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# Outsourcing warfare in the Mediterranean

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**ABSTRACT**

The growing usage of mercenaries and proxies by Russia, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf states in ongoing Mediterranean conflicts such as the Libyan and Syrian civil wars highlight the changing state of warfare. It is no longer just about who has the most effective artillery, navy, or fighter jets. Instead, the future of warfare consists of battles fought by mercenaries and proxies, and is now a business too as evidenced by the usage of private military companies (PMCs). While it may initially seem appealing for the United States to use mercenaries and proxies in order to protect its regional interests and influence, there are considerable risks in employing both. Instead, other avenues such as establishing regional partners, implementing security partnerships, and collaborating with allies may be more pragmatic options. Concerns should be raised regarding the evolving forms, trends, and manifestations of mercenary and proxy-related activities around the Mediterranean. These developments, we believe, have contributed to the exacerbation of the aforementioned conflicts and resulted in the Mediterranean becoming the global epicentre of mercenary and proxy warfare. How these intervening countries decide to act moving forward will determine the outcome of the ongoing Mediterranean conflicts.

**KEYWORDS** United States; Mediterranean; Arab Gulf states; Russia; Turkey

Ongoing conflicts across the Mediterranean, such as the Libyan and Syrian civil wars, involve regional and global actors struggling to reshape the region according to their interests. A disturbing trend that has intensified in both of these conflicts is the outsourcing of warfare to mercenaries and proxies by national and transnational actors. Russia, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf states are leaders in employing these entities for combat missions beyond their borders.

Importantly, the usage of mercenaries and proxies by these actors differ from Iran, the regional leader in the use of proxy forces, mostly from Shiite populations. First, Iran's proxy utilization is not simply to gain influence outside its borders but to also serve an ideological purpose of spreading the values of the Islamic Revolution. Second, Iran's proxy employment has pre-dated these other actors, such as its backing of Hezbollah in Lebanon since the 1980s. Third,

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