

Chapter 7: Gurkhas and the private security business in Africa

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Introduction

The private security business in Africa in the 1990s is more sophisticated than it was in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, it was mostly associated with mercenary activity in violent and bloody civil wars and the emphasis was often on the recruitment of men to serve in combat units. Although some security firms, such as Sandline International, have continued to try and do this, opportunities are increasingly rare. The variety of products now on offer are wider, ranging from supplying bodyguards for eminent people to providing security for oil and mineral installations, drawing up threat analyses and giving military advice and training.

The firms that engage in these activities are increasingly image conscious and deny that they engage in mercenary-type activities. But the line between providing bodyguards or security advice and engaging in mercenary activity remains thin, and ethical and responsible behaviour may be eroded by the need to make a profit. The skills used in security consultancy and bodyguard work, furthermore, are almost identical to those used for mercenary activity.

The 1990s have also seen a growth in the number of private firms offering a wide portfolio of security products. These firms are often run by a couple of individuals who maintain a list of 'contacts' available for security subcontracting or discreet deals. Such firms own few assets and are positioned to mobilise their contacts at short notice. A number of these firms have tried to use Gurkhas from Nepal in their operations in Africa, as their employment is considered to be more cost-effective.

Gurkhas

Gurkhas are soldiers from Nepal, and the Gurkha brigades in the British army are the closest in model to *La Légion Etrangère* (the French Foreign Legion).¹ The British, Indian and Nepalese governments are sensitive to claims that these Gurkha soldiers are mercenaries. They assert that the provision of Gurkhas in their armies is governed by a tripartite treaty between the three governments and is akin to an understanding between allies. The main motivation for the Nepalese government is the arrangement's ability to generate revenue. The British government pays some £30 million a year in pensions to former soldiers who have retired to Nepal. Gurkhas serving in the British military can also expect virtually the same wage as their British equivalents, although the redundancy terms offered to them are considerably less generous than those offered to their British counterparts.²

Following the British government's *Options for Change* defence review in 1991, the Gurkha regiments were reduced in strength by seventy per cent through compulsory redundancy.³ The

UK has tried to soften its cuts by lobbying the UN to employ a Gurkha UN rapid reaction force. British former Prime Minister, John Major, presented the idea to the UN in 1991 with little success.⁴ Because of the large number of retrenchments in British Gurkha units, a number of British-based private security firms tried to recruit and market former Gurkha soldiers for employment in the private security sector. One such firm, Gurkha Security Guards (GSG), markets the Gurkha in its sales brochures as:

“... a phenomenon ... unique among the world’s fighting men. Bred in one of the most inhospitable landscapes in the world, he is tough, self-reliant and used to dealing with great hardship. The very word ‘Gurkha’ has become a byword for steadfastness, courage and integrity and their reputation has won them respect and renown throughout the world.

Since the end of the [Second World] war, the role of the Gurkha has increasingly shifted to the maintenance of internal security and guarding of major installations and strategic assets. They were used as a counter-insurgency force in the defeat of terrorism in Malaya [sic] and Borneo, and their presence guaranteed stability during the riots and disturbances in Cyprus and Hong Kong. During the partition of India and Pakistan, Gurkhas were invaluable as a truly neutral and apolitical force able to segregate rival factions without prejudice.”⁵

GSG’s management also argues that the *“Gurkhas are good in Africa, because they are used to hardship, don’t get bored like Europeans, are courteous, disciplined and are not expensive. They are also apolitical, they serve their client and don’t get involved in asking why?”⁶*

This is all part of a myth-making exercise which maintains that Gurkhas are better trained and dependable than locally engaged staff. In Africa, Gurkhas have elicited a range of opinions about their skills. In July 1993, a Mozambican official working with Gurkhas on mine clearance operations said: *“They work hard and rid us of mines. They cook well, they are friendly and respect our customs and leave our women alone. They are not what we expected from Indians [sic].”⁷*

But they can command fear, too. A former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) soldier in Sierra Leone remembered seeing them in 1995: *“Those Vietnamese [Gurkhas]. I remember them. They carried AKs and large knives. We knew if they caught us we would be eaten. Whites and Africans are easier, we know what they are and what they do.”⁸*

They can also command resentment. In Angola, a government official justified the expulsion of Gurkhas working for the British private security firm Defence Systems Limited (DSL) in January 1998 by saying: *“They take jobs from our young men. We have years of war experience. Our demobilised need jobs. Angolans can do better work than these Gurkhas.”⁹*

The work offered by GSG is also attractive to Gurkhas for financial reasons. For example, a Gurkha serving in Mozambique for the company in 1993 said:

“I am in Mozambique because I need to feed my family and get my children educated. There is little work in Nepal and my land is not enough to feed us all. I worked for the British Army

for many years seeing Hong Kong, Brunei, Belize and active service in the Falklands. So I know about war and landmines. I've been in Mozambique now for twelve months. I like it. People like us and show us respect. But when the job is over I will be happy to leave. I'm here to make money, do a job, not to enjoy myself. I do that in Nepal."¹⁰

Gurkha Security Guards

Gurkha Security Guards Limited (GSG) specialises in recruiting primarily former British Army Gurkha officers and soldiers for security services, and has operated during the 1990s in Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Somalia. GSG was formed in late 1989 and claims that it provides a "... professional, cost effective, competent, solution to the security problems faced by commercial, industrial, diplomatic, and aid organisations operating in the more remote and hostile areas of the world."¹¹

GSG is a privately owned British company. Its original co-directors, and now its 'operating consultants', are Mike Borlace and Anthony Husher. Both men served in the British armed forces and fought in the Rhodesian war. Husher, a Canadian, served in the 1st Battalion of the Rhodesian African Rifles in Rhodesia and Borlace was in the Rhodesian Air Force and later in the Selous Scouts. Borlace was imprisoned in Zambia between 1978 and 1981 after being captured on a Rhodesian cross-border operation. Husher and Borlace met up again in Sri Lanka in 1985 doing contract work for the security firm KAS and then worked together from 1988 for a contract security firm in the UK. Major John Titley, a British Gurkha regiment officer, was the third director until 1994 and was GSG's main link with Nepal.

