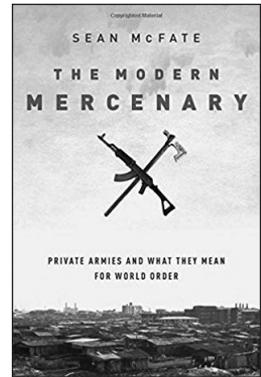


**Outsourcing Security:
Private Military Contractors and U.S. Foreign Policy**
Bruce E. Stanley

Potomac Books: University of Nebraska, 2015, 238 pp.



**The Modern Mercenary:
Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order**
Sean McFate

Oxford University Press: New York, 2014, 248 pp.

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Since the end of the Cold War, the presence of contractors on the modern battlefield has dramatically increased. The reasons why this has happened, and the significance of these developments, are complex and varied. Two books in recent years help explain this phenomenon. In *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order*, Atlantic Council Senior Fellow Sean McFate describes the reemergence of the private military company (PMC) onto the world stage and assesses the implications for international security. Written in a narrative, highly readable style, this is an entertaining book that although short on empirical evidence manages to deliver some reasonable insights.

In *Outsourcing Security: Private Military Contractors and U.S. Foreign Policy*, U.S. Army School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) professor Bruce Stanley laments that typical studies of the increased use of private security have “failed to produce a working theory of the phenomenon.”¹ Moreover, Stanley notes that “descriptive accounts by scholars have not been tested with empirical evidence to determine which causal explanations are not only necessary but sufficient to explain the growth of the industry.”² Writing in an academic style, Stanley takes a narrower approach than McFate by focusing on the U.S. experience, but this approach provides a deeper and more disciplined analysis. Together, these two works provide a good foundation for understanding the role of military contractors in modern warfare.

The growth of PMC’s inspired McFate to ask several questions: “Why have strong countries such as the United States elected to employ private military forces after centuries of prohibition? Does the privatization of war change warfare, and, if so, does it affect strategic outcomes? What does

the privatization of military force augur for the future of international relations?” McFate places the rise of PMCs into context as indicative of broader trends in the current international system that are weakening the principle of state sovereignty and loosening the state’s monopoly on the use of force. The author—a former U.S. Army paratrooper and military contractor—lays out a persuasive case for accepting PMCs as a lasting and potentially useful feature of a changing international system. He concludes by recommending that the international community regulate PMCs to harness and better control the development of private military forces, rather than simply allowing the free market to shape how these organizations evolve.

McFate begins by placing the rise of PMCs within the larger framework of current changes affecting the longstanding Westphalian-based international order. He observes that increased emphasis on international humanitarian law over the principle of sovereignty unintentionally helped create a new market for hired military force.³ Using contracted forces instead of their own troops allows major powers to reduce their casualties “thereby giving the appearance of humanizing warfare.”⁴ McFate argues that the market for mercenaries opened up in part because “the rise of the humanitarian rights regime had a hand, as it required UN commanders on Balkan battlefields and elsewhere to fight with human rights lawyers by their sides to parse the excessively complex and convoluted rules of engagement on the use of force.”⁵ Using contractors makes it easier to operate under these potentially burdensome rules. However, an unintended consequence of the major powers’ growing reliance on contracted military capabilities was the introduction of alternative sources of military power onto the modern battlefield.

McFate assesses that the reintroduction of private military forces to the international arena “heralds a wider trend in international relations: the emergence of neomedievalism.”⁶ After a hiatus of over 400 years, sophisticated private organizations—akin to the medieval Italian condottieri—capable of standing up trained and equipped fighting forces have reappeared to replace or augment professional state-sponsored soldiers on the international scene.⁷ As the state’s grip on sovereignty has eased, these other actors have begun to encroach on powers previously reserved to the state. The reemergence of contracted military force into international affairs could open the door wider to other non-state actors willing to challenge the state’s monopoly on the use of force.

