

## Policy Brief

# Presence of Foreign Fighters: Concessions for Security?

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The purpose of this second paper is to highlight the involvement of mercenaries in decolonization processes in Africa on one hand, and the emergence of Private Military and Security Companies since the 1990s on another hand. The main argument is that despite the change in the structure of private contractors operating in Africa, their essence remains the same: security in exchange of mining concessions. Hence, the paper analyses to what extent mining companies have contributed to the privatization of security in Africa. To do so, the first section of this paper focuses on the role of mercenaries in the Katanga (now DRC) and Biafra (Nigeria), and their links with mining companies that had links with former colonies. To explain the shift from ad hoc mercenaries to the rise of private military and security companies, the second section of this paper argues that there has been a revolution in military affairs that changed the structure of the privatization of security, which also changed the dynamics of international conflict. Finally, the third section argues that the corporatization of former mercenaries and/or soldiers gave rise to structured companies that offered training, military advice, intelligence gathering and many other services, and reduced the political cost of deploying an army for governments. An analysis of the Angolan and Sierra Leonean civil wars is provided to illustrate the growing use of PMSCs by conflict-torn countries, and the links between these private contractors to companies in position to benefit from natural resources.

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## INTRODUCTION

The presence of foreign fighters in Africa is not a recent trend. The French Foreign Legion has been present in Africa since it was formed in 1831 and has operated in Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Morocco, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Zaire, Somalia, Angola, and Benin, among others, to protect and defend French interests in places France considered as being part of its sphere of influence. There is also historical evidence that in the 1890s, U.S. mercenaries fought in the Second Boer War of 1899-1902 (Hunter, 1997: 5; Kwakwa, 1990: 85; Francis, 1999: 320). According to data collected by Petersohn, between 1950 and 2002 a total of 28 civil wars occurred in Africa, in 13 of which mercenaries participated (2014: 202)<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of this second paper is to highlight the involvement of mercenaries in decolonization processes in Africa on one hand, and the emergence of Private Military and Security Companies since the 1990s on another hand. The main argument is that despite the change in the structure of private contractors operating in Africa, their essence remains the same: security in exchange of mining concessions. Hence, the paper analyses to what extent mining companies have contributed to the privatization of security in Africa. To do so, the first section of this paper focuses on the role of mercenaries in the Katanga (now DRC) and Biafra (Nigeria), and their links with mining companies that had links with former colonies. To explain the shift from ad hoc mercenaries to the rise of private military and security companies, the second section of this paper argues that there has been a revolution in military affairs that changed the structure of the privatization of security, which also changed the dynamics of international conflict. Finally, the third section argues that the corporatization of former mercenaries and/or soldiers gave rise to structured companies that offered training, military advice, intelligence gathering and many other services, and reduced the political cost of deploying an army for governments. An analysis of the Angolan and Sierra Leonean civil wars is provided to illustrate the growing use of PMSCs by conflict-torn countries, and the links between these private contractors to companies in position to benefit from natural resources.

### Mercenaries in Decolonization Processes in Africa (1960-1989): Katanga and Biafra

The exploration of the African hinterland in the nineteenth century, and the tensions that arose following the discovery of its resources, provided opportunities for adventurers seeking fortune to enter the resource-rich continent. With the collapse of the colonial order, the use of mercenaries or soldiers of fortune became a regular practice. Western mercenaries, often coming from elite troops and experienced in the techniques of unconventional warfare, intervened in African countries as military auxiliaries, advisers to the newly created states, or executors of secret operations. Hence, they constituted an auxiliary force for missions for which governments—mostly Western—did not want to take responsibility, but did not want to give up their influence or the wealth accumulated from operating in Africa (Le Pautremat, 2006: 127-144; Barnay, 2014: 6).

Nonetheless, it is also important to note that the engagement of these mercenaries was, in some cases, also motivated by ideology, a desire to *“help rescue white settlers or law-*

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1. Including the following cases with mercenary presence pre-1989: Zaire, Chad, Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan. Cases with PMSC presence post-1989: Sierra Leone, Angola, Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire.

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*abiding people of colour from the chaos of decolonization*" (Hasian Jr., 2011). Moreover, although it is often emphasized in the literature that mercenaries are almost an exclusively African phenomenon, Africa is not the only continent where these actors have been active. In Petersohn's analysis, although data shows that in total most of the conflicts with mercenary presence took place in Africa (13 cases), the ratio of total number of conflicts with mercenary presence is greatest in Asia (ratio 14:10) (Petersohn 2014: 202).

Although it is true the involvement of mercenaries in Africa has primarily been driven by financial gain, the latter was mainly in relation to concessions to extract natural resources. Authors including Petersohn (2014), Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski (2013), Collier (2000), Lujala (2009), and Fredland (2004), have analysed to what extent securing resource-rich areas through the use of mercenaries or private contractors can intensify or reduce—depending on the case—the intensity of conflict. The African conflicts analysed below show how the interest to extract natural resources in conflict-affected areas by some companies has greatly contributed to the privatization of security.

