



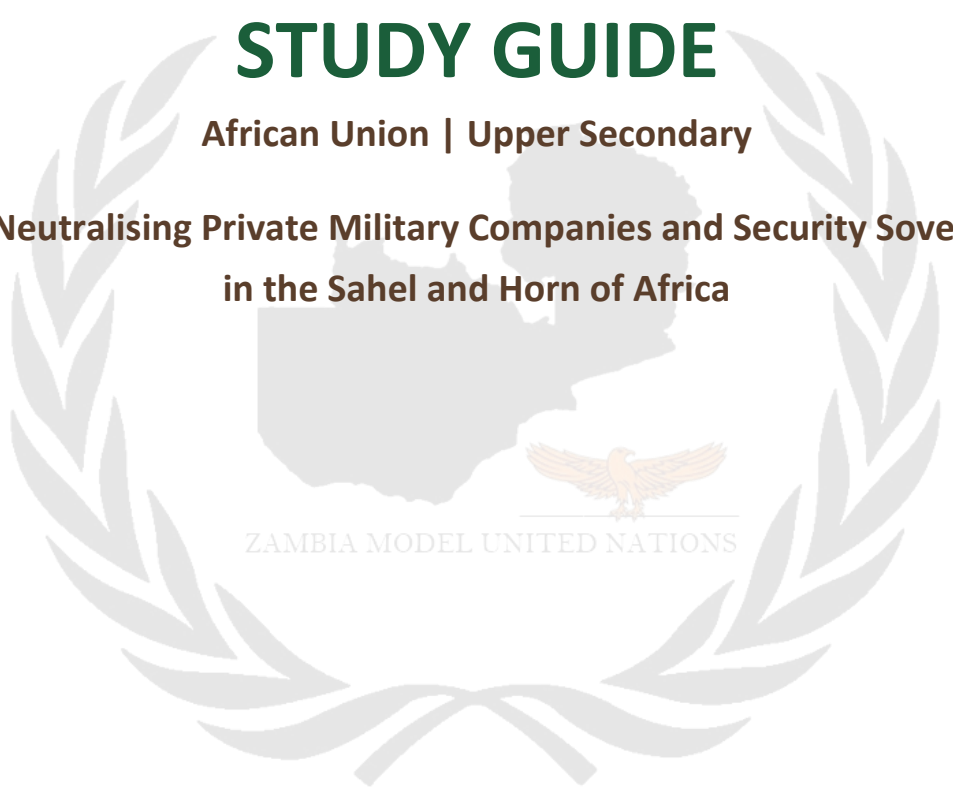
LUSAKA OAKTREE SCHOOL MODEL UNITED NATIONS
LOTSMUN 2026

***Architects of Accountability** • Redefining Power, Peace and Progress*

STUDY GUIDE

African Union | Upper Secondary

**Topic: Neutralising Private Military Companies and Security Sovereignty
in the Sahel and Horn of Africa**



ZAMBIA MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Message from the Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to LOTSMUN 2026.

This year, under the theme “Architects of Accountability: Redefining Power, Peace and Progress,” we invite you to consider not only how decisions are made but who is responsible for them, who is affected by them and how meaningful change can be achieved.

Model United Nations is more than an exercise in public speaking. It is an opportunity to understand complex international problems, challenge assumptions, negotiate with people who may disagree with you and transform competing ideas into meaningful solutions.

As you prepare for this committee, I encourage you to look beyond the information presented in this study guide. The purpose of this document is not to provide you with every answer, but to provide you with the foundation from which your own research, perspectives, and ideas can develop.

Come prepared to question, collaborate, negotiate and most importantly, represent your country’s position with accuracy and diplomacy. Remember that accountability is not simply about holding power responsible; it is about understanding how power can be used to build peace, drive progress, and create meaningful change.

I look forward to seeing the ideas, debates, and solutions you bring into committee.

