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Global Warmongers: The Threat Posed by Transnational Private Security Firms

Global Studies Capstone Project Report

Taylor Rivers

8 May 2020

Dr. Kathryn Poethig and Dr. Richard Harris

Introduction

Towards the end of the 20th century, the privatization of governmental operations became the norm, and an abundance of multinational private corporations to fulfill certain governmental functions. This included the privatization of formal - public services, including internal security and public safety, which have contributed to the erosion of the authority and power of the nation-state. Governments, businesses, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, individuals, and communities have all turned to the private sector for their security needs (Small 2006, 4). These governments search for an easily accessible option to a rapidly changing security situation within their country. A struggling state trying to protect and secure their citizens, may look to the private sector for guaranteed results. However, as a state takes these controversial measures towards the privatization of security, they overlook the downfall of their own sovereignty. This report focuses on the dangers of privatizing state functions such as the maintenance of internal security. The report contends that the use of mercenaries by private transnational security firms is illegitimate for providing security within the nation-state.

According to the United Nations, mercenaries and private military forces can destabilize a country, rendering the state helpless and ineffective. Private security firms are considered to be detrimental to the foundation of the internal security of a state. The implementation of private security companies within low-intensity conflict zones. For the fortification of their internal security, the states preferred to give up part of their responsibilities in the hands of private entities (Piątek 2017, 120). Governments were having trouble defeating rebel insurgencies within

their country, due to a lack of experience, hardware, and overall military leadership. As these private security companies began to establish themselves as legitimate corporations, they provided a form of privatized security, with the supposed intention of aiding these struggling nations with snuffing out rebel insurgencies. Broadly speaking a private security firm is an entity that offers services aimed at addressing security concerns through a variety of security engagements. The word 'security' in this context is used in the most general sense (Baker 2007, 3). These conflict-ridden governments targeted, were African nations with an abundance of natural resources. During the 1990's, transnational private companies have expanded the demand for outside security forces. They offer military and police services that were previously the preserve of the state (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2007, 2).

The creation of the private security industry enabled the development of outside vested interest in the continent of Africa. From the perspective of the United Nations, mercenary activity is a violation of the principles of sovereign equality, political independence and territorial integrity of member states (Brayton 2002, 304). Ultimately, these outside entities utilized their power, wealth, and influence, to undermine the autonomy of these African nations. The seemingly obvious and simple solution that African states need to be strengthened and their public monopoly control on the use of force re-established (Leander 2005, 606). To do so, the international community needs to show an interest in creating a safe and secure environment for these citizens, through productive collaboration with government officials. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the activities of private security firms are pervasive in modern societies (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007, 239).

Private security companies, more often than not, search for security contracts where these low-intensity conflict zones happen to be situated, often near a large abundance of some form of

lucrative natural resources. This can be tied to the connectedness between prolonged conflict, shadow economic activity, governmental corruption, and private security contracts. Government assets in many countries often find their way into the private pockets of these individuals (Reno 2000, 440). Institutionalization of the link between war and resource extraction has not only increased the opportunity for corruption; it fosters it by providing motivation for independent actors to protect the conditions that help them amass fortune (Sherman 2000, 710).

I became interested in this topic as a result of reading an interesting article about a fifty-eight-year-old South African mercenary who was caught fighting Boko-Haram insurgents in Nigeria. From this article, I began learning about South African mercenaries in other parts of Africa. This led me to take an increased approach to researching private security companies that are used by certain governments in Africa. And this interest evolved into an emphasis on the effects these private security firms have on national security and national sovereignty.