## KATANGA, NOW DRC

A group of mercenaries, known as 'Les Affreux', stood out as the most bloodthirsty in Katanga in the 1960s, in the now Democratic Republic of Congo. Bob Denard, Jean Schramme, and Christian Tavernier are some of the mercenaries that fought alongside Moïse Tshombé, self-declared President of the Katanga. The nickname Les Affreux (the awful ones) was allegedly given to them by Belgian employees of the Mining Union of the Haut-Katanga (MUHK) in reference to their physical appearance when they returned from operations, swollen by leech and mosquito bites (Barnay, 2014: 1). The presence of mercenaries in Africa is, in Falola and Oyebade's words, "*a classic case of the infusion of foreign fighters into African conflicts*" (2010: 26).

According to several sources, Tshombé received from the MUHK \$35 million for organising the secession (Bruyere-Ostells, 2014; Romanaz, 2020). At that time, Katanga was the wealthiest province of the Congo, with its copper belt and lucrative mining operations. It is reported that the Belgians, French, and British all supported the secessionists in exchange for mining concessions, despite United Nations regulations that clearly forbade countries from supporting the Katanga movement. In an attempt to put an end to the secessionist movement, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba asked for the involvement of UN forces, and on July 14, 1960, the UN Security Council established a large multinational peacekeeping mission to restore the country's unity, the United Nations Operation in the Congo (known by its French acronym, ONUC). Despite Lumumba's continuous demands that ONUC troops be used to put an end to the Katangan secession, the UNSC refused, claiming UN forces could not intervene in what it considered an internal conflict. Lumumba then turned to his Soviet ally for military assistance, exacerbating tensions between him and President Kasa-Vubu. According to former staff director of the US House Subcommittee on Africa Stephen R. Weissman, following Moscow's decision to help Lumumba, the Eisenhower administration sent the CIA in a covert action, portrayed as a "*surgical, low-cost success*". According to declassified documents, the CIA engaged in pervasive political meddling and paramilitary action between 1960 and 1968 to ensure a pro-Western government in Congo (Weissman, 2014: 14-15). Lumumba was then removed from power and replaced by Mobutu Sese Seko in November 1960. It appears that the MUHK was also behind the assassination of Lumumba, who was fiercely opposed to Belgian interests (Bruyere-Ostells, 2014).

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Meanwhile, MUHK's financial support for Tshombé enabled him to defy the central government by providing the local population with food and medicine<sup>2</sup>. It also enabled him to harass and attack the UN peacekeepers. The Katanga government quickly established its own armed force, the Katanga Gendarmerie, made up of about 7,000 men financially supported and trained by Belgian army officers. Despite continuous resolutions passed by the UNSC calling for the immediate departure of all foreign military personnel and mercenaries from the country, the Katanga government pursued its military campaign. In September 1960, Tshombé sent a special mission to Brussels to recruit 180 mercenaries, officers, and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to lead the Katanga Gendarmerie (Clarke, 1968: 23). Meanwhile, the ONUC began to disarm Belgian troops in the north. In January 1961, Roger Trinquier, an experienced French officer, was tasked to recruit 100 mercenaries and take command of the whole military effort in Katanga. He even opened a recruiting office in Paris. By March 1961, the gendarmerie was composed of 600 Europeans and 8,000 "indigenous". Two types of mercenaries were recruited in Katanga:

- 1. French-speaking soldiers** who had had experience of guerrilla warfare (veterans of Indochina and Algeria), needed to command Katanga's military effort against the Congolese National Army and the insurgents. They were first commanded in 1960 by paratrooper Colonel Trinquier, who had fought in the Indochina war, and participated in the Suez Expedition, before serving in Algeria where he became known as a counter-insurgency expert. In January 1961, he gave way to Roger Faulques (French too), who surrounded himself with about 20 French officers who constituted the bulk of the general staff of the Katanga Gendarmerie (Bryère-Ostells, 2015);
- 2. English-speaking mercenaries** recruited from the established offices in Johannesburg and Bulawayo. They numbered about 200, but were not integrated into gendarmerie units like the French-speaking soldiers, instead forming a separate unit, the *Compagnie Internationale*, commanded by an Englishman named Captain Browne (UN Document, Security Council 5/4796, cited in Clarke, 1968). It is reported that in early April 1961, Indian and Nepalese Gurkhas also arrived in Kamina, helping Tshombé gain military success.

The Katanga secession must be also analysed as a power competition between France and Belgium. The presence of Trinquier and his French mercenaries was seen as a political threat by Belgium, which reacted by launching a counter-offensive to re-establish confidence in the Belgian administration of the army. The operation was a success, as Tshombé quickly dismissed Trinquier (Clarke, 1968: 28). The UN's operations to arrest and expel all foreign mercenaries had only limited success, managing only to expel Belgians. In 1962, France became the main source of mercenaries, who hid in centers where the UN had no garrisons. Tensions between secessionists and the UN kept mounting, and the latter launched Operation Grandslam, an offensive to end the secession. In January 1963, Tshombé signed a declaration ending secession. Some of the mercenaries departed by train to Angola, with some signing up to assist the Portuguese fight the three Angolan liberation movements (FNLA, MPLA and UNITA), while others decided to simply go home. Of the estimated 15,000 gendarmes who fought for the secession, only 2,000 joined the Congolese army; 1,000 remained in two camps in Angola; the rest 'vanished in nature'. Mercenaries in Angola decided to form an organization called *Forces Katanganaises Libres*, with a full command structure, constituting a major threat to the Adoula administration<sup>3</sup>.

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2. See Diplomatic Archives of Belgium, 18 882/IX for more information.

