

Private Security Forces and African Stability: The Case of Executive Outcomes
Author(s): Herbert M. Howe
Source: *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jun., 1998), pp. 307-331
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161407>
Accessed: 05/07/2010 12:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://dv1litvip.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Modern African Studies*.

Private security forces and African stability: the case of Executive Outcomes

Herbert M. Howe*

The end of the Cold War has had contradictory effects on African security. Southern Africa and Ethiopia clearly benefitted from the end of superpower rivalry, whereas central and western Africa have seen an upswing of violence during the 1990s. The withdrawal of foreign patronage, the post-Somalia reluctance of the West and the UN to intervene militarily, heightened external demands for economic and political reform, and the changing nature of African insurgencies, have placed additional pressure on already weak governments.¹ Many African states have only weak militaries to defend their security, the collapse of Mobutu Sese Seko's Armed Forces of Zaïre providing the most recent example.

As recently as 1990, the idea of African states relying upon mercenaries from the former South African Defence Force (SADF) would have seemed both preposterous and insulting. Yet since 1993, Executive Outcomes (EO), the world's largest and best known 'mercenary' group, has marketed itself as a defender of African state security in this post-Cold War era.² A private army with access to some 2,000 ex-South African Defence Force (SADF) combat veterans, EO

* School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC. The author greatly appreciates the large number of people who assisted the research for this paper. He especially thanks his parents, Professors Herbert and Evelyn Howe, who put aside their dislike of the subject of mercenaries, to serve as thoughtful editors.

¹ See Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York, 1991); Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, 1996); Francis Deng, et al., *Sovereignty as Responsibility* (Washington, 1996); Mohammed Ayooob, *The Third World Security Predicament* (Boulder, 1995); and Donald M. Snow, *Uncivil Wars: International Security and the New Internal Conflicts* (Boulder, 1996).

² Other private security groups involved in Africa include Grey Security in South Africa, Military Professional Resources Incorporated in the US, Crofas in France, and Defence Systems Limited, Control Risks Group, Sandline, and Gurkha Security Group in Great Britain. Private security groups dislike the 'mercenary' label, since it suggests a lack of principle and criteria other than profit. EO officials emphasise that their force fights only for sovereign governments, while Tim Spicer of Sandline argues that 'We would like to conduct ourselves in the way most people would expect a First World army to conduct itself.' 'I'm no Dog of War, says former British officer held in Papua', *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 1997.

has helped to defeat discredited insurgencies in Angola and Sierra Leone. Large sections of Africa need effective militaries and EO, which claims to fight only for sovereign governments, presents itself as a stabilising force for African development. To some observers, EO is 'with the possible exception of the South African army, the most deadly and efficient army operating in sub-Saharan Africa today'.³

This article examines the controversial Executive Outcomes military as a security option for African governments. It sketches EO's history, its military effectiveness, and its political loyalty, to assess whether EO threatens or assists African state stability. The article concludes by looking at EO's possible future, and the lessons which it offers about African security.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES

Max Weber noted that the modern state arose because it 'successfully upheld a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order'.⁴ The idea that private military groups might supplement or displace this core function of the state, and aid national development by protecting weak states against armed insurrection, would until recently have been dismissed without serious consideration. The belief that such non-state forces threaten the state's security and legitimacy has been long established. Machiavelli counselled his prince that mercenaries were militarily ineffective and disloyal.⁵ More recently, mercenaries in Africa have sometimes drawn their pay from Western sources, whether governments or mining companies. Such mercenary groups could readily be assumed to be ultimately accountable, not to the state but to the corporation that paid them.

Yet EO's experience has demonstrated that established private groups enjoy potential advantages over state-centric militaries. Private forces can start up and deploy faster than multinational (and perhaps national) forces, and may carry less political baggage, especially concerning casualties, than government militaries. Additionally, they have a clearer chain of command, more readily compatible military equipment and training, and greater experience of working together than do *ad hoc* multinational forces. They may be financially less

³ 'Privatising war, by the executives', *The Independent*, 17 September 1996.

⁴ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons trans. (New York, 1964), p. 154.

⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago, 1985), see ch. 12 and 13, pp. 48-57.

expensive than other foreign forces. Finally, they can handpick from a pool of proven combat veterans.

Executive Outcomes has accomplished tasks which both African and Western governments have approved of, but have hesitated to attempt themselves because of financial or political costs. While the United Nations and some nations may deploy peacekeeping forces, they rarely agree to sending peace-enforcing, or combat, units. EO, however, 'offers to do what the United Nations blue helmets cannot and will not do: take sides, deploy overwhelming force, and fire "pre-emptively" on its contractually designated enemy'.⁶ Although it is usually labelled as 'mercenary', EO has several important differences from past mercenary groups, which suggest that it may actually assist political stability. It claims to support only sovereign states, and its human rights record in Angola and Sierra Leone compares favourably with that of other armed groups in those two countries. Other African countries have reportedly expressed an interest in hiring it. Yet the rapid success and commercial acumen of this South African-based mercenary organisation pose a crucial question about entrusting national security to private groups: do they weaken or stabilise already fragile states?

Executive Outcomes' commercial ties raise concerns about its effects on the *de facto* sovereignty of the African states in which it operates. The Branch Group, a British multinational holding company, has benefitted financially from its close ties with EO.⁷ EO may be far more than an effective intervention force, and serve as the military wing of a multinational organisation which, in an era of worldwide privatisation, is obtaining significant influence within fragile states. It has been described as 'arguably the world's first fully equipped corporate army ... the advance guard for major business interests engaged in a latter-day scramble for the mineral wealth of Africa'.⁸ As discussed later, some observers believe that EO's link with other companies, notably Branch Minerals and Branch Energy, may threaten African sovereignty. These concerns have immediate importance since the influence of private

⁶ Elizabeth Rubin, 'An army of their own', *Harper's*, February 1997, p. 45.

⁷ The Plaza Group includes Heritage Oil, Diamond Works and the Branch group (Branch Energy, Branch Minerals and Branch Mining). Strategic Resources Corporation, whose flagship company is Executive Outcomes, holds significant share ownership in at least seven (apparently non-Branch) businesses. The Plaza group and SRC have numerous linkages, many of which are more informal than formal, based upon shared outlook, friendship and past dealings. EO and Branch have worked closely together in Angola and Sierra Leone. Future Sandline operations are likely to include many ex-EO soldiers, but will probably not involve a formal contract with EO.

⁸ Khareen Pech and David Beresford, 'Corporate dogs of war grow fat in Africa', *Guardian Weekly*, 26 January 1997, p. 8.

groups, and EO in particular, appears to be growing rapidly. Western European intelligence sources state that EO has 'unlimited potential for expansion and self-enrichment certainly within Africa and there is little evidence of the bandwagon slowing down',⁹ and predict that:

Executive Outcomes will become ever richer and more potent, capable of exercising real power, even to the extent of keeping military regimes in being. If it continues to expand at the present rate, its influence in sub-Saharan Africa could become crucial.¹⁰

WHO IS EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES?

