacy of certain types of fighters, often to imply the immoral nature of their employment and their existence.

There is a series of reasons that explain this negative connotation of the term. Ettinger (2014) and Percy (2007) demonstrate that, by virtue of not being part of the community that is waging war, mercenaries are seen as lacking the moral justification for engaging in the abhorrent act of killing[7]. This normative rejection would be supported by negative experiences with mercenaries, since, in late medieval times, these companies would often not demobilize and become extortive local powers in the lands around them (Percy, 2007, pp.78-93). However, it must be noted that even when these practical problems were resolved by reinforcing state control over them and turning them into, effectively, permanent troops, like the Swiss mercenaries that served exclusively for the king of France by virtue of treaty (Percy, 2007, pp. 86), they were still seen as lacking this normative justification for violence. With the rise of nationalism and citizen armies, the lack of attachment of these forces to the cause of the State led to their progressive prohibition during the 19th century (Percy, 2007, pp.92-93).

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[7] In the present, such justification comes from belonging to the forces of a state in accordance with the proper legal channels. This is an outcome of the Westphalian order, which enshrined the pre-eminence of states in armed conflict, and of the Weberian conception of the state, which presented states as holding a monopoly on violence (Ettinger, 2014).

In this research, the concept of mercenary will be used sparingly, and only to compare between what belongs to the field of activities of PMCs and what does not. Since we have established that the meaning of the term "mercenaries" evolves through time, in this work we will focus on the modern phenomenon of mercenaryism as it developed during the 60s and 70s in the post-colonial environment of Africa and the Middle East. These mercenaries were for the most part white veterans who were employed to protect the interests of the former colonial metropolises, companies, and white minorities. Thus, this iteration of mercenaries was perceived as immoral for their role in continuing colonial oppression (Thobhani, 1976) and for their openly egregious and white supremacist behavior (Curtis, 2009; AFP, 2020; McMichael, 2020). Their main organizational trait was the lack of a corporate structure that allowed these individuals to accumulate capital, invest and carry out more complex operations (Singer, 2003, in Ettinger, 2014). This also translated into the absence of a managerial hierarchy, with discipline resting on the charisma of the leader and the expectation of reward (Palka, 2020), an arrangement not so different from the mercenary groups that ravaged France and Italy in the Middle Ages (Percy, 2007, pp.78-93). As we shall see, the difference in organizational structure of mercenaries *vis-à-vis* private military contractors already indicates that both terms are not interchangeable. Nevertheless, the fact that a significant amount of PMCs employees come from societies that have a questionable record with issues of race like the USA, Europe, Australia or South Africa –and increasingly China and Russia– is a commonality that is by no means irrelevant and that will be kept in mind as we move on with the analysis.

Private military corporations or private military contractors –both names can be used interchangeably under the acronym PMCs– are modern corporate structures that offer a variety of services that would normally be carried out by the conventional armed forces of a country, such as front-line fighting, air support, training or intelligence, but they might also involved other activities of military operations which have traditionally been partly or wholly outsourced to civilian contractors, like logistics, and as well as a growing number of specialized tasks related to robotics, informatics and similar aspects of the technology-intensive forms of warfare (Cotton et al., 2010). In his seminal work, Singer (2003) distinguishes three main types of PMC activity: Military providers –air support, strike teams, heavy weapon teams–, military consultants –intelligence, strategic and tactical suggestions–, and military support –logistics of all sorts. Corporations tend

to specialize in one of these fields, but their capabilities are extremely diverse as we can see in the cases brought by Cotton et al. (2010), Malik (2016) and Detsch (2021), to name but a few. Most PMCs tend to not be primarily involved in direct combat actions, a rule that held even during extraordinary deployments of PMCs like the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan (Cotton et al., 2010; Office of Deputy Assistance to the Secretary of Defence, 2018).

The main trait of these entities is that they are registered as a commercial venture, meaning that they are profit-seeking entities that are governed by shareholders, a board of directors, and a series of legal constraints and requirements typical of a modern corporate structure (Palka, 2020; Baum & McGahan, 2009). The effectiveness of this structure for creating responsible and law-abiding entities that provide an adequate military service –or the desirability and legitimacy of this business model itself– is still hotly debated. Authors such as Adams (1999), Spear (2006) and Musah and Fayemi (2000) believe that a corporate structure does not erase the motivation of maximizing profit in a theater of war, something which, on their view, is enough to equate them to traditional mercenaries. Other authors like Percy (2007), Zarate (1998) or Petersohn (2014) believe that being integrated into a legal structure with a specific set of responsibilities, duties and incentives makes it less likely that PMC employees will engage in the same unrestrained abuses as common mercenaries –although not impossible, by any means (El Mquirmi, 2022).

I share the opinion of the latest group, and I believe that the corporate structure presents a significant difference between PMCs and other actors that might operate under a similar façade like the Russian group Wagner (Reynolds, 2019). States might secure contracts for their own PMCs abroad, using them as substitutes for providing the support of their own professional army in occasions (Schrader, 2002; Peterson and Edwards, 2002), but, unlike Wagner, the primary driver of PMCs is to seek commercial gain in serving a variety of contracts as they see fit. They have recognized legal personhood and thus have specific responsibilities towards their employees, clients, shareholders, regulators, and other members of society. Whether this structure is enough to achieve the wellbeing of the societies where they operate is a different matter, but this key distinction still separates PMCs from other private armed actors such as militias, paramilitaries or mercenaries.

The intersection of PMCs and development concerns

The debate over the validity of PMCs can be approached from a great number of angles, including the legal, philosophical, political, and economic. In this project, we will focus on those considerations that are important to understand the impacts of PMC involvement in intra-state conflict, governance, and standard of living of the environments where they are employed.

Firstly, we must consider how PMCs affect the macro-level circumstances of the conflicts where they are deployed. There is a body of evidence that suggests that there is a positive correlation between PMC/mercenary involvement and civil war intensity in conflicts between the 1950s and the 2000s (Petersohn, 2014), as well as an increased likelihood of involvement in those conflicts where there is an availability of diamonds (Chojnaki et al., 2009). However, this type of large-N studies are often hindered by the limited availability of data and the difficulty of separating post-colonial mercenaries from present-day PMCs, a problem which spreads to other studies that rely on them. New efforts to create more recent databases seem to point out to more nuanced mechanisms. Akcinaroglu and Radziszweski's (2013) demonstrates that the employment of various PMCs on the same theater can increase the likelihood of conflict termination, since contractors will operate optimally as to not look worse than their competitors on the ground. Faulkner et al. (2019), however, challenge this idea, claiming that true competition is rarely reached, although even then, his research points out that PMCs acting in cooperation seem to have achieved positive results by complementing each other. In any case, some authors raise the concern that if a weak country comes to rely on a profit-driven security expert like a PMC –or a group of them working in close contact–, the PMC will have incentives to suggest security policies that reinforce its role in the conflict. This phenomenon, known as "expansionary supply", can be highly beneficial for the PMC but harmful for the state, since it loses the capacity of understanding the security threats it faces from an unbiased lens (Leander, 2005).