3. Cyrille Adoula was the Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo from 1961 to 1964.

Bob Denard first went to Angola and then went back to France before leading other operations on the continent. Jean Schramme and other Belgians with over 1,000 ex-gendarmes remained in Angola waiting for “further orders” from Tshombé (Clarke, 1968: 33).

The link between strategic resources and the presence of mercenaries is clear in the case of the Katanga secession. Men enlisted by Jean Schramme in his Leopard commandos were paid by the MUHK, who provided them with civil contracts. As the exploitation of these resource-rich areas guaranteed the payment of mercenaries, mercenaries employed extremely harsh methods to overcome any resistance (Ross 2004: 58-59; Bruyere-Ostells 2014: 2). Furthermore, in 1963, ex-gendarmes occupied the village of Kasenga and completely disrupted the fishing industry. In 1967, the cassiterite mine located near the headquarters of the Leopard commandos in the Maniema area was still exploited, and the resources were exported by train by a Belgian company (Bruyere-Ostells, 2014).

In 1965, two years after their expulsion from Katanga, some of the mercenaries, including Jean Schramme and Bob Denard, were employed by the Congolese government. As Clarke (1968) stated, a large network for recruitment and administration was put in place to bring mercenaries from Europe and Southern Africa. Although the Mobutu regime retained nominal control over this system, the group of mercenaries later ran and maintained itself.

## BIAFRA, NIGERIA

Following Nigeria’s independence from the United Kingdom, its borders were drawn up primarily along ethnic lines: the northern desert region was made up of Muslim states inhabited by the Hausa and Fulani tribes, whilst the southern part of the country was predominantly Christian and Animist. The south-western corner was inhabited by the Yoruba, while the south-eastern part contained the Igbo tribes. To add a layer of complexity, at that time, Nigeria’s primary source of income was oil, only found in the southern part of the country.



In January 1966, a group of eastern Igbo tribesmen staged a military coup in which 30 political leaders—including Nigeria’s Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and the northern premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello—were killed. In retaliation, northern officers and army units organized a counter-coup, which was successful. However, ethnic tensions deepened across the entire country. A Muslim officer, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu ‘Jack’ Gowon (a Christian) was appointed as the

head of the so-called Federal Military Government (FMG). After the federal and eastern governments failed to reconcile, the eastern region voted to secede from Nigeria on

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May 26, 1967. The Republic of Biafra was declared on May 30, 1967, due to the growing economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions among the various people of Nigeria.

In July 1967, the FMG launched an operation to annex the eastern region, which started calling itself Biafra. Despite early failures, the FMG regained the region after intense fighting. During the Nigerian Civil War, Biafran secessionists, headed by Chukwuemeka 'Emeka' Odumegwu-Ojukwu, quickly realized that air power was going to give them a strategic advantage, as they were isolated and in dire need of food and weapons. However, they also needed aircraft and pilots to fly them, and word went out that they were looking for experienced mercenaries. While the Katanga Gendarmerie were unofficially directly equipped by the Belgian government, the Biafrans had much less international support in terms of supplying their armed forces (Thomas & Falola, 2020: 93). Nationals of South Africa Rhodesia, France, Belgium, Germany, Britain, and even the United States, arrived in Biafra and fought alongside Biafrans, as they were highly paid (Oyewole, 1975: 62).

However, the involvement of mercenaries had very limited success. As Thomas and Falola stated, "*while the Katanga struggle and the Congo Crisis as a whole lifted mercenary soldiering into the spotlight, the Biafran war served to break the reputation of the mercenary soldiers*" (2020: 94). The different mercenaries that were hired did not manage to secure a military victory for the Biafrans. However, it is important to note that mercenaries were not hired in Biafra to 'share' their expertise (in communication, intelligence duties, vehicle maintenance...); rather, they were hired as a multiplying force. As Oyewole explains, "*there was a shortage of manpower, especially commissioned and seasoned officers (...) More often than not, Biafran soldiers were without officers*" (1975: 62).

By the high point of the war, the Biafran army most likely had 30,000 to 40,000 men under arms (Thomas and Falola, 2020: 83). The army was organized into five divisions that mainly consisted of infantry, but there also were a number of special formations trained to serve as a guerrilla force, such as the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF). However, the BOFF did not play a very active role throughout the conflict and, hence, did not have an effect on its development. A group of mercenaries, constituted as a 'special' force, was commanded by Rolf Steiner, who previously fought under Foccart and Denard. Steiner was then expelled by Ojukwu from Biafra to Gabon, and, according to different sources, ended up in Sudan, where he was Field Commander of the Conventional Army of the Anya-Nya. Alongside Steiner was Taffy Williams, a Welsh mercenary who fought in the Congo before joining the Biafran Army, in which he rose to the rank of Major. He is remembered for having kept two battalions of Chadian mercenaries serving with the Federal Army at bay for 12 weeks, only using the crudest of weapons. The involvement of mercenaries from different countries in the Biafran conflict reminds us of current conflicts, such as the Libyan, in which several private contractors with different nationalities have been fighting in either the same or even opposite sides.

The French government officially declared its support for the separatist province of Biafra. According to statements made by Bob Denard, he was sent as part of a mercenary force to Biafra, in an attempt to "*hasten the disintegration of West Africa's only regional powerhouse, Nigeria*" (French, 1997: 112). France's support for Ojukwu was also an attempt to end the monopoly of Royal Dutch Shell over the Nigerian oil industry. Furthermore, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research stated in 1969 that "*French assistance to Biafra was having the desired effect of limiting Soviet influence in Federal Nigeria*"<sup>4</sup>.

