

Creating the Renaissance Peace: The utilisation of private companies for peacekeeping and peace enforcement activities in Africa

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Introduction

Scholars of the Italian Renaissance of the 14th to 16th centuries often overlook one of the more interesting and underrated factors that supported the rebirth in Western culture: the use of *condottieri*, (privately-run armies) to provide security for the Italian city-states. Citizens of the Italian city-states were engaged in business, international trade and astounding cultural achievements and felt that warfare was barbaric and best left to professionals.¹ Therefore the states often hired condottieri to provide their state security. Thus, Private military companies (PMCs) helped make the Italian renaissance possible. PMCs can do the same for today's African Renaissance.

Numerous conflicts torment the African continent today. Time and again, conflicts have been mediated, pacified, and tentatively resolved only to flair up again with even greater violence. The United Nations is wary of sending peacekeeping forces to help resolve ongoing conflicts unless all sides have agreed to stop fighting – peacekeeping known as a Chapter Six intervention. This limitation means that there is little hope of quick intervention in Africa's more complex multi-faction conflicts. In addition, few UN member states are willing to contribute armed peacekeepers to what is becoming an increasingly dangerous task. The potential for casualties on these more complex missions is huge. The scale of the peacekeeping missions required for countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are breathtakingly large.² In the past, such missions have cost the UN dearly in resources, money and lives. They have also been plagued by the UN's notorious timidity and reluctance to use armed force when needed. And few states are willing to commit their own

¹ See Anthony Mockler, *The New Mercenaries: the History of the Hired Soldier from the Congo to the Seychelles*, Paragon House, 1987

² Compared to Sierra Leone the DRC has ten times to population and 33 times the landmass. There are currently 17,000 UN peacekeepers authorized for Sierra Leone.

armed forces to these dreadfully dangerous missions. “Donor fatigue” is matched by “peacekeeper fatigue”.

Rationale

Africa needs its own robust peace operations capability (“peace operations” includes peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian rescue). It needs a military that can quickly and effectively deal with complex situations and is not shy of using armed force where necessary to preserve a peace settlement, protect fragile African democracies or rescue innocent lives from violence. The reality of peace operations today offers no choice: only private military companies can fulfil this role. They can deploy faster, operate more professionally, act more decisively, enter riskier environments, and cost substantially less than a comparable UN-managed operation. They are thus both affordable *and* immediately available to Africa. They offer Africa a powerful resource to use in resolving the continent’s many conflicts positively. They can be deployed and controlled by their contracting state or organization of states, and do not need the miserly sanction of the former colonial powers.

Using private companies is a controversial concept and vulnerable to charges of “mercenarism.” However, the military services firms that operate today are a far cry from the mercenaries of the 1960s. They maintain the same structures and offices of legitimate companies and work within the bounds of domestic and international law. Unlike the freelance soldiers of the 1960s, they are able to select their personnel with care and ensure quality. Their long-term business outlook motivates them to guarantee excellence and transparency. And unlike so many mercenaries of the 1960s, instead of destabilising they would be “restablising” African states. With proper safeguards and strict regulations, these companies would likely prove to be a powerful catalyst for peace on the African continent. PMCs can be a potent tool for the African Renaissance; their potential should not be dismissed out-of-hand.

Problem

In an incredibly complex situation like the DRC, applying the usual UN standards would proscribe the UN from ever intervening. The conflict in the DRC involves numerous countries, internal factions, external factions, and a sitting government of questionable legitimacy. If the UN plans to wait for proper Chapter Six conditions, it will be a long wait. For Africans this is understandably frustrating. President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia complained that the UN was waiting for “a perfect score on some performance chart”.³

³ Frederick Chiluba quoted in “Call for Support for Lusaka Agreement, Speedy Establishment of UN Peacekeeping Mission”, email distributed by the African Policy Information Center (APIC), 26 January 2000.

Yet events in Sierra Leone proved that the UN is being realistic about its limits. In Sierra Leone a peacekeeping mission was forced into a situation where the peace was artificial, a hopeful myth backed by Western governments anxious to end a conflict that was embarrassing because it revealed their own double standards between peace operations in Europe and Africa. Unfortunately, the quality of troops offered by UN member states was marginal, and the disastrous results were eminently predictable.⁴ Without substantial participation by professional “First World” militaries, the UN will continue to be of limited utility in peace operations.