What GSG offers

In GSG's brochures, the company offers a number of services.¹² It undertakes the worldwide recruitment, selection, vetting, training, deployment and management of security officers, logistical support staff, and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and landmine clearance engineers. Specific services offered by GSG include:

- the provision and management of manned guarding services in hostile areas in order to safeguard personnel, installations, equipment, and vehicles;
- security training and the management of specialist security manpower;
- close protection of VIPs and persons under threat of their lives;
- supply of security equipment and materials;
- EOD operations, and unexploded ordnance (UXO) and landmine clearance, in both urban and rural areas, including: the location and disposal of buried ordnance; landmine and unexploded ordnance surveys; subsurface and deep subsurface searches; route clearances;

specialist training of indigenous personnel in the clearance of landmines and explosive ordnance; quality control inspections of clearance operations; and the supervision and control of local operations.

GSG claims to be able to deploy worldwide at short notice in order to respond “... *to sudden threats to life, limb, and property; or requirements for logistical support.*”¹³

Recruitment procedure

GSG indicates that it has a number of offices with its head office in St. Helier, Jersey, in the Channel Islands. It also claims to maintain representative offices in Harare, Zimbabwe; Kathmandu, Nepal; and Ottawa, Canada. The latter are no more than commercial answering services or claimed alliances such as with the Canadian Association for Mine and Explosive Ordnance (CAMEO) which is starting up mine clearance projects in Africa.¹⁴ Since 1995, GSG’s directors on its company documents have been no more than names on letterheads, appearing for legal and tax purposes.¹⁵

The only permanent employees are the two former co-directors, Husher and Borlace, who maintain a network of ‘contacts’, who are mobilised if a lucrative contract or subcontract is won. GSG claims that it maintains rigorous recruitment procedures but, as in the case of many private security firms, recruitment is done on personal recommendation. There are no standard procedures for recruitment or operations in the field.

The recruitment of Gurkhas is carried out in Nepal. An agent puts an advertisement in a local paper, uses word of mouth and telephone calls, sufficient to attract several thousand applicants for the few posts on offer.¹⁶ Although GSG insists that it hires former British Army Gurkha soldiers – all of whom left the service with ‘exemplary’ conduct certificates after at least fifteen years of service and that references and curricula vitae are obtained for all personnel employed – the standard of these recruits seems to vary. Competition for these jobs is intense and there is a tendency among Gurkhas to present ‘gifts’ of around US \$2 000 to agents and local officials to ensure a place on the recruitment short list of fifty or so. Since the average monthly wage for a Gurkha in the security business is US \$600-700 and the average contract lasts for six months, several months’ wages are used just to earn the money to cover these ‘gifts’. There is also an increasing trade in falsified ‘exemplary’ conduct certificates and a number of international security firms recruiting Gurkhas in Nepal have experienced problems with recruits not being as skilled as indicated in their documentation.¹⁷

GSG in Africa

GSG has concentrated its work in Africa, mainly because of the background and experience of Borlace and Husher and their contacts. Their most significant contract was in Mozambique where they were subcontracted by Lonrho, the British multinational corporation, to provide security services. Once GSG lost its Lonrho patronage, its fortunes declined rapidly.

Mozambique: The Lonrho connection

The expanding war in Mozambique made Lonrho's £53 million business interests in tomato, tea and cotton farming, gold mining, an oil pipeline and hotels increasingly unprofitable. By 1989, the difficulties of managing the farms and exporting agricultural produce were contributing to Lonrho's annual global losses. A £6 million contract from August 1986 to 1989 with the British private security firm, DSL, to protect its estates and convoys, had become too costly and had failed to ensure complete protection. After trying its own security management, Lonrho hired Gurkhas from GSG in 1990.¹⁸

Security outlays consumed thirty per cent of Lonrho's operating costs – about US \$1 million a year – in addition to production losses caused by sabotage. In the Limpopo Valley, great triple stacks of concertina wire surrounded Lonrho's 2 000 hectare cotton farm at Chokwe. Watchtowers and tanks guarded the perimeter fence. The estate was protected by a militia of 1 400, supervised by Gurkhas. Despite the war, Chokwe's 2 000 hectares achieved 20 000 tonnes of cotton, Africa's highest yield in 1989. Lomaco, a joint venture with the government, also became the biggest tomato grower in the southern hemisphere.¹⁹

In early 1990, prior to GSG taking over company security, an attack by the National Resistance Movement of Mozambique (Renamo) on one of the Lonrho installations strengthened its board's belief that running militarised farms in a civil war was no longer feasible and that 'Tiny' Rowland's efforts to assist the peace process should be fully supported. Some 200 rebels attacked at dawn, driving a herd of cattle through a perimeter fence after a tree was hurled over the barbed wire. The rebels rushed in and blew up \$500 000 of chemicals and irrigation pipes in a matter of minutes. Offices were torched and trucks doused with petrol. The expanding war in Mozambique made Lonrho's businesses there increasingly hazardous.²⁰