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4. See 'Research Memorandum from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research [Thomas Hughes] to Secretary of State Rogers: USSR-NIGERIA: Bilateral Tensions Increase as War Drags On', April 2, 1969, in FRUS, Vol. E-5, 2005 (53) for more information.

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As in the Congo, the involvement of foreign countries in African civil wars through the recruitment of mercenaries was deeply rooted in the need to secure natural resources, but also had ideological elements. The involvement of France in Biafra was articulated around two main elements:

- 1. Involving the mercenary networks that previously fought in Katanga.** Roger Foccart (head of the Katanga Gendarmerie) was in charge of recruiting mercenaries from Paris, as the Biafrans lacked men in their army. Foccart claimed that the mercenaries were then handled by Maurice Beaupré (advisor to Michel Debré, who was both Foreign Minister and Defense Minister of France during the Nigerian Civil War) and the French ambassador to Gabon, Maurice Delaunay (Foccart, 1995: 346-47). Foccart recruited Rolf Steiner, a German-born mercenary who began his military career as a French Foreign Legion paratrooper. Denard was sent to Biafra in late 1967, and commanded French mercenaries who retook the strategic oil town of Calabar (Griffin, 2015). Five mercenaries were killed in the attempt and most returned to Europe, except Steiner, who later became an advisor to the Biafran Army before being expelled by Ojukwu in 1968.
- 2. Shipping arms to Biafra.** Probably the most important aspect of French military assistance to the secessionists. It appears that Portugal and Czechoslovakia also provided weapons to Biafra (Griffin, 2015: 123). As stated above, Biafrans lacked not only heavy weapons, but also small arms and ammunition. Military ties between France and Biafra were deep, to the extent that Biafrans set up an office in Paris called the 'Biafran Historical Research Centre', a bureau de liaison between Ojukwu and Maurice Beaupré, Faulques, and Denard. Weapons were not shipped directly to Biafra; they were shipped via the Ivory Coast and Gabon, within the framework of a normal bilateral military assistance agreement. Moreover, the French did not send their own weapons, but shipped German and Italian weapons with no serial numbers, seized during World War II (Foccart, 1997).

Meanwhile, the British government, unofficially supported the federal government in securing its oil and economic interests. As Uche (2008: 113) stated, "*British oil interests played a much more important role in the determination of the British attitude to the war than is usually conceded*". Indeed, little was known at that time about the fact that the FMG's head, Lt. Colonel Gowon, had strong relations with Britain and the British High Commissioner Cumming-Bruce (Kirkpatrick, 2015). According to several analysts, Britain helped support the civil war with arms deals and shipments to Nigeria between 1967 and 1970 (Rantimi, 2017).

Similarly to what happened during the Katanga secession, it is important to note that the Nigerian Civil War cannot be fully understood without understanding the different layers of complexity created by great power rivalry over the control of natural resources. Indeed, Britain and France supported in different ways the two parties in the conflict. As Julius-Adeoye (2017: 8) argues, "*the control and exploration of oil by foreign nations was a major factor in the decision to engage in the war*". France and Britain had the same goal: secure favorable oil concessions in a military victory from the side they respectively supported through the use of mercenaries.

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## End of the Cold War and Revolution in Military Affairs: From Providing Hardware to Delivering Services

During the Cold War, an ideologically driven patronage system around fragile states guaranteed that, if not both, at least one of the bloc parties would intervene in an ongoing conflict and/or provide military hardware and human resources (Branovic, 2011: 1). However, in the aftermath of the Cold War, great powers reordered their security priorities, and were no longer automatically willing to intervene abroad to restore stability. The old system was replaced by a market-based alternative to support weak governments in need of military goods and services (Lock, 1999; Avant, 2005; Singer, 2008).

The geopolitical context changed the international security architecture, as there was no longer an ideological ordering system, creating a security void. Although states have retained their central role in international security, many governments have become more inclined to rely on the cooperation and resources of non-state actors (Lilly, 2000; Rosenau, 1995; Cooley and Ron, 2002; Mandel, 2002). In his article, Kevin O'Brien estimated that by mid-1997, almost 90 PMCs delivered services to African states<sup>5</sup>. Hence, the end of the Cold War marked a turning point in security privatization for three main reasons:

First, in the early 1990s, many states, especially in the West, decided to downsize their armed forces, as they were reluctant to become involved in conflicts where *"there were no national interests at stake"* (Kinsey, 2006: 97). O'Brien claimed that *"worldwide military forces, on the order of 6,873,000 in 1990, dropped to 3,283,000 in 1997"* (O'Brien, 2000 in Blakely, 2002). The military downsizing created a flood of weapons for sale (especially small arms) and skilled soldiers (Branovic, 2011: 10), which underpinned the emergence of a private military and security sector (Singer, 2003; Brooks, 2000). This evolution in privatized security took the form of private military and security companies (PMSCs), corporations providing a wide range of services that went above and beyond what the traditional mercenary could offer (Mathieu & Dearden, 2007: 746). Moreover, privatization of security or warfare allowed states to extend their reach beyond the limits justified by their military apparatus (Mathieu & Dearden, 2007: 749), which inevitably created an erosion of political control over the means of war.

