

# Private Military Contractors in Conflict Zones

*Hüseyin Özdemir*

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*Çağdaş Yüksel*

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**WRITTEN BY**

Çağdaş Yüksel

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**TRT WORLD İSTANBUL**

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

**TRT WORLD LONDON**

200 GRAYS INN ROAD, WC1X 8XZ

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

**TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.**

1819 L STREET NW SUITE, 700 20036

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# Introduction

**P** rivate military contractors (PMCs) are companies that provide armed security or military-related services to governments and other organisations. These services can include training, logistics, intelligence, and combat operations. PMCs are also sometimes referred to as private security companies (PSCs), private military firms (PMFs), or mercenary companies. They are composed of professional soldiers, usually ex-special forces, and are employed by countries, organisations, or individuals to provide specific military or security-related services. PMCs are for-profit companies, which do not operate under government control but are regulated by different laws depending on the country.

The use of PMCs has become increasingly common in recent years, as governments and other organisations look to outsource certain military and security tasks to private companies in order to save money and reduce the number of soldiers and other personnel they need to employ. The market for private military security services was evaluated to be around \$241.7 billion in 2021 and \$366.8 billion by 2028.

The rapid increase in the number of private military companies shows that there are some changes in the approach of monopolizing the use of force by states. According to the research of The Center for Public Integrity covering the years 2004-2006, US Army contracts in Afghanistan and Iraq increased by 50% year-on-year. Kellogg Brown & Root firm received a tender worth \$16 billion. Since 2008, the United States Department of Defense funded private security contractors peaked in Afghanistan in 2012 at more than 28,000 individuals and in Iraq in 2009 at more than 15,000 individuals.

During the current Russia-Ukraine war, private military companies have been in the news headlines again. The existence of Russia's private military company Wagner, which was known in Crimea in 2014, and later in Syria and Libya, and other private military companies active in conflict areas, keeps the issue on the agenda.



(Vladimir Aleksandrov - Anadolu Agency)

# International Legal Status of Private Military Companies

Mercenaries lost their legitimacy for various reasons at the end of the 19th century. Over time, due to the chaos and tyranny created by the soldiers of fortune, the use of foreign soldiers for money was condemned, and various restrictions and embargoes were imposed on this practice.

Article 47 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions defines a mercenary and states that a mercenary shall not have the right to be a combatant or a prisoner of war. According to the Geneva Convention, a mercenary is any person who:

'a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities; (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party; (d) is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and (f) has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed [forces](#).

The definition of mercenary was also made in the United Nations General Assembly at its 72nd meeting on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989, and on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the United Nations Mercenary Convention, which is an international convention against the recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries, [entered into force](#). The convention had been ratified [by 46 states](#). Of the NATO countries, only Belgium, Romania, Poland, Montenegro, Croatia and Italy have signed the agreement, which has been signed by no member state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Mercenaries have no affiliation with any company or state or title, they just fight for money. But PMCs act as intermediaries between professional soldiers and governments.

In this context, private military contractors are different from the military forces of a country, which are under government control and regulated by applicable laws. PMCs are for-profit companies, which are not under government control but are regulated by different laws depending on

the country. The legal situation of private military contractors can vary depending on the laws and regulations of the country in which they operate, as well as the specific circumstances of their involvement in a conflict.

In general, private military contractors operating in war zones are subject to the laws of the country in which they are operating, as well as any international laws and agreements that may apply. However, the laws and regulations governing the use of private military contractors in war zones can be complex and may vary depending on the specific context.

In the United States, for example, private military contractors are subject to the laws of the United States, as well as any international laws and agreements that may apply. They are also subject to U.S. regulations and oversight, including those of the Department of Defense and the State Department. However, it has been argued that the oversight and regulations in the US have not been enough to prevent incidents involving contractors.

Internationally, the use of private military contractors raises a number of legal issues, including the question of accountability when private military contractors are involved in war crimes or other illegal activities. Some international treaties and conventions such as the Rome Statute, consider that PMCs may be responsible for war crimes if they committed them in the context of an armed conflict, but many other countries don't have specific laws to deal with PMCs.

