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

Master's thesis

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2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
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In Prague on

Beatrice Cirrone

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## References

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## **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

## **Abstrakt**

Konec studené války urychlil proces privatizace bezpečnosti a rozšíření soukromých vojenských bezpečnostních společností (PMSC) v konfliktních oblastech, což zpochybnilo roli státu jako jediného a legitimního poskytovatele bezpečnosti. Tato práce zkoumá, zda nasazení PMSC vedlo k narušení státní suverenity, chápané jako monopol na násilí, v zemi se slabými státními institucemi jako je Sierra Leone. K řešení této otázky využíváme metodiku sledování procesů, která zkoumá, zda a jak se za konkrétních okolností vyvíjí předpokládaný kauzální mechanismus, jehož výsledkem je změna statusu suverenity. Tato změna je měřena pomocí tří ukazatelů: politické stability, kontroly nad územím a kontroly nad přírodními zdroji. Na základě hloubkové případové studie Sierry Leone v období nasazení PMSC (1991-1998) v boji proti Sjedinocené revoluční frontě (RUF) tato práce odhaluje významné negativní dopady PMSC na ukazatele státní suverenity. Zaprvé zapojení PMSC vedlo k vnitřnímu přerozdělení moci, což podnítilo konkurenci mezi dodavateli, armádou a místními milicemi. Zadruhé, zatímco PMSC poskytly krátkodobé územní zisky, ukázalo se, že sierraleonská armáda není schopna udržet územní stabilitu, což vedlo k dlouhodobé zranitelnosti a závislosti na nestátních službách ve střednědobém horizontu. V neposlední řadě výzkum ukazuje, že PMSC získaly od legitimní vlády výhodné koncese na těžbu přírodních zdrojů prostřednictvím dlouhodobých smluv, což omezuje schopnost státu vytvářet zdroje a brání jeho cestě k udržitelnému rozvoji.

## **Klíčová slova**

Soukromé vojenské bezpečnostní společnosti; privatizace bezpečnosti; státní suverenity; monopol síly; Sierra Leone.

## **Název práce**

Úloha soukromých vojenských bezpečnostních společností při narušování státní suverenity: případová studie ze Sierry Leone

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# **1. Introduction**

Private military security companies (hereafter referred to as PMSCs) are international violent non-state actors that have achieved a primary role in states' domestic politics through the security and military services they have provided in the last decades. PMSCs are companies integrated into the global force market that respond to the phenomenon of the privatization of security: increasing globalization coupled with the implications associated with the end of the Cold War and the neo-liberal policies pursued by Thatcher and Reagan's governments have progressively eroded the attribute of state sovereignty, particularly in areas of the world where the Weberian conception of the state, based on the legitimate monopoly of coercive force, had never entirely taken root.

PMSCs are profit-oriented private commercial firms with a corporate structure that are specialized in offering security and warfare functions according to the needs of the clients they contract with: from legitimate governments with internal security problems to multinational energy corporations and factions engaged in conflict. Such private security firms (hereafter referred to as PSFs) constitute global suppliers of military services that focus on several areas: operational military support, such as armed combat and tactical response support; military advisory, through training and strategic planning; logistical support; security services, like the protection of prominent political figures and neuralgic military and energy infrastructure and commercial properties; and crime prevention services, including intelligence gathering (Shearer 1998b; Singer 2003). In stabilization activities during a conflict as well as in humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction programs, such as security sector reform efforts, PMSCs deploy security contractors, staff who tend to be highly specialized and have good access to weapons and military equipment, acting as a

supplement to regular armies to alleviate their economic burden and logistical pressure (Kinsey 2005).

The commercial character and permanent structure of PMSCs have enabled them to become a crucial player in the global security system. The earliest forms of PSFs emerged in the 1960s. They operated in highly volatile areas, such as Yemen and Zambia, where they had a complementary role in the military training of local armies and often acted in a supporting capacity to colonial powers (O'Brien 2000b). PMSCs proliferated in the 1990s peaking in the early 2000s during the War on Terror, as evidenced by the US government's massive deployment in the Iraq War of over 100,000 contractors (Avant 2005) and the presence of more than 120 PMSCs operating in 2007, compared to 40 in the early 1990s (Branović 2011: 28). It was the largest mobilization of private soldiers since the Thirty Years' War (Gorini 2018: 87). The significance and impact undertaken by the phenomenon of war privatization are corroborated by the size of the private military industry market, which increased from \$50,000 million in 1990 (Avant 2005), to \$70,000 million in 2005 (Abrahamsen & Williams 2007), reaching \$224,000 million in 2020 (Picard & Goodman 2022).

This thesis aims to investigate whether PMSCs deployment has resulted in the erosion of state sovereignty, understood as the legitimate monopoly of coercive force, in weak states with limited capacity to deliver essential public services, such as the safety and security of their citizens. The case of Sierra Leone will be used to illustrate this hypothesized causal relationship.

## **1.1 Origins and development**

For the sake of this research, it is relevant to identify the macro drivers inherent in the systemic level that have enabled the emergence of PMSCs. Although they are closely related and overlapping, we can differentiate between the pull factors of insecurity that have created the fertile conditions for their spread and fueled their demand and the push factors that have driven the private security supply.

In respect of the former, the end of the Cold War erased the rival competition and threat perceptions of "communism" and "imperialism", while the bipolar dynamics and the superpowers' needs to project their power into spheres of influence contributed to the survival of precarious state institutions and unstable defense systems until the 1990s, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, as in the case of Zaire and Angola. The loss of Russian and American interest in geopolitically and strategically marginal areas is evinced by the qualitative (in terms of functions) and quantitative (in terms of workforce) reduction of UN peacekeeping operations. There has been a general reluctance and lack of political will on the part of international organizations and states to intervene in highly volatile areas with weak state capacity, especially following the failure of the Restore Hope mission in Somalia (Singer 2003). While there is evidence that the Cold War fossilized ethnic, religious, and social conflicts, its end dusted off and reopened long-standing issues that had been paused for decades. A fortiori, PMSCs represented the epiphenomenon of changing attitudes about interventionism and the only answer to the loss of strategic significance due to military contraction, the fading of the patronage system, and idiosyncratic dynamics that had created a general sense of security vacuum, particularly in contexts of limited state sovereignty, such as Africa (Gorini 2018; O'Brien 2000a).

From a military perspective, this has resulted in a transformation in the nature of warfare because the proliferation of cheap weapons and their easy accessibility to non-state actors has led to an increase in low-intensity conflicts, characterized by the absence of direct confrontation between regular armies, and a blurred division between civilians and combatants, as in the case of warlords and child soldiers (Singer 2005). Since the 1990s, low-intensity conflicts have increasingly challenged state sovereignty, the government's power over the territory, and its status quo through longer and bloodier conflicts, more considerable civilian casualties, and greater involvement of sub- and non-state entities, such as ethnic or religious groups, terrorists, and PMSCs. These "New Wars", a concept coined by Mary Kaldor (2006), trace a predatory attitude that feeds both informal networks parallel to the state system and the instability of regimes safeguarding special economic and political interests.

In the same way that traditional warfare has become inextricably tied to the concept of the nation, its decline has been symptomatic of the cross-cutting and normative transformation generated by globalization (ibid.). At the economic level, the rise of neoliberal policies since the 1980s has expanded market logic to the management of public welfare goods, such as health care and pension systems, leading to the erosion and limitation of the state's ability to provide public services. Privatization first affirmed itself in the services and financial sectors, but it then penetrated the security and military markets as a supposed panacea for public institutions. This normative assumption was based on the idea that PMSCs would have maximized profit and efficiency in delivering public services and security compared to traditional military involvement, which was deemed inadequate (Avant 2005). The national security apparatus underwent a general reorganization and lightening in functional terms and personnel, resulting in the marketization of violence (Leander 2005). Sovereign states and states with weak state capacity recognized the beneficial impact of

outsourcing core state functions from a financial and resource management perspective. The retreat and withdrawal of the state, simultaneously with the privatization of security functions to private actors, produced a transformation of state structure, its power, and its relevance as the primary unit of analysis in the international economic and military system.

Regarding services and goods available in the market, the end of bipolarity resulted in a substantial contraction of the defense budget and a military downsizing of armies by 22%, causing a surplus of low-cost military expertise. The ample supply of soldiers due to the demobilization of more than 6 million between 1987 and 1996, particularly from the US, UK, and Russia, required these highly professional staff to be reintegrated into the private security market (Marchetti 2013). In addition, incorporating former soldiers in PMSCs subsequent to the demilitarization was a way to contain the potentially devastating impact of their propensity for violence that could have fueled criminal organizations or interfered with state stability and democratic transition. For instance, ex-South African Defense Forces personnel demobilized after the end of the Apartheid regime were recruited by Executive Outcomes (Abrahamsen & Williams 2007).

## **1.2 Clients**

The privatization of warfare, achieved through the commercialization of violence and the outsourcing of state and security functions to PMSCs, is a direct implication of globalization and debunked neo-liberal policies on the state. These developments have further challenged and undermined the national sovereignty of countries with poor internal security (Small 2006). Moreover, this concept is essential in explaining the transformation of the Clausewitzian conception of war. It has shifted from being a rational activity of mutual, used to subordinate the opponent's particular will to the centrality of the state through a centripetal push, to an occasion of confrontation for control of resources among a multitude

of actors with a centrifugal pull on state sovereignty (ibid.). The dual demand for private security from state actors (top-down relation) and non-state actors (bottom-up relation) (Mandel 2001) has led to the proliferation of PMSCs capable of providing private security functions that, thank to their credibility and in the absence of adequate public instruments, have established themselves as a viable alternative, gaining *de facto* legitimacy (Cilliers & Mason 1999). Although PMSCs claim *de jure* their apolitical and neutral nature in supporting only legitimate governments recognized by the international community, as confirmed by Executive Outcomes' refusal to work in the service of the rebels in Sudan (Ruzza 2011: 67), these actors have not been reluctant to provide military assistance to rogue states, insurgents, criminal organizations, such as drug cartels in Colombia, and groups close to Al-Qaeda. Given PSFs' goal of profit maximization, any entity with sufficient economic resources, regardless of its level of legitimacy, can potentially access their services (Singer 2005). Multinational oil and mining companies have relied on PMSCs for services in extraction, reclamation, and demining, as well as protection of critical infrastructure in unstable contexts in exchange for privileged access to resources (Avant 2005; Musah 2002).

At the same time, international organizations such as the UN and EU have resorted to PMSCs, fueling the comparison between PMSCs and UN peacekeeping operations about their effectiveness and implications for the stability, authority, and long-term development of the host state (Gantz 2003; Singer 2006)<sup>1</sup>. PMSCs have been deployed by democratic and strong states as a supplement to strengthen expertise and ensure efficiency and *as lunga manus* foreign policy tool of Western states. Such decisions may not always receive domestic approval and may require complex legislative processes that are instead bypassed, as in the

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<sup>1</sup> The economic advantage and logistical effectiveness of using PMSCs over blue helmets were particularly noticeable in the case of Sierra Leone. For a detailed discussion, see Nebolsina (2020).

case of Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI) intervention in Angola (Isenberg 1998; Singer 2003).

The main reasons for weak states to hire PMSCs, in contrast, are related to military needs, immediate need for stabilization, and fill-the-gap functions when facing a threat to state survival: due to political instability and the absence of bureaucratic solid apparatus capable of providing protection to property and citizens in its territory, the state relies on PFS as a conflict management tool (Avant 2005).

In both circumstances, states are inclined to outsource military functions to PMSCs for economic and political gains. On the one hand, hiring contractors allows governments to have access to highly professional, trained, and well-armed military personnel without the effort of recruiting new troops or training their staff, thus ensuring good military effectiveness and rapid deployment to areas where the military apparatus is deficient, as in the case of Sandline's intervention in Papua New Guinea in 1997 (Dinnen, May & Regan 2017). PMSCs deployment also reduces government health care payment, benefits, and pension system costs. On the other, the government seeks to minimize the number of military casualties, which can have substantial spillovers into domestic political stability. Given the public misrepresentation of contractors as motivated by personal and economic profit, their deaths are often dehumanized, and the state may not be held accountable (Stockwell 2020).

Besides allowing circumnavigation of the legal and legislative system by accelerating the deployment of manpower to the field, the most significant benefit of PMSCs lies in the state's ability to share and thereby reduce liability in the event of violations or defeats, as exemplified in the Arms to Africa Affairs when the UK Government allegedly breached the weapons embargo to Sierra Leone using Sandline (Beyani & Lilly 2001). Plausible deniability results in a lack of clear connection between principal and agent that gives

governments the ability to deny involvement in proxy war and avoid legal and political consequences so that the client's image and reputation are not affected (Singer 2003).<sup>2</sup>

Emerging from this discussion is the need to investigate the extent to which PMSCs challenge the state's monopoly of force and are responsible for changes in the attribute of state sovereignty. While the use of private firms can lower economic and political risks, increase effectiveness, and shorten the time it takes to deliver a specific security function, the privatization of security can also empower PSFs, undermine state sovereignty, and transform security into a private good, thus removing it from public scrutiny and control (Small 2006: 5). The next chapter covers the broad academic debate on the classification, regulation, and role of PMSCs in the modern state in parallel with a presentation of the literature on the meaning of state sovereignty. Chapter 3 offers an explanation of the theoretical framework helpful in framing the relationship between PMSCs and state sovereignty, while Chapter 4 presents the methodology adopted for this thesis and the research design. Chapter 5 deals with the Sierra Leone case-study analysis, and Chapter 6 presents the research findings.

