NON-STATE ACTORS, PEACEBUILDING AND SECURITY GOVERNANCE IN WEST AFRICA: BEYOND COMMERCIALISATION

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Abstract

The governance of security in West Africa manifests numerous challenges which point to the need for a comprehensive security agenda to integrate various actors often operating from opposing perspectives. This article argues that the disproportionate focus on the role of commercial security actors in West Africa effectively eclipses research and policy interest in other non-state actors in security governance and tends to undermine sustainable peacebuilding. The article attempts a typology of non-state actors engaged in security governance beyond security contractors and argues that the governance of security should be seen to include 'insecurity actors' (such as criminal networks and local mercenaries) because they form part of the 'push-and-pull' — exerted by various security actors — whose end result is the de facto *governance of security. The challenge of peacebuilding therefore is to bridge the gap between the normative value of security governance (predicated on democratic principles of accountability, transparency and participation) and the reality of diverse interests and perspectives.*

Introduction

Particularly since the end of the Cold War, the market for non-state means of coercion is booming. Within and between states, the increasing withdrawal of governments from their primary responsibility to maintain peace and security has left a security vacuum which is being filled by other actors. Such actors are both profit and non-profit, armed and unarmed, internally and externally located. Among these non-state actors (NSAs), corporate entities in the form of private military companies (PMCs) and private security companies (PSCs) occupy an increasing share of the research agenda and policy debate.

Singularly and collectively, non-state actors impact directly and indirectly on security governance in particular and on peacebuilding generally. Governance is a multidimensional and multi-actor process involving the negotiation and coordination of conflicting and diverse interests and perspectives. Security governance refers to the process of steering the state and society — ideally but not always under effective democratic control — towards the realisation of individual and collective freedom from fear. The various actors direct affairs in ways that complement their interests and perceptions in compliance or non-compliance with commonly accepted norms, and their role in security governance is therefore positive or negative. As Heiner Hanggi has pointed out, governance is achieved by both the provision and jeopardisation of security (2005:9). For example, civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in the advocacy of democratic governance policies play a

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potentially positive role in security governance, while national and regional criminal networks play a negative role. Beyond its normative value, therefore, governance is also a multidirectional, dynamic process through which the 'push-and-pull' of various security actors is reconciled. The notion of security governance used here therefore encompasses both security and insecurity actors.

The freelance security industry has transformed rapidly from the traditional mercenary outfits comprising renegade groups of military adventurers into a diverse group of commercial security providers which includes blue-chip corporations occupying pride of place on the stock exchanges of the world's financial capitals. The transnational private security business has rapidly become a multi-billion dollar industry, owned and backed by some of the most powerful figures in Western governments and military industrial complexes. The vast financial backing which they represent and the powerful political backing which they enjoy have combined to enhance the visibility and study of commercial security entities, which is not extended to other non-state actors engaged in security governance.

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In West Africa, given the alienated nature and structure of the post-colonial state, other actors have emerged to contest and engage the state in the governance of security. The typical West African state has hardly been a success in the Weberian sense, and has often itself been a major source of insecurity for the populace, typically lacking in legitimacy. Its monopoly of the means of force has been artificial and limited. A viable understanding of security governance in West Africa therefore necessarily extends beyond both statutory security institutions and increasingly visible private security contractors. A more comprehensive profiling of NSAs in security governance reflects a multiplicity of actors at global, regional and sub-state levels, including international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foreign-based PMCs, armed groups both in opposition to and in cooperation with governments, locally-owned private security companies, civil society groups and traditional security mechanisms. A comprehensive analysis of all manners of non-state actors in security governance is not attempted here. Rather, this article applies an expanded typology of non-state actors to paint a broader and more representative picture of security governance than is currently discernible in much of the available literature.

The disproportionate emphasis given to commercial security actors by researchers and policy makers tended to divert research interest and policy focus away from other non-state actors who play significant roles in security governance within and across state boundaries, and led to a narrowing of the non-state security governance agenda to its profit dimension. Thus, in much of the available literature, the increasing profile of non-state actors in the governance of security is often limited to its corporate dimensions.

In seeking to expand and enrich the research focus, this article identifies and accounts for those actors which, in addition to PMCs and PSCs, feature in security governance in the West African sub-region from a peacebuilding perspective. It relates security governance to the dynamic process by which actors beyond the state increasingly occupy and respond to the expanded and expanding space arising from the state's increasing withdrawal from a monopolised role in the governance of security.

The article first examines the political economy of security governance in the West African region, with a brief analysis and an overview of the security environment in West African

societies. It next considers the role of non-state actors in security governance in West Africa and goes on to investigate how the limits and challenges of a narrow regulation regime of security companies retard the prospects for sustainable peace and development. The article concludes with a call for a more comprehensive governance agenda.

