

# **Economic and Social Council**

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## Introduction from the Chairs

Hello delegates,

We are your chairs, Arthur, Helena and Lucas, for the ECOSOC Committee for GMUN! We are so excited to see you debate The Role of International Legal and Civilian Oversight in the Operations of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) and Regulating Chinese Belt and Road Infrastructure Investment – both topics of the utmost importance. As chairs, we will monitor the flow of debate and support you in any way we can. We understand that this may be the first Model UN conference for some of you, and we are so thrilled that we get to be a part of this learning experience with you. This topic guide is the first way through which we help you; we have compiled some background information that we hope you will utilize to learn more about your topic in addition to your individual research. For more experienced delegates, we hope you take this opportunity to improve your skills and take on challenges. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to any of us. We are here to help and look forward to watching you debate!

Kind regards,

Arthur, Helena and Lucas

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## Guide to Researching

The following information will serve to guide you in your research.

The first thing you should do is find the basics about your country. The sources you use should be reliable— meaning that the writer (whether that be an organization, a well-known author, an expert in the field, or a governmental organization) are credible and trusted by most. Sources such as Google Scholar and some websites that end with (examplewebsite.edu) are also great tools since they are both for educational purposes. Below are some questions you should answer and [this document](#) contains many sources that you can use to do external research.

1. Where is my country situated?
2. Who is the leader of my country? (President, Prime Minister, etc)
3. What are some major cities in my country?
4. What are the major news stories out of my country currently? (ex. Google: \_\_\_\_\_ news)
5. What is the standard of living? (Economic, political, social, humanitarian issues, Global-South country?)
6. Is my country part of any major alliance? If so, who are my allies?

Continue reading and understanding the information within the topic guide, and extend your knowledge by asking yourself more questions and searching for the answers! Your chairs have worked very hard to make sure this topic guide gives you foundational knowledge on what you will be discussing, but don't be afraid to take your learning further!

Good luck and please reach out to us if anything is needed,

Arthur, Helena and Lucas

## Topic A: The Role of International Legal and Civilian Oversight in the Operations of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs)



Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Fate of the Wagner Group in Syria, Libya, and Sudan," Arab Center Washington DC, August 10, 2023

### Background Information

#### A. Introduction

Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) are private corporate entities that provide military and security services traditionally carried out by state armed forces or law enforcement agencies. These services include armed guarding, convoy protection, intelligence support, military training, logistics, detention operations, and protection of critical infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Over the past three decades, PMSCs have become embedded in armed conflicts, peacekeeping environments, post-conflict reconstruction, and development-related operations.

The proliferation of PMSCs challenges the traditional state monopoly on the legitimate use of force. While states remain the primary subjects of international law, PMSCs operate transnationally in environments where legal accountability, civilian oversight, and regulatory enforcement are weak or fragmented.<sup>2</sup> From ECOSOC's perspective, PMSCs are not solely security actors but

## **economic**

**enterprises** whose activities affect labor standards, development trajectories, institutional capacity, and civilian protection.

The central issue before the committee is how international legal frameworks and civilian oversight mechanisms can regulate PMSCs in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL), labor protections, and sustainable development goals, without undermining state sovereignty.

## **Historical Context**

### **A. Emergence of the Modern PMSC Industry (1980s–1990s)**

The modern PMSC industry emerged following the end of the Cold War. Military downsizing in Western states, the privatization of public services, and the increase in intrastate conflicts—particularly in Africa—created demand for privatized force.<sup>3</sup> Early firms such as Executive Outcomes and Sandline International conducted combat operations in Angola and Sierra Leone, often operating outside robust legal oversight.<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously, multinational corporations, humanitarian organizations, and international institutions increasingly relied on private security to protect personnel and assets in unstable environments, contributing to the normalization of private security contracting.