The second point of contention is the capacity of PMC employees to show restraint and avoid unnecessary destruction, looting and collateral damages. One of the most prevalent considerations in this area is the fact that mechanisms for accountability

and oversight are said to be clearly insufficient (O'Brien, 2000; Conboy-De Pasquale, 2018; Schneiker & Krahmann, 2016). This is translated on effects on the ground: A report of congressional staff of the United States found out that Blackwater –now called Academi– had engaged in up to 195 armed incidents in Iraq between 2005 and 2007, 80% of which were commenced by PMC employees shooting first (Majority staff, 2007). Other illegal activities have been performed by PMCs or PMC employees, like the creation of a prostitution ring in Bosnia by employees of DynCorp (Simm, 2013, chapter 4), the breach of an arms embargo to Sierra Leone by Sandline Ldt. (Select committee on foreign affairs, 1998-1999) or the complicity in the illegal tortures committed by CIA agents in Abu Ghraib by six members of CACI and Titan (Singer, 2004).

There is a belief that the fear of developing an untouchable reputation will be enough to prompt these corporations to refrain their actions and screen their applicants, and indeed, pioneers of the industry like Executive Outcomes and Sandline were dissolved after a series of scandals led to increasing public scrutiny (Campbell, 2002). However, the heavily networked nature of this industry, paired with the private processes of recruitment that are the common norm, mean that individuals with unsavory records might be re-employed in other projects (Petersohn, 2018). The possibility also exists that shell corporations will be set up and abandoned to serve specific contracts, reducing the capacity for oversight (O'Brien, 2000). On the other hand, we must note that negative coverage has an outsized degree of visibility and that these entities operate in extremely challenging environments. It is often the case that public providers of security, such as soldiers or police, are as destructive and rapacious as the forces they are meant to be fighting (Leander, 2005), and that Avant and Neu's (2019) database has determined that only in the minority of interactions with PMSC was some kind of abuse reported. In any case, the lack of mechanisms of oversight opens the possibility that PMCs or PMC employees might get involved in unethical and harmful behaviors.

Lastly, we will briefly explore the effects of PMC involvement in the consolidation of post-conflict societies. Leander (2005) argues that PMCs might prevent the consolidation of public security in frail states, because they might take up resources that could be used for public forces and especially weaken the link between security and the State. It is possible that the lack of accountability of these actors erodes the respect for the rule of law, which is vital in a post-conflict society (Mayer, 2009), while Musah

(2000) add that the involvement of PMCs might result in the "mortgaging" of sovereignty and, where it applies, natural resources, which might deprive the contracting state of a solid platform from which to rebuild. At the same time, the protection provided by PMCs in unstable areas has furthered the spread of development and humanitarian missions that allowed for the establishment of public services (Mayer, 2009) and even Leander, who is often critical, admits that they might be able to break entrenched cycles of violence among local communities (Leander, 2005). As we have reviewed previously, the series of arrangements, constraints and demands of the situation in which they operate will have a high influence in determining the impact of PMC involvement.

Theoretical framework

The concept of Human Security was first introduced in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, titled *New Dimensions of Human Security*. This notion was proposed as a change in paradigm from State-centered security to people-centered security, which is more aligned with the goals of maximizing welfare, sustainable development, and the realization of personal potential. Human security was defined in very broad terms: It included "*safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression*", as well as "*protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions of the patterns of daily life*" (UNDP, 1994). It outlined seven types of human insecurity, which are presented in the table below. As we can see, it covers a wide range of phenomena that can affect the welfare of an individual or community. Throughout the years, the approach has gained complexity thanks to the effort of institutions like the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security or the UN Commission on Human Security, but the base of the concept has remained unchanged.

TYPE OF INSECURITY	ROOT CAUSES
Economic insecurity	Persistent poverty, unemployment, lack of access to credit and other economic opportunities
Food insecurity	Hunger, famine, sudden rise in food prices
Health insecurity	Epidemics, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to basic health care
Environmental insecurity	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters
Personal insecurity	Physical violence in all its forms, human trafficking, child labour
Community insecurity	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions, crime, terrorism
Political insecurity	Political repression, human rights violations, lack of rule of law and justice

(Figure 2: Human Security handbook, 2016)

The notion of Human Security was a momentous contribution to the understanding of development in the modern era, but it has often been criticized for being too vague and broad and thus lacking value as a tool for analysis. Churruca Muguruza (2007) points out that the lack of an operational definition has led to a series of diffuse, fragmented, and uncoordinated outcomes, while Maxwell (2006) suggests that the concept may have been used by the EU to siphon funds from development cooperation to other foreign policy objectives. Regardless of these limitations, it is obvious that the notion of Human Security highlights issues that are very much relevant to understand the main obstacles for human development and welfare.

When deciding how to apply this principle as an effective analytical tool I was greatly inspired by the approach taken by Frances Stewart (2004). In her work, Stewart makes a distinction between economic forms of insecurity, which are more aligned with human development in general, and those that arise from violence. She chooses to focus on the later and defines security as a reasonably low level of "*insecurity*", which is defined as being subject to "*interpersonal violence or the risk of it*". She goes on to analyze the negative impacts that insecurity has on development, demonstrating that nations were interpersonal violence is common –either as the result of an armed conflict, high levels of crime or both– tend to have a lower economic growth, a reduction of nutrition, health and educational standards, and a decrease in the quality of public services. All these outcomes are obstacles for development and tend to precipitate a series of factors which

Stewart associates with an increased likelihood of violence, such as inequality and failure of the social contract, which tends to precipitate new conflicts for resources. She concludes that security and development are tightly interlinked, although the line of causation is not entirely clear. The existence of a reasonable level of security might not create economic growth if other factors are missing, but a lack of security will almost always lead to a lack of development.[8]

The approach taken by Stewart demonstrates that there are many valid ways in which the notion of Human Security can be understood and analyzed. This is a natural thing, considering that the concept is meant to reflect the very numerous and multifaceted circumstances that affect the welfare of human beings. These insecurities may all be interlinked, but they respond to different dynamics and thus require different policies to be resolved. That is why the Human Security Handbook of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (2016) highlights the importance of providing a highly integrated response to human security challenges, so that the many different policies that are necessary to tackle these issues are applied in a coordinated and effective way.

Under this lens, PMCs can be studied as just another tool to deal with the issues outlined by Human Security. Their trade is the use of force: Applying it when necessary, enabling others to use it –training and logistics– or protecting them from the effects of it –guard duties, mine-clearing, etc. This makes them stand out when dealing with challenges that are based on violence, but their presence can have knock-on effects on considerations that go beyond combat, as it is often the case with military actors. Depending on how they operate, PMCs can impact health insecurity –by protecting or destroying vital infrastructure–, economic insecurity –by upholding the rule of law or participating in extortion schemes–, food insecurity –by protecting or hindering humanitarian convoys– or environmental insecurity –by using chemical agents to destroy crops or foliage as a tool to punish insurgencies. The goal of this research will be to use the framework provided by Human Security to better understand how the presence of

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[8] Conversely, Stewart also points out that certain States took policies that managed to mitigate the economic and social damages of an ongoing conflict, in some cases obtaining better social outcomes (for example, regarding child mortality) that neighboring countries that were at peace but had not implemented these programs. That suggests that development is not entirely hostage of the security situation if the state has the means and the institutional capacity to promote effective policies.