The Political Economy of Security Governance in West Africa

Understanding security in West Africa

The sub-region of West Africa comprises some 16 states. Nine are Francophone, five Anglophone and two Lusophone, demonstrating a mixture of colonial experiences.[1] Fifteen of them make up the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The prevalence of insecurity in West Africa is underscored by the fact that since the early 1990s, ECOWAS has become more visible in its search for peace and security than in economic integration for which it was initially established. Since the end of the Liberian civil war in 2003, however, the sub-regional security situation has improved somewhat and the challenge of peacebuilding is increasingly more of peace consolidation than crisis management. However, the root causes of conflict remain largely to be addressed. (Chambas 2006:7; Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment West Africa 2006: ix). The combined GDP of ECOWAS states in 2005 has been put at $139 billion, but this does not reflect the variety of economic fortunes. Nigeria's economy is larger than the combined GDP of all other ECOWAS countries, with a GDP of $78 billion, representing some 56% of the sub-regional aggregate.[2] Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone hold the bottom four places in the UNDP 2005 Human Development Index.

The neo-colonial origins of statutory security institutions in West Africa render them vulnerable to external developments, influences and distortions, while the related, disarticulated nature of the state distances it from local security institutions and processes. Not only is security de-linked from local sub-state processes, but the conceptualisation of the security sector and its governance mechanisms are also defined in formal statutory terms. Thus the state is often the focus of security policy, with regime/state security defining, and at times threatening, human security. The focus of security policy is often to keep the incumbent regime in power at all costs, at the expense of the security of the populace if necessary.

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A defining characteristic of security governance is the failure of states in the sub-region to provide or guarantee public security, with Sierra Leone and Liberia being the worst cases of state collapse. Cote d'Ivoire, historically a bastion of political stability, has been in political turmoil for the past five years, while Guinea has borne the impact of the internecine wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, further complicating its own protracted succession crisis. Those states which have not themselves been theatres of outright war have experienced their own security challenges and threats to national cohesion. Within the first three years of its emergence from protracted military rule, Nigeria suffered over 100,000 deaths as a result of more than 50 ethno-religious conflicts (*This Day* 2002:5). Sporadic outbreaks of conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria have the cancerous potential to develop into an outright war. Ghana, reputedly an oasis of peace in a troubled sub-region, has itself suffered ethnic violence in the north.

The starting point to understanding security in West Africa is the recognition that the state has at no point in time had a monopoly of legitimate force. Just as West African states have operated dichotomised regimes of formal and informal economies, the security sector has also typically manifested both formal and informal tracks. While statutory security institutions have been primarily active in the performance of security functions which secure the state and its institutions, large sections of the population have relied on parallel, less formalised security structures.

Individuals and groups often ensure their own security by finding ways of navigating the threats posed by statutory institutions (such as extortion, brutalisation and other human rights abuses) and other 'non-state threats' that face them in their daily existence. Those with the means, particularly large businesses and rich individuals, resort to hiring the services of local security companies. Yet others engage the services of night guards, a widespread practice in urban centres across the sub-region. Retired soldiers and policemen are prominent in this role, and former fighters from Chad, Niger and Mali are widely sought after for their fierceness and fearlessness. Often, 'watchmen' working in the same locality enter into informal mutual assistance agreements in case of attack. In shantytowns and rural communities, vigilante groups and various forms of militia keep watch over the population. The relationship between these informal structures and formal statutory security agents is often an ambivalent one. At times, these groups cooperate with the statutory institutions by handing suspects over to them for prosecution, or by passing on intelligence. This cooperation often coexists with mutual suspicion: informal security agents view the police as endemically corrupt, colluding with and protecting criminals, while the police often doubt the credibility of those out of uniform, who operate without formal supervision or control.

Security governance mechanisms and processes carry an intrinsic hazard of artificiality: security sector reform (SSR) can be 'successful' in terms of enhancing operational efficiency and the quality of oversight of formal security institutions without having a visible effect on human security. Indeed, the challenge in some West African states is that state security institutions, while legal, are far from legitimate. Other actors have emerged which are legitimate in terms of meeting the security needs of the populace but have questionable legal status. The state's inability to meet its security responsibilities and the attempts by other actors to fill this space reveal a gap between legitimacy and legality. The process by which other actors join the state in the provision and governance of security is dynamic and complex: the state is both a partner and an adversary, and non-state actors cooperate with and compete against each other.

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The privatisation of security governance

Given the peripheral role of West African states in the global political economy, they function essentially as secondary actors in the global security architecture and are particularly vulnerable to externalities. In this regard, security sector governance in West Africa reflects the prevalent theoretical and policy preference for and emphasis on privatisation and 'rolling back the state', based on the assumption that the private sector is more efficient in the delivery of goods and services (Wulf 2005). For example, a 1995 Report of the Defence Science Board, a standing committee that advises the Pentagon on technological, scientific

and other issues, suggested that the Pentagon could save up to $6 billion annually by 2002 if it contracted out all of its support functions to private vendors, except those that deal directly with war fighting. The trend has persisted, as evidenced by a 2002 state-of-the-military review in which emphasis was placed on the success of the department's outsourcing of non-core responsibilities, which undertook to 'pursue additional opportunities to outsource and privatise' (Centre for Public Integrity 2000:2).

