

Private Security & Military Companies: Privatization of Wars

The emergence of private security and military companies and the use of private mercenaries in international armed conflicts is due to the new international order and the emergence of internal and regional conflicts such as ethnic conflicts and terrorism, which affects the interests of major countries and the protection of their facilities. They have replaced regular armed forces in foreign wars, and the dedication to this role has helped escalate security threats and the decline in the ability of states alone to face these challenges, as they are no longer the only party that controls the use of military force.

Wars burden states' budget and resources, causing disturbance in the economy and humanitarian aspects, as well as the loss of military forces that fall on the battlefield. This caused private security services to grow rapidly especially since the Iraq war; and these companies have brought about many crises, from plotting coups in Africa to control oil in Angola, diamonds in Sierra Leone, as well as crises from the Balkans to Afghanistan and Iraq. After that, it gradually shifted its activities from purely military work to protection work, including releasing hostages and providing advice/training to local forces and security personnel. Mostly, former military and intelligence men take advantage of their expertise and networks of relations with the military establishment in order to profit through their activities.

Mercenary; the Shadow Army

Governments prefer to employ mercenaries because they view wars pragmatically. Since mercenaries consider themselves as part of a military company - the name they prefer to call themselves instead of "mercenaries" - and they generally belong to fragile societies, they tend to turn into rebels who are used more in coups and conspiracies due to the ease of movement and infiltration across countries. Their pay also exceeds that of official armies, and they are not subject to any inspection or control authority meaning they can violate the rules of engagement adhered by official armies.

Privatization of Wars in the Arab World

Privatization of wars refers to states giving up financial funding for a war, reducing the number of soldiers and relying on irregular armed organizations, hence reducing the role of the state and its public institutions and increasing the contribution of the private sector. In this case countries have come to rely on strategies of military interventions and proxy wars that are implemented by military companies in particular. Despite the great difference in the contexts of developed countries, countries in transitional stages, countries in post-conflict stages and developing countries, there is a common denominator that privatization of security services occurs when the state is unable or unwilling to play this role.

Privatization of wars is the new policy used by warlords due to the alliance of these companies with the arms industry complexes that benefit from armed conflicts and violence. Private military companies would cross borders and exploit security crises that many Arab countries are going through to enter the "market of death" in exchange for billions of dollars paid to them. They recruit their mercenaries from different parts of the world to combat in battles without values. From Iraq to Libya, Syria and Yemen, private military companies from the US, Russia and the UAE are active on behalf of countries and armies that seek to reduce human expenditures and losses and avoid diplomatic embarrassment and legal accountability, especially when war crimes occur.

Private military companies are active in the Arab world with branches and extensions in many countries and with different names, in addition to local and international security companies estimated in the hundreds, and their activities differ from military companies in the nature of their tasks. While military companies carry out combat missions, recruit mercenaries, and support armed forces and militias on the ground, security companies focus on protecting personalities and facilities, conduct training, give security advice, and work in the fields of intelligence and cyber warfare. The tasks of military companies may overlap with security companies and sometimes complement each other. The French Foreign Ministry estimates the revenues of private security companies at about \$400 billion; a research states that the total profit of these companies in the Arab world between 2011 and 2014 is \$45 billion.

Among the most famous military companies that recruit mercenaries to fight in Arab trouble spots are:

Blackwater

This is a notorious American company that was involved in the murders of Iraqi civilians. Four of its members were convicted of imprisonment between 30 years and life for killing 14 Iraqi civilians including two children in Baghdad in 2007, in a massacre that sparked international outrage over the use of mercenaries in wars. However, US President Donald Trump pardoned the four Blackwater members, which triggered Iraqi discontent. The name "Blackwater" emerged with the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the company obtained security contracts in the country.

The company was founded in 1997 in accordance with US laws by former US Navy SEAL officer Eric Prince. It relies on retired mercenaries and special forces from around the world and provides its military and security services to governments and individuals with US administration's blessing. Following the scandals that took place in Iraq, Blackwater changed its name to Xe Service in 2009, then Academi in 2011. It was then acquired by competing companies and went under the banner of Constelles Holding Group, which operates in 20 countries and employs more than 16,000 people.

Constelles is currently concentrated in Yemen, where media including the New York Times revealed that Prince signed contracts with the UAE and Saudi Arabia to fight in Yemen alongside the Arab coalition. The number of Constelles' recruits in 2015 reached about 1,500 mercenaries from Colombia, South Africa, Mexico, Panama, El Salvador and Chile, some of whom were killed in the battles, especially in Taiz.

