



Power under Contract.

The Privatization of Military Support in the US and in the UK

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Abstract: The increasing provision of military support functions such as logistics and armed security by private military and security companies (PMSCs) is often conceptualized as a functional response to new operational, financial and technological imperatives. The tendency to privatize military support functions, however, is also driven by domestic political factors.

Drawing on neoclassical realism, I conceptualize the use of PMSCs as a strategy dictated by the need to circumvent the tightening hurdles to the conversion of societal resources into military power. Other things being equal, I argue that the tighter the constraints on the extraction and mobilization of societal resources, the higher the propensity to rely on the market as a complementary source of military power.

I provide evidence for this theoretical connection by drawing a comparative analysis between military privatization in the U.S. and in the U.K. Specifically, I investigate in detail the tendency to resort to private military contractors during U.S. military operations in Iraq and U.K. military operations in Afghanistan. In both cases, the privatization of military support functions provided decision-makers with the possibility to circumvent existing constraints over the recruitment and deployment of active duty and reserve military forces.

I then assess the explanatory power of my neoclassical realist explanation of military privatization against other theoretical perspectives, developing two competing explanations based on neorealism and organization theory. Although these theoretical perspectives offer valuable insights on the use of PMSCs, I show that due to its emphasis on domestic political constraints neoclassical realism proves better capable of shedding light on the privatization of military support and its variations across countries and over time.



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Bio: Eugenio Cusumano holds a Master's degree from the University of Bologna. His research interests focus on the different ways in which states generate and employ military power, their political, cultural and bureaucratic determinants and their strategic consequences. In addition, his area of expertise also revolves around democratic control over the use of force, the EU democratic deficit, civil-military relations and security sector reform. As a participant in the Priv-War Project, funded by the EU commission under the 7th Framework Programme, he was involved in the drafting of policy papers and recommendations for EU institutions and member states on the use and regulation of private military companies. Currently a guest lecturer in European Studies and International Relations at the University of Maastricht, he was been awarded a Fulbright-Schuman scholarship to conduct additional comparative research on the use and regulation of private military contractors in the United States.