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GNIMUN



**DIPLOMACY
BEYOND
BARRIERS**

**BACKGROUND
GUIDE**

AGENDA

Evaluating the Threat of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and Non-State Armed Actors in Contemporary Conflicts.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings Delegates,

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to this simulation of the DISEC committee at GNIMUN 25. This background guide will be serving as the foundation for your research on the agenda, remember that this guide is only the start of your research and it should not be the only research you do. We expect you to research further after reading the guide. We hope that the following study guide can provide an insight into the nature and functionality of the committee.

Our agenda: “Evaluating the Threat of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and Non-State Armed Actors in Contemporary Conflicts” addresses a pressing global issue which has been prevalent for years. In various regions around the world, PMCs and non-state armed actors have reshaped the ways are fought and peace is challenged. Their rise and standing poses difficult legal, ethical and political questions.

We strongly encourage you to engage in deep research and to approach the committee with creativity and critical thinking, and come up with innovative solutions to the agenda. This agenda calls for fresh perspectives that balance national interests with the collective responsibility to preserve peace and stability.

As you go through the tides of debate, we remind you that diplomacy and collaboration lie at the very core of United Nations. We urge you to remain respectful, constructive, and committed to the UN values of dialogue, consensus-building, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Lastly, we request all the delegates to sincerely put efforts into preparation and research for the simulation. We hope that you work hard so that the conference is a fruitful learning experience and productive for everyone involved. We are really looking forward to see you at the conference. Good Luck!

Regards,

Sanjana Bathini
Chairperson

Vansh Rajwani
Vice Chairperson

Rules of Procedure (ROP):

For this simulation of the DISEC committee we will be following the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure. Here is the ROP document, please go through it thoroughly and carefully. The Executive Board expects adherence to the Rules of Procedure so that the committee is effective and productive.

Mandate of the Committee:

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), also known as the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, was established in 1945 as one of the General Assembly's principal committees. DISEC serves as a key forum for discussions on matters related to global peace and security. The committee operates under the fundamental principle of fostering international cooperation to maintain peace and security, particularly through disarmament and the regulation of armaments. While DISEC does not have direct authority over the decision-making processes of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Chapter IV of the UN Charter grants it the ability to propose topics for UNSC consideration. Beyond its role within the General Assembly, DISEC is also a part of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), further strengthening its role in global disarmament initiatives. Through its discussions and recommendations, DISEC plays a crucial role in shaping international security policies and promoting efforts toward a more peaceful world.

1. Introduction to the Agenda:

Private Military Companies : PMCs, often also referred to as Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), are independent, for-profit corporations that offer a wide array of military and security services. These services typically mirror those provided by governmental military or police forces but are executed by private personnel under contract. The spectrum of services includes combat operations, strategic planning, intelligence gathering, operational and logistical support, training, procurement, maintenance, and armed protection for individuals, infrastructure, and convoys. PMCs are distinguished by their corporate organizational structure, clear internal hierarchy, and primary motivation for profit rather than political or ideological objectives. They can range from small consulting firms to large transnational corporations operating in over 50 countries.

Non-State Armed Actors : Non-state armed actors are armed entities that operate outside the official representation of a government but possess significant political, social, and/or economic influence. This broad category encompasses a diverse range of groups, including militant organizations, insurgent groups, militias, terrorist organizations, and transnational criminal networks. Unlike PMCs, NSAs are typically driven by political, ideological, ethnic, or religious motivations, and they often engage in armed confrontations against state forces or rival factions. Their organizational structures vary from loosely affiliated groups to highly organized entities that control territory and exert quasi-governmental authority. The proliferation of NSAs is often linked to the post-Cold War security vacuum, failed states, and revived conflicts.

Rise in Modern Conflicts : Over the past few decades, the rise of PMCs and non-state armed actors has been driven by state retrenchment, globalization of security demand, and growing complexity of modern conflicts. After the end of the Cold War, many states reduced standing armies or shifted toward leaner defense forces, creating both a surplus of military expertise and gaps in security provision that private actors could fill (for training, logistics, guard services, etc.). At the same time, weak or fragile states, where the monopoly on violence is contested or unevenly held, have provided fertile ground for non-state armed groups (militias, insurgents, extremist groups) to gain territory, legitimacy, or political influence. Technological diffusion (e.g. cheaper small arms, improved communications, access to media), foreign sponsorship, and global illicit economies have enabled these groups to mobilize more efficiently. In many regions (Middle East, Africa, parts of Asia), PMCs are increasingly contracted by governments or external powers to conduct tasks once pursued by national armies; NSAAs exploit power vacuums, political grievances, and weak governance to expand operations. This dual rise undermines traditional models of state sovereignty, complicates accountability, and increasingly draws the attention of international law, UN bodies, and human rights institutions (e.g. reports by Brookings and policy briefs on the arming of non-state groups).