### **B. Expansion During the War on Terror (2001–2011)**

The U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq marked an unprecedented expansion of PMSCs. By 2007, private contractors in Iraq equaled or exceeded the number of U.S. military personnel.<sup>5</sup> Contractors provided armed security, convoy protection, base security, interrogation support, and logistical services.

The 2007 Nisour Square incident, in which Blackwater contractors killed 17 Iraqi civilians, exposed severe accountability gaps.<sup>6</sup> Contractors often operated under immunity provisions and jurisdictional ambiguities that prevented prosecution under host-state or home-state law.<sup>7</sup>

### **C. Attempts at International Regulation (2010s–Present)**

In response, states pursued non-binding regulatory frameworks. The **Montreux Document (2008)** clarified existing international legal obligations, while the **International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC)** established voluntary human rights standards.<sup>8</sup> However, these mechanisms lack binding enforcement.

The 2010s also saw the diversification of PMSCs, including **Russian-linked groups (e.g., Wagner), Chinese private security companies, and regionally based firms in Africa and the Middle East**, reflecting the globalization and politicization of private force.<sup>9</sup>

## Current Situation



Andrew Radin and Seth G. Jones, "Putin's Proxies: Examining Russia's Use of Private Military Companies," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 3, 2021

### A. Global Scope and Active Areas of Operation

As of the mid-2020s, PMSCs operate in over 50 countries, with particularly high concentrations in:

- **Ukraine and Eastern Europe:** Russian-linked PMSCs have played direct combat and support roles, while Western firms provide training and logistics support to state forces.<sup>10</sup>
- **The Middle East:** PMSCs operate extensively in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Gulf states, providing base security, convoy protection, and intelligence services.<sup>11</sup>
- **Africa:** PMSCs are active in Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Nigeria, and Mozambique, often protecting governments, extractive industries, or foreign investments.<sup>12</sup>
- **Asia:** Chinese private security companies protect Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure in Pakistan, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup>

The global private security market is estimated at **USD 240–260 billion annually**, making it a major economic sector.<sup>14</sup>

