

the trend towards moral judgements about victims risks creating groups of 'undeserving victims' like Rwandan Hutus and Serbs. And recent events in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kosovo's borders with Serbia and Macedonia should be a reminder that one day's victims can be the next day's aggressors.

**GETTING IT RIGHT**

There is also a major question mark over the ability of aid agencies to accurately predict the long-term impact of humanitarian aid interventions on the overall political situation. There was a massive consensus among agencies that the pre-requisite for a lasting peace in the Great Lakes area of Africa was the closure of the Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Zaire which were home to many of the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide. In line with new humanitarian principles, many agencies actively worked towards that end and several withdrew from the camps altogether.

Yet in the event, the closure of the camps by Rwandan backed rebels in November 1996, with the loss of thousands of lives and the shameful involuntary repatriation of refugees, did not deliver peace. Instead the region has been wracked by two civil wars and untold suffering. It is clear that complex political emergencies require political solutions. The Rwandan refugee camps should act as a reminder that new humanitarianism does not inevitably answer the moral dilemmas of the past and throws up many new ones.

Finally there is a real danger that the new approach becomes a new form of colonialism – one where the western concept of human rights is considered morally superior and where conditional humanitarian aid is adopted as a means of forcing southern actors to comply with northern political solutions.

There is no denying that all sides in conflicts have always sought to manipulate and gain political advantage from humanitarian aid. But the commitment to traditional principles of neutrality and the universal right of people to relief in times of suffering have been some form of barrier to the politicisation of aid.

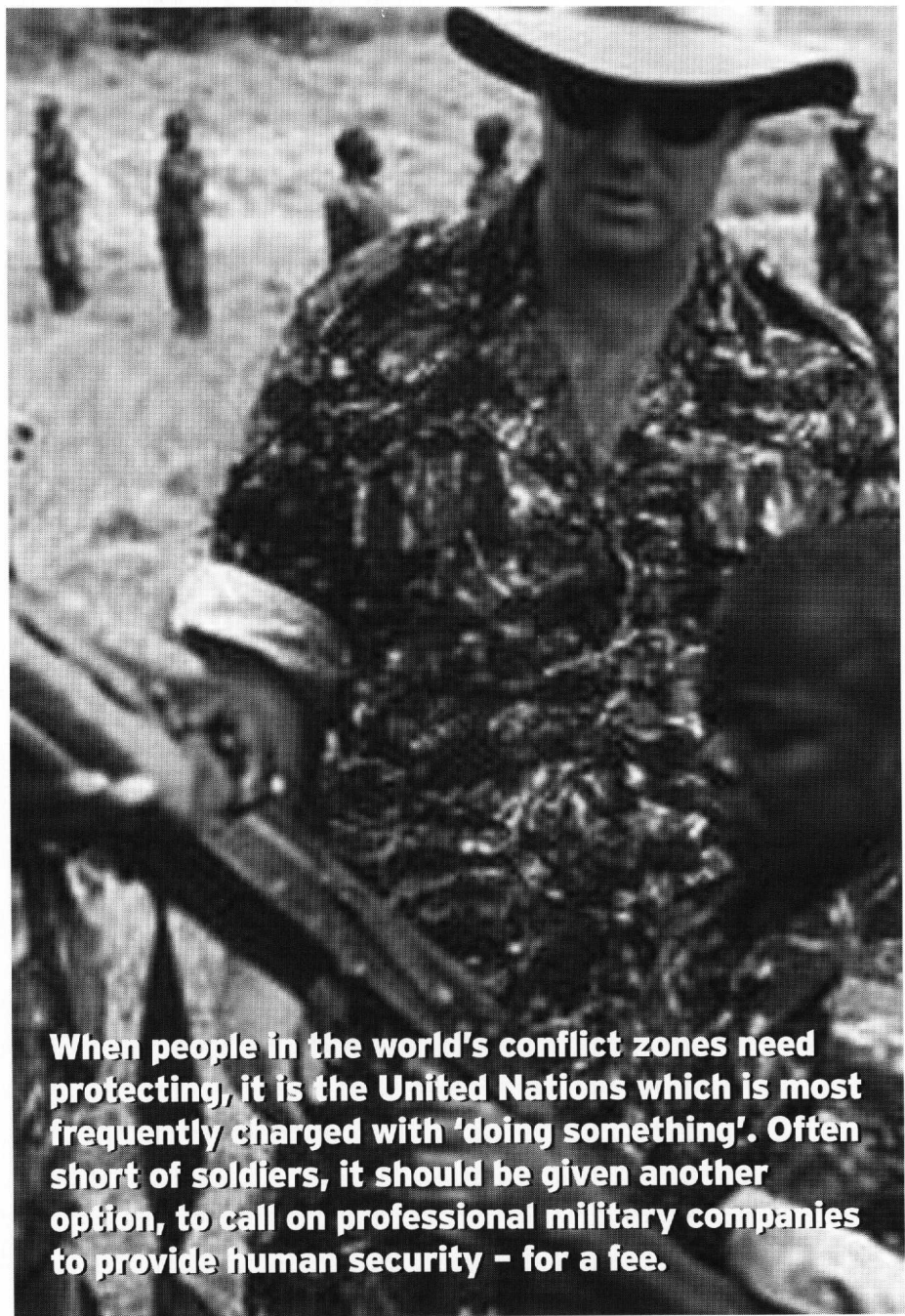
Henri Dunant's compassion inspired a tradition that has endured for over a century and adapted to changing wars and world politics. The post Cold War world raises major new challenges for humanitarians and it is right that traditions should be adapted and subject to criticism. But there are also good reasons to pause before consigning Dunant's legacy to history.

