

DUTCH NARRATIVES IN THE PRIVATE MILITARY SECURITY DEBATE

Abstract

In the last decades, Private Military Security Companies have become a mainstay on the international stage. In the Netherlands the debate concerning these PMSCs has mainly focused on a single industry, the shipping industry. With the use of the concept of narrative, recently introduced to the field of international relations by Alexander Spencer, the Dutch discourse was analyzed. Sources used are parliamentary debates, government reports and webpages belonging to PMSCs. Five distinct narratives were found in the literature, four of which were also found in the Dutch discourse. A fifth, unexpected narrative was also found, which the author has titled the 'tied hands' narrative.

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Introduction

Private Military Security Companies, or PMSCs in short, are not a new phenomenon on the (inter)national stage. As far back as the Middle Ages, Kings and Emperors would hire bands of mercenaries to fight in their wars. These groups would terrorize the lands, committing all sorts of what we would now consider war crimes. When the idea of a strong state, with a monopoly on violence rose to the forefront, these mercenary groups were no longer as popular as before. Professional standing armies, loyal to King and Country, were deemed to be preferable over loose groups only interested in monetary gains. The fear was that these groups were driven "by interests that were inconsistent with those of the states that hired them" (Ramirez & Wood, 2019, p. 1436). And so, these groups moved their area of operation elsewhere, into the uncharted wilderness where there was still a demand for quick and dirty fighters. States in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Guinea and Benin come to mind, where mercenaries played a role in coup attempts. (Adams, 2002, p. 55).

However, in recent times, PMSCs are once again at the forefront of (inter)national security, albeit in a different, more supportive, role. No longer are they the strike force of governments, hired swords that fight at the tip of the spear. They have instead become the trainers, cooks and cleaners of professional, national armies (Adams, 2002; Singer, 2001, p. 188). However, something has changed. In this age, PMSCs provide a different array of services, both to governments and private parties. No longer are they working just for states. Increasingly, PMSCs are hired by private companies.

PMSCs, being privately owned companies, some of which have a listing on stock-markets, are in the business of not only providing services but also of creating new opportunities for them to increase their revenue (Adams, 2002, p. 56). Expanding the range of services they offer to both private and public partners has allowed for PMSCs to grow beyond the confines of a single state.

Supporting armed forces is expensive and so certain tasks will be outsourced to third parties, PMSCs, who will take over these tasks from the military. PMSCs and armies coexist and cooperate in the theatre of war (Joachim & Schneiker, 2014, p. 246). The Dutch army is no exception to this as during the Afghan war the Dutch

military procured the services of PMSCs to perform a multitude of tasks, like the catering in military camps or the transport of provisions (AIV, 2007, p. 24).

PMSCs are still marked by the distant past of their profession. In the media and public perception, there is still this image of 'guns for hire', of trigger-happy men and women who, for a payment, are willing to work for anyone and do anything (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 2). It is a 'dirty' job, in the sense that it is not seen as a normal, desirable profession. In the face of this opposition, or hostile environment, how do the markets for these companies come about? How do PMSCs create a space for their existence and for the services they provide in a nation that, before then, did not have such companies? How do PMSCs, their opponents and proponents *frame* PMSCs and their activities?

Much has been written on PMSCs (see, for example, Higate, 2012; Ramirez & Wood, 2019; Singer, 2001), though most of it concerns those companies located in the United States and the United Kingdom, as they are amongst the oldest and largest of these companies, and their presence in Third World states makes them (appear to be) the most influential (Krahmann, 2005a, p. 278). In the beginning, much attention was given to the consequences of their employment and the legal ramifications this could have for the state that hired them (Krahmann, 2005b), while in recent years the focus of research has shifted towards the PMSCs themselves, their workings, regulations keeping them in check (or the absence of such regulations), their relation with their employers and how they can shape and alter the security-domain in which they operate (Joachim & Schneiker, 2014; Leander, 2004, 2009; Ramirez & Wood, 2019).

Some earlier authors make a very clear distinction between Private Military Companies (PMCs) on the one hand and Private Security Companies (PSCs) on the other, arguing that, thanks to the different nature that these companies provide, a distinction should be made. However, with the growth of the market, such a distinction is no longer as clear as it once was. Companies have merged and diversified, creating different divisions, enabling these companies to offer both private security and private military services

This paper will follow in this emerging tradition and look closely at Dutch PMSCs. It examines how they, their partners and their opponents create and shape the framework legal framework in which they operate. This paper will employ a

relatively new analytical tool in doing so; the narrative. Adapted from the field of literary studies, this theory of narrative has in recent years become more popular within the field of International Relations. It allows for a more comprehensive overview of the “dominance and marginalization of particular understandings of political actors” (Spencer, 2016a, p. 15)

Brief overview of the PMSC market in the Netherlands

The Dutch army has made use of PMSCs, though not much is known about the when, who and where. In Afghanistan and Iraq, various international PMSCs provided support to the Dutch army, including intelligence gathering, providing perimeter guards and maintenance on both aircraft and ground vehicles, though not much beyond that is known (AIV, 2007; Scott-Smith & Janssen, 2014).

Dutch PMSCs consist mostly of those companies that take over duties traditionally associated with the police, like standing guard in a grocery store, transporting money and other valuables or providing night guards. In summation, any “non-police functions” which are given a lower priority by the police can be covered by these companies. With increasing budget constraints and demands on police, more and more of these low-priority functions are created, increasing the range of services Dutch PMSCs can offer (de Waard, 1996, p. 3). However, their rights and responsibilities are not any broader than those of ordinary citizens. Based on existing law, employees of PMSCs are normal citizens, albeit with a somewhat special occupation. They are not allowed to carry weapons or make arrests, as they are still bound to Dutch civilian law (Committee Wijkerslooth, 2011, p. 15; de Waard, 1999; Scott-Smith & Janssen, 2014).

However, in more recent years, a different form of PMSC has risen in the Netherlands. These companies not only provide in the traditional services, they also offer something extra; protection of large, commercial freight ships traveling through piracy hotspots (AIV, 2010). The Dutch navy provides support as well, either through their participation in international anti-piracy missions or through escort missions, either with another ship or with placing marines on board these freight ships, for which the official term is Vessel Protection Detachments (VPD) (Committee Wijkerslooth, 2011). However, due to budget and time-constraints, this is not always possible. There are only so many ships and marines available. Add to that the sheer number of ships operating under Dutch flag and requesting

help, it is simply not possible to provide any and all with protection. According to the Advisory Committee on Armed Private Security against Piracy (the de Wijkerslooth Committee), close to 250 requests for protection had been denied due to lack of capacity (Committee Wijkerslooth, 2011, p. 32) As much was said by defense minister van Middelkoop (Scott-Smith & Janssen, 2014, p. 58). What's more, these escorts can have a negative effect on the earning of these transport companies. When requesting help, ships will also have to comply with instruction from the Navy, as well as keep to the time-table provided to them. As such, hiring private security personnel is seen as a great alternative that is less intrusive, more reliable and more flexible.

As of writing this, it is illegal for Dutch shipping companies to hire PMSCs that provide armed personnel onboard a ship, though the AIV notes in their 2010 report that this most likely is done anyway, as the Dutch state was unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection during transit through these high-risk areas. However, as there is no existing legal framework, this deployment of private security guards is done in a gray area, with all its negative consequences.

Important for this paper is the fact that in 2016, two Dutch MP's from coalition parties VVD and CDA introduced a law in Dutch parliament that would allow for the use of armed private security guards aboard freight vessels and that would allow for them to actively make use of weapons while aboard a ship flying the Dutch flag. This law passed through both houses of parliament and is currently being implemented by government. For four years, this law was debated in both houses of parliament. PMSCs, advocacy groups for the shipping industry and the media commented on the law and the larger issue of private guards. This all makes for a very interesting case and timeline, where the policy-making process is out in the open with opportunities for stakeholders to get involved and try to influence the outcome.

Chapter 1; Theory

Now that the broad strokes are set, it is time to look more closely to the issue of PMSCs, narratives and discourse.

This chapter begins with a theoretical discussion on narratives and their usefulness with regards to discourse and PMSCs. As we are talking about influence, some attention must be given to theories of power, most notably the Two Faces of Power by Bachrach and Baratz and the Three Dimensions of Power by Lukes (Bachrach & Baratz, 2017; Lukes, 2005). After this section, a broad overview of the different theoretical approaches to PMSCs and their rising to prominence is presented. Classical, main-stream International Relations thinking will be presented alongside with Governance theory and some new, up-and-coming theories. It is from these theoretical approaches that some *expected* narratives are formulated in the chapter on methods. It will conclude by circling back and providing a short overview of this chapter so as to refresh and prepare for the following chapters.

Narratives as a tool

The idea of the narrative is not a long-present tool in the toolbox of the international relations scholar. Only recently has there been an increase in interest to this idea. A driving force behind this is a book by Alexander Spencer titled 'Romantic Narratives in International Politics : Pirates, Rebels and Mercenaries'. In this book, Spencer argues that the idea of the narrative, originating in literary studies and narratology is well-suited to the study of international relations, especially with the rise of discourse analysis (Spencer, 2016a, p. 13). But how can we take something from a very different field and adapt it to fit to the study of international relations? This section will provide an answer to that question, using the book by Spencer.

The concept of narrative originates in the fields of literary studies and narratology but has also been adopted by scholars of history and psychology. So, it is not too farfetched an idea to incorporate this concept into the field of political science and international relations. For literary studies and narratology, the narrative permeates our very existences. Spencer notes that "narratives can be found in almost every realm of human life where someone tells us about something" (Spencer, 2016a, p. 14). Narratives can be found in novels, study

guides, newspapers, TV shows. Even this very paper that you are reading right now is in and of itself a narrative on the importance of narratives when studying PMSCs.

However, not everything is considered to be narrative. When it appears, it is all-pervasive, but it does not appear everywhere (Spencer, 2016a, p. 15). Some scholars consider a key aspect of narratives to be that there is a goal to the telling of a narrative (ibid.). For this paper, the assumption is also made that there exists a larger goal behind the narrative, the narrative is a tool used to further a goal, the goal of the person(s) telling the narrative.

For political science and international relations, this link between their field and the concept of narratives is now clearer. Narratives, sometimes used as a synonym for concepts such as arguments, discourse and frame, are ways in which people give meaning to events, ideas and norms (Spencer, 2016a, p. 23). Van Meegdenburg shows this in her paper on the Danish relationship with PMSCs. She notes that "although Denmark too has to balance its international engagements with the limited resources allocated to defense (the typical functional pressures), Danish particular 'soft' neoliberalism and 'hard' commitments to IHL speak against using private actors to make that possible" (van Meegdenburg, 2019, p. 26).

In her paper, van Meegdenburg finds that, though there were few instances of outsourcing defense tasks to private partners and clear reasons to continue to do so, the Danish attitude towards armed conflict runs counter to employing private partners in a military capacity (ibid., pp. 36–38). Because, she says, the Danish people understand themselves to be a certain way, employing PMSCs is out of the question. The Danish people, van Meegdenburg says, adhere to international humanitarian law and to a state's monopoly on violence. It is simply not thought to be a reasonable solution to a problem. This understanding of the self, of the state, came about through decades of reinforcement and reinvention (ibid., 37). Through this understanding of the self PMSCs are transformed into non-viable partners, as their actions appear to be incompatible with the norms and values the Danish people attribute to themselves.

