

The Globalisation of Private Security

Country Report: Sierra Leone



Rita Abrahamsen

Michael C Williams

The Globalisation of Private Security

Introduction	3
Post-conflict Security and Security Sector Reform (SSR)	4
Overview of the Private Security Sector in Sierra Leone	6
<i>Size and Growth of the Sector</i>	
<i>Commercial and Residential Security</i>	
<i>Mine Security</i>	
Policies and Legal Framework	10
<i>Office of National Security</i>	
<i>Qualification and Training</i>	
<i>Recruitment and Hiring Procedures</i>	
<i>Wages and Working Conditions</i>	
<i>Monitoring and Review</i>	
Firearms and the Private Security Sector	13
<i>Firearms and Mine Security</i>	
Future Considerations	17
<i>Regulatory Issues</i>	
<i>Security Sector Reform</i>	
<i>Development and Private Security</i>	

Introduction

The brutality of Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war has placed security at the heart of politics, resulting in an extensive effort to reform the state security apparatus and a parallel rapid growth in the provision of private security. Although crime rates are very low in Sierra Leone, the feeling of insecurity is high. Public trust and confidence in the police is limited, and accordingly most businesses and affluent residences seek protection by private security firms, which to date are largely unregulated and provide services of varying quality. While the recent conflict (1991-2002) provides the immediate context for the expansion of private security provision, the use of private security has a long history in Sierra Leone. As early as 1936 the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a De Beers subsidiary, was allowed to field a private 'security force' of 35 armed men to patrol its diamond concession in the Kono area. Much later, in April 1995, the Strasser government hired the South African company Executive Outcomes to fight the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an arrangement that was continued by President Kabbah until January 1997. Both the extraction of Sierra Leone's mineral wealth and the survival of its ruling elite have thus historically been crucially dependent on the involvement of international private security actors, a relationship which continues, albeit in different ways, in the current post-conflict situation.

As in any country, private security provision in Sierra Leone is closely related to the structure of the security sector as a whole. In Sierra Leone, the key factors defining this context include a long history of military intervention in politics, the destruction and distrust caused by an extended conflict, and the extensive international presence in the post-war provision of security and reconstruction of the security sector. This report provides a brief overview of the private security sector in Sierra Leone, its relationship to the public security apparatus and the key challenges facing the sector in the future.

Post-conflict Security and Security Sector Reform (SSR)

By the time Sierra Leone's civil war was officially declared over in January 2002, over 70,000 people had been killed, 10,000 maimed and more than half the population had fled the country or were internally displaced. The private security sector in Sierra Leone should be seen in the context of the challenges posed by the post-conflict situation, as well as the ongoing effort to reform the country's security sector. Since the end of the war, a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme has successfully disarmed and demobilised over 67,000 ex-combatants from various junta and rebel forces. The broad aim of the on-going Security Sector Reform (SSR) process is to ensure effective management, transparency and accountability of the security sector, so that it does not threaten democracy, human rights or other development goals. With considerable input from international actors, particularly the UK, the SSR programme aims to reduce the size of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and to refocus its mission, moving it firmly away from an active role in 'internal' security towards an 'external' orientation aimed at securing borders. Sierra Leone is perceived as facing few traditional military threats. Instead, societal instability, inequality, corruption, and the broad challenges incorporated under the rubric of 'human security' are seen as the most pressing issues. In the military sphere, the broad goal, in the words of one senior official, is to make the military "affordable, accountable, and admired". This has involved a consistent reduction in the size of the RSLAF, from 14,000 to 10,517 by the end of 2007. While the first round of retrenchments was wholly voluntary, supported by a substantial incentive program, the second will necessitate compulsory redundancies. Discussions are still ongoing concerning the final composition and size of the RSLAF, with some suggesting a that a force of 6,000-7,000 is appropriate and affordable. Given the history of military coups, the brutality of the civil war and the involvement of soldiers (or sobels) in atrocities and looting, the RSLAF suffers from a lack of public trust and respect. Making the armed forces 'accountable and admired' is hence recognised as a difficult and long-term undertaking.

While SSR aims to reduce the size of the RSLAF, it simultaneously seeks to expand the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). The war saw the destruction of most police stations, police posts and barracks throughout the country, and significant resources and international advising, most notably from the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project, have been applied in retraining and re-equipping the SLP with a view to improving both its effectiveness and public reputation. Police primacy in internal security provision has been one of the key objectives of the SSR process, and the current aim is to have a force of 9,500 by the end of 2005.