Most of EO's soldiers have come from South Africa's former 32 Battalion, the Reconnaissance Commandos, the Parachute Brigade and the paramilitary 'Koevoet' or 'Crowbar'. These four groups were South Africa's spearhead for military destabilisation throughout southern Africa during the 1980s. The SADF's Special Forces and the 32 Battalion saw especially heavy service in Angola, where they gained a thorough knowledge of UNITA's guerrilla capabilities and of the Angolan terrain, and several times plucked UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, from the jaws of defeat. The 32 Battalion, composed largely of Portuguese-speaking Angolans, became South Africa's most highly decorated unit since the Second World War. Blacks reportedly comprise about 70 per cent of EO, but most of these serve as combat soldiers.

Three of EO's leaders reflect this elite unit background. Eeben Barlow, EO's chairman until mid-1997, had been second-in-command of the 32 Battalion's reconnaissance unit, and was later a top official of the Civil Cooperation Bureau, which was particularly notorious for fomenting conflict inside South Africa. Laffras Luitingh, head of recruitment, had been a major in 5 Reconnaissance Commando. Nic van den Bergh, chief executive officer, had been a lieutenant-colonel in the Parabats, and took over the chairmanship after Barlow and Luitingh resigned from EO in July 1997.

EO is a military anomaly: a feared force that has neither a standing army nor a major weapons stockpile.¹¹ The company picks its employees from a list of 2,000 proven and trusted combat specialists. Eeben Barlow notes that 'we've had an awful lot of calls and letters

⁹ Information gathered by author, July 1996.

¹⁰ Pech and Beresford, 'Corporate dogs'.

¹¹ The absence of a standing force and supply stockpile has at least two advantages: the host country (South Africa) does not feel a physical threat and EO can reduce its administrative costs.

[from prospective recruits], but unless they served in the SADF or SAP (South African Police), we won't take them'.¹² This stipulation, which has some exceptions, provides soldiers with a common training and probable combat experience. EO also provides attractive financial benefits to its soldiers, although various press accounts have exaggerated the amounts.¹³ The average salary per soldier is about \$3,500 per month, with top helicopter pilots and country commanders earning about \$7,500.

EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES IN ANGOLA

EO arose out of southern Africa's charred political landscape. The 1988 Brazzaville Accords signalled an end to Soviet, Cuban and South African military involvement in Angola and Namibia. As South Africa ended its regional destabilisation policy, many combat soldiers left the Defence Force. By 1992 the Reconnaissance Commandos and the Parachute Brigade stood at approximately half their 1989 strength, and both the 32 Battalion and Koevoet (two units comprised largely of Angolans and Namibians, respectively, under South African command) were officially disbanded. Observers worried that these unemployed upholders of the old order could derail political reforms and subsequent majority rule. Instead, EO arose as an apparently stabilising force. Angola's MPLA government contracted with Executive Outcomes, members of which in the 1980s had fought against the MPLA, to defeat Jonas Savimbi's UNITA, for which EO personnel had previously fought.

Escalating fighting within Angola prompted Executive Outcome's entry in late 1992 or early 1993. The 1991 peace agreement between UNITA and the MPLA resulted in the September 1992 elections, which Savimbi rejected after incomplete returns showed the MPLA to be winning. Returning to fighting, Savimbi soon controlled 80 per cent of Angola's countryside, and the MPLA desperately sought help, which it could no longer obtain from Cuba and the Soviet Union.

As UNITA continued on the offensive throughout much of Angola, Heritage Oil and Gas, which is part of the Branch Group, introduced EO to the increasingly desperate MPLA government, which quickly recognised EO's capabilities and signed a one-year contract for \$40

¹² Interview with Eben Barlow, July 1996.

¹³ This author's own article was one example of claiming exaggerated salaries. Howe, 'South Africa's 911 Force', *Armed Forces Journal International*, November 1996.

million with it in September 1993. Of this amount, \$20 million was for military supplies requested by EO, while the other \$20 million went directly to EO. It was money well spent.¹⁴

Executive Outcomes served primarily as a 'force multiplier' – a small group whose specialised skills enhanced the effectiveness of a much larger force. It fielded a maximum of about 550 soldiers, and trained about 5,000 government (FAA) troops and 30 pilots.¹⁵ At Longa special operations training base, near Luanda, EO personnel instructed the MPLA in skills such as motorised infantry, artillery, engineering, signals and medical support, as well as sabotage and reconnaissance. EO's major turning point occurred in June 1994 when the EO-trained 16th Brigade triumphed over a strong UNITA force at N'dalatando, a strategic town outside Luanda. N'talatonda was the newly-constituted Brigade's first battle; with joint EO–FAA planning, it suffered only four casualties. 'That battle changed the whole attitude of the Angolans', recalls Barlow. 'Everything else fell into place for us in Angola and word spread throughout Africa.'¹⁶

Executive Outcomes personnel sometimes fought, rather than just training and advising. EO-trained soldiers proved instrumental in seizing N'dalatando, and EO personnel helped recapture the diamond areas of Cafunfo in mid-July 1994 and the oil installations at Soyo by November. Pilots belonging to IBiS Air, which appears to be a Plaza company, flew combat sorties in Mi-8 and MI-17 helicopters, and Mig-23 fighters. Defence strategists generally credit Executive Outcomes with greatly assisting the MPLA to turn back the resurgent UNITA.¹⁷ About twenty EO personnel died in Angola, from combat, training and illness.

A chastened Savimbi signed the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994. The Protocol ended the fighting and prepared the ground for another round of elections. It also called for the repatriation of all mercenaries in Angola, but EO remained for another thirteen months, at the MPLA's request. On 12 December, the Angolan government announced the imminent withdrawal of Executive Outcomes from Angola. The first group left for South Africa on 11 January, 1996. EO and the Angolan government followed the letter, but probably not the

¹⁴ Some observers believe that Angola also granted some concessions to Branch as additional payment for EO's services.

¹⁵ A US intelligence source believes the maximum figure for EO in Angola was about 1,000 men. Interview, August 1996. Eeben Barlow claims the top figure was 570 soldiers. Interview with Barlow, June, 1997.

¹⁶ Barlow, interview.

¹⁷ EO and the FAA did not fully defeat UNITA. The group remained active in several areas, especially along the Cuango river – a major diamond source.

intent, of the withdrawal.¹⁸ Up to half of EO personnel remained in Angola legally, often taking jobs in government-encouraged private security companies.

EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES IN SIERRA LEONE

EO's rapid military successes against one of Africa's most capable guerrilla armies attracted attention elsewhere in the continent. In May 1995, Sierra Leone contracted with EO to help its faltering four-year campaign against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Branch apparently entered into an agreement with the Sierra Leone government at the same time. Tony Buckingham, the CEO of Heritage Oil and Gas, helped introduce EO to the Freetown government and Michael Grumberg, a major shareholder in Branch, negotiated EO's contract.¹⁹ The RUF, aided by a general breakdown in order and disloyal government soldiers, had advanced by May 1995 to some 20 miles from Freetown. RUF's strength probably numbered several thousand guerrillas.