This line of thinking is not dissimilar to that of the British government. A 2002 Green Paper similarly commented:

> …in developed countries, the private sector is increasingly involved in military and security activity. States and international organisations are turning to the private sector as a cost-effective way of procuring services which would once have been the exclusive preserve of the military... It is British Government policy for example to outsource certain tasks that in earlier days would have been undertaken by the armed forces' (Straw 2002:4).

In its West African ramifications, however, the compatibility of profit maximisation with the provision of security as a common good has been particularly questionable from a peacebuilding perspective. Far from being a public good, security becomes available to only those who can afford to pay for the services of security contractors. Moreover, one is sceptical about the capacity of multiple private entities with potentially diverging interests to manage complex social demands (Kaul 2005:137). In addition, the fact that many private security actors are based externally makes their regulation and oversight problematic for local institutions.

The trend towards outsourcing and commercialisation of security coincided with the availability of excess manpower and skills which had become available as a result of downsizing among former Cold War adversaries. More than seven million military personnel worldwide had lost their jobs by 2003 (Schreier & Caparini 2005:4; Vaknin 2005). On the other hand, the security business was fast increasing in profitability, capturing the attention of senior business executives. What has subsequently emerged is a system of 'revolving doors' – a network of serving and retired government personnel, both military and civilian, operating in a circular manner to facilitate corporate responses to security needs both within and outside powerful Western countries.[3]

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The impact of the conceptual and operational reconfiguration of security governance to accommodate and advance corporate security interests is clearly manifest in Iraq and Afghanistan (Singer 2003, 2004; Isinberg 2004). The use of security contractors is not a special feature of reconstruction after war in distant corners of the world; rather, it is a global phenomenon with local refractions in West Africa. While the decision of the United States to outsource its participation in security sector reform in Liberia marks the first use of a security contractor directly in peacebuilding (in terms of rebuilding security institutions) in Africa, it is unlikely to be the last. According to Schreier and Caparini, 'private security actors are now so firmly embedded in intervention, peacekeeping and occupation that this trend has arguably reached a point of no return…The market value of the private military industry is expected to rise from $55.6 billion in 1990 to $202 billion in 2010' (2005:1-2).

Here it is argued that while PMCs and PSCs may provide short-term responses, they are at best tangential and at times harmful to sustainable peace and development because they are intrinsically incongruous with accountability, transparency and broad participation. Peacebuilding requires long-term strategies which do not entirely tally with the short-term, contract-based methods of security companies. Given the extensive damage to social capital arising from conflict, particularly within the context of gross human rights abuses by statutory security forces, lack of public confidence in state security institutions is a characteristic feature of post-conflict contexts. The concomitant crisis of confidence in statutory state institutions is a constant challenge to post-conflict peacebuilding (PCPB).

Security sector governance as a peacebuilding strategy

Political and socio-economic exclusion, often the product of authoritarianism, is often a root cause of conflict. Sections of the marginalised and excluded population feel alienated and resort to violent means of seeking participation and inclusion, resulting in internecine implosions within the polity. Security institutions which exist at the pleasure and for the exclusive protection of a regime therefore necessarily function as threats to the physical and socio-economic security of ordinary citizens. Good governance of the security sector is a peacebuilding strategy: a security sector which is responsible and responsive to the needs of the population is less likely to abuse human rights and less likely to function as an instrument for intimidation in the hands of a repressive regime. Sustainable peace and development require a safe and secure environment for state and society (Olonisakin 2003). The state of security and therefore the prospects for sustainable peace and development are a direct function of the level of accountability, transparency and popular participation within society. PCPB therefore requires attention to governance, particularly good governance of the security sector. Peacebuilding entails measures and interventions to transform power relations and to renegotiate the social contract between state and society, in which democratic control and legitimacy are restored through mechanisms for accountability, transparency and broad participation. It necessitates the demobilisation and disarmament of former fighters, controlling small arms, rebuilding civil society, rebuilding state institutions, and creating economic opportunities for the population, all in an inclusive manner. It needs to be stressed at this juncture, however, that while security governance is ultimately a neutral concept – the end-result of 'push-and-pull' by numerous actors – it is in the normative sense (of democratic security governance based on transparency, accountability and inclusion) that governance is most conducive to peacebuilding. The following section identifies the various categories of actors beyond the state which are engaged in the dynamic 'push-and-pull' process of security governance. The challenge therefore is to bridge the gap between the normative appeal of security governance and the realities of a contested process.

