THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES (PMCS): LOOKING BACK ON EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Amidst arguments that the nature of war has changed, notably by Kaldor (2006), Keegan (2004), Münkler (2005), and Van Creveld (2008), Private Military Companies (PMCs) have received increasing media and scholarly attention over the past decade. South Africa is no stranger to the media storm evoked by Blackwater USA during the recent conflict in Iraq Executive Outcomes (hereafter referred to as EO) caused a comparable controversy during the 1990s, first through their involvement in Angola after the withdrawal of the SADF, and later through their contract in Sierra Leone. At the time, PMCs were still a relatively new phenomenon, and thus research was scarce and it was difficult to discuss EO properly in the context of PMCs rather than as mercenaries. In the wake of the war in Iraq, the rapid growth of research into the PMC phenomenon has however provided a wealth of information that facilitates a better understanding of EO's role in the post-Cold War conflict environment. This article aims to discuss EO in this global debate by using recent research into the phenomenon, arguing that Executive Outcomes was part of a global trend in warfare.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, numerous arguments have been made that the nature of war is changing and has been since 1945, notably by Kaldor (2006), Keegan (2004), Münkler (2005) and Van Creveld (2008). Although the validity of arguments for low-intensity conflicts (LICs), new wars, postmodern wars, hybrid wars, or fourth generation warfare has been challenged by scholars such as Smith (2005), Curtis (2006), Kinross (2004) and others, there is concurrence that the majority of conflicts fought during and after the Cold War have been intrastate conflicts rather than the European model of conventional (interstate) wars found in the developed world, particularly as exemplified by the two World Wars. Of particular interest is Bobbit's (2003) argument for an *epochal war*, which he calls the Long War from 1914 to 1990. In his view, this war was fought to determine the best form of government: fascist, communist or parliamentarian, during which the latter succeeded. He now sees a new form of conflict emerging after the Peace of Paris in 1990, which is fought by and for the market state, thus tying warfare to neoliberalism – a view comparable to Kaldor's (2006) and Münkler's (2005) analyses of the importance of globalisation

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and the changing ways in which *new wars* are financed. Private Military Companies (PMCs) are a symptom of the market-state's emphasis on economic competition, privatisation and global, multinational corporations.

Writing in 1991, Martin van Creveld (1991:207) recognised the effect that the predominance of LICs would have on the nature of warfare: "The spread of sporadic small-scale war will cause regular armed forces themselves to change form, shrink in size, and wither away. As they do, much of the day-to-day burden of defending society against the threat of low-intensity conflict will be transferred to the booming security businesses." Many of Van Creveld's predictions were realised through the rapid increase in the use of PMCs in the post-Cold War environment – most notably in Bosnia, Angola, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq – constituting a sea change in the nature of warfare. In 1997, E Barlow recognised the role the company he had founded was playing in shaping the security environment in the developing world when he argued: "Executive Outcomes is the small wave of the future in terms of defense and security, because the international community has abdicated that role" (quoted in Harding 1997:87). Private security now forms an "indispensable component of peace and stability operations worldwide" (Messner 2007:57), and by 2006 there were over 100 000 private security contractors in Iraq (Merle 2006:D01), making PMCs the second largest contingent in the "coalition of the willing", prompting references to a "coalition of the billing".

The private security industry operates all over the world, and in 1998 even South African embassies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Angola were guarded by employees of a private security company, Defence Systems Limited (DSL) (Bothma 1998:6). In the United States there are 10 000 private security companies employing 1,8 million guards, equating to almost three private security officers to every public officer (Brooks 2008:12). By 2005, private security personnel outnumbered police officers in South Africa by ten times (Schreier and Caparini 2005:26), and South Africa's endemic violence forces it to spend more on private security as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than any other nation (Schreier and Caparini 2005:108). In Israel, PMCs and Private Security Companies (PSCs) are some of the largest employers in the country with over 100 000 employees, and the revenues generated are said to surpass the substantial Israeli defence expenditures (Schreier and Caparini 2005:26). These figures illustrate the scale of the private security industry, but where security work is conducted in conflict zones, the issue becomes more controversial.

