

Hope for the “Hopeless Continent”: Mercenaries

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Introduction

Africa is wracked by armed conflicts and dictators. Warlords regularly confound democratic aspirations, and the developed world increasingly chooses to disengage from Africa’s problems rather than engage them. The United Nations attempts to end wars but has been repeatedly thwarted, and the landmine legacy of past and current conflicts continues to torment innocent civilians. Despite the promise of high returns, only a few Western investors willingly gamble their capital in the riskiest continent. Investors must brave corrupt governments, war zones, deteriorating infrastructure and hopelessly bureaucratic and absurd economic regulations. But it is not the investors or warlords who suffer the most, it is the poorest of Africans.

The impotence of the UN and the disengagement of the West means that new solutions must be found if African wars are to be ended, Africans are to be freed from oppression and Africa is to reach its economic potential. Fortunately, in an era of global privatisation, the solution to many of these problems is readily at hand: the solution is mercenaries.

The Modern Mercenary

It is misleading and pejorative to use the term “mercenary”, more correctly they are “military service providers”, or MSPs. MSPs 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 with corporate structures. They 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 offensive combat operations. In fact, few militaries 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utilize former personnel of the world's finest military organizations, and are unbound by bureaucratic red tape and outdated doctrines.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 ideal for addressing Africa's military security problems at affordable prices.

While MSPs by definition provide military services, these services can be broken down into three categories, all of which are essential for addressing aspects of the continent's military and national security problems and improving Africa's economic potential. Some companies fit into more than one category, but the categories can be used as general guidelines to better understand the military service industry.

1. *Non-lethal Service Providers (NSPs)*. NSPs are companies that do a variety of non-combat operations, including logistics for national armies, humanitarian operations, intelligence and mapping services, risk assessments for potential investors and mine clearance operations. Their clients are often non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and states. Examples include the American company Brown & Root and the Zimbabwean Koch Mine Safe Ltd.
2. *Private Security Companies (PSCs)*. PSCs provide passive security for private and public facilities and operations in high-risk conflict zones. Their clients are generally from the private sector, especially multinational companies (MNCs) and resource extraction firms. However, they are sometimes employed by NGOs and states as well. PSCs guard resource mines, embassies and provide protection for personnel conducting humanitarian operations. They train indigenous security company personnel and provide security advice and risk assessments. Examples include South Africa's Saracen International

and the British Defence Systems Ltd. (a subsidiary of the U.S. company Armor Group).

3. *Private Military Companies (PMCs)*. PMCs provide active military services to states and multinational organizations; they are the most controversial of the MSPs. Their services include everything from the training of military units and strategic advice to actual combat operations. Examples include the British Sandline International, the American company MPRI, and the recently closed South African company, Executive Outcomes.

MSPs and Africa

It is important to understand that the market for MSPs is demand driven. MSPs do not create wars. Instead, MSPs alleviate the immediate suffering and the long-term legacy of war, they mitigate the effects of war, and they end wars. Unlike mercenaries of the past, MSPs benefit from ending conflict rather than extending it. They only work for internationally legitimate clients since future contracts – especially with the UN and NGOs - depends on a pristine corporate background. Corporate reputations and future contracts all hinge on speed, quality, price and most importantly, results.

MSPs provide services in these states and regions that make capital-intensive investments possible. By doing their operations in conflict zones they give employment to thousands left unemployed by the conflict. MSPs render dangerous battlefields safe for habitation and investment creating safer economic climates. PMCs bolster legitimate governments and enhance the abilities of state-run military forces to repel usurpers. For corporate clients, PSCs help create stability that reduces costs and increases investment values. Thus the various MSPs fill the vacuum left by the political and military retreat of the West while better ascertaining and addressing the unique needs of Africa.

MSPs provide massive economic benefits to Africa, both within the local economies and in attracting foreign investment to regions economically

marginalized by conflict. By providing their clients with robust security options, MSPs make otherwise extremely risky investment options safe enough to be financially viable. At the same time, they train and employ thousands of local employees, thus stimulating the local economies. In post-conflict countries, MSPs clear landmines and unexploded ordinance from transportation routes and agricultural and industrial lands, reclaiming vast areas for productive economic uses. With their superior knowledge of African conflicts, MSPs provide investors with advice on the best locations for investment and how best to protect those investments. MSPs work within the often-difficult African economic framework to make opportunities possible for investors, by offering the security services and levels of protection required for capital-intensive operations in high-risk regions.

