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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

Stabilizing the International Community: Peacekeeping Forces and Private Military Corporations

"The essence of peacekeeping is the use of soldiers as a catalyst for peace rather than as the instruments of war. It is in fact the exact opposite of the military action against aggression foreseen in Chapter VII of the charter." – Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former United Nations Secretary-General, 1988

"The world may not be ready to privatize peace." – Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General, 1998

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Introduction

In recent decades, the international system has only become increasingly complex. The speedy rate of globalization has furthered interdependence between Member States while also leading to a rise in complicated conflicts. Surrounding these entangled dynamics is the United Nations system and its everlasting mission: to achieve lasting peace and security throughout the international community. Since 1948, UN Peacekeeping has been a core tactic in the toolbelt of this mission. And since its inception, UN involvement in at-risk areas has taken a number of forms: from the deescalation of active conflicts to the prevention of conflict in sensitive areas. While the UN and its numerous arms have worked in tandem to protect all members of the international community, states have also taken matters into their own hands. While Private Military Companies (PMCs) have origins back to the Middle Ages, these groups have emerged as significant power players in recent decades, gaining public notoriety. From Blackwater, to Executive Outcomes, to the Wagner Group.¹ PMCs in the modern day have been tools of foreign policy and influence, and from some perspectives, have taken a place that may have otherwise been held by UN Peacekeeping or Political Missions. This new and growing presence in the world's most sensitive conflicts has challenged international law as well as Member States regulatory frameworks. It's led powerful Member States away from embracing the tools of the international system, and made proxy wars increasingly volatile and unpredictable.²

While the international community and the UN has not been ignorant to the proliferation of PMCs and their use in comparison to Peacekeeping forces, it seems definitive that the international community is at a longstanding crossroads: embrace the mechanisms created by international organizations, or cede intervention to Member States themselves. And while this is no simple quandary, there exist intricacies within it that bear serious considerations. How can trust be rebuilt in the institutions of Peacekeeping and Political Missions? Can international law be strengthened to create legitimate enforcement mechanisms for PMCs? How do these two groups interact with one another? Scrutiny, robust debate, and new measures provide the opportunity to supplement a roadmap forward as the international community works to grapple with the intricacies involved in modern conflict and promoting peace and security in the globalized age.

The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

The creation of the UN Peacekeeping program came shortly after the inception of the UN itself. In 1948, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) launched with the purpose bringing peace and stability to the Middle East in the wake of emerging states, an alleged end to colonization, and conflict across multiple states. The mission will commemorate

¹ Irrera, Simone Rinaldi, Daniela. "The Influence of Private Military Companies on Global Security." The Loop, 7 Nov. 2023, theloop.ecpr.eu/the-influence-of-private-military-companies-on-global-security/.

² Has, Özlem. "Regulating Private Military Companies: A Comparative Study of National Approaches in the United States, Turkey, and Russia." Journal of Conflict and Security Law, vol. 30, no. 3, 4 Sept. 2025, pp. 359–375.

its 78th anniversary this year, and maintains that “UNTSO remains first in peace, until a lasting peace.”³ If this history is indicative of anything, it is that peacekeeping and peacebuilding is far from an exact science. Moreover, given the recent conflict in the region, including the October 7th attacks on Israel perpetrated by Hamas, and the Israeli incursion into Gaza which has been deemed a genocide by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, calls into question the efficacy of this mission in particular, but also the founding values of UN Peacekeeping Operations overall.⁴ That said, since 1948, there have been over 70 Peacekeeping missions deployed. Hundreds of thousands of military personnel, and tens of thousands of UN police and civilians from over 120 countries have participated in these operations in the pursuit of resolving existing conflicts, preventing new ones, and building lasting peace. The first iteration of Peacekeeping forces, which included the UNTSO and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan consisted of unarmed military observers tasked with monitoring political operations, providing expert consultation on political affairs, and supervising Member State operations.⁵ It wasn’t until 1956 that armed Peacekeepers were deployed in the First UN Emergency Force, tasked with addressing the Suez Crisis, which consisted of over 6,000 military personnel at its peak.⁶

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, UN Peacekeeping missions adapted to meet the moment of the crisis they faced, whether that be military observation of a ceasefire in the Dominican Republic or fact finding and stabilization recommendations in Yemen. Many of these were short-term missions with a focus on ushering a new sense of stability to Member States recovering from war. During this time, however, longer term and larger-scale deployments began. This includes the UN Operation in Congo deployed in 1960 with nearly 20,000 military personnel at its peak and the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus launched in 1964, which is still active today. The scope of UN Peacekeeping grew alongside the world as new conflicts inevitably started.⁷

Following the end of the Cold War, UN Peacekeeping continued to change with the world, dramatically shifting its field operations to take a more multidimensional approach. While military operations have remained the backbone of the majority of peacekeeping operations, the toolbelt of expertise grew to have a more holistic approach at peacebuilding. This included: administrators, economists, police officers, legal experts, electoral observers, human rights

³ United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. About UNTSO. 12 Jan. 2026, untso.unmissions.org/en/learn-more-about-untso.

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council. Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 16 Sept. 2025.

⁵ United Nations. “UNMOGIP Fact Sheet.” United Nations Peacekeeping, Oct. 2025, peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unmogip.

⁶ United Nations Peacekeeping. “FIRST UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE (UNEF I) - Facts and Figures.” peacekeeping.un.org/1968/peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unef1facts.html.