PMCs either advances or diminishes the welfare of populations in conflicts where they have been deployed.

As we mentioned above, it is important that we discriminate between the primary areas of activity of PMCs, those based on violence, and the secondary ones, those based on economy and development. This analysis will grant a greater weight to the first category than to the second. If said weight was divided in 100 units, the partition would be as follows:

- Violence-based insecurities: Personal insecurity, Community insecurity, Political insecurity (20 units each, 60 in total)
- Development-based insecurities: Economic insecurity, Food insecurity, Health insecurity, Environmental insecurity (10 units each, 40 units in total).
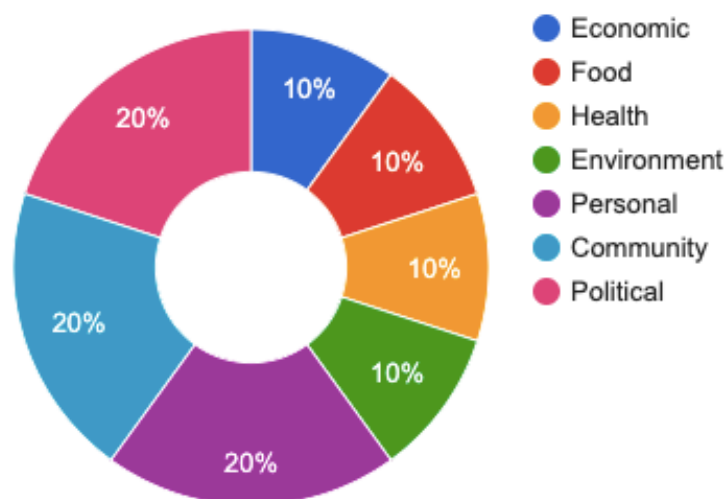
(Figure 3: Made by the author, 2022)

Thanks to this distinction, we will be available to measure both the effectiveness of PMCs at achieving peace and the impact of their externalities in achieving development. This framework is in line with the concept of Human Security, which encourages analysts to use a broad lens to better understand the unforeseen effects that a policy solution might have, and also takes into consideration the findings of experts like Stewart (2004), who have found a strong correlation between the pursuit and security and development.

Questions, goals, and hypothesis

The objective of this paper is to address the following question: What is the impact of employing PMCs in fragile countries that are undergoing armed conflict? To answer this question, the paper will aim for the following objectives:

1) To assess the impact of PMC involvement in an armed conflict for the population that lives in those territories, and to determine if their net military, economic and sociopolitical contributions are positive or negative for this endeavor.

2) To analyze potential causal relationships between the deployment of PMCs in an area and the reduction of violence, or the lack thereof.

3) To gauge the incentives that PMCs might face in different environments to behave ethically or unethically.

Our preliminary research seems to indicate PMCs have been successful to quickly stabilize the situation in a variety of cases, either by acting alone or as support of standard armies. However, this does not seem to be followed by the long-term duration of peace. This leads me to develop the following two hypotheses:

1. PMCs are used as an ad-hoc measure and are thus not well integrated within the general strategy of the hiring state.

2. Giving PMCs a lot of independence to perform their duties may lead them to become semi-independent bases of power that erode the consolidation of state institutions.

Methodology

Techniques for data gathering

This research project is based on information collected through an analysis of primary and secondary sources. The main source of information will be reports conducted by scholars, states, international organizations, and NGOs who have had close contact with PMCs in the two cases we have selected. We will also include journalistic evidence, especially when it includes testimony on the actions of PMCs or the impact of their presence in local communities.

Techniques for data analysis

The information collected through this project will be analyzed by performing two individual case studies, one of Sierra Leone during the civil war that engulfed the country from 1991 to 2002, and one of Colombia during the period of instability and conflict precipitated by guerrilla uprisings and drug-related violence from the 1960s to today.

The case study is a methodological tool that consists on performing a focused examination of a phenomenon, event, place, or person within a real-world context. In this manner, a case study can be used to discover new ways in which the subject of the study operates in relation to others and the world around it, which may allow us to infer future trends, explore previously unknown links of causality and acquire a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics of any given case. These case studies will be mainly qualitative in nature, since they are focused on a phenomenon that is hard to quantify (the net military, social and political contributions of PMC involvement in conflict areas), in addition to the fact that reliable quantitative data is scarce when it comes to conflict areas and the activities of PMCs in general.

The cases studies will be conducted by examining the contribution of PMCs in the following areas of the conflict:

1) The military defeat of hostile armed groups.

2) The construction of a functioning institutional network.

These factors will be gauged by reviewing the characteristics of each conflict, with an especial focus on its evolution and drivers, and analyzing the influence that PMCs

have had in them through the lens of the criteria presented in the "theoretical framework" section. The subject of the study will be any corporate military/security provider that was involved in the chosen conflicts to a noticeable extent and that fulfills the conditions presented in the "state of the art" section.

Once each individual case has been studied, a comparative analysis will be performed between the two of them to gauge the performance of PMCs throughout this diverse set of conflicts and backgrounds. The goal of this comparison will be to search for the existence of overarching trends that might be of interest to further our understanding of the involvement of PMCs in intra-state conflict, and perhaps also on the reconstruction of state institutions after an armed conflict more generally.

Analysis and investigation

Sierra Leone

The Republic of Sierra Leone, a small coastal country in Western Africa, achieved independence from Great Britain in 1961. Although its mineral wealth, high rates of education and a Europe-style university made it "the envy of West African colonies" (Hough, 2007), the state was heavily dilapidated in the following decades by the authoritarian governments of Siaka Stevens and later Joseph Momoh, leading to the progressive breakdown of the economy and state capacity (Hough, 2007). In 1991, the regime was challenged by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an armed movement with ties to the regimes of Lybia and Liberia (Douglas, 1999). The economic crisis has created a base of unemployed and heavily disaffected youths that soon became one of the main bases of manpower for the RUF.

Meanwhile, the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF) failed to respond to the upcoming threat. Not only was it a force with very limited military experience and tradition (Douglas, 1999), but it had suffered steep budget cuts and been "ethicized", in other words, packed with person whose communities had ties to those of Stevens and Momoh. While this meant the army completely unable to challenge the regime through a coup (Faulkan, 2018) it also meant that it was a completely ineffective military force, only useful to promote patrimonial corruption among the regime's supporters (Douglas, 1999). When the war broke out, President Momoh carried out an emergency recruitment

campaign to bolster the numbers of the RSLMF from 3 000 to 14 000 fighters, but this only made his underpaid and untrained force even more dysfunctional (Hough, 2007). These forces would often participate in extorsion, looting and torture to a degree equal to, when not greater than, the insurgents of the RUF (Douglas, 1999; ABC Australia, 2000), leading to the popularization of the term "sobel": Soldier by day, rebel by night. The RUF quickly advanced and took over the mineral deposits of the East and South-East, especially the Kono diamond mine fields around the region of Koindu. Valentine Strasser, Captain of the RSLMF, led a coup that ousted Momoh and resulted in the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). This, however, did not prevent the RUF from pushing their advantage in a campaign of guerrilla attacks of outstanding cruelty. In 1995, the rebel forces were approaching the capital of Freetown, and the junta sought the support of PMCs which could revert the situation.