After the termination of EO's contract in Sierra Leone in 1997, PMCs were largely out of the public eye. The war in Iraq brought PMCs into the public eye once again, in particular the death of four Blackwater employees in Fallujah in 2004, as well as the 16 September 2007 Nisour Square killings in Baghdad, where Blackwater

employee(s)[2] allegedly killed 17 unarmed civilians (Singer 2005). This prompted new research on the phenomenon, for instance by Armstrong (2008), Avant (2004), Gumedze (2009), Scahill (2008), Schreier and Caparini (2005) and Singer (2005), and these new studies, as well as Barlow's own account (2007) and that of Sandline International's Tim Spicer (1999), now offer the opportunity to re-evaluate EO's involvement in Africa and the controversy surrounding the company in its historical context, as this article aims to do.

2. THE POLARITY OF VIEWS ON PMCS: "MERCENARIES" OR "CORPORATE WARRIORS"?

Singer (2002:190) notes that literature on PMCs (what he calls Private Military Firms (PMFs)), remain "highly polarized, aimed at either extolling PMFs or condemning their mere existence". An example is Harding (1997:89), who describes EO as "mercenaries" who are "a highly selective club for the late 20th century *voortrekker*. Its members push up into Africa, away from the constraints of a meddlesome administration, and continue the Afrikaner quest for solitude, *lebensraum*, exemption." Similarly, Millius Palayiwa from International Alert argued in a paper delivered at the African Research and Information Bureau's Conference on Mercenaries and Instability in Africa in 1997 that the motto of EO's "mercenaries" was "have gun, will travel" (quoted by Barlow 2007:480). One of the issues that stimulate controversy is a lack of accurate information, a situation Messner (2007:61) argues needs to be addressed adequately.

> "Accurate representation of private sector operations in conflict and post-conflict environments and an expansion of public understanding of this industry's capacities and capabilities are essential if policy makers are to be enabled to make rational decisions about the best utilisation of the private sector in support of conflict alleviation."

The media in particular are critical of PMCs, such as Sedres's (2004:8) remark that PMCs "destabilise" Africa, undermining Mbeki's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative. Barlow (2007:103) calls the media campaign against EO "the longest propaganda war ever waged against a legitimate private company", where the media referred to them as "mercenaries" and "racist dogs of war". Yet Singer (2002:217) and others argue that EO helped broker peace in Angola and Sierra Leone, and stopped at least two *coup* attempts in Sierra Leone in 1996 – although Gumedze (2009:3) notes that this achievement does not in itself validate the utility of PMCs, since EO did not provide lasting peace. The term "dogs of war" is a further misnomer resulting from a confusion with mercenaries of the Cold War era, nor can a multiracial company, working for the stability of African governments, such as EO, credibly be called "racist". Nevertheless, these terms remain part of the lexicon when describing PMCs, and recently Erik Prince's Blackwater USA found itself described

2 Most of the blame falls on "gunner number three", Paul Slough (Armstrong 2008:159).

in similar terms during a comparable media storm, prompting Blackwater to announce in February 2009 that it was changing its name to Xe, in an attempt to distance itself from the stigma now associated with the company (Baker 2009:D02).

The two terms that indicate these polarised perspectives most clearly are "mercenary" and "private contractor". Messner (2007:58) relates: "Recently, the term [mercenary] has been applied to the private peace and stability operations industry by opponents of the industry, who have used the term either because they simply do not fully understand its meaning, or because of an ideological desire to tarnish and prejudice the perception of the industry." During the decolonisation conflicts in the latter half of the twentieth century, mercenaries, especially in Africa, acquired a reputation for savagery and brutality – the "dogs of war" – and in 1968, the United Nations decreed that the use of mercenaries against national liberation movements was a criminal act, and characterised mercenaries as outlaws (Schreier and Caparini 2005:6). This reputation – whether deserved or not – has plagued the private military industry in the post-Cold War environment, and proponents of the industry have pleaded for the sharpening of the distinction between mercenary and private contractor.

