

South African Mercenary Outfit Training Troops in Somalia

By [Odeusp Eman](#)

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Recently, the Associated Press (AP) broke the story that there were 1050 troops being trained in the north eastern region of Somalia, otherwise known as Puntland, by a mercenary group, or security contractors from South Africa known as Saracen International.

At the end of the Apartheid era, many of the special forces of that regime ventured into various yet similar vocations and enterprises that offered lucrative, opportunities as well as providing absolute impunity. Never mind that “Mercenaries” as persons recruited for armed conflict by or in a country other than their own who are motivated solely by personal gain are outlawed under Article 47 of the Geneva Convention.

Saracen International is a complex web of businesses that sell luxury real estates properties as well as international investment opportunities. It has taken over under a different name the now defunct Executive Outcomes. The latter has a broad record in Angola, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They were guns for hire; a private army to perform variety of “good” and “dirty jobs” necessary enforces peace or silence dissent.

Major Lafras Luitingh, one of the founders and the former CEO of Executive Outcomes, now plays a key leading role in Saracen International. Major Luitingh—a man who has been implicated in a number of reports—was a board member of the South African Civil Cooperation Bureau (CCB) of the Apartheid era. Contrary to what the name might suggest, this was a government-sponsored covert operation; a hit squad during the apartheid era that operated under the authority of Defense Minister General Magnus Malan. This covert organization had three main objectives: to eliminate anti-apartheid activists throughout the world; to destroy ANC facilities both inside and outside South Africa; and, to circumvent UN-imposed arms embargo. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee found the CCB guilty of numerous killings and atrocities.

Ignorantly or perhaps recklessly insensitive to the historic role that the South African mercenaries have played in carrying out former dictator Siyad Barre’s persecution of particular dissenting clans in the north-western region of Somalia, the TFG again has signed

a contract with mercenaries from South Africa.

According to Hussein Abdi Halane, Somalia's Minister of Finance, who was interviewed by the VOA Somali branch, "Saracen will help the Somali government train some of its forces." Among other things, this private security group would be training anti-piracy forces as well as the bodyguards of Somali government officials, drivers, and civil servants.

Ever since the AP report, concerns were raised by a number of stakeholders ranging from UN, AU, AMISOM, US, and EU.

Concerns range from "Who will be financing this contract?", to "Is this going to violate the arms embargo imposed on Somalia since 1992?" However, the real concern, from the Somali perspective, ought to be: Since civilians are already exposed to great dangers with al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam's mortar attacks on AMISOM and the latter's counter attacks, and neither of the former militias (now one group) are waging their attacks from a jungle, how are they going to protect civilian lives from their advanced, state-of-the-art weaponry? Is this group going to uphold basic human rights and respect all international conventions? Who would have the responsibility and/or jurisdiction to prosecute any violation that may be made? Would they be able to differentiate between civilians "Saracens" and combatant ones?

And, from the UN and the international community perspective, the concern ought to be: Would this group keep its hands off the uranium deposits in the central regions of Somalia where they are now allowed to operate freely?

It is quite apparent that the TFG has not done its due diligence. Among other things, the TFG agreed to not tax any of the goods and equipments that this group brings into the country which is euphemism for not searching any and all they possess.

It is incumbent upon the TFG to immediately end this contract, and upon the international community to pressure Saracen International and all other mercenary groups believed to be operating in "Somaliland" and "Puntland" to leave Somalia.

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