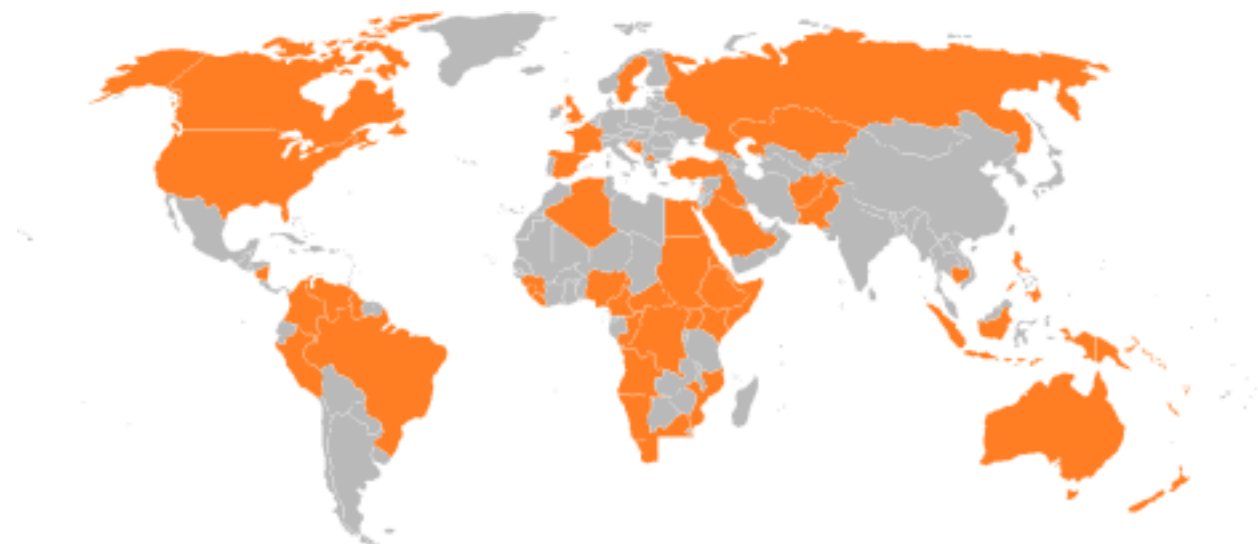
### B. Ongoing Challenges

- **Legal Accountability:** PMSCs remain in a gray zone under IHL, as their personnel are neither lawful combatants nor ordinary civilians.<sup>15</sup>
- **Human Rights Violations:** The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries has documented cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, forced displacement, and arbitrary detention involving PMSCs.<sup>16</sup>

- **Civilian Oversight Deficits:** Contracts are often classified, negotiated without parliamentary approval, or excluded from public scrutiny.<sup>17</sup>
- **Developmental Impact:** In fragile states, reliance on PMSCs can undermine state capacity, distort local labor markets, and exacerbate inequality.<sup>18</sup>

For ECOSOC, the persistence of PMSCs raises concerns about **long-term development, institutional resilience, and civilian control over security sectors.**

### Extent of the Private Military Industry 1991-2008



Source: Singer (2008: 10)

Meyering, Alexander Barrett. 2012. *Military, Inc.: Private Military Companies and State-Centrism in International Relations*. Political Science. Semantic Scholar.

### Past UN Actions and International Efforts

The UN has primarily addressed PMSCs through **soft-law mechanisms**:

- **UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries:** Investigates abuses and advises on regulatory frameworks.<sup>19</sup>
- **Montreux Document (2008):** Endorsed by over 60 states, reaffirming state obligations and good practices.<sup>20</sup>
- **International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA):** Provides certification, monitoring, and grievance mechanisms.<sup>21</sup>

Efforts to negotiate a **binding international convention** on PMSCs have stalled due to opposition from major military powers over sovereignty, definitions, and enforcement.<sup>22</sup> ECOSOC discussions increasingly frame PMSCs as a governance and development issue rather than solely a security concern.

## Timeline of Key Events

- **1989–1998:** Early PMSC combat operations in Angola and Sierra Leone
- **2001:** Rapid expansion following the War on Terror
- **2007:** Nisour Square incident
- **2008:** Adoption of the Montreux Document
- **2013:** Establishment of the ICoCA
- **2015–Present:** Expansion of PMSCs in Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe
- **2020s:** Renewed UN debates on binding regulation

## Definition of Key Terms

- **Private Military and Security Company (PMSC):** A private entity providing military or security services for profit.
- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL):** Law governing conduct during armed conflict.
- **Civilian Oversight:** Democratic mechanisms ensuring civilian control over security actors.
- **Soft Law:** Non-binding international guidelines.
- **Mercenary:** A person who fights in an army for payment.

## Suggested questions for further research

- Should PMSCs be subject to a binding international convention?
- How can civilian oversight be strengthened in fragile states?
- What role should ECOSOC play in linking PMSC regulation to development outcomes?
- How can accountability gaps across jurisdictions be closed?
- Should corporate liability apply to PMSC human rights violations?

## Bloc Positions

### *United States*

The United States is both a major home state and client of PMSCs. It favors domestic regulation supplemented by voluntary international standards, supporting the Montreux Document and ICoCA while opposing binding treaties that could limit operational flexibility.<sup>23</sup>



### *European Union*

The EU supports stronger oversight mechanisms, emphasizing human rights compliance, labor protections, and transparency. While supportive of soft-law instruments, several EU member states have expressed openness to enhanced international coordination.<sup>24</sup>



### *Russia*

Russia **formally** denies legal ties to PMSCs such as the Wagner Group while benefiting from their strategic utility abroad. Moscow opposes international regulation that could expose indirect state involvement or constrain foreign policy tools.<sup>25</sup>



### *China*

China increasingly relies on private security companies to protect overseas investments, particularly under the **Belt and Road Initiative**. Beijing supports state-centric oversight and rejects international mechanisms perceived as infringing on sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> Transparency remains limited.