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<sup>2</sup> An example is DynCorp's involvement in Kosovo when the US government subcontracted the PMSC to limit liability for further failures and the negative impact on domestic politics (O'Brien 2000a).



## **2. Literature Review**

To examine the impact of PMSCs' intervention in the Sub-Saharan African context, which is the geographic area most affected by this phenomenon, it is essential to discuss the meaning and evolution of the two concepts in isolation and eventually identify the points of contact.

### **2.1 Concept and meaning of sovereignty**

Although the intention of this thesis is not to offer an exhaustive discussion on the meaning and evolution of the concept of sovereignty, some examination of it is necessary to offer a benchmark about its content to assess its relationship with PMSCs. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia, following the Thirty Years' War, established the cornerstone principles of the modern state and the interstate system through the affirmation of two concepts of sovereignty, intrinsically linked but ontologically distinct so that the existence of one does not imply the other. Internal sovereignty refers to territorial integrity and the prohibition of interference in internal affairs, while external sovereignty indicates the international recognition by other states of its statehood and sovereign character, which is independent of state control. The idea that the state is the only actor capable of regulating violence in its territory is a hallmark of the modern state system, distinguishing it from other political organizations. While the Peace of Westphalia strengthened the social contract between sovereign and subjects, developed by Hobbes and Locke, according to which the former has rights vis-à-vis the latter in exchange for the guarantee of security and protection from threats to personal and physical integrity. Consequently, this led to the strain of disarming subjects and placing violence under the control of the state, culminating with the formation of

national armies during the French Revolution. By protecting the territory, the state established itself as a legitimate entity, making security a public and collective good through a two-step process (Avant 2005).

Tilly (1990) defined the state as a "security racket" as it acted as a shield to protect subjects in exchange for revenue that allowed an institutional apparatus to be defined. Hence he assumed that "the state makes war and war makes the state[BC1] " since conflict stimulated the need for a robust bureaucracy capable of collecting taxes, paying soldiers, and resisting physical threats. This process of strengthening the bond between the ruler and subjects has led to the Weberian concept of sovereignty, understood as the state's claim to the legitimate monopoly of force in its territory to ensure public order (Small 2006: 12). The focus on the domestic dimension in Weber's (1919) interpretation defined an intrinsic relationship between state and security, in which coerciveness became a core state function, rendering the state as the unique resolver of violence and an actor capable of defining rules of behavior within its territory due to its rational authority. The neutrality of institutions and the bureaucratic apparatus legitimized the state to exercise authority and established binding decisions on its population, territory, and resources. Given that the monopoly of violence is a *condicio sine qua non* for state sovereignty and assuming that the effectiveness of the state is measured by its ability to provide security, it follows that the presence of non-state armed actors, such as insurgents and PMSCs, implies their illegitimacy and is symptomatic of a partial failure of the state's own attribute of sovereignty.

Krasner (1999) coined the term "interdependent sovereignty" in response to modern challenges dictated by globalization: albeit he has argued that sovereignty remains a crucial concept in the international system to give legitimacy to the state, he believes that the use of PMSCs, as well as membership in international organizations, represents an expression of state sovereignty by authorizing and devolving its security and political functions. Although

such delegation should not necessarily be seen as a threat, it can become a source of further discretion and instability in already fragile contexts.

Today, there is a general inability of the state to monopolize violence from above, below, and across, thereby turning it into no longer the sole legitimate holder and provider of security. The proliferation of PMSCs has resulted in a redistribution of the state's power and capacity to control violence, affecting both its sovereignty and the international system (Small 2006) and causing the definition of a network including private and public actors in the realm of global security (Krahmann 2010). Though PMSCs are *de facto* legitimate, integrated, and partly regulated by the state, the delivery of core security functions challenges both Tillian and Weberian conceptions of the state, significantly when the involvement of the third-party actor erodes the host state's development by exploiting its assets in the territory and shaping its cultural values (Musah & Fayemi 2000; Shearer 1998a).

The privatization of security in Sub-Saharan Africa took place within a context of a general and widespread structural weakness of state institutions that arose from the decolonization process. By the time of independence in the second half of the 1900s, African states enjoyed the external legitimacy of the international community that made them legally sovereign. However, this prevented them from developing sovereign, legitimate, and robust state and bureaucratic institutions capable of acting as security shields, establishing themselves as sole holders of the monopoly of force and affirming the overt victory of a social group (Cornwell 1998). A fortiori, this systematic inefficiency resulted in the creation of weak states in Sub-Saharan Africa, characterized by a divergent level of lack of effective governance and control over their territories, limited legitimacy, and dysfunctionality to provide basic security needs (Rotberg 2003)<sup>3</sup>. The failure to establish a strong national

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<sup>3</sup> There is an ongoing debate among IR scholars over the meaning and differences of collapsed, failed, and weak states which are often intended as extremes of a continuum. For an in-depth discussion, see Rotberg (2003).

identity due to the artificiality and tumultuousness made it impossible for Sub-Saharan states to overcome the problems inherent in the social structure, defining realities troubled by civil wars fueled by ethnic and social tensions (Goldsmith 2001). The turbulent end of colonialism defined weak states dependent on resource exploitation by foreign companies, enriching local elites and hampering the development of civil society and transparent institutions (Moore 2001). African states missed the Tillyan process of institutional and military definition because the military structures in place at the post-colonial time were based on those inherited from the colonial era and thus lacked internal legitimacy. As a result, PMSCs found fertile ground in many African countries, such as Sudan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Sudan, DRC, Liberia, and Senegal, and sought to fill the vacuum left by the lack of internal and international security in exchange for favorable concessions in the exploitation of raw materials, reflecting a new conception of war as a moment of resource hoarding (Musah & Fayemi 2000). Weak states have thus seen PMSCs as an opportunity to (re)establish control over their territory and sovereignty but at the expense of transforming security from public good to private one in a zero-sum game (Abrahamsen & Williams 2007; Kwesi Aning 2000).

## **2.2 PMSCs as New Mercenaries?**

The first problem that emerges in the discussion of the role and impact of PMSCs concerns their definition: although a significant interpretation of them has been offered by Singer (2003), who emphasizes their corporate nature, a precise and univocal definition is absent to date, thereby complicating a neutral and compelling analysis of the phenomenon. He also presented the first attempt at classification with the tip-of-the-spear typology that highlights three types of military firms: the military company's armed component is higher when it is in proximity to the war front. Type 1 military provider firms indicate tactical combat services for high-risk situations, such as Executive Outcomes and Sandline in Sub-

Saharan Africa; Type 2 military consulting firms offer training, planning, intelligence, and advisory services for restructuring armed forces, such as MPRI in Angola; Type 3 military support firms offer non-core functions such as logistical support, technical, transportation, and civil activities (Singer 2003: 93).

Avant (2005: 16) elaborates on Singer's idea to coin a double spearhead model, distinguishing two extremes on a continuum from military to police (understood as civilian) functions: both services are included in the definition of private security company as she believes the term "military" is misleading and does not exhaust security functions.

Ruzza (2011: 97) represents an outgrowth of both by proposing the term private security firms: while he agrees with Singer regarding the use of the word "firms" as opposed to "companies" to emphasize the corporate and business character, he concurs with Avant to use the term "security" since not all war services have a military character.

The primary debate focuses on the dichotomy between private military companies (PMCs) and private security companies (PSCs), to which the classifications of active/passive, offensive/defensive, and armed/disarmed can be applied. Both refer to legally registered companies, but while PSCs engage in relevant personal protection services, crime prevention, local-level training, and surveillance of infrastructure and assets, PMCs perform strategic military functions, protection of sensitive targets, training to corps elites, combat, and territorial conquest (Beyani & Lilly 2001; Brooks 2002). According to O'Brien (2000a: 62), PMCs represent an evolution of PSCs, which originated in Italy in the 1600s, with a corporate, vertical structure, and obligations to customers on a contract basis. Nevertheless, such dichotomies and models tend to depend on the perceptions and moral judgments with which PMSCs are regarded and to be conceptually rigid and outdated, failing to grasp a more nuanced reality brought about by private security firms' dynamism and adaptability since they can accomplish both military and security services simultaneously (Ruzza 2011: 92).

The use of the term PMSC is preferred in the text to accommodate the inclusion of any company regardless of its function. The same term is adopted by Private Security Database Project, referring to the logic of market-oriented action, high level of professionalization, corporate structure, legal personality, and delivery of functions generally provided by military bodies (Branović 2011: 5). Alternatively, PSF will be used to allow greater fluency in the syntax and reading of the current research.

Regardless of academic classification, authors agree to understand PMSCs as the ultimate expression of mercenaries and the last evolution in outsourcing security to private entities (Gorini 2018: 82; Ramirez & Wood 2018: 1437). Mercenaries were a form of non-state organized violence that provided military service in exchange for financial and personal profit through an *ad hoc* structure that allowed men to be quickly recruited and dissolve the group as soon as the objective was achieved. Privatizing violence through mercenary service is not a recent phenomenon; however, governmental entities have always sought to exploit driven profit soldiers, such as groups in Ancient Rome, *condottieri* in Middle Ages, and chartered companies during 17th-century colonialism (Percy 2007). For instance, the British and Dutch East India Companies operated as semi-sovereign entities and projections of the home state abroad, enjoying the power to declare war, mint money, and establish trade monopolies. The link between mercenaries and PMSCs has been the object of discussion among those who highlight similarities in their identities and those who deny the comparison, determining stronger or looser support toward PSFs (Small 2006: 9). A relation between the surplus soldiers, due to mass demobilization, and the re-emergence of new conflicts followed by a boom in private forms of security may be observed: the excess of troops after Napoleonic wars, WWI, and WWII was respectively reinvested in private armies and veterans in South America, China, and Vietnam (Ruzza 2011: 64). Both mercenaries and PMSCs are violent non-state actors driven by a desire for economic gain and deployed

in highly unstable territories to defend the property and interests of their clients by performing quasi-sovereign functions (Small 2006). The figure that distinguishes them concerns organizational structure, service delivery, and recruitment (Marchetti 2013: 31): PMSCs are legally registered entities with a corporate and hierarchical structure; they have a contractual bond from which rights and duties to clients arise; and they want to make a corporate, rather than a personal, profit (Krahmann 2012a; Shearer 1998b).

Despite their similar profit-making purpose and the political and strategic level implications on the international system, the qualitative and quantitative expansion of the scale and size of civilian and military services offered, their apparent legitimacy, and their level of horizontal and vertical integration with other companies to improve technical capabilities and profit, makes PMSC a unique phenomenon (Ruzza 2011: 85). Operating in a global market, PMSCs have a variety of clients and functions that makes *ad hoc* mercenary groups inefficient and obsolete. Defining PMSCs as "Dogs of War" or "New Mercenaries" gives a negative connotation to their work, implying the brutality and opacity of the old mercenaries: this delegitimizes their activity and denies the possibility of grasping a general social and political transformation of private military activity because of the extemporaneousness of the concept (Abrahamsen & William 2007: 131; Cusumano 2009: 3). PMSCs tend to associate and portray themselves as professional militaries dedicated to humanitarian support in war-torn societies and do not want to be perceived as only attached to economic gain (Franke & Von Boemcken 2011).

### **2.3 Debate on PMSCs amid criticism and appreciation**

Following the increased deployment of PMSCs and the rise in their visibility in the 1990s, the academic debate about their role is highly polarized and based on a Manichean division between those who drastically and dogmatically condemn any PMSCs involvement,

especially Africanist scholars and those who exalt their actions. While there is inevitable advocacy for improved specialized training to regular forces and contractor engagement in contexts where the international community is reluctant to intervene, several concerns have emerged regarding their accountability and *modus operandi*. The impact of PMSCs on the erosion of state sovereignty depends on two elements endogenous to the state: the conditions of institutional weakness and regulatory framework present at the time of contractors' deployment (Avant 2005: 59; Leander 2006) and the number of functions delegated to PMSCs (Whyte 2003: 584). Hence, it is imperative to present the most influential academic consensual positions and critical interpretations related to the involvement of PMSCs and their implications at the regulatory, legal, operational, and policy levels.

From a normative perspective, the main criticism leveled at PMSCs concerns the allegation that they politically and militarily support illegitimate clients, empowering them over official actors and fostering coups and instability, as happened in Angola, Congo, and Sierra Leone (Ruzza 2011; Singer 2003). The PMSCs' interest in profit and short-term gains debunks their apparent neutrality, fuels the corruption of local elites who exploit contractors to achieve their interests regardless of the conditions of political stability (Reno 2006), and supports the activities of rebels and criminal groups involved in illegal arms trafficking, as happened with the "Arms Affair" scandal in Sierra Leone when Sandline circumvented a UN Security Council sanction (Musah 2002: 926). However, in most cases, PMSCs have supported legitimate and recognized governments and have never taken control of a state *motu proprio*. PSFs are accused of human rights abuses for the torture that occurred in Abu Ghraib prison in 2004, for acts of abetting human trafficking in Croatia by DynCorp employees, and international humanitarian law violations, breaching the principle of discrimination, and carrying out attacks on civilian populations through the use of illicit weapons, as occurred in Angola and Sierra Leone (Leander 2005: 611; Ruzza 2011: 68).



