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## PRIVATE MILITARY SERVICE PROVIDERS: AFRICA'S WELCOME PARIAS

By Doug Brooks

### Introduction

There has been much written on the "scourge" of mercenaries, private military companies, and private security companies that are operating in Africa. They are blamed for instigating conflicts, for human rights abuses, for intensifying wars, for dealing in conflict diamonds, for landmines, for child soldiers, for selling small arms to warlords, even for neocolonialism.

The reality, however, is that in virtually every instance of their use on the continent, these companies and individuals that provide military services were specifically invited and welcomed by African governments. They have assisted regional stability, supported fundamental law and order, protected threatened communities of civilians, curtailed the malicious activities of insurgents, and created conditions beneficial to economic growth and political development. Thus, despite frequent vilification of companies providing military services, African governments continue to utilize or tolerate private companies filling the critical security gaps.

There are many reasons for this; private companies are considered more reliable, effective, and neutral than state security services controlled by African governments. In fact, African states have suffered scores of coups and coup attempts from their own state forces since independence.<sup>1</sup> Many state militaries are guilty of being used to support the ethnic partiality of leaders, of horrendous human rights abuses against their own citizens, and of looting the state treasury.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Europa World Yearbook 1999, vol.1 and 2 (40<sup>th</sup> edition), Europa Publications Limited, London, 1999

<sup>2</sup> Professor Herb Howe's seminal book on African militaries investigates these problems and their underlying causes in fascinating detail, Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001.

For modern African leaders interested in bringing stability, security and prosperity to their countries, the history of recent decades supports the rationality of decisions to increasingly privatize security, both national and commercial. Compared to conventional militaries, the record of private companies in Africa is pristine.

### **Africa's Security Vacuum – Why Africa looks to private companies**

For many African citizens in the years since independence, security has been the exception, not the rule. There was a greater degree of security in the pre-independence days of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but during that period the security was primarily designed to protect the European colonists, not the indigenous people. While we may rightly question their primary mission, colonial police and military forces were usually instilled with a strong sense of professionalism and duty by the colonial power. They were paid regularly, adequately equipped and guaranteed a pension when they retired. In the early days of independence they were critical to the stability of African states.

Unfortunately, in the first years of independence African military forces quickly declined in capability. Much of the necessary organization maintaining that professionalism ended with colonialism as their European officers and trainers as well as the essential bureaucratic structures disappeared. In most cases the former colonial powers had paid scant attention to developing any sort of long-term enduring military structure or officer class. Aggravating this trend, African leaders fearing military coups have deliberately weakened their militaries by purging them of their best officers. Post independence militaries declined quickly as a result.<sup>3</sup>

The tumultuous post independence years in Africa shattered any optimistic hopes that state security forces would provide stability or help to unify the new African states. Instead we have seen the decline and corruption of state security forces on the continent. Most African militaries are little more than show pieces for annual independence celebrations, and disintegrate quickly when required to perform even the simplest military task.

There are many recent examples of the military ineptness common to the continent, perhaps the most obvious being the performance of the Zairian army in the final months of the Mobutu régime. Unprepared for actual combat, the army ran and looted unarmed civilians rather than face even the most feeble of attacks from the rag tag rebel factions walking west from Rwanda. Elsewhere, Zambian troops participated as a part of the UN's UNAMSIL peacekeepers in Sierra Leone. Despite the best intentions, they arrived without even the most basic equipment, and had to be completely resupplied before they could be

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<sup>3</sup> Howe, pp. 28-35.

deployed into the field. When the RUF rebels attacked UNAMSIL in May 2000, the Zambians were quickly decimated, with hundreds being captured or killed in a matter of hours.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously there are a number of notable exceptions. Botswana has maintained a particularly well-equipped and professional military, and the South African military has followed a very different course. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) continues to be the most powerful and competent military in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is accurate to state that the vast majority of Africa's military forces are far less capable today than they were forty years ago.

Blithe Western assumptions that state security forces are inherently accountable, neutral and professional simply have no relevance in Africa. State military forces are rarely passive, disinterested parties in the realm national politics.<sup>5</sup> Instead, military officers have engineered the vast majority of the more than 100 coups and coup attempts that have plagued Africa since countries were given independence. Worse, due to tribal bias, shameless political manipulation, or lack of wages, African militaries have proven to be a far greater menace to the welfare of their own citizens than to the rare external threats to their states.