⁷ United Nations. “Our History.” United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations, 2024, peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history.

monitors, humanitarian workers, and more.⁸ The post Cold War era also led to the authorization of twenty new operations between 1989 and 1994, which raised the number of peacekeepers from 11,000 to 75,000. These operations spanned from El Salvador to Angola to Cambodia, with focuses on implementing peace agreements, stabilizing security situations, and facilitating elections and democratic institutions.⁹ As the role of peacekeeping became more intricate, the conflicts and relationships between Member States became increasingly difficult. While the Cold War had come to an end, Member States' self-interest continued to be a sticking point in the pursuit of peace and security.

The 1990s proved to be a difficult period for UN Peacekeeping which ushered concerns from the international community as to the effectiveness of the operations overall. The two most infamous examples of this being the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia. In Bosnia, the Security Council responded to mass atrocities perpetrated by Serbian forces through the establishment of "safe zones" to be managed by international forces which did little to quell violence or protect civilians.¹⁰ Despite the presence of over 100 UN monitors and 6,000 peacekeepers on the ground in 1992, mass atrocities continued, and cessation of the violence there did not take place until 1995.¹¹ This came after Serbian refusal to comply with a UN ultimatum to use force, and eventual bombing facilitated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹² After gaining independence from Belgium in 1962, Rwanda was thrown into decades of ethnic conflict, culminating in 1990 when the Rwandan Patriotic Force launched an attack from behind Uganda's border.¹³ In 1993, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda was established to support a transitional government and monitor its implementation. Increasing hostilities and insufficient UN troop presence set this mission up for failure. Less than a year later, it was estimated that more than one million ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed.¹⁴

While in both cases of Rwanda and Bosnia, the UN set up international criminal tribunals to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable, both genocides mar the United Nations going into the 21st Century.¹⁵ That said, the UN and its peacekeeping operation were not the sole actors in any of these conflicts, and both examples must beg the question as to whether these situations were a failing of the UN or its Member States. That question has followed UN Peacekeeping Operations in the following decades through today. Despite failures like Rwanda

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Najjar, Farah. "Bosnia's War, 30 Years On: How Did the Atrocities Happen?" Al Jazeera, 15 Dec. 2025, www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/15/bosnias-war-30-years-on-how-did-the-atrocities-happen.

¹¹ Power, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell*. New York, Basicbooks, 20 Feb. 2002, pp. 281–282.

¹² International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. "Srebrenica: Timeline of Genocide." www.irmct.org, 2020, www.irmct.org/specials/srebrenica/timeline/en/.

¹³ United Nations. "Rwanda - UNAMIR Background." Un.org, 2019, peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unamirS.htm.

¹⁴ United Nations. "Rwanda: A Brief History of the Country." Outreach Programme on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the United Nations, United Nations, 2025, www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml.

¹⁵ United Nations. "International Tribunals | Security Council." Un.org, 2020, main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/repertoire/international-tribunals.

and Bosnia, the UN pushed on, establishing peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Timor-Leste, and more. Though the situations have become no less complicated, UN Peacekeeping Operations work to rise to the challenge. Today, with over 110,000 military, police, and civilian staff, the UN currently serves 11 peacekeeping missions.¹⁶ This represents both a decrease in personnel and missions. That said, increases in convoluted political situations and the expansion of the UN peacekeeping mandate over time has cemented that this international mechanism is here to stay.

Private Military Companies Ascension on the Global Stage

Private Military Companies (PMCs) or Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) have been frequent players in the global world far before the emergence of our modern international system. Greek and Nubian men fought for the Egyptians as early as the Late Bronze Age. Mercenaries took Jerusalem from the Roman Empire during the Sixth Crusade, and the British hired Hessian forces during the American Revolution.¹⁷ Prior to the late 19th century, PMCs were one of the predominant mechanisms used for marshalling fighting forces. After the industrial revolution, there was a spike in the mass production of weapons which led states to lean more on their previously standing military bodies and subsequently left room for the evolution of PMCs. Traditional warfare in the early 1900s was largely fought by Member States militaries. Those growing militaries have also been an exhibition of a state's capability for hard power. By the early 21st century, PMCs started to operate in a different way, marked by the 2004 ambush and brutalization of four employees of the Blackwater PMC group in Fallujah. President George W. Bush responded to these attacks claiming the "US cannot stand idly by" and consequently increased the Baghdad offensive which was deemed essential on military and ideological grounds as the strength of the US military operations in Iraq depended heavily on the presence of PMCs.¹⁸ It's worth questioning if the US hadn't responded aggressively to the Fallujah attacks if the authority and effectiveness of PMCs would've been stymied.

By 2003, the number of PMCs doubled, jumping from 38 in 2001 to 79 in 2003. The situation in Afghanistan being the main engine for this growth. The number of American soldiers had reached 200,000 in the country, and almost double that number in PMC manpower. By 2011 the number of new PMCs reached 120.¹⁹ As these new power players emerged on the global stage, the UN worked to respond. In 1980, the General Assembly (UNGA) initiated a Working Group for an international covenant on mercenaries; by December 1989, UNGA delegates sent the International Convention Against Mercenaries to their countries for signature or ratification. After the 22nd ratification in late 2001, the Convention entered into force and has been ratified by

¹⁶ United Nations Peacekeeping. "UN Peacekeeping - Where We Operate." United Nations Peacekeeping, 2023, peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate.

