

Private Military Companies: Applying Managerial Efficiency within the African Wildlife Defense Force

Charles A. Keller II
The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

James Bezjian
The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

Benjamin P. Dean
The Citadel Military College of South Carolina

Rakib Ehsan
The Oxford Exchange

Louise Formby-Tiedman
The Oxford Exchange

Craig Tiedman
The Oxford Exchange

ABSTRACT

This case introduces the concept of Private Military Companies (PMCs). It highlights how PMCs such as the African Wildlife Defence Force (AWDF) are reorganizing and adapting the resources of paramilitary companies to respond to regional challenges such as the protection and conservation of wildlife across the African Continent. Yet, the reorganization presents challenges. The AWDF is structured as a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that synthesizes military organizational structure with a non-profit organizational business model. This case highlights the challenges of developing managerial efficiency uniting the two structures. Students are encouraged to explore new frameworks and recommend different business models to enhance the AWDF's managerial efficiency. This case suits undergraduate management students and aligns with the ESG curriculum and societal impact initiatives.

Keywords: managerial efficiency, private military company, non-governmental organization, not-for-profit, ESG curriculum, societal impact,

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INTRODUCTION

Thirty years of globalization have rapidly changed the traditional interplay of geopolitical alliances and business practices. The political, economic, and commercial rise of Asia, the Middle East, and South America created new power dynamics that challenged American hegemony around the world. Conflicts throughout the Middle East have generated harmful repercussions across global political and economic landscapes (Savell & Lutz, 2024). Any war causes negative domestic spillover effects for a nation-state, such as disrupted supply chains, greater inflation, and diminished goods for export (Goldstein, 2005; Rugman et al., 2006; Jaffe & Ellass, 2015; Federle et al., 2024). National economic output for nations at war is estimated to be reduced by 30% throughout a five-year campaign (Federle et al., 2024). Such outcomes reflect the substantial domestic cost resulting from conflict.

Adding further to the costs of conflict are the enormous expenses incurred by governments in building and sustaining military forces for projecting power and providing security. To achieve economic efficiencies and even to shape external appearances, nation-states have sought alternate military and security strategies, particularly the alternative of employing PMCs. Traditionally, PMCs have provided privatized military forces (Kinsey, 2006; Lawyer, 2005; Krahmman, 2008). Privatized forces potentially offer an attractive alternative to the challenges and expenses that state actors face in developing their own forces and employing direct methods of achieving military strength and national security (see Bures, 2005; Mursitama & Setyawan, 2012).

PMCs, however, have come under intense scrutiny for their role in modern warfare and peacekeeping (Ettinger, 2011; Lawyer, 2005; Hoffman, 2023; Godfrey et al., 2014). Partly in response to such scrutiny but also to expand their appeal to governments, PMCs have sought to find other avenues for applying their capabilities. For example, PMCs have been retained by smaller African nations to combat illegal poaching and animal trafficking, including through an organization called the African Wildlife Defence Force (AWDF) (Duffy, 2014; Duffy & Brockington, 2022; Kiala-Inkisi, 2024). AWDF illustrates how PMCs continue to impact transnational alliances and security arrangements through private enterprises applying innovative methods.

BACKGROUND

Historical Lineage of Private Military Companies

For the last three thousand years, PMCs have been a major feature of warfare, peacekeeping, and commerce combatively and strategically (McFate, 2014). Warfighting became a “capital enterprise” and, according to historian Michael Howard, “the biggest industry in Europe” as opponents continued to increase the number of forces present on battlefields and trade routes (McFate, 2014: pg. 29; Costa, 2013). Securing trade routes and passages of safety for vessels, vehicles, and people became a priority, and trade expansion by a nation-state became increasingly violent as armies grew larger, weapons became increasingly destructive, and the consequences turned more drastic (McFate, 2014: pg. 29; Zajacz, 2017). The demands for effective forces skyrocketed with power struggles worsened between Habsburg, Spain, and Holland and among Habsburg Austria, the Ottomans, and the French Catholics (O’Brien, 2011; Godsey, 2018). Out of numerical necessity, a new business field was born within warfighting

forces – *military enterprisers* (McFate, 2014). This drastically lowered an economic barrier to entry for warfighting, and consequently, “ever-larger battles” ensued (McFate, 2014; Conway, 2014). Access to larger forces also allowed rulers to wage war on a vastly greater scale without concern for national fiscal and administrative reform (Adams, 1999; McFate, 2014; Axelrod, 2013).