Literature Review

As the Cold War ended, African governments locked into long drawn out intrastate conflicts decided to look for a new solution. These governments sought to hire private security firms to strengthen their internal security issues. The Cold War offered a global playing field for the United States of America and the Soviet Union to implement their specific ideologies onto states. After the proxy wars and military assistance provided by the USA and Soviet Union ceased, these nations began to struggle with their own national security issues, unleashing suppressed structured tensions within these nations. The bi-polarized rival structures that had upheld weak and fragile states, as well as suppressing ingrained ethnic, religious, and other ideational tensions, when unshackled, proved vicious (Small 2006, 21). Promoted the creation of

rebel organizations who opposed the sovereignty of the nation. Illuminating the government's inability to maintain sovereign control, rebel groups started instigating long drawn out intrastate conflicts. A new type of mercenary army emerged and transformed the economic value of intrastate conflicts. These are the conflicts between a state government and an armed group. And are more commonly referred to as internal conflict or civil war. During the 1990s several companies termed "international security firms" or "private military companies" sprung up to service this demand (Adams 1998, 1). Emerging private security companies began to control the private security sector in the early 90s by obtaining security contracts handed to them by conflict-ridden governments, who needed an outside security force to provide weapons, training, or other forms of strategic military advice. Many companies thrive off conflict, whether through supplying military hardware to armed forces or running mercenary armies on behalf of combatant states (Mathieu and Dearden 2007, 745).

During the 1990s, the South African private security sector remained the fastest growing industry in South Africa and accordingly, the ratio of private security officers to every uniformed police member stands at 2:1 (Gumedze 2007, 17). I have found this topic to contain a great significance to the understanding of corporate violence, and the systems in place that allow for the presence of private security firms to contract private mercenaries to continue their monopolization of the security industry and violence in Africa. Their material capabilities are evident in the sheer size of the companies, and the financial, technological, and organizational resources they are able to mobilize (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009, 5). Mercenaries can be expected to become significant players in private, group, and corporate conflict, increasingly so if social destabilization increases, degrading the protective and policing capabilities of states (Adams 1999, 1). If overlooked by global entities, this newfound private sector could utilize its

power to undermine a nation's ability to self-govern and provide adequate security for its people. These naturalize the nation-state system and conceal the increasingly transnational character of social power relations, including how the disciplinary politics of global governance are framed and practiced (Berger and Weber 2006, 203). Following the new era of privatized mercenary work, was the formation of a wealthy industry that relies on the constant presence of intrastate war in the global south.

Historically, the monopolization of violence has been a resource. Since the nineteenth century, the norm of state monopoly of force has concentrated the legitimate ownership of allocating, and decision making about the means of violence in the hands of the state (Petersohn 2014, 476). Private mercenary companies came to be because of a post-Cold War era that offered a new playing field for intrastate conflicts. Where States can no longer control the private violence in their territories, alternative military or paramilitary entities will usurp this function (Sapone 1999, 19).

The privatization of state-owned violence through the security industry is a challenge to state-centrism. The growing trend internationally towards the privatisation of security and the outsourcing of state functions typifies the steady erosion of the state monopoly over all forms of organised violence (Small 2006, 4). Given that most definitions of the state centre on the monopoly of the means of violence, it is not surprising that the rise of private security actors tends to be interpreted as a loss of, or threat to, state power (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007, 238). State-centrism is the idea that state sovereignty and autonomy remain a crucial pillar in the foundation of the nation-state makeup. This phenomenon has changed the traditional role of the state dramatically in that it affects the state's traditional monopoly on the means and resources of violence that distinguished it from all other social formations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2007, 2).

Private security companies challenge this foundational pillar by undercutting a state's ability to foster genuine security measurements to protect their citizens, and by hindering economic development by preying on countries with bountiful natural resources within low-intensity conflict zones. Mercenary activities tremendously undermined state power, ie the private face of sovereignty that served the vested interests of the few that control state power (Francis 1999, 321).