MSPs bring various social benefits to Africa as well. In addition to the enhanced economic stimulation and opportunity, MSPs are leaders in capacity building; ensuring a supply of long-term skills in the countries in which they operate. Landmine clearing has a direct impact on the quality of life, especially for the very poorest. In a number of cases, PSCs have provided security for humanitarian missions that would have been curtailed or eliminated without sufficient protection from thugs and bandits. It is conceivable that in the near future PMCs could provide international organizations like the UN with an effective humanitarian rescue capability, with the ability to prevent ethnic conflicts and even Rwanda-style genocides. PMCs contracted by the UN or OAU could provide a quick and legitimate protective force to innocent civilians, who are disproportionately impacted by African wars.

Obviously, the greatest potential benefit of MSPs is in military combat services. The disengagement of the West from Africa has led to too many African countries falling into the abyss of war, dictators and oppression. PMCs are much more effective at peacekeeping or its more robust version, peace enforcement. The international community, and specifically the UN and OAU, lack a viable military force that could underpin diplomatic efforts

and mediation aimed at ending African wars. The disastrous UN peacekeeping effort in Sierra Leone is a case in point.

Peacekeeping

Traditional UN peacekeeping requires two essential ingredients. First, it requires that all parties to a conflict firmly agree to a peace accord. Second, it requires competent and effective military forces working under the UN flag and monitoring the peace. Sadly, both these ingredients are likely to remain a fantasy in Africa for the first decade of the 21st Century. Regarding the first requirement, contemporary African conflicts are seldom simple enough to end with a single accord. There are too many factions involved, too many warlords, and too much money in the offing for the winner. Regarding the second requirement, the remarkable post-Cold War diplomatic and military withdrawal by developed countries from Africa has meant that the UN is forced to make do with inferior militaries to monitor extraordinarily complex peace agreements. Without operative peace agreements monitored by vigorous and effective militaries, conflicts in Africa are likely to multiply and continue endlessly. While it might seem radical at first glance, PMCs may be Africa's only viable option for effective peacekeeping.

In Sierra Leone, the Lome peace agreement optimistically attempted to bring together all sides in the conflict to establish a permanent peace.

Unfortunately, Rebel United Front (RUF) leader Foday Sankoh was reluctant to surrender Sierra Leone's lucrative diamond mines to peacekeeper control, despite the fact that he been accommodated by being given a position in the government as a part of the peace agreement. When the RUF challenged the UN peacekeeping force over the issue of the mines, the critical weaknesses of the UN mission became obvious. As a result of Western disengagement, the peacekeeping troops proffered to the operation were all from developing countries. Their training, equipment, leadership and discipline was wholly inadequate and they were unable to face up to the pitiful rag-tag RUF. As a result, the peacekeepers were attacked and taken hostage by the rebels, completing the humiliation of the UN. The use of PMCs in this instance could have prevented the tragedy.

PMCs can provide the much-needed 'teeth' for peace operations. Although small in actual numbers, they offer sophisticated military talents in the fields of training, intelligence and combat operations. They work as "force multipliers"; assisting otherwise mediocre militaries to become astonishingly more effective. Able to bypass traditional military structures and techniques, PMCs are nimble and flexible, and they work with local forces rather than the UN technique of supplanting them. For traditional UN peace operations hamstrung by military helplessness, they offer immediate effectiveness and an authority that would bolster diplomacy and enhance general peace operations.

Ending African Wars

Beyond basic peacekeeping operations, PMCs can easily bring African wars to a positive conclusion. This ability can be used to speed negotiations or bolster legitimate governments. It is an option not currently available to the UN.

PMCs could end African wars with remarkable ease once called to do so. Most African military factions are little more than barely untrained thugs with rifles. Professional soldiers like those employed by PMCs have made short work of these factions in the past. Should the UN or OAU decide to contract PMCs they will be able to back up their declarations and ideals with force if necessary. No longer will the international community have to give in to the demands of petty warlords like Foday Sankoh or Charles Taylor. The UN and OAU can enforce a higher standard using PMCs.

Executive Outcomes displayed the PMC potential in Sierra Leone between 1995-97 when they effectively won the war against the ruthless Rebel United Front (RUF). Working with the Sierra Leone Army, and later the Kamajor militia, EO routed the RUF again and again. By the time EO was asked to leave, the RUF were scattered and demoralized. Within a few weeks, the RUF would have been eliminated as a military force within the Sierra Leone borders. During EO's operations, democratic elections were held. For the

first time in decades, Sierra Leonians elected a president, Tejan Kabbah. It is hard to imagine that this positive development would have come about without the PMC.