Rowland, chief executive of Lonrho at the time, had been involved with Mozambique since the early 1960s when he negotiated the building of an oil pipeline between Beira and the then Rhodesia for Lonrho. The pipeline was opened in December 1964 and for the next three decades was Lonrho's primary asset in Mozambique. Because the pipeline required security, Lonrho established direct contact with Renamo from 1982. In June 1982, a Lonrho subsidiary signed a secret protection agreement with Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama, and his Secretary-General, Orlando Cristina, over the Beira oil pipeline.²¹

Despite these early problems, Lonrho maintained its connection with Renamo, initially through South African contacts and directly by the late 1980s. Regular payments into foreign bank accounts were arranged for some of Renamo's senior internal leadership, in exchange for an explicit understanding that they would not order attacks on the oil pipeline. Later on, additional agreements were reached over the tea estates in northern Mozambique and for a cessation of attacks along the railway line from Malawi to the port of Nacala. These payments continued until the Rome General Peace Accord in October 1992 and cost the company some US \$5 million.²²

It was agreed that some symbolic Renamo attacks would continue, but that these would not be serious. At times, however, Lonrho plantations and assets were attacked, but Renamo

officials alleged that these incidents were the work of renegade groups operating outside their leaders' command. It is also possible that some of these attacks were designed as reminders to Lonrho that payment was due.

The secret protection payments to Dhlakama of the 1980s and early 1990s, brought temporary respites in some areas, but no lasting peace.

GSG provided fourteen Gurkhas to manage security on the Lonrho estates between 1990 and 1993. These men were responsible for the training, command and control of the locally recruited 120-strong militias maintained on each estate. These militias were armed by the government with AK-47s and RPG-7s. They were also responsible for managing the vehicle convoys carrying goods to the ports. The GSG teams were successful, and the standard and discipline of the militias improved. Despite a number of attacks on the Lonrho installations and vehicle convoys in the first eighteen months of GSG's contract, none were successful once the Gurkha teams were in place. Only one Gurkha was injured during these operations.²³

Many of these farms and installations became small pockets of tranquillity in a war-torn environment towards the end of the conflict. Although GSG was to claim that the improved security situation was the result of its operations, it is likely that Lonrho protection payments were equally important in reducing the incidence of Renamo attacks.

During this period, GSG provided additional Gurkha teams for the protection of a geological survey team of the Irish firm Kenmare Resources in the Angoche area, and some VIP and goods convoy work. GSG was also requested to provide security cover for a number of Renamo officials during the peace negotiations in 1992.²⁴

Landmine clearance

Lonrho was responsible for GSG winning a lucrative mine clearance contract in Mozambique. After the General Peace Accord of October 1992, the Mozambican government and Renamo agreed at a meeting of the UN's Supervisory and Control Commission (CSC) on 31 December 1992, to hire GSG, through Lonrho, to remove mines in central Mozambique. The agreement ended a dispute over who should be contracted: Renamo wanted to hire the South African security company Minerva (a front for Mechem), and the government favoured the Zimbabwean army.

At the end of January 1993, GSG began formal mine clearance operations (operations Electric and Lincoln) in Mozambique in co-operation with Lonrho. The programme was initially funded by the European Community (EC) and directed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The aim was to clear roads of mines and unexploded ordnance, to allow relief vehicles carrying food and other forms of aid to reach more remote regions. GSG's clearance efforts first concentrated on roads north of Beira. Its contract was extended in July 1993 for five months so that additional roads could be cleared for the World Food Program. When the project finished in February 1994, GSG had cleared 160 kilometres of road. Three hundred and forty seven items of explosive ordnance were destroyed, including six mines, at a cost to the EU of \$1 683 000.²⁵

Between July and December 1994, GSG provided another full Gurkha EOD team in Mozambique for Project Caminho, a \$4,3 million contract awarded by the UN to clear priority roads. The contract was won by a consortium consisting of Royal Ordnance, UK, Lonrho and Mechem of South Africa.²⁶ GSG again profited from Lonrho patronage in winning this subcontract.

Angola

GSG has also operated in Angola. In 1991, it was contracted by Oderbrecht Mining Services Incorporated to provide a fully integrated security team of Gurkhas for the prevention of theft at its diamond mine in Luzamba in Lunda Norte province. Theft at the mine did decline during this period.²⁷ However, when Angola returned to civil war in late 1992, the mine was seized by UNITA and the Gurkhas and other expatriate staff were evacuated.

In mid-1994, during the 'third' Angolan war, International Defence and Security Limited (IDAS), a Netherlands-based firm with strong Israeli and US connections, approached GSG to assist in recruiting Gurkhas. IDAS chief executive officer, Michel Jean-Pierre, a former member of the French Foreign Legion, planned to provide as many as 2 000 Gurkha troops to pacify the Lunda Norte area which had fallen under UNITA control.²⁸ GSG claims to have ignored the request. The contract never materialised because the South African firm, Executive Outcomes, dominated the market in the Lunda's at the time. GSG continues to solicit business aimed at providing security services for the diamond industry in Angola.

GSG has also been involved in mine clearance operations in Angola. In 1995, the company provided Mechem with a team of Gurkha EOD engineers to assist the UN with route clearance in various parts of the country.²⁹ The project was successfully concluded in August 1996.

