4
The Public-Private Security Environment

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines some of the risks the UN is likely to countenance should it pay corporate agents to assist in peacekeeping and other operations on its behalf. In the business of conflict some private capabilities have outperformed public resources. Some have resulted in partial successes and there have been some failures. The expression ‘public-private security environment’ denotes a setting inhabited by providers who assess their merits to some degree against the performance of one another.\(^1\) This implies a certain friction accompanying the supply of private sector services to government, business and a widening niche in inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The following section canvasses the lengthy collaboration in violent enterprises between states and business. Mutual co-operation stretches back centuries, accompanied by constant and occasionally ruinous tensions. The third section analyses reasons for the move away from self-sufficiency amongst armed forces and towards the adoption of corporate support. Some of the more public successes and failures are identified along with areas likely to witness further expansion. The fourth section distinguishes corporate from state interests as private influence expands steadily within the public realm. These interests are sometimes confused and conflated. The fifth section on UN issues refers to problems likely to arise from closer relations between the parties. These obstacles would take the form of anticipated and unforeseen risks, costs and industrial tensions. The sixth section provides observations on the effects of recent and far-reaching US government policy changes. Some will assist the industry. Others will intrude into traditional UN peacekeeping. The seventh section canvasses moral hazards, something that will require an effective approach if the UN is to improve its reputation. The eighth section exam-
ines plausible reasons that may tempt UN members to sabotage the outsourcing option. Perhaps unexpectedly, several states could suffer a rise in security related risks should they tolerate the formation of a UN contract legion. Section nine contains a reflection on UN institutional culture and probable resistance to PMSCs that attempt to work in an unfamiliar UN domain. The conclusion summarises these issues before reference to further scrutiny of the industry in the following chapter.

### 4.2 History old and new

When Janice Thomson described the transition from heteronomy to sovereignty during the seventeenth century, she referred to change characterised by new means of organising ‘global coercive resources’. These included delegated authority to apply violence in the name of the sovereign. For well over 250 years, mercantile companies empowered by sovereign charters wielded force in the pursuit of profit. They were not eclipsed by succeeding developments until the nineteenth century. States no longer authorise private corporations to annex foreign territory. Nor does anything resembling or analogous to the chartered companies survive today. Modern military corporations of the present have been infrequent and much smaller actors. They rarely provide formations large enough to fight on their own and have generally trained and sometimes led others. Yet where the interests of states and businesses prove compatible, familiar forms of co-operation have emerged which at least echo traits which characterised an era long past.

When a new generation of private military interests was being formed around 1990 Thomson posed a prescient notion: if changes in the nature of war caused the decline of mercenarism, subsequent changes could lead to its revival. Mercenarism’s resurgence had arguably more to do with changes in economics and the evolution of the state. Nevertheless, her general train of thought presaged shifts which have driven a revival exhibiting both old and new characteristics. Perhaps most surprising is that the authority transferred to privates by European sovereigns in the seventeenth century has taken form in a new and unexpected avatar. This occurred when President Bush invited privateers to assist the US government in its war on terror. Here was a very public rejuvenation of an old form of non-state license in the use of violence. As Robert Mandel put it:

For the most militarily dominant nation in the world to seek the aid of private security providers in confronting a direct threat from