Critics bemoaned the cost of hiring EO in Sierra Leone and the fact that one of the poorest African nations was “wasting” money on mercenaries instead of development. However, those costs should be put in perspective. The average monthly cost of EO was less than two million dollars. Compare that to the more than three million dollars a day that the UN is currently spending on its ineffective peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone. It is also important to remember the humanitarian disaster that occurred in Sierra Leone after EO left – a military coup, the sacking of the capital, and the killing and maiming of tens of thousands of innocent civilians – would have been avoided had EO been allowed to remain. But in one sense, the critics are correct; Sierra Leone should not have had to foot the bill for private peace enforcers. The UN should have paid that bill.

There is also the issue of the 1994 Rwanda genocide and the reluctance of any country – from the West or from Africa – to intervene to stop the slaughter. In June of this year former EO Chief of Staff Chris Grove´ wrote a detailed analysis of the incident and showed how the PMC could easily have done the intervention and ended the genocide. Grove´ mentions that EO had discussed the possibility of intervention in Rwanda and concluded that it was feasible. The PMC could have had combat troops on the ground within two weeks of being contracted and could have provided both military and humanitarian services. For \$150 million the genocide could have been quickly ended, saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. Clearly PMCs have a willingness and capability that states lack, but Africa needs.

The Need for Effective Military Force

Unfortunately, the international community has yet to accept the harsh realities of post-Cold War Africa. Western detachment has allowed warlords and tyrants to gain the upper hand, and diplomatic efforts are seldom

supported by viable force. The United Nations is not a “poor man’s NATO”, only professional soldiers can bolster fledgling democracies and face down power-hungry thugs.

Naive faith in negotiation, mediation and appeasement has meant that African wars are measured not in years but in decades. Wars are “ended” by rewarding warlords with titles and income and hoping they find it in their hearts to become statesmen instead of terrorists. It is a formula that seldom works and ultimately encourages the disgruntled to raise arms against legitimate governments secure in the knowledge that even if they do not win the conflict outright, they still have much to gain and little to lose.

Although the history of mercenaries has been chequered, PMCs offer Africa a viable military force that can bring much needed stability. PMCs are profit-driven companies, but they have proven time and again to be substantially more cost-effective than UN operations. They bring a wealth of talent and experience and a willingness to utilize innovative solutions to solve conflicts. Their doctrine of sharp, intensive use of force when necessary to end conflicts quickly is exactly what is needed to end the seemingly endless low-intensity African wars that primarily impact civilians. For the international community to utilize PMCs would require a fundamental change in our understanding of the concept of peace operations. No longer can the UN rely on states to provide the necessary and effective militaries required for peacekeeping or peace enforcement. The decision to utilize private companies in place of military forces volunteered by member states is no small revolution, but for Africa it is critical. Until that decision takes place the wars in Africa will persist and the innocent will continue to bear the brunt.

Conclusions: MSPs Changing the Paradigm

MSPs enhance economic activity in Africa and offer solutions to many of Africa’s conflicts and post-conflict problems. PSCs and NSPs are already in widely used around the continent and are active in making investment opportunities possible and in undoing damage done by previous wars. However, the real potential for MSPs comes from the PMCs.

Today Africans die by the hundreds of thousands due to UN and OAU incapacity, incompetence, and indolence. Sierra Leone is just the latest example, but Angola and Rwanda were previous instances. Unless some fundamental changes are made soon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will be the next UN peacekeeping disaster. For Africa's sake, we cannot let that happen.

Once the UN and OAU decide to utilize PMCs for peace operations, the whole African paradigm changes. Once again, the UN will be a legitimate and effective factor in African conflicts and politics. The UN will once again mean something. No longer will blue helmets sit by while genocide occurs, as in Rwanda. No longer will blue helmets surrender their armour and weapons to armed children. PMCs give the UN the option of using force to end ethnic and humanitarian conflicts, to guard and support humanitarian rescue operations, to challenge two-bit warlords wherever they dare infringe on democracy or human rights.

As Africa develops, the need for MSPs will decrease. In the meantime, however, MSPs offer critical conflict-alleviation services to a continent that suffers disproportionately from conflict. The fact that MSP services have a direct and positive impact on the poorest of Africans should be enough to encourage their use, but the failure of the UN and OAU mean there are really no alternatives.

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