In summary, the legal situation of private military contractors is complex, and it varies depending on the laws and regulations of the country in which they are operating and the specific circumstances of their involvement in a conflict.

## Soldiers in PMCs

Former members of the military or law enforcement frequently serve as soldiers in private military contractors (PMCs). They are employed to carry out a wide range of responsibilities, including providing security, carrying out combat operations, and finishing other military-related jobs. They are typically highly trained and skilled in military operations and tactics.

Private military companies pay their soldiers a higher-than-average military salary. The salaries of Private Military Contractors in the US range from \$17,412 to \$462,765, with a median salary [of \\$83,487 per year](#). On the other hand, the estimated total salary for a Soldier in the US Army [is \\$63,816](#) per year. According to some sources, Wagner Group increased the wages of its fighters from \$3000 to \$5000 before the Ukraine war, and up to [\\$10,000 during the Ukraine war](#). The Russian army pays its soldiers fighting in Ukraine between 163,000 rubles (\$2350) and 217,000 rubles (\$3140) [per month on average](#).

A PMC soldier may also receive benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave. The compensation can be even higher for soldiers with specialized skills, such as language fluency, and for high-risk assignments.

The training for private military contractors can vary depending on the specific contractor and the type of work they are performing. However, some common elements of training for private military contractors include:

- Firearms training: Handgun, rifle, and heavy weapons proficiency, as well as tactical training for close-quarter combat and other high-risk situations.
- Combat medic training: Basic first aid training, as well as more advanced training in trauma care and emergency medicine.
- Close protection training: Training in protective operations and the use of evasive and defensive driving techniques, as well as training in surveillance and counter-surveillance tactics.
- Survival training: Training in wilderness survival, as well as urban survival and evasion tactics.
- Language training: Training in foreign languages relevant to the area of operation, as well as training in local customs and culture.

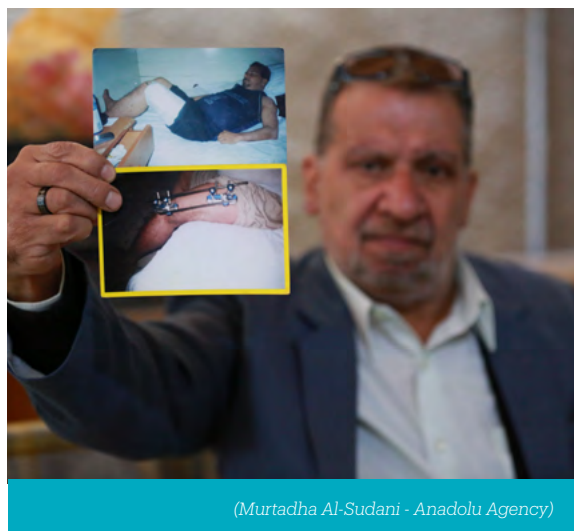
– Additional specialized training like driving, navigation, communication, and others depending on the field of operations of the contractor.

The use of private military contractors (PMCs) in conflict zones is a controversial issue, as their presence raises questions about accountability and the role of private companies in conflicts.

PMCs have been and are being used in various countries in the Middle East, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen, in Central Africa and Libya, and in Ukraine.

Some of the most well-known PMCs that have operated in the conflict areas include:

- G4S
- Constellis, ACADEMI (formerly known as Blackwater)
- Wagner Group
- CACI International



(Murtadha Al-Sudani - Anadolu Agency)

## G4S

G4S, also known as Group 4 Securicor, is one of the world's largest private security companies, with operations in over 85 countries. The company provides a wide range of services, including security personnel, technology solutions, and cash transportation. The company states that it has an extensive network of more than 800,000 employees and has an annual revenues of [\\$18 billion](#).