¹⁷ Brauer, Jurgen (1999), "An Economic Perspective on Mercenaries, Military Companies and the Privatization of Force," Cambridge Review of International Affairs XIII, pp. 130-145

¹⁸ Scahill, Jeremy (2007), Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army (Nation Books)

¹⁹ Swed, Ori, and Daniel Burland. The Global Expansion of PMSCs: Trends, Opportunities, and Risks. 2020.

thirty eight countries. That said, the most effective enforcement of the Convention will only occur once it has been ratified by all UN member states.²⁰ In addition, the Convention is only a start to successful enforcement mechanisms to hold these groups accountable. The document leaves PMCs and their employees in a regulatory gray zone, demonstrating the need for new regulations on using PMCs. Recent resolutions have sought to tackle this issue, notably General Assembly Resolution 74/138 passed in 2019. This resolution incorporated Private Military and Security Companies into the Convention's focus apart from just mercenaries and requested the established Working Group to analyze and report on the activities of such groups.²¹

While PMCs have generated significant media headlines across the globe, the scale of the industry is underreported. The industry has grown in visibility and profitability, with companies like Academi – formerly Xe Services and Blackwater) –from the United States employing personnel from various countries, including Chile and Colombia, or British companies using Nepalese Gurkhas to provide force protection in Iraq. Russia has also become a hub for PMCs, with estimates pointing to a potential 27 active companies, with Wagner Group having approximately 50,000 personnel fighting just in Ukraine.²² A similar pattern was present during the Iraq War – employed by the United States – as there were over 180,000 security contractors with limited supervision, at least 30,000 armed.²³ The contractors themselves face not only a lack of oversight but also increasing dangers, with thousands affected with injuries, raising concerns about the lack of adequate post-service care for these contractors.

The UN maintained for 20 years the position of Special Rapporteur on the Use of Mercenaries, but this position was replaced in 2005 by the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of people to self-determination, under the supervision of the Commission on Human Rights (UNHRC).²⁴ The Working Group conducted multiple fact finding missions to observe the effectiveness of implementation of the Convention, and to collect data on the emerging norms as these companies proliferated the international system. In 2007, visits to Chile revealed concerns about a lack of control over PMC actions, as well as recruitment conducted by PMC for the purpose of deploying to Iraq, but also noted with approval the successful deterrents through independent legislation.²⁵ In 2010, efforts began to draft a global instrument for regulating PMCs.²⁶ Recent reports on visits to Somalia, Honduras, and the European Union

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly. “ International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries A/RES/44/34.” 4 December 1989.

²¹ United Nations General Assembly. “Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination A/RES/74/138.” 18 December 2019.

²² SAUVAGE, Grégoire. “Private Russian Military Companies Are Multiplying – and so Are the Kremlin’s Problems.” FRANCE 24. FRANCE 24, July 16, 2023.

²³ T. Christian Miller, “Private contractors outnumber US troops in Iraq” Los Angeles Times July 4, 2007.

²⁴ “Human Rights Resolution 2005/2: The Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination, 2023

²⁵ United Nations Commission on Human Rights. “United Nations Working Group On Use of Mercenaries Concludes Visit to Chile.” 16 July 2007.

²⁶ UN News Centre, “UN body urges support for treaty regulating private military, security companies” April 30, 2010.

highlight concerns about PMSCs negatively impacting Member State security.²⁷ As these companies have continued to accumulate, the international community has worked to keep up. The emergence of the Montreux Document Forum in 2006 has led to the latest of documents that aim to hold Private Military and Security Companies to legal enforcement. Today, there are 61 Member States that are “participating members” of the Forum.²⁸ While international bodies work to find solutions, PMCs continue to tighten their grip on conflicts throughout the international community. As controls tighten, clear approaches to prosecute human rights abuses are essential. The Security Council must evaluate the reasons and functions of these private security entities and propose guidelines to prevent their actions from unnecessarily prolonging conflicts and causing further harm to civilian populations due to the impediment their human rights violations pose to global prosperity.

Case Studies

Côte d'Ivoire and Cambodia: Successes in Peacekeeping

In 1988, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded that year's Nobel Peace Prize to United Nations Peacekeeping Forces for “preventing armed clashes and creating conditions for negotiations.”²⁹ While UN Peacekeeping Operations are often criticized for either its actions or inaction, there are also many success stories that have resulted from its programs. The UN notes success in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia, and Tajikistan, to name a few.³⁰ In each of these areas, success has differing definitions. Whether it is preventing conflict, rebuilding post-conflict areas, or facilitating the growth and success of Member States.

Cambodia: Swift and Effective Action

Cambodia is a Member State that has been plagued by both interstate and intrastate war for decades leading up to the establishing of a UN Peacekeeping Mission in the country. Over the course of that time, various UN bodies worked to provide humanitarian aid and support in diplomatic efforts to restore peace to the area. After visiting the region in 1985, then Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar developed a series of objectives to provide a pathway to just that.³¹ In 1988, face-to-face talks took place in Jakarta, Indonesia between Cambodia,

²⁷ United Nations Commission on Human Rights. “Mercenarism and private military and security companies.” April 2018. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/MercenarismandPrivateMilitarySecurityCompanies.pdf>.

²⁸ The Montreux Forum. “Participating States and International Organisations.” Montreux Document Forum, 2025, www.montreuxdocument.org/about/participants.html.

²⁹ Norwegian Nobel Committee. “The Nobel Peace Prize 1988.” NobelPrize.org, 1988, www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1988/summary/.

³⁰ United Nations. “Our Successes.” United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations, 2019, peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-successes.

³¹ United Nations Peacekeeping. “United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) - Background (Summary).” Peacekeeping.un.org, 2003, peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/untacbackgr1.html.