**WT**

MILITARY COMPANIES AND HUMAN SECURITY

David Shearer

# Privatising Protection



**When people in the world's conflict zones need protecting, it is the United Nations which is most frequently charged with 'doing something'. Often short of soldiers, it should be given another option, to call on professional military companies to provide human security – for a fee.**

**T**HE REDEPLOYMENT OF MERCENARIES IN THIS BLIGHTED NATION WOULD be an act of genuinely ethical foreign policy,' noted Times correspondent, Sam Kiley after witnessing Sierra Leonean women and children being killed and their limbs being hacked off in January 1999.

This view shared by a growing and diverse group of aid workers, journalists, human rights advocates and even the higher echelons of the British and US armed forces – those closest to the world's frontlines. Although seldom aired publicly, they wonder what there is to lose by using military companies to shield innocent

An Executive Outcomes soldier in Sierra Leone. Panos/Jesper Strudsholm

civilians when there is no other choice.

The protection of civilians in war torn countries from violence, rape and looting, irrespective of the borders within which they live, was a key part of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's millennium address last year. His vision of 'human security' will be welcomed by those people suffering in the world's most brutal conflicts.

But there is a troubling gap. A lack of will has never really been the problem, the question is whether anyone will do anything about it. In 1994, despite nineteen countries making a total of 31,000 troops available to the UN, the organisation was unable to raise 5,000 for deployment in Rwanda. Six years later little had changed. By May last year, eighty-eight states had pledged a total of 147,900 troops but few were offered for either the Congo or Sierra Leone when the request went out.

Who or what will respond to tomorrow's Rwanda? There is a nagging suspicion that perhaps no one will, hence the thinking about private forces.

### HOW MORAL IS IT NOT TO ACT?

There is a serious question here: if a private force, operating with international authority and within international law, can protect civilians, how moral is it deny people protection just because states can't or won't find the forces to do it? Or put another way, is the means of response more important than the end for which it is used – particularly where a failure to respond results in the death and abuse of civilians? A human security approach might put the safety and security of civilians first – but there is a debilitating caveat that only states can do it.

The notion that private military companies might, in some cases, better protect civilians from atrocities or genocide has either been dismissed or vilified. The debate over private military force inevitably founders over the term 'mercenaries' – a label that incites rabid emotion at the expense of good analysis. As a result, states' monopoly on dealing with civil violence has persisted unchallenged.