Wagner

Russia's Wagner is one of the most famous military companies operating in the Arab region following Blackwater's Nisour Square massacre. Wagner's activity in the Arab world began in Syria in 2014, where it oversees two security companies, namely ISIS Hunters and Sanad for guard and security services. Wagner trains the two companies' elements to protect Russian investments such as phosphate mines and oil and gas fields in the Syrian Badia and Deir Ezzor Governorate.

Wagner and ISIS Hunters' involvement in the Syrian War is evident since about 250 personnel - and fighters from the regime's army and the supporting forces - were killed in a US air strike on February 8, 2018. In this raid, 20 members of ISIS Hunters were killed as they advanced to control the oil fields east of the Euphrates River, which was controlled by ISIS.

Wagner uses ISIS Hunters and Sanad in Syria before transferring hundreds of them to Libya to fight alongside Khalifa Haftar's militia. However, Wagner does not depend only on mercenaries loyal to Bashar al-Assad, it also includes a long list of nationalities from Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and even Kazakhstan. In view of the calm of the Syrian front in recent years, Wagner concentrated its main force in Libya, especially in Al-Jufra and Sirte governorates, and its activity extended to the southwest, which France considers its historical area of influence.

The announcement of a Russian naval base construction in Port Sudan on the Red Sea in 2020 will attract more Wagner mercenaries to East Africa. Wagner began its activities in Sudan in 2018, under the cover of the Minvest company for gold exploration, but the US included it in its sanctions list on July 15, 2020, and accused it of trying to undermine Sudan's democracy. Washington imposed sanctions on Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner Group, nicknamed Putin's chef, and the company itself was included in the sanctions list.

Black Shield

This UAE security company was not known until the news of young Sudanese transferred to the UAE to work in the private guard surfaced. It was found that the company trained them militarily to transport them to Libya as mercenaries alongside Haftar and to Yemen. Although Black Shield denied the accusations revealed by The Guardian on December 25, 2019, the file quickly turned into a public issue after hundreds of Sudanese protested in front of the Emirati embassy in Khartoum last July.

In early December, legal advisor for the Sudanese victims Omar Al-Obaid announced the launch of his preparations to file regional and international lawsuits against 10 Emirati, Sudanese and Libyan figures, on charges of human trafficking. A Human Rights Watch report and interviews with the victims reveals that Black Shield made contract with more than 270 young Sudanese men to work in the country as security guards, but deceived them after a long series of procedures and plunged them into "the furnace of war in Libya" without their knowledge. The report states that the Sudanese youth found themselves side by side with Haftar fighters, they were told that their mission was to guard oil installations surrounding the Oil Crescent, "but with time they became involved in hostilities."

Israel and Iran's Investment in Security Companies

In addition to Blackwater, Wagner and Black Shield, there are other private military and security companies operating in the Arab countries, such as the giant G4S. G4S was established in 1901 in Denmark and is headquartered in the UK. It has the largest private army in the world with more than 533,000 personnel of various nationalities. G4S has branches in 85 countries, with 14 branches in the Arab world, nine of which in the Gulf states, particularly the UAE. It assumed some duties at Guantanamo Bay, and its annual income is \$8.8 billion, according to the French Monte Carlo radio station, but its many scandals and the Corona crisis have brought it into financial crises.

Israel employed 8,000 G4S personnel to guard the Ofer prison and administering checkpoints in the West Bank. Given the pressure exerted by the BDS campaign on it, G4S decided to withdraw from it. Israeli security researcher Yossi Melman reveals that 10 private Israeli security companies, including Swiss-based AGT, operate in Arab countries such as Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. With the normalization of relations of some countries with Israel, it is expected that security companies will infiltrate heavily into the Gulf states, led by the UAE, to provide their services in guarding and providing cybersecurity.

Media reports also disclose Shiite militias operating in Iraq and Syria as security companies affiliated with Iran, but they are more of "ideological mercenaries" coming from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq to fight not only for money but for the sect as well. These militias close to Iran established security companies in Syria, represented in the Al-Areen Guard Services, Shield for Security Guards, and Al-Fajr for Guard and Protection Services.

The growing role of global military and security companies at the expense of the traditional Arab armies would make these countries lose their independence in policy-making and have their security exposed to any future threats. If these countries continue being on the warpath, don't they know where they are heading to?