The American Factor

Even with the support of professional Western militaries, the direct military support of the United States is a requirement for the majority of peace operations. Most Western countries have substantially “downsized” their militaries since the end of the Cold War, and this has adversely impacted on their ability to intervene in African conflicts. The United States has the only military with the massive air transport capability and mobile units to be able to carry out sustained peace operations in remote corners of the world.⁵

The recent British intervention in Sierra Leone involved less than 1000 troops, barely enough to secure the airfield and provide light patrols in the capital of Freetown. Even with a tiny coastal country like Sierra Leone, a larger intervention by the British military would place a severe strain on their military resources. If the intervention were inland at all, or required more than an battalion or two of combat troops on short notice, then it would be up to the Americans to provide the necessary assistance.

As the only country in the world with the necessary military air transport and the standing army capable and mobile enough to deploy anywhere, the United States becomes the sole arbitrator about which places require intervention and which places will be “left to die.” And even when they do intervene, the United States is not the ideal state to run peace operations. As was shown in Somalia, the American military travels heavy and utilizes an enormous amount of firepower in their operations. The American military lacks the necessary “light touch” to successfully complement diplomatic efforts. Furthermore, American interventions have no staying power; even a limited number of casualties can motivate the U.S. Congress to recall the military from foreign engagements. It is not a formula for successful peacekeeping.

⁴ Even Kofi Annan admitted to the poor quality of troops being provided to the UN in an interview with the French Daily Le Monde, “Our soldiers are badly trained and badly equipped,” Reuters, “Annan Admits Failings”, 12 May, 2000.

⁵ See William J. Durch, “Running the Show: Planning and Implementation,” in [The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis](#), ed. William J. Durch (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 68.

Private Military Company Advantages

Why should Africa have to beg former colonial powers every time it needs military assistance? Using PMCs would give Africa control over its security and destiny. They are inexpensive, effective and controllable.

Scale of the problem

The military complexities of African conflicts have been exaggerated: professional soldiers can easily bring peace to Africa. African wars are generally characterized by comparatively small, lightly-armed, under-trained, and poorly led armies. Once a political decision is made to end a war, by either peace enforcement or even by choosing sides, then it is a relatively simple matter for professionals to do the actual military operation. Private Military Companies can assemble the small professional armies, trainers and equipment necessary to end the conflict in remarkably short order. And they can do it at a very affordable price. The quick ending of the military conflict lays the basis for a non-violent political agreement and avoids the inevitable destruction of infrastructure.

Affordable

Private companies are inexpensive enough to be easily affordable to African states and organizations. We often forget, but the now defunct South African company of Executive Outcomes was hired by the Government of Sierra Leone and in less than two years *won* the war back in 1996! Their whole operation cost around \$36 million.⁶ Compare that to the \$3 million a *day* that the UN is spending in Sierra Leone. Or compare that to the \$3 billion that was spent on the failed Somalia operation.⁷ And while private companies are cheap enough that they can be paid for by African states if needed, the reality is that the West is inevitably going to help fund African initiatives – out of shame for not doing the necessary intervention themselves and out of relief that they are not being required to risk their own forces.

Effective

PMCs are small enough to be easily transported anywhere on short notice. They utilise highly trained personnel who are veterans of the world's finest militaries and their quality is bound to be much higher than typical contributing states to a multinational mission. Unfettered by arcane military structures or UN bureaucracy, PMCs utilize training, military skill, speed and coordination to act as a "force multiplier", working with local militaries or militias to achieve

⁶ See David Shearer, "Private Armies and Military Intervention", Adelphi Paper No. 316, London, Oxford University Press.

⁷ William Reno, "War, Business, and the Centrality of Sovereignty in Africa", Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 8 June 1999.

the desired result. They transform disorganized, untrained mobs into effective fighting units in a short space of time.⁸

Small

Private interventions are likely to be much less intrusive than state-sponsored missions. UN deployments in Mozambique and Cambodia were huge, and the contingents severely impacted the economies and encouraged negative side effects, such as child prostitution and black markets. The Americans and the UN entered their Somalia intervention with thousands of troops, and hundreds of aircraft and ships. Needless to say, such a massive influx was hardly ideal for the locals. The UN intervention in Sierra Leone is already authorized at up to almost 17,000 troops, hardly a small contingent by any means.⁹ Finding the air transport for these huge, typical UN-style operations is an enormously expensive proposition. Compare this to the less than 300 employees who worked for Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone. Or the few dozen from Sandline International who helped the Nigerians recapture Freetown in 1997. In addition to being non-intrusive, the small size of PMC deployments compels them to work with local forces and governments to be effective, thus reinforcing the indigenous authority.