This understanding of the self is done through telling a story, a narrative. In the case of van Meegdenburg, the Danish people tell a story about how they as a people act and respond to the world around them. It is here that narratives become

a useful tool. They can help us in understanding and explaining “political behaviour on all levels of political life in a community, such as the family, the state or the international organization” (Spencer, 2016a, p. 24). If we know the narrative that drives a community, we can better understand why that community does the things it does. The Danish see themselves in a certain light and as PMSCs are perceived to run counter to that, PMSCs are dismissed as a viable partner. The narrative has ruled out certain actions. So far, what has been discussed does not appear all that revolutionary. Constructivist theory has always payed attention to identity and how it impacts decision making. Concepts such as framing and discourse fill a similar space and are sometimes even equated to narratives. Spencer however argues that the concept of narrative goes much beyond the current understanding and use in political science. Up till now, IR has not focused on “specific characteristics of what constitutes a narrative” (Spencer, 2016a, p. 25).

Narratology, according to Spencer, offers a more structured way of analyzing data. Three concrete categories, visualized in figure 1, have to present before we can speak of the existence of a narrative (ibid.). The following sections will present those categories.

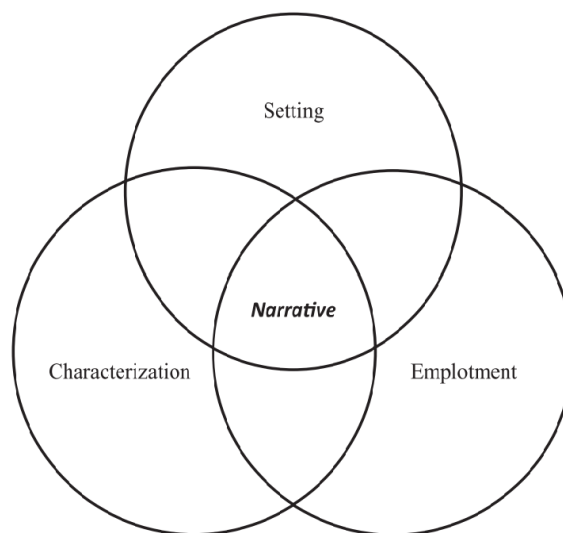


Figure 1; Elements of a narrative, (Spencer, 2016, p. 25)

Narratives are a way of making sense of the world, a way of constructing that which it seeks to represent. This is very much in line with social constructionism, but narratology takes it a step further (ibid., pp. 26-27). One of the cornerstones of a narrative is the setting in which this narrative takes place. As much as a

theatre play has a stage, so too does a political narrative have a 'stage' where the 'story' is acted out. However, in contrast to a theatre play, the audience of a political narrative has some freedom in creating this stage. "A setting is, however, never complete, as it cannot show or describe the whole 'story world' or universe in which the story is taking place. It always has to leave spaces which can be filled by the reader's or viewer's imagination" (ibid., p. 27). The setting allows for the audience to have some clue as to the context and the cultural underpinnings of the narrative. It offers guidelines with respect to appropriate behavior (ibid., p. 28).

The next cornerstone of narratives is the character or the identity. Every story must have characters around which the story is built. Again, we see a link here with social constructionism, where identities are constructed by the social norms and ideas in which people exist and act (ibid., p. 28). Narratology takes it a step further and argues that these social norm and ideas present themselves through a narrative (ibid.).

Interest again emerge from the narrative. As Spencer puts it, "Narratives constitute not only identity as a static picture of the self but importantly narratives include what we consider appropriate behaviour in a given situation" (ibid., p. 30). Narratives inform us on which actions are to be deemed permissible and which are to be discarded.

The construction of identity in a narrative is often done through the characterization of actors. Actors are presented as having certain traits, behaving in a certain way. Through this, the audience creates a larger identity that they then ascribe to the actor.

The thirds and last cornerstone of the narrative is what is called emplotment. "Emplotment provides an overarching context and makes events, characters and their behaviour coherent and intelligible, as it offers an explanation or reason for why settings or characters are the way they are and why they behave in the way they do" (ibid., p. 32). Emplotment provides the reason behind action. Emplotment comes in two forms, temporal and causal. The temporal emplotment is, simply said, concerned with order, duration and frequency. What is the sequence of events as presented in the narrative, how long did certain events last and how frequent do these events take place. The overall insight given by this temporal

emplotment is which events are brought to the foreground and which events are kept in the background (ibid., pp. 33-34).

Causal emplotment tells us why something happened, why a certain actor took certain actions. Together, temporal and causal allows us to “understand the relationships between the setting, characters and events by outlining how and why things happened the way they did” (ibid., p.35). Only then can an audience form an opinion on the characters and their actions.

Now it is important to make a note on the causality of narratives. With narratology, there exist two schools of thought; those that attribute causality to these narratives, that is to say that narratives cause outcomes, and those that speak not of causality but of constitution. It is this second school that this paper adheres to. Narratives do not directly cause certain outcomes. This would be very hard to argue, as there would have to be independent and dependent variables while one of the main concepts of social constructionism and narratology is mutual constitution of these variables. As such, a narrative does not cause an outcome but it creates outcomes that are considered meaningful and outcomes that are not. Narrative analysis does not explain why something happened but it does explain the context and structures that lead to an outcome (ibid., pp. 36-37).

Here we conclude our overview of narrative analysis. In Spencer’s book, titled *Romantic Narratives in International Politics : Pirates, Rebels and Mercenaries*, further explanations can be found, amongst which an entire section on different genres of narratives. For the purpose of this paper, that section is of lesser importance and has thus been skipped, but the interested reader is encouraged to pick up this book.

The following section will go deeper into the question of power. After all, if the claim is that narratives has some influence on the outcomes of discourse, narratives must have some sort of power, same as those that can employ these narratives.

Theories of Power

PMSCs have, as described above, influence. Influence is a form of actualized power, a way to exert the power that is vested in an entity. To better understand the influence, or power, that a PMSC has, we turn towards theories of Power. Two understandings of power are of particular interest when it comes to PMSCs. The

power to shape the agenda, set forth by Bachrach and Baratz, and the power to shape interests, set forth by Lukes.

Bachrach and Baratz see two faces of power; the very direct, observable power of making person B do what person A wants them to do, and the obscured power of person A determining what person B can and cannot talk about. As Bachrach and Baratz put it themselves, their second power "is also created when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A." (Bachrach & Baratz, 2017, p. 948). This agenda-setting power allows an actor to influence those topics and ideas that are deemed appropriate and those that are not. In terms of a PMSC having this power, it would mean that the only ideas and topics up for discussion would be those that are in some way beneficial to the PMSC (Leander, 2004, p. 803). A PMSC has, of course, not so much power that they can decide this on their own, but they can certainly exert some influence. As for the first face of power, PMSCs of course have access to this power as well. Any nation that relies on a PMSC in order to provide security to its citizens is loath to antagonize said PMSC, because this PMSC might just decide to withdraw from the nation, leaving the nation vulnerable and unprotected. PMSCs might want to (ab)use this position to their advantage, threatening to leave if the state does not do as the PMSC wants.

Luke acknowledges the two faces of power, but adds a third, even more invisible power, the power of person A to make person B want what person A wants them to want. Or, as Lukes puts it, "is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have - that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?" (Lukes, 2005, p. 27).

Here, what Lukes is talking about is a process which happens before any decision is made. Here, the very desires and goals of person B are altered to fit those of person A, often without person B being aware of this.

Here, a PMSC would achieve this through their participation and cooperation with government. By slowly 'pushing' their worldview, decision makers can be influenced to think along the same lines. PMSCs can "shape the interpretations of security through their non-negligible role in training and consulting within the

armed forces and the state in matters of security, both at home and abroad” (Leander, 2004, p. 817).

What follows now will be an overview of narratives about PMSCs found in literature. Three distinct narratives will be presented though they are of course interrelated in some aspects.

The Classical view on PMSCs

Traditionally, the study of International Relations was (and still is, though to a lesser extent) dominated by Realist and Liberal theories, and when it comes to PMSCs this is no different. Although repeating them here might be redundant, it is important to do so nonetheless in order to better understand the approaches that some scholars take when it comes to PMSCs and their employment.

These two theories then, Realism and Liberalism, take as their starting point that the state is at the center of it all, and then diverge when it comes to non-governmental actors (Mearsheimer, 2013). Realism sees no role for them whereas Liberalism gives them a more supportive role, a different avenue for states to exert their influence.

Realism conceives of international relations as a struggle to survive, to maintain ones place in the world all the while being besieged by all other states, all vying for the same resources. There is no place for altruism, for long-lasting cooperation. There are no eternal friends, only eternal adversaries (Bell, 2017; Lebow, 2013; Mearsheimer, 2013; Morgenthau, 1950). Because of this, there is no international authority, as states will never adhere to this, as they are ultimately in pursuit of their own interests and should these interests clash with any international authority, these states will then dismiss the international authority. In other words, the international stage is characterized as being in a state of anarchy, a ‘war of all against all’ where every state is looking to gain an advantage over the others while at the same time keeping all others in check so as to not allow them to grow too powerful (Morgenthau, 1950; Waltz, 1979). And because states are rational, self-interested entities, they will always choose those actions that have the best outcome for themselves.

This process creates a Balance of Power, where all states strive to keep each other in check. After all, if one state were to gain a too large advantage, it might very well threaten the continued existence of the other states in the system. And

so, the struggle for balance is ultimately a struggle for survival. In this thesis, the question of why states strive for this not important, but interested readers could consult *Politics Amongst Nations* by Hans Morgenthau or *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz, two foundational works within the Realist school. For this thesis however, it is enough to know that states are the central, sole actors on the international stage and that they strive for a balance between all other states.

Liberalism has in common with Realism that they too see the state as the central, main character on the international stage. However, where the Realist fears that this 'war of all against all' is everlasting, the Liberal sees a way out, a light at the end of the tunnel. Through democratic principles and norms, free trade and international forums where states can meet and discuss, cooperation is possible. The end goal, is, according to Kant, a "federation of interdependent republics", where states are linked through trade and cooperation but ultimately are still sovereign (Russet, 2013, p. 95). This is a way out of the anarchical international stage.

Important as well is the notion that states are assumed to make "decisions based on a set of self-interested priorities and according to a strategic cost-to-benefit analysis of possible choices, reactions, and outcomes." (Sterling-Folker, 2013, p. 115). It shares this notion with Realism, placing them in the same category when it comes to their understanding of the relationship between the state itself and those that operate within the state. For Realism, the state is a single entity "with particular, specifiable goals, rather than composites of many different domestic actors and competing interests" (ibid.). For Liberalism, the interest of the state is arrived at through domestic processes involving competing domestic partners, but in the end it still falls to the state to achieve these goals. So, while the domestic levels plays a bigger role than in Realism, it is still the state that, in the end, is the important player.

It is here that we can link all this back to PMSCs. When PMSCs are researched from the perspectives as described above there is no room for the PMSCs themselves. States, being the only actors that matter, are seen as the sole holders of power, making a rational choice based on cost-benefit analyses to employ PMSCs (see, for example, Krieg, 2014; Mohlin, 2014; Schreier & Caparini, 2014; Singer, 2001). In these traditions, PMSCs are weapons in the hands of

government, inanimate objects that are to be used by states to further their own goals. There is no place to think about the influence that PMSCs themselves could have on government decisions, on policy and perhaps even on the international stage itself. There is no room to see them as having a will of their own, with their own goals and aspirations (Leander, 2004).