These violations are explained in light of the inherent immorality of PMSCs and their corporative need to achieve contract objectives regardless of the lawfulness of the means (Singer 2003). This results in an inherent dilemma in the relationship since there is a necessary clash of interests and goals between the client and contractors, and incentives are not always aligned (Schreier & Caparini 2005). The absence of PMSCs' accountability at the criminal level weakens the state and results in a non-transparent environment where it is difficult to assign responsibility for wrongdoing and failure, primarily because monitoring and screening of contractors' actions are left in the hands of the companies in states with already undermined institutional capacities (Francis 1999; Mandel 2001; Musah & Fayemi 2000).

Nonetheless, PSFs are economic actors motivated by profit and the desire for reemployment and, thus, should not be affected by political desires or ethical biases. They should comply with the contract signed and avoid being involved in human rights violations and illegal actions because they would otherwise undermine their reputation and image as responsible and trustworthy actors (Kinsey 2005: 280; Ruzza 2011: 216). Another criticism concerns their exploitation of natural resources in weak and economically poor states, which are forced to enter into contracts with PSFs in exchange for privileged access to mineral resources as a reward for their military support, referred to as "imperialism by invitation" (Doyle 1986) or "debt-equity swaps" (Singer 2003). In Africa, the abundance of natural resources, such as oil, diamonds, and gold, has allowed the survival of patrimonial interests and made the continent vulnerable to the predatory tendencies of international public and private actors, such as foreign states, multinational corporations, and PMSCs, prioritizing economic rather than security interests (Musah & Fayemi 2000). PSF's exploitation of natural resources becomes a long-term commitment that reiterates a form of neocolonialism based on a highly asymmetrical relationship and a Faustian bargain: the state mortgages its

public assets to PMSC that guarantees military support, while foreign multinational enterprises help finance the armed intervention and, together with private firms, collect the revenues of extractive activities (Selber & Jobarteh 2002). It follows that resource grabbing and expropriation in exchange for military services divert income from public to private actors, thus affecting the state's ability to deliver essential services and perform sovereign functions, undermining the principle of self-determination, territorial sovereignty, long-term national development, and equitable distribution of resources (Francis 1999; Musah & Fayemi 2000).

Concerning the legal dimension, legislation at the national and international level about PMSCs is ineffective, uncertain, and deficient, defining a grey area that prevents establishing their legal status, obligations, and rights (Percy 2007). Scholars now argue the need for legal regulation by the international community to overcome situations of contractors' impunity, determine accountability, and facilitate criminal prosecution (Chesterman & Lehnhardt 2007; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Singer 2004; Whyte 2003; Zarate 1998). As a matter of fact, this is the only way to anchor PSF to the state and prevent it from escaping its control by undermining the very legitimacy of institutions. Despite the ongoing partial opposition to regulation motivated by a categorical moral rejection and poor political foresight, which is unable to seize PMSCs' potential positive effects on international stability, regulation is necessary because this would treat contractors as legitimate actors, educating them to respect human rights, and establishing bodies capable of monitoring their activities (Avant 2005; Shearer 1998b). Although mercenary activity spread in the Middle Ages, legal coverage at the international level appeared only since the 1970s with the ratification of four international law instruments (still in force): Article 47 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (1977), Article 1 of the Convention of the Organization of African Unity for the Elimination of Mercenary Services in Africa (1977), the International

Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries (1989), and the Montreux Document (2008)<sup>4</sup>. The vagueness and inadequacy of these instruments stem from the absence of a unified PMSC definition, which leads to their equating with mercenaries, from the willingness of African governments to use contractors to regulate situations of internal instability eventually, and from the Western countries' reluctance to bind their national private industries (Ruzza 2011: 222)<sup>5</sup>. The establishment of a soft domestic legal framework in these states failed to co-opt PMSCs and did not restrict their activities but pushed them to act more covertly (Beyani & Lilly 2001). In general, PMSCs can exploit legal opacity to move their headquarters to some tax havens to evade more stringent national legislation and for economic and profit needs, denying states the possibility of control over their operations. Despite the crimes committed, territorial states have never desired to investigate and enforce the law, especially if the commissioning state coincides with the state where PMSCs are deployed (Chesterman & Lehnardt 2007). Beyond that, contract confidentiality, the protection of client privacy, and the difficulty of retrieving reliable information give PSFs privileges, criminal double standards, and absolute superiority in areas of limited stability (Ruzza 2011).

At the operational level, critics believe that the delegation mechanism of security and military functions presents inherent contractual problems that result in monitoring, control, and coordination failures by the client, primarily when it revolves around unstable conditions, as in the Sub-Saharan African context. PMSCs have an independent chain of command and responsibility and a different code of conduct than regular armies, enabling them to be autonomous in terms of screening and selection of personnel and complicating

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<sup>4</sup> The Montreux Document is a non-binding instrument that reaffirms the rising *opinio juris* but does not prove the existence of customary law under international law, despite the ratification of previous treaties.

<sup>5</sup> Most of the PMSCs have originated in the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa. It is no coincidence that these states have not ratified the 1989 Convention.

public scrutiny of contractors' performance (Ramirez & Wood 2018: 1437; Ruzza 2011: 78; Shearer 1998a). The weak state that hires a PMSC must bear the burden of information asymmetry, incomplete information, and the desire for profit maximization that can lead contractors to defect whether there is a change in initial stipulation conditions and economic and security costs exceed gains, such as in the case of Gurkha Security Guards' withdrawal from Sierra Leone (Avant 2005: 59).

Privatizing security implies that military operations alter the relationship between civilian and military institutions because their scrutiny is removed from the public domain, and people can no longer recognize whether contractors work on the state's behalf or for their personal profit (Singer 2003). This complicates the relationship between PMSCs and the regular military and produces new instability because better conditions in terms of compensation, equipment, rules of engagement, and contractor discretion can increase competition, resentment, and assertiveness on the part of the military (Mandel 2001). Regular army members' anger and perceived inferiority can push them to join rebel and opposing factions, destabilizing legitimate governments and leading to new coups or institutional upheavals (Dell'Olio 2009; Howe 1998; Musah 2002). The resulting assumption shared by many authors is that PMSCs, due to profit interests and ties to criminal networks, prolong the conflict, increase casualties, and exacerbate intensity at the expense of legitimate actors (Mandel 2001; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Verkuil 2007).

PSFs have an inherent and ontologically non-peace-oriented *modus operandi* that creates harm at the pacification stage, while their stabilization function can only be pursued if compatible with their economic investment and interests in asset exploitation.

Despite Verkuil's (2007) accusations that the greater the number of security functions outsourced and contractors involved, the more undermined the state's ability to govern, Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski (2012) have shown that more PMSCs incentivize better

performance, shorten the duration of conflicts, and act as a deterrent, lowering the intensity of rebel response. PMSCs are considered to be an asset for the host state, especially in conflict-torn societies, because they can improve its stability while reducing costs: firstly, PSFs carry out military functions that would otherwise be unavailable given the reduced economic capabilities of client states; secondly, the involvement of a third, neutral party in security management does not exacerbate power rivalry between internal factions (Singer 2003); lastly, contractors serve as a supplement to national forces, providing them with military expertise, specialized training and equipment, and fast deployment units. Apart from professionalizing armies, contractors can offer substantial knowledge in logistics, infrastructure, and demining, increasing weak countries' internal stability and security (Howe 1998; O'Brien 2000b). Their operational and economic efficiency compared to UN peacekeeping operations emerged sharply in the Sierra Leonean case, where the UN mission cost about \$47 million for 8 months (out of a total cost of \$4,200 million), while Executive Outcomes company cost \$35 million for 18 months (Ruzza 2011: 117). Despite lowering economic costs and producing stabilization in the short term, reliance on PMSC can cause significant vulnerability to external dynamics, impede long-term economic development by fueling poverty, social fragmentation, and refugee crisis, and hinder the consolidation of legitimate state institutions due to the presence of parallel structures designed to sustain the status quo of particular groups (Kwesi Aning 2000).

At the political level, scholars remain divided between those who believe that PMSCs contribute to the eroding of state sovereignty and the monopoly of state force, and others who argue that they can contribute to the stabilization and consolidation of state power. PSFs' activities tend to act as a destabilizing factor for state holding because they blur the dichotomies between public and private, civilian and military, and internal and external domains (Ruzza 2011).

Regarding the first one, the privatization of security fuels a "Swiss Cheese" security structure in which there are some sectors managed by public entities and others by the PMSCs: the depoliticization of violence due to its removal from the public space can erode and delegitimize the role of public forces, risking fueling violent contestations against national security apparatus (Leander 2006). Suppose a PMSC becomes vital to a state's security and assumes exclusive control of certain security functions. In that case, a relationship of dependence on external services is established, exacerbating the destabilization and placing the state in a position of inferiority and vulnerability to PMSC extortions (Dell'Olio 2009). Nevertheless, a portion of scholars understands PMSCs as the only actors willing to fill the security vacuum, compensate for the state's poor supply of protection, and intervene in states with homeland security problems (Cilliers & Mason 1998). Shearer (1998b) believes that contractors are not part of the problem of instability and erosion of state capacity but rather a response to that concern.

In respect to the civil/military dichotomy, PMSC can assume monopoly and superior positions in the security market of weak countries, preventing civilian control of military activities and favoring executive over legislative power, thus altering the institutional checks that ensure transparency about the contractors' activities (Ruzza 2011). It is equally valid, however, that PMSCs can move the needle in favor of civilians and pursue the national interest of stabilization, preventing violence, and protecting the legitimate government's power, as evidenced by Executive Outcomes' neutralization of three coup attempts in Sierra Leone in 1996 (Singer 2003).

As to the internal/external distinction, PMSCs penetrate policy-making to maximize their power and profit because they both present themselves as the best solution in implementing decisions and stand as experts in identifying clients' security needs. Through

close contracts with the government, they may shape stakeholders' perceptions about security concerns. Therefore, PSF determines and frames security and military issues, thus having a direct influence on the way the host state defines strategic, military, and foreign policy priorities and responds to security crises, delegating the definition of a public good to the private actor. Contractors could hence create illegitimate or nonexistent security concerns to secure profit (Leander 2005). Such manipulation of the public interest undermines the state's sovereignty, alters its ability to act outside an external actor's interference, triggering a vicious cycle that weakens state capabilities, fuels dependence on PMSC's services, and increases public spending on security functions (ibid.). In doing so, political decision-making, as well as military decisions in a narrower sense, becomes a private good that does respond to private firm concerns (Verkuil 2007). The erosion of state authority and the ability of PMSCs to influence social perceptions have been reflected in two aspects: first, the shift in security's understanding from threat neutralization to risk management, enabling a more relevant role for contractors; and second, the concept of culture of violence, fueling an environment of fear to perpetuate the host state demand for security services required for profit maximization (Krahmann 2012a).

As a result of the previously discussed positions, a large segment of scholars believe that PMSCs in weak states have significant repercussions on their authority and ability to control their own territory. This leads to an erosion of state sovereignty as well as a long-run incapacity to develop robust, independent, and free public institutions from external interference (Leander 2005; Mandel 2001; Musah 2002). The delegation of sovereign functions to PSFs in a context of institutional weakness can produce the footprint dilemma that depends on the contractors' degree of intrusiveness in the state's domestic affairs and may result in the government's marginalization, exacerbating internal conflict among political elites and defining overlapping jurisdictions (Baser 2011: 16).

The decentralization of security functions marks an inevitable step toward the erosion of statehood because sensitive military and intelligence information about the conflict and the territory is shared with contractors causing a risk in the more intimate security realm (Mandel 2001: 144). Moreover, PSFs emerge as competitors to the state thanks to their access to violence and economic resources, generating a centrifugal movement of violence from the central apparatus to non-state actors that undermines the state monopoly of force. It follows that PMSCs challenge the state's bond with citizens because it may be affected by the cut in public spending on the provision of essential goods in favor of more notable government investment in the private sector (Musah & Fayemi 2000; Ruzza 2011).

Nevertheless, some authors believe that PMSCs can be functional in the restoration of the legitimacy, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the state since they allow it to regain control of violence by subordinating it to state institutions, facilitating a return to order and stability (Avant 2005; Serewicz 2002; Shearer 1998b; Singer 2003). Therefore, PMSCs cannot be seen as competitors to the state capable of challenging its sovereignty since they are not oversized (Taulbee 2000) and do not have access to the political resources necessary to unseat the state from its dominant position as the central unit of analysis in the international system (Serewicz 2002). The emergence of PSF can allow the state to expand its expertise, improve the efficiency of its military and security structures, and strengthen the stability and confidence in political institutions (Weiss 1997). Although the hiring of contractors entails the highest risks for weak states in Sub-Saharan Africa, it also involves the highest gains: in the short term, they offer weak governments new professional military functions and services to ensure stability that would otherwise be politically and economically unsustainable, including disarmament services, humanitarian assistance, and SSR (Bryden & Caparini 2006; Singer 2003); in the medium term, they enable the spread of high military standards for law enforcement education and practices that are legitimate to



the extent to which they are subjected to international norms (Avant 2005); in the long term, the result is a strengthening of the internal sovereignty and Weberian conception of state as legal authority (Shearer 1998b).

In addition to the consolidation of legitimate power, PMSCs can be a functional tool for African regional security to reduce national dependence on foreign actors: weak states can rely on contractors to obtain military expertise, becoming an alternative ally to international powers and allowing small states to step out of the traditional patron-client relationship, based on exploitation, interference in internal affairs, and control that had characterized previous centuries.

