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# Global Order and Security Privatization

by Herbert Howe

## Conclusions

- Nation-states are losing their monopoly over military might. Private security firms are filling a void by offering military services and security for national governments and non-governmental organizations.
- The ending of the Cold War has raised both the supply of, and often the demand for, private security organizations. The loss of superpower patronage has weakened numerous governments and worldwide military cutbacks are supplying the private market with vast supplies of equipment and trained personnel.
- The rising number of insurgencies and an increase in banditry threaten not just the capabilities of some national militaries to ensure national security and stability, but also the effectiveness of international relief organizations.
- Private security firms may be a threat to global security because they lack accountability, act as strongmen for multinational companies, and may prolong conflicts for greater profits.
- Established private security companies are able to handpick employees on the basis of proven accomplishments and their desire for future contracts encourages them to insist upon proper employee behavior. A few private security firms provide combat soldiers: many more offer specialists in logistics, communications, procurement, intelligence, advising, and training.
- Elimination of "mercenary" behavior is impossible and probably undesirable: private groups can offer some useful services. The international community should establish international regulations which could ensure that private companies assist global security.

The international state system has controlled military might over the past 300 years. Some observers believe that a dramatic growth in private security could challenge this control and eventually may threaten global order with military force that is less accountable/controllable than state militaries. Max Weber maintained that the modern state arose because it "successfully upheld a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order." A number of established private firms are

increasingly shouldering military responsibilities which once belonged to the state. Does this growth threaten global security or could it assist fragile states undergoing dramatic changes in this post-Cold War era?

Recent demand for better security has driven private security's growth. Many governments have lost ground to powerful insurgents, often because the demise of superpower competition lowered foreign support to numerous governments. "Collapsed states" are a post-Cold War phenomenon and governments in Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, and Zaire lost significant support when their Cold War patrons withdrew their previous aid and the possibility of military intervention. National militaries, at least in Africa, have often proven incapable of national defense and have sometimes increased state instability.

While state might has declined during the 1990s, insurgent capabilities have often grown. Both the Cold War and its ending saw a flood of equipment and personnel, especially from the former Soviet Bloc and South Africa (fully-assembled AK-47 assault rifles sell for about \$15 in some African townships). Children are increasingly used (the various factions in Liberia's civil war from 1990-1996 employed some 6,000 children under 15 years of age, out of a total of some 60,000 fighters). Insurgencies increasingly are robbing or coercing aid organizations for their foreign exchange, communications, and logistics (Somalian thuggery during the early 1990s was a major reason for U.S. and UN military intervention).

Possible options for African state defense include African regional military forces, Western intervention, and the UN. Yet these possibilities either lack strong military capabilities or are unlikely to occur.

Lacking other options, states and businesses, as well as insurgencies and criminal groups, increasingly are employing private security. While combat soldiers, or "mercenaries," have received the most attention, private firms are more likely to furnish specialists in logistics, communications, procurement, intelligence, advising, and training. Many of today's private soldiers hail from highly disciplined military units (e.g., U.S. Special Forces, the British Special Air Squadron and Special Boat Service, or South Africa's apartheid-era Reconnaissance Commando and Parachute Brigade). The majority train and advise, rather than fight for, their foreign employers.

Private security today is far different from the ad hoc organizations of the past. Many of today's companies exhibit a distinct corporate nature, including an ongoing intelligence capability, and a desire for good public relations. Their established character allows them to handpick each employee on the basis of proven accomplishments. The companies' goal of obtaining contracts encourages them to control their employees' actions. Private firms have a large pool of qualified applicants, due to worldwide political realignments and defense cutbacks since 1989. And, many of these companies often enjoy ties with major multinational, especially mineral, companies which provide increased funding, intelligence, and political contacts.

## **Growth**

The growth of private military and police capability is staggering, especially in eastern Europe, wealthy Middle Eastern states, and threatened African states. U.S. intelligence in late 1993 estimated that some 20,000 foreigners were fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Military Professional Resources, Incorporated (MPRI)* is an American firm which claims that it contains "the greatest corporate assemblage of military expertise in the world" (it employs 17 retired U.S. generals full-time). MPRI has 182 former U.S. Special Forces personnel training and equipping the Bosnia Federation's military force (the U.S. Government has supplied over \$100 million in surplus equipment to assist MPRI's success). A wide range of private British and U.S. firms operate in the Middle East. About 1,000 ex-U.S. military now work for the *Vinnell Corporation* in training the 65,000-man Saudi National Guard. *Executive Outcomes* is a private company that British intelligence termed "with the possible exception of the South African army, the most deadly and efficient army operating in sub-Saharan Africa." Executive Outcomes (EO) fielded about 600 combat soldiers in Angola and 300 men in Sierra Leone to help defeat insurgencies—something the government forces could not accomplish by themselves. EO's air capabilities, including MI-8, -17 and -24 helicopters and MiG-23 fighters, supported these soldiers. U.S. State Department sources claim that over 80 private security companies operate in Angola alone; five years ago there were six.