Controllable

PMCs are essentially businesses with a profit motive and in most respects operate like any other business. When hired they work under a contract which stipulates what they are to do as a part of that contract and how much they are to be paid for that task. PMCs work for money. If the money is cut off or the contract ends, the PMC leaves. Executive Outcomes willingly left Angola and Sierra Leone when their contract was terminated. Sandline International left Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea when their contract was terminated. In addition, the long-term fortunes of the PMCs require them to operate within national and international laws. Violation of laws, contracts or regulations would mean future financial disaster for the company.

Robust

PMCs have a willingness to accept substantially more risk than normal multinational operations; this allows them to deploy a fraction of the personnel typical to UN operations. While PMCs try to minimize their casualties, deaths and injuries are not a cause for immediate withdrawal. Unlike the United States and other developed countries, PMCs have no political constituency that would demand immediate disengagement. Their personnel are specifically contracted for their mission and know what to expect, a vast improvement over the militaries normally volunteered for UN operations.

⁸ Herb Howe, "South Africa's 911 Force" Armed Forces Journal International, November 1996.

⁹ "UN Commitment to SL increased", Associated Press, 19 May 2000.

Neutral

Virtually any African country involved in peace operations is unavoidably going to bring political or historical baggage, especially for peacekeeping operations such as the DRC. PMCs bring no agenda or political history, and thus are more likely to be accepted as neutral by the numerous factions involved.

Disadvantages

Mercenarism

Many analysts consider PMCs to be mercenaries, although PMCs vigorously dispute this label. Both the UN and the OAU have legislated against mercenaries. Nevertheless, even if we do assume PMCs are mercenaries, both organizations make it very clear that private militaries working for legitimate states are quite legal (so long as they do not oppose recognized national liberation movements).¹⁰

Mining Connections

Much has been made of the allegations that the PMC, Executive Outcomes, acquired mining rights for a related company when they did their operations in Angola and Sierra Leone.¹¹ EO has denied this, but the perception remains. Thus to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, it is important for Africans to ensure that any PMC that is to be hired for peace operations maintain a transparency of business dealings, and any resource company connections be terminated before a PMC can be contracted.

Human rights abuses

While there have been a number of accusations against PMCs, notably Executive Outcomes, regarding to human rights abuses,¹² there has been remarkably little independent verification of these allegations.¹³ Few would argue that PMCs have a human rights record anywhere as abysmal as that of typical African militaries. Nevertheless, maintaining an immaculate human rights record must be a priority requirement of any peace operation contract.

¹⁰ See Garth Abraham, "The Contemporary Legal Environment", in Greg Mills and John Stremlau, eds., The Privatisation of Security in Africa, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg 1999.

¹¹ See for example, Khareen Pech and David Beresford, "Africa's new-look dogs of war", Mail and Guardian, 24 April 1997.

¹² See Alex Vines, "Mercenaries and the privatisation of security in Africa in the 1990s", in Greg Mills and John Stremlau, eds., The Privatisation of Security in Africa, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, 1999.

¹³ Philip Trehwitt, "The Business of Killing", The Parliamentary Human Rights Group, London 1999.

Thus the initial contract must spell out the human rights parameters that the PMC must follow and independent onsite monitors must be included in operations.

Uncontrollable

Some people have expressed fears that PMCs, which by nature are small but powerful militaries, could turn on the state that hires them. This threat is exaggerated, since the PMCs and individuals involved would have too much to lose by becoming international criminals. Nevertheless, peace operation contracts should stipulate conditions and regulations to ensure proper behaviour. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Safeguards and Regulations – Neutralizing the Disadvantages

How can PMC advantages be maximized and disadvantages minimized?

It is essential to give PMCs guidelines and a clear mandate; this is to protect both the PMC and the contracting state or organization. It is important that there is trust between the company and the contactors and a shared understanding of what the mandate entails.

The Initial Proposal and Contract

The initial proposal and contract is critical since it will detail the duties and services expected of the PMC. It is important to remember that PMCs are *not* NGOs – they offer their services for profit, not altruism. In addition to the obvious military services, they can perform many humanitarian tasks better, faster and often substantially cheaper than NGOs. However, they are not donor-supported and must charge for every task they are assigned.

PMCs can provide a wide variety of services and will charge appropriately but it is essential to itemize these services and requirements in the initial proposal and contract. It is on this basis that PMCs will offer competitive prices on costs of the mission. The mission could range from simple peacekeeping to vigorous conflict termination, and could include post-conflict demining election security. Contract clauses should include the possibility of “mission creep” – the expansion of the original mission or the necessity for additional missions (such as humanitarian medical services). And finally it must be remembered that PMCs do not operate in a vacuum. Much of their success stems from their relationship with their contractor, with NGOs working in the area, and with the local population.