### HUMAN SECURITY SOUNDS GOOD

Unsurprisingly, the UN has distanced itself from private security forces, but recognises the value of armed intervention as the option of last resort. '[I]n the face of mass murder,' Kofi Annan notes, 'it is an option that cannot be relinquished.'

The Brahimi Report on the future of UN peacekeeping echoed the Secretary General's ideas. It supports the need for the UN to distinguish victim from aggressor, instead of treating all equally when one has committed horrendous acts. That, it notes, 'can in the best case result in ineffectiveness and in the worst may amount to complicity with evil.' At times, therefore, the UN will need to act forcefully. This in turn implies 'a willingness to accept the risk of casualties on behalf of the mandate.' But that is the key reason why western states in particular, refuse to send their forces into messy, brutal civil wars – why more are willing to monitor a more straightforward peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, for example.

Instead, the emerging picture is of a third world army of peacekeepers, paid by the west – a scenario 'where some people contribute the blood and some contribute

the money,' as Colum Lynch put it in *The Guardian* last year. But that too is unlikely to be sustainable. One of the reasons why the highly professional Indian and Jordanian contingents pulled out of Sierra Leone was their reluctance to carry the burden for the west.

### WOEFUL QUALITY

As a result, militaries of woeful quality are pushed forward. For many poorer states the prospect of earning around \$1 million a month for each battalion contributed to a UN peacekeeping mission is the chief incentive. Quality then becomes the casualty. The rifle of a soldier from one of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone's (UNAMSIL) African contingents manning a strategic forward bunker, for example, was found to have only two bullets in it when checked. His battalion's mortars had not been test fired and most of its other equipment was broken. 'We would have liked to see some of the governments with capacity, with good armies and well-trained soldiers, participate,' said Annan, 'but they are not running forward to contribute to this force.'

Few of the peacekeepers interviewed in Sierra Leone felt it was their responsibility to go to the aid of another country's soldiers when they were under threat. Most believed their job was to keep the peace – and shoot only if fired upon. Their reluctance highlights the risk of whether a more robust Chapter VII mandate – for the peaceful settlement of an international dispute – might be implementable if agreed by the Security Council. As most military experts will attest, a cohesive, single force is the only possibility for success in battle.

The US training of Nigerian, Senegalese and Malian forces to intervene may help, but most observers accept that a few weeks' schooling is insufficient. No surprise then that Sierra Leone's citizenry, when asked, preferred the return of the private military company Executive Outcomes than UN peacekeepers. During Executive Outcome's time in Sierra Leone – April 1995 to January 1997 – it completely turned the tide of the war. Most importantly, in those places where it was based, civilians experienced the first security from the ravages of both their own army as well as the rebels.

### COALITIONS OF THE WILLING

The most successful armed interventions in the recent past have been coalitions of the willing, usually regional in nature, and dominated by one state. Nigeria intervened in both Liberia and Sierra Leone without initially seeking UN approval but under the aegis of the regional peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. Within NATO, US selected targets and mounted most of the raids against Yugoslavia in 1999, again outside the UN. And Australia, East Timor's closest neighbour, led the International Forces East Timor (INTERFET) – later to evolve into UNTAET – with UN blessing.

Each had a clear strategic interest in intervening. But where does that leave other less strategic states? Post Cold War history is littered at almost two-yearly intervals with massive disasters resulting from war: Croatia and Bosnia 1991-1997, Somalia 1992 and onwards, Rwanda 1994 and Congo in 1997 and its spillovers, Kosovo 1999. That doesn't include the the running sores of Angola, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

David Shearer  
is a Research  
Associate with  
the International  
Institute for  
Strategic Studies  
and has written  
extensively on  
private military  
force.

## BEST RESULT

Two important caveats should be made with regard to private military companies. First, most would argue that the power to authorise and delegate the use of military force should remain with states, preferably at the level of the UN Security Council. But once agreed, exactly what or who is deployed is less important – the issue then is to find the most effective and least costly alternative.

But it's fair to say that most peacekeeping decisions have concentrated on inputs rather than outcomes. Rarely has the question been asked: what will achieve the best result? And, just as with other peacekeeping operations, UN observers should work alongside any private force to ensure adherence to international law.