Like other commentators, Francis (1999:324), is however unconvinced that PMCs are essentially different from mercenaries. "Replacing the 'mercenary' stereotype with the term 'military company' is more like clothing an illegitimate activity with a cloak of legitimacy." Defining what a mercenary is, is however difficult. The International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, adopted by the UN in 1989, provides the following definition (see Messner (2007:66)):

> "1. A mercenary is any person who
>
> a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
>
> b) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar rank and functions in the armed forces of that party;
>
> c) is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a party to the conflict;
>
> d) is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and
>
> e) has not been sent by a state which is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.
>
> 2. A mercenary is also any person who, in any other situation
>
> a) is specially recruited locally or abroad for the purpose of participating in a concerted act of violence aimed at:
>
> i) overthrowing a government or otherwise undermining the constitutional order of a state; or
>
> ii) undermining the territorial integrity of a state;
>
> b) is motivated to take part therein essentially by the desire for significant private gain and is prompted by the promise or payment of material compensation;
>
> c) is neither a national nor a resident of the state against which such an act is directed;

d) has not been sent by a state on official duty; and

e) is not a member of the armed forces of the state on whose territory the act is undertaken."

In a 2007 interview with Lara Logan, Blackwater founder Erik Prince emphasised the distinction between mercenaries and private contractors by arguing that "(a)nything we do is to support US policy. You know the definition of a mercenary is a professional soldier that works in the pay of a foreign army. I'm an American working for America" (Logan 2007). Concerning EO, it is also problematic to classify them as "mercenaries" since they a) act on behalf of a legitimate, UN recognised government in order to provide stability, and b) because they were contracted to provide security, training and an advisory service, combat resulted as they defended themselves. Section 1.a), 2.a) i), and 2.a)ii) of the above therefore does not designate EO operatives as mercenaries. The use of former soldiers from 32-Battalion in Angola creates difficulties in terms of 1.c), since many of these soldiers are indeed Angolans.

The use of motivation as a basis for the classification of operators as "mercenaries" also creates operational difficulties. Schreier and Caparini (2005:14) note that the boundary between a mercenary and a member of a volunteer army, i.e. almost every army since 1990, including the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), is vague, "when they are paid, and when money is as much part of their motivation as ideology, volunteers are mercenaries". Conversely, there are documented cases of mercenaries who fought for ideological reasons rather than financial gain, e.g. the Frenchman Gilbert Bourgeaud, known as Colonel Bob Denard, the German Colonel "Black" Jacques Schramme, or the Irish-born "Mad" Mike Hoare – three of the most notorious mercenaries of the Cold War era. In the case of EO, after the termination of the company's contract in Sierra Leone, some operators stayed to help the Sierra Leonean government through the later contract with Sandline International. One such operator was the pilot Neil Ellis, who had flown for both companies, until Sandline's contract was terminated in 1999. He however remained in Sierra Leone, unpaid, and by May 2000 British troops arrived and took responsibility for his salary (Barlow 2007:403).

Singer (2002) makes a clear distinction between the mercenaries of the Cold War era and the modern, "corporate warriors". He argues that PMCs operate as body corporates, trading on stock exchanges, and openly marketing their services (particularly on the internet), compared with the dubious practices and black market nature of mercenaries. This corporate organisation is a key factor in distinguishing PMCs from mercenaries, for companies can utilise the sale of stock shares and intrafirm trading to raise funds, whereas mercenaries require payment in cash (since their actions are illegal). Furthermore, PMCs employ contractors but will remain an organisation if these contractors leave and are replaced by others, and thus the distinction, in Singer's (2002:192) view, is that "it is not the people who matter but the structure they are within". The definition of a PMC rendered by the Centre for Public Integrity (quoted in Schreier and Caparini (2005:17)) underscores Singer's distinction:

> "[A] registered civilian company that specializes in the provision of contract military training (instruction and simulation programs), military support operations (logistic support), operational capabilities (special forces advisors, command and control, communications, and intelligence functions), and/or military equipment, to legitimate domestic and foreign entities."