For the purpose of this research, it is critical to raise a premise to overcome the scholars' dichotomous and polarized understanding of PMSCs. Either a reading that intends them as a panacea, projecting excessive and impossible expectations as vectors of change, or one that depicts them as an absolute threat to the state, is misguided and prevents an accurate and authentic analysis of the effect of PMSCs on the capacities of weak and failed states.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

In the previous chapter, I presented the academic debate about the meaning of state sovereignty and the role and impact PMSCs can have in weak states. The discussion is split between advocates, who argue the beneficial effects of hiring private firms on stabilization, and critics, who lament the deterioration of state authority and the exacerbation of conflict. In addition to the reasons for states with weak capacities to hire PMSCs, the chapter pointed out that the starting conditions of the states where the companies act are of considerable importance in determining the outcome of their intervention. At this stage, it is necessary, however, to analyze two theoretical tools that can help in understanding the causal mechanism that connects the PMSCs' intervention to the erosion of sovereignty, thereby elucidating how PMSCs can have a destabilizing impact on the host states' monopoly over the use of force. While these two explanations are presented separately, they should not be viewed as mutually exclusive; rather, they partially overlap and reinforce each other. This understanding allows us to perceive the relationship between PMSCs and the state as a continuum, ranging from an ideal situation where the agent willingly submits to authority and complies with its legal obligations, to a scenario in which the agent is entirely autonomous from the state (Avant 2005).

#### **3.1 The concept of state territoriality**

The erosion of sovereignty by PMSCs is a constituent element of the broader phenomenon of the diffusion of power, which runs counter to the historical process of power centralization that the Peace of Westphalia instigated. This erosion of sovereignty can be understood as an epiphenomenon resulting from globalization, proliferation, and the infiltration of non-state actors within territorial boundaries. Consequently, state sovereignty

and the principles of security governance have undergone a significant transformation, posing challenges to the conventional state-centric framework (Krahmann 2012b).

The concept of state territoriality allows us to link the deployment of PMSCs to the transformation of state sovereignty. The territory is intrinsically connected to sovereignty, serving as the essential foundation for defining borders, the population within which the state exercises power, and the source of rights and obligations vested in the state. Since the state is a non-monolithic and permeable entity, responsive to its surrounding environment, PMSCs have the potential to reshape the normative environment in which state institutions and citizens exist. This can undermine the notion of the state as the sole security provider and challenge the public and state control over the use of force (ibid: 47).

PSFs alter the definition of the subject responsible for providing protection and security within territorial boundaries. The monopoly of violence is an attribute that stems directly from the social contract between the sovereign and subjects, as first described by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. In a state of perpetual insecurity, individuals limit their autonomy to grant the sovereign the legitimate monopoly over force, which becomes a necessary condition for order, peace, and the security of citizens. The social contract outlines the state's obligations, including providing security and military protection to its citizens. However, the social contract is not a fixed concept but depends on idiosyncratic conditions. A fortiori, the presence of external actors, including PMSCs, can reconfigure the social pact and reinforce a hybrid political space composed of state and non-state actors (Bak, Jensen, Olsen, Moisiu & Nissen 2013).

This is particularly prominent in the African context for two reasons. Firstly, the incomplete consolidation of power centralization has resulted in significant political power being retained by ethnic and tribal groups, creating a dual social contract that binds individuals to their communities and communities to the state. Secondly, the prevailing form

of social contract can be depicted as permissive, wherein the ruler claims territorial monopoly but exercises it only partially, allowing certain areas to remain partially autonomous and beyond direct control (Nugent 2010: 44). Moreover, since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, peace was associated with the elimination of non-state violent actors within state borders. However, with the emergence of PMSCs, peace becomes dependent on their intervention, and private firms become synonymous with security.

The utilization of PMSCs by small businesses, multinational energy corporations, and NGOs, who prefer to rely on private actors rather than the state as security provider, and their involvement in internal conflicts, engender competition with the state. This competition creates territorial spaces wherein PMSCs hold an almost monopolistic grip on security and position themselves as guardians against threats (Krahmann 2012b). Within territorial boundaries, different stakeholders, including PMSCs, coexist, defining multiple and potentially conflicting standards of behavior and competing to gain institutional legitimacy through disseminating norms to gain a dominant position (Avant 2005). Concurrently, PMSCs can alter the object of protection, shifting from a conception of security as a public good and collective attribute to a private and individual one. This transformation disrupts the norms of security communities and gives rise to subnational security communities based on the ability to pay for protection. As a result, a process of exclusion emerges, exacerbating social fragmentation and undermining collective identity and political cohesion. The disengagement of state institutions and the subsequent delegation of military services to PSFs create private enclaves of security and public spaces of insecurity within the same territorial state. This instils a sense of fear and distrust among citizens toward state institutions (Krahmann 2012b: 48). This perception of the state's and law enforcement's inability to provide security undermines the credibility and authority of the state: on one hand, it exacerbates competition between contractors and regular forces, as the latter fear

being replaced and view the former as the cause of instability; on the other, the sense of national community diminishes, leading individuals to arm themselves, take autonomous measures for their security, and to support PMSCs, thus losing interest in participating in state taxation, which is necessary to generate revenues for funding public security (Bak 2013).

Concerning state and public control over the use of force, PMSCs can shape military and security threats and transform the way political strategies are defined, owing to their involvement in strategic activities and sovereign defense functions, such as offensive and counterinsurgency operations (Krahmann 2012b: 46). The close interaction between contractors and military and civilian personnel in the defense and security fields can influence the perception of power, strategic culture, and social and normative structure where policymakers produce decisions through day-to-day practices (Avant 2005).

Another way PMSCs undermine the state's ability to exercise control over the use of force is through a change in the rule of law, understood as accountability and oversight in implementing laws. PMSCs weaken both elements because they are not subject to the same obligations as citizens and possess autonomy in pursuing their objectives and enforcing their own rules, thereby establishing a parallel authority and discretionary system. The lack of state control and an effective accountability mechanism allows PMSCs to operate outside its oversight, posing a threat to domestic stability, increasing the potential for contractors' impunity in misconduct cases, and eroding the social contract (Tonkin 2011).

Lastly, the collective control of violence by a legitimate government can be undermined if PMSCs support rebels and anti-government factions, or if contractors, during training programs, propagate subversive values and engage in non-transparent practices, such as participating in coups d'état (Krahmann 2012b: 62). This can lead to a redistribution of power within the political sphere, which may benefit the ruling government but also strengthen its

political rivals. Due to the limited monitoring mechanisms available to the state, PMSCs' self-serving objectives could prevail over the promotion of collective security and the restoration of sovereignty (Avant 2005).

### **3.2 Principal-Agent Theory**

In addition to the transformation of the concept of the state as a security provider, the erosion of state sovereignty can be explained by the principal-agent theory presenting the inherent issues of the delegation mechanism. This theoretical framework proves to be a useful analytical tool for investigating the contractual relationship between the state and PMSCs based on the delegation of power and public functions and the implications that the diversity of actors' goals have on the principal's sovereignty. The principal, in this instance, the state, does not have the resources or expertise to perform a particular function but has the power and authority to delegate it to an agent, a PMSC, which then becomes responsible for fulfilling it on the basis of an implicit or explicit agreement (or contract) (Ramirez & Wood 2018: 1437). In a context of bounded rationality, when military and security functions are outsourced to external contractors, the results may be satisfactory but not necessarily coincides with the best outcome. This is because the limited information available to the government allows contractors to take advantage of opportunities and prioritize their interests and profits.

Given the rational nature of the actors involved, both parties aim to maximize their profits. However, this goal leads to a clash of interests and conflicting goals when the underlying assumption is that the greater the effort exerted by the agent, the higher its costs, and the better the outcome for the principal. While the state wants the PMSC's effort to be maximum, the agent seeks to determine its level of involvement in a way that maximizes utility and minimizes costs. Consequently, one actor's pursuit of profit maximization results

in a suboptimal outcome for the other. If the PMSC's objective is to generate a more extensive economic profit, it implies a greater temporal involvement in the territory. However, a prolonged presence increases the risk of conflicts with military forces, competition, and potential escalation of conflicts solely to extend the contract, ultimately undermining the sovereignty of the host state. However, an alignment of the different interests between the client and the agent is possible if the incentive is a public good such as natural or mineral resources since the PSF has an interest in quickly stabilizing the area affected by the clashes to resume and increase resource extraction, and thus raise its profit (Avant 2005).

Contrary to strong states with effective bureaucracies, weak states lack the ability to exert functional and political control over state functions delegated to private actors. Their reliance on PMFs leads to increased costs and a redistribution of power that benefits the military apparatus and executive fringe, thereby raising the risk of private contractors penetrating the public domain (ibid.). Information asymmetry and goal misalignment between the state and PMSCs creates challenges in terms of effectiveness and cost, as the latter can position themselves above the state. In contexts with weak institutional capacity, the loss of control over the actions of PMSCs is exacerbated. These states rely on PMSCs to handle the screening, selection, and training of contractors (Tonkin 2011). The military, political, and administrative apparatus cannot hold contractors accountable if they fail to fulfill their obligations. Furthermore, PMSCs in weak states tend to operate with an autonomous operational chain of command separate from regular forces.

Apart from the aforementioned control-related problems raised by PMSCs critics, two other negative externalities arise from information asymmetries affecting the principal. Adverse selection results from the state's inability to verify and select a PMSC able to meet its demand adequately; however, a substantial number of PMSCs involved would enhance

competition, consequently bolstering the proficiency and effectiveness of contractors, thereby yielding a positive impact on the host state sovereignty.

Moral hazard, by contrast, is a type of post-contractual opportunism that arises when the principal cannot see the agent's actions (hidden information) or verify his actions (hidden action) due to a lack of monitoring tools. It is possible that PMSC fails to maximize its efforts to achieve the principal's goals or undertakes actions outside the contract that run against the legitimate government's interests, causing a shift in power structures and possibly fostering rebels (Ramirez & Wood 2018: 1439).



## 4. Methodology

This research aims to address the gap in the current literature, which is divided into two opposite perspectives. One side warns of the implications of using PMSCs, such as threats to state authority, accountability, and prolonged conflicts (Francis 1999; Howe 1998; Krahnmann 2012b; Leander 2006; Musah & Fayemi 2000; Reno 1997; Verkuil 2007). Conversely, some believe that PMSCs are essential for modern warfare, as they can stabilize conflicts in regions where the international community lacks interest or resources for intervention (Avant 2005; Brooks 2002; Serewicz 2002; Shearer 1998b; Weiss 1997). By studying this topic, I intend to provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the role of PMSCs in the context of state sovereignty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is from this dualistic narrative that the multiple objectives of this thesis develop: on the one hand, the dissertation pursues an analytical approach and objective assessment of the role of PSFs to grasp to what extent they may have undermined some aspects of the sovereignty of fragile regimes or, on the contrary, have provided benefits regarding their ability to manage the monopoly of force; on the other hand, it aspires to contribute to the current debate to highlight any risks that contractors' deployment poses to the sovereignty and security of client states in order to suggest a more conscious use by governments, improving their control in a context of general privatization of violence. Another gap that has emerged from an in-depth review of the PMSC-related literature is an over-focusing on their impact in Afghanistan and Iraq through single case studies and poor comparisons. At the same time, less attention has been paid to Africa, which has been the site of the largest PSFs deployment, where states have suffered the most significant problems in asserting state sovereignty and developing effective and robust state institutions (Chojnacki, Metternich & Münster 2009). The research question that this dissertation aims to investigate is whether

there is a causal relationship between the privatization of security functions through the use of PMSCs and the weakening of sovereignty in the vulnerable states where these companies operate. It follows that the deployment of PMSCs constitutes the cause and treatment variable (X), whereas the change (erosion or strengthening) of the sovereignty of the host state represents the effect and outcome variable (Y).

Two methodological clarifications deserve to be raised at this stage. This research encompasses all PMSCs operating in the client state, irrespective of the specific military or security functions they perform. A comprehensive analysis of these companies, conducted through a cross-sectional approach, is necessary to understand their impact on state sovereignty fully. Accordingly, the variable X may assume different values depending on the functions performed, and it will be investigated whether there has been a greater erosion or reinforcement of sovereignty in cases where PMSCs have been involved in more extensive services, such as direct combat and participation in hostilities, as supported by the theory. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2.1, the term sovereignty primarily refers to its internal dimension, as the external dimension is an element that is directly dependent on the international community and is, therefore, exogenous to PMSCs.

Assuming that the weak state constitutes the unit of analysis since it is the subject to which the attribute of sovereignty refers, the research design is initially centred on the operationalization of the concept of sovereignty (Y). This involves breaking down sovereignty into three distinct and observable indicators, which collectively serve as manifestations of sovereignty and enhance the study's validity. While these indicators may not perfectly capture the concept itself, translating abstract theoretical concepts into tangible entities is the only available tool for indirectly examining the presence of a causal link between the deployment of PMSCs and the erosion of sovereignty.