Second, the privatization of security was justified by market pressures for more efficiency and cost-benefit calculations, and went hand in hand with globalization (Binder, 2007: 307). The end of the Cold War also meant the triumph of an ideology that praised privatization over another. As Singer argued, *"fuelled by the collapse of the centralised systems in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, and by successes in such places as Thatcherite Britain, privatization has been touted as a testament to the superiority of the marketplace over the government. It reflects the current assumption that the private sector is both more efficient and more effective"* (2002: 197).

Third, technological developments and the need for more technical expertise were also an important factor that created favorable conditions for the use of PMSCs. The so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) is a theory that re-emerged following the U.S. victory in the 1991 Gulf War. RMA proponents argue that a relatively small number of well-trained military personnel equipped with advanced weapons technology can easily reduce the relative power of a much larger but poorly-trained force with less-sophisticated

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5. O'Brien, K. (2000), "PMCs, myths and mercenaries: the debate on private military companies," *The RUSI Journal*, 145:1, pp. 59-64, DOI: 10.1080/03071840008446490



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equipment (Blake, 2002: 18; Fredland, 2004: 215). Hiring private companies with highly skilled personnel became increasingly less costly than sending national armies, as there was no need for high-tech skills among the uniformed soldiers and no urgency in keeping up with technological change (Campbell, 2007). As Shearer (1998) argued, “PMSCs are more flexible, better trained and easier to mobilise than most UN peacekeepers” and at a competitive price. They can deploy faster than multinational or national forces, and they have less political consequences than government militaries (Howe, 1998: 308). Moreover, PMSCs diversified their activities to include military advice and training, arms procurement, intelligence gathering, logistical and medical support and, in some cases, even combat and operational support.

However, as mentioned above, the debate around the role of PMSCs in conflict-torn countries in Africa revolves around the extent to which they helped pacify these countries and whether or not they helped fuel conflicts. In the cases of Angola and Sierra Leone, EO and Sandline were allegedly paid, in part, through mining concessions, and it has been reported that the British holding company, the Branch Group, benefitted financially from its close ties with EO (Howe, 1998: 309). Indeed, protecting extractive industry infrastructure was a key element in PMSC operations, to the extent that UN Special Rapporteur Enrique Ballesteros stated during the UN Commission on Human Rights in March 2002 that “mercenaries were inexorably linked to the illegal diamond trade in Africa”. O’Brien (2000) estimated that by mid-1997, there were almost 90 PMSCs operating in Africa. For example, De Beers, Texaco, Chevron-Schlumberger, British Gas, Amoco, Exxon, Mobil, Ranger Oil, BP, American Airlines, and Shell have all contracted DSL, now part of the U.S.-based PMSC Armor Group (Mathieu & Dearden, 2007: 747).

## ANGOLA

After the collapse of the Portuguese colonial empire in January 1975, three revolutionary movements—the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Ugandan Peoples Army (UPA), which merged with the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FMLA) in 1962, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)—signed the Alvor Accords with the Portuguese government, granting Angola independence and establishing a three-way power-sharing agreement. However, the three revolutionary groups struggled to trust each other and failed to collaborate, and the country descended into a civil war that lasted almost thirty years<sup>6</sup>.

In a Cold War context, international interests played an important role in the Angolan civil war. The U.S. initially backed the FMLA, and then started supporting UNITA, with South Africa’s support. The USSR and Cuba supported the MPLA.

The 1991 peace agreement between UNITA (Portuguese: *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*) and the MPLA (Portuguese: *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) enabled the 1992 elections, elections rejected by UNITA’s leader Jonas Savimbi, who decided to resume the fighting. In a very short amount of time, he controlled 80% of Angola’s countryside, leaving the MPLA isolated and searching for support. Deprived of its traditional allies, Cuba and the former USSR, the MPLA government decided to hire Executive Outcomes (EO).

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6. World Peace Foundation, “Angola: civil war,” Tufts University, August 7, 2015, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/atocityendings/2015/08/07/angola-civil-war/>.

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The presence of EO in Angola is an interesting case for two main reasons. First, most EO employees came from South Africa's former 32 Battalion, the Reconnaissance Commandos, the Parachute Brigade and the paramilitary 'Koevoet' or 'Crowbar', a 'squad' used by South Africa to militarily destabilize southern Africa in the 1980s (Howe, 1998: 310). The 32 Battalion (composed mainly of Portuguese-speaking Angolans) and the South African Defense Force's Special Forces served in Angola, where they gained a thorough knowledge of UNITA's guerrilla capabilities and of the Angolan terrain whilst fighting alongside UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. The 1988 ceasefire and the ensuing New York Accords marked the beginning of the withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops (Reed, 2009: 50). Following the disbanding of 32 Battalion and the SADF's Special Forces, many soldiers found themselves unemployed, and in Howe's terms, "*EO arose as an apparently stabilising force*" (1998: 311). Hence, when EO contractors entered Angola, they had perfect knowledge of the field and, most importantly, of their enemy (UNITA), as they had fought alongside it in the past. Eeben Barlow was second-in-command of the 32 Battalion's reconnaissance unit, and later became EO's chairman until mid-1997.