Relevance : The relevance of evaluating the threat of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and Non-State Armed Actors (NSAAs) is greater today than at any point in recent decades. These actors increasingly blur the lines between state and non-state authority, often operating in legal grey zones that complicate accountability under international law. PMCs like the Wagner Group or Blackwater have been central players in conflicts across Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and Africa, while NSAAs such as Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and the Taliban continue to destabilize entire regions. Their activities directly challenge the UN Charter's principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, while also undermining international humanitarian law through widespread human rights abuses and civilian targeting. Moreover, globalization, the privatization of security, and illicit arms flows have expanded their reach, enabling states to outsource warfare and non-state groups to access advanced weaponry.

2. Historical context and case studies:

Private Military Companies (PMCs) trace their origin to the post–Cold War era, when downsizing of national militaries and the end of proxy wars created a surplus of trained soldiers and a market for privatized security. Companies like Executive Outcomes (South Africa, early 1990s) and Sandline International (UK, mid-1990s) were among the first to formalize the business of providing combat services, logistics, and training to states and corporations. Their rise was driven by two main factors: (1) weak or failing states in Africa and elsewhere that sought military expertise they lacked, and (2) neoliberal policies promoting privatization, which extended even to security. By the early 2000s, especially during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, PMCs like Blackwater (later Academi) became prominent, marking the consolidation of the private military industry as a global phenomenon. Private Military Companies (PMCs) trace their origin to the post–Cold War era, when downsizing of national militaries and the end of proxy wars created a surplus of trained soldiers and a market for privatized security. Companies like Executive Outcomes (South Africa, early 1990s) and Sandline International (UK, mid-1990s) were among the first to formalize the business of providing combat services, logistics, and training to states and corporations. Their rise was driven by two main factors: (1) weak or failing states in Africa and elsewhere that sought military expertise they lacked, and (2) neoliberal policies promoting privatization, which extended even to security. By the early 2000s, especially during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, PMCs like Blackwater (later Academi) became prominent, marking the consolidation of the private military industry as a global phenomenon.

Case Studies:

Wagner Group: The Russian-affiliated Wagner Group has emerged as a prominent and highly controversial PMC, deeply involved in multiple conflict zones.

Syria: Wagner Group was deployed in combat roles, including securing oil and gas fields, operating alongside Russian military units, and supporting the Assad regime. Their activities have been linked to human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial killings.

Ukraine: Wagner Group has been extensively deployed in combat roles since early 2022, fighting alongside Russian forces and recruiting nationals from other conflicts and even prisoners. Their involvement has been linked to increased conflict intensity and allegations of war crimes. The group's failed insurrection in June 2023 dramatically showcased their significant military and political power, challenging the Kremlin itself.

Africa (Mali, Central African Republic, Sudan, Libya): Wagner Group has established a significant presence in several sub-Saharan African countries, often exchanging security services for high-value natural resources or mining concessions. They have been linked to widespread human rights abuses, including mass executions, rape, and child abductions, and have been accused of destabilizing regions and exacerbating terrorism. In January 2023, the U.S. Treasury Department designated the Wagner Group as a transnational criminal organization.

Blackwater (Academi): Blackwater (now known as Academi) was one of the most infamous Private Military Companies, founded in 1997 by former U.S. Navy SEAL Erik Prince. It rose to prominence during the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where it provided armed security, training, and logistical support under lucrative government contracts. At its peak, Blackwater employed thousands of contractors, often carrying out roles traditionally reserved for national militaries. However, it gained global notoriety after the 2007 Nisour Square massacre in Baghdad, where Blackwater guards killed 17 Iraqi civilians, sparking outrage and raising urgent questions about the accountability of PMCs under international and domestic law. Despite rebranding several times (to Xe Services and later Academi), the company remains a symbol of the dangers posed by privatized warfare, highlighting issues of legal loopholes, civilian protection, and blurred lines between state and private military force.

3. Current Global Situation:

Private Military Companies and non-state armed actors remain deeply embedded in today's conflicts. In Ukraine, Russia's Wagner Group has played a central combat role, often accused of war crimes and destabilizing sovereignty in both Ukraine and parts of Africa where it operates (Mali, Central African Republic, Sudan). In Syria, PMCs have been used by state and non-state sponsors alike, while groups such as ISIS and various militias have prolonged instability through terror, territorial control, and trafficking. Across Africa, Wagner, Executive Outcomes, style successors, and regional militias exploit resource-rich but fragile states, undermining governance and fueling cycles of violence. Meanwhile, non-state armed actors like Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia, Hamas in Gaza, and remnants of FARC in Colombia showcase how insurgent or extremist groups challenge state authority, disrupt peace processes, and inflict widespread civilian harm. Collectively, these actors erode sovereignty, commit grave human rights violations, and exploit gaps in international humanitarian law, making their regulation and accountability a pressing challenge for the international community.

4. Key Issues/Threats:

PMCs and non-state armed actors pose major threats due to legal loopholes and weak accountability, allowing them to function outside traditional state and UN oversight. Their actions are frequently associated with grave human rights abuses, including civilian killings, forced displacement, and the recruitment of child soldiers. By altering power balances, they prolong conflicts and destabilize regions, undermining both peace processes and state sovereignty. Their activities are sustained through illicit funding streams such as arms and drug trafficking and the exploitation of natural resources, while state sponsorship further complicates responsibility under international law.