## Objections

Critics have generally labeled private security companies as threats to global security because of alleged nonaccountability (including a disrespect for human rights), their possible use by neo-colonial forces, and a tendency to alienate the local military. Some critics charge soldiers (or companies) of fortune with incompetence, perhaps to prolong the war and thus their contracts.

**Accountability.** Machiavelli cautioned his Prince that competent mercenaries could threaten the state. Critics assume that money drives mercenaries' actions and that greed will quickly shred any accountability or loyalty.

Private security companies may have several masters: their own government, the employing government, and possibly a private business. Once inside a country and its defense establishment, a private firm could exert powerful leverage upon the state. Private security's coupling with powerful multinational companies dramatically increases a foreigner's power within a beleaguered state.

No effective international norms or sanctions exist. A hiring government or insurgency may have little control over a powerful private security force and could hesitate to discipline its presumed allies at a time of need. Mercenaries often move unimpeded and unrecorded through immigration, thus lessening chances for future investigations into alleged misbehavior. These implicit licenses for illegal behavior encouraged past mercenary groups to engage in serious violations of human rights. Foreign military personnel often show little knowledge or sensitivity to local customs and institutions.

As Western governments increasingly work with private firms, some critics worry that such cooperation may circumvent public oversight and enforcement. The U.S. Government in 1995 reportedly sidestepped a UN embargo that proscribed state supplying of military equipment to Rwanda by hiring *Ronco*, a private de-mining company, to provide armored transport vehicles and explosives.

**Last Gasp of Colonialism?** Africans especially distrust private security groups (although numerous states and insurgencies have hired them). Accusations of white neocolonial, mercenary muscle gaining cheap mineral concessions and thus threatening self-determination have some basis in fact, especially in Africa. During the 1960s, mercenaries often received financing from Western businesses and fought against African governments.

**Relations with National Militaries.** Private foreign personnel—especially combat units—may foment bitterness, and perhaps revolt, within the national army. The hiring of private personnel is an *ipso facto* judgment by the government of its own military. The foreigners' often vaunted military background, their often superior weaponry, and their higher salaries may further anger the government's military. Foreigners in various African conflicts (e.g., Congo, Biafra, and Sierra Leone; as well as in Papua New Guinea) have embittered various local officers. Papua New Guinea officers mutinied in 1997 against the introduction of the British-based *Sandline* military force and forced Prime Minister Julian Chan to step down.

**Ineptitude.** Popular literature presents two images of the mercenary: the manipulative and uncontrollable warrior or the inept foreign soldier. Sometimes "ineptitude" is deliberate. Pilots for Nigeria during its civil war (1967-1970) deliberately failed to bomb "Biafra's" single airport: since their salaries were based on months and not results, their prolongation of the war procured financial gain. Sometimes the foreigners are simply incompetent. A force of some 400 east European mercenaries fought in the former Zaire during Mobutu's final year. Mixed military capabilities and languages restricted operational effectiveness and inadequate medical capability saw many of these soldiers quickly contract malaria and dysentery.

### **Advantages of Private Security**

Yet private security companies have grown despite these and other fears. They fill a military void for both Western and recipient governments, are relatively inexpensive, and they may offer several military and political advantages.

**Filling a Void.** Private security can enter situations where Western governments presently fear to tread, especially after the world's intervention into Somalia. President Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive-25 summarizes the views of many governments not to intervene in areas not of vital national interest. Not coincidentally, the rise of these companies is coinciding with the pullback of Western nations and the UN from peacekeeping and peace enforcing.

Private companies can perform services which governments approve of, but hesitate to attempt themselves because of political, military, or financial costs. Private companies can supply both combat soldiers and competent military specialists to train or advise in areas where the national militaries may be lacking.

These companies could aid humanitarian groups which increasingly need protection from insurgents or

bandits attacking relief efforts for the money and supplies. Protection was a major rationale for U.S. and then UN intervention into Somalia—an experience which the world wishes not to repeat. Competent private protection would lessen pressure upon governments to intervene, as well as prevent the insurgents from gaining tactically-important supplies.

**Economy.** Economy is a major selling point for private security. Private security has a "shadow" capability which can be quickly assembled when contracted for. Executive Outcomes has a permanent staff of 30 and yet it reportedly can deploy a fully supported battalion (about 650 men) within 15 days. Paying for specialists only when needed saves considerable sums in salary, housing, and pensions while the leasing of private equipment, especially airplanes and helicopters, saves storage, insurance, and maintenance costs.