Second, it is important that private military force is not seen, as some seem to suggest, as a palliative to all conflict. In truth, a private military force is likely to be useful in only a handful of situations. Using private forces in the Kosovo conflict was not an option. And it is difficult to believe that Sandline International's operation to suppress separatist rebels in Bougainville, as envisaged in 1997, would have resulted in a better peace deal than that ultimately achieved through negotiation and intervention of the New Zealand and Australian Governments.

But where civilians are preyed upon by rebel groups or their own governments, other options deserve to be put into the mix. If nothing else, military companies offer another arrow in the quiver of international response.

## CHEAPER

Most evidence suggests that private companies are likely to be cheaper. Executive Outcome's total fee for the nineteen months it was in Sierra Leone was \$35 million – against more than \$600m for the current number of troops. The reason is simple: companies tend to front load their military deployments and hold little in reserve.

Perhaps more importantly, most companies will only work to a clear mandate and are more likely to insist on what exactly they have to do to get paid. Imagine a situation where a company loses a contract if it is unable to safeguard civilians it has been charged to protect. The current model offers little come back aside from some handwringing.

Many factions are increasingly motivated by economic gain through the control of diamonds, gold or minerals. Why not award the concession to a company which will mine and protect the resource, thereby keeping diamonds out of the hands of rebels who will sell them to finance their war? Stemming the flow of illicit diamonds from Sierra Leone is unlikely despite the valiant efforts being made to clamp down on the international diamond trade. There are simply too many loopholes for miners to sell their gems through other channels.

Southern Cross Security, for example, a company headed by a former Executive Outcome officer, has protected Sierra Leone's titanium dioxide mines from total destruction throughout the war. That

single effort is likely to be the most important factor to guarantee the country's economic future once the war finally ends.

## WHERE IS THE ARMY?

Despite the moral arguments, we are some way off privatised peacekeeping forces. Developing countries have enough difficulty swallowing the concept of human security that in their eyes weakens their sovereignty by allowing outside forces to enter states uninvited to protect civilians, without contemplating a privatised military doing the job.

But like it or not, we may be heading inexorably down that path anyway. Future troops being offered to peacekeeping forces might well come from private companies rather than states. The US firm Dyncorp, for example, provided the US share of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitors in Kosovo. Dyncorp is now training Colombian soldiers in its drug war. Another company, MPRI, also recently in Colombia, continues to train the Bosnia army in sophisticated US weaponry.

And as the Bush administration has signalled that it wants to rethink its participation in international operations such as Bosnia or even the Sinai, there is a temptation to stay engaged through the use of trusted military companies instead. They invite less scrutiny and are less problematic when it comes to casualties.

Private security companies – those protecting private interests – are a booming business in countries where there is instability. Fine for those who can afford it. But these more benign security tasks are a different order from their military cousins. Rather than offering protection only for those who can pay, military companies are hired to influence the overall strategic situation – to protect the public or end the war regardless of ability to pay.

Ask any civilian in war what they want and the answer is security, all else is secondary. Kofi Annan is leading the charge with his notion of human security – it's just a pity that there is no army behind him. **WT**

## Chatham House Events

### SEPTEMBER 10

**Where Geography is not Destiny – the wider Caribbean**  
**Professor Victor Bulmer-Thomas**

### SEPTEMBER 19

**The Renewable Energy Task Force** **Sir Mark Moody-Stuart**

### SEPTEMBER 20

**The World Economy and Financial Markets After the Technology Bubble**  
**Anatole Kaletsky**

### SEPTEMBER 21

**Managing UN Reform: UNIDO's need driven approach** **Carlos Magariños**

### SEPTEMBER 27

**European Defence** **Sir Michael Quinlan**

**The Institute has a worldwide reputation for furthering the understanding of international issues. An impartial research and membership organisation, independent of government and vested interests, it brings together people of all nationalities and from all walks of life.**

**Membership:** 44 (0) 20 7957 5748

**Conferences:** 44 (0) 20 7957 5754

**Meetings:** 44 (0) 20 7957 5732

**e-mail:** [contact@riia.org](mailto:contact@riia.org)

## September 2001