Second, EO was introduced to the Angolan government by Heritage Oil and Gas—part of the Branch Group—leading to the belief that foreign companies were interested in stabilizing the country to gain access to strategic resources. As Pearce stated, "*this time, there was no question of the Angolan war being about ideology or about anybody's freedom. It was about money*" (Pearce, 2005: 155). Similar to what happened in Sierra Leone, both UNITA and the MPLA financed their military operations through diamonds and oil. In the 1990s, the Angolan government hired multiple companies to secure commercial facilities, train government forces, and engage in direct combat with the rebels. Already in 1992, two oil companies, Gulf Chevron and Sonagol, hired EO to protect their oil installations in Soyo, Angola (Moesgaard, 2013; Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2013).

The contract was initially for a year, and cost \$40 million. EO's contractors entered Angola in September 1993. In the beginning, EO served as a 'force multiplier', and combined training, advisory, and fighting activities (Howe, 1998: 312). The company trained between 4,000 and 5,000 Angolan government troops and 30 pilots (Goulet, 1997; Isenberg, 1997; Pech, 1997; Moesgaard, 2013).

In June 1994, the EO-trained 16th Brigade defeated UNITA at a strategic town of N'dalatando outside Luanda, ending Angola's three-year civil war and pushing UNITA and Savimbi to sign the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994. Following EO's success in securing the resource-rich areas of Angola on behalf of the government, a Branch-Heritage subsidiary gained concessions over those resources (Schreier and Caparini, 2005).

According to Eeben Barlow, EO left Angola in 1997 after increasing U.S. pressure on the Angolan government to end the contract and hire instead the American firm Military Personnel Resources Incorporated (MPRI). MPRI was hired to protect oil installations both onshore and offshore (O'Brien, 1998; Mason, 1999). That same year, U.S. oil giant Chevron was part of a consortium that contracted PMSC AirScan to work with the Angolan army to ensure their continued control over a key oil field, thereby guaranteeing Chevron's own continued presence in Cabinda (Campbell, 2002). According to the company's public statements, its contracts with Sonangol and Chevron subsidiary Cabinda Gulf Oil Company were to "*protect personnel, environmental resources, overseas high-value oil field production facilities, pipelines and pumping stations through airborne data and intelligence gathering and interface with security and maritime security personnel and ground security*". However, considering that Brigadier General Joe Stringham, a founding member of AirScan and in charge in Cabinda, was responsible for many covert counter-

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insurgency operations in El Salvador in the 1980s, the involvement of AirScan officers at that exact time in Angola could justify the belief that the company was actually providing covert training and assistance to some mining companies (Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski, 2013).

Moreover, in 1998, a Belgian PMSC called International Defense and Security (IDAS) obtained diamond concessions through its partnership with the Angolan State Mining Company, and later sold these concessions to America Mineral Fields. Shortly after the transaction, IDAS became a wholly owned subsidiary of America Mineral Fields (Mathieu & Dearden, 2007: 747).

## SIERRA LEONE

The 11-year Sierra Leone Civil War (1991-2002) caused the deaths of 70,000 people and displaced 2.6 million<sup>7</sup> (UNDP, 2006). The explosive domestic situation in Sierra Leone was due primarily to high levels of corruption, the collapse of state institutions due to their dependence on mineral rents, the impact of structural adjustments, and the rise of non-state actors (Kaldor, 2006; Blakely, 2002; Bruyere-Ostells; 2014; Faulkner et al, 2019). The war started on March 23, 1991 when a group of rebels, led by Foday Sankoh and operating under the name of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), invaded Sierra Leone with support from Liberia and Burkina Faso. Support from Liberia came from rebel leader Charles Taylor and his group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NFPL). Both the RUF and the NFPL attempted to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone's President Joseph Momoh in 1991, after having secured control over the diamond-rich territory in eastern and southern Sierra Leone. In 1992, Captain Valentine Strasser led a military coup and overthrew President Momoh, who fled the country and went into exile in neighbouring Guinea. Following the seizure of power, Strasser created the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) to restore democratic civilian rule. It is worth noting that the coup's success was deeply rooted in the policies of former president Siaka Stevens (1971-1985), who intentionally under-funded the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSMLF) to counter any threats from the army. Stevens imposed significant budget cuts on the RSMLF and tried to 'ethnicize' it. The RSMLF's officer corps was mainly composed of Northerners (Kandeh, 1999: 363). Fearful of a possible military coup, Steven had also established the Internal Security Unit (ISU), a well-trained and armed Cuban paramilitary force, as a way to "keep the power of the RSMLF in check" (Fyle, 1994; 129), and he gradually incorporated military elites within the civilian government (Faulkner et al, 2019: 645). Momoh inherited Stevens' fear of the military, and by the time the civil war erupted, the size and quality of the RSMLF was severely deficient. Towards the end of 1994, the RUF had made significant military gains against the NPRC, despite military assistance from Guinea and Nigeria –through bilateral military agreements-. By 1995, the RUF had overrun many mining sites, which included a number of leased concessions in the Kono and Kenema diamond districts, including the Swiss-owned Sierra Ore and Metal Company (SIEROMCO) bauxite mine at Mokanji, and the U.S.-Australian-owned Sierra Rutile operations at Gbangbatok. By attacking these strategic resources, the RUF deprived the government of its main foreign exchange resources (Francis, 1999: 325). The expression 'blood diamonds', widely used to describe conflicts in Africa, has its roots in the Sierra Leone civil war, as both the rebels and the government funded the war from diamond mines operated using slave labour (Momodu, 2017). The RUF's important military gains and the desperate and chaotic security situation in the country pushed the NPRC

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7. There are no accurate estimates of the casualties, although conservative estimates suggest that 70,000 people were killed and 2.6 million—more than half the population of Sierra Leone at that time—were displaced.