- *Political stability and absence of hostilities:* as discussed above, the Weberian concept of sovereignty refers to the monopoly and control of force. PMSCs can deteriorate internal social and political relations and influence power distribution, favoring the rebels or the military apparatus and leading to increased political violence. Thus, the presence of coups, the outbreak of new hostilities, the spread of VNSAs, and a deterioration of the population's confidence in state institutions are understood as a symptom of the erosion of state sovereignty.
- *Control over territory:* given that it represents an essential condition for sovereignty, weak state institutions, incapable of managing or producing state revenues, result in reduced resources available to military forces in terms of budget and equipment, causing less physical control of territory and thus reduced sovereignty. It is necessary to observe whether, during the PSFs' deployment, there have been any new territorial claims by rival groups or territorial losses and conquests by regular forces.
- *Control over natural resources:* control of natural and mineral resources is pivotal to the state because profit and economic growth can be generated from their sale, and institutions can use this to deliver primary goods, such as health, education, and security, leading to a strengthening of sovereignty. Conversely, granting privileged access to the exploitation and control of resources to contractors means that state institutions cannot use these resources to pay for other services for which they will be required to seek foreign aid, increase public debt, or decide not to provide them. Thus, it is appropriate to observe the presence of long-term contracts between PMSCs, multinational energy companies, and the government.

The dissertation employs a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary analysis to examine the causal relation between PMSCs and the erosion of sovereignty. The exclusion of a

quantitative study is motivated by the intention to concentrate on a single case in order to conduct an in-depth analysis. Moreover, this explanatory and analytical study aims to comprehensively understand this complex phenomenon, emphasizing the significance of environmental variables within the Sub-Saharan context.

To investigate the existence of a causal mechanism between PMSCs intervention and the erosion of state sovereignty, and to achieve a valid descriptive and causal inference, the research will utilize the process tracing method (Mahoney & Goertz 2006). The process tracing method allows us to move beyond mere correlation as it employs a cause-and-effects approach. Its aim is to trace, verify, and affirm the existence of a necessary causal link that explains whether and how the deployment of PMSCs has been a crucial factor leading to the erosion of state sovereignty (Beach & Pedersen 2013). A robust causal relationship with a high confidence level can be reasonably claimed if the results consistently align with the theory's predictions.

This method allows for the investigation of the existence of a necessary but not sufficient causal relationship. In theory-testing explanations, unlike case-centric ones, it is possible to establish the presence of a causal mechanism. However, it is not possible to exclude a priori the existence of other causal pathways that may have contributed to and influenced the causal mechanism determining the outcome.

A notable aspect of process tracing is its equifinality, where multiple and divergent causal pathways can lead to the same outcome, and each path results from a combination of circumstances (Blatter & Haverland 2014). The cause-effect relationship occurs in a specific environment open to the intervention and influence of other actors, which cannot be separated from the analysis (Checkel 2005). It is impossible to eliminate other explanations from the study or claim that X is the sole cause, as alternative explanations may have contributed to the same outcome, given that Y is the cumulative result of various

interconnected factors (Bennett & Checkel 2015). The main focus is to explain the existence of a causal mechanism, whereas no claims can be made regarding the evaluation of the magnitude of the causal effect and whether the mechanism was the sole factor resulting in the effect Y. Therefore, investigating to what extent the exclusive deployment of PMSCs has caused the erosion of sovereignty is an ambitious objective beyond the scope of this thesis (Mahoney & Goertz 2006).

The theory-testing process tracing aims to evaluate and test whether the hypothesized causal mechanism described in the literature, which links X and Y, was present in the case study and functioned as predicted. Although a neo-positivist and deterministic approach characterizes this reasoning, environmental conditions and contingencies are crucial elements that allow the causal mechanism to operate and the effect to unfold (Blatter & Haverland 2014).

A direct consequence of the circumstantial nature of the causal mechanism is the need to narrow the scope, preventing generalization. However, the exportation of the causal mechanism is possible in the case of a similar context; otherwise, causal heterogeneity occurs, which is a situation where the causal link has occurred in a very different environment. Simultaneously, the path dependency of the cause-effect mechanism depends on spatial contiguity and temporal sequences (*ibid.*). The study of events and the evolution of the link in chronological order through a detailed narrative allows for establishing the direction of the causal link, as well as determining that the deployment of PMSCs occurred temporally prior to the change in sovereignty (Checkel 2005). An additional advantage of process tracing is that it provides evidence supporting or against a hypothesis derived from the theory, encouraging the consideration of alternative explanations whether the result deviates from the expectations or presumed predictions.

This research analysis consists of a causal process of observation of the relation at different stages in a longitudinal study to identify a temporal sequence supporting the causal mechanism. By collecting data over an extended period, the research allows examining the changes in the three indicators from when the PMSCs arrive in the weak state to the time of their departure. Tracking the object of analysis for a certain period provides the ability to monitor the evolution of the relationship, PMSCs' behaviors, long-term development patterns, and the presence of causal links.

The choice of a single case study to test the existence of a causal relationship and within inference stem from the desire to achieve a comprehensive understanding and conduct an in-depth investigation, enabling researchers to develop detailed explanations about the phenomenon in that particular case (Beach & Pedersen 2013). The primary intention was to narrow the case analysis to Sub-Saharan Africa, a context characterized by high political instability, weak international community interest, and weak state capacities. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Compilation (2002) is among the most comprehensive and accurate datasets regarding the presence, number, and functions performed by PMSCs in conflicts in Africa between 1950 and 2000. Of the 25 states included, I then selected the Sierra Leone case study, which occurred in the 1990s, where PMSCs intervention was authorized by the legitimate government, where many PMSCs had been involved for an extended period in order to maximize the validity of the results obtained and facilitate the observation of the causal mechanism. In Sierra Leone, PMSCs were deployed from 1991 to 1998 and operated during the 1991-1996 intrastate conflict (Sarkees & Wayman 2010), further undermining the institutions' ability to preserve state sovereignty and deliver political goods, such as security.

The dissertation analyzes secondary data previously produced and collected by national and international government entities, valuable research centers, and think tanks. Document

analysis includes official government and national agencies' reports, international organizations' research, government and military personnel statements, academic papers, contracts (whether available), and PMSCs' comments. The dissertation uses a multiple data source strategy to increase its reliability and credibility. These sources are supplemented with quantitative data to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon and assess the actual PMSCs' impact on state sovereignty.

Though the validity of this dissertation is supported by rigorous and methodical fact-checking to verify its factuality, it is necessary to present its limitations to achieve full methodological effectiveness and maintain scholarly integrity. Data collection has structural limitations intrinsic to the research topic itself because PMSCs are bound by confidentiality and secrecy agreements that result in more difficulties accessing information related to their economic and military contracts. As a secondary analysis, the data were produced by third-party actors whose biases and perceptions may have been influenced. A fortiori, the study does not claim to extend the results to the general level.

## 5. Case study: Sierra Leone

This chapter examines the case of Sierra Leone, a nation that achieved independence from Britain in 1961. The long-lasting political and economic instability culminated in a brutal civil war in the 1990s between the national army and the Revolutionary United Front (hereafter RUF). From the onset of the war in 1991 until 1998, the Sierra Leone government hired 13 PMSCs, each tasked with a distinct set of responsibilities. The table below provides a comprehensive overview of their respective functions.

PMSC involved	Period	Functions
Specialist Service	1991	Port security
Marine Protection Service	1992	Tax collection related to fishing
Frontline Security Services	1994	Mining facilities security
IBIS Air International	1995-1996	Air combat and support
Gurkha Security Guards	1995	Military training and support for RSLMF
Defense Security Ltd	1995	Mining facilities security and military training
Control Risk Group 4	1995	Mining facilities security
Executive Outcomes	1995-1997	Military training and support against RUF, mining seizure and security
Sandline International	1997-1998	Logistics and military training for Kamajors
Lifeguard Management	1996-1998	Mining facilities security, intelligence gathering, and military training
Teleservices	1996-1997	Mining facilities security
Pacific Architects Engineers	1997-1998	Logistics and air transport security

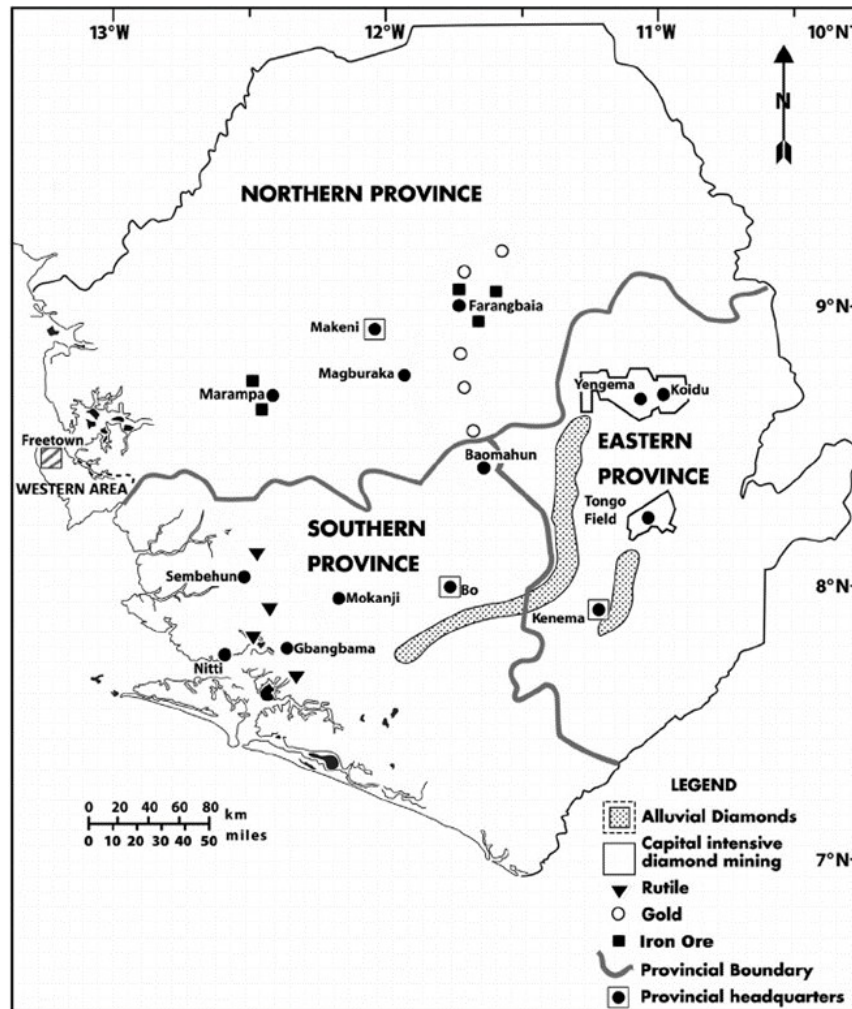
*Source: UK Government (2002)*



The deployment of PMSCs in Sierra Leone has sparked intense debate among academics, with proponents highlighting their potential for stabilizing the region (Howe 1998) and critics accusing them of perpetuating a new form of colonialism driven by corporate interests in resource exploitation (Musah 2000).

In order to fully comprehend the dynamics of internal political instability and ethnic conflicts and, most importantly, to ascertain a causal link between the involvement of PMSCs and state erosion, this chapter aims to delve into the idiosyncratic conditions and historical, social, and economic context in which this relationship unfolded. A comprehensive understanding can be achieved by highlighting the contingent factors that contributed to a specific outcome. The civil conflict in Sierra Leone emerged as a consequence of a security vacuum that has been commonly observed in the changing geopolitical landscapes since 1989. The drastic reduction in foreign aid, which during the Cold War allowed a system of patronage to be nurtured and kept Freetown tied to world dynamics, resulted in a state failure (Bak 2013: 55).

The intensity of violence in the 1990s and the conditions of economic underdevelopment and social crisis that have been the hallmark of Sierra Leone's post-independence period were exacerbated by abundant natural resources. As a matter of fact, Sierra Leone is a country rich in mineral resources and deposits of diamonds, rutile, iron, gold, and bauxite, especially in the hinterland areas (Ruzza 2011: 107).



Source: Akiwumi (2014: 775)

Although a superficial analysis may lead one to believe that the presence of resources would result in improved socioeconomic well-being, various theories, such as the resource curse and Dutch disease, have explored the adverse effects of resource abundance on democracy and national economic performance. These theories highlight the negative repercussions that can arise when a country heavily relies on natural resources for its development and governance.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see also: Larsen (2005); Mien & Goujon (2021); Ross (1999); Stevens & Dietsche (2008).

## **5.1 Sovereignty before PMSCs deployment**

Following its independence (1961), Sierra Leone experienced decades of political instability, as evidenced by three attempted coups. This was due to a dictatorial regime incapable of generating economic and social growth and high ethnic fragmentation resulting from the presence of over 18 ethnic groups (Avant 2005). Consequently, the institutions in the emerging kleptocratic state reflected the neo-patrimonial interests of the wealthy and exhibited high levels of corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of legitimacy. The Sierra Leonean social structure was fragmented among numerous ethnicities and militias that controlled different regions of the territory, including the Kamajors, the majority component of the Mende group in the south, the Temne tribes in the northeast, the Konos in the southeast, and the Tamaboro in the north (Musah 2000: 80). Tribal leaders and local chiefs in rural areas carried out government functions and made substantial contributions to the political decision-making process.