Vietnam, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and special envoys to the Secretary-General.³² Nearly a year later, Vietnam announced the withdrawal of its troops from Cambodia, and in 1991 the involved parties attended the Paris Conference on Cambodia along with 17 other countries, leading to the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements, which along with a Security Council resolution, established the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).³³ This UN mission is widely regarded as one of the most successful since peacekeeping efforts began in 1948. UNTAC involved 15,900 military, 3,600 civilian police, 2,000 civilians, and 450 UN Volunteers, as well as locally recruited staff and interpreters. In addition, it cost over \$1.5 billion, and was carried out both within its allotted budget and on time.³⁴

Following initial deployment, UNTAC assumed control of all key sectors within the state's administrative structures and was declared to be the interim transitional authority for eighteen months, and formally given power to run the government. This included foreign affairs, defense, security, finance, and communications. This was for the purpose of building a stable environment conducive to holding national elections.³⁵ This was an operation carried out by multiple UN bodies. While the mission was underway the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) oversaw the repatriation and resettlement of around 360,000 refugees and internally displaced persons.³⁶ Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme coordinated infrastructural and economic reconstruction. Following the initial deployment of UN Peacekeeping forces, UNTAC prepared the country for national elections in May 1993, and oversaw the electoral campaigns and registration of voters in addition to election proceedings. Following the election, it was determined that nearly 90 percent of registered voters cast a ballot, and it was declared that the election was free and fair.³⁷ This mission was multifaceted – it consisted of both military, civilian, and political rehabilitation of the country. One could not be successful without the other. In many ways, UNTAC can be seen as the ideal scenario for how a peacekeeping operation should function. This begs the question: why haven't they all functioned this way? One thing is certain: instances like Cambodia should be closely studied and when applicable used as a model for peacekeeping operations in the future.

³² WILLIAMS, NICK B. "Asian Alliance Agrees to Join Cambodia Peace Talks." Los Angeles Times, 6 July 1988, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-07-06-mn-5350-story.html.

³³ UN Security Council. "Resolution 718 (1991) /: Adopted by the Security Council at Its 3015th Meeting, on 31 October 1991." United Nations Digital Library System, UN, 31 Oct. 1991, digitallibrary.un.org/record/130494?ln=en&v=pdf.

³⁴ Trevor, Findlay. "Cambodia: The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC." Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, no. 9, 1995.

³⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping. "United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) - Background (Summary)." Peacekeeping.un.org, 2003, peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/untacbackgr1.html.

³⁶ Peace Accords Matrix. "Refugees: Framework for a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict - Peace Accords Matrix." University of Notre Dame, 11 Apr. 2019, peaceaccords.nd.edu/provision/refugees-framework-for-a-comprehensive-political-settlement-of-the-cambodia-conflict.

³⁷ Zaalberg, Thijs W. Brocades. "Making Sense of the Mission: UNTAC's Military and Civil Mandates." Soldiers and Civil Power, by Brocades Zaalberg Thijs W., Amsterdam University Press, 2006, pp. 75–102. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mxbz.7.

Côte d'Ivoire: The Long Game

While Cambodia illustrates swift action to stabilize a Member State, Côte d'Ivoire illustrates a much longer timeline to provide peace and stability. The UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) completed its mandate on June 30, 2017, after more than 13 years active in the country. After its success, the Security Council requested that the Secretary-General compose a comprehensive study of the mission and the role of the UN in the settlement of the unrest in the state.³⁸ UNOCI was created following a failed coup in 2002, after soldiers of the Ivorian armed forces attempted to topple then president Laurent Gbagbo. Following two years of civil war, the UN mission was established in April 2004 to monitor a then agreed upon cease-fire, with peacekeepers monitoring a “zone of confidence” that separated the government-controlled southern region of the country from the rebel-held northern region.³⁹ This peacekeeping replaced an existing political mission – United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire or MINUCI.⁴⁰ This peacekeeping operation set out with a multidimensional approach and with an objective to facilitate the implementation of the peace agreement signed by the warring parties in 2003, which aimed at ending the Ivorian civil war completely. This came after intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through the ECOWAS Peace Force for Côte d'Ivoire, which led the first peace negotiations that led to the cease-fire. In addition, throughout the laborious peace process, the French Republic was heavily involved, and the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS remained involved with the UN Mission to form a working group to rehabilitate the country.⁴¹ Over the first six years of the peacekeeping operations, there were multiple peace talks and agreements signed, and over time the UN authorized increased troop presence in the country.

Meanwhile, on the ground forces worked to prepare the country for elections, which was a lengthy process. By October 2010, the first round of presidential elections was held, with over 80 percent voter turnout, and the results of that vote were later certified by the UN. A second round of elections was held about a month later with similar turnout rates, and an Independent Electoral Commission declared Alassane Ouattara the winner. Despite free and fair elections, the president of Côte d'Ivoire's Constitutional Council invalidated the results of the Independent Electoral Commission, and proclaimed former president Laurent Gbagbo the winner of the election.⁴² This led to increasing hostilities in the country, and the eventual deployment of 2,000

³⁸ Alexandra, Novosseloff. “The Many Lives of a Peacekeeping Mission: The UN Operation in Côte D’Ivoire.” June 2018.

³⁹ United Nations Security Council. “Resolution 1528 (2004) /: Adopted by the Security Council at Its 4918th Meeting, on 27 February 2004.” United Nations Digital Library System, UN, 27 Feb. 2004, digitallibrary.un.org/record/516209?ln=en&v=pdf.

⁴⁰ United Nations. “MINUCI: United Nations Mission in Côte D’Ivoire.” Un.org, 2024, peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/minuci/.

⁴¹ Alexandra, Novosseloff. “The Many Lives of a Peacekeeping Mission: The UN Operation in Côte D’Ivoire.” June 2018.