PMC involvement

The first corporation that was approached by the government was called Gurkha Security Guards (GSG), a company suggested by Great Britain to the Sierra Leonean government (Douglas, 1999). Its contract stipulated that it had been hired to train the members of the RSLMF rather than participate in front-line operations. However, the leader of the group, Major Bob MacKenzie, alongside with some assistants and local RSLMF soldiers, was killed in an engagement with RUF soldiers. Some sources claimed the skirmish was mere happenstance (Douglas, 1999) while others claimed it was a concerted ambush (Faulkner et al., 2019; Francis, 1999). Whatever the case, GSG withdrew in May 1995 without making almost any impact in the theater.

A second attempt was made by hiring the South African Executive Outcomes (EO) at the behest of Branch Energy, part of Brach-Heritage Group, a business conglomerate with mining interests in the areas occupied by the rebels. Not only did Branch Energy obtain mining concessions from the government, but it was instrumental in brokering the security deal between EO and the Sierra Leonean government in April 1995 (Douglas, 1999, pp. 179-180). EO was meant to perform two main tasks: The first was to coordinate and spearhead military assaults against the forces of the rebels, maximizing the support of a few armored vehicles and attack helicopters that the company had at its disposal; and the second was to uplift local troops through improved training, intelligence gathering and leadership –in other words, to act as a "force multiplier" (Hough, 2007). In its

mission, EO was assisted by a variety of subsidiary PMCs that belonged to the same holding as itself, called Strategic Resources Corporation. These PMCs included Ibis Air –air support and logistics–, Cape International Corporation –troop training, after the departure of EO in 1997–, and LifeGuard Management and Teleservice International – mine security.[9] EO carried out a three-step offensive that expulsed the rebels from the vicinity of Freetown, recovered control over the resource-rich areas and practically annihilated all major RUF encampments throughout the country. The stability achieved by this offensive was enough to celebrate elections in February and March of 1996, resulting in the election of President Tejan Kabbah, followed by the peace accord of Abidjan in November 1996. However, the RUF demanded that all foreign military forces (including EO) left the country as a precondition for signing the peace. A combination of international pressure and financial constraints led to the termination of EO's contract on January 31st 1997, although other contractors, like LifeGuard and Cape, continued to operate for some time, often re-employing individuals which had taken part on EO's mission (Faulkner et al., 2019).

Kabbah's regime was ousted in a coup on May 25th, 1997, barely a few months after EO's exit. The government came to be held by a new junta (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, or AFRC), which promptly allied with the RUF to create a coalition government. The new AFRC/RUF junta was opposed by an ECOMOG[10] force led by Nigeria, a key ally of Pr. Kabbah, who was now in exile in Guinea. Hwoever, the first operations were inconclusive, and the country precipitated into anarchy. Through the suggestion of Peter Penfold, British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Pr. Kabbah reached out to Sandline Ltd., a British PMC that belonged to the same holding as Branch Energy and thus had some degree of relationship to EO (Francis, 1999). The agreement was to support the ECOMOG and other anti-AFRC/RUF forces in Sierra Leone, such as the Civic Defense Force (CDF) integrated by the so-called Kamajors (Douglas, 1999). The contract commenced in late 1997, according to Faulkner et al.'s timeline (2019), and it is unclear to what extent it contributed to the slow and painful push carried out by the ECOMOG/CDF forces that led to the recovery of up to 90% of Sierra Leonean territory

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[9] For an in-depth account of the PMCs involved in the Sierra Leonean Civil War, as well as their main areas of expertise and times of operation, read Faulkner et al. (2019)

[10] ECOMOG stands for Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, and represents the multilateral force integrated by ECOWAS countries. In the literature, ECOMOG and ECOWAS is used interchangeably, but the correct term to refer to these forces is the former.

by April 1998. Sandline coordinated the purchase and shipment of 28 tons of light arms from Bulgaria, intended to arm the CDF, but these were impounded by ECOMOG and were not distributed (Douglas, 1999). The contract of Sandline was terminated in late 1998, shortly after the company saw itself embroiled in a political scandal for the violation of an UN-mandated arms embargo to Sierra Leone, which came to be known as the "arms to Africa affair" and involved various members of the Foreign Office, such as Mr. Penfold (Select committee on foreign affairs, 1998-1999).

<u>Impact and implications of PMC involvement</u>

The civil war of Sierra Leone is often cited as one of the most notable cases in favor of the use of PMCs especially because of EO's successful offensive in the 1995/1996 campaign. All sources agree that the operations were undeniably successful in achieving some degree of stability, allowing for the celebration of elections, and forcing the RUF to come to the negotiating table. Their intervention, however, unsettled the world's public opinion. The members of EO and most other related PMCs came from elite units from the SADF, the armed forces of South Africa's *apartheid* regime, which served as the vanguard of South Africa's "campaigns of destabilization" in the 80's (Howe, 1998). According to some authors, the strategies of EO included "psychological warfare" (Francis, 1999) and the use of new technology like "napalm, fuel air explosives and cluster bombs" (Hough, 2007), although it is unclear to what extent and on what circumstances they were used.

Considering the record of racial brutality in which the apartheid regime often engaged, one could be forgiven for thinking that the employment of such tactics by individuals with this background would be highly problematic. Nevertheless, I could not find specific records of alleged abuses committed by members of EO on the ground, nor of any other PMC. It is entirely possible that these abuses occurred, but that they were overshadowed by the much more numerous atrocities committed by the RFU or the equally brutal and rapacious forces of the RSLMF. In fact, this high level of brutality worked in favor of government PMCs, since it made it very easy to win the hearts and minds of the locals and turned them into effective allies without the need for coercion (Hough, 2007). In this sense, even though EO and other PMCs can be accused of occasionally using force indiscriminately, especially in the form of air support (ABC Australia, 2000), nothing suggests at first glance that their intervention worsened the

political, communal, and personal forms of insecurity in Sierra Leone at the time of their arrival. In fact, it seems that the case was quite the opposite.

The PMCs had a vital role to play in securing access to the mineral deposits of Sierra Leone, which were one of the most valuable targets during the war. As many authors agree, the loss of these deposits to the RUF was devastating for the Sierra Leonean government, since it took away the main source of earnings and of foreign currency for the state (Francis, 1999; Hough, 2007; Faulkner, 2019). Not only did EO evict the rebels but it coordinated the protection of the sites through LifeGuard, allowing for the operations of extraction to resume. It is undeniable that there was a strong component of self-interest, as pointed out by authors such as Fuchs (2007), since those resources were exploited by companies belonging to the same commercial holdings as the PMCs – Strategic Resources Corporation and Branch-Heritage Group. The historical trajectory of the colonization and de-colonization process has meant that extractive corporations have influenced the politics of nascent African countries to their benefit, and almost always to the detriment of the population, meaning that their influence tends to be correlated with a reduction of the country's sovereignty and a lack of wealth distribution among its population, leading to conflicts like Sierra Leone's (Fuchs, 2007). As important as it is to consider those theories, they fall well beyond the scope of this work. The facts on the ground when PMCs became involved in 1995 is that the government had lost access to the mineral deposits. Regardless of the fairness of the exploitation deals that were in place, the alternative was to obtain absolutely no funds; even worse, said resources would go on to sustain the war effort of the enemy. It would have been impossible for the RSLMF to carry out the military operations to recover these sites or to hold them long enough for exploitation to resume. While the presence of PMCs was not enough to discourage the widespread looting that was main cause behind the fallout of the Sierra Leonean economy (Howe, 1998), it served to stabilize the country and regain temporary access to the valuable mineral deposits.

