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The mercenary moniker : condemnations, contradictions and the politics of definition / Aaron Ettinger

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Abstract:	<p>Despite considerable efforts, the concept of the 'mercenary' remains ill-defined within the scholarly literature on non-state combatants. In common usage, 'mercenary' is intended to function as a descriptive category of combatant, denoting certain unique or transhistorical properties. Instead, however, it is a highly subjective, imprecise and politicized term. This article critically analyses historical, legal and philosophical definitions of 'mercenary', and asks whether it is worth retaining the term as an analytical category at all. In short, the answer is no. The article's exposition of the 'mercenary moniker' uncovers the statist political ethic that anchors different interpretations of the mercenary concept. It shows that conceptions of the mercenary are deeply rooted in a Westphalian political ethic of war and conflict that upholds the instrumentality of the state to notions of political community, morality and identity. Accordingly, it argues that 'mercenary' should be jettisoned from the academic conceptual vocabulary of non-state combatants, and proposes 'freelance militant' as an alternative. Properly contextualized, this alternative could make possible a conceptual vocabulary that is able to clearly distinguish between such freelance militants and other non-state combatants.</p>
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