Broadly speaking, the model of police reform is that of a larger, unarmed constabulary supported by a diversified armed support division, the Operations Support Division (OSD). The OSD comprises approximately one-third of the total police force – a total of 2,100 members in 2004, with a planned expansion to 2,900 by the end of 2005.

The Globalisation of Private Security

The OSD in turn has seven sub-groups, of which the Police Support Group responsible for serious public disorder (essentially a riot police) and the Mobile Armed Response Group (providing armed back-up) are particularly relevant for private security companies, especially in the mining sector.

The reform and restructuring of the SLP is widely perceived as having achieved considerable success under difficult circumstances. However, the level of public distrust of the SLP remains high. Wages are low, and corruption and abuse of power (though much improved) is commonplace. In confidence, many private security companies (PSCs) and their clients express their reservations concerning the effectiveness and honesty of the police in general, and the OSD in particular. The SLP is now deployed in all districts, but it is acknowledged that the gradual withdrawal of UNAMSIL will place additional demands on the SLP and its ability to maintain law and order throughout the country.

Overview of the Private Security Sector in Sierra Leone

Size and Growth of the Sector

Before the war there were two private security companies in Sierra Leone; Mount Everest Security Agency, founded in 1984, and Dynamic Security, established a year later. Since then, the sector has expanded considerably. The Office of National Security (ONS), the government agency responsible for the private security sector, reports that there are approximately 30 companies operating in the country, although the actual number may be higher. The companies vary considerably in size, and security operators estimate that there are approximately 20 significant companies, and a host of smaller operations. Most companies are concentrated in Freetown, but several have smaller offices in provincial towns like Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Koidu. In terms of sheer numbers, Mount Everest is likely the largest company, employing approximately 1,600, followed by Pentagon with over 900 guards, and Hughes Security with nearly 800. The international firms were until recently considerably smaller, but the recently merged Group4Falck and SecuricorGray will together employ approximately 1000 guards. Although no accurate employment figures exist, the ONS estimates total employment in the private security sector at approximately 3,000 persons, while other calculations suggest that it may be as high as 4,000 to 5,000. As these figures indicate, private security in Sierra Leone is a growth industry, a significant employer, and one of relatively few sectors of employment demand in the country.

A pervasive sense of insecurity arising from the decade-long conflict, combined with concerns over the capacity and integrity of the police service, are the main reasons for the substantial growth of the sector. In addition, the arrival of a large number of international and non-governmental organisations involved in development and post-conflict reconstruction has significantly expanded the demand for private security services. In this sense, the post-war economy has provided a boost for the sector. There is, however, general agreement that this process has now peaked and that the gradual drawing down of the international presence may see the market for private security services diminish, with a resultant heightening of competitive pressures and a likely shrinking of the sector in terms of both employees and firms.

The private security sector in Sierra Leone can usefully be divided into two main areas; commercial and residential security, and security operations specific to the mining industry. Currently the private security sector is unarmed. Although the National Security and Intelligence Act of 2002 does in principle allow PSCs to hold arms, this is presently overruled by the UN arms embargo of 1998, which prevents the sale of arms to non-state actors, and is reinforced by a strongly-held view amongst many key actors that the sector should remain unarmed. As will be discussed below, however, there are important exceptions to this general rule in the mining sector. A number of anomalies and tensions surround these situations, and the nature of their resolution may have important implications for both the future of the private security sector and the overall security situation in the country.

Commercial and Residential Security

The services provided by PSCs to commercial and residential customers in Sierra Leone are very basic: unarmed, manned guarding dominates, with relatively little use of more advanced technologies such as CCTV, electronic alarms or electric fencing. The unarmed nature of the sector does not allow for a mobile armed-response service, as found in for example South Africa. Only one company operates a panic button and rapid (unarmed) response service in Freetown. In most cases, guards communicate with their control rooms via radios. The client base is dominated by commercial companies and various international aid organisations, with guards performing general guarding duties, as well as access control and perimeter protection. The residential market is comparatively small and relatively unprofitable, although many companies provide residential protection as part of their contracts with commercial clients, especially with international aid organisations.

Economically, the commercial and domestic private security sector in Sierra Leone is very much a 'bums on seats' business, with profitability determined mainly by volume (number of guards) and cost (mainly wages). In this setting, the ability of international PSCs to use their technical resources and expertise as a competitive advantage is limited: low wages give technology little or no competitive benefit, while infrastructural issues such as an unreliable electricity supply and even adverse climatic conditions severely limit the effective deployment of technologies such as alarms and electric fencing, and make the claim of international companies to provide effective 'integrated systems' unviable.