The war had devastated the country. One and a half million of Sierra Leone's 4 million people had become refugees, and at least 15,000 had been killed since 1992. The economy lay in shambles: RUF had largely closed road traffic as well as diamond and bauxite mining. The war's disruption of Sierra Leone's extensive diamond and titanium dioxide (rutile) deposits saw the gross national product decline by at least 10 per cent in 1995, and inflation soar to 35 per cent. Clandestine diamond and agricultural production cost the government about \$200 million: government domestic revenues were only \$60 million.²⁰

The Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) evinced many of the limitations which have encouraged the growth of private militaries. It hardly qualified as an army, despite its size of perhaps 14,000 soldiers, two-thirds of whom had been hastily recruited, and lacked basic military professionalism. The military displayed no lack of corruption. The term 'sobels' ('soldiers by day, rebels by night')

¹⁸ UNITA correctly claimed that EO personnel were still assisting the FAA, months after the signing. The MPLA clearly did not trust Savimbi and wanted EO personnel to remain on call. Worried that EO's presence had prompted Savimbi's slowness in following the Lusaka timetable, President Clinton pressed President Eduardo dos Santos during a state visit to Washington in December 1995.

¹⁹ Tony Buckingham introduced EO to Angola and Sierra Leone. This coupling of economic and security power as a 'package deal' undoubtedly assisted both Branch and EO in securing their contracts. Mr Buckingham is a former Special Air Services (SAS) officer.

²⁰ See William Reno, 'Privatizing war In Sierra Leone', *Current History*, May 1997, p. 228. A good study of the war is Paul Richards, *Fighting For the Rainforest* (Portsmouth, NH, 1996).

described soldiers who also engaged in banditry or rebel activities, and RSLMF units sometimes fought each other. The past governments of Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh had 'ethnised' the military and cut its budget. The World Bank and the IMF increasingly pressed the government to lower military funding following the army's hasty build-up.

EO submitted a proposal to the financially strapped Strasser government. 'They said they couldn't pay', EO's Laffras Luitingh recalled. 'We said they could pay us when they could afford it.'²¹ Barlow and Luitingh maintain that EO insisted that the Strasser government begin a democratisation process. According to Barlow, 'when Strasser started renegeing, we threatened to withdraw. We insisted on a timetable for democracy – within one to one and a half years. We kept on pushing, pushing... ten months later the (election) occurred.' Other observers downplay EO's requests for democratisation.²²

EO's military progress was rapid. Once again, EO as a force multiplier provided technical services, combat forces and limited training; 30 EO soldiers arrived in about May 1995, and within weeks had trained 150 government soldiers.²³ Its first tasks were to push RUF away from Freetown, protect the Kono diamond district, and open the roads to Freetown for food and fuel transport. By late January 1996, EO-backed forces had retaken the southern coastal rutile and bauxite mines, notably those belonging to Sierra Rutile and Sieromco. Brigadier Bert Sachse, EO's commander in Sierra Leone, states that EO suffered two killed during EO's year-and-a-half of combat.²⁴

EO's activities helped to facilitate a cease-fire, as they had in Angola. In February 1996 the Julius Maada Bio government, which had seized power from Strasser, scheduled elections which occurred without serious complications. The new government headed by Ahmed Tejan Kabba took power on 29 March and continued the war against RUF and the 'sobels'. On 29 November the Kabba government and RUF signed a peace settlement which continued into early 1997. Executive

²¹ Interview with Laffras Luitingh, June 1996.

²² Barlow, interview. A US diplomat previously based in Sierra Leone disparages EO's democratising actions. He states that while EO initially pressed for elections when it entered in May 1995, it dropped its insistence during the military campaign. Interview, Dec. 1996.

²³ EO claims that the Sierra Leonean military feared the capabilities of an EO-trained force and therefore did not offer any trainees after the first 150. EO thus turned to the Kamajors.

²⁴ Interview with Brigadier Bert Sachse. Sources close to EO state that force levels stood at 160 through May 1995, topped at 350 in Jan.–Feb. 1996, and then declined to 80 until the contract ended in January 1997.

Outcomes departed Sierra Leone on completion of its contract in January 1997.

EO's military assistance aided Sierra Leone's economic and political situation. William Reno, generally a critic of EO, notes that the force created the stability which attracted more foreign investors, whose revenue helped lower the foreign debt by 20 per cent in 1995 and 1996, and facilitated the nationwide elections in March 1996.²⁵ Canadian General Ian Douglas [Ret.], a UN negotiator, acknowledged that: 'E.O. gave us this stability [in Sierra Leone]. In a perfect world, of course, we wouldn't need an organization like E.O., but I'd be loath to say they have to go just because they are mercenaries.'²⁶

THE MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS OF EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES

Machiavelli contended that mercenaries are usually ineffective. Executive Outcomes has largely disproved that view, by demonstrating the ability of a small, highly trained group to change the military tide. EO's expertise in combat operations and, especially, as a force multiplier have garnered widespread respect. EO's troops proved instrumental in several battles, for example at Cafunfo in Angola and Kono in Sierra Leone. Its pilots, often flying MiG fighters and MI helicopters, greatly assisted ground and intelligence operations.

Yet EO's upgrading of local military capability proved more important than its combat capability. Training and intelligence are two major aspects of force multiplication. EO's officers, many of whom had trained and officered black contingents of the former South African Defence Force, proved excellent trainers of African recruits. In Angola, EO provided the FAA with specialised services which its previous patrons, Cuba and the USSR, had not furnished. It transferred its close knowledge of Savimbi's capabilities to the MPLA and the FAA. EO planes and helicopters conducted aerial, including infra-red, reconnaissance flights. Its radio operators listened to, and reportedly jammed, UNITA and RUF communications. Long-range reconnaissance and aerial surveillance provided visual identification of enemy camps. Defence experts believe that EO is highly skilled in signals and communication and photo interpretation.²⁷

Sources within EO reveal that the organisation in Sierra Leone also

²⁵ Reno, 'Privatizing', p. 229.

²⁶ General Douglas, quoted in Rubin, 'An army', p. 48.

²⁷ Interviews in US and Europe, 1996 and 1997.

conducted counter-intelligence operations. EO intelligence operators identified possible informants, isolated and trained them, and then supplied them with communications equipment.²⁸ EO also quietly drew upon threatened business operations for local intelligence. Rapid acquisition of intelligence is especially essential for EO, since as a private foreign force it presumably lacks official South African (or Western) intelligence, and yet faces great pressure to achieve quick victories. Inadequate intelligence has hamstrung other recent African interventions, perhaps most notably ECOMOG in Liberia. EO achieved strong intelligence capabilities in short order, a success that is especially surprising, given its foreign, white officership and its apartheid history.

EO's actions to increase its political acceptability also aided its intelligence gathering. During the 1980s the SADF had stressed (although it often did not practice) that counter-insurgency was 80 per cent political and 20 per cent military. EO reduced outside criticism and gained valuable internal support and information with generally good behaviour towards African civilians and minimal civic action programmes. 'We train our soldiers to behave with the locals', states Barlow, 'and not [to] become their enemy... we build trust and acquire more intelligence.'²⁹ Limited medical aid for civilians augmented intelligence from signals intercepts, ground and air reconnaissance and host governments.