President Siaka Stevens governed the country from 1967 and shaped a state based on political repression, with tax privileges for family members in control of the diamond industry who were exempt from taxation and the subordination of the army to his party through forms of loyalty and personal rewards (Reno 1997: 228). Despite his attempt to centralize power at the national level and combat local militias in the east of the country, it resulted in progressive privatization of resources and increasing conflict among political elites for their exploitation, a growth of the illegal black market and corruption, leading to an economic and social decline linked to the absence and inability to collect taxes (Wilson 2013: 1004). In these conditions of political and economic grievances, as well as institutional and economic weakness due to the lack of state revenues and the closure of several mines, President Joseph Momoh came to power in 1985. He had to implement cuts in public

spending, such as education and healthcare, to contain the debt under the World Bank and International Monetary Fund pressures, fueling social discontent and negative GDP growth (Musah 2000: 91; Reno 1997: 228).

Momoh's inability to provide essential state services, coupled with political instability and the loss of official revenues due to the illicit trafficking of rare resources, pushed many young people to start their illegal mining activities in the country's hinterland. The scale and extent of smuggling were such that Momoh initiated Operation Clean Slate to counter this illegal privatization by expelling 15,000 illegal diamond miners from the Kono District (Eastern Province) (Wilson 2013: 1005). However, this decision proved to be a failure as it created fertile ground for rebel recruitment, fueling the emergence of the RUF. At the same time, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (hereafter referred to as RSLMF) was in terrible condition due to downsizing the military personnel to 3,000 units and a lack of equipment, weapons, and economic resources to finance soldiers' salaries and provisions (Musah 2000: 81).

In this context, in the late 1980s, the RUF, a pan-African movement consisting of students, unemployed individuals, farmers, and disillusioned youth, emerged intending to overthrow the authoritarian government led by Momoh. Their objective was to dismantle a network of corrupt political elites focused solely on monopolizing neocolonial resources and implementing a multi-party system (Fuchs 2007: 106; Musah 2000). Led by Sankoh, the RUF promised better wages and opportunities for resource exploitation, skillfully leveraging the general sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. The RUF received logistical, economic, and military assistance from leader Muammar Gaddafi, who hosted fighters in Libya for guerrilla warfare training (Pagliani 2004: 178). Additionally, the RUF had ties to Charles Taylor, who was planning a coup in Liberia, bordering Sierra Leone at the time. After recruiting thousands of rebels, the RUF initially aimed to overthrow the incumbent

President, assuming military and administrative control of the country, and then sought to gain control over resources and achieve internal wealth redistribution (Marks 2019: 4).

The analysis of the three indicators prior to the intervention of PMSCs in Sierra Leone reveals a weak state characterized by extremely fragile and unconsolidated sovereignty. Indeed, there was a high level of political instability in the early 1990s, as evidenced by a political framework that reflected ideological tensions among different ethnic groups competing with the state, the presence of parallel informal structures, corruption, neo-patrimonial interests, and tension between the RSLMF and the government. Military loyalty was not embedded in the institutional structure but relied on a system of privileges and economic concessions guaranteed by the president himself (Francis 1999: 325; Reno 1997). The government of President Momoh had limited control over the territory and faced challenges from local groups that contested state authority and were able to control large areas of the country autonomously. Furthermore, there was evident porosity of the borders with Guinea and Liberia due to the lack of effectiveness and professionalism of the Sierra Leonean military, as confirmed by the invasion of 1991 and the ease with which the Libyan government under Gaddafi provided arms and equipment to the RUF insurgents through the Liberian border. As mentioned, the state's ability to exercise sovereignty over its resources was weak because the exploitation of mines was managed by illegal and informal networks and personal connections, which prevented establishing a system capable of generating economic revenues and collecting taxes.

As a result, the Sierra Leonean government had low legitimacy and sovereignty, and the absence of effective institutions in a shadow state allowed for the penetration of private and economic interests into the public sector, which led to the civil war (Zack-Williams 2012: 16).

## 5.2 PMSCs and the relationship with state sovereignty

The RUF invaded Sierra Leone in March 1991, crossing the border with Liberia and advancing through the southern district of Pujehun and the eastern district of Kailahun, with the ultimate goal of capturing Freetown. However, the attack on the mining areas would come later due to their limited technical skills (Marks 2019: 3). Simultaneously, both factions began a massive recruitment campaign: while the RUF recruited fighters in rural areas through a combination of coercion and allure, the RSLMF recruited unemployed youth and criminals, eventually reaching a force of 14,000 (Douglas 1998). Nevertheless, the dissatisfaction and frustration among the security forces due to the lack of equipment and low wages led a significant faction within the RSLMF to carry out a military coup against Momoh in April 1992. The new president, former Captain Strasser, formed the military junta known as the NPRC (National Provisional Ruling Council) and declared increased military spending against the rebels. Although the mining areas were not directly under the control of the RUF initially, and therefore the state's extraction capacity was not immediately affected, state finances remained insufficient to provide state services and improve the quality of the troops (Reno 1997). As a result, the discipline, frustration, and non-compliance of the recruited RSLMF personnel were so significant that they were referred to as "*sobel*s", meaning soldiers by day and rebels by night, as they pursued profit interests and resource exploitation, occasionally having sporadic contacts with RUF rebels (Douglas 1998: 178; Wilson 2013: 1006). This highlighted the high tension and absence of a formal and professional army structure capable of effectively combating guerrilla warfare.

Similarly, the conventional guerrilla tactics adopted by the RUF proved ineffective in the initial phase. Despite receiving economic and military assistance from Libya and Liberia and having a considerable number of rebels (3,000-4,000 units), they failed to generate

foreign and local support due to their lack of professionalism (Marks 2019). Despite launching an attack in the alluvial diamond mining region of Kono (Eastern Province) in late 1992, the RUF faced an offensive by the NPRC in November 1993, which destroyed many of their headquarters and forced them to retreat into the jungle near the Guinea border (ibid.). The deployment of PMSCs by the Sierra Leonean government in the early phase of the conflict (1991-1993) reflected the military needs of the civil war. Considering the rebels' inadequacy and lack of interest in attacking mining sites, the German PMSC Specialist Service International and the British PMSC Marine Protection Service were primarily involved in the capital, Freetown, for the protection of maritime assets, safeguarding trade and exports, and managing port-related affairs (Musah 2000: 77).

The dynamics of the war underwent a significant shift in 1994, with the beginning of the second phase (1994-1996). During this period, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) embraced a more assertive approach that placed less emphasis on garnering public support and instead targeted communication infrastructures and government revenue sources, such as mines. They understood that before controlling state and military infrastructures, it was necessary to control the resources. The RUF gradually gained *de facto* territorial and operational control over six districts in Sierra Leone located in three provinces, particularly in proximity to rutile and bauxite extraction areas (ibid.). In early 1995, the RUF attacked and gained control of Sierra Rutile and SIEROMCO, Swiss and Australian-owned mining companies located in Gbangbatok and Mokanji, respectively (Southern Province), which together accounted for over 60% of government export income (Reno 1997: 228). In May, the rebels destroyed the military and mining infrastructure in an attack on Koidu (Kono District) and managed to seize Freetown. The insurgents' strategy of depriving the government of resources and encircling mining areas proved effective, as the state generated only \$60 million in domestic revenue compared to the RUF's \$200 million from illegal

mining in 1995, further weakening the authority and sovereignty of the state (Marks 2019; Reno 1997: 228).

Considering the severe deterioration of the situation, the government under Strasser pursued a more extensive involvement of PMSCs, comparable to Type 1 and 2 of Singer's "tip of the spear" model, with broader functions than before. This included securing mining facilities, logistics, military support, combat operations, and training for the RSLMF. Alongside the hiring of Frontline Security Services to secure mining companies, in February 1995, Gurkha Security Guards (hereafter referred to as GSG) were contacted to provide non-lethal equipment, training for RSLMF personnel, and protection for economic assets and mining installations in the southern province (Ruzza 2011: 111). The British PMSC Defense Security Ltd cooperated with the GSG by providing logistical support and protecting private infrastructure (Vines 1998: 129). Their mission ended a few weeks later following an ambush by the RUF that resulted in the killing of five contractors, including the commander, and a platoon of 20 soldiers, leading to GSG to withdraw from the country and avoid involvement in combat operations (ibid.). In April 1995, the Strasser government engaged Executive Outcomes (hereafter referred to as EO), a PMSC composed of former South African Defense Forces, with three objectives: regaining control of Freetown and surrounding areas, retaking economically crucial areas and mining sites, and destroying RUF headquarters (Ruzza 2011: 114). With over 300 personnel, including two combat helicopters (Mi-17 and Mi-24), armored vehicles, and two Land Rovers equipped with machine guns (Douglas 1998: 182), EO's tasks included training the RSLMF in groups of 150 soldiers at a time, providing direct combat and rapid reaction forces, conducting tactical risk assessments, monitoring and disseminating diamond mining skills, and restructuring the army to make it more effective and operational even in the absence of external support (Francis 1999). However, EO was also involved in training and supporting the Civil Defense Forces



(hereafter referred to as CDF), formed by armed militias from different ethnic groups. Dissatisfied and concerned about the weakness of the RSLMF, these groups decided to organize themselves autonomously to defend against the RUF. In particular, EO provided military, technical, and logistical support in terms of military equipment, radio communications, weapons, and special training to the majority militia group known as the Kamajors, led by Norman, who directed the movements of the Civil Defense Forces (Ruzza 2011: 114). The close collaboration between EO and the Kamajors proved crucial in the second half of 1995 when EO achieved significant gains against the rebels. In May, EO recaptured the capital after a weeks-long battle that pushed the rebels 100 km inland (Douglas 1998: 182). During the summer, the PMSC reclaimed the alluvial diamond area in the Kono District, enabling the resumption of mining operations and profitable activities for EO (Ruzza 2011). Between December and January, EO gained control of Sierra Rutile and SIEROMCO, and the protection and security of these areas were entrusted to associated PMSCs such as LifeGuard Management and Teleservices. EO also destroyed one of the operational strongholds of the RUF near Freetown (Francis 1999: 327).

The success of EO in stabilization and reconquest was made possible thanks to cooperation with the indigenous Kamajors group. On the one hand, their deep knowledge of the territory increased the efficiency of EO's military operations and intelligence gathering, significantly contributing to the liberation of Freetown, Kono mines, and the defense of Bo (Southern Province) and Kenema (Eastern Province). On the other hand, the relationship of understanding and privilege allowed the Kamajors to become a regional defense force whose value and role were recognized by the government itself (Douglas 1998: 183).

Despite EO's positive role in favor of territorial control and government resources under the Strasser regime, in January 1996, the PMSC implicitly supported the military coup led by Bio Maada, as it created a domestic power redistribution to the advantage of Sierra

Leonean special forces, trained by EO and led by Maada. Bio wanted to overthrow President Strasser out of fear that he would compete in the subsequent elections, as evidenced by the high political instability and conflict (Reno 1997).

The government's acquired superiority in the civil war and the partial withdrawal of the RUF to border regions led to the holding of the first multiparty elections in February 1996, in a relatively peaceful atmosphere, resulting in the triumph of Sierra Leone People's Party's leader, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, who understood the strategic importance of EO in ensuring stability and renewed their contract. President Kabbah made security and sovereignty even more dependent on non-regular and non-national armed forces, such as PMSCs and CDF, at the expense of the RSLMF (Musah 2000: 91). Intimidated by a rebellious army and potential new military coups, Kabbah tasked EO with restructuring the military and incorporating and formalizing the role of the Kamajors within the RSLMF. While the Kamajors reached 20,000 units and received preferential treatment, privileges, and modern equipment, the regular army underwent downsizing from 18,000 to 3,000 units. The newly appointed Minister of Defense, Norman, former leader of the CDF and the Kamajors militia, denounced the incompetence of the armed forces, further worsening the country's stability and highlighting an imbalance in favor of the Kamajors (Douglas 1998).

The offensive by EO and the Kamajors succeeded in generating a period of relative peace, allowing for the resumption of business and the attractiveness of mining exploitation, and destroying the RUF stronghold at Kangari Hills in October 1996. This pushed the RUF to negotiate the Abidjan Peace Agreement in November, which included amnesty for the rebels, their demobilization, and their incorporation into the political system through the formation of a party on the condition of EO's withdrawal (Ruzza 2011: 116).

An important factor that deserves to be taken into consideration is the economic aspect. The Sierra Leonean government incurred a total cost of \$35 million (approximately \$1,7

million per month) for the two EO contracts signed in 1995 and 1996. Half of the amount was paid indirectly through the exploitation rights of Sierra Rutile mining (Fuchs 2007: 107). However, it was presumed that EO obtained a portion of this money through the exploitation of diamond mines via Branch Energy, a holding company dedicated to resource extraction, in which EO held a 40% stake. Despite EO and Branch Energy denying any connection, the agreements regarding the exploitation rights of the Kono diamond area between Branch Energy and the Sierra Leonean government coincided with EO's regaining that territory (Ruzza 2011: 118). It appeared logical to assume that cooperation between EO and Branch Energy could bring absolute advantages to both parties: the latter served as a guarantee for payment for the former's activities in exchange for stability and protection necessary to increase the company's profits (Reno 1997). Throughout the presence of PMSCs in Sierra Leonean territory, the government consistently entrusted the management of the mines to Branch Energy (later absorbed into DiamondWorks) under EO's protection, as they feared defections by RSLMF troops following the territorial recoveries of mining areas (Musah 2000).

