

BOOK REVIEW

Jakkie Cilliers & Peggy Mason, (eds.), *Peace, Profit or Plunder? The Privatisation of Security in War-torn Societies*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 1999. Pp. 245.

This book, discusses an issue that has plagued the politics of post-independence African states since the 1960s. The presence of mercenaries and their contribution to the collapse of the Congolese state, now Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), is a well known case of the potentially dangerous impact of these sub-state actors on state politics. In the post-cold war period, discussions and analyses of the role of mercenaries in state politics has resurfaced and placed itself squarely at the centre of discussions about how the provision of security in all its forms should happen: state – or mercenary centred security? Such analyses have raised central and critical questions dealing with the concept of security? To what extent can security be privatised? What is the nexus between structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which undermine state capacity to perform, security functions and the rise of what are known alternatively as Private Military Companies (PMC) or Private Security Companies (PSC). What is the nexus between resource appropriation and the operations of these actors?

Mercenaries have re-emerged unto African politics since the 1990s in a more vicious, “efficient” and endemic manner. Two points are particularly troubling. Point one concerns their presentation in the media. They are now habitually presented as settling knotty security issues in several of the continents collapsing states, which their authorities are incapable of resolving. The second, is the perception that mercenaries rescue European “humanitarians” assisting disaster victims, who themselves have become casualties, entangled in the irrational disorder of African politics. The dilemmas that are raised by analysing PMCs or PSCs is difficult to capture, and how they can be controlled is aptly captured by the title of this book.

In the preface to this edited book, its editors define their task which resulted from conference papers and a series of commissioned articles as “... ensur[ing]

that the issues would be discussed and presented from different angles". However, the editors place a caveat on the contributors by asserting that because of their interest in diversity of opinions and views – which is not a bad idea in itself – both theoretical and ideological perspectives would somehow not be given central emphasis. And it is this rather unclear definition and arbitrary delineation of the duties of the authors that somehow undermines the efforts of some contributions.

In spite of this ambiguity the book is a major contribution towards clarifying some of the confusion surrounding either PMSs, PSCs or the private security industry (PSIs). The book is divided into eleven chapters with a preface and a list of abbreviations that has useful acronyms for those not conversant with the terminology in the field. While some of the chapters cover very general topics, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and 11, others, Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are relatively specific in their focus.

Jakkie Cilliers and Ian Douglas present a discussion of the military as business (pp. 111-123) by examining the transition and career trajectories of ex-military officers from state service into private and profit-oriented business. What is particularly novel about the discussion here is that while the focus of the book is on war-torn African societies, this chapter competently analyses the emerging philosophy underlying the new security trends that are found in all war-torn societies: the inability of recognised state entities to provide their citizenry with the expected human- and state-security. Their analysis and presentation of the example of Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) in Croatia is useful in this light.

Other important issues concern the rampant employment of such "forces" to perform services without the appropriate legislation in terms of accountability, transparency and codes of ethics. But if there is a lack of norms and values concerning the extent to which PSIs can be employed, there is no doubt, at least in an African context, that the rise of PSIs in several African instances can be contextualised as battles for scarce but valuable natural resources. Angola (Chapter 8) and Sierra Leone (Chapter 9) and the ephemeral successes of Executive Outcomes (Chapter 5) are examples. Most especially, the manner in which the former company attained international popularity or notoriety – depending on who is examining their actions – by appropriating and presenting its functions through sophisticated international terminology, was most disturbing. Suddenly, the perception of mercenaries as *les 'affreux'* (the horrible ones) was replaced by a false sense of decorum, probity and respectability. Characterisations such as "competitive tendering", "effectiveness", and "rationalisation" became buzz words beneath which they still pursued their trade: profit, loot and subversion of stability.

Ian Douglas' chapter on Sierra Leone is one of the specific case studies which

seeks to situate the tragic situation in that country within a wider perspective. However, it has certain analytical and interpretational weaknesses. Other chapters, including Richard Cornwell's, have situated the contemporary phenomenon of PSIs in the context of the collapsed state, Mark Malan's analysis takes a totally different point of departure: namely an approach that seeks to understand how the international community has increasingly shelved its responsibility to play the role that it ought to in finding solutions to African crises.

On the whole, the book is well-edited and the difficult issues taken up by the different chapters are presented in a readable and easily accessible language. The contents and approach will certainly generate debates in the coming years. It provides important background information to understanding and appreciating African conflicts and the major actors involved in them. This book is highly recommended to both academics and practitioners in the field.

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