

The Globalisation of Private Security in Africa **Dr Rita Abrahamsen and Professor Michael Williams**

Thursday 9th January, 1200-1400

Department for International Development, London

This lunchtime seminar was presented by Dr Rita Abrahamsen and Professor Michael Williams both of the Department of International Politics at the University of Aberystwyth. They lead the [Globalisation of Private Security](#) research project funded by the New Security Challenges Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK (ESRC).

The seminar drew on the research conducted by Dr Abrahamsen and Professor Williams on private security provision in Africa and specifically the Niger Delta, Cape Town and Nairobi. The presentation looked firstly at the social construct of security and how initial displeasure towards private security provision stems from understanding security as a public good. Once the state does not provide this good and the private sector takes it up, there is often unease leading to fears of social fragmentation. Such unease does not take into account the rearticulation of governance and the fluid and evolving relationship between the public and the private sector.

The private security industry is a massive one. Both presenters acknowledged that whilst very little is known about it in the developed world, almost next to nothing is known about it in the developing world. It is a highly pervasive and rapidly expanding industry. Figures put the industry at a value of \$85 billion and with several million people employed in it. The past decade has seen the industry experience a 6-8% growth rate with rapid acceleration in the developing world.

The trans-national character of many of the actors in the private security industry has had a massive affect on sociological approaches to security. The expansion of providers such as Securitas in the 80s and 90s and its rise to become the largest private security provider in North America and one of the largest in Europe has played a role in changing perceptions and approaches to private security providers. Another of the world's largest private security companies, Group4Securicor has over 400,000 employees in over 100 countries. Group4Securicor is considered by some to be Africa's largest private employer, employing over 82,000 on the continent.

The drivers for this rapid rise in the developing world include a rise in state neo-liberal policy that is more accepting of outsourcing what were previously considered to be public goods. As privatisation of service provision and outsourcing have become more popular, traditional distinctions between the public and the private are being reconfigured. Greater networks have been established between the state and private actors providing more opportunity for private actors to offer their services. A second driver is the 'commodification' of security whereby security shifted from being a public good to a service provided by private actors and thus a good that can be traded globally. A third driver is that of the increasing 'risk mentality' in the global economy where private actors claiming expertise in mitigating risk are sought after as part of any business or investment activities. An example can be found in a South African telecoms

company that declines to enter new marketplaces without the participation of their preferred security provider.

Such a shift in the way security is provided has been mirrored by a shift in the way security is thought about. The partial state disassembly that has seen functions of the state divided has made private security provision more feasible and acceptable. A phenomenon of global security assemblages now exists and public-private relationships are joined by local-local and local-global relationships. Practically speaking, it is the relationship between local, regional and trans-national private security providers with states.

The interlinked relationship between the public and private is apparent in the Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. With no exact figures, the best guesstimates put the number of private security providers in Nigeria at between 1500 and 2000. The private security industry in Nigeria is unarmed. Oil companies that operate in the Delta such as Chevron, Shell, and Exxon employ so-called supernumerary or "spy police", who are trained by the Nigerian state and then employed and paid by the oil companies. In addition, as the security situation in the Delta has worsened, the oil companies also rely on the services of other public security forces, including the paramilitary Mobile Police, the Navy and the Armed Forces. In many cases, this is supplemented by the services of private security companies, in intricate public-private, global-local security networks. An example is Chevron's contract with a subsidiary of Group4Securicor in Nigeria called Outsourcing Services Limited (OSL) which provides almost 1000 personnel. OSL provides security and security strategy for Chevron. In instances of high alert and/or extreme danger, the OSL personnel co-operate and work alongside armed state security personnel in what is a coordinated operation involving private, paramilitary and state security sector provision. This is a striking illustration of a hybrid network of global and local security actors.

Private security is important not only in the context of resource extraction, but is also increasingly prevalent in African cities, where its activities are frequently crucial to an understanding of urban security dynamics. Two contrasting case studies were examined:

- Cape Town, South Africa, has a highly regulated private security industry, which is highly integrated with public security provision.
- Nairobi, Kenya, has an unregulated private security industry, whose relationship to the public security sector is ad-hoc and tension filled.

In Cape Town, the Central City Improvement District was established in 2000 and entails a situation whereby important elements of the security of the city centre are, in effect, outsourced to the world's largest security company Group4Securicor (trading in Cape Town as Securicor). G4S provides a highly visible security presence, including foot, vehicle and horse patrols. There is close cooperation with the police; for example, CCID vehicles are linked to police station radio and CCTV monitoring is done by joint teams. The public-private partnership in Cape Town challenges the common assumption that the rise of private security actors implies an automatic erosion or weakening of state authority and sovereignty, in that the mobilisation of private security has allowed for the presence of a much larger security force than the state alone could have afforded and has also enabled the government to claim that it is 'doing something about crime'. On the other hand, the new security arrangements in Cape Town

have also led to a form of social exclusion, especially of street children, beggars and general hawkers/street sellers. Paradoxically the efficiency and success of the CCID might lead to social and economic exclusion and thus affect stability.

The experience of private security provision in Nairobi is vastly different from Cape Town. The private security industry in Nairobi is unregulated and it enjoys at the best of times a highly tense relationship with the state. It is a very diverse industry with local, regional and global actors. While some companies are highly capitalised and operating according to international standards of 'best practice', there is a lack of professionalism amongst many of the companies, and collusion between private guards and criminals is common. The relationship between the private security sector and the public police is characterised by tensions and mutual suspicion, leading to a lack of cooperation between the two. There are also tensions between the global and the local security providers, especially following the government's imposition of a minimum wage for private security guards. This met with much opposition from the local security providers who maintained that they could not afford to adhere to the minimum wage policy, and that if they did they would go out of business and large sections of the poorer parts of society would be deprived of security services. In not enforcing this law, the government contributed to a spiral of low wages, poor service, and the temptation towards crime.

The lecture concluded with an assertion that the rise of the private security industry does not signify an automatic decline of the state. Instead, we are witnessing the emergence of new power relationships and new networks of global-local, public-private security actors. Understanding these new networks and relationships is crucial in analysing contemporary security politics and to Security Sector Reform initiatives. The importance of regulation of the private security sector must also not be underestimated, and interest in this must remain, particularly as the industry will not simply go away, but will continue to expand.

This series of events are part of DFID efforts to reach accurate definitions of Private Security. They aim to explore links between Private Security and development programming in security and justice and its impact upon the two; realising the relationship between the two as independent fields with strong interlinkages between them. The broader elements of this relationship that concern resource allocation, public financial management and logistical issues are also of concern to DFID.

DFID intends to produce guidance material for SSR programming that incorporates private sector actors, highlighting risks involved and the potential rewards of their involvement.

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