G4S, the largest private security company in terms of number of personnel, would have been NATO's second largest army in terms of employees if it had been a NATO member country rather than a [private company](#). In 2022, the United States had the largest number of military personnel out of all North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries, with 1.35 million troops. The country with the second largest number of military personnel was Türkiye, with just around [447,000 personnel](#).

G4S has been the subject of controversy and criticism for several reasons.

One of the main controversies surrounding G4S is its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The company provided security services to Israeli settlements in the [West Bank](#), which are considered illegal under international law. In addition, G4S has been criticized for providing equipment and services to Israeli prisons, where Palestinian political prisoners are held, including [child prisoners](#).

## Academi/ Blackwater

Blackwater Academi, also known as Blackwater USA or Xe Services LLC, is a private military company founded in 1997 by former Navy SEAL Erik Prince. In 2014, the company was sold and rebranded again as Constellis. Operating in more than 50 countries, Constellis Holding has 14,000 employees and an annual revenue of [\\$1.3 billion](#).

Blackwater, which also owns EP Aviation, has 14 Bell 412 helicopters and 28 aircraft in its [inventory](#).

Blackwater gained notoriety in the early 2000s for its involvement in the Iraq War, where it provided security services to the United States government and private contractors. Blackwater's role in the Iraq War was controversial, as the company was accused of several incidents of misconduct, including the killing of unarmed Iraqi civilians. The most high-profile incident occurred in 2007, when Blackwater guards were involved in a shooting in Baghdad's Nisour Square that left 17 Iraqi civilians dead and [20 others injured](#).

Another incident involving Blackwater occurred on De-

This has led to calls for boycotts and divestment from the company by human rights organisations.

Another controversy involving G4S is its role in the deportation and detention of immigrants in the UK and other countries. The company has been criticized for its role in the detention of asylum seekers and the removal of failed [asylum seekers](#). In particular, there have been reports of abuse and mistreatment of detainees in G4S-run immigration removal centers, leading to calls for the company to be removed from the UK's [immigration detention system](#).

G4S has also been involved in a number of scandals related to its management of contracts. There have been reports of overcharging, fraud, and mismanagement of contracts for services such as electronic tagging of offenders, and security for the [London 2012 Olympics](#). These controversies led to the UK government cancelling contracts with the company and launching investigations.

Moreover, G4S has been criticized for its human rights record, particularly in relation to the treatment of its employees and the use of force. G4S employees have been accused of abuse, mistreatment, and wrongful deaths of people in their custody. In addition, G4S has been accused of failing to properly train and equip its security personnel, leading to the use of [excessive force in some cases](#).

On September 24, 2006, in which a Blackwater contractor shot and killed an [Iraqi vice-presidential guard](#). This incident led to a diplomatic crisis between the United States and Iraq, and the Iraqi government demanded that Blackwater be expelled from the country. The incident also raised questions about the legal status of private military contractors operating in Iraq, as they were not subject to the same rules and regulations as U.S. military personnel.

Blackwater had a presence in Iraq and Afghanistan during the US wars in these countries. Blackwater also provided private security services to various clients in the region, including oil companies and other businesses. According to TRT World, Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater, carried out a number of activities to explore and extract natural resources in [Afghanistan in 2018](#).

In addition to these incidents, Blackwater has been accused of other questionable actions, such as weapons trafficking, illegal [arms sales, and bribery](#).

