

Public's perception of the usage of Private Military Contractors in foreign affairs

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Abstract - Private Military Companies (PMC), business firms that provide military services such as protecting assets, training local fighters, or provide logistic support to whoever hired them, via state or non-state actors (Montreaux, 2008), are having an increasing influence on foreign policy. Whether it's Russia using their private force in Syria (Foreign Policy), or the American Oil Companies hiring these firms to undermine protestors at the Dakota Pipeline Access (Larsen & Santos), they're becoming very popular choice by state and nonstate actors. With all of this in mind, the general public in the United States have little knowledge of what PMC do, and there has been little research on the perception the public has on them. This research paper hopes to fill in the gap in knowledge by creating a hypothetical UN peacekeeping scenario where the U.S military force is needed to prevent a Genocide. The goal would be to see if the option of using PMC in a foreign policy situation would have an effect on the participants choices. By using explanatory factors, U.S. troops and PMC troops, in a Randomized Controlled Trial, the data is collected and used to analyze the public perception on PMC is.

Background:

UN Peacekeeping Operations

The United Nations peacekeeping operations are built on three principles that are all mutually reinforcing: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense of the mandate (United Nations "Principles of Peacekeeping"). In order for the UN to be able to carry out mandated tasks, it requires a commitment by all parties involved in a political process (Ibid). Its second principle of impartiality keeps the UN from siding with any certain party and is crucial to preserving the consent and cooperation of the main parties (Ibid). The third principle permits the UN to use force at a tactical level and gives the authorization to use all necessary means at any actions that attempt to disrupt the political process, protect civilians, and/or assist national authorities in maintaining law and order (Ibid). UN peacekeeping operations use force as a measure of last resort, with the goal of using the minimum force necessary to most effectively carry out the task.

Another key aspect of UN peacekeeping is preventing conflicts. This consists of both military peacekeepers who work to protect civilians and stabilize conflict zones and also peacekeepers whose goal is to reinforce the social and civic conditions essential for peace (United Nations "Preventing Conflict"). Currently, the UN is reliant upon the troop-support of members to intervene in conflicts. Even in

extremely public cases where the people seem to care about the issue, any troops dying can create extreme domestic political costs. For example, when Belgium troops died helping the prime minister of Rwanda stop the Rwandan Genocide, the Belgian government pulled their troops out immediately to avoid more public backlash and minimize the political costs (Heidenrich 198). To minimize the cost, Governments are inclined to send a little troops as they can, which reduces the effectiveness of the operation. Thus, creating a scenario revolving around this would be perfect to gauge the public incentive on the usage of PMC.

Private Military Companies Foreign Policy Impact

The concept of PMC has been around since the beginning of civilization, though its ancestor is more well known as Mercenary. Outlawed in 1648 when the nation-state was born, they became incredibly unpopular and were shunned by the world until the 21st century (Sean McFate, 2015). Its rise in acceptance began when The United States extensively used PMC's personnel in the Iraq War 2003 (University of Denver, 2014). They complete tasks that were usually handled by the state military in the past, like guarding supplies, escorting cargo or valuable personal, advisory and training to local fighters, or construction (Ibid). PMCs were used so much that by 2010 there was a 1:1 ratio of contractors to U.S troops, which then increased to a 3:1 ratio in 2013 in Afghanistan (Ibid). Considering how the most powerful military in the world is also the biggest customer to a 200 billion dollar industry (Richter, 2016), this sent a ripple effect that other state and non-state actors began to see PMC as a legitimate service to use as an option for foreign policy (Stanger and Williams, 2006). An example of this can be observed with the state actor Russia. Around 2015 Russia made a business deal with Syria that any oilfields that were capture by their PMC would gain 25% profit from it (Foreign Policy). Because they are a nontraditional combatant in international law, they are increasingly being used in foreign policy decisions from other nations.

Hypothesis and Question

The experiment will be based upon the theory that there is a casualty aversion against the loss of military life that leads to people being reluctant to use them. Its hypothesized that the hiring of PMC

troops will lead to the person not feeling as much of a connection to the units, and thus not having much of a casualty aversion. Specifically, it is expected to see a significant difference between yes choices for the question of do you support the policy in favor of monetary donations. In theory, the Americans will be more sensitive to sending young, fellow Americans to a place that the United States has no stake in versus being virtually detached from the international PMC combatants. It is easier to be detached from those soldiers because people do not know their nationality so it is easier to not identify and empathize with them. The research question essentially asks if people prefer the use of American soldiers or private military contractors to assist international organizations, such as the UN, for their peacekeeping missions. The experiment that's conducted helps answer this question for many reasons. First, two scenarios were conducted. The first is about using American soldiers to send to a UN peacekeeping operation:

"A genocide has broken out in Tranzania, which puts the lives of 500,000 Tranzanians at risk of being killed. The United Nations has launched a peacekeeping operation in response to this. The United States decides to aid this peacekeeping mission by contributing 2,500 American soldiers. The cost of this mission to the United States will be 3 million dollars. Do you support the U.S. contributing 2,500 American soldiers to support the UN operation?"