The deprofessionalizing of African militaries occurred in parallel with the disintegration of African political systems. In the hands of corrupt dictators and warlords militaries often became the primary tools of oppression. In many cases they were purged of rival ethnic groups, or deliberately marginalized by the leaders to diminish their ability to threaten the governments. As money ran out due to the gradual crumbling of national economies, the militaries became the instigators of micro-oppression themselves as they looted their own communities to make up for the states' refusal or inability to pay even the most basic of salaries. The consequences of this degradation of African militaries are still being realized.

### **Legacy of the Breakdown of Security**

In light of the deterioration of the general security situation in Africa, it is no surprise that foreign direct investment shuns Africa. Investors have every reason to ignore the continent and take their capital to Asia or the former communist states in Eastern Europe, and avoid the high risks and hassles of business in Africa. Most that do invest do so only in those industries with the highest returns

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<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, "Congo (Democratic Republic of) Deadly Alliances in Congolese Forests", Report - AFR 62/33/97, 3 December 1997; Christopher S. Wren, "U.N. Troops Brace To Defend Capital Of Sierra Leone," *New York Times*, 11 May 2001, p.1.; "U.N.'s Lead Role in Sierra Leone at Risk" *Washington Post*, 13 May 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Howe goes into the many reason why African militaries are so often dangerous and useless.

on investment with a minimum of commitment: offshore oil, diamonds and other high-value minerals.

Despite a willing and inexpensive workforce, many African governments undermine their own comparative advantages through absurd economic and tax policies, imposing pointless bureaucracy and allowing levels of corruption that make even the most determined investor blanch. Other problems such as inadequate legal systems and weak financial systems are also detrimental.<sup>6</sup> But even without substantive foreign investment African countries would be considerably better off if they did not suffer from chronic conflict. It is the wars and conflicts that do the most to undermine development and prosperity on the continent.

Time and again economic and social development is thwarted by military coups and civil wars. Investment or development projects designed to take years to complete may never bear fruit due to disruptions caused by armed conflicts. In many countries the pattern ensures that “long-term development” is a term only seen in academic textbooks. But it is exactly these countries suffering internal conflict are the most needy in terms of development programs.

While international development agencies have often attempted to fill the void left by absent or fleeing private capital, they too are finding many countries in Africa too risky to provide effective aid. Western development agencies find their personnel are harassed and threatened by combatants, forcing many to minimize or even terminate their assistance programs.<sup>7</sup> Worse, African conflicts tend to be long and brutal, meaning that the larger long-term programs are often a waste of time and resources. For NGOs and other development organizations neutrality in the face of long-running regional or ethnic conflicts is inherently difficult and nearly as dangerous as choosing sides – unarmed Western development personnel have been robbed, raped and killed in Somalia, Sierra Leone and DRC. In fact the International Red Cross lost more people in the 1990s than in the rest of the organizations history put together.<sup>8</sup> And while régimes change, international debt continues, and money stolen or squandered by previous governments is still owed by their successors, no matter how much greater the popular legitimacy of the new government.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of these key principles are discussed in Ernesto Hernández-Catá, “Raising Growth and Investment in Sub-Saharan Africa: What Can Be Done?,” *Finance and Development: A Quarterly Magazine of the IMF*, December 2000, Volume 37, number 4.

<sup>7</sup> A 1997 report by the British Department for International Development (DFID) suggests that development programs are essentially useless without achieving political stability – stopping the wars - first. DFID, *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century - White Paper on International Development*, Department for International Development, London, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Discussions with Red Cross officer, Pretoria, South Africa, September 2000.

The West is loath to intervene militarily in African conflicts. Aside from the sheer danger and complexities involved, many academics and development specialists reckon that all conflicts have underlying causes that must be addressed prior to any sort of armed intervention – no matter how horrendous the cost of delay in human terms. Others contradict this argument and point out that in too many conflicts the average age of the combatants is younger than the wars themselves, a strong sign that the underlying causes have probably been forgotten. Either way, military intervention is rarely utilized even in the most pressing cases, such as Rwanda, due directly to a lack of will in Western militaries, and a lack of capabilities in African militaries. For the West the Somali debacle dispelled any interest in becoming involved in African conflicts - no matter how desperate the need. The West's reluctance to send effective peace enforcers is likely to be further exacerbated by the new war against terrorism when there is more pressing demand for their military manpower. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it appears that the only competent military forces both capable and willing to intervene in African conflicts are private military companies.