5. Stakeholder Positions:

Some states actively employ private military companies as instruments of foreign policy, using them to expand influence, protect economic interests abroad, and maintain plausible deniability in conflicts. Others struggle directly with the presence of non-state armed actors within their borders, where insurgencies, terrorism, and armed groups undermine sovereignty, displace populations, and obstruct peacebuilding. A third group of states, though less directly exposed, remain concerned about the wider implications of PMCs and non-state armed actors for global stability. They emphasize the risks these actors pose to international humanitarian law, call for stronger oversight frameworks, and advocate collaborative approaches within multilateral forums such as the UN.

6. Existing International Frameworks:

i) International Humanitarian Law (IHL):

IHL, codified primarily in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, forms the bedrock for regulating armed conflicts. These instruments provide clear rules on the protection of civilians and the conduct of hostilities, binding all parties to an armed conflict. Most PMC employees are considered civilians under IHL, affording them protection from attack unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities. If they take a direct part in hostilities, they lose this protection and can be prosecuted for participation in conflict, but they are not typically granted prisoner of war status. States are obliged to respect and ensure respect for IHL, including by PMCs they hire. However, the Geneva Conventions do not explicitly address PMCs as corporate entities, leading to ambiguities regarding their direct responsibility.

ii) International Conventions and Treaties:

Several international instruments attempt to regulate private military actors and mercenaries:

a) UN Mercenary Convention (1989): The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries mandates states to adopt provisions criminalizing mercenary activities in national law. However, its definition of a mercenary is highly restrictive and often does not apply to most modern PMC personnel, limiting its practical effectiveness.

b) Montreux Document (2008): Developed by Switzerland and the ICRC, this non-legally binding document compiles existing international legal obligations and good practices for states concerning PMC operations in armed conflict. It outlines responsibilities for contracting, territorial, and home states to prevent misconduct and ensure accountability. As of December 2018, 54 states and three international organizations had endorsed it.

c) International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC) (2010): This multi-stakeholder initiative sets principles and standards for private security companies based on international human rights and humanitarian law. Signatory companies commit to adhering to these standards, including vetting personnel and establishing grievance procedures. The ICoC aims to improve industry accountability through an external independent oversight mechanism.

d) UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs): These principles outline the human rights responsibilities of both states and businesses.

e) Proposed UN Convention: The UN Human Rights Council has an open-ended intergovernmental working group exploring a binding international convention for PMSCs to establish regulatory, monitoring, and oversight mechanisms.

7. Possible Solutions and Debate Areas:

i) Strengthened National Legislation: States need to adopt or strengthen national laws to define permissible and prohibited PMC services, specify minimum standards of conduct, and create mandatory training on IHL, human rights, and rules of engagement.

ii) Robust Oversight Mechanisms: This includes providing sufficient human and financial resources for public regulatory bodies, establishing enforceable sanctions for non-compliance, and ensuring transparency in public procurement procedures for PMCs. Parliamentary committees need support in monitoring procurement and making information accessible to civil society and the media.

iii) Clear Accountability Frameworks: Licensing, registration, and contractual arrangements must clearly articulate individual and corporate liability, ensuring that PMSCs are held to higher standards of conduct, including potentially waiving traditional immunities.

iv) International Cooperation: Enhanced communication and intelligence sharing among partners are crucial for anticipating threats and mitigating risks from non-state cyber actors. International efforts should aim to build norms around acceptable behavior in cyberspace and strengthen cybersecurity practices.

v) Holistic Security Sector Reform (SSR): Integrating PMCs into SSR frameworks ensures that legal, political, and policy structures reflect good governance principles of accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

8.Guiding Questions for Delegates:

- i)How can international law better regulate PMCs?
- ii)Should states be held responsible for the actions of PMCs they employ?
- iii) How to differentiate between freedom fighters, terrorists, and armed non-state actors?
- iv)Can the UN enforce binding mechanisms against such actors?
- v)Should the Montreux Document and ICoCA be made binding under international law?
- vi)Where is the line between resistance and terrorism? Who decides it?
- vii)Should states be held internationally liable for crimes committed by PMCs they contract?
- viii)Does the existence of PMCs create a global “market for war”?

Useful links for further research:

1. Montreux Document – <https://www.eda.admin.ch/psc>

 2. ICRC – Private Military and Security Companies (overview, FAQs, law & policy) – <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/private-military-and-security-companies>

 3. UN Treaty Collection – International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries – https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XVIII-6

 4. OHCHR – Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries – <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-mercenaries>

 5. Human Rights Council Resolution 57/8 on the use of mercenaries – <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4009290>
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6.Arms Trade Treaty (official text) –<https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-text.html>

7. OHCHR Report A/69/338 – Use of private security companies by the UN –<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/780838>

8. International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoCA) – <https://icoca.ch/the-code/>

9. ICRC Casebook on Mercenaries & PMCs –
<https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/mercenaries>
Rop document : ROP