To gain business in this setting, international PSCs rely upon either claims of greater organisational effectiveness (better guards with better training, better supervision, superior reaction capabilities), or the specific desire of clients for an international company. The latter arise most often from existing international contracts (such as Group4Falck's contract with the US Embassy, arising from its contract to provide US Embassy protection throughout Africa), or from the attraction of clients to the reputation, credibility, and accountability attached to globally recognised 'brand names'. In addition, the ability to provide liability insurance is an advantage for international firms, offsetting to some degree their higher price (though a number of local firms compete effectively on both reputation and the provision of liability coverage).

A number of instances of what has been termed 'hybrid' policing, i.e. instances where public and private security providers co-operate, are found in the commercial sector. These include arrangements at a number of banks, where OSD officers provide an armed presence in conjunction with unarmed private security personnel. Attempts by the authorities to remove the OSD from this role have been strongly resisted by some banks, with one even going so far as to refuse funds for the payment of the police force when its OSD protection was withdrawn. A more striking example of 'hybrid' policing is found at certain diplomatic missions in Freetown, where OSD officers have been assigned to supplement the protection offered by private security companies. In these cases, OSD officers and private security

guards co-man PSC vehicles, with the companies paying a premium to the individual OSD officers above their standard wages. Similarly, some PSCs use OSD officers during money transports, although concern is sometimes expressed by the companies about the integrity and effectiveness of this arrangement. In all instances, the PSCs supplement the wages of the ONS officers.

Relations between the public police and private security in the commercial and residential sectors are generally reported to be good. However, there remain concerns from some in the private security sector that police performance (particularly response times and reliability) are less than fully adequate, and some concerns exist regarding the reliability of the OSD.

Mining Security

During the civil war, corporate mining activity in Sierra Leone came to a halt. In the diamond mining areas, rebels and sobels fought for access to the country's most lootable, high value asset, whereas Sierra Rutile, the country's largest private employer, closed operations after it was over-run and plundered by rebels. Today, corporate mining activity is gradually returning, potentially bringing new business and new challenges for the private security sector. To date, however, many mining companies have opted for in-house security, or as in the case of the main diamond mining company, a combination of in-house and PSC services. In many cases, the in-house security staff consists of ex-patriots with direct combat experience.

Security in the diamond mining areas remains more volatile than in the rest of the country, and diamond mining also has particular security requirements given the ease with which diamonds can be hidden and stolen. At the moment, diamond mining is dominated by artisanal alluvial mining, where there is little, if any, demand for the services of PSCs. Corporate mining activity has only more recently restarted, and a number of companies are now involved in diamond prospecting and exploration. The main company is Koidu Holdings, a subsidiary of DiamondWorks and Branch Energy, which have in the past been linked to the activities of Executive Outcomes. The company restarted its operations in 2003, and the success of its kimberlite mining enterprise in Koidu is considered crucial to increasing Sierra Leone's attractiveness to foreign investment.

There have been significant tensions between Koidu Holdings' operations and elements of the local population, concerning both the resettlement of members of the community living on the concession, and claims of damage to surrounding houses caused by blasting. At some points, these tensions have risked escalating to potentially violent confrontations; in the words of one observer, "six months ago I thought we were going to have a riot up there". While the situation appears to have calmed, and company-community communications and relations improved, these events indicate the volatility of the security situation surrounding the mine. Such factors may prove even more relevant in the case of Koidu Holdings' recent acquisition of a concession in the Tongo fields, where local youth and artisanal

miners are said to be hostile to its operations and security is thus a key concern for the company.

At Koidu Holdings a three-tier security structure is in operation. The mine area is guarded by an international PSC, SecuricorGray, which provides a force of 86 guards. In addition, the company has an OSD contingent of 23 officers dedicated to the security of the mine. Overall supervision of security is in the hands of 7 ex-patriot specialist personnel employed directly by Koidu Holdings. The OSD is under the direction of the Koidu Holdings Chief Security Officer, and in-house security staff also accompany OSD officers on mobile patrols of the concession (patrols consist of one Koidu Holding personnel and two OSDs). SecuricorGray is also responsible, in co-ordination with armed OSD officers, for the security of the diamonds when in transit from the mine to Freetown, and for their shipment from Sierra Leone to Antwerp.