So instead of direct military intervention, the West has focused on addressing some of the symptoms of African wars, while doing little to end the wars themselves. There have been a number of popular campaigns to address “Blood diamonds,” landmines, and child soldiers – all worthy causes but ignoring and even marginalizing the real problem – the actual conflicts - and the shocking lack of security for the average African.

The breakdown of state security has contributed to the demise of the commercial business sector. Doing business on the poorest continent in the world can be extremely expensive and dangerous due to a number of factors, including corrupt leadership happy to shakedown merchants, poorly-paid state security forces as interested in looting merchandise as protecting it, and high crime rates due to floundering economies and high unemployment. Businesses find that despite paying exorbitant taxes to the state for basic services that often do not work anyway, they also have to pay for their own security as well, adding substantially to their overhead and reducing their viability.

Perhaps the most debilitating effect of the degeneration of African militaries is that usually they are the ones being called on to provide the troops for UN peace operations in African conflicts. With a depressing dearth of nations volunteering to send more competent troops, the UN is forced to rely on these inept African militaries to do their peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The problem is that no amount of good will can make up for a military that lacks training, equipment, competent officers, and logistics capability. As a result, the UN is often left with the world's least competent soldiers to do the world's most difficult peace missions, almost ensuring failures and setbacks such as in Angola and Sierra Leone. Without basic services such as logistics and transportation even the most dedicated militaries are ineffective. UN peacekeepers are not a poor man's

NATO, nor should we assume they approach the capability of the preeminent military alliance.<sup>9</sup>

The degeneration and collapse of state security has meant citizens, businesses, and even governments have no choice but to turn to private security options. This is most obvious in South Africa, where frustration with the poor quality of the police have forced affluent home owners and neighborhoods to turn to the growing numbers of private, quick reaction security companies. Even in the poorer neighborhoods residents often prefer to summon nongovernmental vigilante groups rather than the lackadaisical South African Police Service (SAPS).<sup>10</sup> Other countries in Africa, however, are far worse off than South Africa from a security perspective, facing national wars rather than random crime. The security companies that operate those countries are appropriately more robust.

### **The Role of Private Security**

International private security services that are operating in countries suffering from serious armed conflict range from the basic private police services, to armed companies able to defend commercial installations against an organized military attack, to companies capable of carrying out offensive actions or supporting state forces engaged in regular military operations. The main thread connecting all these companies is that the key personnel are ex-military personnel from the best Western militaries – British, American, French, Belgian, Israeli or South African. They bring with them the essential skills that are critically lacking in Africa, including everything from security management, to effective logistics and supply, to basic military and police training.

It is important to recognize the difference between rogue “mercenaries” and the private companies offering military services. Rogue mercenaries are individuals with military skills that are willing to work for virtually any employer, do virtually any task required, and attempt to do so with as little identification and accountability as possible. In Africa today, the majority of these rogue mercenaries are Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian, and South African. While motivations, morality and actual behavior of individuals can vary quite widely, the potential for criminal acts and abuse are enormous, whereas with legitimate, registered, monitored companies, the motivations are quite the opposite. Companies value good “names,” they crave legitimacy from both their clients and their home governments, since that legitimacy is what brings contracts. Rogue mercenaries and companies providing military services may sometimes use the

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<sup>9</sup> David Shearer has written extensively on this topic, his most recent publication is “Privatising Protection: Military Companies and Human Security”, *World Today*, 30 June 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Information from discussions with students in my organized crime classes at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2000. The widespread disillusionment with the SAPS crossed the racial divisions.

same personnel, but the company must be much more careful that the individual does not become involved in acts that will bring legal or financial harm or negative publicity which might cost future contracts.

