

# Lawmakers Propose Creation of Russian Mercenary Firms

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U.S. Army Soldiers conduct a test near Kabul, Afghanistan, Dec. 28, 2007.

In a move inspired by the example of U.S. private military firms like Blackwater, a Russian political party has proposed legalizing heavily armed security companies for use abroad, RIA Novosti reported, citing the deputy chairman of the A Just Russia party, Mikhail Yemelyanov.

Yemelyanov explained that the bill, which is being submitted to the State Duma on Wednesday, is inspired by the financial success and international influence of private military contractors (PMCs), which Western nations have used extensively in the Middle East.

The PMC industry has flourished in the last decade, with the U.S. relying heavily on such services to guard buildings, people and convoys in Afghanistan and Iraq. The PMC industry was estimated to be worth \$55 billion in 2010, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

"They not only earn some serious cash, billions of dollars, but also actively participate on the geopolitical level," Yemelyanov was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying.

Yemelyanov seemed to focus not on the commercial possibilities of PMCs, however, but on the potential to use them to advance Russian foreign-policy aims. By not having any PMCs of its own, Russia deprived itself of a crucial weapon in its battle against Western influence, Yemelyanov said.

Western military firms "shined in the Middle East, and now we are seeing their representatives in Ukraine. We also need to create such an outfit," Yemelyanov said, adding that "in the context of a new foreign policy situation, this bill is very relevant."

Such firms would be staffed by "our former military men who are willing to carry out military and security functions, even on the territories of foreign nations," Yemelyanov said.

In April, the Russian Foreign Ministry accused Kiev of employing 150 members of U.S. private military firm Greystone in eastern Ukraine, an accusation Greystone denied.

Yemelyanov brushed off potential criticism that Russia might be looking to create mercenary units. Much like Washington's defense of its use of private military contractors, Yemelyanov insists that legalizing their operations will mean that the contractors are not technically mercenaries — a term that he says implies extrajudicial behavior.

This is not the first time that Russian lawmakers have looked on Washington's use of PMCs with envy. According to RIA Novosti, in June, the deputy chairman of the Duma's Defense Committee, United Russia member Frants Klintsevich, told RIA Novosti that his committee was working with the Defense and Foreign ministries on a private military bill.

"I am sure that we need such a law, and I am sure we will adopt it," Klintsevich said at the time.

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