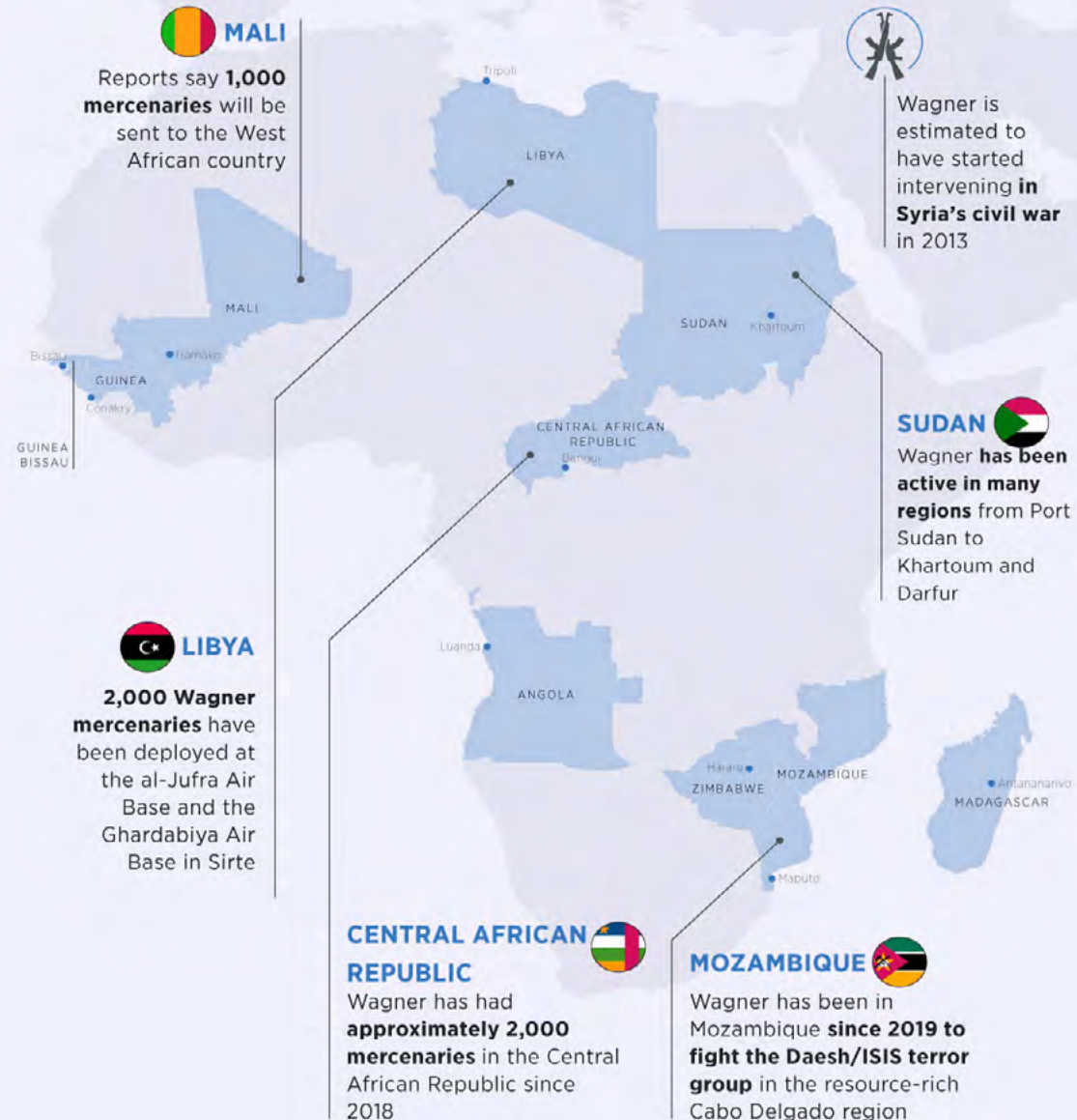
# Wagner's sphere of influence expanding in Africa

Amid reports that Russian mercenary force Wagner may soon strike a deal with the government of Mali, there is increasing scrutiny around the group's structure and presence of Russian soldiers in Africa



**WAGNER  
MERCENARIES ARE  
BELIEVED TO BE  
PRESENT IN 9  
COUNTRIES IN  
AFRICA**

- Libya
- Central African Republic
- Mozambique
- Sudan
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Madagascar
- Zimbabwe
- Angola





# Wagner Group

The Wagner Group, also known as PMC Wagner, is a Russian private military company (PMC) that has been involved in various conflicts around the world, including in Ukraine. The group is linked [to Yevgeniy Prigozhin](#), a Russian businessman with close ties to the Kremlin. Prigozhin's name was also in the news for alleged interference in the [2016 US presidential election](#).