The original military enterprisers raised and produced armies, as opposed to commanding them (Axelrod, 2013; Conway, 2014). Though military enterprisers were private actors in a conflict and motivated by profits, “they typically worked in monogamous public-private partnerships with a government client to build armies rather than deploying them” (McFate, 2014: pg. 30). States found these middlemen of contractor history appealing for two primary reasons. Private military actors generate – not control – less threatening forces to their government clients (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2007; McFate, 2014).

Nations that gained freedom at the end of the Cold War gained greater access to international markets and more globalized PMCs. All this occurred while global threats expanded and security gaps emerged. Without state systems overlooking societies, much of the global order collapsed. The result was a mix of higher levels of capability, danger, and turbulence (Singer, 2008). Certain geographic zones experienced security gaps even as perilous new cultures enabled the brutalization of citizens by “transnational criminals, economic insurgents, warlords for profit, armies of child soldiers...” (Singer, 2008: pg. 51). The security gaps also reflected disruptions in the supply of effective military services (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2007; Singer, 2008). The private sector recognized and seized its opportunity, rapidly meeting the demand (Grillot & Grillot, 1998; Bohlen, 2003; Singer, 2008). Traditional state-led forces often proved dated, ineffective, and weak compared to the PMCs’ lean and efficient military structures (Prince, 2017).

The efficiency and effectiveness of private military services stimulated healthy competition between federal and private forces (Singer, 2008) but did not eliminate the need and demand for PMCs. In lieu of expending state resources to improve their direct capacity to meet security threats, nation-states have repeatedly turned to private firms due to their efficiency and effectiveness (Bohlen, 2003; Singer, 2008). PMCs currently apply their capabilities on behalf of various nation-states, particularly nation-states in the Sub-Saharan African regions. The United States, too, has employed PMCs to mitigate the strain on government forces and other resources in meeting security commitments on multiple continents, particularly the use of Blackwater across the Middle East conflicts (Harden, 2017).

AFRICAN WILDLIFE DEFENCE FORCE (AWDF)

As noted, African nations involved in anti-poaching efforts and wildlife protection turned to PMCs for help. These efforts also include bypassing corrupt government officials and engaging in broader activities that enhance wildlife conservation. The AWDF stands as an important example.

AWDF's founder, Jean Kiala-Inkisi, had conducted extensive field research in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and South Africa. Kiala-Inkisi hoped to generate solutions to Africa's problems of wildlife poaching and related state-level corruption. Kiala-Inkisi envisioned an “elite, specialized ranger units to safeguard Africa's-natural treasures” (Kiala-Inkisi, 2024: pg. 3). The organization was modeled after the French Foreign Legion and the Nepalese Gurkhas but adapted to wildlife protection (Kiala-Inkisi, 2024: pg. 3). In 2012,

AWDF was formed in the name of those brave enough to dedicate their lives to wildlife conservation (Kalron, 2013).

While AWDF remains a military force, the model has evolved. By 2020, the AWDF had shifted to exclusively recruiting and training forces. Rigorous and thorough training including, "...advanced techniques in wildlife capturing, drone operations, and parachuting, with further specialization in areas like K9 handling and air supply..." (Kiala-Inkisi, 2024: pg. 4). In addition, AWDF conducts a 17-week training program aimed at preventing corruption within units such as the Advanced Force Rangers (AFR) and the Special Force Rangers (SFR). AWDF provides trained forces to protect Africa's wildlife in a privatized stronghold, kept secure against armed poachers and federal corruption.

Additionally, AWDF is a regional pioneer in sustainability initiatives, demonstrated through its significant investments in agroforestry, wildlife farming, and insect management, all of which provide income streams used to conserve wildlife and forestry (Conciatore, 2020; Kiala-Inkisi, 2024). Such efforts further enhance AWDF's regional influence in developing and allocating militarized assets.