EO started in 1989 as a company providing specialised training to the then South African Defence Force (SADF), and its corporate mission, reprinted in Barlow (2007:538-539), clearly states that the company provided training, advice, and equipment, rather than combat personnel. The company was registered in South Africa and the United Kingdom, again unlike Cold War mercenaries. Details regarding EO's contracts and the quotes provided to governments and the UN are readily available, unlike in the case of mercenaries, and they marketed their services openly, even at the International Defence Exhibition in Abu Dhabi in 1997, and on the internet (www.eo.com).[3] When Barlow submitted his resignation on 27 June 1997, he gave his shares to the other directors in the company, again indicating the corporate nature of EO.

EO's insistence that the South African government implement regulations further indicates that the company did not regard itself as engaged in illegal activities, and in 1997 the company was granted a licence by the South African government to operate under the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill [B54-97]. EO therefore operated within the law, and Barlow (2007:516) argues that the closure of the company on 31 December 1998 was the result of internal issues and was unrelated to government legislation. Although Barlow's premises were raided by the Investigating Directorate of the Serious Economic Offences unit – better known as the Scorpions – in December 2000, the National Prosecuting Authority's case 1/4/3-4/99 was closed soon afterwards, since they discovered no evidence with which to prosecute Barlow (Barlow 2007:506-508).

In accordance with Singer's abovementioned distinction, EO should therefore be classified as a PMC rather than as a group of mercenaries. Furthermore, the Centre for Public Integrity's definition is a suitable description of EO's activities, and in the light of all of the above, classifying EO as a PMC (as Barlow himself does) is more accurate than the label "mercenary".

3. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RISE OF PMCS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO EO

Singer (2002:193) names three reasons why PMCs grew in importance in the 1990s:

1. The end of the Cold War and the vacuum this produced in the market of security.
2. Transformations in the nature of warfare; and
3. the normative rise of privatisation.

3 This site is no longer operational.

3.1 The end of the Cold War

According to Singer (*Ibid.*), the total number of personnel employed by the world's armies was reduced by 6 million in the 1990s. The US military shrank from 2,1 million in 1989 to 1,4 million in 2005, the Soviet Union/Russian Federation diminished its army of 5 227 000 in 1987 to 977 000 in 2001, and the UK now has an army that is at its smallest since the Battle of Waterloo (Schreier and Caparini 2005:4). Six million people with skills suited to the security industry therefore flooded the job market; as Barlow (2007:91) reflects on the South African situation: "President De Klerk's policy of single-handedly destroying what was arguably one of the best bush-fighting armies in the world meant there were many highly trained and competent ex-soldiers looking for work." While the transformation in the SANDF merged former liberation movements with regular forces, the SANDF also reduced its numbers to 59 000 by 2003, compared with 110 000 in 1994 (Cock 2005:795). Cock (2005:796) cites a study claiming that 66% of ex-liberation fighters were left unemployed by the end of the liberation struggle, and these soldiers rarely have other skills apart from their military training – an issue noted by Barlow (2007:77) himself after the dissolution of the Civil Cooperation Bureau and his subsequent dismissal.

It is therefore consistent with global trends that the first PMC to grab the headlines in the new post-Cold War era was the South African firm, EO. Johann Smith, an ex-member of the SADF, remarked that security contractors "are our best export commodity to other African countries" (quoted in Potgieter (2002:14)). After 23 years of fighting the Border War in Namibia/Angola, as well as throughout Southern Africa, the South African soldiery emerged with valuable lessons learned regarding counter-insurgencies in Africa, making them useful throughout the continent. Particularly soldiers from elite units such as Koevoet, 32-Battalion, Paratroopers, and the Reconnaissance Commandos were expertly trained and experienced at fighting counter-insurgencies: in operating with the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) and the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO), they acquired experience in training local recruits and assisting with logistics and intelligence gathering, as well as with Russian weaponry, thus laying the foundation for assisting government forces in similar situations. Their skills and experience were therefore well suited to the environment in which they were required to operate, while simultaneously their governments could no longer accommodate these skills.

