

services involves civilian rendering of expertise that, nonetheless, directly enhances the recipient's military and security capabilities. All the services on offer by the private military industry have a direct impact on and contribute to the management of the state's monopoly of legitimate violence.

By recruiting former military personnel and by taking on tasks previously handled by states, PMCs have inherited routines in which established military practice and international law and custom are already contained. Since PMC employees typically acquired their skills in the service of the state, expertise tends to be delivered or transferred in accordance with rules established and observed by the respective states. Hence, the modes and norms of warfare and law enforcement of the traditional legal regime tend to resonate in private military and security provision. Belonging to this tradition we find adherence to international laws governing war, observance of rules of engagement, the organization of personnel according to a system of ranks, the delegation of authority through chains of command, the use of prescribed weaponry, tactics, and intelligence, and the establishment of commercial relations with internationally recognized governments and organizations. Although in the process of privatization they may erode or unravel in a variety of ways, this might be particularly the case when the motive for privatization is to escape these rules and practices, or when firms do not establish adequate vetting procedures for the selection of personnel.

Clearly, there are always borderline cases. Mercenary outfits might be operating in the periphery of the world disguised as PMCs. Perhaps some of these borderline cases are found in the "retired military guys sitting in a spare bedroom with a fax machine and a Rolodex" envisaged by Wood (cited in Silverstein 1997: 11), or the "virtual companies" (similar to e-commerce) noted by Singer (2003a: 75). Nevertheless, the existence of such mercenary groups does not undermine the distinctive features of the Private Military Company. Sound judgment is therefore needed not only to distinguish illegitimate military service providers from PMCs, but also in assessing the applicability of the definition proposed here to firms in related commercial areas.

The definition makes it also possible to argue that PMCs are constituted either as stand-alone firms, or represent, or are part of, hybrid business enterprises. The primary business of the 'stand-alone PMC' is the offering of private military services. The stand-alone PMC can be an independent service provider, although legally it may be a subsidiary of a different firm. In the latter case, they nonetheless preserve a good degree of operational independence. The 'hybrid type of PMC', on the other hand, is a functional division of a corporation that while offering private military services its chief business does not fall within the PMC service spectrum. Thus, stand-alone