The UN has publicly taken an uncompromising stand against private military services. Equating them with mercenaries, they have a “Special Rapporteur on the use of mercenaries” who has grouped many private military service companies in the same condemnation he has for the rogue mercenaries.<sup>11</sup> This attempt to take the moral high road would be commendable if there was an alternative. The problem is there is nothing willing and available to take the place of the services these companies provide, so condemning the one source of effective security is clearly counterproductive and potentially harmful to international humanitarian efforts. Their removal would result in a greater breakdown in security and vastly greater human suffering on the continent.

Instead the international community must look at engaging private companies to find ways of regulating and best utilizing their services. If companies are required to live within certain regulations and guidelines in order to win lucrative UN contracts, they will do so.<sup>12</sup> Private companies can do much to enhance the capabilities of indigenous militaries by providing the logistics, combat transportation, training and tactical insight that can make up for some of the past 40 years of neglect. Private companies already have worked directly with African military peacekeepers on a number of occasions to combine will with capability.<sup>13</sup> Regulation means the companies are far less likely to violate international norms or laws, or engage in activities that go against the will of the international community. Actions by well-meaning NGOs and UN officials that focus on banning the trade in private military services in the face of manifest demand, are in effect ignoring realities on the ground and thus encouraging unregulated actors to function beyond the ethical bounds of Western militaries.

Unfortunately, much of the resentment against these private companies is driven by unfounded myths, inaccuracies and unfair assumptions.<sup>14</sup> There is a need for a rational and pragmatic examination of the companies that are currently

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<sup>11</sup> Comments by Enrique Bernales Ballesteros in *The Privatisation of Security: framing a conflict prevention and peacebuilding policy agenda, Wilton Park Conference report, May 2001*, International Alert

<sup>12</sup> Interviews by the author with a number of MSPs between October 1999 and October 2001.

<sup>13</sup> ICI of Oregon provided key combat helicopter transportation for ECOMOG peacekeepers in Liberia and other parts of West Africa. JESA air, working for the Sierra Leone government, has done much to bolster the military effectiveness of UN operations in Sierra Leone.

<sup>14</sup> Many of the more outrageous claims against the PMC Executive Outcomes were dispelled in a research report commissioned by the British Parliament to look into the alleged atrocities, Philip Trehitt, *The Business of Killing*, The Parliamentary Human Rights Group, London, July 1999. Also, for a stark contrast compare the unsubstantiated allegations against EO to the verified reports by Human Rights Watch and other watchdog NGOs of atrocities and human rights violations committed by the other military forces engaged in the same conflicts.

providing essential military services in African countries. And there is a distinct need to examine the security issue and better understand the dearth of alternatives to privatization, and to better appreciate the humanitarian risks of marginalizing the privatization option. What follows is an attempt to describe these companies and put them into categories that make the phenomenon easier to understand.

### **Military Service Providers (MSPs)**

A preferred term for these international companies that provide military services is simply “military service providers”, or MSPs.<sup>15</sup> Again, these companies have little in common with the traditional image of a mercenary that stems from their activities in the 1960s and 1970s. MSPs are lawful, profit-seeking companies utilizing normal corporate structures and behaving as any other normal companies behave, with similar profit-oriented motivations and, importantly, constraints.

Since MSPs are legal entities they can be controlled legally. Thus governments of their home countries are able to influence the company’s behavior through regulations and laws. Clients can control the behavior of an MSP through legal contracts, financial bonuses and financial penalties for services rendered. It is interesting to note how careful security companies have been about following these legal technicalities to the letter in Africa, even though the countries where they have operations may have no functioning legal system.<sup>16</sup>

MSPs provide the whole gamut of legitimate services that were formally provided by national armies. In Africa, these services include anything from logistics and mine clearance, to facility protection and, rarely, offensive combat operations. In fact, few national militaries in Africa are currently capable of carrying out most of these tasks, and none can compete with MSPs in terms of cost, speed and effectiveness. MSPs utilize former personnel of the world’s finest military organizations, and are unbound by bureaucratic red tape and outdated doctrines. This efficiency makes them attractive to clients and ideal for addressing Africa’s military security problems – and at prices even the poorest countries can afford.