Shadow economic theory surrounding private military/security entities helps to showcase how corporate-sponsored soldiers maintain the interests of their benefactors. Although mineral exploitation is not the motive behind all private military activity, it clearly has been the driving factor in countries such as Sierra Leone and Angola (Brayton 2002, 110). The shadow economy refers to economic activity that falls outside the purview of government accounting and is known by various names: shadow, informal, underground, hidden, clandestine, or illegal. (Farrell, Fleming, and Roman 2000, 387). Within specific security contracts that the governments of Angola and Sierra Leone granted to certain private security companies required that these governments hand over their natural resource concessions. South African private security company Executive Outcomes became a household name by indulging in shadow economic activity in Angola and Sierra Leone. Branch Energy acquired the Kono diamond mining rights, thereby confirming diamond mining concessions as part of the payment. Further justification could be found in the military government's decree that granted the concession to Branch Energy (Francis 1999, 331).

The trend is now for private corporations to actively reach out and "establish" governments that will then make their decision with an eye first on corporate interests so that instead of a country's citizens, foreign shareholders become the real basis of sovereignty (Francis

1999, 323). Although many of these nations may see these mercenaries as a legitimate form of outsourced security, they do not assess the eventual damage, destruction, extraction, and death that follows these unethical war machines. The black markets and informal economies that have proliferated in states destabilized by an economic and political transition, conflict and social upheaval (Sherman 2000, 700). Payment for such support may well have derived from profits drawn from activities more closely associated with the shadow economy of these countries, rather than through normal economic activities. (Kinsey 2006, 111). Receiving payment for security measures through illicit gains can be closely associated with undermining a nation's ability to develop through access to their natural resources.

Theoretical framework

For my theoretical framework, I have two theories to support my argument. First, I apply the concept of state-centrism to highlight the importance of state-sovereignty and how it can be challenged by the use of private security firms. State centrism theory stresses the involvement of state within society. These phenomena undeniably have an impact on the state's grip on non-state actors which has, in turn, a potential impact on the respect of human rights (De Brabandere 2009, 3). A citizen of a state should be guaranteed security and economic development by their government. This is challenged by private security companies when governments allow these security companies to use any means necessary to complete the task at hand. As such, populations across the globe have gradually come to expect that the state ought to monopolize domestic security provision and, by extension, to regard any institution which appears to undermine this monopoly as immoral and unjust (White 2011, 89). If a nation decides to use a private contractor for a state-controlled asset, such as security, violence, or economic development, they should consider the eventual damage they are causing by hiring these outside

consultants to handle something that the state should handle themselves. The understanding of the state-centrism theory is pivotal to identifying the plight of individuals living in states that employ private security firms.

To frame and examine the global context, I apply William Robinson's notion of the privatization of war, including his reference identification of the range of clients that employ private security firms and their motives and reasons for doing so. According to Robinson, one of the reasons state's employ private security firms (PSFs) is to open up access to economic resources and corporate investment opportunities — deployed, for instance, to mining areas and oil fields — leading Singer to term PSFs “investment enablers.” PSF clients include states, corporations, landowners, nongovernmental organizations (Robinson, 2020: 3). Globally, private security firms are recognized as a service that belongs to the highest bidder, no matter the morality of their employer. Which leads many to question the legality of this business.

Secondly, my usage of shadow economic theory, with intention to showcase how private security firms can often dictate these economies. Unquestionably, the shadow economy represents some form of unofficial economy (Farrell, Flemming and Roman 2000, 389). PSF's enable other corporations to ‘safely’ conduct their business abroad. Secondly, I will be using the shadow economic theory throughout this report, to emphasize how private security companies destabilize the state, by conducting their targeted affairs in areas with a high abundance of easily accessible resources. In countries such as Sierra Leone and Angola, private security companies would secure areas with a high concentration of diamonds, oil, or lumber. The lure of rich resources and the risks of exploiting them in unstable areas are powerful incentives for companies to maintain stability in weak states (Shearer 1998, 72). In Africa, these unstable nations contain a large amount of potential for economic growth by effectively accessing their

natural resources. However, private security companies only see these nations as having a 'natural resource curse'. So, they decide to take it upon themselves to make these areas safe for outside investment. Such private security firms specialize in secondary tasks not part of the overall core mission of the client which constitutes the largest sector in scope and revenue (Singer 2008, 97).

