

IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	Glasgow 2685538 DCU 21109150 Charles 87851090
Dissertation Title	The Roles of PMSCs in Addressing Maritime Security Threats

<p>Word Count Penalty (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)</p> <p>Word Count: 23,394 Suggested Penalty: no penalty</p>		

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark: D2 [10]

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Very Good
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Very Good
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Weak
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Weak
B. Use of Source Material	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Good
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Good
C. Academic Style	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Good
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Good
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Good
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

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ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

The reviewed thesis aims at exploring and comparing the PSMCs' roles in maritime security in three different regional maritime hubs – the Gulf of Guinea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Straits of Malacca. As such, the thesis covers a relatively novel topic.

Unfortunately, the thesis suffers from a number of shortcomings, many of which I raised with the author as the supervisor in my comments on the early drafts of the first three chapters. These include the following:

1. The thesis lacks a proper literature review mapping the current state of the of the extant research of PMSCs in general and PMSCs in maritime security in particular. The offered literature review is not only incomplete but it mixes the at random the insights from extant literature on PMSCs non-maritime and maritime security services provision.
2. When it comes to methodology, the discussion in Chapter 3 is rather generic, not really offering much of information as how the author actually collected and analyzed the data relevant/necessary to answer stated research questions. Most of data sources listed in Chapter 3, e.g., operation reports, public records and media reports, are actually not used, or at least formally cited, in the thesis. Only academic sources are cited in the thesis. The thesis also lacks a clarification regarding the operational differences, challenges, and effectiveness of PMSCs, especially when it comes to explaining how these will be operationalized and assessed in the thesis. This is a major shortcoming given the wording of the proposed research questions.
3. The thesis lacks a theoretical and/or conceptual framework. It offers a very brief review of some concepts from the Copenhagen and CST Schools but it is not clear why these two theories, or perhaps rather schools, and some of their concepts, are suitable for studying PMSCs in general and PMSCs in maritime security in particular. Moreover, none of the concepts introduced briefly is then actually genuinely applied in the analysis of PSMCs' roles in maritime security in three different maritime hubs - the Gulf of Guinea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Straits of Malacca.
4. Many of the paragraphs in the thesis present similar arguments, especially regarding the supposedly unique features of the three different maritime hubs and the PMSCs' services provided there, albeit the empirical chapters offer only limited evidence to support these claims. Overall, the thesis often reads more like a policy report, a compilation of various more or less relevant insights from the general literature on PMSCs. The citations of all sources used is also far from ideal in many sections of the thesis, which contain specific factual information, data or facts neither commonly known nor derived from the author's own research.

Overall, the thesis only barely meets most of the standard criteria for this type of academic work.

Reviewer 2

The dissertation sought to contribute to the academic and policy debate on a very complex and difficult-to-research topic, ie. the role and impact of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) in maritime security. The complexity of the topic mainly stems from the limited access to accurate data and information in a field deliberately maintained opaque by the numerous stakeholders involved in such sensitive activities. With that premise, it is not a surprise that the dissertation could not attain its very ambitious (or rather overambitious) objectives to assess the effectiveness of PMSCs in a comparative fashion in three difference maritime zones.

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Unfortunately, the dissertation's methodology was not sufficiently developed to overcome or at least balance the objective complexity of the topic. As a result, the research findings do not provide fully satisfactory answers to the three Research Questions (p. 3) and Objectives (p. 4), although the dissertation offers an interesting and informative overview of a critical and timely issue.

The problems in the methodology are likely to be caused by the lack of a theoretical direction in the student's analysis, which compromised the possibility of carrying out a proper empirical analysis. In this regard, the Literature Review is largely descriptive and lacks the necessary analytical depth which should characterise the initial analysis of the 'state of the art', into which the research must fit. The vagueness of the theoretical framework and therefore in the hypotheses to be tested makes it difficult to understand what the methodology seeks to test.

The process of data collection and use is also not very well elaborated. For instance, it is not clear if and how the 'Operational Reports from PMSCs' (mentioned on p. 28) were indeed identified and analyzed. Similarly, it is quite unclear which 'keyword searches' (p. 29) were used in the data mining. It seems most of the analysis was indeed based on existing literature.