EO did not mount any major civic action programmes but its ability to defeat rebel groups militarily, and its correct behaviour towards the general population, created popularity with civilians – although, as a World Bank critic of EO rejoins, 'It doesn't take much [in Angola or Sierra Leone] to look pretty good.'³⁰ EO could not count on Sierra Leone's corruption-ridden military, but did use a locally based network of hunters, the Kamajors. The Kamajors grew to over 10,000 fighters and along with EO militarily turned the war around. They knew the terrain, enjoyed excellent relations with the paramount chiefs, and resented RUF's intrusions. EO strengthened the military capability of the Kamajors, and provided them with food, intelligence, training and some strategic planning, even though such support for local, parallel

²⁸ Interviews in England, Sierra Leone, and Washington, DC, 1996 and 1997.

²⁹ EO's treatment of prisoners also paid intelligence dividends. Barlow claims that UNITA and RUF prisoners had often been executed before EO's entry. 'We've been very successful in stopping this practice. A prisoner holds a lot of intelligence.' Barlow, interview. Several journalists contend, however, that EO soldiers mistreated prisoners.

³⁰ Interview with a World Bank official, January 1997.

militaries later backfired in Sierra Leone, and was a contributory factor to the subsequent army/RUF takeover.

LOYALTY TO THE STATE

The generally-used definition of 'mercenary', a foreign soldier fighting for money, suggests a purchasable and changeable loyalty. It might well be asked whether a government could trust Executive Outcomes, given the company's profit-driven ethos and its opposition to UNITA, which EO personnel had previously supported when fighting for the SADF. In practice none the less, and in return for significant payments, EO has remained loyal to its employers.³¹ It has not switched sides, has not threatened the government, and has not shirked from combat – three traits of many past mercenary operations.

EO provided valuable military assistance to the Angolan government and then left when requested in late 1995. Equally, EO stood by the Sierra Leonean government (although it threatened to leave in late 1995, apparently because of non-payment) and did not become involved in the several coup plots of 1996; it reportedly forestalled a planned coup against the 1996 elections.³² Business pragmatism largely determined EO's loyalty.³³ EO hopes, in Barlow's words, 'to live a long time as a company'.³⁴ Thus, an undisputed record of loyalty, as well as military success and a good human rights record, appears essential to generate future business. EO soldiers have apparently obeyed their commanders' directives to refrain from interfering in political or economic activities, two trademarks of some previous mercenary operations. A shared history, including a common South African upbringing, and experience of training and fighting together, along with the need to unite within a foreign land, have probably created a

³¹ Executive Outcomes as a private company fights primarily for financial gain. EO will not commit its forces to any combat without certain guarantees. 'We are a business ... everything is cash ... Before going into a country we want three months of salary and cost.' Barlow, interview. Despite this statement, EO has reportedly supplied limited, *pro bono* convoy protection and security advising.

³² 'our people who are involved in Sierra Leone picked it up, reported it and then necessary action was taken in order to neutralize the coup d'état'. 'Executive Outcomes head Eeben Barlow interviewed', South African Broadcasting Corporation, 22 Jan. 1997, in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, AL2825 A/8 January 24, 1997.

³³ The old South African Defence Force (SADF) did have an ethic that respected the division between civilian and military authority. See Herbert Howe, 'The South African Defence Force and political reform', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32, 1 (1994). SADF special forces stated, although didn't always practice, that counterinsurgency was 80 per cent political and only 20 per cent military and that correct relations with innocent civilians would assist the counterinsurgency.

³⁴ Barlow, interview.

strong professionalism within EO's ranks. EO's permanence, as against the *ad hoc* nature of other mercenary groups, and the need to keep open the possibility of future employment, have undoubtedly bolstered allegiance and decreased the chances of unprofessional behaviour, as have EO's medical capabilities and its pay and leave packages.³⁵

Finally, EO's budget (\$40 million yearly in Angola and far less in Sierra Leone) appears reasonable when compared to the national military budgets of Angola and Sierra Leone. Angola spent an estimated \$515 million on its military in 1994, while Sierra Leone spent \$41 million in 1995.³⁶

EO: A RECOLONISING FORCE?

This still leaves open the question of whether Executive Outcomes actually assists state security in Africa. EO has sought to disprove Machiavelli's contentions, by demonstrating both military efficiency and political loyalty. Yet serious problems, including its linkages with Western commercial interests, its often less-than-permanent victories, and its possible militarisation of Africa, may lessen its contribution to state security. Just because a government can trust EO does not necessarily mean that EO is good for long-term national development. Its record raises several difficult-to-resolve issues.

'Recolonisation' involves highly advantageous concessions, support for pro-EO politicians, and the permanent retention of foreign security personnel. Some Western and African diplomats speculate that, in return for a temporary security fix, EO and its linked companies in the Branch group are 'gaining a host of dirt cheap longterm concessions which mortgage a country's future to this foreign company that can call upon both economic and military force ... and get a foothold'.³⁷ A television documentary broadcast in the United States claimed that 'as soon as EO cleared the rebels out of the diamond fields, the government of Sierra Leone awarded Branch Energy a huge diamond concession. There have been similar coincidences in other countries where EO has ventured.'³⁸ Branch rejects these allegations of recolonisation, and

³⁵ Despite these attractions, South African soldiers knowledgeable about EO claim that some EO soldiers dislike the reportedly harsh and sometimes arbitrary discipline. South African press reports have also featured complaints by relatives of dead EO soldiers about EO's pensions. 'Executive Outcomes. The War Business'; a 1977 Journeyman Productions documentary film features family members of dead EO soldiers complaining about the lack of EO's death benefits.

³⁶ US State Department official, interview.

³⁷ *The Military Balance*, 1996-7, pp. 242, 263.

³⁸ Transcript of 'Dogs of War,' on 'Sixty Minutes', Columbia Broadcasting System, 1 June 1997.

claims only that it introduced EO to the Angolan and Sierra Leonean governments, served as a 'consultant' to EO, and disbursed the government's pay to EO.

Other observers believe that the connections went beyond 'consultancy', and that Branch may have financed some of EO's costs, when the Sierra Leonean government fell into arrears. Sources close to Branch reveal that the Sierra Leonean government paid nothing during EO's first eight months, despite an agreement to pay almost \$2 million monthly, and that for the duration of the EO operation (May 1995 to January 1997), the government paid only \$15.7 million of a \$35.2 bill.³⁹ While EO may have retained some profits from its Angolan campaign, it is most unlikely that it could have paid its approximately 200 men and provided equipment from Angolan profits. Branch (and other mining companies) depended on EO for security and had the resources to assist it. Heritage's Tony Buckingham aided and appeared to speak for EO, when he flew to Freetown in December 1995 and told the Kabba government that EO would leave within two weeks if it did not provide adequate funding.

The importance of likely Branch funding for EO is that Branch could thereby have obtained more favourable terms on its concessions. Possibilities include a stretched tax holiday or customs exemptions from the Bio/Kabba governments, which desperately needed both EO's physical protection and Branch's revenues. Highly favourable concessions could constrict national development by lessening future government revenue, and provide a short-term reprieve in exchange for a long-run curse.