To better understand how these companies have evolved, MSPs can be divided into three categories. Nonlethal Service Providers (NSPs), Private Security Companies (PSCs) and Private Military Companies (PMCs). PMCs can be

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<sup>15</sup> Some analysts use the term “Private Security Organization”, and there are other terms as well. However, MSP is a nice umbrella term that captures all of the companies that provide military services.

<sup>16</sup> The best work that looks at the legal issues around private military forces and mercenaries is Juan Zarate, “The Emergence of a New Dog of War: Private International Security Companies, International Law, and the New World Disorder” *Stanford Journal of International Law*, 75 (1998), 75-162.



further divided into active and passive categories. These concepts are further discussed below with examples, followed by insights into the role of these unique companies in the future of African security.

### **Nonlethal Service Providers (NSPs)**

The least controversial of the MSPs are the “nonlethal service providers” or NSPs. NSPs are companies that do a variety of non-combat operations, including logistics for multinational peacekeeping operations, intelligence and mapping services, risk assessments for potential investors and mine clearance operations. Their clients are usually NGOs, international organizations, and states. Examples include the American company PAE (Pacific Architects and Engineers) and Mine-Tech of Zimbabwe.

**Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE)** of Los Angeles, California is a classic NSP. While the company has worldwide operations doing logistics and engineering projects, in Africa it has focused on providing support for peacekeeping operations. Clients include the United States, and the United Nations. PAE won high praise for their work in supporting ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, and is currently refurbishing airfields in the Democratic Republic of Congo for the next UN peacekeeping mission there.

While PAE utilizes a surprisingly small American staff to support these operations, it still manages to provide an amazingly high level of service. PAE taps the talents of former military officers to provide strong, independent authority in the field, and gives them a great deal of latitude and responsibility in managing their operations. While PAE personnel are not armed, they are often working to support armed operations and there is a high degree of risk involved. Most logistics companies would not dare engage in operations in countries wracked by war, but PAE has developed and honed the necessary management skills to do these missions successfully. PAE’s ability to bring Western management and skills while utilizing local staffs as much as possible make them cost effective and efficient, and they have won high praise from peacekeepers in the field.<sup>17</sup>

### **Private Security Companies (PSCs)**

PSCs provide passive security for private and public facilities and commercial operations in high-risk zones of conflict. Their clients are generally from the private sector, especially multinational companies (MNCs) and resource extraction firms. However, PSCs are sometimes employed by NGOs and states

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<sup>17</sup> Numerous interviews by author in Sierra Leone, Great Britain, and the United States, 2000-2001.

as well. PSCs are often used to guard mines, embassies and provide protection for personnel conducting humanitarian operations. Their general method of operation is to use a handful of former military expatriates from a NATO-class western military to train indigenous security company personnel and provide security advice and risk assessments. Examples include South Africa's Gray Security Services (recently purchased by Britain's Securicor) and the British ArmorGroup (formerly Defence Systems Ltd. - a subsidiary of the U.S. company Armor Holdings).

Angola makes the greatest use of PSCs of all African countries. Despite infinitely more manpower, equipment and finances, the Angolan government forces have not been able to win their conflict with the rebel UNITA (Union For the Total Independence of Angola) forces of Jonas Savimbi. In fact, in the 25 years of independence from Portugal, the government military forces have not shown the capability to provide even the most basic security for the commercial operations such as oil and diamond companies whose taxes are essentially paying for the war. Foreign companies would simply not operate in Angola unless they could ensure protection for their equipment and personnel. Protecting against guerillas requires something more than the regular "rent-a-cop". Thus, with the full blessings of the Angolan government, PSCs are providing the robust protection for the companies and making such operations in a war zone actually viable.

**ArmorGroup**, formerly known as Defence Systems Ltd. (DSL), was acquired by the giant American company Armor Holdings in April, 1997.<sup>18</sup> DSL had been founded by former SAS soldiers and had a reputation of working closely with the British government in many of their contracts. Many observers thought DSL would not survive the acquisition by the American company since Armor Holdings is listed on the New York Stock Exchange, which requires greater transparency than the company had been accustomed.<sup>19</sup> ArmorGroup appears to have thrived since its acquisition. Currently it is one of the few PSCs that have contracts with the MSP-shy United Nations.<sup>20</sup> The UN contracts "legitimize" ArmorGroup in the eyes of many African governments, indicating a rosy future for the company on the continent.