Sierra Leone

GSG attracted international attention primarily because of its work in Sierra Leone. The civil war that began in Sierra Leone in 1991, reached a crisis stage in late 1994 with the capture by RUF rebels of the country's diamond, titanium oxide and bauxite mines. By early 1995, the capital Freetown was threatened and the then National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government approached a number of private security companies to provide assistance. J & S Franklin Limited, the British manufacturer of non-lethal military equipment and a weapons sales agent, subcontracted GSG to train the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF). GSG arrived in January 1995 under the command of Major Bob MacKenzie, an American and veteran of Vietnam, the Rhodesian SAS, Bosnia and a contributing editor on unconventional operations for Soldier of Fortune magazine.³⁰

GSG sent 58 Gurkhas and three European managers – MacKenzie, James Maynard, a former British Gurkha officer, and former British Coldstream Guard sergeant Andrew Myres – to set up a training base for the Sierra Leone special forces and later infantry officer cadets.³¹ The

Sierra Leone Information Minister announced that, “[t]hese people have come to assist in the training of our forces. We’ve had some problems in the military getting used to jungle tactics.”³²

The Sierra Leone government had requested that GSG train their army officer cadets. “It is extremely unusual for any nation state to entrust the training and welfare of their future military officers to a commercial company composed solely of foreigners,” states GSG about this contract in its sales brochure.³³

Nick Bell, GSG’s accountant, also maintained at the time that the Gurkhas, “... are not in Sierra Leone in an offensive role.”³⁴ In January 1995, GSG began to train the Sierra Leone military in counterinsurgency techniques, from hot pursuit, to ambushing and evacuation. Husher claims that, “[w]e trained selected security units in the very basics of protecting their civilian population and economic assets from the depredations of armed bandits.”³⁵ He also denied that GSG trained in mine warfare. He stated:

“We most certainly did not conduct any form of training involving land mine warfare, and certainly would never have countenanced this; unless it was in the detection and destruction of landmines. I actually spent half an hour with the Army Chief of Staff in Sierra Leone talking him out of his wish to lay landmines in order to protect their borders and vital installations. While I could not get his agreement to destroy their land mine stockpile; he agreed not to permit any to be laid.”³⁶

GSG’s team not only provided specialist training for the Sierra Leone army, but also safeguarded the strategic Camp Charlie military base in the heart of the country. After some initial skirmishes with the rebels, GSG was able to secure the base and ensure the pacification of the surrounding area.

Soon after GSG started their training programme, government forces supported by two Russian Mi-24 helicopter gunships with Belarussian mercenary pilots engaged in attacks on a number of RUF bases.³⁷

However, disaster struck on 24 February 1995. While scouting the Malal Hills in search of a live firing training area, MacKenzie, Myres, five Gurkhas and a platoon of RSLMF infantry walked into an RUF training camp by mistake and a fire-fight ensued. At least 21 were killed, including Major Anbou Tarawali, President Strasser’s aide-de-camp, MacKenzie and Myres. Most of the Sierra Leone troops fled from the scene leaving the Gurkhas, MacKenzie and Myres to fight. Many of the bodies were never accounted for.³⁸

The US State Department wrote in its annual human rights report that, “[i]n a February attack, the military aide to the Head of State, the expatriate commander of the mercenary advisory group, and several other individuals were killed by rebels in an ambush. None of the bodies was ever recovered, and reports indicated later that they were mutilated and put on display in rebel-held areas.”³⁹

A former RUF fighter described the incident as an organised attack. He stated:

“It was morning time. We were listening to a radio message, to announce promotions. Then we were called out of the base, and then ordered back in. Two jets came to bombard. But we knew the air raid was not the thing, that ground forces would come, so we were ready. They told us they [Gurkhas] are coming. We began to fight seriously. It was not an ambush.

Did you see the Gurkha commander [MacKenzie]?

There was one white man. He had compass, camera, gun. He was hit, and then killed. We dragged his body back to camp. We saw he had a tattoo on his arm. They cut the arm off, to show the tattoo to identify the person, to prove to the government that he had been killed. We buried Tarawali. After that attack the commanders decided to move the camp. After one week the jets came to bombard but we had left the camp site by then.”⁴⁰

In Mercenaries: Soldiers of Fortune, a coffee table book sold in a number of British supermarkets during 1997, MacKenzie’s death was glamorised.⁴¹ The author Tim Ripley incorrectly wrote, “... the veteran American mercenary Bob MacKenzie, who was on a freelance contract in the country in 1995, was shot by the government soldiers he was supposed to be leading and left to be captured by rebels, who reportedly ate him.”⁴²

After the deaths of MacKenzie and Myres, Borlace and Husher went to Sierra Leone to continue the training. Camp Charlie was in a hostile zone and came under four days of heavy attack. They initially had 36 officer cadets, who in effect found themselves in live training and held on to the base. By late March, the government had withdrawn all of its cadets from the programme.⁴³

At the time, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office feared that the rebels would interpret the presence of Gurkhas as a sign of direct British intervention which could lead to the execution of some British hostages then being held. It issued a statement in March saying, “[w]e have not been giving any military assistance to the government of Sierra Leone. We have made this perfectly clear to the RUF, but if people who are no longer in the British Army decide to sell their services elsewhere we cannot stop them. They can do what they like with their specialist knowledge as long as they don’t break British laws.”⁴⁴

During this period, GSG was urged by the NPRC to engage in operations directly against the RUF, but it stuck to its contract and refused to conduct offensive operations against the rebels. Because GSG refused such operations, and it was becoming clear that the RSLMF, in spite of training, would be incapable of retaking important mining assets without assistance, the mining firms of Sieromco and Sierra Rutile approached Special Projects Service Limited (SPS) in the UK to provide 400 former British military personnel to secure the mines. SPS held a recruitment reception in a hotel in Banbury, Oxfordshire, which some fifty former British Army soldiers attended, and offered US \$2 000 a week to work for SPS in Sierra Leone.⁴⁵ The Ohio-based Sierra Rutile already maintained a force of some twenty former British soldiers guarding its assets during this period.