### *African Union and African States*

African states are disproportionately affected by PMSC operations. While positions vary, many governments and the African Union advocate stronger oversight to prevent abuses and resource exploitation while maintaining access to security services.<sup>27</sup>



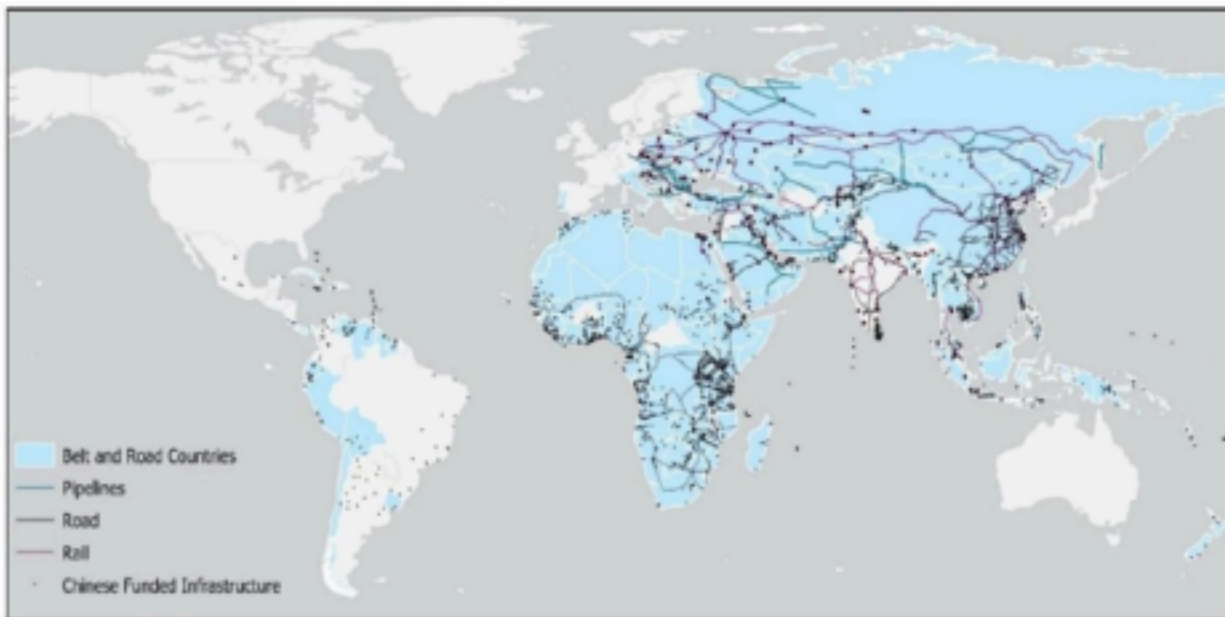
### *Non-Aligned Movement and Global South*

Many developing states support a **binding international regulatory framework**, citing historical experiences with mercenaries and limited domestic enforcement capacity.<sup>28</sup> Emphasis is placed on civilian oversight, accountability, and development outcomes.

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## Topic B: Regulating Chinese Belt and Road Infrastructure Investment



"A Map Illustrating the Belt and Road Initiative Roads, Rail Network and Pipelines and the ...." *ResearchGate*, accessed December 18, 2025

### Background Information

#### A. Introduction

Launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's flagship global infrastructure and development strategy. It aims to enhance connectivity through large-scale investments in transportation, energy, telecommunications, and industrial infrastructure across Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. As of 2024, more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations have signed cooperation agreements related to the BRI, making it the largest development initiative in modern history.<sup>1</sup>

From an ECOSOC perspective, the BRI sits at the intersection of development finance, debt sustainability, environmental governance, labor standards, and global inequality. Proponents argue that the initiative addresses chronic infrastructure deficits in the Global South and accelerates progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>2</sup> Critics, however, highlight concerns over opaque lending practices, debt distress, weak environmental safeguards, labor violations, and limited host-country oversight.<sup>3</sup> The central question for this committee is how international regulation and cooperation can ensure that BRI investments contribute to

sustainable, inclusive development without undermining economic sovereignty or social welfare.