States, it is argued, make use of PMSCs for two main reasons and one minor reason; firstly, PMSCs can provide those services that traditionally were provided by national armed forces more efficiently, that is, cheaper but at the same quality, or at a higher quality for the same price (Avant, 2004; Swed & Crosbie, 2017). Add to that that, once services are no longer required and any contract has come to its end, any costs associated are no longer there. Maintaining armed forces in peace-time is costly, at least more so than hiring PMSCs (Cockayne, 2009). Wages have to be paid even if soldiers are not actively performing those tasks for which they were trained. Material needs to be maintained and replaced, new recruits need to be hired and trained to replace those that choose to retire or make a career-switch. By relying on PMSCs, states can cut down on the funding of their own armed forces. If the state has to spend less resources on their armed forces, it can spend those resources in other areas where there is more need (Adams, 2002, p. 59; van Meegdenburg, 2019, pp. 27–28).

The minor reason behind states employing PMSCs in order to diminish military casualties as states “became much more sensitive to the domestic political consequences of military casualties, especially for causes not directly tied to the national interest” (Adams, 2002, pp. 58, 62). It is much easier to ‘sell’ an armed conflict if the risk for your ‘own’ people is much lower. Soldiers coming back in body bags drives home the reality of the situation and domestic support might dwindle as a result. If you can alleviate this issue by (partially) employing PMSCs, thus decreasing the risks for your ‘own’ troops, you run a lower risk of having casualties.

The second main reason is that it allows states to ‘punch above their limit’, to participate in military missions that they would otherwise not be able to participate in. PMSCs act as ‘force amplifiers’ that increase a state’s military capabilities beyond what it would normally be able to deliver. Missions that the military can not accomplish, either due to lack of material or expertise, can be ‘outsourced’ to PMSCs. After the Cold War, expenditure went down, as there was no more great

external threat that loomed over the West. As a result, expertise was lost, which cannot be rebuilt quickly in time of need. This is where PMSCs step in, with an offer of temporary expertise.

All of the above leads to two possible narratives; the Realist narrative which presents PMSCs as weapons to be used by states to maintain and/or increase their influence, and the economic narrative which takes from both schools of thought. In the economic narrative, PMSCs are tools to *protect* the economy, either through lowering costs for government or protecting vital interests. Both narratives place the state at the center, presenting a one-way relation between state and PMSC, where the PMSC is a tool in the hands of governments which can be used strategically to achieve certain goals that the government has set.

PMSCs as actors of their own

In response to the rather rigid, state-centered Realist and Liberal schools which could not explain, for example, the end of the Cold War (Fierke, 2013), scholars have sought out new ways to incorporate other, previously ignored actors into their analyses of International Relations. Coined under the umbrella-term of Constructivism, these theories, each with the emphasis on something else, see the world as something that is in a constant state of change. As Fierke puts it, it is “not that actors are totally free to choose their circumstances, but rather that they make choices in the process of interacting with others” (Fierke, 2013, p. 189). The state is not a unitary actor with a singular will, it is made up of a multitude of different actors, all contesting and shaping the direction the state will take, both domestically and internationally.

Important here is the idea of mutual constitution, where individuals, states and anything in between are capable of influencing their environment and being influenced in return. Another important concept introduced by constructionism is the idea that (international) politics are not just a cold calculation. Actors act in a certain way not only because they think they can benefit in some way, they act in a certain way because they believe it is the right way to act. Actors are guided not only by cost and benefit, they are also guided by norms and values. And there is a constant push-and-pull, a constant contestation of these ideas, values and norms. It is here that there is room for the PMSC to influence the state that hires them, to influence policy and opinion. But so too is the PMSC influenced by the

state. Rules and regulations force the PMSC to behave in a certain way, to operate within the confines of the state in which it finds itself. But not only can the PMSC influence the state, it can also influence other institutions and citizens with whom it comes into contact. As van Meegdenburg puts it, “a country’s use or non-use of PSMCs is not the outcome of a functional imperative but is better understood as the outcome of a process of sense- and decision-making” (van Meegdenburg, 2019, p. 38). That is to say, the decision to employ or allow the employment of PMSCs is not just a cost-benefit analysis. Deeper issues such as culture and identity play a big role. How a state perceives of themselves, and how they perceive PMSCs, is an important factor when deciding on such issues. In the study by van Meegdenburg, one interviewee notes that, with regards to employing PMSCs “that would never work, not in the Danish model. ... *we don’t think like that*” (van Meegdenburg, 2019, p. 37). This suggests that there exists an idea of what should be done and that PMSCs do not fit with that idea.

This decision-making process is something where PMSCs are increasingly present. In them being hired, they bring in their analyses, their assessments and their modes of thinking. A PMSC that is hired to gather intelligence is also in the business of analyzing it, of presenting it *in a certain way*. Through this, the PMSC can influence the security discourse. What is considered a ‘security’ problem and what are accepted solutions to such a ‘security’ problem. This is of course also a political discourse (Leander, 2004, p. 813). By offering training and educational programs, PMSCs shape attitudes within the armed and security forces, which in turn influences the decision-making processes, as politicians rely on experts in these fields to inform their decisions. Furthermore, as they are seen as experts, they sometimes are directly consulted on policy-matters. According to Leander, “as private specialists on violence they are filling functions similar to those filled by their public counterparts” (Leander, 2009, p. 53). Last but certainly not least, PMSCs are involved in framing both “an understanding of problems as security problems primarily and for the specific solution they have to offer” (Leander, 2009, p. 53). They actively lobby decision makers and partners at all levels in order to sell their conception of security problems, their conception of the world (Leander, 2004, pp. 816–817).

And of course there is the normalizing presence of PMSCs in everyday life. By simply being present as, for example, a security-guard at a local supermarket, the

existence and hiring of PMSCs is normalized. We grow used to them, we accept them as a fixture in our society, something that is naturally present, even if 20 years ago they were a rarity.

Government, it is argued by some, is increasingly changing into governance. But what is this governance? Stoker characterizes it as follows; "governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred" (Stoker, 2018, p. 15). It is government in a new coat, a different mechanism looking to achieve the same outcomes. Government is a centralized, top-down system that sets up what to do in which way. Governance, on the other hand, is a more deliberative, hands-off system that sets out goals but then leaves it to the stakeholders to figure out how to get there (within certain limits of course). It is a process of accommodating different standpoints and interests (Keping, 2018, p. 3; Pierre, 2009, p. 591; Somerville, 2005, p. 118). As Stoker puts it; "It [the difference between government and governance] is rather a matter of a difference in processes (2018, p. 15).

At times, Governance is used to justify budget cuts by claiming that the combination of public and private partners will create a more efficient system. Other times, it is argued that governance will lead to a more democratic system where citizens have more input through self-governance.

A great example of governance and PMSCs is the UK, where a scheme was invented called Private Finance Initiative, whereby private partners were contracted to complete and manage public projects, such as military bases and training facilities. In return, government would pay yearly rates plus interest, making this (hopefully) a good investment opportunity for private corporations. In 2018, there were 39 of such projects operational in the UK out of the 700 total projects. However, it should be noted that these 39 projects had the second-highest capital value at just over £9bn (Infrastructure and Projects Authority, 2018, p. 6). These projects range from housing to IT-support, with values ranging from £5m to £2687,6m. These are all projects outsourced to private partners through a bidding process, created with the belief that a private partner is more incentivized to perform the tasks with efficiency in mind. Through competition and a bidding-process, these private partners are stimulated to provide the best service

for the lowest cost. This, it is believed, will lead to a more efficient and responsive system.

Of course, governance is not the end-all, holy grail system when it comes to public-private partnerships. Krahmman notes that "Private governance actors frequently lack so-called 'input' legitimacy due to their limited accountability, transparency and public participation in organizational decision-making" (2017, p. 54). These private partners are, in the end, business partners that are looking out for their bottom line. Public officials are known to their constituents and can thus be held accountable. For the CEOs of these private partners, this is not the case. The answer not to the voters but to their investors. So, some would argue that governance could even lead to a worsening of the democratic system, where responsible parties can hide in anonymity.

Narratives following the theory of governance would present PMSCs as equal partners that would be able to share their expertise in order to assist the state with managing problems relating to security.

A fourth and fifth possible narratives can be found in Spencer's book and an article by Schneiker et al., which will be called the positive and negative mercenary narratives (Schneiker et al., 2019, p. 484; Spencer, 2016b, p. 125). Both Spencer and Schneiker et al note that PMSCs still struggle with their image as being 'mercenaries' and that they go to great lengths in order to combat this. So, on the one hand we can have a negative narrative, portraying PMSCs as bad actors that should not be engaged with and on the other hand we have a positive narrative, told by PMSCs to counter this negative narrative. As Schneiker et al. put it, "Given that ... negative labels are harmful to their business, PMSCs go to great lengths to discredit them and avoid being 'perceived by the voting public as immoral, unpatriotic mercenaries' (2019, p. 484). Or, as Spencer notes, "PMSCs attempt to tell narratives and constitute certain images of themselves and communicate these to an outside world" (2016b, p. 125).

So, the negative or anti-mercenary narrative will present PMSCs as embodying a plethora of negative traits such as cowardice and disloyalty (ibid., p. 128). Mercenaries are only in it for the monetary gains and have no real loyalty to those that employ them.

The positive mercenary narrative will try and counter this anti-mercenary narrative. Spencer found that in the US, this was done through characterizing PMSCs as providing innovative solutions to newly emerging security issues and those that work for PMSCs as patriots willing to fight for their country. "Company leaders are characterized as 'a proven, experience-forged senior leader in military and international affairs' and 'epitome of a warrior, a powerful leader of men, and a living example of a moral, ethical life in action'"(ibid., p. 146). A link to the national military enforces the idea that PMSCs and their staff are still patriots, even though they have retired from the military.

Summary

This chapter started out by defining what a narrative is. In short, the narrative has three pillars that distinguish it from normal speech; a setting, a character and plotment. What or who is being talked about in which context? Not all three pillars have to be present in equal parts, but they have to be present.

Then, a quick excursion was made to theories of power so as to better grasp why narratives and those that employ narratives, in this case PMSCs, can be said to have power. By setting the agenda and demarcating the accepted boundaries of possible options, certain problems and solutions are legitimized while others are ostracized.

Lastly, five possible narratives, extrapolated from literature, were presented; the realist narrative which focusses on capabilities, power and presence, the liberal narrative which focusses on a (rational) cost-benefit analysis and the governance narrative, which focusses on PMSCs as potential partners to the state in order to collectively solve problems related to security. The other two, the anti-mercenary and positive mercenary narrative are intertwined and focus more on the (perceived) nature of PMSCs and their actions.

Chapter 2; Methods

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodological underpinnings of this thesis, sketching in broad strokes the shape that the analysis will take. This chapter will start off with a section on the case selection, followed by a section on the specific method of analysis applied to the selected case. After that, the process of operationalization will be discussed. A discussion of data-sources and critical points that can be made with regards to the chosen method will conclude this chapter, hopefully having presented a clear enough picture to move on to the analytical part of this thesis, where the data collected will be presented, analyzed and discussed.

The Dutch Case

This thesis will study a single case. This case being the Netherlands and the decision to provide more capabilities to Dutch PMSCs. The goal is to determine which of the different narrative discussed in the previous chapter are present. In this thesis, a case is a "spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time" (Gerring, 2007, p. 19). That is to say, a specific unit, observed over a defined time-period. For this thesis, that unit is the Netherlands. First, a justification for this case is provided, after which the time-frame is further specified and justified

The choice of a single-case study was based on several theoretical and practical considerations. Starting with the theoretical considerations, a single-case study lends itself greatly for a deep and thorough analysis (Gerring, 2007, p. 20).