Methodology

For the understanding of this research project, the research was gathered through several scholarly outlets, most notably the California State University library database, as well as other databases including google scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate. The preparatory research and general interest in this research topic were collected in the fall of 2019 through the guidance of the global studies staff at California State University Monterey Bay. Thus, ending my research in February of 2020. Upon gathering my preliminary research, I began to utilize various secondary sources to establish a level of compression on the topic regarding private security companies and their intrusive behavioral tactics in Sierra Leone and Angola.

I chose to use an illustrative and comparative approach to analyze the two cases. Illustrative case studies are primarily descriptive. They typically utilize one or more instances of a particular phenomenon. Illustrative case studies serve primarily to make the unfamiliar familiar and to give readers a common language to use in discussing and explaining the subject in question (Colorado State University 1993-2020).

I have used qualitative data and both historical as well as comparative analysis to examine the effects of privatizing internal security in developing countries, which is usually a national government function. I decided to focus on the historical context as well as the contemporary importance of the private security firms in both Angola and Sierra Leone. Why I

chose these two countries is because of their similar histories involving private security firms. Typically, a comparison of two cases is used to show the difference, but for my report, I chose to use two cases that are similar to showcases two states that used the same private security companies to strengthen their weakened internal security. With a group being pushed into power, post-independence from colonial rule, created a multi-party system, each with a strong following. This led to multiple instances of conflict, which caused the two governments to hire private security firms to enhance security measures within their respective states. Both of these nations had ongoing intrastate conflicts, and both nations had an abundance of natural resources located near conflict zones.

I found both primary as well as secondary sources, including U.N reports and other official documents on the activities of both the national governmental and non-state actors involved in internal security in these two countries. I also found other primary and secondary sources that provided peer-reviewed information and analysis on private security firms.

Discussion of Findings

Throughout my research process, I have found two similar cases regarding the implementation of private security firms, and their benefactors. In this section, I am conducting a comparative case study between Sierra Leone and Angola, while showcasing the connection to my theoretical framework and relevance to my thesis. As stated previously in this report, there are dangers to privatizing state functions such as the maintenance of internal security. The report contends that the use of mercenaries by private transnational security firms is illegitimate for providing security within the nation-state.

Providing two comparative examples that strengthen my overall argument, pertaining to the destructive nature of intrusive entities in Sierra Leone and Angola. Comparative case studies

usually utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods and are particularly useful for understanding how the context influences the success of an intervention and how better to tailor the intervention to the specific context to achieve the intended outcomes (Goodrick 2014, 1). My utilization of a comparative form of analysis, rather than a single case study analysis, gives my research a multifaceted comparative approach to better understanding my two examples. The comparative case study approach—that attends simultaneously to global, national, and local dimensions of case-based research (Bartlett & Vavru 2017, 10).

Both States became synonymous with intrastate conflicts, abundance of natural resources, and security contracts. Throughout this section of my report, Comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal in a way that produces knowledge that is easier to generalize about causal questions (Goodrick 2014, 1). I compared private security companies such as Executive Outcomes and Sandline International, and how they played an important role in the internal security of Sierra Leone and Angola.

In regard to the two cases, both showcase the effects of private security firms. Sierra Leone and Angola, rather than empowering the state, the engagement of PSFs has been an obstacle to the development of the state's capacity to control and manage its national natural resources (Gumedze 2005, 5). Large deposits of attainable resources such as oil, diamonds, ore, timber, etc, have caught the eyes of transnational resource companies, who want the safety of the particular regions for resource extraction in these regions. As I stated previously, transnational corporations chose to invest in these two regions because of their desperate need for a short-term security solution and their abundance of diamonds and other resources.