Because of reduced numbers, resources are bound to be strained, unless the threat level decreases correspondingly. That did not happen after the Cold War, and between 1990 and 2000 the US Army alone deployed troops on 36 occasions compared to ten deployments during the 40 year long Cold War (Schreier and Caparini 2005:4). Spicer (1999:22) affirms that Western powers reduced their armies after the end of

the Cold War "before the leaders woke up to the fact that the world had actually become more dangerous" (see also Ward and Marsh (2006:3)). The continuation of the war in Angola after the withdrawal of the SADF and Cuban forces illustrates that the reduction in military force did not reduce the threat level; after Angola's first national elections were finally held in late September 1992, UNITA rejected the results and continued the war without South African and US aid. In 1993 Barlow was approached by Simon Mann and Tony Buckingham of Heritage Oil & Gas and its subsidiary, Ranger Oil, to recover equipment lost when UNITA overran Soyo in Angola. Buckingham claimed he had requested that UNITA return his equipment: "I told them that I want no part in their war. I just want the kit out of Soyo because it's costing me in over $20 000 a day in lease fees alone. They were pretty straightforward with their answer – they told me to fuck off" (Barlow 2007:89). Left with no alternative, EO was contracted.

Fifty-six out of the 72 EO contractors initially sent to Angola in 1993 were veterans of the Border War (Barlow 2007:107). The total number of EO personnel in Angola would eventually grow to about 500 (Barlow 2007:299), and EO would later employ ex-MK (*Umkhonto we Sizwe*) members as well. The applicability of their skills and experience is illustrated by the outcome: The contract resulted in operators driving UNITA's forces from the Soyo oilfield and being contracted to train the new Angolan army until 1996. EO's efforts are generally regarded as a decisive factor in bringing UNITA to the negotiating table, and at the time the contract was completed, EO "had trained a demoralised and defeated army and turned the tide of the 20-year-long Angolan war" (Barlow 2007:299).

3.2 Transformations in the nature of warfare

With the Soviet Union disbanded and the Russian Federation fighting to maintain integrity, the strategic significance of particularly developing countries declined, prompting the US and NATO to intervene less and with fewer resources. Spicer (1999:16) argues: "The world's political leaders are afraid of political or military involvement in the world's endemic conflicts because they don't want the body bags coming home [...] or because they don't want to take the risks or to be blamed if matters go awry." Operation Gothic Serpent in Somalia in 1993 illustrated that "intervention into potential quagmires against diffuse enemies has become less palatable and the potential costs less bearable" (Singer 2002:194). Indeed, Armstrong (2008:1) starts his book, *War PLC*, with this incident and the number of "acceptable losses" that a population is now willing to tolerate in the absence of strategic significance or a direct threat to national security. After this incident, President Clinton drafted Presidential Decision Directive 25, which restricted foreign deployment to where the interests of the US are at stake (Armstrong 2008:2) – a move that had a direct influence on US complacence in Bosnia and Rwanda. PMCs evolved to fill this

void, since PMC casualties are rarely reported, and rarely cause a significant public outrage (at least initially).