## **Historical Context**

### **A. Origins of the Belt and Road Initiative (2013–2015)**

The BRI was formally announced in 2013 through two speeches by President Xi Jinping: the “Silk Road Economic Belt” in Kazakhstan and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road” in Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> The initiative built upon earlier Chinese “Going Out” strategies but marked a dramatic expansion in scale and ambition. Financing was initially driven by Chinese policy banks—the Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank—alongside state-owned enterprises (SOEs).<sup>5</sup>

In its early phase, BRI lending focused on transport corridors, ports, and energy infrastructure, particularly in low- and middle-income countries that struggled to access capital from Western-led institutions such as the World Bank or IMF.<sup>6</sup> These investments often bypassed traditional conditionality requirements tied to governance, transparency, or environmental impact assessments.

### **B. Expansion and Globalization (2016–2019)**

By 2017, the BRI had gained formal endorsement at the UN General Assembly, where references to the initiative appeared in multiple resolutions on development cooperation.<sup>7</sup> The first Belt and Road Forum in Beijing attracted leaders from over 130 countries, signaling broad international engagement.<sup>8</sup> During this period, BRI financing surged, peaking in 2018 with over USD 125 billion in overseas energy and infrastructure investment.<sup>9</sup>

However, this rapid expansion also exposed systemic weaknesses. Several recipient countries—most notably Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Zambia—experienced rising debt burdens linked to Chinese loans.<sup>10</sup> The leasing of Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port to a Chinese SOE in 2017 became emblematic of concerns over “debt-for-equity swaps,” although scholars note that the reality is more complex than the popular “debt trap diplomacy” narrative suggests.<sup>11</sup>

### **C. Recalibration and “Green BRI” (2020–Present)**

Following mounting international criticism and growing loan defaults, China began recalibrating the BRI. Lending volumes declined sharply after 2019, and Beijing emphasized a shift toward smaller-scale, greener, and more sustainable projects.<sup>12</sup> In 2021, China announced it would no longer finance new overseas coal-fired power plants, aligning BRI rhetoric more closely with climate commitments.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, debt restructuring replaced new lending as a dominant feature of China's engagement, particularly in Africa and South Asia.<sup>14</sup> This evolution has intensified calls for multilateral coordination, transparency, and regulatory frameworks to manage BRI investments in line with international development standards.

## Current Situation

As of 2024, BRI investments remain significant but more selective. Chinese financing increasingly targets **renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and logistics**, while traditional mega-projects have declined.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, unresolved challenges persist:

- **Debt Sustainability:** According to the World Bank, over 60% of BRI recipient countries are at high risk of debt distress.<sup>16</sup> Chinese lending contracts frequently include confidentiality clauses, complicating debt restructuring and IMF coordination.<sup>17</sup>
- **Governance and Transparency:** Many BRI projects are negotiated bilaterally with limited parliamentary or civil society oversight in host states.<sup>18</sup>
- **Environmental and Social Impacts:** Weak enforcement of environmental impact assessments has led to deforestation, displacement, and biodiversity loss in several regions.<sup>19</sup>
- **Labor Standards:** Reports from the ILO and NGOs document cases of unsafe working.<sup>20</sup>

In response, alternative frameworks have emerged. The G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the EU's Global Gateway aim to provide transparent, sustainable alternatives to BRI financing.<sup>21</sup> Rather than replacing BRI, these initiatives increase the urgency of global standards for infrastructure investment, which ECOSOC is well-positioned to debate.