The services of EO were said to place a heavy financial burden on the State, limiting its capacity to address the deeper socioeconomic roots of the conflict (Fuchs, 2007). However, while the initial contract foresaw the monthly payment of $2 million, that amount had been renegotiated to $700 000 by April 1996, and even then, EO left Sierra Leone having only been paid half of the $40 million it was due (Hough, 2007). Reno

(1997, in Howe, 1998) reports that the domestic revenue of the government was only $60 million in 1995, although he does not clarify whether this amount represents the monthly or yearly revenue. In any case, it is evident that payment for the services of EO would have involved a significant percentage of the government's revenues. However, considering the widespread insecurity and the almost inexistent state capacity, no amount of social spending within the reach of the Sierra Leonean government would have been able to address the causes of the conflict until the RUF was forced to stand down and some sort of stability had been achieved. In this sense, it can be said that the funds that were invested in EO and other PMCs represented a good return for investment, considering the other options that existed.

It is interesting to highlight Hough's (2007) argument that EO fit the role of a "peace-enforcing" military force, rather than a peacekeeping one. This means that the role of EO was to lend strong, unequivocal support to the side of the government, using force to repress hostile groups like the RUF and disincentivizing them to take the path of armed opposition. This approach was successful, but only because it happened to result in an intense and aggressive campaign that kept the RUF on the back foot and reduced the likelihood of rearguard attacks or terrorist action. If EO's contract had lengthened and the company had been forced to oversee the implementation of a long peace agreement – peacekeeping operation–, it is much more likely that the group would have struggled to use force with effectiveness and restraint. However, as Douglas (1999) highlights, the most effective use of these forces is not to be the main enforcers of security, but to train and advise security officials and armed forces. The high efficacy of their joint missions with RSLMF and Kamajor militia elements demonstrates the positive "force multiplier" effect that can come from an elite small unit in terms of coordination, intelligence-gathering, counterinsurgency, and combined-arms doctrine (Hough, 2007).

On this light, it is important to explore the role that EO, and to a lesser extent, Sandline, had in enabling the creation of alternative centers of power. Since the government had severely limited the total number of RSLMF that EO could train, perhaps fearing a military coup (Hough, 2007), EO came to rely increasingly in ethnic militias such as the Kamajors. Already opposed to the atrocities of the RUF, the Kamajors proved to be outstanding allies. Not only did they provide the local knowledge and intelligence sources that EO lacked (Hough, 2007), but they also provided a significant number of

men –30 000 members to bolster EO's 400, a vital source of muscle when it came to searching and destroying RUF enclaves (Francis, 1999). The Kamajors became so effective under the leadership of EO that their image improved significantly, while that of the RSLMF plummeted (Hough, 2007). The Kamajors eventually constituted the CDF, whose leader, Samuel Norman, was given the deputy defense position in President Khabba's cabinet. The meteoric rise of CDF is one of the main reasons why the coup of 1997 came to happen, leading to the unholy alliance between the ACFR and the RUF and precipitating an intensification of atrocities (Douglas, 1999). While the CDF sided with Pr. Khabba's elected government and the forces of ECOMOG, they were still a loose collection of militias that were loosely accountable.[11] It is possible that the shipment of small arms carried out by Sandline, had it been successful, would have increased the severity of the conflict and perhaps reinforced the position of CDF as an autonomous power holder, preventing the consolidation of the Sierra Leonean State. The situation evolved otherwise, partly because Mr. Norman was already part of the government in exile, making opposition to the government on the part of the CDF very unlikely. In any case, it is possible to argue that a more self-sufficient military force, such as the British intervention of 2000, would not have depended on local allies to such an extent, preventing the proliferation of ultimately uncontrollable armed parties.

To summarize, the intervention of EO and other subsidiary PMCs (and later Sandline, in a more limited capacity) were instrumental in achieving short-lived periods of stability by handing severe defeats to the RUF, acting as a force multiplier, and holding vital assets. The quick deterioration of the peace after the exit of EO demonstrates, at the same time, the inherent strengths and weaknesses of EO's intervention. On the one hand, it achieved enough success to allow elections to be carried out, restoring some of the legitimacy of the government, and forcing RUF to scale back its operations for some time. On the other, its *modus operandi* led to the rise of an alternative locus of power, the Kamajors, which led to rivalry with the national army. I believe, all in all, that the contributions of the PMCs in the situation of Sierra Leone can be widely considered to advance the fight against the insecurities defined by the UN. While it can be argued, and reasonably so, that the dependence on PMCs was compounding the problem of post-colonial economic arrangements and flawed sovereignty (Fuchs, 2007), the absolute

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[11] Mr. Norman, and two others of his lieutenants, were indicted of human rights atrocities by Special Court for Sierra Leone.

collapse of the state meant that the organized, professional, and comparatively restrained intervention of the PMCs served to bring some modicum of improvement, even if for short periods of time.

Final assessment

- Violence-based insecurities:
    - Personal insecurity: 12/20
    - Community insecurity: 10/20
    - Political insecurity: 15/20
- Development-based insecurities:
    - Economic insecurity: 8/10
    - Food insecurity: 2/10[12]
    - Health insecurity: 2/10
    - Environmental insecurity: -2/10[13].

Total: 47 / 100

Colombia

For the last five decades, and up until very recently, Colombia has been marred by a "dirty war" against insurgent guerrillas that sprung in the 60s. The origins of the conflict, however, go further back and must be sought in the way in which Colombia built itself – the way in which colonization distributed land and wealth unequally. González (2004) highlights the importance of what he calls "*campesino* colonization of peripheral areas", that is, the process through which marginalized rural populations were pushed towards previously unclaimed lands as a consequence of the high concentration of rural land ownership that was characteristic of Colombia's model of development. Since the state had a limited capacity to project itself on the peripheral areas, it often necessitated the cooperation of oligarchic landowners to exert any form of government authority. This resulted on an unequal degree of state presence throughout the national territory and a

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[12] There is not enough evidence to judge the impact of PMC intervention in food and health insecurity but considering that a) no reports of damage to infrastructure or crops by PMC was registered and b) the PMCs acted as a stabilizing force, especially enabling the Kamajors and other militias to better protect their communities and property, it has been assumed that they had a slight positive impact.

