

# **PRIVATE MILITARY AND SECURITY COMPANIES: ETHICS, POLICIES AND CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS**

---

*Andrew Alexandra, Deane-Peter Baker and Marina Caparini  
(Eds)*

Routledge, 2007, 265 pages  
Index, notes, select bibliography  
ISBN - 978-0-415-43275-7  
£150

This publication contributes to a growing body of literature on a phenomenon, the privatization of the means of coercion, that manifests on the international strategic landscape. Whether a phenomenon one agrees with, or not, private military and security companies form an rising and real feature within the daily life of individuals, communities and states of the international system. International, regional and national security, as well as the security of the individual is increasingly entwined in services provided by private military and security contractors. The editors accordingly acknowledge that "... [the] astonishing growth of private and security companies (PMSCs) is clearly one of the most noteworthy developments in national and international security arrangements ...".

The content of the publication covers three fields of enquiry: ethics, policies and law, and civil-military relations and stems from a research programme sponsored by South African, Australian and Swiss institutions. At the heart of the publication resides the inherent conflict and controversy between private contractors and the challenge they bring to traditional views regarding the regulation and operation of the control over force and its application. Inherently the publication attempts to contribute to the debate on how to regulate or control a new way of employing and controlling instruments of violence in the international system.

The section on ethics covers the question "What is mercenaries?, whether private contractors can be ethical, regulating private militaries, bringing just war theory into step with shifts in warfare proper, and efforts to point out the social responsibilities that now seem to accrue.

The authors covering policies and law primarily focus on the economics of the challenge, what private contractors could/should contribute, and the dilemmas experienced when employed. While some of the authors in this section are critical about private military and security companies per se, others recognise their

contribution and that it is perhaps better to regulate, rather than campaign for their dismissal and prohibition. Simply ignoring the privatization option also brings certain dilemmas to the responsibility to deal with threats and vulnerabilities.

Regarding civil-military relations, it appears that that the authors attempt to take an integrated approach to utilise the contributions by some private contractors. Making use of a comparative approach, interventions, democratic control of armed forces, the interplay between states, humanitarians and private security are dealt with. A rather forward looking view is also presented on how military forces and their private counterparts could interface and whether a new generation of soldiers moulded by new values is possible.

The publication covers quite a wide spectrum of matters pertaining to private military and security companies that in effect demonstrate just how pervasive these private actors became within the security and defence sectors. As such it contributes to the debate by attempting to create a better understanding of the role, contributions and inherent entrapments of private actors. The contribution by Adedeji Ebo, *Private actors and the governance of security in West Africa* for example creates an astonishing profile of just how pervasive private security practices became in this African region.

On a more critical note the distinction between private military and private security contractors remains murky. The publication could well have included a contribution outlining the distinction between private military entrepreneurs and those more active in the security domain where some private contractors are quite explicit about their stance of not “crossing” the line into the military sector of training, advising and physical participation in warfighting on behalf of the contracting government or non-state actors. In a sense the publication does not clearly distinguish between the moral and ethical acceptability of those more inclined to wear the cloak of the mercenary, those who merely train and advise on military matters and actors who avoid the latter two domains. This latter distinction is crucial for it is quite important not to collapse the boundaries between the more constructive contributions of private security companies, the questionable profile of private military security companies and the potentially more destructive role of private military companies. The lack of properly discerning between these categories is the single most important void in the publication.

The publication presents good insights into this ever-growing phenomenon, although it is an expensive publication for the average South African. *Private Military and Security Companies* represents an update on a necessary debate and an insightful contribution to academic and state libraries where academics and decision-makers are increasingly faced by the polemics of privatization in the military and security domains.

*Dr Francois Vreĳ, senior lecturer, Military Strategy Department, Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University.*