## Past UN Actions and International Responses

The UN has not formally regulated the BRI, but it has increasingly engaged with China on development coordination:

- **UNDP–China Memorandum of Understanding (2016):** Established cooperation to align BRI projects with the SDGs.<sup>22</sup>
- **UN General Assembly Resolutions (2017–2019):** Several resolutions referenced the BRI as a contributor to international development cooperation, though without regulatory

mechanisms.<sup>23</sup>

- **UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):** Issued repeated warnings about infrastructure-led debt accumulation and the need for transparent financing practices.<sup>24</sup>
- **ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum:** Serves as a platform for discussing debt sustainability, blended finance, and infrastructure governance—key arenas for BRI regulation debates.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these efforts, no binding multilateral framework exists to regulate large-scale bilateral infrastructure initiatives like the BRI.

## Timeline of Key Events

- **2013:** Announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative
- **2016:** UNDP–China MoU on SDG alignment
- **2017:** First Belt and Road Forum; BRI referenced in UNGA resolutions
- **2018:** Peak of Chinese overseas infrastructure lending
- **2019:** Rising debt distress in multiple BRI states
- **2021:** China announces end to overseas coal financing
- **2023:** Launch of EU Global Gateway and expansion of PGII
- **2024–2025:** Increased debt restructuring and calls for multilateral standards

## Definition of Key Terms

- **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** China-led global infrastructure and development program launched in 2013.
- **Debt Sustainability:** A state’s ability to meet current and future debt obligations without compromising economic stability.
- **Blended Finance:** Use of public funds to mobilize private investment for development projects.
- **Global Gateway:** EU infrastructure initiative emphasizing transparency and sustainability.
- **South–South Cooperation:** Development collaboration among countries of the Global South.

## Suggested questions for further research

- Should ECOSOC play a role in establishing international standards for large-scale infrastructure financing?
- How can debt sustainability frameworks be strengthened without limiting development access?
- To what extent can this committee label the BRI as predatory debt financing?
- 4. Can global alternatives to the BRI coexist with Chinese-led development finance?

## Bloc Positions

### *China*

China frames the BRI as a win-win development initiative rooted in South–South cooperation. Beijing rejects accusations of debt-trap diplomacy and emphasizes host-country sovereignty and voluntary participation.<sup>26</sup> China supports coordination with the UN on sustainable development but strongly opposes binding international regulations that would constrain bilateral financing or impose external conditionalities.<sup>27</sup>



### *United States*

The United States views the BRI as a strategic and economic challenge. Washington emphasizes transparency, debt sustainability, and anti-corruption standards, arguing that opaque Chinese lending undermines global financial stability.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. supports multilateral oversight through the IMF, World Bank, and OECD while promoting alternatives like the PGII.<sup>29</sup> Under the current administration of President Donald J. Trump, the United States is taking an ever so aggressive stance towards Chinese programmes, and such is reflected in their position towards the BRI.



### *European Union*

The EU adopts a more regulatory approach, focusing on environmental standards, procurement transparency, and labor rights.<sup>30</sup> While some member states initially joined the BRI, the EU now prioritizes the Global Gateway and calls for alignment with international norms rather



than outright opposition.<sup>31</sup> Please note that various EU member states have differing positions to that of the EU as a whole; conduct your own research.

### *African Union and African States*

African states are among the largest BRI recipients. Many governments value Chinese financing for addressing infrastructure gaps but express concerns over debt sustainability and local capacity building.<sup>32</sup> The AU advocates for fairer financing terms, technology transfer, and regional consultation mechanisms rather than rejecting BRI investments

outright.<sup>33</sup>

### *Latin America*

Latin American countries display mixed positions. Some welcome BRI investments as diversification away from U.S. dominance, while others worry about debt exposure and environmental harm. Regional blocs emphasize national regulatory capacity and multilateral development bank involvement.<sup>34</sup>



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