This thesis is informed first and foremost by a constructivist approach, focusing on narratives, communication and beliefs. Due to the difficulty to capture this adequately through a qualitative analysis, a quantitative single-case study was deemed to be necessary.

When looking at broader research and the cases chosen, the Dutch case constitutes a deviant case. According to Seawright and Gerring, a deviant case is a case that "demonstrates a surprising value" (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 302). Compared to PMSCs with headquarters in the US and UK, which have been the frequent subject of study, Dutch PMSCs have to deal with a market and political landscape which is very different.

Most studies focus on US or British PMSCs, large international corporations that have government contracts, often times participating in wars or the maintenance of military infrastructure. Much legislation is in place and the range of services they can provide, and the means they can employ when providing these services has been much debated. Political liberalism and the ideas of governmentality are very present in these countries, allowing for these PMSCs to present their capabilities or 'products' as being a cost-effective way to hand over these government tasks to a private partner. Add to that the larger military commitments that the US and the UK have, this creates a market with a large demand for public-private partnerships and a government that facilitates this.

The Dutch landscape for PMSCs is very different. Some of the large, international PMSCs do operate in the Netherlands, but there are no large Dutch PMSCs. Dutch PMSCs are much smaller, are less visible to the public and their clientele is predominantly private instead of public. Legislations is fairly limited and thus these Dutch PMSCs often operate in gray areas (Committee Wijkerslooth, 2011, pp. 26–27). A recent exception to this are the laws regulating private guards aboard freight vessels.

One of the major services offered by Dutch PMSCs is the protection of commercial sea-faring vessels, mostly freight ships that have to navigate international waters where pirates operate. These ships fly the Dutch flag, meaning that anyone aboard these ships falls under both International maritime law and Dutch law (AIV, 2010, p. 30). It is only recently that the Netherlands has implemented specific laws that regulate how PMSCs can effectively guard freight vessels, increasing the actions and means that contractors are allowed to take while protecting these vessels. However, it is suspected by the AIV that even before these laws were introduced, shipping companies hired armed guards to protect their ships when traveling through dangerous waters (AIV, 2010, p. 31). This, the AIV argues, could have led to situations of abuse, where these private guards were hired 'under the table' with no proper licensing, with all the negative consequences this can have (ibid.).

All this makes for a set of characteristics that is very different from the standard cases used in earlier studies, which justifies referring to the Dutch case as a deviant case.

In addition to the already mentioned characteristics, the Dutch case also is interesting because it provides us with an opportunity to study PMSCs in an as-of-yet understudied state. Additionally, this case provides us with an opportunity to study the impact PSMCs can have on the decision-making process. The Netherlands is a new and understudied case when it comes to PMSCs and this legislation process, started in 2016, provides the perfect opportunity to take a closer look at the Dutch PMSCs and their interactions with the government.

Furthermore, the introduction of new regulations is accompanied by an increased interest in that which is the subject of the new regulations. Debates take place in parliament, political parties communicate their stance, news media is incentivized to report on PMSCs and PMSCs themselves communicate more in order to sway the process in their favor. This provides us with an amount of data that would be hard to obtain were such a law not be proposed.

All in all, this makes the Dutch case a great case to study in order to better understand what influence PMSCs can have on the legislative process in a country where there is not much regulation to speak of.

As was alluded to in the previous sections, the main time-frame for this case-study runs from 2016 till 2019. The discussed new legislation was introduced to parliament in 2016. Two members of government parties introduced this law and after 4 years of deliberation in both houses of parliament this law was passed in 2019, with the implementation planned in 2020-21 (though this could be delayed due to the current crisis with regards to the COVID-19 outbreak).

However, to better understand already existing sentiments, government reports, published in 2007, 2010 and 2011 will also be analyzed, as these reports might still have an effect in 2016. After all, stakeholders would have most likely fallen back in these reports in deliberations.

Content Analysis

For this thesis a content analysis will be conducted on the basis of multiple sources, including written texts and spoken words. Through this analysis, the relevance of the multiple narratives introduced in the previous chapter will be determined.

Content analysis as defined by Krippendorff (in White & Marsh, 2006, pp. 23-27) is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use". Texts (or other meaningful matter) that are useful are "composed of linguistic elements arranged in a linear sequence that follows rules of grammar and dependencies and uses devices such as recurrence, anaphora and cataphora, ellipsis, and conjunctions to cause the elements to "hang together" to create a message (cohesion)." (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 28). In other words, content analysis takes these modes of communication, these attempts to convey a particular message, and systematically tries to understand what this message is and how it is conveyed.

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) distinguish between deductive and inductive content analysis. Deductive content analysis is based on a coding-system developed on the basis of existing research prior to the analysis of texts. This requires prior knowledge and works best when the aim is to test existing theory. Inductive content analysis is employed when not much is known beforehand. As there is little to no prior knowledge, it is impossible to create a coding-system before analyzing the data. As such, in inductive content analysis the coding-system is created in tandem the data-analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). Once all the data is analyzed and many different categories have been created, the great 'collapsing' begins. Similar categories, all derived from the data, are collapsed into larger, more broader categories or narratives.

This thesis will make use of a mix of deductive and inductive content analysis. As such, there is no prior coding scheme in place that can be presented, as it is *a priori* not clear which narrative are present in this case and how they present themselves in the data. This follows the inductive approach. However, from the theory some *expected* narratives can be extracted. What follows in table 1 will be a description of how these *expected* narratives are *expected* to be presented in the data. This could be seen as deductive, as these *expected* narrative are found in prior research, though this research is not related to the Dutch case.

| Expected narrative | Broader description | Expected signifying words/ideas |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Realist | PMSCs are functional tools to be used by states in order to increase or maintain their influence in a larger, more complex world. PMSCs are considered 'force multipliers' in that they allow states to do more than they otherwise would be able to do. | Influence, capabilities, keeping up with others, continued cooperation with others, staying involved |
| Economic | PMSCs are a way to more cost-efficiently carry out traditional government duties through cooperation between the public sector and the private sector. | Efficiency, cost reduction, free market, expertise, austerity |
| Constructivist | PMSCs are independent actors that can contribute to a better understanding and management of Security in all its forms | Partner, advice, expertise, cooperation, learning from each other |
| Anti-mercenary | PMSCs are no more than mercenaries, cast in a different light | Mercenary, soldier-for-hire, only in it for the money, no accountability, no loyalty |
| Positive mercenary | PMSCs are loyal, patriotic ex-servicemen who are honorable and are fighting for something greater than money | Ex-service, former soldiers, patriots, honor, emphasizing a link with the country, examples of humanitarian aid |

Table 1; Expected Narratives and their expected signifiers

It should be noted that the above table is by no mean exhaustive, during the analysis other narratives and signifying words could come to light. As such, this table, with any new additions, will once again be presented at the end of the analysis to give a clearer overview of those narratives present in the Dutch political debate.

One single occurrence of a word or sentence is not enough evidence for the existence of a narrative. Ideally, signifiers will be found in multiple data-sources so that we can speak of an overarching narrative instead of a one-off statement.

Overview of data sources

As was done in earlier research (see, for example, Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, 2014), the public communication of several Dutch PMSCs will be analyzed. Web-pages, social media accounts and documents published online will be analyzed in order to better understand how these companies (wish to) present themselves to the outside world, which narrative(s) they wish to have present in the political discourse. The nature and overall theme of the individual sources will be analyzed, with attention to some of the recurring key words/phrases/themes so that they can be contrasted and compared to other sources.

In order to find evidence in line with the respective narrative in the political discourse, parliamentary debates and committee-meetings will be analyzed. This will allow for the discovery of those narratives not pushed by PMSCs, should they exist, as well as discover which narratives and arguments pushed by PMSCs resonate within the political discourse. Here too, attention will be payed to which member of parliament says what, so that perhaps something can also be said with regards to the relation between political affiliation and supported narrative, though this would be a reach.

A critical look

A single-case study has its limitations. Even though it allows for a thorough investigation of a single case, any generalization is difficult, because it is in fact the different, case-specific particularities that makes a case so interesting. In time permitted, selecting multiple similar cases would allow for stronger, more general conclusions A single-case study can serve as example for similar studies of other cases, or it can be used in Quantitate Case Analysis studies, but any results coming

from this specific study should not be seen as having any predictive power other than in relation to future studies of the same case.

The inductive content analysis has similar problems. Because the categories or narratives arrived at at the end of the analysis are, in a certain sense, 'made up', it is difficult to transpose these categories to future research. In the end, this will be a subjective analysis of the data and different scholars might arrive at different narratives and conclusions. It is of course also possible that the data-sources selected are biased on one way or another. Perhaps different sources would paint a different picture, reveal different narratives.

This paper does not look at media sources, such as newspaper articles or television broadcasts. This is solely for practical reasons, as it would be of great benefit to the study to do include these sources. For one, most of these articles are hidden behind a paywall, making it difficult and costly to access. Add to that the fact that, compared to the other sources, there is less data. Last but not least, it would be very difficult to add an analysis of the media to the other data sources within the current time constraints. So, even though it would strengthen this thesis, the choice was made to not include media sources in the analysis.

Of course, time permitting, it would be better to pick multiple cases so that a form of comparison can be made. Alas, this was not possible within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it would still be possible to compare this thesis to other, similar works through, for example, QCA. Thus, the hope is that this single-case study will still offer some insight, even if it is only insofar that it simply studies a new case, expanding the list of cases to choose from.

Chapter 3; Analysis

This chapter will present the results of the analysis. The chapter is structured as follows, first, every source of data is presented on its own. This chapter will start with a section on the government reports published in 2007, 2010 and 2011. After that a section on PMSCs and their social media use, followed by a section on the parliamentary debates. At the end, these sections will be combined to provide a more general overview.

Important to note here is that most of the data is in Dutch. When quotes are used, one must be aware that these are translations, so some nuance may be lost in translation.

In the appendix the raw findings can be used, which will include the raw text or idea and the page on which it was found.

Government reports

Three influential reports were analyzed in order to better understand the overall landscape of the debate in 2016. These reports are, essentially, a trilogy, with each report building on the one before that. What follows are the outcomes of the analysis of these three reports.

AIV 2007

The first report, published in 2007 by the Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken (AIV). The AIV is an independent research institution that can be tasked by government to study problems relating to international relations. This report tackles the broad question of the what's and how's of employing PMSCs, as the Netherlands had, at time, already been employing PMSCs in multiple different regions (AIV, 2007, pp. 5, 7). What follows is a table presenting which narrative were found how many times in the 2007 report.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances (percentage of total) |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Realist narrative | 8 (24%) |
| Economic narrative | 9 (27%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 16 (49%) |
| Total | 33 (100%) |

Table 2; Narratives found in AIV 2007

Some interesting findings can be presented for this first report. When looking at the economic narrative, two out of the nine instances can be classified as negative or non-supportive. That means that these two instances did not present PMSCs as more efficient or a way to save money. In the report it says, for example, that “in practice, it won’t be easy to find out if the hiring of capacities will really be cheaper” (ibid., p. 12). It also says that “the prediction that the use of PMSCs in ongoing conflicts will save money can’t be proven” (ibid., p. 14).