One of the most notable controversies involving the Wagner Group is their involvement in the ongoing civil war in Syria. The group has been accused of providing military support to the Assad regime, including training, and advising Syrian government forces and participating [in combat operations](#).

The group also supports the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Warlord Khalifa Haftar in the ongoing civil war. The Wagner Group has been linked to several incidents of human rights abuses, including the use of chemical weapons and the targeting of [civilian areas](#).

PMC Wagner has also been accused of involvement in other conflicts around the world, including in the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mali. The report of the US-based nonprofit Organized Crime and Corruption Report-

ing Project (OCCRP) alleged that the Wagner Group was operating in Sudan in exchange for privileged access to the country's [lucrative gold mining](#). Moreover, the group allegedly carried out the execution of 300 unarmed persons in Mali. The group has been linked to human rights abuses, war crimes and [other illegal activities in these countries](#).

Another important conflict zone, in which the Wagner Group is involved, is Ukraine. It is alleged that the group has been active in the Donbas region since 2014, providing military support to separatist rebels in the region, including training and participating in combat operations. It is stated that the group is actively involved in the Ukrainian war and constitutes [10 percent of the Russian army](#). The United States estimates that Wagner has 50,000 personnel deployed in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 convicts recruited from [Russian prisons](#). White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby claimed that the group bought weapons from North Korea.

# CACI International

CACI International is a US-based defense contractor. Founded in 1962, CACA has a revenue of [\\$6 billion](#).

One of the most notable controversies involving CACI concerns the company's role in the Abu Ghraib [prison scandal in Iraq](#). In 2003, CACI employees were present at the prison during the time when prisoners were subjected to brutal and inhumane treatment, including sexual abuse and torture.

The abuse at Abu Ghraib was first brought to light in 2004, when photographs of the abuse were leaked to the media. The photographs showed prisoners being subjected to a variety of degrading and inhumane treatment, including being forced to pose in sexually explicit positions, being hooded and subjected to electric shock, and being forced to stand for long periods of time in stress positions.

In the wake of the scandal, CACI was accused of being complicit in the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The company was also accused of failing to properly supervise its employees at the prison, and of failing to report the abuse to the appropriate authorities. CACI has denied any wrongdoing and has stated that it was not aware of the abuse at Abu Ghraib until the photographs were [leaked to the media](#).

Despite CACI's denials, several former employees of the company have come forward to testify that they reported abuse to CACI management, and the company did not take any action to address the issue.

# Why do states use private military companies?

Governments use private military contractors (PMCs) for a variety of reasons, [including](#):

**Political and legal issues:** Without having to directly assume responsibility for them, governments might deploy PMCs to carry out activities like counterinsurgency or covert operations that may be politically or ethically contentious. Moreover, there is a perception that the loss of troops in private military companies, who are seen to be operating for their own financial benefit, would not have the same detrimental effects on domestic politics as the loss of soldiers in official forces.

**Cost effectiveness:** Compared to traditional military or government organisations, PMCs are more efficient at providing military and security services.

**Flexibility:** Since PMCs can be employed temporarily or on a project-by-project basis, governments are able to quickly scale up or down their military and security capabilities as needed.

**Specialized knowledge:** PMCs can offer specialized knowledge and talents that may not be present within conventional military or government groups, such as activities involving intelligence gathering or counterterrorism.

**Supplementing existing forces:** In circumstances where a higher number of personnel is required, such as in peacekeeping or humanitarian operations, PMCs can be employed to support the current military and security forces.

**New employment area:** PMCs offer new employment opportunities for trained and experienced ex-military personnel who are unemployed as a result of downsizing and personnel reduction practices in industry.

PMCs are typically not subject to the same level of oversight and regulation as traditional military or government organisations, which make it difficult to hold them accountable for their actions.



(Diego Herrera Carcedo / Anadolu Agency)

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