Trained observers

PMCs have already indicated their willingness to accept trained, independent military observers to accompany them on all their operations. These observers could be from the UN or the OAU. Such observers would report on whether the PMC is successfully carrying out its contractual tasks, that it is

following agreed principles, and also offer the PMC protection against unfounded accusations.

Mediation groups

Before any private peacekeeping operation begins, a mediation group should be in place. The group would include representatives of the warring factions, relevant states sponsoring the intervention, members of the communities involved, active NGOs and of course, the PMC itself. The mediation group would address complaints and requests and determine if changes need to be made in the PMC contract and methods of instituting such changes.

Transparency

To ensure the trust of the sponsors and combatants, PMCs would be required to have transparent business practices. As far as possible, personnel lists, pay schedules and business plan should be open to inspection. PMCs should be able to prove they have no vested interests or links with any party in a conflict and that they have no irregular ties to interested parties or sovereign states.

Corporate Independence

PMCs involved in peacekeeping should not have irregular ties to multinational companies, especially in terms of resource extraction that might have an interest in the outcome of a conflict. Although it is expected that investors will be interested in seeing a resolution to conflicts, the PMCs focus must always be on the execution of its contract, not on side deals with other companies.

Competition

Once it is determined that private companies will be used for peace operations, there should be a public announcement for bidders. It is important that a degree of competition be maintained to ensure the highest quality and most innovative design for a given operation. There are currently few companies that openly express interest in such contracts, but once the process is legitimized there will be several who could conceivably carry out the necessary duties. In addition to lowering prices and improving quality through the competitive process, multiple PMC choices offers fallback options should the primary contractor not live up to standards or expectations.

Sponsorship

A major concern when using private militaries to do the duty normally done by states is legal responsibility. This is on two levels. One, if the PMC needs to be "reigned in" for some reason, there needs to be a primary state that will take responsibility for directing the PMC and altering the contract. Second, criminal acts by the PMC or any of its employees need to be identified and prosecuted. A primary state sponsor can then utilize their own domestic laws or utilize their own legal framework to extradite the parties to their country of

citizenship for subsequent prosecution. This is necessary due to the fact that countries hosting peace operations rarely have functioning legal structures.

Quality

There needs to be a minimum standard for PMC personnel used in peace missions. A huge advantage of using private forces is that there is a large pool of talent with experience in first-rate militaries available to choose from. All personnel should have background checks to ensure they are whom they claim, and that they have no criminal history.

Statement of principles

Any private company must abide by a public “statement of principles”, essentially a guideline by which the company must operate. The principles would encompass much of what has already been mentioned and ensure that all employees strive to obey the rules of war as set out in the Geneva Conventions, minimize risk to non-combatants, limit property damage and obey the states contracting them.

State Building

PMCs can create and enforce a peace, they can ensure safe elections, and if needed they can provide long-term security. However, the international community must do state building. International organizations and NGOs must be prepared to reconstruct government institutions quickly, so as not to waste the window of opportunity created by the PMC.

Weapons removal

In order to combat the proliferation of arms in Africa, PMCs should be required to account for and remove all weapons that it introduces in its operations.

Essential Philosophy

Finally, in the interest of successful PMC peace operations, there are three guiding philosophies that the contracting states must take into account:

1. By necessity PMCs do not operate with the same methods and techniques that a UN force would use. This means they operate with a far smaller compliment of personnel, use unconventional tactics, and require a great deal of latitude in their operations. To ensure maximum effectiveness it is important that the contractors accept this latitude.
2. Private companies must be given a robust mandate, allowing them authority to use force on short notice, especially in cases of humanitarian protection.

3. Once the decision is made to utilize PMCs, they should be protected from adverse political pressures. They should be given clear goals and a mandate, as well as a timetable to achieve those goals. As long as they are making progress and following the contractual principles, they need to be protected from the kinds of political pressures that have contributed to the hamstringing of UN operations in the past.

Conclusions

For the African Renaissance to achieve its full potential, Africa's numerous armed conflicts must be swiftly ended. As has been proved time and again, Africa can no longer rely on the United Nations or the former colonial powers to come to the rescue. Africa needs a military force that can serve as an army for peace and democracy, a deterrent against warlordism and a cavalry for emergency humanitarian rescue. Unfortunately, existing African militaries are either incapable or inflexible.

PMCs offer an effective and affordable answer. They can solve the military aspect of the conflicts. They can provide the necessary post-conflict security for free and fair elections and state reconstruction. They can offer a new age of human security, underpinning the values of the African Renaissance. But while PMCs can bring stability, end humanitarian disasters, and offer breathing space for reconciliation, PMCs are not a panacea. Africa will still need to establish long-term political solutions for regions of conflict.