⁴² Ibid.

additional peacekeepers.⁴³ In mid-2011, Gbagbo was apprehended by the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire, and flown to The Hague to face international prosecution. He became the first former head of state to be taken into custody by the International Criminal Court.⁴⁴ Following his removal, UNOCI was able to downsize their team and take a more civilian-led approach. Four years later, the French operation in the country came to an end and was transformed to a much smaller contingent of soldiers. Focuses of the mission were based around supporting social cohesion, implementing strong judicial measures, disarming combatants and re-integrating them into society, and strengthening the country's National Commission on Human Rights.⁴⁵ Following successful elections in 2016, the Ivorian administration becoming present in all local departments, and strengthening the country's economy, the UN was able to scale back its presence, ultimately leading to the closure of UNOCI and full withdrawal of UN peacekeepers.

The success of both these peacekeeping missions, despite being in different regions of the world and under different circumstances, have two key intersections. The first, the missions were holistic. Both involved a military presence coupled with civilian and political peacekeepers, with a key mission of providing long term stability and the strengthening of key institutions that would allow the Member State to function without any support from UN bodies. Second, there was support from regional groups. In the case of Cambodia, ASEAN was a key player, and for Côte d'Ivoire, both ECOWAS and the AU were heavily involved in the peace process. These takeaways are vital for the continuation of successful peacekeeping missions as the world becomes increasingly interdependent, and as the task of running a thriving Member State becomes an uphill battle – particularly in regions prone to instability.

Libya: A Peacekeeping Cautionary Tale and PMC Playground

The Intervention and Its Mandate

The 2011 Libya intervention was, by the standards of recent history, a moment of remarkable multilateral speed. Following the Qaddafi regime's violent crackdown on civilians, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1970 (2011) on 26 February 2011, imposing an arms embargo, travel ban, asset freeze, and—critically—an ICC referral under Chapter VII.⁴⁶ Three weeks later, Resolution 1973 (2011) authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, established a no-fly zone, and tightened the embargo, marking the first time the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was invoked for an active military operation.⁴⁷ The resolution

⁴³ United Nations. "UNOCI Background - United Nations Operation in Côte D'Ivoire." Un.org, 2025, peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unoci/background.shtml.

⁴⁴ International Criminal Court. "Gbagbo and Blé Goudé Case." [Www.icc-Cpi.int](https://www.icc-cpi.int), 2019, www.icc-cpi.int/cdi/gbagbo-goude.

⁴⁵ United Nations. "Our Successes." United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations, 2019, peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-successes.

⁴⁶ "In Swift, Decisive Action, Security Council Imposes Tough Measures on Libyan Regime, Adopting Resolution 1970 in Wake of Crackdown on Protesters | UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." 2011. February 26, 2011. <https://press.un.org/en/2011/sc10187.doc.htm>.

⁴⁷ "Libya - Hansard - UK Parliament." 2011. April 1, 2011. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2011-04-01/debates/11040186000471/Libya>.

passed ten to zero with five abstentions, including permanent members China and Russia, whose reservations about open-ended mandate language would prove consequential.

NATO's Operation Unified Protector (March–October 2011) enforced the no-fly zone, conducted naval embargo operations, and struck regime military assets. Within months, the Qaddafi government collapsed. Qaddafi was killed by rebel forces on 20 October 2011.⁴⁸ On paper, the operation had achieved its humanitarian objective. In practice, it had crossed a line. Russia and China argued publicly that the civilian protection mandate had been exploited as cover for regime change, a position that, whatever its merits, calcified into the governing logic of the Security Council for the next decade.⁴⁹

UNSMIL: A Political Mission in a Security Vacuum

Following six months of armed conflict, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2009 (2011) on 16 September 2011, establishing the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).⁵⁰ Critically, UNSMIL was not a peacekeeping operation. There were no uniformed UN troops on the ground, no Status of Forces Agreement, and no coercive capacity.⁵¹ It was a civilian-led political mission tasked with supporting Libya's transitional authorities, an institutional architecture deliberately chosen to satisfy the National Transitional Council's rejection of foreign forces and to avoid triggering P5 vetoes. The mandate has been renewed continuously, most recently through Resolution 2702 (2023), with UNSMIL today headquartered in Tripoli and maintaining a presence in Benghazi and Tunis.⁵²

The structural mismatch was catastrophic. Libya's post-conflict landscape was characterized by dozens of armed militias that had no incentive to disarm, a state apparatus hollowed out by four decades of personalist rule, and oil wealth that immediately became a contested resource. UNSMIL had neither the tools nor the authority to address the security vacuum NATO had created and then departed.⁵³ In May 2014—less than three years after OUP concluded—Libya collapsed into a second civil war between rival governments based in Tripoli and Tobruk. The country became a failed state, and with it, a marketplace.⁵⁴

The PMC Playground: Privatized Warfare Fills the Vacuum

⁴⁸ “NATO and Libya (February - October 2011).” n.d. Site Name Seo.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/nato-and-libya-february-october-2011>.

⁴⁹ Marcus, Jonathan. 2011. “Why China and Russia Rebuffed the West on Syria.” BBC News. October 5, 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15180732>.

⁵⁰ “Security Council Creates United Nations Support Mission in Libya, Adopting Resolution 2009 (2011) | UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” 2011. September 16, 2011. <https://press.un.org/en/2011/sc10389.doc.htm>.

⁵¹ “UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) | Refworld.” n.d. Refworld.

<https://www.refworld.org/document-sources/un-support-mission-libya-unsmil>.