Typology of Non-state Actors in Security Governance in West Africa

The increasing inability and/or unwillingness of states to exclusively perform security functions has resulted in a vacuum which is being filled by an array of actors engaged in a multidirectional and dynamic process which progressively underpins security governance. In West Africa in particular, the role of non-state actors is reinforced by the historically alienated character of the state, widening the gap between security institutions

and ordinary citizens. Therefore, a viable understanding of security thinking, provision and oversight in West Africa necessitates an expanded typology which recognises and underscores the role of a multiplicity of actors beyond the state and beyond the increasingly prominent commercial security contractors (See Table 1).

The role of non-state actors in security governance extends beyond the dimension of profit and includes a multiplicity of actors, both negative and positive, which function as mechanisms and structures for linking security at different territorial levels, from local (sub-state) to global, and which regulate relationships within society. Governance implies the coordination of this multitude of actors, and is the end result of the 'push-and-pull' between them. The typology below seeks to expand the 'privatisation' of security beyond *profitisation*, elucidating of other non-state actors in the West African security landscape.

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs)

INGOs have become increasingly visible in the West African security landscape, a role largely ignored in current conceptions of security governance by NSAs. In immediate post-conflict contexts, INGOs have been prominent in influencing the post-conflict policy environment generally and SSR in particular. For example, reports by the International Crisis Group have shaped the understanding of the political and security environments in countries which are so devastated after conflict that a coherent and informed appreciation of internal and external dynamics is problematic Other INGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have played a prominent role in exposing human rights violations by both statutory and armed militia groups, thus providing valuable information without which oversight of security institutions would have been much more difficult .

Beyond human rights advocacy, other INGOs extend their activities to facilitating SSR processes more directly. For example, the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) has worked with the Ministry of Justice and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to facilitate a national dialogue on SSR and with the Governance Reform Commission to support an inclusive national security policy. DCAF is also directly engaged in research and practical initiatives to promote democratic governance of the security sector within and between states in the sub-region, including a working partnership with ECOWAS to develop a West African code of conduct for armed forces and security services. INGOs are playing an increasingly active role in supporting and facilitating participatory and consultative processes for articulating national security policy and normative instruments after war. Given the notorious role of statutory institutions in precipitating conflicts, such consultative and participatory processes have a democratising and confidence-building effect on peacebuilding.

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Foreign private military/security companies

The history of the freelance security industry in Africa is a long and inglorious one and continues to colour current perceptions of the role of foreign-based security contractors on the continent. Though the use of mercenaries in Africa has been traced to pre-Westphalian times, the phenomenon became more visible with the scramble for Africa by various colonial powers. The 1960s and 1970s have been described as the 'the golden age of mercenaries in Africa and of their impact on stability in the continent' (Fayemi & Musah,

Table 1: Typology of Non-state Actors in Security Governance in West Africa

Level	Types	Examples	Activities
Global	International NGOs	International Crisis Group; Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Democratic Control of Armed Forces	Reports & policy analysis on security governance, human rights, SSR support; DDR support
	Private military/ security companies	Military Professional Resource Inc.; Executive Outcomes; Sandline International; DynCorp	Consultancy, training, logistics, combat
Regional & sub-regional	NGOs & civil society networks	African Security Sector Network; West African Civil Society Forum; African Strategic & Peace Research Group; West Africa Network for Peacebuilding; West African Network for Security & Democratic Governance; West African Action Network on Small Arms	Research & analysis, advocacy, conflict resolution, policy dialogue, training
	Criminal networks		Small arms & light weapons production, trans-border crime, human & drug trafficking, illicit trade in natural resources, fraud
National	Think- tanks, NGOs & individuals	Centre for Democracy & Development; African Security Dialogue & Research; Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria;	Research & analysis, advocacy, policy dialogue, training
	PSCs		VIP security, security for homes & businesses, consultancy, training, logistics
	Media		Reporting, public information, agenda setting
	Criminal networks		Robbery, area control, arms & narcotics trade, human trafficking
Sub-state	Armed groups	Revolutionary United Front; Liberians United for Reconciliation & Democracy; Odua People Congress; Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra; Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta.	Combat for or against governments; hostage taking; policing & law enforcement, debt collection, vigilantes
	Sub-state		Informal community policing, administration, traditional judicial & oversight mechanisms

2000:17). Freelance security services were directed primarily at preventing the self-determination and democratic aspirations of African societies. Recognition of the role of mercenaries in instability in Africa is evidenced by the adoption of the 1977 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism and Civil Conflicts. Since the 1990s, profit-based security services have taken on a more corporate dimension, with many of them forming part of multinational corporations. Regardless of their mutations, for many Africans PMCs remain the corporate 'dogs of war'.[4]

During the Nigerian civil war (1967-70), the French Secret Service and the secessionist Biafran government hired a group of 53 mainly French and German mercenaries to help fight the Nigerian federal troops. Next door in Benin in 1977, opponents of the Kerekou government hired the notorious Bob Denard and some 90 other mercenaries in a failed attempt to overthrow the government (Michaud 2005). The recent arrest in Zimbabwe (and subsequent trial and conviction) of a group of mercenaries planning to overthrow the government of Equatorial Guinea further confirmed that the rogue types of mercenaries continue to exist, sometimes in close relationship with elements from the corporate world. The plot was led by Eton-educated Simon Mann and the finances were directly linked to Mark Thatcher, the son of a former British Prime Minister. Subsequent exposures that the British government had foreknowledge of the coup but failed to warn the government of Equatorial Guinea paint a picture of an intricate web of corporate and political intrigue. They also illustrate the resilience of the challenges of establishing oversight over the activities of such amorphous groups which at times fight little wars in faraway places.