Malenji Arthur Jonah

Secretary General, LOTSMUN 2026

ZAMBIA MODEL UNITED NATIONS

1. The African Union

1.1 What is the African Union?

The African Union (AU) is the continental organisation of African states, and the successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) that adopted the 1977 Convention against mercenarism.¹ Its **Peace and Security Council (PSC)** is the body that has taken up the question of private military and defence companies. In December 2023 it called for the review of the 1977 convention to be fast-tracked.²

In this simulation, you are a **member state** in an AU committee. Your task is to agree on how African states should respond to foreign private military companies, while protecting the right of each state to run its own security. Here are the bodies and instruments that matter for this topic:

Body or instrument	What it does
Peace and Security Council (PSC)	The AU body that has discussed private military and defence companies and asked for the 1977 convention to be reviewed. ³
OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)	Adopted at Libreville on 3 July 1977 and in force since 22 April 1985. Its Article 1 condemns mercenaries and mercenarism. ⁴
Draft revised convention	A 40-article draft produced by the PSC-inspired review, with an oversight committee, wider definitions and reporting duties for states. ⁵
Regional groupings (ECOWAS, AES)	Regional blocs shape Sahel politics. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in 2023 and left ECOWAS. ⁶
UN and Montreux frameworks	The UN mercenaries convention (in force 2001) and the 2008 Montreux Document give wider rules on mercenaries and private security companies. ^{7,8}

¹ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977). <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/oau-mercenarism-1977>

² Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-au-takes-aim-at-africa-s-new-brand-of-mercenaries>

³ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December 2025).

<https://www.africanews.com/2025/12/23/sahel-alliance-leaders-meet-in-bamako-to-deepen-break-with-ecowas/>

⁷ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁸ ICRC. Private military and security companies (Montreux Document). <https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/private-military-and-security-companies>

2. Introduction to the Topic

Many African governments face armed groups, coups and stretched armies. Some have turned to **private military companies (PMCs)**: firms or networks that provide fighters, trainers or security services for pay. The question for the AU is where such support helps a state defend itself, and where it undermines the state, harms civilians or lets outside powers gain influence. **Security sovereignty** means a state's right and ability to control its own security, and to choose its partners freely.

Here is one way the problem can develop:

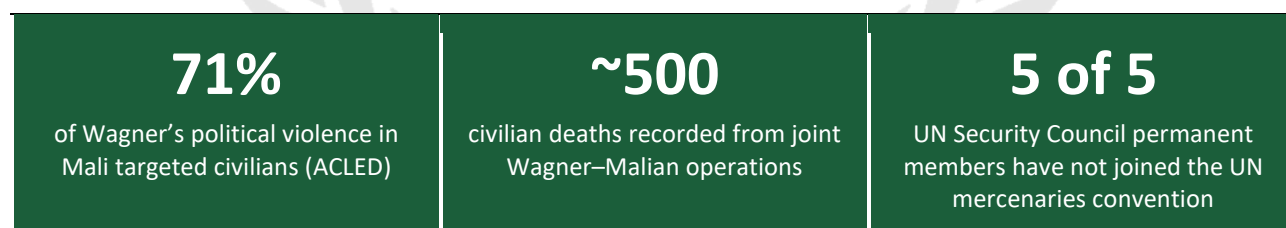


This is a simplified picture. Governments often have real security needs, and PMCs are sometimes chosen because other partners were unavailable. Debate the **conditions and safeguards**, not only the principle.⁹

2.1 The scale of the problem

Reach. Analysts say Russian mercenary forces have operated in six African countries: Mali, Niger, Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic and Burkina Faso, with spillover into Chad and Mauritania.¹⁰ Other cases include Wagner and the Dyck Advisory Group in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado, and thousands of mercenaries working for rival factions in Libya.¹¹

Harm to civilians. ACLED, a conflict-data organisation, found that civilians were targeted in 71% of Wagner's political violence involvement in Mali and 52% in the Central African Republic (CAR, December 2020 to July 2022). It recorded about 500 civilian deaths from joint Wagner–Malian operations.¹²



These numbers come from monitoring groups, and other sources may count differently. Governments concerned often dispute allegations, so check who produced each figure and how.

⁹ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey line. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mercenaries-and-private-military-security-africas-thin-grey-line>

¹⁰ RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren't Going Anywhere (June 2025). <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/06/the-wagner-group-is-leaving-mali-but-russian-mercenaries.html>

¹¹ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹² ACLED. Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African Republic and Mali. <https://acleddata.com/report/wagner-group-operations-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-central-african-republic-and-mali>

2.2 Why does it happen?

Security gaps. Armed groups have challenged state authority in northern and central Mali, and in 2024 attacks reached Bamako for the first time in nearly a decade.^{13,14} **Fewer partners.** Mali's decision to seek Wagner caused diplomatic tension with France.¹⁵ **Payment in resources.** Wagner sought mining concessions to fund its work, as it had elsewhere, although Mali's junta resisted giving it control of mining.¹⁶ **Blurred rules.** Mercenaries and private security companies are both paid for their services, and some actions of PMCs may amount to mercenarism, so the legal line is unclear.¹⁷