As discussed in the previous section, the war in Angola resumed without South African and Cuban intervention, and in the absence of strategic significance, countries in the developed world were also reluctant to become involved in Sierra Leone's civil war. In March 1995 EO became involved at the behest of Valentine Strasser's government, and "in just over a week on the ground they managed to expel the RUF [Revolutionary United Front] from Freetown, pushing them 126 km back into the jungle" (Hough 2007:11). After the defeat of the RUF, Sierra Leone was able to hold democratic elections (Armstrong 2008:48), which were won by President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. Hough's (2007:21) analysis of the war in Sierra Leone concluded that "EO's success was not specific to its role as a PMC and could be duplicated by a national army, as long as that army is professional and preferably a number of elite soldiers are sent". However, sending British paratroopers to an African conflict was a rare occurrence, and "if nations with professional militaries are unwilling to commit elite units to interventions, the bolstering and training of local militaries by PMCs may be the best available alternative" (*Ibid.*).

EO therefore fulfilled a role previously occupied by the superpowers: that of military advisors, training, logistics, and leading local forces – the same roles occupied by US Green Berets during the early years of the war in Vietnam. Had Strasser's government been in the same position 20 years earlier, he could have requested aid from either the Soviet bloc or Western powers, but since strategic decisions were no longer made against the backdrop of the Cold War, Strasser approached the private industry. In this respect also, EO's operations tie in well with Singer's (2002) conception of the factors that lead to the rise of PMCs; Barlow himself stated: "The [end of the] Cold War left a huge vacuum and I identified a niche in the market" (quoted in Schreier and Caparini (2005:19)).

3.3 The normative rise of privatisation

The third issue of privatisation concerns two of the main global powers, in particular: the US and UK. Singer (2002:197) argues: "Fuelled by the collapse of the centralized 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 government." Already under Thatcher "(t)he Tory party [...] moved away from 'One Nation' Conservatism towards a set of policies aimed at promoting business, consumerism, and the interests of those who aspired to be 'upwardly mobile'" (Childs 2005:4). This emphasis on the market-state was continued by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair within the framework of a "neoliberal global era" (Peet 2002:54), resulting in "accusations that Blairism amounted to little more than Thatcherism" (Urban 2004:356). Also in South Africa, the free-market economy triumphed over

the ANC's initial insistence on nationalisation (Peet 2002). Privatising the military is thus part of a global trend towards privatisation in general, as Sinclair Dinnen (quoted in Singer (2002:198)) notes: "The current revival in private military security is broadly consistent with the prevailing orthodoxy of economic rationalism, with its emphasis on 'downsizing' government and large-scale privatization" (see also Armstrong (2008:247)).

One of the main objectives of privatisation is to improve cost-efficiency, and PMCs are indeed more cost-efficient than national governments or the UN: EO provided a quote to the UN in mid-April 1994 to help stabilise Rwanda, but the UN decided it was "too expensive" (Barlow 2007:441). The US sent troops that only arrived in Kigali on 30 July (Barlow 2007:442), and they only succeeded in evacuating 148 Americans and 82 "others" (Barlow 2007:542).

EO's mission in Sierra Leone cost $33 million over 21 months, whereas the official UN cost was $500 million a year (Barlow 2007:390; see also Schreier and Caparini 2005:19). EO's success in Sierra Leone is well-documented, and Sierra Leonean President Kabbah said of the company (quoted in Spicer (1999:47)): "We didn't consider them as mercenaries but as people bringing in some sanity." Nevertheless, as in Angola, diplomatic pressure prevented the renewal of EO's contract, war restarted, and within a hundred days the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) staged a *coup* and allied itself with the RUF, who then regained "all of the territory that it had lost to the EO-reinforced CDF" (Civil Defence Force) (Hough 2007:11). The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) redeployed its troops from Liberia to Sierra Leone in June 1997 with the goal of liberating Freetown from the RUF and restoring the Kabbah government to power, but after failing to achieve their mission for six months, Kabbah signed a contract with another PMC, Sandline International, in early 1998. Diplomatic pressure once again forced their withdrawal, the RUF launched another attack on Freetown which ECOMOG troops were unable to handle effectively, and a UN peace-keeping mission was sent in October 1999. O'Hanlon and Singer (2004:92)[4] state: "Despite having nearly twenty times the budget and personnel of Executive Outcomes, the UN force took years and multiple crises to come close to the same results – and required substantial help from the UK."[5]

The contract in Sierra Leone illustrates why the global security environment of the late 1990s favoured PMCs and EO in particular; as a private company, EO was

4 In contrast to this view, Riley (1997: 287) states that "the ruthless and expensive intervention from mid-1995 of the South African mercenary and mining operation, Executive Outcomes" was one of the factors that undermined the Sierra Leone Army (SLA).