PMCs are increasingly being used by supplier governments as tools of foreign policy by proxy, for the provision of logistical and other support services by peacekeeping organisations, by humanitarian agencies and by extractive commercial ventures. Their list of clients includes sovereign governments, United Nations agencies such as the UN Development Programme, (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross and a host of other international organisations. Within Africa, for example, Military Professional Resource Inc. (MPRI) has conducted military training in Nigeria under a contract with the U.S. government, while Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) is under contract to provide logistical support for regional peacekeeping in West Africa, with a depot in Freetown, Sierra Leone. In Liberia, the U.S. government has outsourced American post-conflict involvement to two American companies: DynCorp International is responsible for vetting, recruitment and provision of basic training to the new Liberian armed forces; while PAE is responsible for specialised advanced training, equipment, logistics and base services. The $95 million training package is administered by the U.S. State Department (Cook 2006:10). Such use of private military and security companies raises issues of governance and accountability, particularly in terms of lack of local ownership of post-conflict SSR programmes and lack of democratic oversight by host state's institutions and civil society.

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Local mercenaries

In addition to the activities of foreign private security outfits, West Africa features indigenous and locally based mercenaries moving freely from conflict to conflict in the sub-region. Relative to foreign mercenaries, they are more integrated into local societies, generate better intelligence

and are better adapted to guerrilla warfare given their superior local knowledge. They also have greater resistance to malaria and typhoid fever. These mercenaries have been active in virtually all armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War, conflicts propelled by widespread poverty and inconclusive DDR programmes which emphasise disarmament and demobilisation at the expense of reintegration and rehabilitation. Many of today's West African mercenaries were previously child soldiers, giving rise to a population of self-sustaining 'young veterans'.[5] The phenomenon of the local mercenary in contemporary West Africa is closely tied to prevailing socio-economic conditions. With the population of West Africa being predominantly youthful, the relationship between high rates of youth unemployment and mercenarism is a self-perpetuating one.

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Criminal networks

The West African sub-region has a vibrant informal security sector which centres on cross-border crime. Transnational organised crime in the region has become a subject of growing concern whose challenges were articulated in the UN Secretary General's 2005 Report on West Africa.[6] These crimes are diverse: drug trafficking, Internet fraud, human trafficking, diamond smuggling, forgery, illegal manufacture and trafficking in firearms, armed robbery and the theft and smuggling of oil (UN Office on Crime and Drugs 2005). Indeed, trans-border criminal networks have played an infamous role in the governance of insecurity in West Africa, straining relations between and within states, and entrenching a sense of anxiety among the populace. A major challenge of criminal networks to peacebuilding resides in the lack of gainful employment opportunities in the immediate aftermath of conflict. When DDR programmes are not comprehensive and reintegration and rehabilitation are inadequate, criminal networks built on old and new alliances emerge as survival mechanisms.

Little attention has been given to the apparent emergence of an indigenous, traditional military-industrial complex in West Africa involving local fabrication of firearms with an associated sub-regional transportation and distribution network. While the campaign against proliferation of small arms has targeted supply from outside Africa, there is growing evidence that a significant proportion of firearms used in crimes are produced within the sub-region, at times involving trans-border collaboration and cooperation between craftsmen of neighbouring states (Ebo 2004; Aning 2003).

Civil society

The role of CSOs in security governance has been aptly captured in terms of watchdogs, agents of change and sources of technical input (Hutchful 2003:35-43). Civil society actors, such as NGOs and advocacy groups, represent a powerful instrument for generating local ownership of security governance processes and play a crucial role in the search for peace and security. In Sierra Leone, for example, some 60 NGOs had by 1995 formed the National Coordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP) and collaborated with both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, thus contributing to their legitimacy.[7] Other active CSOs included the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace, the Supreme Islamic Council, the Council of Churches, the Labour Congress, and the Teachers' Union. Increasing reliance on professional staff, and less on volunteerism, however, has robbed civil society in Sierra Leone of much of its legitimacy and restricted much of its operations to the capital, Freetown (IPA 2002).