Several critics believe that EO/Branch pursue an 'enclave development' strategy with cooperating African officials. This strategy would grant special treatment to the foreign companies within their economic area. The Sierra Leonean government officially invited EO, whose initial deployment was to secure the capital, and the mineral areas in which Branch had gained concessions. Paul Kamara, the editor of Sierra Leone's *For De People*, wonders whether his government paid EO to protect Branch Energy with official funding.⁴⁰ In effect, did Branch get something for nothing?

This enclave approach calls for the collaboration of African 'compradors', who benefit from EO/Branch's military and economic abilities. Reno casts this thesis into the post-Cold War era: rulers of

³⁹ Interviews, July 1997.

⁴⁰ Interview with Paul Kamara, January 1997. EO soldiers did engage RUF outside the diamond areas, after they had secured the capital and the mines.

weak states can use a foreign partnership to compensate for the lack of great-power patronage.⁴¹ Branch/SRC have brought leading Africans, and especially military figures, into their economic tent. American officials state that General Joao de Matos, Angola's chief of staff, has economic interests in a Branch/Diamondworks concession, as well as in the Alpha-5 security force, reportedly an EO spinoff.⁴² Branch and the Sierra Leonean government are partners in a major diamond concession, in which Branch has majority ownership.

EO/SRC/Branch deny that their activities threaten present or future state stability. A professional military such as EO can in their view quickly restore stability, sometimes in countries which have witnessed obscene human rights violations, while the Branch/SRC companies offer technology and finance which most African states desperately need. These companies, therefore, claim that they are no different from other private enterprises which help develop a country in return for a profit. Furthermore, any possible Branch underwriting of EO's expenses provided a necessary service by aiding state stability, since neither the Sierra Leonean government nor the West would have paid EO's bill. Branch and SRC claim that they can act as economic subcontractors following the peace that EO has achieved, and introduce into a struggling state other corporations which EO can continue to protect.⁴³ Even if Branch did barter EO's muscle for favourable concessions, a high-ranking Branch official asks, 'What's wrong with bartering? A country uses whatever assets it can during bargaining.'⁴⁴

The short history of EO/Branch cannot firmly answer the question of whether they are exerting undue security and economic influence. The Sierra Leone experience certainly exhibits Branch influence, but apparently not control, over major policy decisions. Other powerful international actors add a counterbalancing influence. The Sierra Leonean government depended upon EO for its security throughout 1995 and 1996, but rejected Branch attempts to obtain the country's National Petroleum company and its maritime surveillance contract through a non-competitive bidding process. Other international actors, notably the World Bank and the IMF, insisted that the government

⁴¹ Reno, 'Privatizing', p. 227.

⁴² US State Department officials. These same officials state that General Salim Saleh in Uganda, President Museveni's half-brother, owns 25 per cent of Saracen Uganda (an SRC affiliate) and has interests in a Heritage oil concession.

⁴³ Barlow and Branch interviews, June and July 1997.

⁴⁴ Branch official, July 1997.

conduct a transparent and competitive bidding process. As a result, Branch gained neither concession. The IMF also successfully insisted in mid-1996 that the Sierra Leonean government cut its overall spending, which resulted in fewer payments to EO, to which it owed \$19.5 million. Executive Outcomes reportedly bid for a contract to train a downsized RSLMF, but outside funding sources, notably Britain, reportedly told Sierra Leone's government that it would not finance any EO training operation.

Yet EO's loyalty to the state does not necessarily mean that its services are beneficial to the nation. The government gains a reprieve, but only, perhaps, by cheaply bartering national resources; future governments may have less revenue as a result. How lasting, moreover, are the settlements forcibly obtained by foreign soldiers? A military solution to longstanding social and economic divisions may prove financially costly and of only temporary value. Sierra Leonean soldiers sympathetic to the rebel RUF overthrew the democratically elected Kabba government some four months after Executive Outcomes left the country. The growth of the Kamajors as a parallel force was a major cause of the coup, and the first act of the new government was to demobilise them. The coup's aftermath plagued Freetown with its only serious destruction during the six years of war; and meanwhile, Branch had obtained at least one very valuable long-term concession, and EO had collected about \$16 million from a foreign-exchange strapped country. EO officials counter that the 1997 instability showed how effective EO had been, and that an extended EO presence would have provided breathing space for the Kabba government. They also contend that EO personnel are not nation-builders; their role is only to obtain a military settlement, which hopefully will assist political reconciliation. They argue that a deployment of UN observers, or a UN peacekeeping contingent, could have provided stability after EO's departure.

Existing national militaries have not always appreciated EO's assistance, and their anger can destabilise the national government and nullify EO's achievements. EO is better paid and enjoys better weaponry, while its mere introduction suggests governmental dissatisfaction with the existing military.⁴⁵ EO has faced 'turf' battles with

⁴⁵ Like armies anywhere, African armies have traditionally disliked parallel armed forces which operate outside their nations' normal chain of command. In some countries, resentment of a newer force answerable only to the president has sparked coups, e.g. Ghana in 1966. Mercenary groups have generally angered existing militaries (Rolf Steiner's 4 Commando in Biafra was such an example).

national militaries in Angola, Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea. In Angola, EO faced a special problem; cooperating with a former enemy. 'The FAA had a lot of hostility towards us', recalls Barlow. 'They couldn't forget very quickly a lot of past engagements.'⁴⁶ Luitingh remembers that the MPLA was 'hesitant to divulge force levels and deployment which we needed for our operational planning'.⁴⁷ EO's quick successes, notably at N'dalatando, lessened FAA hostility.

However, mutual suspicions sometimes remained. EO operated outside the normal chain of command in Sierra Leone, where it reported directly to the president, who was also minister of defence, and to the deputy minister of defence. It continued to keep much of its operational intelligence to itself, since the allegiance of much of the RSLMF was questionable. EO's Operations Room at Defence Headquarters was off-limits to almost all of Sierra Leone's officers.

EO's victories produced different reactions from the two militaries. EO's successes in Angola apparently lessened antagonism between it and the FAA. Yet battlefield victories in Sierra Leone, notably at Kono, convinced some RSLMF personnel that EO was both showing them up and lessening their opportunity for diamond theft.⁴⁸ The level of military loyalty to their respective governments helps to explain the difference. The RSLMF was more factionalised than the FAA. The former, which contained numerous 'sobels', had a history of military coups, whereas the FAA remained loyal to the Angolan government. EO did not spark any reported violence from the RSLMF during its stay, but its high salaries and assistance to the Kamajors later encouraged the 25 May, 1997 coup against President Kabba.⁴⁹

In Papua New Guinea, EO's presence likewise triggered a military coup in early 1997. Sandline International, the military advisory wing of the Branch group, had signed a \$36 million contract with the government of Sir Julius Chan to end a nine-year conflict on Bougainville Island. EO soldiers formed part of the Sandline force. Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok initially supported the contract but

⁴⁶ Barlow, interview.

⁴⁷ Luitingh, interview.

⁴⁸ EO soldiers and IBiS pilots maintain that government officials, presumably involved in smuggling, restricted EO's activities following the retaking of Kono. EO reported RSLMF soldiers who had looted civilian or government property to their military commanders.