## **Private Military Companies (PMCs)**

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin O'Brien, "Freelance Forces: exploiters of old or new-age peacebrokers?", Jane's Intelligence Review, 1 August, 1998. For a rather apocalyptic view of DSL and the merger with Armor Holdings, see Pratap Chatterjee, "Guarding the Multinationals: DSL and the International Private 'Security' Business", Multinational Monitor, March 1998.

<sup>19</sup> On the NYSE Armor Holdings is listed as "AH".

<sup>20</sup> David Isenberg, "Combat for Sale, the new post-Cold War mercenaries", USA Today Magazine, 1 March, 2000.

PMCs provide active military services primarily to states and multinational organizations; they are the most controversial of the MSPs. PMCs can be broken down into two categories as well – the ‘passive’ ones that focus on training and developing force structure and who do not serve with their client’s militaries, and ‘Active’ companies that are willing to carry weapons into combat along side their clients, in addition to their other services such as training and providing strategic advice.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Passive PMCs***

Passive PMCs provide military services primarily to states but do not become involved in lethal combat. They can provide basic military training, civil military relations training, defense restructuring, or assistance in defense planning. Passive companies do not engage in actual combat, which makes them more acceptable than active PMCs in the eyes of the UN and many NGOs.

**MPRI** (formally known as Military Professional Resources, Inc.- now officially just “MPRI”) made the claim that it had “The World’s Greatest Corporate Military Expertise.” MPRI was founded by a number of retired generals and other officers from the U.S. military. Most of MPRI’s income comes from contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense, though it has always been branching out to assist military forces worldwide. Some of MPRI’s better-known contracts are actually in the Balkans, where they are helping to train the Croatian and Bosnian militaries but they have a number of contracts in Africa as well.

MPRI has been trying for more than seven years to win a contract to train the Angolan military – thus far without success. Another contract, in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea to train the Coast Guard, has been approved by the U.S. government and will begin soon. Elsewhere in Africa, MPRI is currently working in support of the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), an effort to increase the military capacity of African states and their ability to do UN Chapter Six peacekeeping operations. It is also supporting the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), a U.S. backed security think-tank for Africa, where MPRI provides administrative management, curriculum development and other indispensable activities.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps MPRI’s most interesting work is in Nigeria. Until recently Nigeria was a repressive military dictatorship, and so MPRI is working with the Ministry of Defense and the National Assembly to develop a new civil-

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<sup>21</sup> My thanks to Dr Kevin A. O'Brien, Deputy Director, ICSEA, King's College, London, who originally suggested the active and passive categories.

<sup>22</sup> From interviews with company officers, and from the MPRI web page, accessed 3 October 2001: [http://www.mpri.com/subchannels/int\\_africa.html](http://www.mpri.com/subchannels/int_africa.html)

military relationship more appropriate to a democracy. This includes reprofessionalizing the armed forces while developing a better conception of the military's relationship to the civilian government. Considering all the African nations that have suffered or are suffering from military governments, this is the kind of training that may be the most critically useful in developing a stable future for the continent.

### **Active PMCs**

Active PMCs are the ones that are prepared to carry weapons into combat situations on behalf of their clients. They usually work as “force multipliers”, training much larger numbers of local troops and then providing military advice, leadership, and the specialized skills that would take many years and cost a great deal of resources for the host country to develop. The classic “active” PMC was South Africa's Executive Outcomes, which worked for the Angolan, Sierra Leonean and Democratic Republic of Congo governments.

**Executive Outcomes** (EO) no longer exists, it closed its doors in December 1998. Nevertheless, EO was a groundbreaking company and showed the impressive potential of private companies. EO's major operations were in Angola, Sierra Leone, Papua New Guinea, and finally the Democratic Republic of Congo. In each case EO had the blessing and was paid by the governments. EO utilized ex-special forces from the former apartheid military in South Africa with years of combat experience. They graphically showed how a small, professional military unit could change the course of conflicts in Africa. EO helped force UNITA to a UN-supervised peace in Angola, and working with the army and local militias, won the war in Sierra Leone in a matter of months.