McFate illustrates his argument with two case studies detailing the different experiences of private military forces in Liberia and Somalia. His Liberia case study provides an example of the positive contributions that a competent and professional PMC can provide as a mentor to less developed militaries. In this case, the U.S. government contracted DynCorp International to provide military advisors and trainers to build a new army for Liberia. McFate, a former DynCorp employee, offers a balanced analysis of the company’s role in shaping the new Liberian military. He explains that Liberia’s experience was largely positive and exemplified the benefits of using competent PMCs, such as their relative efficiency, propensity for innovation, and ready access to valuable skills and resources. However, even in Liberia there were signs of the potential negative aspects of PMCs, such as the prevalence of the profit motive in company decision making, and the ability of a private company to influence the government. The Somalia case study offers a stark contrast to Liberia and a warning against taking a *laissez-faire* approach to how PMCs are developed. In Somalia, McFate shows how PMCs fostered purely by the free market contributed to greater instability by encouraging the growth of predatory mercenary forces.

McFate draws several inferences from his case studies, such as the apparent resilience and inevitable indigenization of PMCs. He concludes that the industry will probably endure even after

major powers such as the U.S. drawdown their contracted forces because local actors will seek to use the skills they learned while employed by PMCs and emulate the practices they observed. His most salient observation is that “the industry is beginning to bifurcate between a mediated market with military enterprisers and a free market populated by mercenaries.”⁸ McFate describes two alternative paths that PMCs could take as they evolve. One path, exemplified by his Liberia case study, is that of the mediated market and the positive role of competent well-regulated military entrepreneurs. PMCs are a “potential boon to global security” because of the many benefits associated with private military forces that have been properly vetted and trained, such as their potential use by international organizations such as the UN to rapidly deploy their own contracted peacekeeping forces.⁹ The alternative path, exemplified by his Somalia case study, is to allow the free market to dictate the evolution of PMCs, a path that McFate argues would lead to the proliferation of undisciplined and destructive mercenary forces.

If the book has any weakness, it is perhaps McFate’s tendency to get carried away with his own analogy by overemphasizing the looming dawn of a new medievalism. He unabashedly proclaims that the “parallels between earlier and modern PMCs are strong.”¹⁰ For example, McFate treats Count Albrecht von Wallenstein and his role in the Thirty Year’s War as the medieval version of DynCorp.¹¹ Both are military enterprisers rather than mercenaries because they built armies for governments rather than for deployment under their personal command. Eliot Cohen once insightfully cautioned strategists to be wary of false historical analogies and to look “for uniqueness much more than commonality.”¹² An historical mind, Cohen reminds us, will use the right analogy to explore a problem and ask the right questions.¹³ Fortunately, McFate does rise above his analogy and explores some thought-provoking questions regarding the unique role of PMCs in today’s strategic operating environment.

Stanley on the other hand argues that developments in the international environment by themselves do not fully explain the rise of the PMC’s. His examination of the rise of PMC’s is drawn from historical case studies that encompass the U.S. experience in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Joint Endeavor, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. He notes that domestic politics have also played a role in the development of PMCs, in the U.S. as well as in other advanced industrial democracies. Stanley’s book uses a supply-demand framework to explain the growth of PMC’s. Citing solid research and more measurable evidence, Stanley draws conclusions regarding PMCs that are not limited to the current international situation. For example, Stanley concludes that “when political leaders choose to reduce their nation’s military force structure, they may face conflicts beyond their anticipated scope and duration. Such decision makers are left with no choice but to legalize and legitimize the use of PMC’s, resulting in the use of PMC’s as a deliberate tool of foreign policy.”¹⁴

Overall, Stanley’s book rests on research that is more empirical, and his conclusions are probably the more useful ones for policy makers and military officers. The supply-demand framework Stanley uses provides analysis that can help us understand the PMC phenomenon beyond what has been experienced in limited contingency operations. Taken together, these two books complement each other and can help the reader better think about what future roles PMC’s might play in an era of major combat operations against a peer or near peer adversary. **IAJ**

NOTES

- 1 Bruce Stanley, *Outsourcing Security: Private Military Contractors and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, Potomac Books, 2015), 1.
- 2 Ibid., 1.
- 3 Sean McFate, *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 44.
- 4 Ibid., 45.
- 5 Ibid., 5-7, and 90-100.
- 6 Ibid., 44.
- 7 Ibid., 52.
- 8 Ibid., xv.
- 9 Ibid., 64.
- 10 Ibid., 27.
- 11 Ibid., 29-30.
- 12 Eliot Cohen, "The Historical Mind and Military Strategy," *Orbis*, Vol. 49, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 579.
- 13 McFate, 581.
- 14 Stanley, 195.