It is important to recognise that the arrangement at Koidu Holdings was developed due to the UN arms embargo, preventing the company from arming its internal security force in accordance with a previous agreement with the Government of the National Provisional Ruling Council in 1995.¹ By contrast, Sierra Rutile (a rutile and bauxite mine) operates the only armed private security force in the country, and many mine operators and private security personnel regard this as a preferable and more secure arrangement. Government authorities and their international advisors, on the other hand, consider the arrangements at Koidu Holdings as the model for other companies with similar security requirements and expect that as new companies start operating, the OSD will provide armed protection as and when needed. The controversial issue of arms and the private security sector will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

¹ The Koidu Kimberlite Project Mining Lease Agreement (Ratification) Decree, 1995, Clause 7.1.2, Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXXVI, No.48, 19 October 1995.

Policies and Legal Framework

Office of National Security

The private security sector is regulated by the National Security and Central Intelligence Act of 2002, and the Office of National Security (ONS) is responsible for the licensing and regulation of PSCs.² At present, a licensing application must be accompanied by the following documentation:

- a) a certificate of company registration specifying the purposes of the application,
- b) a specification of the financial resources and other equipment, including any arms and ammunition, whether or not licensed under the Arms and Ammunition Act, 1955, intended to be used by the company
- c) the particulars of the applicant and other promoters, directors and other officers of the company
- d) any other information that the ONS may require

It is worth noting that the Act opens up the possibility that PSCs might be armed, although this is prevented by the UN arms embargo of June 1998.³

In assessing an application for a license, the ONS takes into account the following:

- a) the adequacy of the resources and the validity of the mode of acquisition of the equipment, including any arms and ammunition
- b) the character and fitness of the applicant and other promoters, directors or officers
- c) the public interest

Importantly, there are no clear criteria for these assessments, nor is the Act supported by any specific regulations. No specific duties are placed on the private security providers, nor are there any specific penalties laid out for breach of the Act, a shortcoming of which the ONS is aware and seeking to amend.

Qualification and Training

There are currently no governmental regulations referring to the qualifications and training of security personnel, and there are no minimum training standards specified to ensure that security companies provide an acceptable service. Training is accordingly left to the individual companies, all of which claim to provide some form of training. The standard of this training, however, varies considerably. In a number of cases, the training is both extensive and intensive – up to four week courses covering everything from legal issues and customer relations, to self-defence

² The National Security and Central Intelligence Act, 2002. Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette Vol. CXXXII, No.42, 4 July 2002. Part IV, Section 19 deals with the 'Control and licensing of private security companies'.

³ UN Security Council Resolution 1171, 5 June, 1998.

and first aid. Potential employees have to pass the required exams, sometimes including literacy, numeracy, as well as fitness tests. In other instances, evidence indicates that training is at best cursory, with guards being placed on duty with little or no knowledge of basic security issues and principles.

Recruitment and Hiring Procedures

The private security sector has been an important source of employment in Sierra Leone, where formal employment opportunities are severely limited. The growth of the sector has coincided with the end of the civil war, and many former combatants, particularly young men from the RUF, have found employment in security companies. Similarly, many former police officers and soldiers have become private security guards.

Foreign firms are required to submit requests for employees directly to the Ministry of Labour, which then provides a pool of suitable applicants. It is, however, unclear that this regulation applies, or is applied, to local companies, who report that recruitment is through advertising in newspapers, 'word of mouth', or from people who present themselves at the gate.

All companies claim that they require potential employees to certify that they have no record of criminal offences. The reliability of the criminal records data is, however, seriously in doubt, due to the destruction of many records during the civil war and limited administrative capacity. A number of companies also reported their suspicion that applicants were able to secure a clean record through bribery, and there is widespread concern within the sector that personnel laid off for misconduct by one company can obtain employment by another almost immediately. As one Managing Director put it, "we are all fishing in the same small pool of employees, and the worry is that this pool is by now pretty polluted". This problem is aggravated by the absence of any requirement that security companies report employees dismissed due to misconduct to the police, or any central register of previously employed security guards.

Wages and Working Conditions

Wages and working conditions for security personnel are regulated by labour legislation, as agreed by the Services Trade Group Negotiating Council.⁴ This limits the working week to a maximum of 60 hours, and provides for a minimum wage of 21,000 leones per month. Most companies pay (or claim to pay) approximately 140-150,000 leones per month as a basic salary, and pay scales range up to L 250,000- 300,000 at the very top supervisory levels. The international companies appear to be at the higher end of the wage-scale.