Angola

Angola's drive for independence from Portugal came to fruition in the early 1970's, at the height of the Cold War. It was seen by the Soviet Union as an opportunity to spread socialism to developing countries, build a sphere of influence and create a bloc in opposition to the West, while the US government feared a communist takeover of the African continent. During their struggle for independence, Angola had separate revolutionary groups. Later on, one of these groups gained power in Angola, causing ongoing civil unrest in Angola. The groups included the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The Soviet Union and Cuba provided military support to the MPLA, which identified itself as a socialist group, while the FNLA and the UNITA were backed by South Africa and the United States (Ogunbadejo 1981, 20). Each of the three forces fought the Portuguese, as well as each other during their battle for independence. Political mobilisation among the urban élite, who supported the MPLA since 1975 has been a function of this feeling of superiority to, and fear of the pretos/mutumbas (pejorative terms for non-assimilado black Angolans) and supporters of the FNLA and UNITA (Cleary 2015, 143). Therefore, it will be impossible to build a sustainable peace in Angola without confronting this core reality. This was a precursor for the instability and bloodshed to come. Also, the ethnic divides in Angola are deep seeded, this included the Ambundu, Ovimbundu, and Bakongo tribes, each supported by different states. Thus, causing political and ethnic friction in Angola.

Before the outbreak of intense violence in Sierra Leone unfolded, the private military organization Executive Outcomes was contracted by the Angolan MPLA government to take control over a section of the country from UNITA supporters. In the early 1990's, for the first

time in Angola's history, UNITA party members were elected to seats in the Angolan government. An intrastate conflict followed this election, where UNITA forces were once again pitted against MLPA forces.

A situation, which would later become similar to the one in Sierra Leone, Angola offered a lucrative contract to Executive Outcomes. With the intention of defeating UNITA forces, Executive Outcomes became a constant presence in Angola. For this, EO is believed to have been paid in the region of \$40 million a year for two years by the Angolan Government (Harding 1997, 89). A majority of UNITA's earnings came through their organizations sales of diamonds. Ultimately, this fueled their operation, and without their access to the Angolan diamond mines, UNITA would have had a hard time maintaining their objectives. During the peak of UNITA, they reportedly earned as much as US\$600 million annually from illicit sales of diamonds (Reno 2000, 433).

Private security firms knew there was a large monetary gain to be made in intrastate conflict zones. Companies such as Executive Outcomes and their web of corporate ties, made this a priority. In addition to direct payments, EO, its parents and affiliates sometimes received mining and energy concessions from Angola (Sapone 1999, 18). Diamonds, once again, being at the forefront of the private security industry. The benefits beyond the base pay for their services, is a driving force for their interests in the continent. What little was left of Angola's economy after their destructive civil war was destroyed between 1992 and the end of 1994. The GDP declined by seventy per cent over three years; total external debt, as a percentage of GDP, almost quadrupled, as did military spending, while social expenditure was halved (Cleary 2015, 147). With a majority of their mining areas handed over to Executive Outcomes through their lucrative contracts, Angolans little to none of this money re-enter their economy.

Furthermore, Executive Outcomes involvement in Angola, was seen to be the blueprint on how to conduct private security operations in the post-cold war era. Later came the insurrection in Sierra Leone, where Executive Outcomes saw an opportunity to duplicate their monetary success. Development in Angola was stifled from the beginning, as outside influences have always disregarded Angolans their right to complete sovereignty. With little to no control over their country, Angola fell victim to the lure of an easy and quick security solution, without taking into consideration the corrosive nature of private security firms and their benefactors.

Sierra Leone

After Sierra Leone gained its independence from Britain in 1961, the government began a long and difficult struggle to maintain total sovereignty and autonomy. There had been tensions between the “countrymen” (people from the inland “protectorate”) and the Krios in the Western Area who had had a better relationship with the colonial administration, probably because of their education and adopted European lifestyle (Kargbo, 2011). An issue that many African nations faced after independence whenever a smaller minority is placed in charge of a majority, especially, if they are placed in power by a colonial ruler, then this tends to cause a long-lasting distrust between civilians and those who hold government positions, eventually, sparking civil unrest. From the end of the nine-tenth century until independence, the most divisive ethno regional conflict in Sierra Leone pitted colony Creole elites against protectorate African elites (Kandeh, 1992).