Also of interest is the way in which the anti-mercenary narrative is present. Five of the sixteen instances of this narrative mention a scandal that PMSCs have been involved with, with Blackwater (now operating as Academi) being mentioned four times and DynCorp one time. This fixation on scandals, as well as the use of words such as *reckless* and *irresponsible* paints a negative picture. Multiple instances of describing PMSCs as being driven primarily by monetary gains and shareholder concerns, leading to the presenting of PMSCs as a risk to the Netherlands. The report speaks of “inherent and fundamental contradictions of interests ... can cause great damage” (ibid., p. 15). The hiring and use of PMSCs can, according to this report, lead to damage to Dutch prestige and authority as well as damage to operations (ibid., p. 35).

As for the third narrative, the Realist narrative, instances are very much in line with expectations. PMSCs allow for government to be more flexible and better able to pursue political goals (ibid., pp. 14, 30). However, there is also a note of necessity in the report, with observations such as “Our country [The Netherlands] does not at this time appear to be capable or willing to free up troops to guarantee existing supply lines without that [the freeing up of troops] hindering ongoing operations” (ibid., 28).

AIV 2010

The second report, by the AIV as well, was published in 2010 and focuses on the problem of piracy for the Netherlands, with a few sections discussing the roles PMSCs can play when it comes to tackling this issue. Overall, PMSCs are discussed less in this report when compared to the 2007 report.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances (percentage of total) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Realist narrative | 1 (12,5%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 3 (37,5%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 4 (50%) |
| Total | 8 (100%) |

Table 3; Narratives found in AIV 2010

As is clear from the table, there were much less instances of narratives in this report. Interesting is that the positive mercenary narrative is present here while it was absent in 2007 while the economic narrative is missing. The only time that the realist narrative is present is to note that government can't provide protection to all Dutch ships requesting it due to "logistical constraints" (AIV, 2010, p. 28).

The anti-mercenary narrative presents the presence of PMSC as potentially escalating the violence. A mention is even made of a potential "civil arms race on sea" (ibid., p. 29). PMSCs are likened to "cowboy companies", giving them the characteristic of being reckless and untrustworthy (ibid., p. 28). Lastly, it is noted that "hiring of unknown, internationally operating PMSCs leads to abuse" (ibid., 31).

The positive mercenary narrative is the most present narrative in this report. The most notable instance of this narrative is when PMSC employees are being described offering "professional services of ex-military, especially marines and special forces" and making use of "ex-military personnel from India and the Ukraine" (ibid., 28). This links PMSCs to the military, creating an image of professional, well-trained employees who have experience with these operations.

Adviescommissie Wijkerslooth

The third and last report is a report by a committee (committee Wijkerslooth) tasked to look into the “desirability and possibility of private armed guards aboard freight vessels to counter piracy” (Committee Wijkerslooth, 2011, p. 7). This touches upon the ideas of sovereignty and the monopoly on violence, which the Dutch government argues still lies with it. Here too, the report only briefly touches on PMSCs, most of the report discusses legal and practical problems that the state has to deal with

| Found Narratives | Number of instances (percentage of total) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Realist narrative | 1 (12,5%) |
| Economic narrative | 1 (12,5%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 5 (62,5%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 1 (12,5%) |
| Total | 8 (100%) |

Table 4; Narratives found in Committee Wijkerslooth 2011

Here, we see another instance of presenting PMSCs as tools to divert some auxiliary tasks away from the military so that the military can “free up capacity to focus on core tasks” (ibid., p. 25). The economic narrative is once again one of PMSCs presenting an opportunity to deal with budget cuts or “if government is unable or unwilling to pay the price” (ibid., p. 26).

The most prevalent narrative is once again the anti-mercenary narrative, this time focusing not so much on PMSCs as only being in it for the money, as was the case in the 2007 report, but on PMSCs as unregulated and uncontrolled entities (ibid., pp. 26-27). There is once again a mention of a fear for “escalation of violence” and an “unclear chain of responsibility” (ibid., p. 27). The one positive light in this report is the mention of “a regime of self-regulation” (ibid., p. 27).

The table above once again shows that there were much less instances of narratives found when compared to the 2007 report. However, some trends can be discerned, which will be presented below.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances AIV 2007 | Number of instances AIV 2010 | Number of instances Wijkerslooth 2011 | Total instances |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Realist narrative | 8 (24%) | 1 (12,5%) | 1 (12,5%) | 10 (20,4%) |
| Economic narrative | 9 (27%) | - | 1 (12,5%) | 10 (20,4%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 16 (49%) | 3 (37,5%) | 5 (62,5%) | 24 (49%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | - | 4 (50%) | 1 (12,5%) | 5 (10,2%) |
| Total | 33 (100%) | 8 (100%) | 8 (100%) | 49 (100%) |

Table 5; Narratives found in AIV 2007, 2010 and Committee Wijkerslooth 2011

In the realist and economic narrative, the state is at the forefront and PMSCs are seen as tools that are available to government. PMSCs are characterized as being efficient, effective tools that can *get the job done*, so to speak. Here, the setting is the (inter)national conflicts in which government must operate, and the plotment is of having to deal with a struggle for power in the realist narrative and budgetary constraints in the economic narrative. Governments are driven by a need to on the one hand keep a strong outward appearance to stay relevant in an ever changing world but to do so in a cost-effective way.

In every report, the anti-mercenary narrative had a large presence. As can be seen in table 4, 49% of all instances found carried the anti-mercenary narrative in many different forms. The setting in these narratives is of the PMSC as an actor in international conflicts, characterized as unruly, uncontrollable. References to scandals hammer this message home that PMSCs are, at best, untrustworthy and at worst a liability to a governments standing and goals. The plotment or motivation for PMSCs is presented as being monetary gain, pleasing the shareholders. And the PMSC will go to great lengths to achieve this goal, even if in doing so it damages its client.

The very small positive mercenary narrative emphasizes the professionalism of PMSCs by linking them to military service, instilling a feeling of trust. PMSCs are actors on the international stage that bring a professional, calm and supporting

presence. They are driven not by monetary gain but by a wish to provide security and safety to their clients.

The governance narrative is not present in any of these reports. At no point were PMSCs presented as possible partners with whom government could cooperate in permanently delegating some of its tasks. Instead, there was an emphasis on strict government oversight on PMSCs, keeping a tight leash so as to avoid any unfavorable outcomes. The Wijkerslooth report words this as ensuring that the monopoly on violence remains firmly in hands of the government.

Online presence of PMSCs

This section will analyze the online presence of three Netherlands-based PMSCs, these three being Brain Security and Diving Operations (BSDO), Infinite Risks International (IRI) and Exclusive Security Services & Special Assignments (ESS&SA). Homepages and existing social media accounts are analyzed, both written text and visuals, in order to gain a better understanding of the narratives that these three PMSCs are presenting.

BSDO

The first PMSC is also the one with the smallest online footprint. Their homepage features a photo of a soldier aiming a gun away from the observer into the void, almost as if the soldier is leading in the front. This reinforces the idea that the visitor, a potential client, is in need of protection against the unknown threats that exist. If we look at the bottom of the page a list of partners can be observed, including the Dutch ministry of Justice, emphasizing that they are a trustworthy partner. After all, the ministry wouldn't continue working with them if they were not right? (BSDO, 2019b).

If we take a look at their page on maritime security, a similar photograph as used on the homepage can be observed. This time, we see a soldier staring at the sea, gun ready, clearly on the lookout for any dangers. A small introduction is written under this photograph, explaining that their employees are all "highly trained specialists, mostly ex-commando's or marines coming from the Dutch armed forces" with "at least 4 years' experience as active soldiers and at least one tour" (BSDO, 2019c). Here too, the same partners are shown at the bottom of the page.

Looking at some of the other pages on their website, words and phrases such as “a client’s needs”, “professional”, “respect”, “personal wishes” and “well qualified” appear on most pages (BSDO, 2019c, 2019a, 2019d). All this presents us with a narrative which takes the PMSC as a facilitator of the client’s needs. The PMSC is a trustworthy, thorough and well-equipped partner who’s first priorities lie with the client. By linking their employees to military service, an image of well-trained, experienced and trustworthy guards is created, someone you can entrust your life and wellbeing to. The driving force is not any monetary gain but the safety and wellbeing of the client. As can be expected, on the webpage of a PMSC, we find a positive mercenary narrative.

IRI

With IRI, we can even learn something from the name, Infinite Risk. The world is a dangerous place, full of uncertainty and risk, and IRI can help you guard against those uncertainties. This is reinforced by photographs of men in black suits wearing sunglasses, depicting the archetypical bodyguard; professional, steadfast and ever vigilant. Exactly the type of guard you would want in this world of infinite risks. And Infinite Risk International can supply you with those guards (IRI, 2019c).

IRI has an English webpage, clearly catering to an international audience. Quotes on the bottom of the webpage, sourced from governments, companies and private persons, regale of the professionalism, trustworthiness and client-focus that IRI provides. The introductory text on the front page emphasizes that IRI is a “global security agency founded by an experienced group of elite security and intelligence professionals” that focusses on keeping the client “safe, happy and comfortable” (ibid.).

If we take a look at their *about-us* page, we again find a mention of “recruiting our security officers from former elite military, police and intelligence services” with an addition of “US and British licensed operators” (IRI, 2019a). However, there is also emphasis on the Dutch nature of IRI and its operators. The Dutch are presented as having “perseverance, willpower, and realistic way of life” and “cultural awareness ... and social ability” (ibid.) These characteristics, it is argued, are the exact qualities that make their operators so well-equipped to help and guard the client (ibid.). And it all stems from the *Dutchness* of IRI.

Another interesting aspect can be found on the Media Security page, where IRI presents their services when it comes to protecting members of the media, either on assignments abroad or in the home country. The dangers that journalists are exposed to are emphasized, after which a range of services to counter those dangers is presented. Again, the fact that IRI's operators are former Dutch and UK special forces is mentioned (IRI, 2019f).

The last point of interest on the webpage of IRI is their blogs. Blogs with titles such as *Is Brazil safe, Are the Netherlands safe or Bodyguard services in New York* are another way of presenting yourself as a solution to a problem. First, these blogs describe the situation. The Brazil blog, for instance, discusses topics such as *violence and crime, female travel and health*. After this more descriptive part, the blog moves on to what IRI can provide in term of security in Brazil. First, a problem is created, after which a number of solutions is presented, all the while of course mentioning the fact that IRI operators are former Dutch special forces who take the needs of the client as the greatest good (IRI, 2019d, 2019e, 2019b).

The webpage of IRI presents their corporation and operators as highly trained, former Dutch and UK special forces who place the needs of the client at the heart of their job. The link to Dutch culture serves as a way to humanize the operators, it presents IRI as something to be proud of as a Dutchman. This small, Dutch company that is so Dutch can compete with the big international firms. This creates an extra layer of linkage with the Netherlands, atop of the linkage created by constantly mentioning the former Dutch special forces that work for IRI. It is after all harder to critique something if you see part of yourself in it.

By emphasizing media security, IRI presents the image that they work for the greater good, protecting journalists and thus the flow of information. Presented as providing a public service, it form extra justification of the existence of corporations like IRI.

Now we turn to the social media use of IRI, in this case twitter and Instagram. Twitter is a medium where short, 280-word messages and links can be shared. IRI primarily uses twitter to share their blogs with a wider audience, but it is also used to reinforce the linkage between IRI and the military. On the 17th of April 2020, for example, a message was placed commemorating the 10th anniversary of the death of two marines in Uruzgan, Afghanistan (IRI, 2020a). Another message,

posted on the 17th of December 2019, links to a report by Reporters without Borders detailing the threats that journalists faced that year, accompanied by hashtags such as *medieecurity* and *mediaprotection* (IRI, 2019g). The last common use of twitter for IRI is to share reports of violent happenings such as kidnappings, terror attacks and pirate attacks. All of this combined reinforces the narratives presented on the webpage of IRI; that it is a company with links to the Dutch military, committed to protecting its clients in a dangerous world with the use of highly trained, professional operators.