⁴⁹ 'What they do not do is address the root causes of the conflicts they've been involved in. They scratch the surface. The minute [Executive Outcomes] left Sierra Leone - what they drove underground rose up when they left.' Kayode Fayemi of the Africa Research and Information Bureau, quoted in 'Africa/Mercenaries,' *Voice of America*, 8 July 1997. 'A chief complaint of the coup-makers is that the government paid large sums to Executive Outcomes and other forces [the EO-assisted Kamajors], rather than improving and paying the army.' 'Sierra Leoneans resist new rulers', *Washington Post*, 11 June 1997.

then, in mid-March, openly broke with his government. Singirok demanded that Chan quit over his hiring of EO. Chan then sacked Singirok, an action which helped trigger large anti-EO street demonstrations. Sandline and EO ignominiously left the country and a beleaguered Chan stepped down. Although Singirok justified his actions by claiming that EO planned to use force directly against Bougainvillians, notably with helicopter-fired rockets, other observers claim that the motivating factor was army resentment over EO's capabilities and its high pay: 'the Sandline contract undermined [Singirok's] standing with his own troops who, frustrated by low pay and poor equipment, were infuriated by the money paid to the mercenaries'.⁵⁰

Another worry is that Executive Outcomes' training and combat skills may only increase the militarisation and destabilisation of a desperately poor continent. Endangered governments could turn to EO, rather than to peaceful negotiations, to answer insurgents' demands. The UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group has suggested that EO's Sierra Leonean success 'may lead to a situation where any government in a difficult position can hire mercenaries to stay in power',⁵¹ while a company that depends upon strife for its profit may understandably work to start or prolong conflict.⁵² Others worry that the training and equipping of irregular forces, such as the Kamajors, will threaten future stability, since such groups are less controllable than regular militaries. Finally, EO has inspired, or assisted, a number of corporate security companies in Sierra Leone, Angola and elsewhere within Africa. Such groups, encouraged both by foreign companies and by national governments, may become a force unto themselves.⁵³

Given EO's short history, these worries cannot yet be adequately answered. Any foreign intervention, however, no matter how well

⁵⁰ 'Mercenaries' chief held on arms charge', *Observer* (London), 23 March 1997. Sandline officials believe that General Singirok deliberately okayed EO's mission in order to use the mercenaries' presence against Prime Minister Chan.

⁵¹ Parliamentary Human Rights Group, quoted in *The Independent* (London), 17 September 1996.

⁵² British freelance pilots during the Nigerian civil war deliberately avoided bombing Biafra's major airstrip, the destruction of which would have greatly hastened the war's end. See John de St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1972) pp. 319–20.

⁵³ Saracen was part of Strategic Resources Corporation, until recently. Branch reportedly now owns Saracen. Alpha-5 (which some Angolans refer to as 'Filho de EO' – 'Son of EO') and Lifeguard have close relations to EO. These companies, often including numerous EO veterans, practice corporate security. Some observers speculate that EO, and/or its above offshoots, could easily smuggle guns and minerals into or out of various countries. It faced only minimal customs or security restraints in South Africa, Angola or Sierra Leone. Interviews with US and British intelligence officials, 1996 and 1997. EO denies all such allegations.

intentioned, may destabilise an already fragile situation. West Africa offers an interesting comparison between the effects of regional militaries and private forces on militarisation. ECOMOG, a multinational African peacekeeping force, tried for six years to end a devastating civil war in Liberia, but did not achieve peace during its first six years there. In fact, several national contingents within ECOMOG prolonged the Liberian conflict by arming and abetting one or other of the factions, which subsequently turned against their regional benefactor and prolonged the war.⁵⁴ While there are important differences between the two wars,⁵⁵ EO helped to end Sierra Leone's insurgency during its year and a half stay, even though political instability resumed after its departure.

THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF EXECUTIVE OUTCOMES

Although many African states and their vital economic centres are likely to face recurrent guerrilla and banditry threats, and Executive Outcomes has certainly demonstrated remarkable capability on a continent not known for rapid military successes, its continuing success is not a forgone conclusion.

Some factors certainly favour its prospects. Political instability, especially in western and central Africa, and foreign reluctance to intervene in Africa, should maintain a market for private security forces. The new phenomenon of 'collapsed states', caused by a combination of inept national militaries, rising ethnic divisions, struggling economies and stretched government budgets, will encourage insurgencies in African states. Many African governments lack the basic military or police capabilities required to contain such conflicts. Some rulers, such as Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaïre, intentionally weakened and divided their militaries in order to diminish their coup potential.⁵⁶ Many states have reasonable equipment on paper, but

⁵⁴ Herbert Howe, 'Lessons of Liberia: ECOMOG and regional peacekeeping', *International Security*, Winter 1996/7.

⁵⁵ Different mandates were a major difference. ECOMOG entered Liberia in 1990 as peacekeepers whereas EO clearly entered Angola and Sierra Leone as peace enforcers, i.e. as a combat (and training) unit. Even after serious attacks against it in 1990 and 1992, ECOMOG did not sustain its military offensives designed to crush Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). See Howe, 'Lessons of Liberia'.

⁵⁶ Michael Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaïre* (Bloomington, 1988), especially pp. 52-70. For more recent information on the Zaïrian military, see 'Retreating Zaïrian troops spread terror, chaos', *Washington Post*, 14 November 1996; and 'Zaïre's army a fighting force in name only', *Washington Post*, 25 April 1997.

much of this is inoperable, due to inadequate maintenance.⁵⁷ The lack of democracy and 'transparency' has weakened military efficiency.

The changing nature of African conflict sometimes provides new benefits to insurgencies. Rebel groups can increasingly avail themselves of ideal guerrilla equipment – cheap, lightweight and reliable weaponry – much of which is surplus material from the Cold War. Insurgents have developed external economic ties (and resultant foreign exchange) to finance their warfare.⁵⁸ They often recruit 'child soldiers', and have forced economic concessions from well-meaning but defenceless relief groups.⁵⁹

Major political changes have permitted a partial acceptance of EO. By 1993, apartheid was dead, and now-private EO personnel were not noticeably furthering a reprehensible ideology. The ending of the Cold War lessened great power support for often corrupt regimes, and thus endangered the state's patronage power. At the same time, rag-tag insurgencies and 'warlords' were employing sometimes grisly violence to threaten increasingly fragile regimes. Somalia and Liberia provided visual cautionary tales of the need for adequate state security. Also aiding EO's acceptability was the fact that desperate sovereign governments, such as Angola's MPLA, were seeking EO's assistance. Because EO aided sovereign states, neither of the major regional powers, South Africa and Nigeria, nor the OAU, campaigned strongly against EO.⁶⁰

EO's stabilising actions contrasted with those of its opponents. UNITA and the RUF enjoyed only limited domestic and international support. Savimbi's refusal to accept the 1992 election results and his subsequent return to warfare greatly reduced his already limited credibility. The RUF was readily perceived as a proxy for the Liberian warlord, Charles Taylor. The threat from the insurgents thus proved more worrisome than the background of EO. UNITA held about 85 per cent of Angola in late 1992, about 1,000 people daily were dying from the war, and a potentially booming economy was in ashes. Both guerrilla and government forces had engaged in human rights

⁵⁷ 'Mozambique does not have one plane that flies or one boat that floats.' Interview with Western military specialist, Mozambique, June 1996. In the early 1990s, Mozambique had 44 MiG-21 fighter planes.