[13] No major environmental hazards were reported, but the inextricable links between PMCs and mineral extraction, as well as the potential use of weapons like napalm, leads us to believe that the overall environmental impact of these corporations was not positive.

complex relationship with the entrenched local elites that had long been integrated into the power structure. As the staggered process of colonization unfolded and new areas were consolidated by landowners, the *campesinos* kept being pushed out to increasingly isolated areas were the state had virtually no presence, since it lacked the oligarchic power base from which to exercise it. As a result, these communities became increasingly removed from the political and economic dynamics of the country.

In the post-independence period, the political, economic, and regional interests of Colombia coalesced in the rivalry between the Liberal and the Conservative party. The murder of the charismatic liberal leader Jorge Eilécer Gaitán in 1948 led to the outbreak of a grueling conflict between the supporters of both parties which saw its bloodiest clashes in rural areas, as supporters from one party tried to dislodge the others from the land. This period, which went from 1948 to 1957 and is known as *La Violencia*, led to the death of at least 200 000 and the displacement of 1 million people from the rural areas (Caballero, 2016, Chapter 11), setting a precedent in which violence would be used to displace population and allow for other actors like landowners or corporations to step in, consolidate their possession over the land, and thus integrate it into the increasingly globalized and resource-export driven Colombian economy (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016).

After the war triggered a short-lived military regime, the two main parties returned to power in 1957 through the National Front, a joint political platform through which they carried out power-sharing agreements. The National Front brought relative stability at the cost of immobilism, which clashed with the demands of a rapidly changing society and led the political system to become increasingly de-legitimized and dysfunctional (Caballero, 2016, Chapter 12; González, 2004). In the process, the government tried to stamp out some of the banditry and *campesino* self-defense groups that had sprung during *La Violencia* and refused to de-mobilize. The military campaigns of the 60s had the result of turning these local groups into radicalized, Communism-inspired insurgencies like the ENL (1964), FARC (1966) and PLE (1967). Even the electoral fraud of 1970 led to the

creation of another insurgency, the M-19 (1972), this one with a more urban background and less clear ideological lines.[14]

The difficulties of the state to assert itself, coupled with an upsurge in demand for narcotics from the United States, lead to a flourishing drug planting and trafficking economy from the 70s onwards, first of marihuana and then cocaine (González, 2004). This created a burgeoning class of drug potentates that embedded themselves in the power structures of the country by corrupting the institutions (Caballero, 2016, Chapter 12) and by slowly becoming landlords themselves. The deterioration of state control led to clashes between local elites –including drug lords– and insurgencies as the latter started to perform kidnappings and extortions int previously untapped territories. This upsurge in guerrilla activity led to the proliferation of self-defense rural associations known as CONVIVIR, tacitly supported by the state by virtue of Decree 356 of 1994 (Lynch, 2019). These groups soon developed quasi-military roles, leading to the creation of organized paramilitary entities such as the fearsome AUC, one of the most violent right-wing paramilitaries of Latin America (NOVACT, 2016). In addition, the gruesome conflict between the Colombian state and Pablo Escobar's Cartel de Medellín resulted in the death of the latter in 1993 and the fragmentation of the previously dominant drug cartels, increasing the anarchy and violence. It was in this period that the insurgencies also came to adopt the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics as their main source of funding, which, according to González (2004), increased their capacity to acquire weapons and operate independently from the communities in which they had been originally based.

As a result of the deterioration of security and the challenges posed by Colombia's traffickers to the War on Drugs, the United States began to increase its support for the Colombian government throughout the 90s. The Clinton administration led to the Plan Colombia, a $1.3 billion fund –it would be prorogued and complemented to reach a total of $7 billion between 2000 and 2012– which went overwhelmingly to increase the capabilities of the army and police, with 80% of the funds destined to this end (Eventon

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[14] The specific ideological inspirations of each party present a fascinating account of the main insurgent and communism-inspired movements of the 60s, going from student-led, Cuban-style revolution (ELN) to an eclectic mix between peasant Maoism and "theology of liberation" Catholicism (ELP), not to mention the eclectic M-19. They also reflect the deep and numerous social cleavages that had led Colombians from many different backgrounds, mostly from the middle classes and the poor rural communities, to become profoundly alienated with the government (Caballero, 2016, Chapter 12).

& Bewley-Taylor, 2016). Plan Colombia resulted in the purchase of high amounts of military gear from American producers, as well as the employment of American PMCs to carry out tasks like training of security forces and fumigation of crops. The destruction of the cocaine fields was a central component of Plan Colombia and one of the metrics of success chosen by the US government, although the destruction of the crops themselves did not have a noticeable impact on stemming the flow of narcotics and was extremely detrimental to the surrounding population (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016).

PMC involvement

As advanced by Singer (2003), Colombia represents a case in which the failure of the State to provide basic services, including security, has led to the proliferation of private actors that seek to fill this role. Even as peace accord of 2017 was on the horizon, NOVACT (2016) predicted that the fragile, complex, and volatile environment of Colombia would still present opportunities for these private entities. It is important to note that most private military entities in Colombia fit the paramilitary rather than the corporate label and are thus beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the prominence of privately managed violence reinforces the lack of structures for accountability and restraint.

There are two main types of PMCs in the Colombian conflict: American PMCs hired by US institutions and the rest. The main reason behind this distinction is twofold. First, the United States had an outstanding degree of influence in the conflict because of the Plan Colombia, and it used this position to hire American PMCs for certain operations, like fumigation, that happened almost beyond the control of the Colombian government. Second, by virtue of a series of treatises and accords, American contractors were effectively free from prosecution and oversight in Colombia, a luxury which was not afforded to contractors from other nationalities, especially Colombians –although the enforcing capabilities of the responsible public agency, the Superintendency of Private Security and Surveillance (SVSP), are fairly limited in all cases (NOVACT, 2016).

The regulation of private armed entities and PMCs in Colombia begins with the publication of the aforementioned Decree 356 in 1994. This decree stipulated the creation of the SVSP, a mainly administrative body whose responsibility was to issue and control licenses. The regulation of private military and security forces has been left almost

entirely to this institution, which has limited mandate and capabilities because it comes from a presidential decree rather than law (NOVACT, 2016). Recent attempts to legislate private security such as *Proyecto de Ley 188/Senado* of 2008 and *Proyecto de Ley 195/2016C* of 2016 have failed. The latter would have, among other things, imposed limitations on foreign capital investment in domestic private security firms (Sanchez Díez, 2019). The law 1920 of 2018, popularly known *la ley del vigilante* (Seguridad Superior, 2018), improves the working conditions of the more than 270 000 persons that are part of the industry in Colombia. This is by no means a trivial subject, as the findings of NOVACT (2016) demonstrate, but it does not address the central issue of PMC control and accountability.

However, by far the largest problem of PMC accountability in the Colombian conflict comes on the hand of US-registered contractors, who are beyond the regulatory and juridical scope of Colombian authorities. One of the most notable members of this groups is DynCorp International, one of the largest beneficiaries of the anti-narcotics push of US foreign-policy, and it has received up to one third of the $3.1 billion worth of contracts awarded by Washington on this field from the year 2000 to 2009 (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016). For its operations in Colombia, DynCorp was contracted by the US Department of State (DoS), and is under the purview of the DoS's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) with the Aviation Division (AD) (CorpWatch, 2001). The employees of DynCorp are protected as a result of a series of bilateral agreements between the US and Colombia, coming from as far back as 1947, which have over time created an almost absolute degree of juridical immunity for US companies and personnel that were part of bilateral cooperation programs, especially in matters related to security (Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo", 2007).