Executive Outcome's operations lend some cred-ence to this cost efficiency. EO's budget (\$40 million yearly in Angola and far less in Sierra Leone) appears small when compared to the national military budgets of Angola and Sierra Leone. Angola spent an estimated \$515 million on its military in 1994, while Sierra Leone spent \$41 million in 1995.

Another financial aspect is that some private companies act as arms merchants for their home governments. A private Israeli firm, *Levdan*, trained the Presidential Guard of the Congo-Brazzaville government in the early 1990's. The government then purchased \$10 million of Israeli military equipment.

**Military and Political Advantages.** Private companies offer some possible military advantages. A private force can start up and deploy faster than multinational (and perhaps national) forces. Additionally, it probably will have a clearer chain of command and is not subject to changing political desires (or fears) of the contributing nations. It will not suffer the national vs supra-national tensions which plague multinational forces. It may have more readily compatible military equipment training and common language, and possibly greater experience of working together than do ad hoc multinational forces. Additionally, private forces such as Sandline and Executive Outcomes can handpick each of their soldiers based upon past service records.

Finally, small groups of foreign specialists may provide some political advantages over military personnel of local or foreign governments. A private agreement carries no political IOUs and some governments prefer foreigners who neither understand nor represent local viewpoints (several African presidents have preferred foreign personal bodyguards).

## Trends

Several private security trends are appearing. First, a continuing supply of competent applicants and the demand by businesses and fragile states will assist the growth of this multifaceted business. Elimination of mercenaries, a goal sought by the African Research and Information Bureau in London, would prove impossible to administer and would drive both buyers and sellers away from any public oversight.

Second, despite this overall growth, private militaries similar to Executive Outcomes appear unlikely—despite EO's clear military successes in Angola and Sierra Leone. EO's effectiveness was unusual for a mercenary force: most have performed as did the East Europeans in Zaire during 1997. Possible nonaccountability of such powerful groups, the guilt-by-association that their employers sometimes experience, and their often-concealed links with multinational mineral companies worry observers about their possible destabilizing of global physical and economic security.

Third, governments increasingly are employing private companies to help advance national foreign policy goals which the governments wish accomplished but hesitate to do themselves. MPRI has furthered U.S. goals in the former Yugoslavia and Defense Systems Limited has done the same for the British government.

Fourth, governments increasingly will use private security to augment their own military capabilities; in other words, the choice is not between private security and governmental militaries. Multinational forces are probably the wave of the future for African security and private groups should have a growing role to play. Private military groupings have assisted both national and regional militaries within West Africa. Executive Outcomes soldiers cooperated with Nigerian troops during the conflict in Sierra Leone from 1995 to 1996. The U.S.-based Pacific Architects and Engineering provided logistical, especially helicopter, service to ECOMOG (a West African multinational force) in Liberia. The British-based Sandline military consultancy supplied unreported but important advisory and logistical assistance to Nigerian soldiers when they ousted the widely condemned J. P. Koromah government of Sierra Leone in early 1998.

Finally, small private guard forces will continue to expand and provide important security for multinational companies and relief groups. This protection hopefully will assist worldwide economic development and lessen the need for the international community to deploy government troops to protect relief shipments.

## **Moving Toward Regulation**

Because the role of private security companies is clearly growing, governments and international organizations should seek ways to regulate, rather than eliminate, them.

Most security companies operate from Western nations where media and government provide some control over their activities. American companies, for example, need governmental approval—the terms of which are stipulated by the Arms Export Control Act and the Export Administration Act. An inquiring media can also serve as a check. Some supporters of these companies will argue that the personnel for these companies come from first-world, highly professional militaries.

But international regulation is necessary. Governments and media may, or may not, learn of objectionable behavior and then often only after the fact. Regulation would benefit responsible companies by providing them with greater legitimacy while separating them from those truly "mercenary" groups

willing to fight for any organization capable of paying them. *International* regulation is necessary since, as Sandline itself notes, these companies "can become very nomadic in order to evade nationally applied legislation which they regard as inappropriate or excessive."

Regulation would be a multi-step process and involve *registration*, which would determine the applicant's initial qualification, and *specific project approval*, and then operational oversight which should include observers from recognized human rights organizations. Finally, an *enforcement capability* would be essential, both during the military operation to lessen abuses and then following the operation.

Numerous details need resolution (e.g., the appropriate international regulatory body and the extent of its enforcement capabilities). Specific problems would include client confidentiality and the client's need for quick action versus the regulator's requiring time and contractual information before granting project approval.

Governments may find it difficult to agree to international regulation because such action would confer legitimacy upon nonstate military actors. Yet the supply of private personnel and the demand for them by states and businesses continue to expand. Rather than engaging in futile attempts at legally eliminating "mercenary" behavior or ignoring this growing phenomenon, the world community should channel these companies' capabilities into assisting global security.

Herbert M. Howe is Professor of African Studies at Georgetown University. A longer version of this paper will be printed in the Fletcher Forum.

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