The disenfranchised minority group in the eastern diamond mining areas of Sierra Leone, later became the founders of the infamous Revolutionary United Front (RUF). An organization which obtained their weaponry, manpower, and training through access to the diamond mines in eastern Sierra Leone. With a goal of overthrowing the corrupt and unjust Sierra Leonean

government based in Freetown, in the late 1990's these rebels began to march on Freetown, the capital, to take their country for those without a voice. Already heavily invested in its peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, and without a member of the Security Council lobbying on Sierra Leone's behalf, the UN remained unresponsive (Baker 2007, 12). With the situation escalating in the Balkans, U.N Security Council's resources were temporarily shifted their attention away from Sierra Leone, to tackle the ongoing conflict in the Balkans. This created the opportunity for the RUF forces to make their descent onto Freetown. With the U.N preoccupied; it was at this point that the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took matters into its own hands. Later on, their efforts were deemed ineffective and costly.

There was an opportunity created by the Sierra Leonean government, providing a bulk of private security contracts for eager PSF's. Contracts that were offered to the private security firm Executive Outcomes. There were people in Sierra Leone who felt strongly about EOs nose for money. At the time of this defensive contract being offered to Executive Outcomes, the EO corporation was already heavily invested in the circumstances of the Angolan intra-state conflict. Angola's circumstances were vastly similar to those of Sierra Leone, both, fighting a war within their own borders, in land that possessed valuable minerals. Globally, reporters, NGO's, and other governmental organizations, each wanted to know what Executive Outcomes was receiving for its work, how the payments were made, and how long they were likely to continue.

For example, the Executive Outcomes (EO) mission to Sierra Leone cost US\$35 million for a 21-month engagement period during which the rebels were eventually pushed out of Freetown (Small 2006, 24). A large sum of money for a 'weak state' with a troubled economic and political situation. Not to mention the other aspects of the Sierra Leone contract, which

granted Executive outcomes, a share of natural resource concessions, that (EO) later handed over to Branch energy. The EO contract not only cost the government a \$1.225 million a month salary, huge mining concessions in the Kono diamond fields were also granted to Branch Energy as a result of the contract (Francis 1999, 326). Siphoning diamonds away from the Sierra Leonean people, without investing the money back into the Sierra Leone economy. Executive Outcomes, Diamond Works, and the Branch Energy Corporation hijacked the country's ability to create a prosperous economic situation for their people. They widened the influence of the shadow economy, while undermining the state's sovereignty over the country's natural resources. These harmful practices were implemented by foreign corporations' intent on extracting large amounts of money and resources, for the benefit of other economies and states, keeping the money and resources and far from the reach of any Sierra Leonean citizen.

Conclusion

Transnational private security firms, a new concept at the end of the 20th century, have imposed themselves on developing countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone. Although deemed a short term and effective solution for internal security issues, foreign observers have connected the abrupt rise of private security firms to the dismantlement of a state's sovereignty. In an era where the privatization of the military has become the norm, an international private security industry has blossomed. Meanwhile, the private security (policing) business is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in many countries and has come to overshadow public security around the world (Robinson 2020, 4). Utilizing their power, military knowledge, and global influence, these transnational corporate security firms initialized the privatizing of the internal security industry in Sierra Leone and Angola. The discussion of my findings cemented the connection between private security firms and the expansion of shadow economies and the

erosion of national autonomy within Sierra Leone and Angola. By highlighting the effects of privatizing the protection of the private extraction of these valuable natural resources including diamonds, this led to the eventual degradation of formally state controlled commodities.