IRI's presence on Instagram, a medium where users can publish photographs and share these with others, paints a different picture. Gone are the mentions of violence, gone is the link between IRI and the Dutch military. Instead, the glamorous side of the services that IRI provides is shown. Photographs of parties, superyachts and tropical destinations are shown. Instagram appears to be used more as a recruitment tool, displaying the benefits of working for IRI (IRI, 2020b). This can also be considered part of the positive mercenary narrative, as it counters the notion that being a 'mercenary' is a dirty job. These photographs show the complete opposite, they show that some of the most prestigious and celebrated events and celebrities make use of these 'mercenaries'. This is of course great PR for companies such as IRI.

ESS&SA

ESS&SA is solely focused on providing maritime security and this is reflected in the photographs displayed on their webpage. Large freight ships and superyachts, the property that ESS&SA is in the business of protecting, are on display. Here too, the website is in English, clearly targeting international clients.

It is clear from the information on the front page that ESS&SA is presenting the positive mercenary narrative in a different way when compared to the other two companies analyzed. ESS&SA heavily emphasizes its compliance to "the highest (inter)national legal, regulatory and industry requirements" (ESS&SA, 2017d). At the bottom of this page, a whole list of different certifications is shown (ibid.). There is even a separate compliance page, listing nine different qualifications that ESS&SA holds (ESS&SA, 2017c).

When taking a look at the company profile page, once again the adherence to regulation catches the eye. But what also stands out is the language when it comes

to the relationship between ESS&SA and its clients. Here, ESS&SA considers itself to be “essential to ensure safe passage” and that “ESS&SA has at heart to build a solid personal relationship with its client” (ESS&SA, 2017b). There is even a link to ESS&SA’s *code of ethics*, leading to a 7-page document discussing the code of ethics that operators will have to adhere to. Here, we see another form of creating a trustworthy image; ESS&SA puts the client first and foremost and adheres to all possible regulation, ensuring that the safety of the client is ensured in such a way that will not negatively impact the client’s prestige and standing.

The only mention of operators having served in the military can be found on their recruitment page, where one of the requirements to join is a “minimum of 4 years of military/law enforcement service” with “proof of Honorable Discharge” (ESS&SA, 2017a). However, nowhere else on the webpage is this mentioned.

ESS&SA also makes use of twitter, though very different when compared to IRI. ESS&SA was active on twitter up until the 13th of March 2018, when the law that would allow PMSCs to deploy armed guards on maritime vessels was passed. After that point, there was no more activity. Any activity before that point consisted of publishing incident reports of pirate attacks in the areas where ESS&SA is active. One can argue that this was done in order to showcase the threats that exist and that this law would allow ESS&SA and other PMSCs to counter. Once the law was passed, the need for this was gone and as such, ESS&SA stopped using twitter.

Summary

The online activities of all three of these companies all present the positive mercenary narrative in different forms. There is emphasis on having a connection with the military and in the case of IRI an attempt to humanize the company by stressing the *Dutchness* of the company. Then there is the approach of stressing the compliance that you adhere to in the case of ESS&SA. This counters any concerns when it comes to conduct and the negative consequences that can be associated by employing PMSCs. By emphasizing that the services you provide also serve a public function, some more negative associations can be countered, such as that PMSCs are ‘only in it for the money’. Lastly, each of the three companies stressed the importance of the client to them, further countering the supposed ‘self-centeredness’ of PMSCs.

All in all, the narrative that seems to be presented takes PMSCs as providers of safety to whomever might need, placing the client at the heart of their every action and being driven not by money but by providing the best service possible through well trained operators.

Dutch debates

Now we have arrived at the heart of the analysis, the parliamentary debates on PMSCs, in particular if and how the Dutch government would allow shipping companies to contract PMSCs to guard their ships. Two debates, both held in 2018, were analyzed. These debates are sequential, meaning that in the first debate, question were asked which were answered in the second debate. Each debate will be presented severally, after which the two will be combined to come to a more complete understanding of the narratives present in these debates. The only speakers were members of parliament with no outside experts or other stakeholders being allowed to speak.

The first debate; Bescherming Koopvaardij

Held on the 23rd of January 2018, this debate was the first two debates on the proposed law by to members of parliament to allow armed private security personnel aboard merchant vessels. First, a table with the found narratives will be presented before moving on to each specific narrative and taking a closer look at how this narratives took shape in this debate.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances (percentage of total) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Realist narrative | 16 (29,6%) |
| Economic narrative | 16 (29,6%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 8 (14,8%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 6 (11,2%) |
| Tied hands narrative | 8 (14,8%) |
| Total | 54 (100%) |

Table 6; Narratives found in debate 1, 2018

The debate, though shorter than the second debate, held the most instances, with some interesting findings. First up is the realist narrative, one of the two most prevalent narratives throughout this debate. One notion that stands out is that there is a “war” against piracy, which the Netherlands has fought with the use of traditional means but that now requires more modern ones (Tweede Kamer, 2018a). And one of these modern tools to fight this war is of course the deployment of PMSC operators aboard merchant vessels. The military only has so much resources that they can allocate and PMSCs are presented as being an enhancement to those resources, something which can be used if the military can’t provide the requested services. In the Netherlands, Vessel Protection Detachments are available to shipping companies. These VPDs are groups of marines which can travel aboard merchant vessels to guard them. However, the VPDs cost the government money and are in limited supply (ibid). So, PMSCs are presented as an alternative; if VPDs are not available or too expensive, PMSCs are allowed to be used. Essentially, PMSCs are presented as a tool, used to fill a gap in resources and flexibility that are inherent to the military.

As for the economic narrative, the importance of the shipping industry for the Netherlands is hammered home. It really is a “pillar of the Dutch economy” and if it were to be threatened by, say, pirates, there would be “grave ... economic consequences” (ibid.). Add to this that PMSCs can provide the same kind of service as VPDs at lower costs which would in turn be good for the competitiveness of Dutch shipping companies, and PMSCs are presented as an integral part of keeping the Dutch shipping industry afloat.

The anti-mercenary narrative is highly focused on a single word; “cowboys” (ibid.). Of the eight instances, seven involved the word “cowboy” while the eighth warned of “a wild-west situation at sea” (ibid.). In this context, the “cowboy” is seen as lawless and “trigger happy”, not being subject to any oversight whatsoever.

The positive mercenary narrative takes an interesting approach, presenting PMSC-operators as people who “serve Dutch interests and Dutch people” and who should be “awarded for their service to Dutch interests” (ibid.). There also exists the notion that PMSC-operators should be given the same legal status as VPD-members, drawing a closer link between PMSCs and the military. One interesting comment that stood out is talks about the link between private security and ancient

Cartage, where Hamilcar is said to have used mercenaries (ibid.). This could be seen as an attempt to paint 'mercenaries' as an ancient trade, with us throughout history and not something to be ashamed of. If it was so bad, how come it is still around after 3000 years?

The astute reader will have noticed a new narrative being present in the table above. This new narrative, the 'tied-hands' narrative, is very present. The main line is as follows; other countries have allowed PMSCs to be deployed on merchant vessels. This has allowed for international security standards to rise. If Dutch shipping companies can't hire PMSCs and thus can't meet those security standards, they will lose their contracts as their clients will choose for shipping companies which can meet those standards. So, if the Dutch shipping industry is to stay competitive, PMSCs must be allowed to provide their services (ibid.). Furthermore, there is the danger of Dutch shipping companies leaving for countries that do allow them to hire PMSCs and foreign companies not being willing to move to the Netherlands, causing the vital Dutch shipping industry to weaken. Or, to put it in other words; "if all countries around us allow private security but we don't, it'll disrupt the position of the Dutch maritime sector" (ibid.). There is a need to adopt PMSC use to stay up-to-date with other countries. PMSCs have become a fixture in the international sea trade and the Netherlands is forced to follow suit lest they doom their maritime sector. It is simply a question of moving with the international flow.

The second debate; Initiatiefvoorstel Ten Broeke en Van Helvert Wet ter Bescherming Koopvaardij

Held on the 6th of March 2018, this debate is the continuation of the first debate, with the same participants. As with the first debate, first a table of all found narratives will be presented before taking a more closer look at each of those narratives.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances (percentage of total) |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Realist narrative | 11 (25,6%) |
| Economic narrative | 10 (23,3%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 4 (9,3%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 14 (33,5%) |
| Tied hands narrative | 4 (9,3) |
| Total | 43 (100%) |

Table 7; Narratives found in debate 2, 2018

Here, we find most of the narratives, with the exception of the constructivist narrative. While there are many mentions of PMSCs having expertise, they are nevertheless never put in an equal relationship with government. Their expertise is a reason to make use of them but it does not give them a seat at the table.

If we take a look at the realist narrative present in this debate, one of the terms that stand out is 'monopoly of violence'. The argument here is that it is the government who holds the monopoly on violence, which it can then bestow on others to use that violence to further the goals of government. In other words, "the conditions of the use of violence are set by the State, so that, if the State so decides, private persons may also use violence" (Tweede Kamer, 2018b). Later on in the debate, it becomes clear that PMSCs are not allowed to operate on merchant vessels without the "express approval of the minister" (ibid.). This reinforces the idea that PMSCs are not equal partners but a tool which can be held by government if they so please. Other than this 'monopoly of violence', terms such as 'war' and 'police' are also used, instilling the notion that PMSCs are there to fight this 'war'

or to take the place of the 'police' when out on sea. Added to this is the much-present notion that PMSCs can step in where government can't fulfil its obligations to the shipping companies. Striking here is the comment that "it is not cooperation but subordination" (ibid.). The first option must always be support from the government; if that is not possible one can look for alternatives in the private sector.

The economic narrative emphasizes the importance of the shipping industry for the Dutch economy, detailing how much BPN it adds, how many jobs it provides. Claims such as "90% of Dutch trade is done by ship" bring to light the contribution to the Dutch economy the Dutch shipping industry brings (ibid.). Piracy is a threat to that contribution and PMSCs are part of the solution to this threat, and are as such vital to the Dutch economy. Of course, there is also the familiar theme of PMSCs being a cheaper alternative to VPDs. Thanks to their "expertise" "experience" and "flexibility", PMSCs are able to provide the same level of security for a lower cost, or so the argument goes (ibid.). There is also the idea that, if the use of PMSCs rises, the military can reallocate some of its budget. If the need for VDPs decreases, that part of the budget that was reserved for VDPs is freed up and available to other, more pressing issues. All in all, PMSCs are presented as having positive economic outcomes associated with them.

The anti-mercenary narrative is not very present in this debate, mostly referring to possible "cowboys" and "Rambo's at sea", fearing that, if the proposed legislation does not pass, shipping companies will illegally hire less-than-trustworthy PMSCs (ibid.). There is a single mention of the Blackwater scandal, but all in all the narrative here is one of 'a few bad apples' that need to be removed (ibid.).