⁵² “Document Viewer.” n.d. [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2702\(2023\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2702(2023)).

⁵³ “NATO and Libya (February - October 2011).” n.d. Site Name Seo.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/operations-and-missions/nato-and-libya-february-october-2011>.

⁵⁴ Certo, Peter, and Peter Certo. 2021. “Four Years After Gaddafi, Libya Is a Failed State.” Foreign Policy in Focus. March 3, 2021. <https://fpif.org/four-years-after-gaddafi-libya-is-a-failed-state/>.

Libya's fragmented sovereignty, abundant oil revenues, and absence of functional state institutions created optimal conditions for Private Military Companies. The most extensively documented deployment is that of the Wagner Group, a Russian PMC operating as a de facto instrument of Russian state policy.⁵⁵ According to the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, Wagner first deployed to Libya in October 2018 in support of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army. By May 2020, between 800 and 1,200 Wagner contractors were conducting sniper operations, artillery fire direction, and electronic countermeasures, while Russia conducted 338 documented military transport flights to sustain those forces, each a direct violation of the arms embargo Russia itself had voted to impose in 2011.⁵⁶

Wagner was not alone. Turkey deployed contractors through SADAT A.S. and recruited Syrian fighters to support the UN-recognized Government of National Accord.⁵⁷ The UAE financed Wagner's operations while also transferring military equipment in embargo violation. France—officially supporting the GNA—had special operations contractors documented working with the LNA. Every significant external actor pursued its objectives through privatized or deniable channels rather than through UNSMIL, the mechanism the Security Council had established.⁵⁸ The UN Panel of Experts characterized the arms embargo as "totally ineffective," with violations described as "extensive, blatant and with complete disregard for the sanctions measures." No enforcement action followed, for an irrefutable structural reason: the state most directly implicated in violating the embargo holds a permanent veto.⁵⁹

The Libya Effect: Consequences Beyond Libya

Libya's most durable legacy is not military but political. Russia and China's abstentions on Resolution 1973 became vetoes on every subsequent attempt to authorize protective action, in Syria, Myanmar, and beyond, with Libya cited explicitly as justification for non-intervention.⁶⁰ The R2P consensus, unanimously assembled at the 2005 World Summit, has not recovered. When the Assad regime used chemical weapons against Syrian civilians in 2013, the Security Council could not authorize a response. When the Rohingya were subjected to what the UN High

⁵⁵ Megerisi, Tarek. 2025. "The Bear Who Came to Tea: Russia, Libya and the Kremlin's Playbook for Fragile States." ECFR. November 21, 2025.

<https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-bear-who-came-to-tea-russia-libya-and-the-kremlins-playbook-for-fragile-states/>.

⁵⁶ BBC News. 2020. "Wagner, Shadowy Russian Military Group, 'fighting in Libya.'" May 7, 2020.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52571777>.

⁵⁷ Nordic Research Monitoring Network. 2020. "UN Launched Probe Into Deployment of Syrian Fighters to Libya by Turkish Gov't and Its Paramilitary." *Nordic Monitor* (blog). August 19, 2020.

<https://nordicmonitor.com/2020/08/un-rapporteurs-asked-turkish-government-to-provide-information-on-deployment-of-syrian-fighters-in-libya/>.

⁵⁸ OHCHR. n.d. "Libya: Violations Related to Mercenary Activities Must Be Investigated – UN Experts." <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2020/06/libya-violations-related-mercenary-activities-must-be-investigated-un-experts>.

⁵⁹ "Libya Arms Embargo 'Totally Ineffective': UN Expert Panel." 2021. UN News. March 19, 2021.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087562>.

⁶⁰ Goldberg, Mark Leon, and Mark Leon Goldberg. 2012. "How Libya's Success Became Syria's Failure." UN Dispatch. January 19, 2012. <https://undispatch.com/how-libyas-success-became-syrias-failure/>.

Commissioner for Human Rights called a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" in 2017, the Council issued a Presidential Statement. The pattern is direct: the perception of abuse in Libya produced paralysis everywhere else.⁶¹ This calls into question the feasibility of deploying new peacekeeping missions to areas with critical instability and risk. It also leaves room for Libya to act as a scapegoat when denying political or peacekeeping missions under the guise of protecting civilians or sovereignty, when the reality may be rooted in a Member States' self-interest. It leaves intervention into conflict by the international community in grave jeopardy.

The proliferation of PMCs accelerated in precise proportion to that paralysis. When states observe that formal multilateral mechanisms are unavailable, politically unreliable, or operationally insufficient, the rational calculation shifts toward private military capability—lower political cost, higher deniability, no Security Council authorization required. Libya demonstrated that PMC deployment could generate strategic gains without legal consequence. The October 2020 Libyan Ceasefire Agreement explicitly called for the withdrawal of all mercenaries and foreign fighters.⁶² The UN Panel of Experts reported in early 2021 that there were no indications of any Wagner withdrawal. The message to prospective PMC-deploying states was unambiguous, and without any enforcement mechanisms to hold PMCs or their contractors accountable, the situation in Libya is likely to be recreated in unstable Member States.

Private Military Companies Successes – Russia, The Wagner Group, and Syria

When reviewing the successes of Private Military Companies, the lens through which to view success differs from that of UN Peacekeeping Operations. Success for a PMC is not based solely on solving a conflict for either a Member State or the international community, but on the desired outcomes of whatever entity or Member State is employing a PMCs service. In addition, there is the self-interest of the PMC to take into consideration – while it can be assumed that the interests of any UN political or peacekeeping mission lie within creating peace and security, a PMC operates as a business, not as an international organization.