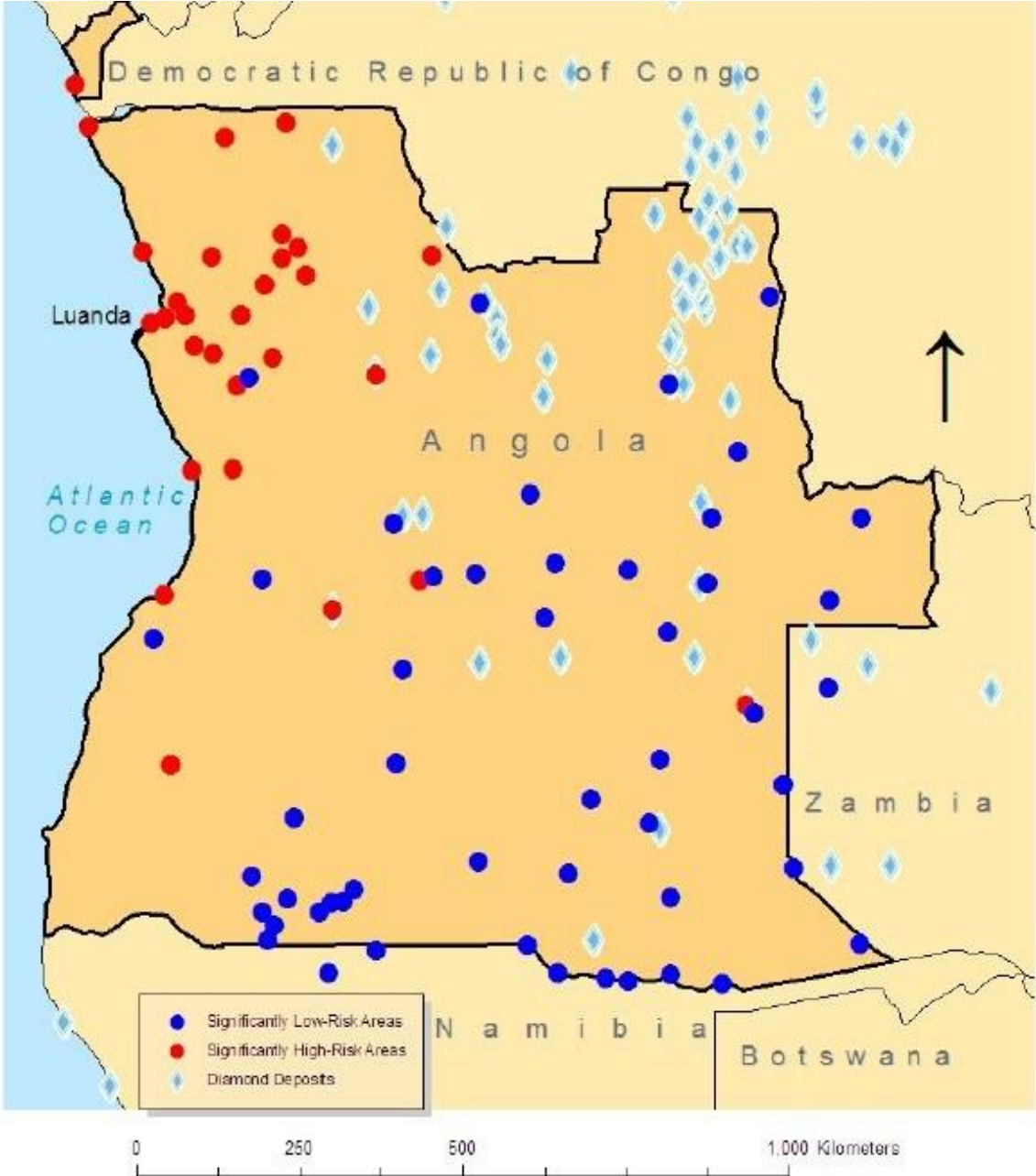
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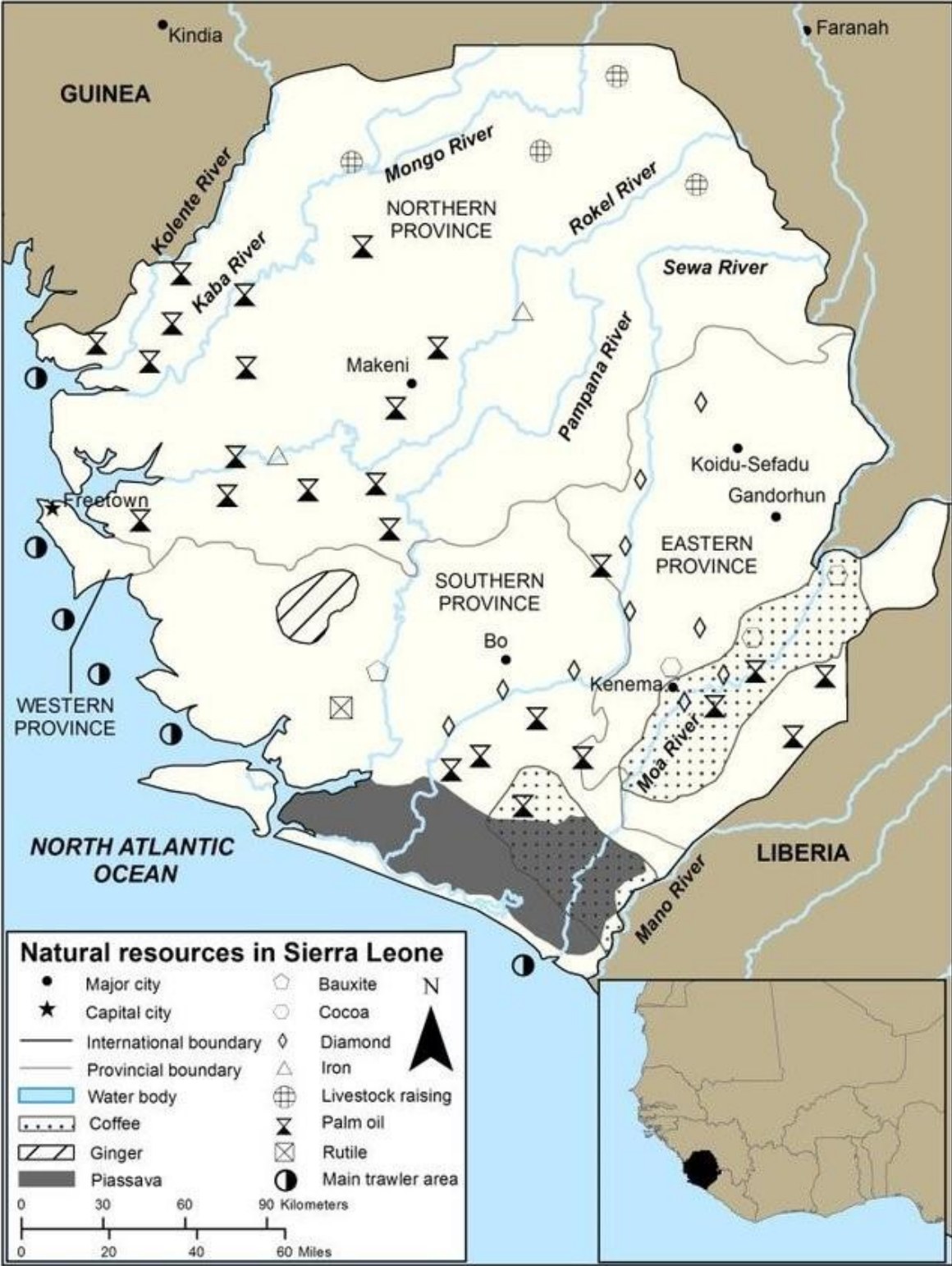
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Author: Jen Ziemke, 2007

SatScan Model Estimation Results

Map 1. Conflict zones in relation to diamond mines within Angola.



Map 2. Sierra Leone's natural resources



Map 3. Executive Outcomes engagement zones near diamond mines