The third phase (1997-1999) of the conflict began in January 1997 when EO terminated its contract after 18 months of operations and left Sierra Leone. However, a significant portion of its personnel and activities were absorbed by other PMSCs, such as LifeGuards Systems and Teleservices, which were employed to safeguard the diamond mines previously managed by Branch Energy (ibid: 92). The security vacuum left by EO, the government's dependence on Kabbah, the frustration of the army resulting from the exclusion from the political process, and most significantly, the competition between law enforcement forces, Kamajors, and PMSCs, emerged during the coup in May 1997. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a professional military faction of the RSLMF led by Johnny Paul Koroma, seized power, leading to new political instability and violence against the

civilian population (Douglas 1998: 188). As the RUF rebels approached and supported Koroma due to the increased deployment of ECOMOG troops, the recognized and legitimate government of Kabbah was overthrown and went into exile in Guinea, indicating a severe and profound loss of sovereignty. Meanwhile, the RUF made significant territorial advances and consolidated control over the mining area of Tongo (Kenema District), forcing DiamondWorks and Diamond Mining Corporation companies to flee and halt diamond extraction (ibid: 189).

Following the renewed hostilities in June 1997, the Kabbah government signed a contract with Sandline International, a UK-based PMSC led by former British Armed Forces commander Tim Spicer; however, initial contacts were mediated by the UK High Commissioner to Sierra Leone (Pech 1998: 93). While no official claims are documenting the contacts between EO and Sandline, it was evident that the latter was an extension of the former, as evidenced by the absorption of EO contractors, its functions, and its affiliation with the same holding company, Branch Heritage Group. It is no coincidence that three former special forces members, Spicer, EO's CEO Eeben Barlow, and Branch Heritage Group's executive head Anthony Buckingham, were among the major shareholders of Branch Energy/DiamondWorks, which secured enormous mining concessions in Sierra Leone valued at over \$2,000 million.

Sandline collected and ensured the payment of the \$20 million debt owed by the Sierra Leonean government to EO. The contract was financed by Saxena, an entrepreneur from Jupiter Mining Company, and the government through a mix of diamond extraction concessions and money (Musah 2000).<sup>7</sup> The deployment of Sandline was supposed to follow five consecutive phases: securing control of Bo and Kenema, encircling major cities,

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<sup>7</sup> Rakesh Saxena was supposed to contribute \$10 million but he only paid \$1,5 million as he was arrested. As a result, Sandline's activities were downsized (Fuchs 2007: 111).

conducting simultaneous attacks against the RUF and AFRC, regaining control of key economic and infrastructure points, and ultimately reinstating the Kabbah government in Freetown (Douglas 1998). Concurrently with the operational phase, Sandline was tasked with training over 40,000 Kamajors units, which continued to be seen as the only reliable military force, thus increasing their power, providing logistical, aerial, and tactical intelligence support to the national armed forces, and coordinating the military command, control, and communications to regain full sovereignty over the capital (Musah 2000).

The pro-Kabbah alliance's offensive, which Sandline led in collaboration with the CDF and ECOMOG troops<sup>8</sup>, successfully reached its objectives (Francis 1999: 328). The ultimate goal to reclaim Freetown was reached in March 1998, when the legitimate government claimed to hold nearly 90% of Sierra Leonean territory (Douglas 1998: 193). Despite the operational effectiveness of the missions, negotiations were initiated with the RUF rebels, who were unwilling to relinquish control but instead withdrew to the northeast, retaining a significant portion of the alluvial diamond region, such as the Kono District, and the border area with Liberia, from where they received Taylor's support (Marks 2019: 8).

The credibility and reputation of Sandline were severely undermined by the "Arms to Africa Affairs" scandal, which, in response to the international community's reaction, led to its withdrawal and the end of its operations in Sierra Leone in April 1998 (Douglas 1998: 193). Sandline attempted to introduce over 28 tons of weapons from Bulgaria on a cargo plane, violating UNSC Resolution 1132 by imposing an embargo to prevent the arrival of weapons in the country. However, the weapons shipment was seized by ECOMOG before

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<sup>8</sup> The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was a regional peacekeeping force established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was deployed in Sierra Leone from May 1997 to 2002 (from 2000 onwards, it was integrated into the UN peacekeeping mission UNAMSIL). Its objective was to restore the legitimate government, reverse the coup led by Koroma, control Lungi airport in the capital, and achieve a ceasefire. The initial deployment involved 3,000 personnel, but the deteriorating situation in 1998 led to an increase to 10,000 troops, most of whom Nigeria provided to consolidate its regional hegemony. For a detailed discussion, see Gberie (2003).

they could have been allocated (Kinsey 2007: 99). Sandline claimed that they believed the distribution of weapons to ECOMOG and Kabbah's troops complied with the embargo. This scandal fueled an intense debate regarding the regulation of contractors in international law, as well as the emergence of state responsibility (Tonik 2011).<sup>9</sup>

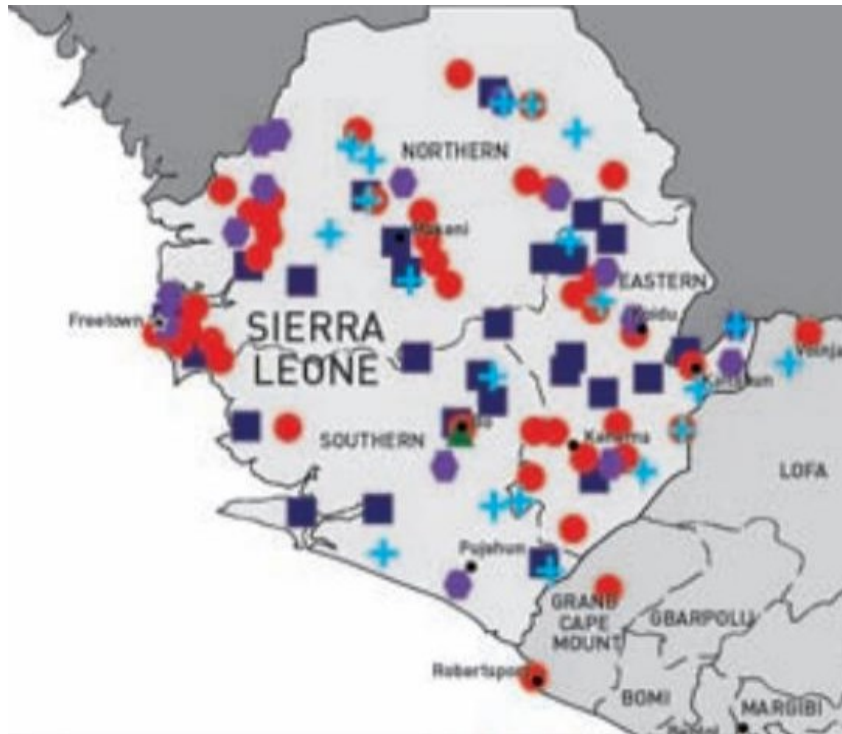
In the aftermath of the massive withdrawal of Sandline and other associated PMSCs, such as Lifeguard Management and Teleservices, in the summer of 1998, a cycle of renewed violence ensued.<sup>10</sup> This was evidenced by the fact that 1998 was the year with the highest number of battles and territorial advances by the insurgents.

- Battle - Rebels overtake territory    + Battle - Government regains territory
- Violence against civilians    ● Battle - No change of territory    ▲ Riots/Protests



<sup>9</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the role of the British government and the subsequent drafting of the Green Paper, please refer to Douglas (1998) and Kinsey (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Pacific Architects Engineers and Cape International Corporation left the country by the end of 1998 (UK Government 2002).



*Sierra Leone's map in 1997 and 1998 (Dowd & Raleigh 2012: 17)*

Following the execution of several members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who had participated in the coup against Kabbah, a climate of intense political violence and internal polarization within the army emerged, making it impossible to distinguish between the violence of the insurgents and that of the government. At the same time, the new leader of the RUF, Sesay, elected after the arrest of leader Sankoh in Nigeria, adopted an assertive strategy that allowed the rebels and the military junta to launch a counteroffensive, regaining control of strategic cities and mining areas such as Kono, Tongo, and Kenema (Musah 2000). With the logistical and military support of Taylor, by December 1998, the RUF gained control of Makemi and Mange, two cities approximately 150 km from the capital in the Northern Province, while in January 1999, they managed to assault Freetown, resulting in the death of over 6,000 people (Marks 2019: 7). The operational advantage in 80% of the territory, coupled with the technical expertise acquired in diamond extraction and production, as well as Sesay's centralized power, significantly strengthened the rebels'

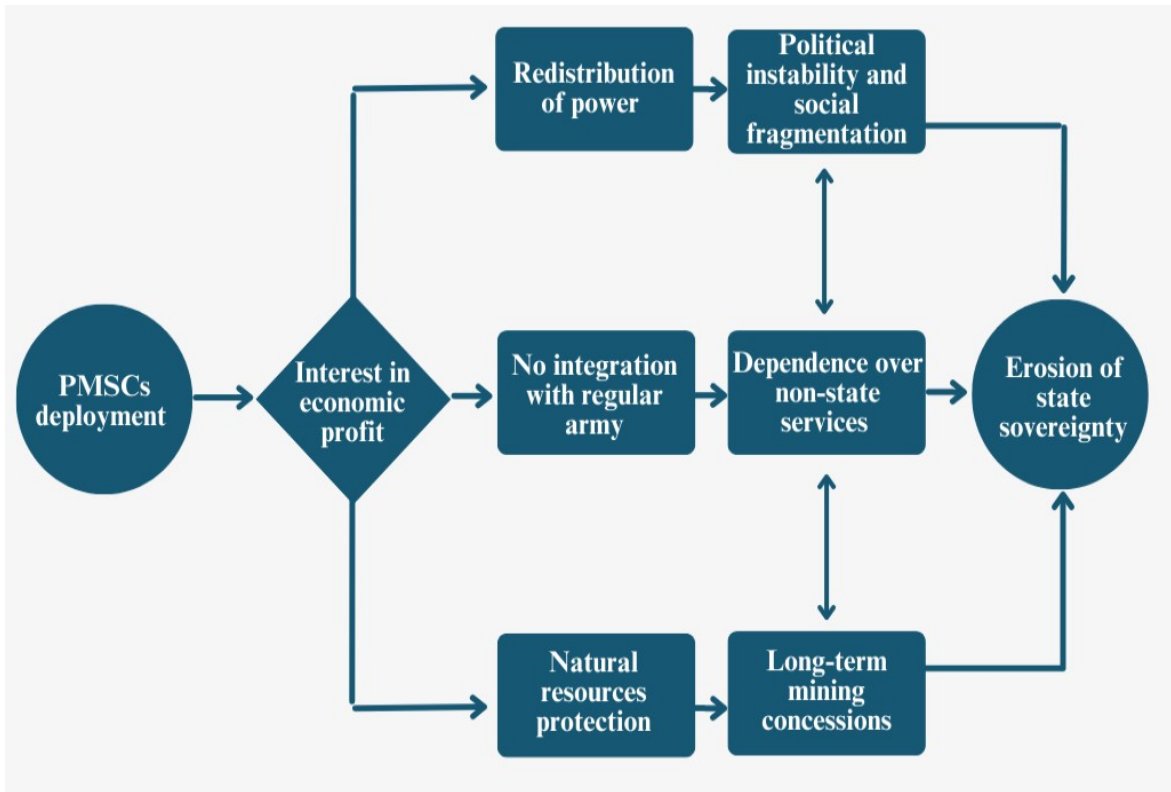
mining operations and revenue collection, positioning them as a real alternative to Kabbah's legitimate government and leading to another evacuation of Kabbah's government (ibid.). The regained credibility and consolidation of the RUF's political role allowed them to enter the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999 with considerable negotiating power while maintaining private diamond exploitation (Fuchs 2007: 114). The weakness of the agreements and the multitude of opportunistic actors and interests involved in Sierra Leone resulted in a high porosity of borders and cross-border violence between 2000 and 2001, leading to the spillover of the conflict into the Liberian territory as a sign of the Sierra Leonean authority's inability to control its territory (Dowd & Raleigh 2012: 16). The civil war officially ended in January 2002, leaving behind an economically devastated country, weak political institutions, as the Kamajors still constituted a parallel security force, and high social fragmentation, requiring the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



## **6. Findings: a causal mechanism really exists?**

From the analysis of the case study and the observation of sovereignty indicators described in the methodology, it is possible to confirm the existence of the previously hypothesized causal relationship between the intervention of PMSCs and the deterioration of sovereignty in Sierra Leone during the period in which they were deployed in the country, with short and medium-term implications for institutional capacity development. Thanks to the application of process tracing, this chapter elucidates how the causal mechanism has worked and unfolded. However, it cannot be asserted that PMSCs were the necessary *and* sufficient cause for the erosion of sovereignty since there might have been other intervening variables that cannot be arbitrarily excluded from the analysis. Therefore, other potential causes that contributed to the final outcome will be explicitly stated for the reader's understanding, preserving the validity and reliability of this research.

The flow diagram below briefly illustrates the causal pathways that led to the erosion of sovereignty in Sierra Leone.



*Table showing how the causal relationship operates*

As commercial enterprises, PMSCs that operated in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 1998 were primarily driven by profit-seeking motives. The context, characterized by significant social and political instability, presented lucrative opportunities.