Impact and implications of PMC involvement

Colombia's areas of conflict can be noticeably violent and volatile. The overwhelming number of violent deaths can be attributed to insurgencies, paramilitaries, and state forces, especially the last two[15] (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016; Gillard et al., 1998). It is hard to determine the number of victims caused by PMC activity, as the SVSP

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[15] This is not considering ordinary homicides and other forms of ordinary crime-related and accident-related deaths, of course.

does not keep accounts of the persons killed by these entities, although is extremely unlikely that they are on par with other perpetrators of violence in Colombia. They, however, have contributed to the operations of the army and paramilitaries by acting as force multipliers. Take as an example the role of the Israeli PMC Silver Shadow in providing support equipment to the 14th Brigade, an army with one of the worst human rights records in the conflict, as the result of a security agreement between the army and the Ocensa petrol consortium, who were Silver Shadow employers at the time (Gillard et al., 1998). The consortium also used the expertise of previous employees of Defense Systems Limited (DSL) to develop its own sources of intelligence which might have been used to incriminate local figures in the eyes of the army (Gillard et al., 1998). These arrangements were allegedly performed to ensure the defense of the pipeline from insurgency attacks, but of course could not be prevented from fueling local conflict dynamics. Another Israeli contractor, Yair Klein of Spearhead Ldt., arrived in Colombia in the 80s to train paramilitary groups, including the infamous AUC, with the alleged knowledge and approval of the Colombian state (Barrett, 2012).

US-based contractors take this conflict even further since they do not answer to the Colombian state in any shape or form. Take the fumigation of marijuana, coca and poppy fields by DynCorp International. Since the contract is between DynCorp and the Department of State, and thus does not involve the Colombian government (CorpWatch, 2001), it is to be expected that the DoS –or the relevant institutions within it, such as the INL– determine the contractual responsibilities of DynCorp as well as the way in which it is paid. The way the company operates in not public knowledge, but sources suggest that DynCorp may be paid by the extent of ground it fumigates (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016). This creates a clear incentive for DynCorp to fumigate as many areas as possible regardless of whether this strategy advances US and Colombian strategic goals, or whether the fumigation carries severe environmental and health risks for the areas involved. Furthermore, there seems to be evidence that DynCorp planes are often preceded by paramilitary squadrons that "clear the field" to prevent these planes from being shot at (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016; NOVACT, 2016, Bigwood, 2001). The collusion between DynCorp and paramilitary groups demonstrates that the fumigation of fields is not only an activity that is profitable for them, but also to other actors that move in to occupy the land when the population has been displaced by the chemicals.

In other words, DynCorp is contributing to the dynamics of population displacement and land concentration that sustain the deep inequalities of Colombian society. This activity is not only questionable, but it is one of the main drivers of violence, volatility, and human rights abuses in Colombia (González, 2004). Since DynCorp does not report to Colombian institutions and its activities are legalized by virtue of the US-Colombia bilateral deals, Colombian civil society organizations are effectively bereft of legal avenues to hold DynCorp accountable for its actions. Furthermore, even though the [Colombian] Law 1448 of 2011 created a fund to aid those farmers that had been displaced from their lands as a result of violence, the funds do not cover those affected by US-led fumigation campaigns because they are assumed to have been partaking in the cultivation of illegal crops even if the reason of their departure was that the chemicals polluted the legitimate crops, rivers and soil of the area (NOVACT, 2016). DynCorp could still be chided for its actions, but the reality is that there is an absolute lack of effective accountability. As far as DynCorp acts reasonably within the bounds of its contractual obligation and delivers the outcome that the US government seeks –the destruction of opioid fields–, any other considerations seem to be non-important (NOVACT, 2016).

To the immunity of the organization we must add the immunity of employees themselves. According to civil society organization *Corporación Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo"* (CCAJAR), DynCorp employees were engaged in a variety of crimes that included trafficking with munitions and acts of sexual violence –including the recording of the act and distribution of the videos– against underage girls in the town of Melgar, near the military base of Tolemaida. There are also allegations that DynCorps employees have engaged in the traffic of narcotics, raising worries of the potential role of these individuals in the criminal economy of Colombia (CCAJAR, 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggests that other investigations that were opened against DynCorp employees have been quietly dropped (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016; CCAJAR, 2007), including the odd circumstances surrounding the death of Alexander Wakefield Ross, a Panamanian citizen and employee in the Antinarcotics Base of Villagarzón, due to the alleged negligence of a DynCorp pilot (Viviana Arias, 2003).

In summary, like most other actors that provide security in Colombia, PMCs operate in a volatile environment where there are very few mechanisms for

accountability, and this reflects on the impact they have. Even though there seems to be no evidence of roving bands of corporate death squads, their role into the conflict is still problematic. Their cooperation with armed groups that engage in high levels of extra-judicial violence is contributing to the climate of insecurity in the country, as well as to the abusive and self-perpetuating dynamics of population displacement. Since the destruction of crops pushes these communities to increasingly isolated areas, the lack of infrastructure makes it even less likely that these populations will be able to sustain themselves by cultivating legitimate commercial crops, increasing the probability that illegal crops will be planted, and so the cycle goes. Specifically, the act of fumigation – which was discontinued by the American government in 2015– was extremely detrimental on local inhabitants and environments by virtue of being so indiscriminate, a trait that was worsened by the lack of even the simplest of measures that could have been taken to minimize the spread of the chemicals to legitimate crops (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016). In addition to that, the immunity enjoyed by these foreign contractors discredits the Colombian justice system and makes a mockery of the rule of law and the principle of equal sovereignty.

The employment of these corporations in the Colombian context has been detrimental because rather than contributing to the capabilities of the state, they have reenforced the capabilities and thus the bargaining position of local powers. From resource-extracting corporations to paramilitaries, they have acted as a force multiplier for them and contributed to their goals, as it was the case with collusion that allowed paramilitaries to occupy land more easily by fumigating it beforehand. In addition to that, they served as the vehicle for a foreign state –the United States– to effectively highjack a central part of the counter-narcotic efforts and impose its own objectives and methods through the contract between DynCorp and the Department of State, as well as other aspects of the Plan Colombia. In doing so, PMCs enabled the United States to carry out a policy that it considered to be favorable to itself (Eventon & Bewley-Taylor, 2016) while denying the Colombian government and civil society the possibility of knowing more about, even less to challenge, these operations that were causing great harm to their territory and population.

Final assessment
-   Violence-based insecurities:

- o Personal insecurity: -8/20
- o Community insecurity: -12/20
- o Political insecurity: -12/20
- Development-based insecurities:
  - o Economic insecurity: 0/10
  - o Food insecurity: -5/10
  - o Health insecurity: -5/10
  - o Environmental insecurity: -8/10[16].