However, given the uncertainty about the course of the war and the estimated US \$80 million cost of such an operation, both companies decided on a wait-and-see strategy. A number of

other UK-based security companies were also directly involved in pursuit of business opportunities in Sierra Leone during this period, including DSL, Control Risks, Group 4, J & P Security Limited and Rapport Research and Analysis Limited.⁴⁶

The departure of GSG from the country in April 1995 coincided with the arrival of a 100-man team from Pretoria-based Executive Outcomes, which immediately began training the RSLMF. EO had sent a representative to Freetown in March to negotiate a contract with the NPRC after having been approached by the Sierra Leone government. GSG had tried in March to form a joint venture with Sandline International to work with EO in Sierra Leone, but EO showed no interest. Husher of GSG later claimed that EO won the contract because it was prepared to undertake offensive action. *“Their costs were also much less than ours because they didn’t offer their employees comprehensive insurance cover or demand an up-front fee from the government.”*⁴⁷

GSG continues to look at Sierra Leone as a potential market for its services.

Other GSG activities

GSG has also done other work in Africa. It provided a two-man team for security work in Somalia and has undertaken security consultancy work in South Africa and Zimbabwe.⁴⁸ In 1997, it was subcontracted to provide five Gurkhas as field supervisors in Bosnia for the Zimbabwean firm, Mine-Tech. This contract was won because Mine-Tech is run by former colleagues of Borlace and Husher from the Rhodesian war, Chris Pearce and Colonel Lionel Dyke.⁴⁹ However, following a spate of accidents caused by the Gurkhas, relations soured between Mine-Tech and GSG.⁵⁰ GSG is also seeking to pick up a landmine survey subcontract in Sudan from the Nairobi-based NGO, Operation Save Innocent Lives and Canadian CAMEO.

Immediately after the Gulf War, GSG provided Gurkha engineering teams to assist British weapons manufacturer, Royal Ordnance with landmine and UXO clearance of the British sector in Kuwait. GSG deployed three teams for seven months, during which they cleared 258 000 separate pieces of ordnance. GSG has also provided the Cambodia Mines Action Committee with a managed team of Gurkha EOD instructors for six months and conducted a survey of a route through Cambodia and Vietnam which cuts across the ‘Ho-Chi Minh trail’.⁵¹

GSG splits

In March 1994, GSG split following a meeting in a hotel at Batumbeng in Nepal between Major John Titley, Matt Matulewicz, a consultant for Maggie Peacock Working Dogs Limited (MPWD) and Marc Ranson who decided to form a new firm, Special Gurkha Services Limited (SGS), with an office in Kathmandu. The dispute was over management practices, money and the choice of clients. Initially, SGS encountered difficulties in recruiting Gurkhas in Nepal, and Titley and Matulewicz were detained briefly by local officials.⁵² In August 1995, the UN awarded a contract to SGS to provide five field-level supervisors for its Accelerated Demining Programme in Mozambique. In 1998, SGS had five Gurkhas employed in Mozambique, two

in Laos and two in Angola. The company also won a \$350 000 contract to clear landmines and other unexploded ordnance in Taiwan in 1998.⁵³ SGS is involved with the French NGO, Handicap International, in developing their 'proximity demining programme' in Mozambique.

GSG in trouble

GSG attracted much unfavourable publicity in the British press in early 1995 on account of its Sierra Leone contract. Husher and Borlace attempted to limit the damage by trying to transform GSG into a non-profit organisation. They also hoped that this would help to restore the legitimacy of the operation. In 1994, GSG claimed to support two charitable trusts, the GSG Trust and a Gurkha charity, the Goorkha Trust, which were to fund a variety of aid projects in Nepal. A percentage of the company profits were to be paid into these trusts annually, but the two initiatives remained dormant. In July 1995, GSG relaunched its GSG EOD Trust, naming several British-based development NGOs, such as the Jaipur Limb Campaign and Save the Children Fund, as recipients of donations made by the Trust from contracts awarded. Without their permission, these NGOs were also named in a GSG project proposal sent to the EU. All the NGOs subsequently requested that their names should be withdrawn from the proposal, a request that GSG adhered to.⁵⁴

In September 1997, GSG issued a statement after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, calling for international attention to the landmine problem in Angola. "... [M]aybe now it is possible," the GSG spokesperson wrote, "to mobilise the British public in a campaign to put a stop to this. It would be a way of providing a positive and practical tribute to Diana." The statement attracted unfavourable comment from The Observer newspaper which remarked:

"Concern on the part of GSG would seem entirely laudable. Its job is to find employment for thousands of Nepalese Gurkhas who served in the British Army until they were pensioned off under the last government's Options for Change proposals. As many Gurkhas were trained in explosive disposal, they are ideally suited to the job.