One of the most notorious and militarily successful PMCs is the Wagner Group; a Russia-based PMC run by Russian oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, an Oligarch with close ties to Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin.⁶³ Founded in 2014, Wagner, originally called the Slavonic Corps, operates as both frontline troops and as logistic training and support for the Russian military. Initial operations by the group took place shortly after its inception in the Donbas region

⁶¹ Adams, S. (n.d). Failure to Protect: Syria and the UN Security Council. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

⁶² "Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the Announcement of a Ceasefire Agreement in Libya." 2020. Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood. October 25, 2020. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/declaration-high-representative-behalf-eu-announcement-ceasefire-agreement-libya-2020-10-25_en.

⁶³ Philippa Karen, Larsen. The Rise and Fall of the Wagner Group. Danish Institute for International Studies, 9 Jan. 2025.

in Ukraine, which allowed coverage for the Russian government to deny any involvement in the region at the time.⁶⁴ While they first fought in the initial Russian incursion into Ukraine, the Wagner Group found their footing after operations in Syria began in late 2015 in the midst of a multidimensional war involving the Syrian government, the Islamic State, Kurdish forces, and various Member States.⁶⁵ Syria's internal conflict allowed the Wagner group to forge themselves from a loose coalition of former Russian Military officers into a much more state-like army.

Russia had goals within the Syrian Conflict that went beyond helping their declared ally, Syria, retain control of their territory. While the Wagner Group was in Syria, their direct assistance allowed the Syrian state troops to maintain territorial control. At the same time, the mere presence of the PMC acted as lubrication to let the controlling interests of the Wagner group reap economic benefits. Namely, Russian business access to the warm water ports of Syria's Coast. Prigozhin and his oligarchic cadre used the Wagner Group to both prop up their state's failing Ally, and make money off of the deployment of Russian troops paired with the PMC.⁶⁶ Once embracing the Wagner group, Russia and allied international actors and journalists legitimized the group's role in the international system, describing them as a 'serious and completely legal business', 'highly valued', and as having a high level of training and experience based on their work in Syria.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the group not only provided additional support to Assad-controlled Syrian military forces, but also got involved in the oil and gas industry to generate wealth for Prigozhin and his allies. This success was not long lived, but worked for the purposes of the Wagner Group and its backers.⁶⁸

The legitimization of the Wagner Group as a force in conflict, along with the generous backing of the Russian government and oligarchs in the country have allowed the group to spread far and wide across the world. Whether it be across the African continent and much of the Middle East, or Venezuela.⁶⁹ It's clear for many Member States, PMCs have become an integral force to carry out its ideal of success. That said, we are left to question whether that success is in the best interest of stabilizing and achieving prosperity for the entirety of the international community, or in the image of the Member States most capable of retaining such forces.

⁶⁴ Ray, Michael. "Wagner Group | Facts, Leader, Rebellion, & Russia-Ukraine War | Britannica." www.britannica.com, 14 Aug. 2023, www.britannica.com/topic/Wagner-Group.

⁶⁵ Taylor, Adam. "Analysis | What We Know about the Shadowy Russian Mercenary Firm behind an Attack on U.S. Troops in Syria." Washington Post, 23 Feb. 2018,

⁶⁶ Sukhankin, Sergey. War, Business and Ideology: How Russian Private Military Contractors Pursue Moscow's Interests. The Jamestown Foundation, 20 Mar. 2019.

⁶⁷ Philippa Karen, Larsen. The Rise and Fall of the Wagner Group. Danish Institute for International Studies, 9 Jan. 2025.

⁶⁸ Giustozzi, Antonio. "How the Wagner Group Lost Syria." Rusi.org, 31 May 2024, www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/how-wagner-group-lost-syria.

⁶⁹ Katz, Brian, et al. "Moscow's Mercenary Wars: The Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies." Moscow's Mercenary Wars: The Expansion of Russian Private Military Companies, Sept. 2020, russianpmcs.csis.org/.

Private Military Companies: A Lack of Oversight and Accountability

From a global perspective, the reliance on PMCs contributes to what some scholars call the privatization of conflict. When war becomes a service, actors with financial means—whether states, corporations, or non-state entities—can effectively “buy” military capacity.⁷⁰ This opens the door to asymmetric security environments where accountability mechanisms lag behind capability expansion. The result is an uneven playing field that threatens the predictability and transparency that international security systems depend upon. Furthermore, the use of PMCs has begun influencing how major powers project influence abroad. For instance, China’s deployment of Private Security Companies throughout Africa to enforce the Belt and Road Initiative quickly blurs the lines between foreign policy and corporate warfare.⁷¹ Such operations often provide plausible deniability for governments, eroding norms against intervention and weakening multilateral frameworks like the UN Charter.⁷² Delegates should therefore consider how the proliferation of PMCs interacts with the foundational principles of collective security, sovereignty, and the rule of law.

One of the greatest threats PMCs pose to global security lies not simply in their actions, but in the regulatory gaps that surround them. International humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions are designed to regulate state militaries and recognized combatants—but PMCs exist in a gray area.⁷³ They are neither formal state actors nor traditional mercenaries, leaving accountability mechanisms unclear. While attempts have been made to create these mechanisms – The Montreux Document (2008) and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC) are important steps forward, but both are voluntary. Without binding international standards, enforcement remains inconsistent.⁷⁴ This legal ambiguity allows PMCs to exploit jurisdictional loopholes: a contractor could commit a human rights violation in one country, be employed by a firm headquartered in another, and be legally shielded by a third state’s laws. This is in direct contrast to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, which has enforcement mechanisms and after accusations of impropriety, has undergone reform.⁷⁵ While

⁷⁰ Swed, Ori, and Daniel Burland. 2020. “Outsourcing War and Security.” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, November. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1925>.