5 Peace was eventually established by British paratroopers, who were deployed to Sierra Leone in May 2000, but their late arrival only signifies the reluctance of first world powers to become involved in third world civil wars.

able to respond to Strasser's request quicker and in a more cost-effective manner than the UN or developed countries were able to do.

3.4 The inability of the UN to sustain peace

To these factors should be added that the UN has proved incapable of sustaining peace (see e.g. Barlow (2007:201)). The end of the Cold War exposed existing UN inadequacies; Spicer (1999:22) says that "it could be argued that PMCs are the inevitable outcome of the UN's failure to tackle long-term problems with sufficient resolve and adequate resources". Codevilla and Seabury (2006:292) note how Dutch troops supposedly guarding the UN "safe area" of Srebrenica in Bosnia, watched as Serbian troops massacred perhaps 4 000 refugees. In Sarajevo, the UN's "inappropriately named UN Protection Force [...] protected nothing and forced nothing" (Codevilla and Seabury 2006:293). Under UN supervision, Angola's Third Civil War broke out in mid-1997 (Barlow 2007:302), after the successfully completed EO contract had not been renewed because of diplomatic pressure[6] – a situation preceded in Namibia in April 1989 during the so-called Nine Day War. Messner (2007:62) states: "Events such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide or the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, both of which happened before the very eyes of UN peacekeepers, are a grave testimony to the severe shortcomings of UN peacekeeping capacities." Nor did the UN redeem its reputation in Liberia, Darfur, or numerous other conflict zones. The absence of foreign intervention, such as the diplomatic pressure that brought peace to Namibia in 1989, and UN incompetency, therefore stimulate the market for PMCs – a point illustrated by EO's involvement in both Angola and Sierra Leone.

4. CONCLUSION

Eleven years after the closure of EO, Gumedze (2009:3) confidently calls EO's involvement in Sierra Leone the "typical example of the use of a PMSC [Private Military and Security Company] in an African conflict". EO occupies a privileged position in the history of PMCs, because the company ventured into an Africa reeling from the withdrawal of the superpowers after the Cold War, and the company was itself rooted in a country that had to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of the early neoliberal market-state era. As such, EO illustrates the recent literature on PMCs, e.g. that of Singer, especially vividly: the loss of employment opportunities for ex-combatants that the end of the Cold War entailed, the loss of strategic significance of conflicts after the Cold War and the resulting reluctance of developed countries

6 Howe (1998: 329) names the Clinton Administration as the main entity behind this diplomatic pressure.

to become involved in African civil wars, and the role of privatisation in the global security environment.

The recent plethora of academic research into the phenomenon of PMCs has allowed a re-evaluation of the concept that sets it aside from Cold War mercenaries, and although accounts of PMC activities remain highly polarised, with the media in particular viewing the phenomenon in a negative light, it has become possible to acknowledge the positive aspects of PMCs such as EO. In line with recent research into PMCs, this article has argued that a distinction exists between PMCs and mercenaries, and EO more properly belongs to the former category (as argued by e.g. Singer). Such a distinction is crucial when attempting to discuss the history of post-Cold War conflicts, since EO constitutes South Africa's best-known contribution to this growing international phenomenon and a misunderstanding of this company's role and character distorts its historical significance. Although EO was more closely involved in combat operations than e.g. Erinys or Blackwater in Iraq, the company exhibits most characteristics that define PMCs, and despite the fact that it was not the first PMC, its visibility in the media and literature makes it an important case study in the development of PMCs.

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