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to seek external assistance to put an end to the civil war; an assistance found in private military and security companies, which initiated the privatization of security in Sierra Leone (Francis, 1999: 325) .

According to Akcinaroglu and Radziszewski's dataset (2013), the Sierra Leone government contracted twelve PMSCs were contracted in an attempt to stabilize the war-torn country. The first PMSC to arrive was the British firm Marine/Maritime Protection Services (MPSSL) of Sierra Leone, hired to prevent illegal fishing and ensure the collection of fishing royalties. MPSSL's contract was supported by the International Monetary Fund, despite the government favoring the company West African Fisheries, which had direct ties to President Momoh (Faulkner et al, 2019: 645; Reno, 1996: 7-18; Reno, 1999: 122). MPSSL suffered from bad press and inadequacies, which led to its replacement by Specialist Services International (SSI), a German firm contracted to collect customs revenues from the Freetown port (Reno, 1996: 211).

In 1995, the UK-based J&S Franklin, manufacturers and suppliers of non-lethal military equipment, subcontracted the Jersey-based Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) to train the RSLMF (Hooper, 1996: 41). The first contractors arrived in February under the command of Colonel Robert Mckenzie, a former Rhodesian SAS soldier. However, a few days later Mckenzie and the aide-de-camp to the head of state were killed in an ambush, allegedly by anti-government elements within the army in collaboration with the RUF (Francis, 1999: 326). The role of GSG was limited to training the military, as the company refused to take part in any offensive operations against the RUF.

The Swiss company SIEROMCO and Sierra Rutile were then approached by the UK-based company Special Projects Services (SPS), to provide 400 former British military personnel to guard mines (Francis, 1999: 326). However, because of the huge cost of the proposed contract with SPS and the fact that Sierra Rutile needed an anticipated \$80 million to restart its operations, the contract with SPS did not go through (Hooper, 1996: 41; Francis, 1999: 326). Other UK-based PMSCs, including Defence Systems, Rapport Research and Analysis, were later invited to submit bids after having assessed the security situation in Sierra Leone, but none of them made any significant change to the military balance.

Executive Outcomes arrived in Sierra Leone in March 1995, contracted by Valentine Strasser's government to fight the RUF, which controlled large parts of the country's natural resource exports (Moesgaard, 2013). EO had earned a reputation for proactive military operations against the UNITA rebels in Angola, and was hired by the National Provisional Ruling Council government to train and provide military logistics, and conduct offensive operations against the RUF (Francis, 1999: 326).

EO's task was to provide limited basic training, intelligence, combat assistance, and the use of its radar for nighttime attacks. In the words of EO's commander in Sierra Leone, Brigadier Burt Sachs, *"the company's operational strategy in Sierra Leone was to concentrate on reorganising the RSLMF into a proper military structure and retraining its forces to a level where it could uphold the government without external assistance"* (Hooper, 1996: 41). According to *World Airnews* magazine, in both Angola and Sierra Leone, EO flew two used Boeing 727's as supply planes, acquired for \$550,000 each from American Airlines. The company also regularly flew Soviet Mi-17 armed transport helicopters, Mi-24 Hind gunships, MiG-23 jet fighter-bombers, and a squadron of Swiss Pilatus training planes converted to fire air-to-ground rockets.

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The Sierra Leonean government paid around \$1.225 million a month to EO (Francis, 1999: 326). Whyte (2003) estimates that EO charged the Sierra Leone government \$35 million for a period of 21 months, whereas the presence of UN peace-keepers over eight months would have costed \$47 million.

In ten months, EO managed to pacify the country, and in March 1996, Sierra Leone held its first presidential election in 23 years. EO's contractors were even hailed as "*liberators from RUF and renegade soldiers' atrocities*" (Goulet, 1997; Isenberg, 1997; Reno, 1997). The stability provided by EO forced the RUF to the negotiation table, which led to the Abidjan Peace Accord on November 30, 1996, between the RUF and the newly elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Nonetheless, the RUF's precondition for signing the peace agreement was the departure of EO from Sierra Leone, reminiscent of the similar request Jonah Savimbi made before signing the UNITA-MPLA peace agreement in Lusako in 1994 (Francis, 1999).

However, just like in Angola, EO was deeply linked to the Branch-Heritage Group. Indeed, EO was introduced to the National Provisional Ruling Council by Tony Buckingham, CEO of the Branch-Heritage Group. A subsidiary of the British company gained a concession in the Kono diamond fields shortly after EO secured them for the government (Mathieu & Dearden, 2007: 747). Additionally, an auxiliary company of EO, Lifeguard Security, was tasked with providing protection for Branch Energy's diamond sites and Sierra Rutile mining operations in Sierra Leone (Francis, 1999: 325). Francis (1999) has suggested that when the Sierra Leone government could no longer pay EO, it offered the company commercial rights in the pacified territory. Allegedly, similar arrangements were made with other PMCs in Angola (Brayton 2002; Ross 1999).