⁷¹ Markusen, Max. “A Stealth Industry: The Quiet Expansion of Chinese Private Security Companies.” www.csis.org, 12 Jan. 2022, www.csis.org/analysis/stealth-industry-quiet-expansion-chinese-private-security-companies.

⁷² Australian Institute of International Affairs. 2024. “The Wagner Group: Russia’s Shadow Army and Its Impact in Africa - Australian Institute of International Affairs.” June 27, 2024. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-wagner-group-russias-shadow-army-and-its-impact-in-africa/>.

⁷³ Has, Özlem. 2025. “Regulating Private Military Companies: A Comparative Study of National Approaches in the United States, Turkey, and Russia.” Journal of Conflict and Security Law, August. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcsl/kraf012>.

⁷⁴ Nelleke, Van Amstel, and Tilman Rodenhäuser. 2016. “The Montreux Documents and the International Code of Conduct: Understanding the Relationship Between International Initiatives to Regulate the Global Private Security Industry.” January 1, 2016.

⁷⁵ United Nations. “Reforming Peacekeeping.” United Nations Peacekeeping, 2018, peacekeeping.un.org/en/reforming-peacekeeping.

that reform has been at times incomplete or imperfect, the framework for such implementation exists. And while individual Member States or International Organizations can and have placed sanctions against PMCs for their actions in other countries, individual perpetrators and leaders have little recourse for consequences.⁷⁶

Conclusion: Conflict Prevention and Management in Today's Landscape

When addressing the resolution of conflict and the means through which to achieve peace and security, we see an international community divided. Some Member States embrace the longstanding UN Peacekeeping Operations and international cooperation, while some favor less traditional methods of intervention in Private Military and Security Companies. What all Member States can likely agree upon is that our world grows more intricate, and conflicts mirror those complexities with the emergence of non-state actors, cybersecurity threats, drone warfare, and more. With eroding confidence in the UN's ability to launch effective Peacekeeping and Political Missions, mirrored by a Security Council deadlocked when discussing today's most pressing conflicts, Member States have considered looking elsewhere to resolve ongoing instability. Meanwhile, Private Military Companies are embraced by more powerful states in the international system and developing and less developed countries reliant on external support for stability embrace them as well. The escalation in the use of Private Military Companies calls into question the ability for peace and stability to be achieved when it is rivaled by self interest, and is left in the hands of forces that rarely be held accountable. The erosion of norms around the lawful use of force not only threatens the credibility of peacekeeping missions but also emboldens other non-state armed groups to pursue similar models.⁷⁷ The Council should weigh whether strengthening international law or promoting new frameworks for transparency might restore confidence and oversight in global security practices. The same can be said for strengthening the methodologies and standards of UN Peacekeeping Operations. While the global system incurs some of the worst humanitarian crises in its history, increases in diverse conflicts, and escalations of tensions between global superpowers, it is the everlasting duty of the Security Council to forge ahead in pursuit of lasting peace and security.

⁷⁶ "Human Rights Resolution 2005/2: The Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination, 2023

⁷⁷ Adamson, Liisi, and Erica Harper. 2025. "War Reloaded: The Erosion of Norms and the Urgency of Prevention." Lieber Institute West Point, June 17, 2025. <https://ieber.westpoint.edu/war-reloaded-erosion-norms-urgency-prevention/>.

Guiding Questions

1. To what extent should United Nations Peacekeeping Operations expand beyond traditional roles to counter terrorist threats, and how can such mandates remain legitimate, effective, and consistent with UN principles?
2. What reforms, if any, to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations should be made to better equip Blue Hats to defend against terrorism?
3. Can there be changes made to the Peacekeeping landscape and existing mandates to see further progress in long-standing missions?
4. How can the Security Council successfully regulate PMCs, and should it intervene at all?
5. How does your Member State interact with these two issues? Do they employ Private Military Companies, have they ratified any Conventions mentioned in this guide? Do they provide financial or personnel contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations? Or do they have an active Peacekeeping Operation within their borders?
6. What are your Member States policies and attitudes surrounding intervention, sovereignty, Responsibility to Protect, and the efficacy of UN Peacekeeping Operations.
7. What existing frameworks and policies are there surrounding UN Peacekeeping and Private Military Companies? Are there updates that could be made to those existing documents, or are new instruments needed?

Resource Guide

Understanding the powers of differing United Nations bodies. To participate fully in this committee, understanding what the Security Council and other UN bodies can do is essential. We highly recommend reading this [Q&A from the United Nations University Center for Policy Research](#) to better understand the dynamics at play in authorizing the deployment of peacekeepers.

Written by the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, this [overview on Mercenarism and Private Military and Security Companies](#) details the process and findings of the Working Group tasked by the United Nations Human Rights Council to study human rights violations committed by mercenaries.

[General Assembly Resolution A/RES/74/138](#) - Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination

The United Nations provides extensive record keeping on both peacekeeping missions and the political situations that inform them. [Referring to our case study on Cambodia](#), it may be helpful to gain deeper background on the issue that shows the diplomatic intricacies involved in developing and implementing the mission.

[The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries](#).

[Full text of the Montreux Document](#), as well as background information on existing Working Groups and participating Member States.

In 2025, the Secretary-General held the United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial, a high level political forum intended to discuss the future of peacekeeping and for Member States to express their support for UN Peacekeeping Operations. [You can find the forum's summary, remarks, and more here](#).