Civil Society and SSR in West Africa

The African Security Sector Network (ASSN) is a continent-wide network active in research and policy dialogue. Its sub-regional component in West Africa facilitates South-South exchanges between parliamentarians, practitioners and scholars. In Liberia, ASSN, in partnership with the University of London and DCAF, has facilitated a 'national dialogue on security sector reform' and lends technical support to Liberia's Governance Reform Commission.

The West African Network for Security and Democratic Governance (WANSED) was created in 2004, and describes its vision as the achievement of democratic governance of the security sector in West Africa. Its conducts research, training, political dialogue and policy advocacy.

The West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) exists to coordinate and facilitate civil society action in the area of small arms control.

In 2003, the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) was established to facilitate civil society interface with ECOWAS, and to further strengthen civil society networking the West Africa.

In Liberia, civil society has become increasingly visible and vocal on reform initiatives. In March 2005, for example, a conference of over a hundred groups set up the National Coalition of Civil Society Organisations in Liberia (NACCSOL) in order to 'broaden civil society inputs in the reform process'.[8] Civil society groups further created the Working Group on Security Sector Reform, which aims at ensuring civil society input into the SSR process.

Several issues arise in considering the role of civil society in security governance in West Africa. First, protracted military rule and civilian autocracy deprived civil society of the necessary space for participation. Particularly in the security sector, West African governments and military institutions adopted an exclusionary approach. The extent of civil society involvement was often limited to seeking a return of the military to the barracks. With such a narrow focus on the conflict dimensions of security governance, civil society in West Africa has been finding it particularly challenging to meet demands of peacebuilding and peace consolidation. A second and related issue is that SSR remains a rather specialised subject in much of West Africa: the lack of expertise and interest is compounded by the traditional secrecy with which security related issues have been cloaked.

Traditional civil society institutions, such as the *Poro* and *Sande* societies in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, had mediated relatively effectively between local communities and formal polities before being corrupted by authoritarian rule and the protracted conflict that ensued (ICG 2004). The contribution of traditional civil society to security governance and the policy trajectories for building bridges between traditional and modern civil society formations remain significant areas of research and policy attention.

Domestic private security companies

Beyond imported security services, there has also been a boom of West Africa's locally based private security services. All across West Africa, the security gap resulting from rising insecurity and declining state capacity to respond, together with the continuing lack of confidence in public security institutions, is sustaining a persistent increase in the

patronage of commercial security services. In Nigeria, for example, there are an estimated 1,500-2,000 security companies employing in excess of 100,000 personnel. In fact, it has been suggested that 'security is now the second largest source of revenue in Nigeria, surpassed only by oil and gas' (Abrahamsen & Williams 2005:3). The operations of locally owned private security companies have increased dramatically also in both Liberia and Sierra Leone as a direct result of protracted conflict. It is estimated that since before the war, the number of security companies in Liberia has risen from five to 15 today.[9] Due perhaps to a more relaxed legal framework, the increase in private security business in Sierra Leone has been more rapid. There were only two locally registered security companies in Sierra Leone before the war. The Office of National Security in Freetown puts the number of security companies in Sierra Leone currently at 30, employing some 5000 personnel. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, security companies serve businesses and affluent residences, international organisations and extraction companies in the mining and logging industry. The local commercial security entities evolved largely from the protection of natural resource extraction interests. Their services have been to protect profit and to earn profit, and they are therefore of marginal value in the provision of security as a public good.

> **The operations of locally owned private security companies have increased dramatically also in both Liberia and Sierra Leone as a direct result of protracted conflict.**

The development of the local security industry has largely escaped serious policy attention in most West African states so far. There is an absence of commonly agreed professional standards, and the quality of training tends to vary widely.

Armed groups

Particularly since the end of the Cold War, armed NSAs have emerged to share security space with the state. Caroline Holmqvist (2005:45) has categorised armed NSAs as including 'rebel opposition groups, local militias (ethnically or otherwise based), vigilantes, warlords, civil defence forces and paramilitary groups (when such are clearly beyond state control)'. The lack of a consensus and clear policy options on engaging armed NSAs among states and the international community remains a major challenge. In the increasingly arduous task of maintaining control over use of force, several West African states have either had to resist the challenges posed by armed opposition groups or enjoyed the support of armed actors outside the state's formal control. Armed groups are not always in opposition to the state, and may be pro-government, such as the Kamajors in Sierra Leone. Some governments, concerned with growing opposition, have been known to recruit informal youth militias to intimidate and terrorise opposition supporters. (Wannenburg 2005: 8-9). A recent study indicated that there are some 25 armed NSAs in nine West African states: Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone (Florquin & Berman 2005).

Non-state armed groups operate differently from statutory forces. They do not always wear uniforms and have rather fluid membership and hierarchical structures. Promotion criteria are not always clear. Given their distinctive patterns of weapons distribution, armed NSAs boost and complicate the proliferation of small arms. As Capie (2004:9) has observed, 'NSAs are often forced to decentralise their weapons stocks. The fluid and chaotic nature of internal control makes the stockpiling of arms in armouries impossible, so comparatively large caches of arms may be held by individuals for easy distribution'. This represents a major peacebuilding challenge as DDR programmes may be carried out without a comprehensive accounting of the weapons of war (Ebo 2005).