In practice, adherence to these standards varies widely. There is strong feeling amongst foreign companies that their adherence to labour laws is monitored and enforced much more stringently than that of local companies, putting the foreign firms at a considerable disadvantage. Perhaps most significantly, there is evidence of significant exploitation of guards in terms of both pay and hours of work. Research revealed guards working 12 hour days, with

⁴ The Regulation of Wages and Industrial Relations Act (No. 18 of 1971) Govt. Notice No. 74. Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Industrial Relations. The Sierra Leone Gazette (Extraordinary) Vol. CXXXIII, 1 March, 2002, No. 10.

only one day off per month, for a wage of 70,000 leones per month. Other reports place the lowest end of the wage scale at as little as 40,000. Given such low pay, it is little wonder than many guards working nights also take on day jobs, with the frequent result of falling asleep on their night job.

Wage and working conditions for security guards are of considerable importance for the reliability of the services provided by security companies. Put simply, underpaid and overworked guards are less likely to feel a strong commitment to the protection and safety of their clients. Generally speaking, PSCs have a low reputation in Sierra Leone, and clients frequently complain about the lack of quality service, of guards falling asleep on duty, and of guards stealing from their premises. Cases of guards being involved with organised criminal gangs to rob clients have been reported, and many companies admit to alarmingly high rates of theft or misconduct among their employees and a consequent high staff turn-over. Poor pay and working conditions appear to be at the root of these problems, and without improvement in these respects it is difficult to see how the private security sector as a whole can attain a better level of service and trust.

Monitoring and Review

There is little evidence of an effective monitoring or review process of PSCs by governmental authorities. The exceptions lie in the Ministry of Labour's frequent checks on foreign firms for adherence to labour standards. Recently, there are signs of an attempt at cooperation within the industry itself. A proposal for the creation of an industry-wide database listing guards who have been fired has been put forward, and there is a clear sense amongst some members of the industry that a formal association and self-regulatory body would be beneficial. Such industry associations exist in other African countries (including for example South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya), and can provide an important form of self-regulation, often including a voluntary Code of Conduct. To be fully effective in Sierra Leone, however, an industry association would likely require the cooperation and support of a more effective governmental regulatory authority than currently exists.

Firearms and the Private Security Sector

Few issues are as controversial in the private security sector in Sierra Leone as those surrounding the arming of PSCs. As noted earlier, the sector is currently largely unarmed, in accordance with the UN arms embargo of 1998, which prevents the sale of weapons to non-state actors. This also reflects the strong preferences of many political authorities and international aid organisations, who regard an armed private security sector as inappropriate given the brutality of the civil war and the general attempt to de-militarise and disarm society.

At the same time, the National Security and Intelligence Act, 2002, allows PSCs to bear arms, and there remain pressures in favour of allowing arms in the private security sector. A considerable body of opinion, including some corporate clients and security providers, holds that the current arrangements where the armed capability resides with the OSD alone are inadequate. This view is accompanied by a concern that as the international security presence, most notably the UNAMSIL mission, is gradually reduced the SLP will be unable to provide adequate security, particularly in the volatile diamond mining areas.

Within the private security industry itself, views on the provision of firearms differ significantly. Many companies view the arming of PSCs as both dangerous and unnecessary. As one Managing Director put it, “the sector must not under any circumstances be armed, given the country’s recent violent history”. Another described an armed private security sector as “potentially disastrous”. According to these representatives of the PSCs, there is no threat that requires an armed capability, and they argue that the lack of effective regulation would likely result in a reintroduction of arms into society, undoing the progress made by the DDR process.

Conversely, there are some companies that view the provision of a generalised armed response capacity along the lines of found in South Africa as the model for the future. Although a clear minority view, this position holds that the relatively low rates of crime (and particularly the very low rates of armed crime) in Freetown and elsewhere in the country are a result of the heavy international security presence and the relative (if short term) financial stability provided to ex-combatants by the DDR and international aid programmes. As each of these fades, it is argued, the rate of crime will increase, and if the capacity of the SLP remains inadequate, private security will only be of value to its clients if it can provide an armed component. Under such conditions, private security must either become armed or largely irrelevant. Additionally, some argue that a development towards armed response is crucial to the future success and survival of international security companies in Sierra Leone, as their managerial and technical expertise would allow them to compete successfully in a more skilled environment, whereas they struggle to compete with local companies at the more basic end of the market, such as the provision of guards.