*If only GSG restricted itself to landmine clearance. Just over two years ago, it signed a contract to supply 58 Gurkhas to the military dictatorship in Sierra Leone under Captain Valentine Strasser ... Both GSG and the Sierra Leone government were non-committal about the role of the Gurkhas. But when troops attacked a rebel base deep in the jungle, putting at risk British hostages and killing a number of guerrillas, they were certainly in attendance."*⁵⁵

By 1998, GSG had failed to attract any significant business and remained *de facto* a 'letterhead company'. In December 1998, Husher sent an e-mail about the Canadian Association for Mine and Explosive Ordnance (CAMEO) stating that:⁵⁶

"The Board of Directors of The Canadian Association for Mine and Explosive Ordnance (CAMEO) Security have asked me to express their particular pleasure and satisfaction at the excellent response CAMEO has received from all those with whom it has worked since its incorporation as a non-profit Society in May 1997 and its registration as a Charitable Organization by Revenue Canada."

Husher clearly saw more value in marketing CAMEO than GSG, which had continued to fail to attract any serious business since the Sierra Leone debacle. Meanwhile, Borlace appears to be working with the airwing of Sandline International in Sierra Leone.

Defence Systems Limited

Defence Systems Limited⁵⁷ was founded in 1981 by Alistair Morrison, a former SAS officer who was experienced in operating in hostile environments, and realised the demand for such services.⁵⁸ For much of the 1990s, DSL was associated with the Hambros Bank.

In April 1997, DSL was bought by a US firm, Armor Holdings.⁵⁹ The take-over transaction accounted for a pooling of interests valued at \$7,6 million in cash for all preferred shares and \$10,9 million in stock (Armor also assumed \$7,5 million in debt). DSL's revenues for 1996 were reported at \$33,1 million in annual pro forma revenue, and it had more than 5 000 employees worldwide throughout South America, Africa and Southeast Asia, of which only 100 had access to firearms.

Today, the company has over 130 contracts with 115 clients in 22 countries. The company is mostly composed of former British special forces officers. DSL claims that it "... *never gets involved in other people's wars. It's simply not an aspect of our business, and business is good.*"⁶⁰

GSG had a contract for several years to provide Gurkhas for DSL, but it was cancelled at the end of 1994.⁶¹ DSL continued to work with Titley after the split within GSG, saying that he was their main contact and SGS, the company to which he was affiliated, was regarded as reputable.

DSL has used Gurkhas in a number of African countries, including Angola and Mozambique. It was approached in 1992 by the UN to deploy 7 000 Gurkhas to protect NGO relief convoys in Somalia from threats posed by the warlords. However, after an assessment mission, DSL decided that it could not successfully undertake the contract. It admits that the company's use of Gurkhas in Africa has not been a success. David Abbot, a director of DSL, said:⁶²

"Gurkhas have not been a success in Africa. Culturally and otherwise they are not good. We have found that they are much more successful in the Gulf, which has a strong tradition of foreign personnel in the asset security business. We do not see much future in their deployment in Africa."

Unlike GSG, DSL is a leader in the wider private security market and the employment of Gurkhas was only a tiny part of its services on offer to clients.

DSL began providing security and logistical personnel to the UN mission in the former Yugoslavia in 1992, becoming the largest contractor to this mission with at least 430 personnel by February 1995. The firm was also approached by the Papua New Guinea government in the mid-1990s to assist in establishing a paramilitary police force for the

country. The contract was never concluded due to a lack of funds on the part of the government, but DSL chairman, Alistair Morrison, recommended Sandline International to Papua New Guinea.⁶³

DSL has been involved in protecting British Petroleum (BP) oil interests against guerrilla attacks in Colombia for a number of years. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), DSL protects installations belonging to the SOCIR oil refinery of Congo-SEP (the Belgian Petrofina's subsidiary), as well as the US Embassy. Other DSL clients in Africa have been De Beers (DRC), Andarko Petroleum (Algeria), Anglo American (Mali) and Chevron (Angola); as well as NGOs such as CARE and Goal. DSL claims experience in Angola, Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Somalia and Uganda.

DSL's core business is to devise and subsequently implement solutions to complex security problems. It is contracted to the US State Department for the provision of security to high risk embassies, as well as to other diplomatic clients such as the British High Commission in Uganda. DSL has subsidiaries in Washington DC (US Defense Systems), Singapore (DSL Security Asia), Hong Kong (JSGS), Colombia (DSC), Peru (DSP), the Republic of Congo, South Africa (DSL Systems Africa), Russia and Kazakhstan (Gorondel Trading), and has offices in the former Yugoslavia, Uganda and Mozambique.

DSL and Angola

Although in limited numbers, DSL has continued to use Gurkhas. It ran a high profile operation in Angola from late 1991, where some 25 per cent of its clients had interests.⁶⁴ Its security personnel guarded embassies, oil and diamond companies and a number of NGOs. On 24 December 1997, the Angolan government issued a decree which ordered all foreigners working for DSL to leave the country, citing a law of 1992, which, according to the Interior Ministry, made it illegal to run security companies under an entirely foreign management. The ministry claimed that DSL had contravened the law relating to the registration of public enterprise security companies (PESC) by concluding contracts with foreign corporate nationals directly through London rather than through DSL's Angolan subsidiary.