⁵⁸ Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 230–4.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Easy Prey: child soldiers in Liberia* (Washington DC, 1994); Mary B. Anderson, 'Humanitarian NGOs in conflict intervention', in *Managing Global Chaos*.

⁶⁰ EO served the purpose of South Africa in Angola by helping to defeat Savimbi's UNITA, whereas it aided Nigeria's regional policy in Sierra Leone by helping to defeat the RUF. In Sierra Leone, EO several times cooperated with Nigerian forces in anti-RUF offensives.

violations. And in Sierra Leone, a leading human rights activist notes that:

our country had so much destruction and devastation [which had] never been seen here before. Most of us didn't understand apartheid ... our country is far from South Africa and is 80% illiterate ... Call them [EO] whatever, they were coming to save us. My survival over somebody else's apartheid? – never an issue.⁶¹

EO's generally correct treatment of civilian populations and the speed of its military successes countered previous perceptions of mercenaries, and curtailed potential criticism. Corporate necessity, and the military need not to antagonise local populations, explain EO's possibly surprising deference to human rights. Abuses would have validated the traditional fears of rapacious mercenaries (*les affreux*), embarrassed Branch Group, and jeopardised relations both with the Mandela government and with possible future clients.

EO fills a special security void: most African governments lack a capable combat force,⁶² and until, or unless, government-sponsored intervention forces become a reality, some market will remain for EO's services. The success of the recent American proposal for an 'African Crisis Response Initiative', may, over time, lessen EO's appeal,⁶³ as would the implementation of proposals for a 'permanent blue helmet' UN force.⁶⁴ Yet these scenarios remain largely hypothetical and call only for peace-keeping, rather than peace-enforcing (combat) intervention. EO stands today as the only combat force able and willing to enter ongoing conflicts. Its permanence offers numerous military, although uncertain political, advantages over *ad hoc* multinational forces.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Interview, January 1997.

⁶² Two important caveats, however. Several African states have increased their overall military capabilities. Recent developments in central/southern Africa illustrate the tactical skills of the Rwandan army and the airlift capability of the Angolan armed forces. African states are also increasingly willing to intervene militarily against fellow African states, as shown by events in Congo-Brazzaville and the former Zaïre.

⁶³ US Secretary of State Warren Christopher proposed the Africa Crisis Response Force (now, 'Initiative') during his October 1996 African trip. The US is presently working with Britain, France and other nations to provide training and funding for selected African militaries. The goal of the Africa Crisis Response Initiative is to build a standardised, interoperable capability within designated African militaries for a rapid peacekeeping response. US Special Forces soldiers have trained a battalion each in Senegal, Uganda and Malawi.

⁶⁴ Brian Urquhart, 'For a UN volunteer military force', *New York Review of Books*, 10 June 1993.

⁶⁵ Unlike multilateral peacekeeping or peace enforcing groups, EO has a clear chain of command, no conflicting national interests, or non-complementary sets of military equipment or doctrines. It can handpick from a pool of experienced personnel.

The ANC government's tolerance of EO, whose members once fought against various liberation movements, probably demonstrates that a private security group can assist its host nation. EO did help the new South African government by employing, and then moving to foreign countries, ex-SADF soldiers who could have threatened the political transition. It also pushed Jonas Savimbi, an ANC *bête noire*, to sign the Lusaka Protocol, at no military or financial cost to South Africa. EO also earns valuable foreign exchange, and sometimes passes on intelligence to the South African government. The Mandela government may indirectly legitimate EO and some other private groups through government regulation. The South African '*Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Bill*' (emphasis added) does not abolish private security companies, but requires that their actions accord with the state's national interest. The government may exact changes from EO in return for its continued tolerance, and indeed Pretoria may have requested the 1997 resignation of Barlow and Luitingh.

Even the OAU may have met with EO to discuss possible cooperation, despite EO's serious political baggage. 'A recent South African intelligence assessment concluded that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) may be forced to offer it [EO] a contract for peace-keeping continent-wide.'⁶⁶ A Western intelligence source confirms that, although no agreement was reached, 'discussions [between the OAU and EO] took place and soundings were made'.⁶⁷

Nor does EO's growth depend entirely on state contracts. Relief organisations are increasingly hiring security advisers from the private sector, and EO personnel can provide protection to extractive companies operating in hostile environments. A Canadian expert on the Branch-related Diamond Works was asked: 'How would investors react to news about the mercenaries [involvement with Diamond Works]?'; and answered: 'Probably quite well... this is not a stock market negative, this is a stock market positive.'⁶⁸

Yet several factors will continue to restrict EO's growth. Among its weaknesses are the already mentioned concerns about its Western corporate links, its less-than-permanent solutions (and difficult relations with national militaries), and its possible further militarisation of

⁶⁶ *The Independent*, 23 March 1997.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Western intelligence official, 1996. EO disputes that the OAU meeting(s) occurred.

⁶⁸ John Woods of 'Stockwatch' newsletter, quoted. Transcript, 'The Fifth Estate', 4 Feb. 1997, p. 1.

unstable areas. Other drawbacks are its continuing lack of international political acceptance, its own military limitations and constraints on involvement, and a lessening manpower pool.

EO will never gain full political acceptance. Traditional suspicions about mercenaries, including their non-accountability and behaviour towards civilians, as well as the apartheid past of EO's present soldiers and EO's links to Western capital, will continue to create suspicion.⁶⁹ Recent apparent dealings of Sandline (and probably EO) with a fugitive Indian banker to stage a counter coup in Sierra Leone will only add to these suspicions.⁷⁰ Fears about non-accountability restrict the appeal of EO and other private combat groups. Heavily armed ex-SADF soldiers operating with few internal or external constraints in a fragile state have, despite EO's generally correct behaviour, hurt its appeal, while suggesting that the state system may be surrendering one of its basic prerogatives:

responsibility for global peace and security, for law and order, cannot be diverted to a private body, a mercenary outfit, which is beyond the control of either government or international bodies, but is purely commercial in its undertaking.⁷¹

EO's actions continue to be a racial insult to many critics: former apartheid gangsters now claiming saviour status for an 'independent' continent that cannot save itself. Thirty-five years after Africa's independence, a white-led group of ex-SADF soldiers is killing black Africans for profit, both for themselves and for multinational business interests. Chief R. O. A. Akinjide of the International Law Commission writes that:

The crime of mercenarism is particularly obnoxious within the African context. In Africa, the mercenary is seen as the representative of colonialism and racial oppression – an assassin hired to kill freedom fighters in wars of national liberation and wars against racial oppression.⁷²

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Rubin concludes her *Harper's* article by contending that 'Like a hawk riding the thermals, Barlow is simply capitalizing on the shifting currents... He is accountable to no nation and no legal body. His law is the marketplace. And if the geoeconomic world order should require Barlow to adapt his services for a new kind of client, there isn't much to prevent the chameleon from once again changing colors', Rubin, 'An army', p. 55.

⁷⁰ Canadian press reports in August 1997 indicated that Rakesh Saxena, who was charged by Thai officials with embezzling \$88 million from a Bangkok bank in 1996, had paid Colonel Tim Spicer of Sandline \$70,000 to assess the possibility of using the Kamajors in a military strike against the Sierra Leonean military government. 'Mercenaries eye Sierra Leone', *Globe and Mail*, 1 Aug. 1997.