Firearms and Mine Security

The issue of armed protection is particularly relevant in the mining sector, which has the potential to attract much needed foreign investment but is also perceived as having the highest security risks. Some participants in the mining sector are of the opinion that the unwillingness to allow armed private security is a deterrent to foreign investors, and point to the fact that mining operations in most of Africa are protected by armed private guards. The government and its international advisors, on the other hand, insist that the current provision of armed protection by the OSD is working well. Accordingly, government authorities and international advisors present the arrangements at Koidu Holdings as a model for other companies, and regard this as providing the optimal balance between public and private security. However, it is clear that many companies and clients would prefer to have the capacity to carry arms, and to be partly or wholly independent of the OSD, whose efficiency and reliability is often viewed as questionable. In this context, it is important to note that Koidu Holdings re-submitted its application to operate an armed, in-house security force in September 2003.

Sierra Rutile provides a clear illustration of the controversies surrounding armed private security in the mining sector. Before the war, Sierra Rutile accounted for 57% of Sierra Leone's total export earnings, its annual tax payment was US\$7 million, and it was also the country's largest private employer. Accordingly, the reopening of the mining operation is widely considered the single most important economic issue in Sierra Leone. As noted previously, Sierra Rutile currently possesses the only armed private security force in the country. Specific legislation, the Sierra Rutile Act of 1989 (2002)⁵, states that "In order to achieve an effective security regime, the Company may create and maintain a security force to provide a deterrent, defence and reaction capability to incidents". Furthermore, "The Company may import such arms and ammunition that are appropriate to such a security force subject only to the prior approval of the Government and the security force may carry and use such arms and ammunition for the purpose of carrying out its functions".⁶

The security arrangements at Sierra Rutile represent the most extensive private security provision in the country. This is a direct legacy of the events of the civil war, when the (unarmed) mine was overrun by relatively small insurgent force, and was subsequently looted by the very police contingent that had been assigned to protect it. During the war, the in-operative mine was protected by a series of private companies, including the Gurkha Security Guards, Executive Outcomes, Lifeguard and Southern Cross Security Services. The current in-house security arrangements are directed by a staff of 3 ex-patriots in charge of a force of 155 guards. Of this number, 130 are unarmed, static guards, positioned at numerous key points (equipment sites, depots, generating stations) throughout the 30 square kilometre concession. These unarmed personnel are reinforced by a mobile Rapid Reaction Force of 25, armed with AK-47 rifles. During the night, the Rapid Reaction Force conducts patrols throughout the concession.

⁵ The Agreement was ratified by the present Sierra Leone Government by the Sierra Rutile Agreement (Ratification) Act, 2002. Supplement to the Sierra Leone Gazette, Vol.CXXXIII, No.5, 31 January, 2002. Notably, a similar right was granted to the Koidu Kimberlite Project by Decree in 1995.

⁶ Sierra Rutile Agreement (Ratification) Act, 2002, Clause 11, § Q(2) and (3).

In addition to the weapons carried by the Reaction Force, Sierra Rutile Security until recently also possessed a number of heavier weapons. These weapons were the source of considerable controversy, and have now been removed after extended discussions with the government and its international advisors. In the eyes of some government officials, this is only the first stage of a process which in its second phase will see Sierra Rutile surrender all weapons and move toward a situation similar to that at Koidu Holdings: an unarmed security force backed up by a dedicated OSD presence. Indeed, a contingent of 20 OSD officers has recently been assigned to the company.

The future development of the security situation at Sierra Rutile is by no means clear. Some figures within the Government and international aid organisations are strongly of the opinion that a solution on the model provided by Koidu Holdings is the clear and non-negotiable way forward. It is less certain that the company finds this an acceptable resolution. While the company agreed to hand over the heavy weapons, it is reluctant to disarm completely. The legacy of the events in 1995, and the heavy investment (US\$ 74 million) required to rehabilitate and (by 2005) reopen the operation have led to a reluctance to place security in the hands of a police force that had so conspicuously failed to provide protection in the past. Matters were not helped when the OSD contingent assigned to the mine arrived with neither prior notification, nor any accommodation being provided by the SLP, requiring Sierra Rutile to find and provide temporary accommodation for the officers. Both investors and employees at the mining operation have expressed serious concerns about the capacity of the OSD to provide adequate security; a case that in light of past events, the remoteness of the operation, and the potential for theft that exists over a large concession with high-value equipment certainly needs to be taken very seriously. Moreover, it is unclear whether the Sierra Leone Government would be willing to push the issue of disarming Sierra Rutile Security to the full, in the face of potential warnings from the company that it would pull out its investment.