Individuals

Analyses of processes of policy change too often focus on formal state structures and processes. The importance of key individuals who act as 'micro-level sources of influence and change' is crucial but less well recognised (Krause 2004:31). The debate on security governance in West Africa has benefited from the contributions of some key individuals who have, through a combination of activism and scholarship, provided leadership and opened the space for advocacy and study of good governance of the security sector. Even though such key individuals usually function under the auspices of particular organisations, their individual contributions extend beyond their official institutional affiliations. In the case of West Africa, 'Funmi Olonisakin, Eboe Hutchful, Kayode Fayemi, Boubacar N'Diaye, Wuyi Omitoogun and Kwesi Aning, to mention a few, have through a combination of activism and scholarship opened the space for advocacy and study of good governance of the security sector.

It is evident from the foregoing that the role of security contractors may be emerging as necessary – but by no means sufficient – for non-state contributions to security governance and peacebuilding in West Africa. Despite the phenomenal rise in the profile and prominence of security contractors, the degree of oversight to which they are subjected is minimal, especially in post-conflict environments where institutional mechanisms are too weak to assert effective authority over private actors. Other non-state actors (with oversight challenges of their own) are also engaged in security governance in West Africa. The significant point to note is that for a comprehensive, viable understanding of the challenges of security governance and the role of non-state actors in peacebuilding in West Africa, there is a need for a broader framework which recognises the role of a multitude of actors beyond security contractors – a framework which is more responsive to the needs of the people – rather than a narrow focus on state security.

Between Regulation and Governance: Towards a More Integrated Policy Framework

The record of security institutions in many West African states justifies the conclusion that they function more to threaten, rather than protect, basic human needs. The relationship between the security sector and the populace tends to be exploitative and predatory, and individuals and groups are more victims than beneficiaries of ill-motivated and ill-governed security institutions. While security contractors may provide temporary and tactical escapes from the challenges of peacebuilding, a strategic repositioning is required which builds more on local energies, and in which research and policy focus on non-state actors extends beyond commercial actors. Even in states with relatively functional and effective oversight mechanisms, PMCs and PSCs remain problematic because of the grey area in which they operate, the lack of public information, and because they are often 'embedded' in the security industrial complexes of their home states. The marketing niche and appeal of commercial security services often reside in the opaque nature of their operations. Even though the available literature is replete with insightful suggestions for the regulation of PMCs, implementation is problematic and has limited prospects for enhancing oversight. The political backing they enjoy and their integration into the military

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industrial complexes of many of their home governments imply that the political will and the prospects for a rigorous regulation of the industry are doubtful. Local governance institutions have no input in contract negotiations, monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, reporting channels, if in place, reside in home governments' institutions. Regulation regimes for security contractors may therefore be necessary but are grossly insufficient for addressing the challenges of private security governance.

The role of DynCorp in Liberia marks the beginning of what is likely to be an emerging trend in which private security companies increasingly take on tasks which require them to function as peacebuilding actors active in rebuilding state institutions after protracted conflict. In conflict with requirements of peacebuilding, security contractors suffer from a double governance deficit: first, they are subject to effective oversight only by their shareholders and clients; second, since they are not founded on principles of accountability and transparency, PMCs and PSCs are inherently and organically incapable of functioning as the conductors of these principles, especially in post-conflict contexts characterised by weak governments. Given their externalities, PMCs are not and cannot form the basis of democratic governance of security in West Africa. They are externally owned, externally manned and externally based, and thus not amenable to oversight beyond that of their own shareholders. Their objective role is a direct function of the duration of their contracts, their corporate interests and the dictates of their clients. The net contribution of security and military companies to democratic governance is negative because they drain resources from public security forces and weaken the incentives for governments to provide security for the local population and to subject them to local oversight and control mechanisms within the legislature and civil society. Thus, security contractors potentially undermine the building of state institutions which are essential for both operational efficiency and democratic control in the medium and long term.

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The private (non-state) sphere of security governance in West Africa includes a multiplicity of NSAs besides security contractors which present their own challenges for the governance of security. The activities of international NGOs, for example, can be said to resemble a splintering of uncoordinated initiatives by foreign interlocutors. Organisations operating in specific areas such as transitional justice, justice and penal reform, parliamentary capacity building and military and police training all approach the reform of the security sector from their own institutional priorities and culture. While civil society actors play a crucial role in enhancing local ownership, their dependence on external funding is a continuing challenge.

Locally owned private security companies are likely to feature more prominently in security governance in the sub-region, given the seeming inability of many West African states to fulfil their security functions. Domestic security companies may contribute positively to security governance by filling the gap left by state institutions, but they operate largely below the radar of the prevailing oversight and governance mechanisms.