However, the civilian government was overthrown 15 months later, on May 25, 1997, by the military. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) military junta aligned itself with the RUF to form a coalition government, led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. The ousted government was exiled to Guinea and was internationally recognized as the legitimate government of Sierra Leone (Francis, 1999: 327). Diplomatic attempts by the U.S. and other governments and a UNSC arms embargo failed to restore the elected government (Graves & Gurdon, 1998; Adams, 1999). The British company Sandline International was hired by the ousted government, allegedly with the covert approval of the British Foreign Office, to help restore the elected president Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to power. According to statements made by Sandline International, the company was asked by the British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone to help train and equip a local force capable of restoring the civilian government to power and ousting the officers behind the coup, with tacit support from the U.S. government (Ibid). Allegedly, the deal between President Kabbah and Sandline was sealed in London in September 1997 for \$10 million, promising huge diamond concessions and mining rights to Rakesh Saxena, an Indian financier and trader in the derivatives market, who was to finance Sandline's operation in Sierra Leone. Saxena had a controlling interest in Diamond Works Ltd., which purchased Branch Energy (Francis, 1999: 329). Moreover, another businessman was interested in restoring peace in Sierra Leone. Jean-Raymond Boulle, director of Nord Resources, a major mining company in Sierra Leone, financed the first Sandline plan. However, he pulled back from the deal as he disapproved of Sandline's relationship with Diamond Works and Branch Energy, his commercial rivals (Francis 1999).

Sandline's role in overthrowing the military junta included giving advice on air strikes, providing tactical intelligence and ancillary equipment, delivering medical supplies, and ferrying troops, weapons and logistics by helicopter (Francis, 1999). The company shipped

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35 tons of Bulgarian arms and ammunition to forces loyal to the ousted government and the Nigerian-led West African peacekeeping ECOMOG forces, in violation of the UN arms embargo, creating a political maelstrom, known as the 'Arms to Sierra Leone Affair'. However, Sandline's intervention was crucial in restoring the civilian government in February 1998.

## EQUATORIAL GUINEA

In 2004, a group of mercenaries (as they were not under the umbrella of a corporation) was arrested in Zimbabwe, accused of planning a coup against Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, a coup later known as the "Wonga Coup". Amongst those arrested was Simon Mann, ex-British Army officer and a former partner in Executive Outcomes and Sandline International. When arrested, Mann claimed the group was picking up weapons for a security job at a mine in the DRC. However, Zimbabwean authorities stated that the mercenaries were on their way to Equatorial Guinea in an attempt to overthrow Teodoro Obiang's government (Smith, 2008). The plan was, according to confessions from the mercenaries, simple: pick up weapons from Harare, fly to Equatorial Guinea to join another team who had set up a meeting with Obiang to gift him cars. Then, the plane coming from Zimbabwe would arrive, private contractors would have overpowered Obiang's guards and install the exiled opposition leader Severo Moto, who was (and still is) exiled in Spain, as the new president. The mercenaries were then to be given \$1.8 million and oil concessions. Simon Mann was arrested and sentenced to 34 years in jail by a court in Equatorial Guinea, and a Lebanese businessman Mohamed Salaam to 18 years. Mann later accused Eli Calil –British/Lebanese businessman- and Sir Mark Thatcher to be behind the financing of the operation. He also stated that the operation was approved by the governments of Spain and South Africa, allegations both countries denied<sup>8</sup>. The interesting part of this story is the links between Mann and Tony Buckingham, CEO of Heritage Oil and Gas, who was involved in Angolan strategic resources and later in Sierra Leone, as both had set up two PMSCs: Executive Outcomes and Sandline International. Sandline, headed by Mann and Tim Spicer, shipped arms to Sierra Leone in contravention of a UN embargo, and caused controversy following its involvement in Papua New Guinea.

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8. 'Cry Havoc: Simon Mann's Account of his Failed Equatorial Guinea Coup Attempt,' Transcript, Chatham House, 1 November 2011, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/021111mann.pdf>

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## CONCLUSION

The willingness to differentiate private military and security companies (PMSCs) from mercenaries was in part motivated by the controversial reputation of the latter, brought on by 'soldiers of fortune' who fought during the decolonization processes in the 1960s, mainly in the then-Belgian Congo and then Angola. Mercenary activity reached its peak during decolonization, and these 'freelance soldiers' fought in African countries either for financial gain and/or ideology, although some of them have claimed to have acted with their country's approval, leading to the belief that mercenaries were part of proxy wars. Some authors have also claimed that the presence of mercenaries was a device of neo-colonialism. In the words of David Shearer, "*mercenary activities in Africa had established an image of the mercenary as an agent of the colonial powers and therefore a reactionary symbol of racism and opposition to self-determination*" (1998: 15). Moreover, mercenaries in both Katanga and Biafra were financed by mining companies headquartered in European countries, proving the three points highlighted above: former colonies were still interested in extracting natural resources and hence, have used mercenaries in this conflict-areas to pursue their business interest. Furthermore, the privatization of security has also been fueled by the end of the Cold War era and the development of competitive markets for different military and security services that ensued. The rise of PMSCs in the 1990s – as explained through the examples of the involvement of Executive Outcomes in both Angola and Sierra Leone - showed that the corporatization of mercenaries, in what later became known as PMSCs, not only changed the state-centric approach to security, but also security governance more broadly. Nonetheless, although there is a substantial difference between mercenaries and private contractors from PMSCs, in the case of Africa, the link between mining companies and the presence of foreign fighters is clearly evidenced. Hence, the dependence upon the private sector for military and security services will keep expanding, which in turn highlights the need for a pressing international legislation that addresses the issue of privatization of security.

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