2.3 Rules and tools to know

Rules exist, but they are old, uneven or not widely accepted. These are the ones you are most likely to use:

Rule or tool	What it says
OAU Convention (1977)	Condemns mercenaries and mercenarism, with 14 articles and an extensive definition of mercenarism. It has no safeguard clauses for international humanitarian law, and faces implementation challenges. ^{18,19}
UN Convention on mercenaries (in force 20 October 2001)	Treats mercenary activity as an offence, but the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have not signed or ratified it. ^{20,21}
Montreux Document (2008)	Restates states' existing legal duties on private military and security companies in armed conflict and recommends good practices. It began with 17 supporting states and now has 54 plus three organisations. ²²
AU draft convention (review)	Proposes an oversight committee, expanded definitions of mercenaries, monitoring and reporting duties and a role for civil society. ²³

¹³ The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner's failure in Mali. <https://thesentry.org/reports/mercenary-meltdown-wagner-failure-mali/>

¹⁴ RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren't Going Anywhere (June... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹⁵ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹⁶ The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner's failure in Mali... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹⁷ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹⁸ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

¹⁹ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁰ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²¹ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²² ICRC. Private military and security companies (Montreux Document)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²³ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

3. Key Definitions

These definitions are written for delegates and adapted from the sources in the bibliography. Learn them, because you will use them in speeches and clauses.

Term	Meaning
Mercenary	A person hired to fight in a conflict mainly for private gain rather than out of loyalty to a state. The exact legal definition differs between treaties. ^{24,25}
Mercenarism	The activity of recruiting, using, financing or training mercenaries, which the 1977 OAU Convention condemns. ²⁶
Private military company (PMC)	A firm that provides armed security, training or military support for payment. The line between a PMC and mercenaries can be blurred. ²⁷
Private military and security company (PMSC)	The term used in the Montreux Document for private companies providing military or security services, including in armed conflict. ²⁸
Wagner Group	A Russia-linked mercenary organisation founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, which operated in several African countries. ²⁹
Africa Corps	The Russian Defence Ministry-controlled force that took over from Wagner, so Moscow is now directly accountable for its operations. ³⁰
Security sovereignty	A state's right and ability to control its own security and choose its own partners.
Monopoly on the use of force	The idea that only the state may legitimately use armed force. Contractors hired by local elites can weaken it. ³¹
Plausible deniability	When a government can claim it is not responsible for what a group does. State control of Africa Corps removes some of this. ³²
Impunity	When perpetrators are not punished. UN experts have warned of a "climate of terror and complete impunity" in Mali. ³³
International humanitarian law (IHL)	The rules of war that protect civilians and limit how fighting is conducted. States must ensure private contractors follow them. ³⁴

²⁴ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁵ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁶ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁷ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁸ ICRC. Private military and security companies (Montreux Document)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

²⁹ UN News. Mali: Independent rights experts call for probe into Wagner Group's activities (January 2023).
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1133007>

³⁰ RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren't Going Anywhere (June... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³¹ Canadian Forces College. The Use of Private Military and Security Companies in Somalia (Hancock).
<https://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/259/290/402/305/hancock.pdf>

³² RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren't Going Anywhere (June... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³³ UN News. Mali: Independent rights experts call for probe into Wagner Group's activities... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³⁴ ICRC. Private military and security companies (Montreux Document)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

Term	Meaning
Alliance of Sahel States (AES)	The alliance formed in 2023 by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which withdrew from ECOWAS. ³⁵
ECOWAS	The Economic Community of West African States, the regional bloc Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have left. ³⁶
JNIM	An armed group that claimed attacks that killed over 100 Malian soldiers and some mercenaries. ³⁷
Ratification	When a state formally agrees to be bound by a treaty.
Oversight committee	A body proposed in the AU draft convention to monitor mercenarism and report to the PSC. ³⁸
Civil society	Non-government groups, such as human rights organisations and researchers, that monitor abuses and advise governments. ³⁹
Accountability	Making sure that people and institutions answer for what they do, through investigation, prosecution and remedies.