The first causal pathway triggered by this situation was that the PMSCs exacerbated the centrifugal effect on the centralization of power in an environment that was already highly fragmented ethnically and institutionally prior to their arrival. This fragmentation was evident in the state's inability to control its territory, numerous military coups, and the presence of over 18 ethnic groups. The empowerment of the Kamajors was first initiated by EO when it appeared in Sierra Leone in 1995. Initially, EO was tasked by the Strasser government to train RSLMF and CDF troops for restructuring and modernizing the armed forces in their offensive against the RUF. However, due to EO's immediate stabilization needs and the poor condition of the regular army, EO entered into cooperation with the

Kamajors beyond the agreements stipulated in the initial contract between the government and Barlow. This underscored the weak state's inability to verify contract implementation. The logistical, tactical, and military support provided by EO initially and later by Sandline to the Kamajors allowed them to assume a prominent position within the CDF. As their effectiveness and sense of superiority grew, they felt emboldened to confront other militias and clash with regular soldiers, escalating domestic tensions and the intensity of violence.

During the acute competition for political and military positions between the Kamajors and the regular army, which began and persisted even after 1998, the Kamajors emerged victorious. Although they became loyal to EO sooner than to the state, they gained significant recognition from the Kabbah government in 1997, which agreed to make them a cornerstone of the armed forces, enhancing their training and appointing Norman, former leader of the Kamajors, as the Minister of Defense. This pivotal decision to centralize power around the Kamajors made them less accountable to the state than the regular army, allowing them to form a separate and privileged force that expanded in size. They established themselves as a parallel structure of authority and legitimacy, undermining the formal state's power and gaining credibility and recognition among the population. Indeed, it is no coincidence that with their growing power and resources, the Kamajors were even able to hire the Cape International Corporation, a PMSC engaged in mining facilities security and military training (UK Government 2002).

In addition to the competition with the Kamajors, the RSLMF felt threatened by the contractors who enjoyed extensive responsibilities, better equipment, higher salaries<sup>11</sup>, and access to sensitive intelligence information that the regular military personnel did not have. The army lacked access to EO Headquarters, indicating a separate operational chain of

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<sup>11</sup> EO contractors were paid from \$2,000 to \$18,000 per month, while regular soldiers had a monthly salary around \$300 (Pagliani 2004).

command and screening process for the PMSC (Howe 1998). Ultimately, the intervention of PMSCs, through the empowerment of the Kamajors and the exclusion of the soldiers, facilitated the redistribution of power in favor of other non-state armed actors, fueling internal rivalries and increasing power decentralization. On the one hand, this allowed the RUF rebels to advance their offensive; on the other hand, it triggered a vicious cycle where increased defection and corruption within the RSLMF pushed them towards desertion, joining the rebels, or plotting coups. In response, despite their economic interests, the state preferred to rely on contractors and outsourced more security functions to the Kamajors and PMSCs. While EO successfully prevented three military coups against the Kabbah government in 1996, the PMSC indirectly but substantially contributed to political and military power distribution that led to the Bio Maada coup. Bio Maada, heading an elite body of the RSLMF trained by contractors, felt empowered to overthrow the Strasser regime.

Besides increasing short-term instability by granting significant power to the Kamajors, PMSCs left behind a large number of weapons in the country, fueling a climate of violence until 2002, leading to massive militarization of society and causing medium-term consequences.<sup>12</sup>

Although the conditions before 1991 were typical of postcolonial states, characterized by a dispersion of power, polarization, and the presence of many autonomous groups independent of the deployment of PMSCs, the PMSCs exacerbated ethnic fragmentation and perpetuated political violence. This resulted in the erosion of sovereignty in Sierra Leone, as confirmed by a political stability index of -2.2 in the 1990s (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi 2008: 84). The opening of participation to private actors in the management of public services and security, such as PMSCs, Kamajors, tribal groups, and mining companies,

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<sup>12</sup> Although PMSCs have left tons of weapons and ammunition in Sierra Leone, they are not responsible for the failed process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration which was signed in 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement.

challenged the conception of the state as the sole provider of security. It led to the penetration and involvement of various private interests, further highlighting the state's inability to define and uphold a unified state interest. The population's belief that the elites pursued their particular interests, according to the voice and accountability index (*ibid*: 81), bears witness to the alteration of the social contract, resulting in an even more significant number of intermediaries between citizens and the state. This demonstrates a deterioration in confidence in the government's effectiveness and the credibility of law enforcement, ultimately undermining state authority.

The profit-maximizing intent of PMSCs initiated a second causal pathway that ultimately led to the erosion of Sierra Leone's sovereignty in the medium term. The deployed PMSCs were contracted by the local government as logistical forces to protect the mines or as multipliers and supplements to the regular forces in regaining territorial control. The PMSCs' drive for exploiting natural resources, feasible only under stable and controlled conditions and at the expense of the RUF, resulted in a suboptimal outcome for the state: in the short term, the state gained strengthened control, but it came at the cost of stability and sovereignty in the medium term. As previously observed, PMSCs relied on the Kamajors in their fight against insurgents, while the reinforcement of the existing military structure took a backseat. This occurred because the latter required a deeper and more resource-intensive commitment that neither the contractors nor the Sierra Leonean government were willing to accept. The contractors needed a swift stabilization of the mining regions to generate profits, while the government needed to reestablish its authority.

From the analysis of the conflict's dynamics, two instances reveal a pattern of territorial loss, the government's territorial reconquest, and subsequent re-loss by the RUF. The case study highlights a direct relationship between the presence of PMSCs involved in operational military support (Type 1 according to Singer's classification) and territorial control.

However, upon the departure of the PMSCs, the rebels were able to reclaim territory, exploiting the vulnerability of the Sierra Leonean state. This exposed the evident reliance of the state's stability on outsourcing military and security functions to private actors. It also revealed the inadequacy and inefficiency of the training provided by PMSCs to the RSLMF and police in techniques such as rapid deployment, counterinsurgency, and protection of critical infrastructure (Pech 1998).

Following the RUF offensive in 1994-1995, EO played a crucial role in regaining control of Freetown, and principal mining areas such as Kono and Sierra Rutile, which pushed the RUF back. The political and territorial stabilization led by EO set the conditions for signing the Abidjan Peace Agreement in November 1995, for the presidential elections in March 1996, and for renewed credibility in the eyes of investors in the mining sector. This, in turn, led to a 20% reduction in foreign debt between 1995 and 1996, ushering in a phase of relative peace (Reno 1997). The short-term stabilization effectiveness of the EO was attributed to their sophisticated military and tactical abilities, as well as their deterrent effect on the rebels, as evidenced by the RUF's insistence on EO's withdrawal from Sierra Leone as a condition for signing the peace agreements. After EO's departure, there was a military coup and a significant RUF counteroffensive in 1997, which was only reversed with the intervention of Sandline. This allowed the reinstatement of the Kabbah government to power and the consolidation of territorial control in the Bo and Kenema areas (Francis 1999). Nevertheless, new hostilities, instability, and substantial territorial losses in 1998 marked a turning point for the Kabbah government, which went from controlling 90% of the territory in 1997 to around 20% in 1998-1999 (Francis 1999; Marks 2019). While it cannot be excluded that changes in RUF leadership and the deployment of ECOMOG with over 10,000 units contributed to these outcomes, it is essential to note that the presence of ECOMOG remained constant before and after the withdrawal of PMSCs in 1998.

The efforts of PMSCs in reclaiming lost territories have had various consequences on Sierra Leone's sovereignty. Firstly, the speed and effectiveness of PMSCs in achieving their objectives, along with their respect for human rights and IHL, allowed them to establish better relationships with civilians than regular military forces. They were often perceived as liberators, and civilians tended to feel safer in the presence of contractors than with RSLMF soldiers or rebels. This dynamic reflects a perception of the state's inadequacy among citizens, leading to mistrust towards institutions, altering the social contract, and undermining the state's authority as the sole legitimate controller of coercive force (Francis 1999). Secondly, the prolonged presence of PMSCs, especially Type 1, led to short-term stabilization. However, the immediate improvement in territorial control in Sierra Leone was incompatible with a reduction in political violence, social fragmentation, and state control over natural resources. The substantial reacquisition of territory meant a higher presence of contractors, resulting in increased costs which pushed the state to mortgage mines, thus reducing state revenue. Thirdly, the urgent need for stabilization in the Sierra Leonean government, made possible by the contractors' technical superiority and autonomous command structure, left the RSLMF troops lacking support, assistance, and tools to manage the post-war situation when the PMSCs departed the country. This demonstrated the high level of dependence on foreign private armed actors for national security.

A third causal pathway emerging from the case study analysis relates to the exploitation of mineral resources, such as diamonds, bauxite, and gold, by PMSCs and affiliated energy companies. This exploitation hindered the state institutions' control and utilization of these assets, resulting in a limited capacity to generate the necessary public revenues for providing essential goods and services. In the 1990s, fiscal revenues amounted to around SLL 100,000,000 million (equivalent to approximately \$100,000 million at the 1997 exchange rate) (World Bank 2014). Despite the RUF's attacks on mining areas on three different

occasions (1992, 1995, 1998), they did not pose a significant threat to the state's exploitation of mines until 1998, when it demonstrated an adequate capacity for exploitation (Marks 2019). The Sierra Leonean state's dependence on PMSCs dedicated to the protection and security of mining facilities is further confirmed by the decline in diamond production in 1998, which decreased from \$1,78 million to \$1,24 million in 1999 following the withdrawal of PMSCs (Wilson 2013: 1006).

The erosion of the state's sovereignty was primarily undermined by the government's inability to pay for the services of PMSCs, leading it to mortgage its natural resources and grant them advantageous exploitation rights, thereby compromising political institutions. The provisioning of mining assets as payment for PMCs resulted in negative long-term effects, as it hindered the government from regaining territorial control, decreased government income, and expanded the influence of PMSCs and mining companies over the government. The loyalty and presence of PMSCs in Sierra Leone should be seen as a desire to maximize resource exploitation, and the stabilization and consolidation of the legitimate government were direct consequences of the latter. The production and extraction of diamonds were entrusted to energy companies like Branch Energy/DiamondWorks. However, it was likely that these actors had some connections with EO and Sandline, given that they belonged to the same holding company, Branch Heritage Group. Examples of long-term mining concessions include the contract signed by Kabbah in 1995 for 25-year exploitation valued at over \$1,000 million in the alluvial diamond mining region of Kono (Douglas 1998; Fuchs 2007) and another concession worth \$200 million in 1997 for diamond exploitation, necessary to finance Sandline's deployment following Saxena's arrest. Kabbah himself warned of the financial burden the state had to bear to pay PMSCs and acknowledged the dangerous consequences of their utilization.



Lastly, PMSCs deployment and affiliated mining companies exacerbated the process of replacing local and social interests with corporate interests and resource depletion, leading to a new form of colonialism that hindered short- and middle-term development, as encapsulated in the concept of "imperialism by invitation" (Doyle 1986). Even after the departure of PMSCs, the mining companies, previously supported and legitimized by them, continued to act as parasites. For instance, Branch Energy remained privileged even after the 1998 reform on natural resources, requiring mining companies to have at least 25% Sierra Leonean personnel, because it managed to get an exemption, which serves as evidence of the corporate mercenaries and neocolonial exploitation (Francis 1999). This, along with the non-application of national laws to contractors, created double standards, generated a sense of distrust among citizens toward institutions, and eroded state authority and credibility.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the dissertation, I aimed to investigate the existence of a causal relationship between the deployment of PMSCs and state sovereignty while understanding the extent to which they contributed to its erosion. This hypothesis was tested in Sierra Leone, where PMSCs were present from 1991 to 1998. Following a thorough analysis of the literature, which was divided between critics and supporters of PSFs involvement in conflict regions, the case study analysis revealed that the three indicators measuring the concept of sovereignty (political stability, territorial control, and control of resources) were negatively impacted by the introduction of PMSCs in the host state. This highlighted a detrimental effect on the Sierra Leonean government's ability to exercise domestic sovereignty and on long-term institutional development, especially in the presence of PMSCs engaged in operational military support and protection of critical assets.

This thesis suggests that the profit maximization pursued by PMSCs has been incompatible with the strengthening of sovereignty in Sierra Leone, as it has caused a profound redistribution of power, placing the RSLMF in a disadvantaged position. This, in turn, favored military competition with the Kamajors and contractors, leading to new spirals of violence and military coups. Although PMSCs proved effective in stabilizing and regaining territorial control during their presence, their autonomy and separate chain of command fueled tensions with the military. As a result, upon their departure, the regular military struggled to maintain territorial control, supporting the idea that delegating sovereign functions to PSFs in a context of profound institutional weakness risks creating a footprint problem and marginalizing the government.

PMSCs, in cooperation with mining companies, were also able to exploit the state's vulnerabilities to secure long-term concessions in mining exploitation and influence security concerns. Natural resources have been more of an encumbrance than an asset because they made the state extremely susceptible to external actors, with significant consequences for its sovereignty and ability to generate revenue essential for post-war development. PMSCs have brought to light the dynamics of new corporate colonialism, where they have altered the concept of state territoriality, modifying the object and subject of security, and have made the notion of peace anchored and dependent on the presence of a multitude of private actors through their penetration into the social contract. States experiencing high social fragmentation and institutional instability, while seeking immediate stabilization, should carefully consider that PMSCs' external interference is capable of triggering a vicious circle that increases the population's insecurity, undermines the role of the state as the sole provider of security, and fosters the state's reliance on PMSC services.

Further research on the involvement of PMSCs in other case studies should be undertaken to support the hypothesis regarding the erosion of sovereignty. Additionally, there might have been instances in which, despite the state's decision to cede part of its sovereignty to a private actor, PMSCs have been responsible for developing and consolidating the host state's governance capacity in the medium and long term.

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