The positive mercenary narrative has a few interesting aspects, first and foremost the idea that Michiel de Ruyter, Holland's best known and most successful admiral, a national hero, is presented as being a 17th century private maritime security guard, fighting against pirates in service of both the state and the shipping companies. This lends a certain historical flair to PMSCs and bestows them, partly, with some 'Dutch glory' (ibid.). This is further reinforced by presenting the shipping companies that would make use of PMSCs as "god-fearing, Orange-loving [Orange being the national color of the Netherlands and the name of the Dutch royal family] proud Dutchmen" with "companies that are our heritage". Of course, the people

who put themselves in harm's way to protect these important Dutch companies deserve our respect and admiration (ibid.). Add to this all the link that is made between PMSC-operators and the navy (which was invented, some say, by Michiel de Ruyter) and we are presented with a picture of patriotic, well-trained men and women who protect Dutch heritage, following in a tradition which has existed for centuries.

The 'tied hands' narrative here takes an interesting turn. PMSCs must be allowed to operate aboard merchant vessels because if they are not, shipping companies will re-flag their ships to countries which do allow PMSCs to operate on ships. The Netherlands is presented as "the last country to not have a solution to piracy if government can't provide" (ibid.). If the Netherlands do not follow the other European member states, "Dutch shipping companies will move abroad ... and foreign shipping companies will not want to move to the Netherlands" (ibid.). So here, PMSCs are presented as almost being inevitable. If the Netherlands wants to stay up-to-date, PMSCs must be allowed to operate in the Netherlands.

Summary

Multiple narratives were found in the two debates, presented below.

| Found Narratives | Number of instances debate 1 (percentage of total) | Number of instances debate 2 (percentage of total) | Total number of instances found (percentage of total) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Realist narrative | 16 (29,6%) | 11 (25,6%) | 27 (27,9%) |
| Economic narrative | 16 (29,6%) | 10 (23,3%) | 26 (26,8%) |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 8 (14,8%) | 4 (9,3%) | 12 (12,4%) |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 6 (11,2%) | 14 (33,5%) | 20 (20,5%) |
| Tied hands narrative | 8 (14,8%) | 4 (9,3) | 12 (12,4%) |
| Total | 54 (100%) | 43 (100%) | 97 (100%) |

Table 8; Narratives found in both debates

The most interesting outcome of the analysis is of course the presence of a not-expected narrative; the 'tied hands' narrative. Looking back, there was one instance of this narrative in the very first report discussed, the AIV 2007 report.

This instance was not taken into consideration as it was just that, a single instance. Here, we see that the narrative plays a much more substantial role. PMSCs are presented as something that has to be dealt with, whether one likes it or not. Their presence and use has become the international norm and not adopting that norm would only damage the interests of the Netherlands.

The realist and economic narratives are clear-cut and closely related. The realist narrative envisions PMSCs as a way to shore up any deficiencies that exists within the Dutch military. If, either due to lack of personnel or budget, government can't provide the safety that is requested by shipping companies, PMSCs are allowed to step in. And the only reason why this would be allowed is because those shipping companies contribute greatly to the Dutch economy. PMSCs are thus necessary in protecting a vital part of the Dutch economy, though the aim is to use them as little as possible.

The anti-mercenary narrative focusses on the presentation of PMSCs as potential "cowboys" who, if not kept under control, will act in a way that is undesirable (Tweede Kamer, 2018b, 2018a). In terms of setting, character and emplotment, we can say that the setting is the international shipping sector, the character is one of recklessness and incompetence and they are emplotted by greed.

The positive mercenary narrative presents PMSC-operators as patriotic semi-soldiers who put their lives on the line for the protection of Dutch interests. PMSCs are providers of efficient security with well-trained operators often having a military background. The setting is once again the international shipping sector, but now they are characterized by expertise, patriotism, a willingness to serve. The emplotment, their main goal is no longer money but the satisfaction of their customers.

Again, as with the three reports, we see no governance narrative present in these debates. While the narratives are overall in favor of making use of PMSCs, there is great reluctance to consider PMSCs as equal partners to government. Instead, they are to be treated as tools, kept on a tight leash with strict control over their every action. They are not meant to replace government responsibilities, only to step in when government can't meet those responsibilities. And even then, they are subject to much scrutiny.

Chapter 4; Conclusion and discussion

This thesis set out with the goal to identify which narratives are present in the Dutch political debate on the use of PMSCs. From the literature, five possible narratives were identified, these five being the realist, economic, governance, anti-mercenary and positive mercenary narratives. Through the analysis of government reports, parliamentary debates and the online presence of Dutch PMSCs, four of those possible narratives were found, with one new narrative being added. These five found narratives are presented below in the table which was also presented in the methods chapter.

| Found narratives | Broader description | Found signifying words/ideas |
|------------------|--|---|
| Realist | PMSCs are functional tools to be used by states in order to increase or maintain their influence in a larger, more complex world. PMSCs are considered 'force multipliers' in that they allow states to do more than they otherwise would be able to do. | Influence, capabilities, continued cooperation with others, staying involved, flexibility, references to being in war, shaping political ambitions, objectives, policing, providing protection, monopoly on violence, |
| Economic | PMSCs are a way to more cost-efficiently carry out traditional government duties through cooperation between the public sector and the private sector. | Efficiency, cost reduction, free market, expertise, austerity, protecting economic interests, creating jobs, reallocation of funds |

| Found narratives | Broader description | Found signifying words/ideas |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Anti-mercenary | PMSCs are no more than mercenaries, cast in a different light | Mercenary, soldier-for-hire, only in it for the money, no accountability, no loyalty, cowboy, Rambo-at-sea, references to scandals, no democratic control, bad cooperation with others, fraud, reckless, bloodbath |
| Positive mercenary | PMSCs are loyal, patriotic ex-servicemen who are honorable and are fighting for something greater than money | Ex-service, former soldiers, patriots, honor, emphasizing a link with the country, examples of humanitarian aid, linking to history, emphasizing the <i>Dutchness</i> of a PMSC, protecting Dutch interests, award operators, |
| Tied hands | PMSC-use must be adopted in order to keep up with other countries | Other countries have done it, shipping companies will move abroad if we don't adopt PMSC-use, must keep up with international situation |

The four narratives that were both expected and found presented in a way which was expected based on existing literature. The realist narrative perceives PMSCs from the perspective of the state, as a tool to be used by said state to fill roles that would typically be filled by the military. The economic narrative, as expected, perceives PMSCs as tools that bring with them an economic benefit, be that allowing budget cuts or protecting interests.

Both the anti-mercenary and positive mercenary narratives follow closely to what Spencer found in his book (2016b). The anti-mercenary narrative presents PMSCs as untrustworthy, greedy, egotistical entities. In the Dutch context, they are also perceived to be reckless, cowboy-like. If the PMSCs are not kept under control they will misbehave. The positive mercenary narrative mostly creates a link between PMSCs and the military, either by emphasizing that most of the people working for PMSCs are former military or by stressing that they do the same job as the military and as such deserve the same recognition. The historical

comparisons present give the job of 'mercenary' a bit more weight, a bit more legitimacy. If all those amazing historical figures made use of 'mercenaries' or PMSCs there must be something good about them.

The absence of the governance narrative stands out, as this is very present in the literature. Yes, PMSCs are sometimes presented as having more experience, as being the experts, but this then is not used as a reason to argue for more involvement of PMSCs. It is used as a reason why it would be okay for them to take over certain roles that up to now would be taken up by the military. Yes, PMSCs are experts, but they are nevertheless not welcome at the decision making table, at least not formally.

The presence of the 'tied-hands' narrative is very interesting in that it remains neutral about PMSCs. They are not good or bad, they simply are. The main narrative appears to be that if others are allowed to make use of them then we should be too lest we damage our international position. It could be seen as an arms-race, where countries feel the need to create an even playing field, even if they feel hesitant about what is needed to do so.

The Dutch narratives are a perfect example of this. There are many good reasons why PMSCs can provide a benefit to the way that things are done and yet there is hesitation. PMSCs can provide support for government, they can protect Dutch economic interests, they can provide security to shipping companies for a lower price. But this all comes at a heavy (perceived) cost; the erosion of the monopoly of violence. And in the Netherlands, a heavily centralized state when it comes to security, this is a serious problem. This could explain why the governance narrative is less present in the security debate, though much work is to be done in order to come to a conclusion.

The presence of the 'tied-hands' narrative could stem from the international nature of the shipping industry and the Dutch economy as a whole. The Netherlands prides itself on having one of the largest shipping ports in the world. The 'tied hands' narrative could be a way to set aside any reservation that might exist about the use of PMSCs. It might also be used as an excuse, a way to accept the use of PMSCs without having to explicitly voice your support. It allows stakeholder to say; I don't agree with the use of PMSCs but I will allow it in order to save our shipping industry. This new narrative might be present in other cases

but it might also be that it is only found in those cases that lag behind in adopting PMSCs.

Reflections

A great strength of this thesis is the combination of different data sources. By analyzing government reports, the online presence of PMSCs and parliamentary debates a more holistic image is captured when compared to the analysis of only one of those sources. By applying a relatively new concept to

The shortcomings of this thesis are twofold. First and foremost, the amount of data analyzed leaves much to be desired. Media sources, such as newspaper articles, media-appearances of stakeholders and news reporting could not be taken into account due to time constraints and difficulty of access. Secondly, it proved difficult to make use of a temporal element in the analysis, making it impossible to determine if there was a certain sequence or method behind the appearance of certain narratives.

The use of narratives in the field of international relations is a somewhat new endeavor and as such, there are no clear examples of what a study on narratives should look like. This allows for great flexibility, which is always welcome to the researcher, but might be somewhat unsatisfactory to the reader. I can only encourage others to also make use of the concept of narrative. In doing so, a more general way to use the concept can be formed, cementing narratives as the way to make sense of complex decision-making processes. This method is still in its infancy and the more it is applied the better we can grasp it.

Further research in this line should, ideally, take the following approach. First, additional data should be analyzed in order to confirm that the narratives found in this thesis are indeed present and are indeed the only ones. As this thesis could not analyze all existing data it is probable that narratives that are out there were missed or that narratives that were found do in fact not play a large role overall. The next step would be to determine which stakeholders make use of or believe in which narratives. For some narratives the outcomes will be simple but for others this might offer surprising insights. The (for now) final step would be to figure out why certain stakeholders use certain narratives. After all, the narrative-theory holds that narratives are a tool to be used by stakeholders to achieve their goals. For this, in-depth interviews would be necessary. An additional road to take would

be to pay close attention to when and how certain narratives appear. In doing so, perhaps the 'travel history' of narratives could be determined. The point of origin of narratives could tell a lot about the goal of the narrative.

In the future PMSCs will likely play a much larger role than they do now. Already in the Dutch debate there are voices that advocate for the expansion of services that PMSCs are allowed to provide. By gaining a better understanding of the narratives that could potentially drive this development it allows people to have a more nuanced understanding of the debate. If we can know which narratives are pushed by which stakeholders for the purpose of which goals, we are less likely to be swayed by these narratives.