This scenario will serve as the control group because it offers us a base to compare the results. We decided to emphasize the dependent variable in the question to make sure that the reader sees that they are American soldiers that will be donated. If people are averse to this idea this should make them less likely to support this policy. The second scenario is similar except that it suggests the US will hire 2,500 soldiers from a private military contractor:

"A genocide has broken out in Tranzania, which puts the lives of 500,000 Tranzanians at risk of being killed. The United Nations has launched a peacekeeping operation in response to this. The United States decides to aid this peacekeeping mission by hiring 2,500 soldiers from an internationally-funded private military company, who will report to the United Nations. The cost of this mission to the United States will be 3 million dollars. Do you support the U.S. hiring 2,500 private military company soldiers to support the UN operation?"

This second scenario is the treatment group because it will officially allow us to compare our results to the control group, that being the first scenario. The scenarios help answer the question because of the difference at the end of the paragraph. Using American soldiers versus hiring soldiers from a private

military contractor will drum up different emotions in people. To ensure no other variables are developed in the trial, the cost of money and troops in both scenarios are kept the same, so that the only difference is the connection to the troops used. Thus, this should emphasize the public's sensitivity to using American troops or PMC troops.

Statistical Analysis

In this experiment, the explanatory variables are divided into two groups: the control group is the United States donating American troops to the UN and the experiment group is hiring PM troops to work for the UN. For the experiment, the null hypothesis states that there is no difference in support between PMC troops and American troops, while the alternative hypothesis states that there is a difference in support between the two. While the test group is the U.S. purchasing Private Military Company contractors for the UN efforts. The response variable will be binary dependent, 1 being yes and 0 being no, so a t-test will be used to analyze our results. After gathering our results, 404 people responded with 175 in the control group and 229 in the test group. For the control group, over 37% of them support the idea of intervention, while 30% of the test group support the idea, meaning there is a 7% difference. It seems that the majority in both groups do not support military intervention since in both responses less than 40% support the policy. After performing a t-test on our results, the p-value appeared as .164, which is greater than the generally accepted p-value .05. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and there is insufficient evidence to support our hypothesis that there is no casualty aversion for PMC troop donation.

Implications

The results showed some support for using American troops, but the experiment does not show a high enough confidence level, because of the high p-value, that we can assert any strong conclusions about casualty aversion in reference to PMCs. However, it also does not mean that it can be completely ruled out. One potential reason for the low confidence could be inherently due to the limited sample size, which would have tainted the accuracy of our findings. Retesting the experiment with a larger sample pool may produce findings different than the ones in this experiment. Another reason may be due to a lack of public information regarding private military companies. Although the question regarding PMCs stated

that they were troops who were internationally funded who report to the UN, it may not be clear enough in identifying where they come from, or who they actually are. PMCs are typically not an area in which many people are greatly informed upon, which could have led people coming to their own conclusion, thus affecting the results. A question with the space to give more explanation about PMCs could reveal different findings if performed again.

If the results were considered accurate, the slight preference for using American troops may also reveal a stigma against PMs. This may not be that surprising, as society has shown a distrust for programs like PMCs in the past, as illustrated in the Third Geneva Convention, which institutionalized an anti-mercenary norm (Ulrich, 2014). This law has often been a point of criticism due to its ambiguity and many loopholes, but it remains a strong social norm, as any state has yet to challenge the law openly since it was established (ibid). And despite attempts to rebrand themselves during the 1980s and 1990s from mercenaries to ‘legitimate private military companies, these industries continue to face negative perceptions that could create an aversion itself (Varin, 2018). For example, the decision made by Nigeria to hire a PMC in its fight against Boko Haram has been argued as crucial in how Nigeria was able to turn the tide in its favor (ibid). Regardless of their multiple military successes, they continue to be perceived as little more than mercenary units “led by third-country nationals” (ibid).

Due to the low confidence in our results, a detailed policy proposal cannot be made for this issue, therefore further research and experimentation is needed to address this. For future experiment ideas, the wording on the description of PMC can be changed as a way to reduce bias from interfering with the results. For example, instead of calling them private military companies, they can be described as a company that specializes in providing security or call them external risk minimizers, etc. An additional variable that contains descriptions made by real PMCs from their advertisements can be made to see if their vocabulary has any effect on changing the respondents’ answers. Another way we can test the respondents’ decisions is by providing a definition of PMC before taking the experiment. Since if there is an inherent aversion, which is greater than the casualty aversion, then any additional efforts to test our

hypothesis will be pointless. Experiments that try to isolate specific aversions can serve as a step towards finding public perception of PMC.

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