The difference in views concerning the future of Sierra Rutile security arrangements represents a divergence in appraisals of the significance of its current security force. In the view of one security officer in the company, it should be viewed as “an asset and not a threat” to the government: a way of protecting a vital economic resource (a key source of employment and tax revenue, and a crucial symbol of stability, potentially attracting further direct foreign investment) at no cost to a fiscally-strapped government. The idea that the armed private force could pose any threat to the government is dismissed as wholly misplaced, since “25 guys are not going to take over the country”. The company also stresses the professional training and discipline of its security force, whose high degree of training corresponds to South African standards.

From the other side, a number of contrary perceptions seem to be at work. Perhaps the most important of these concerns the symbolic significance of an armed private security force. Much of the SSR process in Sierra Leone has concentrated on constructing a Western-style security structure: an externally-focused army, an unarmed constabulary, and a small, tightly-controlled armed police component. Indeed, it is difficult not to see this as a very

'British' model – and it is in fact seen as such (whether admiringly or critically) by most participants in the private security industry.⁷ In this light, the removal of arms from private hands has a political and symbolic significance, which goes beyond any narrow conception of security. It also cannot be discounted that while a small, well-managed, highly-disciplined, and geographically remote security force such as that of Sierra Rutile may indeed pose a very limited threat to societal security, the authorisation of armed private security firms throughout the country could have very different and much more destabilising consequences.

⁷ This vision of public policing and private security would certainly not apply in the same way if, for example, the United States was taken as a model.

Future Considerations

Regulatory Issues

It is clear that at present the private security sector in Sierra Leone is largely unregulated and unsupervised. As a result, companies offer varying standards of protection, clients frequently complain about low levels of service and competence, companies struggle to recruit suitable personnel, and employees are at times ruthlessly exploited. In order to ensure a more professional, accountable and trustworthy private security provision it is essential that regulation and oversight is improved. Given the generally over-stretched capacity of the Sierra Leone state, a regulatory framework would have to enlist the support of the sector itself, most likely through a self-regulatory professional association.

A consultancy report produced by the South African risk management company Quemic in February 2003, recommends the establishment of a regulatory authority and framework modelled on the South African system.⁸ This would entail a separate Security Industry Regulatory Authority, intended to exercise effective control over security providers and to ensure professionalism, transparency, and trustworthiness. It would also entail the formalisation of training requirements for security guards, along a clearly defined grade structure depending on duties and responsibilities. While reform along these lines is undoubtedly highly desirable, it is important to recognise the limited resources and capacities available for such an Authority in Sierra Leone, as well as the possibility that any new Authority might be equally vulnerable to inefficiency and bribery.

In light of the limited resources and capacities of state authorities, self-regulation may provide the best hope for a more professional and trustworthy security sector. There are signs that the industry is moving towards the formation of a professional association, in order to improve the sector's reputation and ensure minimum standards of service. A particular effort is also being made to prevent the circulation of employees fired for misconduct. Some within the sector are also talking about the need to standardise training and the potential economic benefits of some form of co-operation in the training of guards. To date however, no such self-regulation or code of conduct exists, and it is unclear to what extent it would be welcomed by all participants in the sector. It is also important to recognise that self-regulation is inherently limited, and cannot alone solve the problems of the private security sector.

As noted previously, one of the key problems in the private security sector is the frequent breach of labour regulations, requiring guards to work long hours for very low wages. This in turn leads to low levels of commitment, theft and 'moon lighting' by guards, especially those on night shifts. Given the difficulties of obtaining employment in the country, guards have little option but to accept the current working conditions. In order to ensure a better quality service, however, it is important that guards are sufficiently remunerated. The Ministry of Labour needs to enforce labour laws not only in the international companies, but also in local companies, some of which substantially under-pay their employees. At the same time, it could be argued that security guards are no worse off than other employees, as

⁸ Quemic (Pty) Ltd (2003) 'Assessment of the Commercial Security Industry in Sierra Leone. First Report', February 2003. The report was commissioned by Koidu Holdings, and has been submitted to the Government of Sierra Leone.

their wages are broadly comparable to that of the army and police, and well above the stipulated minimum wage of 21,000 leones paid to messengers and cleaners employed in government ministries.

