Privatised Peacekeeping

Deane-Peter Baker

Over 10 years ago, the Cathedral Peak Hotel, which nestles among the peaks of South Africa's majestic Drakensburg Mountains, played host to what was, at the time, a unique gathering. Scholars from around the globe (the United States, Britain, Switzerland, Australia, Germany, South Africa, and Israel) met with representatives of international NGOs (the International committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Center for the Democratic Study of Armed Forces, among others) and members of the private military and security industry to discuss and debate the growing role of private contractors in contemporary conflict zones. I was the convener of that conference and co-editor of the subsequent volume of the same title, *Private Military and Security Companies: Ethics, Policies and Civil-Military Relations* (Routledge 2008).

Though the modern private military company can be traced back to companies such as David Stirling's WatchGuard International in the 1960's, and though there was some related early scholarly research, it was the massive use of

Latest

An Update on the Security Policy Change Programme

Chances for Peace in the Third Decade

A Story of ORG: Oliver Ramsbotham

A Story of ORG: Gabrielle Rifkind

contractors by the United States in Iraq in the civil war that emerged after the 2003 invasion which ultimately sparked serious public and scholarly interest in the sector. Just a year before the conference, the killing and gruesome mutilation of four Blackwater contractors by insurgents had been a major cause of the bloody and ultimately fruitless first battle of Fallujah. Given the context, it's particularly interesting that Doug Brooks – then the President of the largest industry body for PMSCs, the International Peace Operations Association (now the International Stability Operations Association) – chose to focus his contribution to the conference, and his co-authored contribution to the book, on *peacekeeping operations*.

Brooks argued then that, with the growth of what he called 'Westernless peacekeeping' (i.e. UN and African Union peacekeeping operations carried out without major support from NATO and 'NATO-class' military forces) PMSCs should have an increasing role in peacekeeping operations, contributing capabilities not possessed by the military forces of developing world countries like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal, Indonesia and Rwanda, who contribute the bulk of peacekeepers for UN operations. Contractors, Brooks contended, offer 'faster, better and cheaper' solutions to capability challenges in peacekeeping operations, operate with a smaller and less culturally sensitive footprint than equivalent military forces, and act as a force-multiplier through the provision of specialist and niche capabilities.

A decade on and Iraq is still in the news, but Western boots on the ground are largely absent, and the previously booming market for contractors there and in Afghanistan has shrunk dramatically. As Molly Dunigan and Ulrich Petersohn and their collaborators show in a recent edited collection, the once-championed 'global market for force' has proven itself to be, in fact, a conglomeration of

Most read

The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities

Making Bad Economies: The Poverty of Mexican Drug Cartels

ORG's Vision

Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres

quite different markets for force, and it is a mistake to conflate the legitimate with the illegitimate. The United States, Britain and other nations continue to employ the services of private military contractors for lower priority tasks where doing so is (or at least appears to be) cost and manpower effective.

The US State Department's five-year $10.2 billion Worldwide Protective Services contract, the next phase of which was announced in mid February, is distributed largely among companies like SOC, Triple Canopy and Aegis Services which made their names during the Iraq post-invasion boom. And the old stomping ground is showing signs of a revival – according to a report by Bloomberg Business week, "Operation Inherent Resolve, the Pentagon's anti-Islamic State initiative, employed 7,773 contractors in the second quarter of 2016, up from 5,000 in the first quarter of 2015." Many of those contracts are for logistical, training and advisory roles in conflict and post-conflict environments in Africa and the developed world. And, quietly, the United Nations has also become a significant employer of PMSCs, as a careful reading of the UN Department of Procurement's list of registered vendors reveals. As long ago as 2011 the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) released a report showing that, despite the sensitivities involved, "the UN has increasingly paid private military and security companies (PMSCs) for a range of services in the areas of humanitarian affairs, peacebuilding and development." The companies themselves have become increasingly corporatized and professional in their structures and practices, an evolutionary necessity for those companies which survived the 'gold rush' days of post-invasion Iraq.

The more dramatic pronouncements by both proponents and opponents of the PMSC industry have failed to come to pass. Contractors have neither rendered

state-based peacekeeping and stability operations obsolete, nor have they radically undermined the monopoly on force of the states that employ them or created greater instability in the international sphere.

Looking to the future, what might we expect regarding the involvement of PMSCs in peacekeeping and stabilization operations? Despite their popularity as 'bad guys' in television dramas and Hollywood films, and an uncomfortable legacy of past serious human rights abuses committed by contractors, the evidence suggests that in the real world the use of PMSCs is increasingly becoming normalized, and that in policy circles there is a growing understanding of the potential value contractors can provide if properly employed. While there are still contractors operating in the global periphery who better fit the old 'mercenary' moniker, we can expect this process of normalization to lead to an increase in the employment, and more open employment, of PMSC's in peacekeeping operations (though the term 'PMSC' will likely decline in usage).

The improved clarity about the status and responsibilities of contractors in zones of armed conflict that resulted from the publication of the ICRC sponsored Montreaux Document of 2008 has played an important role in this process of normalization. Though this was unquestionably *not* the intended purpose of the creation of the document (which carries no legal weight but summarizes the status of contractors under international law and gives recommendations to both PMSCs and the states that contract them), the Montreaux process cleared up numerous misconceptions and provided a firm framework to which companies could attach their claims to legitimacy.

Over the past decade there has been much debate and discussion over what functions ought to be considered by states to be 'inherently governmental' and

which therefore ought not to be contracted out. A similar discussion will likely occur as the outsourcing of peacekeeping functions becomes more publicly acknowledge. However, it will likely be pragmatic factors which establish the limits of outsourcing. Whatever those limits turn out to be in practice, it is certain that there will *be*limits. Even in today's complex and spoiler afflicted environment, effective peacekeeping relies heavily on the perception of legitimacy, and that means blue UN helmets or the green berets of the African Union, not beards and Oakley sunglasses.

Dr Deane-Peter Baker is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at UNSW Canberra, located at the Australian Defence Force Academy. He is also a Researcher in the Australian Center for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society. His research interests include military ethics, private military and security companies, special operations, military strategy and the ethics of public policy. He is the author of Just Warriors Inc.: The

Share this page