DSL's chief executive in Luanda, Richard Bethell, requested clients in a letter dated 15 January 1998 to put contingency plans in place. The expulsion involved 103 expatriate DSL personnel, 45 of them Gurkhas. Luanda claimed at the time, that DSL and its Gurkhas were 'mercenaries' and were undermining the Lusaka Peace Accords.⁶⁵ The expulsion of DSL from Angola had been on the cards for some time. The company had made little effort to indigenise its workforce and management, or to find a strong local patron in government. It had been threatened with expulsion a number of times by senior government officials. It appears that senior Angolan officials believed they could profit from running a DSL-type operation themselves with Angolans and moved against DSL. The company initially attempted to transfer its assets to the South African-based firm, Gray Security Services, which had a joint venture training agreement with the registered public enterprise security *Tele Service Sociedade de Telecomunicações, Segurança e Serviços* (TeleServices). This did not

happen, and ISDS, a firm with links to Gray Security, took over the daily running of this operation as DSL-Angola with a management core composed of Israelis. DSL's loss of the Angolan business translated into US \$12 million in revenue and approximately \$1 million in gross profit.

DSL mishandled its operation in Angola, but it was also the victim of the domination of the private security business by a number of senior MPLA government military and security officials. There is fierce competition in the security market in Angola, with some security firms concluding joint ventures with Angolan partners – usually senior Angolan officials who are paid hefty dollar salaries to sit on the local companies' boards of directors.⁶⁶ There are about ninety registered security firms in Angola, of which two of them – TeleServices and Alpha 5 – dominate the market.⁶⁷ Both firms are controlled by senior Angolan officials and are able to divert police and officers of the *Forças Armadas Angolanas* (FAA) into their operations if it is deemed appropriate.

DSL threatened the expansion of this *de facto* monopoly and had to be evicted. Despite joint ventures, the quality of security protection has deteriorated in some cases and the costs have risen. The attack by armed insurgents on the Yetwene diamond mine in November 1998 was made easy by lax security and subsequent looting of the mine by TeleServices personnel responsible for the mine's security, aggravated the security situation in Angola even further.⁶⁸

Conclusion

GSG was a typical example of a small private security firm dependent upon a limited number of key individuals. Its work for Lonrho in Mozambique appears to have been professional, although it was possibly assisted in its job by Lonrho's protection payments to high-ranking officials. Once GSG lost Lonrho as a patron, it quickly fell upon hard times. GSG's entry into mercenary activities in Sierra Leone followed the loss of Lonrho as a client and a destructive split in the company. A clear lesson from GSG is that small private security firms, with little capacity to see them through difficult financial circumstances, may be more inclined to engage in mercenary-type activity in order to remain viable.

GSG has damaged its reputation beyond repair and has failed to attract any serious work since. Its attempt to bury this episode and break into the more ethically-driven NGO market for mine clearance has also failed because of its negative image. By December 1998, GSG remained little more than a letterhead with Husher preferring to be seen as part of the Canadian mine clearance NGO, CAMEO, and Borlace working in Sierra Leone for Sandline International. GSG's offshoot, SGS has been more successful, setting itself up as a mine clearance and EOD specialist firm.

GSG's lack of commercial success, following its Sierra Leone debacle, is also the result of a number of other factors. Its loss of a significant patron hurt, and failure in Sierra Leone made it an unattractive proposition, compared to firms like Executive Outcomes. GSG is also attempting to compete in the wider security market where there appears to be increasing competition and less room for generalist expatriate firms offering a wide portfolio of services.

GSG's specialisation in deploying Gurkhas was a clear weakness as the emphasis is firmly on indigenisation in the late 1990s. Many African governments see this as a key indicator of positive social impact, especially as they downsize their militaries and experience serious unemployment crises. In such circumstances, the use of Gurkhas can be seen as patronising and possibly racist. The expulsion of DSL from Angola was partly due to its poor efforts to 'Angolanise' its staff and the Gurkhas were a high profile advertisement of this failure. The future trend is to have joint ventures with local partners where a small number of expatriate staff are involved. The challenge will be to ensure international standards and best practice in such ventures. Work for Gurkhas in Africa will become increasingly rare.

Endnotes

- 1 The Gurkhas first served with the British in 1816, after the East India Company was granted the right to raise local troops in Nepal to serve in the Company's Army. They served in two world wars and numerous colonial conflicts. After Indian Independence in 1947, the Gurkhas were split between the British and Indians, with four out of ten regiments remaining under British control.
- 2 The wastage rate of Gurkha recruits in the British military is almost nil, that for British recruits is between 25 and 34 per cent. The Gurkhas' level of fitness is also superior to that of the average British recruit.
- 3 J G H Corrigan, Major, Royal Gurkha Rifles, *Letter*, The Times, London, 5 January 1998.
- 4 US News and World Report, 121(26), 30 December 1996.
- 5 GSG, GSG Limited: International Security, brochure, no date.
- 6 M Borlace, Interview, London, March 1994.
- 7 Gurkha soldier, Interview, Mozambique, June 1993.
- 8 RUF former combatant, Interview, London, October 1997.
- 9 Angolan official, Interview, June 1998.
- 10 Gurkha soldier, op. cit.
- 11 GSG, brochure, op. cit.
- 12 GSG, GSG Limited: Company Profile, no date.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 GSG also offers a range of other managed services such as road, bridge, and airfield reconstruction teams, and logistical support services in remote hostile parts of the world. It also advertises the provision of skilled and artisan personnel able to operate in a range of fields: pilots, paramedics, plumbers, bricklayers, heavy goods vehicle drivers, vehicle mechanics, electricians, water engineers, camp managers, heavy-plant operators.
- 15 GSG refused to provide these names when requested.
- 16 Gurkhas, Interviews, employed by GSG, SGS, and DSL, Beira, June 1994; Maputo, May 1997; Luanda, January 1996.
- 17 Ibid.