³⁵ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³⁶ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³⁷ Al Jazeera. Russia's Wagner mercenaries leaving Mali, Africa Corps to remain (6 June 2025). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/6/russias-wagner-mercenaries-leaving-mali-africa-corps-to-remain>

³⁸ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

³⁹ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

4. Case Studies

These cases show the problems and some responses in real life. Facts come from the sources in the bibliography. Many events are recent, contested or still developing, so check dates and separate proven facts from allegations. **You must represent your assigned country's view.**

4.1 Central African Republic: contractors and impunity

In October 2021, UN experts said that so-called “Russian instructors” from the Wagner Group were harassing and intimidating civilians, peacekeepers, journalists, aid workers and minorities in CAR, and reported arbitrary detention, torture, disappearances and summary executions. They said victims avoided complaining for fear of reprisals, and asked CAR to end its relationship with Wagner. The CAR government’s own Special Commission of Inquiry confirmed that violations took place, including by “Russian instructors”.⁴⁰ ACLED found that Wagner was involved in nearly 40% of political violence events in CAR between December 2020 and July 2022, and directly targeted Fulani communities.⁴¹

4.2 Mali: from Wagner to Africa Corps

Wagner fighters arrived in Bamako in January 2022. The Sentry judged the deployment largely unsuccessful: Wagner had not taken control of areas in the north and centre, civilian attacks rose, and Mali’s junta resisted giving it control of mining.⁴² In late March 2022, UN experts said Malian forces accompanied by personnel believed to belong to Wagner executed several hundred people at Moura, and called for an investigation.⁴³ On 6 June 2025 Wagner announced its withdrawal after three and a half years, but Africa Corps stayed. Africa Corps said Russia “continues to support Bamako now at a more fundamental level”.⁴⁴ RAND notes that Wagner was restructured into Africa Corps, under the Russian Defence Ministry, so Russia lost plausible deniability.⁴⁵ The Sentry adds that personnel levels stayed roughly the same.⁴⁶

4.3 Sudan: mercenaries and the Horn of Africa

In May 2026, Human Rights Watch reported that hundreds of Colombian contractors, hired through the UAE-based Global Security Services Group, were deployed since 2024 to support the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan, and that they trained RSF child soldiers, a war crime for children under 15. Contractors were documented fighting when the RSF captured El Fasher in October 2025. The UAE denies giving military support to the RSF, calling its aid humanitarian.⁴⁷ These are allegations from one organisation, so present them as such.

⁴⁰ OHCHR. CAR: Russian Wagner Group harassing and intimidating civilians, UN experts say (27 October 2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/11/car-russian-wagner-group-harassing-and-intimidating-civilians-un-experts>

⁴¹ ACLED. Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴² The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner’s failure in Mali... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴³ UN News. Mali: Independent rights experts call for probe into Wagner Group’s activities... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴⁴ Al Jazeera. Russia’s Wagner mercenaries leaving Mali, Africa Corps to remain (6 June 2025)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴⁵ RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren’t Going Anywhere (June... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴⁶ The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner’s failure in Mali... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch. Sudan: Colombians Linked to Atrocities Trained in UAE Bases (25 May 2026). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/05/25/sudan-colombians-linked-to-atrocities-trained-in-uae-bases>

4.4 Somalia: private security and the state

Somalia has used private military and security companies for decades. DynCorp International, PAE and AECOM provided training support, and Selected Armor offered direct military support to the government. A study warns that PMSCs lacked accountability, which fed corruption, and that local elites used them to strengthen clans rather than state institutions, so the government could not hold a monopoly on force.⁴⁸

4.5 The Sahel: security sovereignty and new alliances

Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso formed the Alliance of Sahel States in 2023 and left ECOWAS. At the AES summit in Bamako in December 2025, the leaders announced a joint military force to fight terrorism. They say they act independently of Western influence.⁴⁹ The AES presents the change as a defence of sovereignty. Critics point to the security record of outside contractors and the harm to civilians.^{50,51}

4.6 The law: a convention in need of an update

The 1977 OAU Convention was adopted when newly independent African states faced destabilisation by mercenaries.⁵² It has 14 articles and no safeguard clauses for international humanitarian law.⁵³ Modern PMCs, sometimes state-linked, are hard to fit into the old definition.⁵⁴ In response, the AU review produced a 40-article draft with an oversight committee, wider definitions, reporting duties and a role for civil society.⁵⁵ At the global level, none of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council has joined the UN mercenaries convention.⁵⁶ Check whether your country has ratified the 1977 convention, and how it voted or spoke on the review.