### **Future of MSPs in Africa**

The future of MSPs depends very much on the future of Africa. MSPs thrive on the continent because demand arising from the chaos and conflict. Whether governments or private companies contract them, MSPs specialize in bringing order from disorder, or at least creating harbors of peace in oceans of chaos.

The goals and behavior of MSPs depends substantially on their clients. As discussed above, PSCs are normally contracted by multinationals with operations in risky regions of the continent, and PMCs are normally hired by African governments. When a PMC is contracted by a government for domestic use, the goals and impact can be easier to predict than when a PMC is contracted by a foreign government to carry out its policies in Africa. This last concept is the most interesting.

Since the September 11 attacks in the United States there has been a radical change in U.S. policy towards the developing world. Conventional military ties, which were not very extensive in any case, are being reduced, so that the military can focus on its larger objective of countering terrorism. But at the same time, the United States quickly paid up its UN arrears to help garner world support for its new campaign against terrorism. To continue to court support, and to help stabilize parts of the world that are not of paramount interest during the focus on terrorism, there is likely to be an American interest in *increasing* military support and regional stabilization. To avoid using regular troops needed elsewhere, the United States will increasingly have to rely on private companies to carry out many of these essential bi and multilateral security policies.

The United States will look to follow the precedent set when it used PAE and ICI in supporting ECOMOG peacekeepers in Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the time Nigeria was a military dictatorship, and the civilian companies provided the American government with a useful degree of separation from the Nigerian-led peacekeeping operation, while at the same time imparting critical logistics and even air-assault capabilities that substantially aided the peacekeeping effort.

The West as a whole is not about to have a sudden change of heart to become substantially more engaged in peace operations on the African continent either. Instead, Western countries are more likely to hire or support MSPs to fill the demand for these essential services. For African leaders, they are left with few alternatives to private companies. Former colonial powers are no longer offering the training, equipment and military support that they used to. African states suffering from internal conflicts still need competent security, so they may get offered the services of private companies by donor states, or they may contract MSPs for security themselves. Or they may choose to do without and watch their economies disintegrate even more and their populations suffer even worse tribulations. No one can count on the West's militaries to do what needs to be done - unless the problem directly impacts on the strategic interests of a "first world" nation.

Indeed, far from becoming extinct, MSPs will play an important role in the security and recovery of African states for decades to come. Their functions of providing security during conflicts, supporting peace operations, and ultimately assisting with post-conflict recovery means that there is no shortage of future work in such a war-torn continent. The noble but ultimately harmful biases of many NGOs and policymakers against MSPs means they will continue to shun the use of such companies, especially for the larger, more prominent security operations on the continent. Even without the formal acceptance and recognition they desire, MSPs will continue to work effectively – and profitably – behind the scenes. Whether they are doing post-conflict reconstruction activities, or protecting foreign direct investment, there will be demands for their services for the foreseeable future. In some cases MSPs will be doing what the international community should be doing but is not. In other cases they will simply bring their

crucial skills to make what the international community is doing work better, or in the case of peacekeeping, simply work at all.

## **Conclusions**

African countries have shown they can thrive in today's globalized world, given a reasonably democratic and responsive government, given a rational market-based economic system, and given a basic level of safety and security for their citizens. With that essential level of stability, double-digit Asian-esque economic growth rates are very achievable. Though they have far to go yet, Uganda and Mozambique proved to the world that no matter how destructive the conflict, African countries have an astonishing ability to take advantage of a globalizing world and bounce back. Because of their affordability, capabilities and flexibility, MSPs will continue to be quietly welcomed in Africa to provide the essential security needs that can support this long-term economic revitalization.

Nevertheless, due to the inherent suspicion against privatizing security, MSPs will continue to be blamed for Africa's conflict-related ills, and they will continue to suffer from accusations of neocolonialism, and from the "mercenary" label. Africa would be much, much worse off without these companies, but few outsiders realize this fact. The degeneration of Africa's own state militaries has created a security vacuum that is destroying societies continent-wide. With the international community revealing a shameful reluctance to intervene with their own military forces to end conflicts and provide critical security, MSPs are increasingly being called on by both African states and Western nations to fill that security vacuum. Whether they are the mundane NSPs or the more controversial PMCs, MSPs will continue to provide services that support stability and security in Africa, and they will continue to be vilified and welcomed at the same time.

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