AWDF is a unique PMC; it operates as a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that relies heavily on donations. Within its security arrangements with specific African governments, AWDF receives subsidies to pay for training. This not-for-profit PMC model manifests certain weaknesses. As examples, AWDF struggles long-term to recruit and retain enough soldiers and staff, and the organization needs more managerial effectiveness and efficiency (Kalron, 2013).

Overall, however, AWDF provides African nation-states a cost-effective option and a viable solution for the long-term wildlife protection. This case thus reflects an innovative and successful application of a transnational strategy that engages private enterprises to provide essential military forces.

AWDF Business Model

The AWDF business model consists of four main areas (Kiala-Inkisi, 2024):

- 1) Organizational Structure and Operations
- 2) Revenue Generation and Capital Development
- 3) Performance Capabilities and Scope of Services
- 4) Military Governance, Resources, and Effectiveness.

The organizational structure of AWDF is comprised of military experts classified as Advanced Force Rangers (AFR) and Special Force Rangers (SFR) (Conciatore, 2020). These are soldiers who the French Foreign Legion and other PMCs primarily train. Training focuses on tactics and techniques for deterring poaching and protecting African wildlife. PMCs train them in parachuting skills, underwater combat, land navigation, and hand-to-hand combat. Additionally, the AFR and SFR soldiers are also equipped to handle conservation challenges in the harshest terrain. The AWDF focuses on localized recruitment from the Batwa Pygmies, who are known for their specialty skills of woodland and bush survival (Kiala-Inkisi, 2024).

The AWDF operates as a non-profit organization that relies heavily on donations, grants, government assistance, and capital campaigns. Nearly 80% of revenues go toward conservation and protection activities across the region, with the remaining 20% allocated toward administrative costs.

Finally, AWDF's internal military-type governance approach and associated paramilitary partners use military techniques and resources to achieve an environmental stewardship mission. However, this also presents a challenge for the management of AWDF. While the military approach helps to combat poaching and thus ensure wildlife sustainability, the approach does little for ongoing managerial efficiency and sustainable funding from civilian sources at local, national, and international governmental levels or from NGOs (Duffy, 2014; Conciatore, 2020). Thus, funding private ventures outside government entities is an ever-increasing challenge.

CURRENT CHALLENGE

As noted, AWDF is facing a challenge regarding its managerial efficiency as a non-profit organization. While AWDF's mission, vision, and plans are clearly articulated, AWDF is struggling to find a sustainable revenue stream to meet its ongoing operational and administrative costs. Additionally, managerial challenges in synthesizing non-profit and for-profit ventures have constrained long-term planning efforts and efficient resource allocations necessary to support conservation and anti-poaching efforts. The tension between for-profit and not-for-profit ventures has led to challenges with workforce management within AWDF. Operational challenges among special operators and other soldiers and paramilitary members of AWDF have contributed to burnout and avoidable injuries and stand-offs with heavily armed groups of poachers. There also is a need for more managerial effectiveness to help AWDF "achieve its objectives with greater precision..." and to enable sustainable growth and greater impact (Espitia-Escuer & Garcia-Cebrian, 2004: pg. 330). Because the AWDF works across various African nations, recruiting and retention have been challenging in a localized population adopting a paramilitary working model where employment is based in remote regions and areas of political instability.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the business model of the AWDF. How can this model be redesigned to enhance managerial efficiency and performance?
2. Focusing on AWDF's current strategies, what steps could management take to streamline operations and create efficient and sufficient cash flow for the organization?
3. In what way can AWDF manage the burnout and turnover among its employees to increase staff and soldier retention?
4. How can managerial efficiency contribute to regional engagement with local towns, governments, and organizations on a local, regional, and national level?
5. How can managerial efficiency contribute to creative marketing and capital campaigns to manage the challenge of a growing operational budget?
6. Does the AWDF business model in its current state provide clarity for how other PMCs can operate? How can managerial efficiency evolve the current business model?

7. How might the dynamics and potential benefits for a nation-state change if instead of hiring a fully privately owned PMC, it engages a PMC that is state-controlled or “publicly owned” (perhaps PMC Wagner, a group state-funded by Russia operating on behalf of certain African nation-states)?



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