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Appendix

| Found narratives AIV 2007 | # of instances of narrative | Indicator/sentences | Page # |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Economic narrative | 1 | More efficient, more effective | 8 |
| | 2 | Budget constraints | 9 |
| | 3 | cost advantage | 12 |
| | 4 | efficiency and effectivity | 12 |
| | 5 | difficulty knowing what the effects are (negative economic narrative) | 12 |
| | 6 | private market can fulfill demand | 12 |
| | 7 | can't decide to employ PMSCs based on cost/benefit alone (negative economic narrative) | 14 |
| | 8 | only have to pay PMSCs when you make use of them, as opposed to standing military with constant costs | 15 |
| | 9 | PMSC use due to political budgetary constraints | 30 |
| | | | |
| Realist narrative | 1 | Cold War, maintaining peace and security, international missions | 8 |
| | 2 | Increasing complexity of warfare | 8 |
| | 3 | Capabilities, new objectives | 8&9 |
| | 4 | PMSCs allow governments to be more flexible with their capabilities | 14 |
| | 5 | PMSCs are tools for governments to shape their political ambitions | 14 |
| | 6 | The Netherlands does not have the capabilities to manage logistics, making PMSCs a necessity | 28 |
| | 7 | PMSC use due to political choice of having more operations | 30 |
| | 8 | PMSCs can contribute to effectivity of military operations | 33 |
| | | | |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 1 | Mention of Blackwater incident | 5 |
| | 2 | Calling the use of PMSCs a "problem" worth discussing | 6 |
| | 3 | mention of the problem of private armies and mercenaries | 8 |
| | 4 | Questions surrounding the loyalty and state of service, mention of companies that are not responsible and skilled | 9 |
| | 5 | Once again, mention of Blackwater incident | 9 |
| | 6 | PMSCs are only in it for the money, in it to satisfy shareholders, not in it for the public good | 11 |
| | 7 | danger of fraudulent behavior | 13 |
| | 8 | costs to prestige and authority | 14 |
| | 9 | PMSCs frustrate democratic control, responsibility is vague | 14 |
| | 10 | another mention of Blackwater | 14 |
| | 11 | characterizing certain PMSCs are reckless and irresponsible and acting detrimental to goals | 14&15 |
| | 12 | again, mention of PMSCs only being in it for the money | 15 |
| | 13 | clash of interest between PMSCs and military | 15 |

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|--|----|---|----|
| | 14 | one more mention of Blackwater | 23 |
| | 15 | Mention of DynCorp and their scandal in the 90s | 27 |
| | 16 | Due to scandals and need for accountability, special observers should be trained to keep an eye on PMSCs so as to, at the least, avoid damage to the Dutch reputation | 35 |
| | | | |
| Perhaps 6th narrative? The "Have to deal with it" narrative? | 1 | PMSCs have become a staple in operation zones, have to deal with this the best we can | 11 |

| Found narratives AIV 2010 | # of instances of narrative | Indicator/sentences | Page # |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------|
| | | | |
| Realist narrative | 1 | protection of Dutch vessels is impossible due to logistical constraints | 28 |
| | | | |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 1 | cowboy-companies | 28 |
| | 2 | escalation of violence, civil arms race, no clarity on responsibility and rules of engagement | 29 |
| | 3 | "abuse" | 31 |
| | | | |
| positive mercenary narrative | 1 | armed guards present = de-escalation | 27 |
| | 2 | linking PMSC employees with military duty, emphasizing that they are ex-soldier/special forces, so they must be well trained | 28 |
| | 3 | international code of conduct = sector can self-regulate | 29 |
| | 4 | deter and de-escalate due to weapons being present | 31 |

| Found narratives Wijkerslooth 2011 | # of instances of narrative | Indicator/sentences | Page # |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------|
| Economic narrative | 1 | PMSCs lower cost of military | 26 |
| | | | |
| Realist narrative | 1 | PMSCs make it possible for the military to focus on core tasks | 25 |
| | | | |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 1 | Lack of controls, might lead to fatal incidents | 26 |

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|------------------------------|---|---|----|
| | 2 | PMSCs do not keep to local and international rules | 26 |
| | 3 | Use of PMSCs can lead to uncertainty with regards to responsibility | 27 |
| | 4 | escalation of violence | 27 |
| | 5 | Mention of the absence of international regulations, | 31 |
| | | | |
| positive mercenary narrative | 1 | mention of self-regulation by the sector, there is an awareness of problems and a willingness to deal with these problems | 27 |
| | | | |

| Found narratives debate 1 | # of instances of narrative | Indicator/sentences | Page # |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Economic narrative | 1 | commercial interests, if no private security then disruption of Dutch shipping sector | 4 |
| | 2 | sea trade is a pillar of our economy | 8 |
| | 3 | sea trade essential to Dutch economy | 9 |
| | 4 | again, sea trade pillar of Dutch economy | 18 |
| | 5 | economic consequences if security is not well provided | 31 |
| | 6 | use of pmscs is cheaper compared to vpds | 42 |
| | 7 | shipping industry pillar of Dutch economy | 43 |
| | 8 | pmscs cheaper | 47 |
| | 9 | pmscs are more efficient, need less resources | 60 |
| | 10 | sea trade of great importance | 85 |
| | 11 | no budget at defense, so have to look for alternatives | 94 |
| | 12 | costs to military too high | 95 |
| | 13 | pmscs as solution to budget constraints | 101 |
| | 14 | budget constraints | 110 |
| | 15 | pmscs are cheaper | 153 |
| | 16 | if budget constraints, must look for private alternatives | 154 |
| | | | |
| Realist narrative | 1 | no police at sea | 2 |
| | 2 | Government can't always protect merchant vessels | 9 |
| | 3 | PMSCs fight a war | 24 |
| | 4 | another mention of fighting a war | 25 |
| | 5 | another mention of fighting a war | 26 |
| | 6 | another mention of fighting a war | 29 |
| | 7 | government can't provide protection, isn't flexible enough | 32 |
| | 8 | government maintain monopoly on violence, government is the ultimate decider in each case | 40 |

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|--|----|--|-----|
| | 9 | government is ultimate decider | 84 |
| | 10 | pmscs will be under government control | 86 |
| | 11 | military not flexible enough | 95 |
| | 12 | private security firms are more flexible | 98 |
| | 13 | under strict supervision of the state | 110 |
| | 14 | not enough personnel | 110 |
| | 15 | only use PMSCs if government can't provide | 138 |
| | 16 | not enough personnel, so use of private security | 146 |
| | | | |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 1 | cowboys | 30 |
| | 2 | cowboy-like pmscs | 89 |
| | 3 | wild-west situation at sea | 100 |
| | 4 | pmscs as cowboys | 107 |
| | 5 | trigger-happy cowboys causing a bloodbath | 111 |
| | 6 | cowboys | 113 |
| | 7 | cowboys | 113 |
| | 8 | cowboys | 114 |
| | | | |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 1 | PMSC operators serve Dutch shipping companies and Dutch interest, should be thanked for this | 22 |
| | 2 | legal position should be same as that of marines | 24 |
| | 3 | well-trained operator | 29 |
| | 4 | award them for serving Dutch interests and people | 29 |
| | 5 | pmscs have a deterring effect | 54 |
| | 6 | if we don't take action, companies will move | 86 |
| | 7 | have to adopt PMSCs if the Netherlands wants to stay competitive | 99 |
| | 8 | other countries have allowed PMSCs to operate on ships | 113 |
| | 9 | mercenaries are an ancient trade, even Cartage made use of them | 148 |
| | | | |
| Perhaps 6th narrative? The "Have to deal with it" /Liberal narrative | 1 | following legislation in neighboring countries | 3 |
| | 2 | If we don't follow suit with other countries, lose Dutch shipping | 4 |
| | 3 | All other seafaring EU member states have passed legislation, but we have not | 10 |
| | 4 | Absence of PMSCs has led to Dutch shipping companies re-flagging their ships, and foreign shipping companies don't move to the Netherlands | 17 |
| | 5 | no pmscs = shipping companies leaving for countries that do allow them | 131 |

| Found narrative | # of instances of narrative | Indicator/sentences | Page # |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Economic narrative | 1 | The shipping industry is vital to the Dutch economy, PMSCs protect these interests, | 24 |
| | 2 | mentioning of jobs, linking piracy to loss of job, thus PMSCs to protection of those jobs | 25 |
| | 3 | VPDs are more expensive when compared to PMSCs, VPDs cost the government money | 69&70 |
| | 4 | PMSCs are more flexible and thus cheaper | 74 |
| | 5 | Allowing use of PMSCs might be budget cuts in disguise | 115 |
| | 6 | PMSCs are more effective in smaller teams, thus cheaper | 125 |
| | 7 | PMSCs are cheaper when compared to VPDs | 177 |
| | 8 | PMSCs lower cost to government | 188 |
| | 9 | PMSCs as a solution to the problem of low defense budget | 193 |
| | 10 | PMSCs protect vital trade | 201 |
| Realist narrative | 1 | Likening piracy to war, the presented solution being the employment of PMSCs | 7 |
| | 2 | You can't call the police at sea; government can't protect you, someone else has to | 8 |
| | 3 | Government has the monopoly of violence and is the ultimate decider of who is and isn't allowed to use violence | 10 |
| | 4 | Protection of merchant vessels by navy is not doable, there is a finite amount of resources that can be deployed, PMSCs can fill any gaps created | 15 |
| | 5 | Department of defense can't be flexible with their resources, PMSCs offer a solution to this | 43 |
| | 6 | Government will dictate when and how PMSCs can be deployed on a case-by-case basis | 45&46 |
| | 7 | Use of violence is ultimately up to government, not up to PMSCs | 62 |
| | 8 | PMSCs are more flexible, take context and particularities into consideration | 72 |
| | 9 | government can't meet requirements, PMSCs fill that gap | 88&89 |
| | 10 | government can't meet requirements, PMSCs fill that gap | 152 |
| | 11 | government can't meet requirements, PMSCs fill that gap | 190 |
| Anti-mercenary narrative | 1 | reference to Blackwater, Rambo at sea | 30&31 |
| | 2 | If PMSCs are not under control, the outcomes will be undesirable | 31 |
| | 3 | Likening PMSCs to cowboys, | 100 |
| | 4 | another mention of Rambo at sea | 100 |
| Positive mercenary narrative | 1 | Mention of Michiel de Ruyter, the Netherlands' most famous admiral; linking him to being a private security operator, protecting private shipping companies against pirates | 9 |

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|--|----|--|----------|
| | 2 | a whole list of incidents involving pirates; if PMSCs were present the outcome was good, if PMSCs were not present the outcome was bad | 11&12&13 |
| | 3 | PMSC and navy cooperate in their fight against pirates | 12 |
| | 4 | The decrease in piracy is directly linked to the presence of PMSCs, showing that they are an effective tool | 16 |
| | 5 | PMSCs are a tool of deterrence, violence is often not necessary | 17&18 |
| | 6 | presence of PMSC operators is a relief to those that stay at home, they know that their loved ones will be safe | 23 |
| | 7 | Dutch shipping companies are often old, family owned business, PMSCs are needed to keep those traditional businesses in the Netherlands. Mention of Dutch glory | 28 |
| | 8 | Literature studies found no wrongdoings on part of PMSCs when protecting maritime vessels | 32 |
| | 9 | another mention of deterrence | 73 |
| | 10 | PMSCs have former servicemen, so well trained | 73 |
| | 11 | PMSCs have more experience, they perform more missions like this than the navy | 73 |
| | 12 | another mention of more experience | 76 |
| | 13 | another mention of deterrence | 123 |
| | 14 | another mention of PMSCs having more experience | 124 |
| | | | |
| Perhaps 6th narrative? The "Have to deal with it" /Liberal narrative | 1 | Last country to not have a solution to piracy | 5 |
| | 2 | Other European countries have allowed PMSCs to protect freight vessels, shipping companies might move to those countries while forging companies won't move to the Netherlands because of this | 28 |
| | 3 | only the Netherlands does not yet allow PMSCs to protect private vessels | 107 |
| | 4 | Netherlands must adopt this in order to stay up-to-date with other countries | 191 |