⁷¹ Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich, 'Editorial comment: privatising peace enforcement', *African Security Review*, 5, 6 (1996), p. 2.

⁷² Chief R. O. A. Akinjide, 'Mercenarism and international law', Lecture delivered at the International Law Seminar, Palais des Nations, Geneva, 27 May 1995.

While EO justifiably claims to have stabilised several African states, the company's rhetoric sometimes moves beyond simple paternalism. Barlow states that 'We understand the cultures, we understand the people of Africa. We have to be around for a long time ... who else will solve Africa's problems?'⁷³ The United States has publicly criticised EO, and President Clinton successfully pressed President Jose Eduardo dos Santos to expel it from Angola. A State Department official notes that 'We tell them [African countries] that we're opposed to EO.'⁷⁴

Continued growth by EO could prove self-checking. A more powerful EO, as well as the growth of other private forces, would worry numerous states about losing their monopoly over formal coercion to non-governmental, non-accountable firms. Princeton Lyman, the US ambassador to South Africa during EO's Angolan campaign, believes that EO could become a victim of its own success: 'a serious political backlash [could occur] if the growth became extensive'.⁷⁵

Surprisingly, EO's lack of military capabilities could also slow its growth. In helping to reverse the Angolan and Sierra Leonean conflicts, EO was blessed by very unusual circumstances. It had extraordinary knowledge of UNITA's various capabilities, longstanding experience with southern Angola's topography and terrain, and major financing by the oil-rich state. In Sierra Leone, EO initially had little knowledge about the enemy, but the RUF lacked serious military capabilities; for example, it had few, if any, operable anti-aircraft guns. 'Suppose RUF had UNITA's military capabilities, EO would have had the devil of a time defeating it.'⁷⁶

The 'white knight' status conferred upon EO by several writers is misleading. Indigenous groups, notably the FAA in Angola and the Kamajors in Sierra Leone, provided indispensable backing by supplying intelligence and large numbers of men for combat and garrisoning. While military analysts agree that EO hastened the wars' endings, they disagree as to whether EO turned the tide or simply hastened an inevitable conclusion. Executive Outcomes itself will limit its operations, trying not to overextend its resources or enter politically

⁷³ Barlow, interview.

⁷⁴ US State Department official, April 1996.

⁷⁵ Interview with Princeton Lyman, April 1996.

⁷⁶ Interview with US Department of Defense official, November 1996. Neither UNITA nor RUF enjoyed significant international support, especially from bordering states, when EO began operations. EO would face serious difficulties against a relatively competent, politically driven, guerrilla group, such as Zaire's Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation (Congo-Zaire) or Uganda's National Revolutionary Movement. A Western defence analyst wonders 'is it only a matter of time before an EO force gets trounced?' *Ibid.* Christopher Clapham provides a useful classification of insurgencies, Clapham, *Africa*, especially pp. 209-12.

harmful conflicts. Sources close to EO acknowledge that the Sudanese government approached it to provide security to oil companies, but that EO declined. Aligning itself with a fundamentalist and repressive government would damage EO's reputation with most other states: supporting sovereignty is not necessarily supporting legitimacy. Some states could draw EO into conflict with other sovereign states. Supporting Sudan could antagonise Uganda, where Branch Energy has a major investment. Equally, aiding the discredited Mobutu government in eastern Zaïre could have pushed EO soldiers into conflict with Rwandan and Ugandan forces.

Executive Outcomes will also limit its involvements if it maintains its policy of assisting governments, and not insurgencies, while its lack of French speakers (probably one of several factors which kept it from assisting Mobutu) will probably eliminate any large-scale involvement in Francophone Africa. Sierra Leone's \$19.5 million arrears and Papua New Guinea's domestic political divisions may add further caution to EO's decisions. It also faces an ageing and finite manpower pool of South African-trained and tested combat personnel. Part of EO's unique ability stemmed from a force with common training, outlook and combat experience. Yet the former SADF had de-emphasised combat capability and had stopped its regional destabilisation by 1990. Barlow acknowledges that this problem will increasingly trouble EO.⁷⁷

EO's combat success may not spawn many imitators. Its composition, of proven veterans with shared training and experience, and its permanent structure, have proved unique. *Ad hoc* multinational mercenary groups may draw inspiration from EO, but like the recent 400-man force in Zaïre, will achieve only mediocre results.

A British intelligence assessment that EO will enjoy 'unlimited potential for expansion within Africa'⁷⁸ is wrong. The organisation faces an uncertain future. It may not gain many more large combat contracts, for already specified reasons. Yet serious post-Cold War instability will continue in many African countries, African militaries will often prove ineffective, and so the need will continue for private security.

⁷⁷ Barlow, interview. EO can draw soldiers from other countries, but this would probably lower its combat capabilities. EO's refusal to permanently employ its soldiers means that if EO does not land frequent contracts, its soldiers may seek more permanent employment and decline subsequent EO possibilities. The burgeoning growth of corporate security companies, with their more permanent work possibilities, may further drain EO of its experienced soldiers.

⁷⁸ Information gathered by author, July 1996.

Even the demise of EO would therefore not necessarily signal the disappearance of private security groups in Africa. Increasingly, states for their own national interests may regulate, but not eliminate, such groups. The development of private security will probably centre on training and support, rather than combat. Western nations are quietly supporting private security groups which help to further their own political goals. Such organisations provide limited accountability, can deploy quickly with proven military skills, and are relatively inexpensive, given their contract nature. The US-based Military Professional Resources, Incorporated is currently running a major 'train-and-equip' programme in Bosnia, and may soon begin limited training in Angola. Pacific Architects and Engineering, another US firm, has assisted ECOMOG's helicopter capabilities in Liberia. Britain's Defence Systems, Limited aided both the British multinational Lonrho and the Mozambican government against RENAMO attacks during the 1980s, and has various advisory and security contracts in Africa.

CONCLUSION

Despite its mixed record and uncertain future, Executive Outcomes has provided several important military lessons for African security and foreign intervention.

1. Counter-insurgency wars in Africa can be won. A small but highly skilled force may tilt the power balance in domestic wars by acting as a 'force multiplier' for existing assets. This is especially true in many Third World conflicts, where the insurgents lack significant military strength and a defining ideology.
2. A private, already established military force may offer significant advantages to its employers: quick start-up, less political criticism over casualties, a single chain of command, recent combat experience, lower cost and no political debt. *Ad hoc* groupings generally prove counterproductive.
3. A foreign force can obtain information quickly, especially through good military-civilian relations and a relatively small investment in technology, such as spotter planes, radios and signals-intercept equipment.
4. A limited amount of reliable air support (transport, reconnaissance or combat) is surprisingly cost-effective, given most insurgencies' lack of counterfire.
5. EO's success reveals the incompetence and financial waste of some conventional national militaries, and supports the argument that Africa should professionalise and often downsize her militaries. Acceptance by the national military of the foreign force will greatly assist their success. Conversely, a politically divided military may use the foreigners' presence as a pretext for political unrest.