What is required therefore is a policy framework which integrates local and external actors and profit and non-profit institutions on the one hand, and state-centric and human security dimensions of security on the other. Such an integrated policy framework would recognise the state as the primary agent of security provision but accommodate and internalise the role of other actors beyond the state and beyond profit.

Conclusion

This article has argued that commercial security and military services are likely to occupy even more space in security governance in West Africa and beyond. The increasing prominence of the private security industry, featuring both local and foreign businesses, is an offshoot of a global phenomenon reflecting powerful financial and political interests and is an intrinsic part of the current external assistance regime characterised by outsourcing. As West African governments struggle with their security responsibilities, non-state local and foreign actors will continue to emerge to fill the security vacuum. Particularly in the context of post-conflict societies, private contractors are increasingly employed to perform security and peacebuilding functions as part of bilateral or multilateral SSR programmes. This trend raises several governance challenges, which are of particular concern in a peacebuilding context. With specific regard to foreign-based security contractors, their external location and management encumber them with accountability deficits which can be addressed only partly through regulation. Characteristically, oversight institutions in the country of operation do not play a role in the negotiation of the contracts. The fact that the tenures of contractor employees are often limited to their contracts makes it incongruous to include foreign-based security companies in oversight frameworks in their countries of operation. In the final analysis therefore, foreign security contractors retard the prospects for democratic governance because they poorly reflect and transmit the cardinal principles of accountability, transparency and popular participation.

> The increasing prominence of the private security industry, featuring both local and foreign businesses, is an offshoot of a global phenomenon reflecting powerful financial and political interests and is an intrinsic part of the current external assistance regime characterised by outsourcing.

This article has also argued that privatisation of security is a complex phenomenon involving a multiplicity of actors beyond security and military companies, such as roaming bands of indigenous mercenaries and criminal networks as well as civil society. The widespread informalisation of security implies that policy bridges need to be built between informal security institutions and statutory oversight mechanisms. While the use of PMCs for political exigencies such as countering rebel incursions may be attractive to ailing governments, longer-term approaches need to be undertaken to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity – an approach that would help to neutralise the role of negative actors in security governance. Finally, the prospects for sustainable peace and development will be significantly enhanced by expanding the focus of research and policy debate to include other non-state actors beyond commercial security interests.

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Endnotes

[1] ECOWAS states include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

[2] 'Energy Information Administration, Official Energy Statistics from the U.S. Government', available at www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/ECOWAS/Background.html, accessed 9 June 2006.

[3] *The New York Times* reported that for first time in recent memory heads of all three services came directly from government contractors: James Roche, Secretary of the Air Force, is a former vice-president of Northrop Grumman; Gordon England, Secretary of the Navy, is a former executive at General Dynamics; and Thomas P. White, a former Secretary of the Army, is from Enron. Details available at http://pej.org/pej/html/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=459, cited 26 June 2006.

[4] Although definitions of mercenaries do exist, particularly in international instruments banning mercenarism, there is no definition for what constitutes a private military company (Singer 2003). This ambiguity has fuelled a debate. One school of thought emphasises the need to distinguish modern PMCs from conventional mercenaries (Schreier & Caparini 2005). On the other hand, it has been argued that between mercenaries and PMCs, 'the underlying meaning is the same' (Fayemi & Musah 2000: 2).

[5] According to Human Rights Watch, more than two-thirds of the 60 former combatants from Liberia it interviewed said they had received offers to fight in Guinea and Ivory Coast in the last year. Of those recruited to fight in Guinea, about half had been approached by commanders claiming to represent a fledging Guinean insurgency, the others by those claiming to be supporters of Guinean President Lansana Conteh (Human Rights Watch 2006). See also 'Mercenaries Fuel West African Wars', BBC, 13 April 2005, available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4438497.stm, cited 27 June 2006.

[6] According to the 'Progress Report of the Secretary-General on Ways to Combat Sub-regional and Cross-border Problems in West Africa' (S/2005/86) of 2005, such challenges include the use of child combatants and mercenaries, small arms and light weapons proliferation, impunity for perpetrators of human rights abuses, youth unemployment and corruption. At the 12th meeting of the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission, it was resolved that chiefs of police would enhance cooperation and share information and intelligence on trans-border crime.

[7] See Pham, P. 'Lazarus Rising: Civil Society and Sierra Leone's Return from the Grave', available at www.icnl.org/journal/vol7iss/ar_pham.htm; and Turay, T. 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding: The Role of the Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone', available at www.c-r.org/accord/s-leone/accord9/society/shtml, accessed 22 February 2006.

[8] Author's interview with NACCSOL member, 29 August 2006.

[9] Private security services in Liberia tend to be wholly locally owned. According to Ministry of Justice guidelines, Liberian birth or naturalisation is required in order to operate a private security outfit.

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