- 18 See A Vines, *The Business of Peace: 'Tiny' Rowland, Financial Incentives and the Mozambican Settlement*, Accord: The Mozambican Peace Process in Perspective, 3, 1998.
- 19 L Crawford, *When Managers Carry Guns*, Financial Times, London, 25 May 1994.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 A Vines, Renamo: From Terrorism to Democracy in Mozambique?, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, and James Currey, Oxford, 1996, pp. 144-145.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Lonrho personnel, Interviews, Maputo, October 1994.
- 24 GSG, Profile, op. cit.
- 25 GSG, GSG Ltd. Land Mine Clearance Mozambique Contract Completion Report, 1994.
- 26 Human Rights Watch, Still Killing: Landmines in Southern Africa, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1997.
- 27 Oderbrecht, Information, July 1997.
- 28 *Gurkha-diamond Row Rocks Angola*, Africa Analysis, 14 July 1995.
- 29 V Joynt, Communication, Director, Mechem, Johannesburg, March 1998.
- 30 MacKenzie was also the husband of Sybil Cline, the daughter of a former director of operations at the US Central Intelligence Agency, Ray Cline. MacKenzie knew Borlace and Husher from their Rhodesian days.
- 31 A Husher, Interview, London, 16 December 1997.
- 32 *Would Diana Approve?*, The Observer, London, 5 October 1997.
- 33 GSG, Profile, op. cit.
- 34 J Hooper, *Nation to Ransom*, The Sunday Telegraph, London, 12 March 1995.
- 35 Husher, 1997, op. cit.
- 36 A Husher, Letter to Jaipur Limb Campaign, 11 August 1995.
- 37 Hooper, 1995, op. cit.
- 38 Husher, 1997, op. cit.
- 39 US Department of State, Sierra Leone: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1995, US Government Printer, Washington DC, 1996, p. 232.
- 40 K Peters & P Richards, *Why We Fight: Voices Of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone*, unpublished manuscript, Working Group on Technology and Agrarian Development, Wageningen Agricultural University, Netherlands, 1997.
- 41 T Ripley, Mercenaries: Soldiers of Fortune, Paragon, Bristol, 1997.
- 42 Ibid., p. 82.
- 43 Husher, 1997, op. cit.

- 44 J Sambona, *British Mercenaries Shore up Sierra Leone*, New African, June 1995.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 J Hooper, *Sierra Leone – The War Continues*, Jane's Intelligence Review, January 1996.
- 47 Husher, 1997, op. cit.
- 48 GSG, Profile, op. cit.
- 49 L Dyke (retired Colonel), *Natural Born Soldiers: Interview*, Moto, Harare, June/July 1995.
- 50 C Pearce, Interview, Johannesburg, March 1998.
- 51 GSG, Profile, op. cit.
- 52 SGS staff, Interviews, London, December 1997.
- 53 *By Unearthing Mines, Taiwan Buries its Past*, Asian Times, 24 March 1998.
- 54 GSG, Letter to Jaipur Limb Campaign, 22 August 1995.
- 55 The Observer, 5 October 1997, op. cit.
- 56 A Husher, *New Premises for Cameo*, Email Communication, 6 December 1998.
- 57 DSL attracted controversy over its training of local police for BP in Colombia in 1996. BP had signed an agreement with the National Police units assigned to protect oil rigs. Members of these police units were suspected human rights abusers. See Human Rights Watch, *Colombia: Human Rights Concerns Raised by the Security Arrangements of Transnational Oil Companies*, Human Rights Watch Short Report, April 1998; see also *Corporations and Human Rights*, Human Rights Watch World Report 1999, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1998, pp. 456-457.
- 58 Morrison (55) made his name leading the famous SAS rescue of a hijacked Lufthansa plane at Mogadishu Airport in 1977.
- 59 Armor Holdings Incorporated is a leading provider of security products and services for law enforcement, government agencies and multinational corporations around the world. Founded in 1969 as American Body Armor & Equipment Inc., the company primarily manufactured armoured products until a controlling interest was acquired by Kandors Florida Holdings in January 1996. Since this time, Armor Holdings has made five strategic acquisitions which has broadened the company's product offering, expanded its distribution network, and facilitated entry into security services.
- 60 D Abbot, Interview, London, November 1998.
- 61 In 1993, GSG entered into an agreement with Jardines in Hong Kong under which GSG recruited, vetted and selected Gurkhas in Nepal and arranged for their travel to Hong Kong where Jardines took over. Over 400 Gurkhas were successfully employed in Hong Kong.
- 62 Abbot, op. cit.
- 63 S Dorney, The Sandline Affair: Politics and Mercenaries and the Bougainville Crisis, ABC Books, Sydney, 1998, pp. 105-106.
- 64 According to DSL, the profits from Angola were lower given the high operational cost there. DSL, Interview, London, 10 July 1998.
- 65 *Angola-Mercenaries*, Sapa-DPA, Lisbon, 16 January 1998.

- 66 Monthly Review Bulletin, February 1998.
- 67 Gray Security Services entered into a joint venture with Alpha 5 after an initial relationship with Saracen Security, a firm linked to Executive Outcomes. Gray's main market is South Africa, although it has expanded through joint ventures into Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. It claims to operate under the code of practice of the International Standards Organisation, the body that sets standards for industrial enterprises.
- 68 I Gilmore & C Dignan, *Diamond Fever – British Victims of Africa's Billion Dollar War*, The Sunday Times, London, 15 November 1998.