Total: -50 / 100

Final conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this work was to increase of our understanding of PMC dynamics in two chosen case studies of conflict. As we have seen, large parts of the literature rely on abstract cases or large N case studies, as pointed out by Faulkner et al. (2019). Considering the highly contextual nature of intra-state armed conflicts and the diversity of capabilities within the industry, we agreed with the idea that a more granular approach to this phenomenon had to be taken. The Human Security approach developed by the UNDP allowed us to tackle the issue from a new perspective as well: Rather than providing a completely arbitrary assessment of the impact of PMCs, the categories provided by this model have allowed us to theoretically anchor the result of our observations, something which I believe represents an advancement of the way in which this phenomenon has been studied in the past.

At the outset of this work, we sought to prove or disprove two hypotheses: 1) PMCs are not well integrated within the general strategy of the hiring state and 2) independence may lead PMCs to become semi-independent bases of power on themselves. The first hypothesis has a mixed result, and this is because the capacity of a state –or any other entity, for that matter– to integrate a PMC with its general strategy depends on the overall

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[16] The last three are justified, in a large part, by the effects of the fumigation campaigns. It is entirely possible that the presence of PMCs might have deterred insurgents and criminals from attacking crops, health infrastructure and valuable environmental locations. However, I have not found sufficient evidence on this regard, while the involvement of these corporations with forces that occasionally cause these very problems is a proven fact.

organizational capacity of said entity. In the case of Sierra Leone's NPCR junta, hastily put together in 1992 during a moment of extreme crisis, the state lacked all semblance of strategy beyond mere survival, which allowed EO to take a leading role in the design, coordination, and execution of the anti-insurgency offensives, even coordinating itself independently with other domestic forces like the Kamajors. Khabba's government in exile, which had a greater degree of legitimacy, more seasoned members like Mr. Norman and the support of the international community, was in a better position to set the strategy that Sandline Ltd. was expected to follow. The plan to use Sandline as the nexus between the many disparate forces that were fighting for the liberation of the country, as well as arming of the pro-government forces, suggests that Khabba's government was indeed able to integrate the PMC into its strategy, even if the implementation of this plan left to be desired. Lastly, the example of the US demonstrates that the most powerful states are familiar with the practice of using PMCs to achieve domestic and foreign policy objectives and that they can do so with great degrees of skill. Overall, I would argue that the hiring of PMCs on intra-state conflict tends to follow a strategic goal, rather than being an ad-hoc supplement of military muscle as the original mercenary companies might have been.

On the other hand, the second hypothesis seems to have been largely disproven. In the case of Sierra Leone, EO had position of absolute prominence because of the lack of state capacity, the weakness of the RSLMF and the highly cooperative relationship with local militia groups and other PMCs deployed in the country. According to this hypothesis, this lack of potential rivals should have resulted in EO taking steps to become entrenched as a semi-independent locus of power, but it does not seem to be the case. True, the mining interests that EO represented might have achieved a significant degree of control over the mineral fields, but this was performed in an accord with the Sierra Leonean government, following the contemplated legal procedures rather than being the result of EO liberating these deposits and unilaterally deciding that they would be granted to a foreign mining interest. Furthermore, there is no evidence that EO took advantage of its positive relations with local militias to become more deeply embedded in the security structure of the country –if anything, it seems the militias benefited more from EO's support to consolidate their power than the other way around. This is an interesting line of thought because it follows the conclusion we reached after analyzing the Colombian conflict: A PMC is not likely to not become a locus of power on itself, but by virtue of

being a force multiplier, it might *enable others* to become loci of power. I believe that this might be the case because, contrary to national armies or even more established local armed groups, PMCs are heavily dependent on the use of local support spaces and infrastructure provided by their employers, such as bases or intelligence networks. The lack of a consolidated territorial platform from which to exercise control and the incentives that are intrinsic of a commercial corporate structure means that PMCs are very unlikely to pursue direct political control over an area, although they are perfectly capable of helping someone else in this process whether intentionally or unintentionally.

While the situations of Sierra Leone and Colombia might seem relatively similar, they have several differences that set them apart in fundamental ways. The geographical size of the country and the duration of the conflict makes an armed intervention in Colombia much more complex than one in Sierra Leone, all else being equal. The consensus on determining that Sierra Leone is a civil war while Colombia is a domestic security crisis has also created different incentives and avenues for intervention. Unlike in Sierra Leone, were a single PMC enjoyed a position of prominence, Colombia presents a much more complex security structure as a result of the more developed state apparatus, including exceedingly powerful armed forces, a plethora of right-wing and criminal paramilitary groups with unclear political ties and the overwhelming influence of the United States. It is absolutely unthinkable that a PMC could have the organizational capacity to design, coordinate and carry out a coherent offensive that involved all these actors, not to mention mustering the legitimacy to do so. As a result, PMCs in the Colombian context could only contribute to the questionable strategic choices of the actors that employed them, and in doing so, they found themselves in the "enviable" position that because the roots of the conflict were not being addressed, the conflict was likely going to continue, ensuring a steady flow of revenue for their services. Parts of the literature claim that the profit-maximizing nature of private military corporations can lead them to act sub-optimally and prolong conflicts artificially. These findings suggests that the profit-maximizing mindset might exist and be harmful, but that it is not the cause as much as the consequence of the stagnation of conflict for reasons that are beyond the power of these corporations to influence. Furthermore, it might look as if corporations that have much tighter financial margins, like EO, have an incentive to minimize costs by acting effectively and firmly, while PMCs that have a secure position in financial and political terms, such as DynCorp, seem more likely to slack off and deliver less cost-effective results.

Since most modern intra-state conflicts fit the description of Colombia rather than Sierra Leone's –highly complex and protracted conflicts with the involvement of numerous private and state interests–, we must highlight the importance of implementing mechanisms of accountability and oversight to minimize the chance that the employees will partake in actions that are harmful to the Human Security indicators of the societies where they operate. It is possible that an agreed upon code of conduct, ideally embedded in legislation but otherwise codified through individual contracts, might make it easier to enforce these positive behaviors under the punishment of not only of judicial persecution but also of unemployment. For this threat to be effective, however, the industry would have to undergo a considerably higher degree of transparency and regulation, which is challenging due to the nature of the industry and the lack of political will to undertake this reform.

While these findings hint at new and valuable discoveries on the incentives governing PMC action in intra-state conflicts, the reality is that the sample size of the case study is too small to extract more conclusive findings. It would be very interesting to delve deeper into case studies that share similar circumstances to that of Colombia to determine whether the profit-maximizing incentive is, as we have claimed here, a consequence rather than a cause of the elongation of conflicts, and whether PMCs that have significant economic and political capital are more likely to participate in unethical behaviors than those with less resources. Additionally, new studies could be carried out on the impact of America's practice of obtaining immunity for its personnel in bilateral security missions throughout the world. The Human Security paradigm suggests that the actions that these contractors might engage under the umbrella of immunity have an impact on vital aspects of the community they serve, not only on abstract discussions of sovereignty. Considering the immunity of contractors under this lens might introduce new considerations that change the cost-benefit dynamic and result in the creation of more channels for transparency and accountability on American foreign policy, as well as in other countries that might follow similar models of intervention.

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