Security Sector Reform

Sierra Leone is currently undertaking substantial reform of the security sector, seeking to restructure and professionalise the armed forces and the police. It is clear that to date, the private security sector has been treated as largely external to this process of reform, both by the Government and the international donors sponsoring the SSR programme. In order to increase security in Sierra Leone, the private security sector should be regarded as an integral part of SSR. The provision of private security has become an important part of the security sector in Sierra Leone, and a functioning, reliable and professional private sector can assist and relieve an over-stretched and under-resourced police force. Conversely, a neglected and unregulated security sector can contribute to increased insecurity. As the UNAMSIL presence is gradually reduced, the ability of the SLP to enlist the co-operation of private security providers could become crucial to the maintenance of law and order. As demonstrated above, a number of 'hybrid' forms of policing is already in effect in Sierra Leone, and as part of SSR, a positive and open dialogue between the PSCs, the Government and the international actors involved in the process is essential.

The importance of seeing private security as a part of SSR is highlighted by the fact that the private security sector appears to have been a source of considerable employment opportunities for ex-combatants over the past several years, perhaps easing the economic dimensions of the DDR process. However, if the sector has now reached its peak, and may even be in decline in terms of numbers of employees, it is unlikely to play this role in the future. Since the next down-sizing phase of the RSLAF will involve compulsory redundancies, these factors are potentially significant. Should the economic situation in the country not improve, this clearly has security implications that will need careful consideration.

Development and Private Security

While considerable progress has been made in the short time since the end of the civil war, particularly in terms of disarmament, it is a source of concern that the underlying social and economic causes of the conflict remain largely unchanged. As a report by the International Crisis Group noted, "in a very real sense, the conditions that spawned the war and inflicted gruesome casualties on Sierra Leone's citizens have not disappeared".⁹ Similarly, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan reported that "the high unemployment rate among youth and ex-combatants who have not yet benefited from the reintegration programmes represent challenges that have political and security implications".¹⁰ Importantly, there are currently concerns that armed crime might be on the increase, as a result of continuing economic

⁹ International Crisis Group 2003 'Sierra Leone: The State of Security and Governance', Africa Report No 76.

¹⁰ Report of the Secretary General on the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, No 20, 2003 (available at www.un.org/dpko/unamsil).

hardship for the majority of Sierra Leone's population. The future resolution of these broader socio-economic and political issues is likely to have a significant impact on developments in the private security sector.

In a country with severe fiscal restraints and limited public policing capacity, adequate private security provision is a key condition of foreign investment. Sierra Leone's economic future and its ability to attract foreign direct investment thus needs to be seen in relation to its ability to guarantee a well-functioning and accountable private security sector, especially as the UNAMSIL mission come to an end. On the other hand, private security in the country has in the past contributed to the creation of enclave economic zones, which have exacerbated rather than resolved socio-political tensions. In this context, it is important to recognise that Sierra Leone's ruling elite has in the past secured its survival through alliances with foreign investors and private security forces, and that in weak states the ability to control resources is frequently more important than the ability to control and administer territory. In this sense, the monopolisation of the means of violence sought as an ideal by the SSR process may not always be in the interest of ruling elites.

The ambiguities surrounding the arms issue should be seen in this light. At the moment, the balance of power between the resource companies and the international donors involved in Sierra Leone's SSR process is tilted in favour of the latter. The Government tends to adhere to the views of the donor community, but there are signs that as the international presence draws down and its influence wanes, the pressures to arm PSCs will increase. At that point, these views may well find a more favourable hearing, as they have in the past. In this sense, private security provision in Sierra Leone remains a highly sensitive, political issue.

This report is the first in a series of four, and is part of *The Globalisation of Private Security* research project. The project examines the development and dynamics of the global private security sector, and the impact of private security on security provision, social cohesion and stability, and political legitimacy in the developing world, focusing on Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa. For further information, please contact Dr. Rita Abrahamsen (rra@aber.ac.uk) or Dr. Michael Williams (mjw@aber.ac.uk).

The Department of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth was established in 1919 and is the oldest department of its kind in the world. One of the largest Departments of international politics in Europe, it currently numbers 53 staff, with 600 undergraduate students and 150 postgraduates. The Department was awarded a top 6-star rating in the latest UK Research Assessment Exercise. Further information is available at www.aber.ac.uk/interpol.

The Globalisation of Private Security research project is funded by the New Security Challenges Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom (ESRC). The New Security Challenges Programme was launched in 2003, and aims to promote research into security which builds on, but moves beyond, the traditional pre-occupation with military conflict between states. By supporting innovative research, the Programme seeks to define a more comprehensive and comprehensible agenda to meet the security challenges of the twenty-first century. Further information on the Programme is available at www.newsecurity.bham.ac.uk