⁴⁸ Canadian Forces College. The Use of Private Military and Security Companies in Somalia... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁴⁹ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁰ The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner's failure in Mali... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵¹ ACLED. Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵² Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵³ ICRC IHL Databases. OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (1977)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁴ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁵ Institute for Security Studies. The AU takes aim at Africa's new brand of mercenaries... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁶ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

5. Major Actors

5.1 Countries and regions

Your delegation may represent any country, and your country may not be listed here. The table shows broad patterns only. **Always check your country's recent statements, laws and policies before you rely on them.**

Type of country	What to expect
Sahel states (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger)	Stress sovereignty, defend their right to choose partners and to hold their own security policy, and have left ECOWAS for the AES. ⁵⁷
States with contractors on their territory (e.g. CAR)	Face pressure over abuses, and may argue that contractors filled real gaps in security. ⁵⁸
Sponsoring and home states (Russia, the UAE, others)	Often deny or downplay involvement, or describe it as training or humanitarian help. Russia now controls Africa Corps through its Defence Ministry. ^{59,60}
States with past experience of mercenaries	Often support a strong AU convention, having faced destabilisation since the 1960s and 1970s. ⁶¹

Almost every state says it opposes mercenaries and supports African security. The disagreements tend to come over **definitions** (who counts as a mercenary), **enforcement** (who checks and who punishes) and **sovereignty** (how far the AU can question a state's partners).

5.2 Organisations and networks

- **AU Peace and Security Council, ECOWAS and the AES.** The PSC drives the review of the 1977 convention, while ECOWAS and the AES offer competing regional approaches.^{62,63}
- **UN experts and the ICRC.** UN experts have called for investigations in Mali and CAR, and the ICRC promotes the Montreux Document.^{64,65,66}

⁵⁷ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁸ OHCHR. CAR: Russian Wagner Group harassing and intimidating civilians, UN experts say (27... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁵⁹ RAND. The Wagner Group Is Leaving Mali. But Russian Mercenaries Aren't Going Anywhere (June... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch. Sudan: Colombians Linked to Atrocities Trained in UAE Bases (25 May 2026)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

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⁶³ Africanews. Sahel Alliance leaders meet in Bamako to deepen break with ECOWAS (23 December... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁴ UN News. Mali: Independent rights experts call for probe into Wagner Group's activities... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁵ OHCHR. CAR: Russian Wagner Group harassing and intimidating civilians, UN experts say (27... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁶ ICRC. Private military and security companies (Montreux Document)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

- **Monitoring groups (ACLED, The Sentry, Human Rights Watch, ISS).** Publish the data and reports that shape debate.^{67,68,69,70}



⁶⁷ ACLED. Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁸ The Sentry. Mercenary Meltdown: Wagner's failure in Mali... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch. Sudan: Colombians Linked to Atrocities Trained in UAE Bases (25 May 2026)... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

⁷⁰ Institute for Security Studies. Mercenaries and private military security: Africa's thin grey... (See earlier note or bibliography.)

6. Preparing for Committee

6.1 Questions a strong resolution answers

1. **What exactly is being regulated?** Mercenaries, PMCs, state-controlled forces, or all three? Define the terms.
2. **Who is responsible?** The hiring state, the sponsor, the company, or the individual?
3. **How will it be enforced?** Who monitors, who investigates and what are the consequences?
4. **Does it respect sovereignty?** How does it protect a state's right to choose partners while protecting civilians?
5. **Does it help victims?** Are there remedies, protection for witnesses and access to justice?
6. **What is the alternative?** How will states meet real security needs without outside contractors?
7. **Does it fit existing law?** Link to the 1977 convention, the UN convention and the Montreux Document.
8. **Can it win support?** Will states from different regions and views vote for it?

6.2 Guiding questions for your research

1. Has your country ratified the 1977 OAU Convention or the UN mercenaries convention?
2. Does your country use, host or sponsor private military companies? What are the rules?
3. What has your country said about Wagner, Africa Corps or the AES?
4. How does your country define a mercenary in law?
5. What security problems does your country face that outside help might address?
6. What can your country offer: troops, training, funding or diplomacy?
7. Which countries share your goals, and where would you compromise?

6.3 Where to research

- **AU website and PSC communiqués**, for the review of the 1977 convention.
- **ICRC** pages on private military and security companies and the Montreux Document.
- **UN News and OHCHR**, for expert statements and reports.
- **ACLED, ISS Africa and The Sentry**, for data and analysis.
- Your country's foreign ministry and its statements at the AU and UN.

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<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/06/the-wagner-group-is-leaving-mali-but-russian-mercenaries.html>
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