

## **Abstract**

The end of the Cold War accelerated the privatization of security and the proliferation of private military security companies (PMSCs) in conflict-ridden areas, challenging the state's role as the sole and legitimate security provider. This thesis explores whether deploying PMSCs has resulted in the erosion of state sovereignty – understood as the monopoly of violence – in a country with weak state institutions, such as Sierra Leone. To address this, the methodology employs process tracing to examine if and how the hypothesized causal mechanism unfolds under specific circumstances, resulting in a change in sovereignty status. This change is measured through three indicators: political stability, control over territory, and control over natural resources. By conducting an in-depth case study of Sierra Leone during PMSCs deployment (1991-1998) in the fight against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), this thesis reveals significant adverse impacts of PMSCs on the state sovereignty indicators. Firstly, PMSCs involvement led to an internal power redistribution, fueling competition among contractors, the army, and local militias. Secondly, while PMSCs provided short-term territorial gains, the Sierra Leonean army proved unable to maintain territorial stability, resulting in prolonged vulnerability and dependence on non-state services in the medium term. Lastly, the research indicates that PMSCs obtained advantageous concessions in exploiting natural resources from the legitimate government through long-term contracts, hindering the state's capacity to generate resources and impeding its path towards sustainable development.

## **Keywords**

Private military security companies; privatization of security; state sovereignty; monopoly of force; Sierra Leone.

## **Title**

The role of Private Military Security Companies in eroding state sovereignty: a case study from Sierra Leone