

OPERATIONAL STUDIES

www.operationalstudies.com

ARMED CONTRACTORS IN THE BATTLE SPACE

By

Mark V. Lonsdale

Copyright © 2007

As evidenced by the types of contracts being funded and awarded by DOD in Iraq and Afghanistan, many mission critical services are being outsourced to civilian contractors. These essential security, stabilization, reconstruction (S&R), and security sector reform (SSR) services were traditionally handled by the military but with the current lean force structure of the US military, and its primary focus on those tasks directly related to warfighting, the civilian contractor has become an essential component of Phase IV operations.

Private security companies (PSC) are being tasked as convoy escort teams (CET), protective security details (PSD), close protection (CP) for key commanders and political figures, static security for military and governmental installations, mine and ordnance clearance, police and military mentoring and training, and intelligence collection, collation and distribution as it pertains to the above operations.

Historically it was envisioned that these functions would be handled in a post-conflict permissive environment, but the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have necessitated that security contractors up-armor and up-gun to be able to operate alongside the military in the battle space.

This has created a situation where combatant commanders and US troops are required to interface with armed contractors on a daily basis. Unfortunately there are very few mechanisms in place that facilitate this relationship between the military and the security providers. Ground commanders are confronted with such issues as:

1. Where do these contractors fall into the chain of command?
2. How do they communicate with them?
3. How do they track their movements?
 - a. Contractors do not show up on the Blue Force Tracker system
 - b. TOCs are not always notified of CET and PSD movements
 - c. Commanders are not notified when a CET or PSD is operating in their AOR so have problems mounting QRFs or CASEVACs
4. What are the SOPs and ROE for contractors?
5. Are the weapons they are carrying authorized?
6. There are no standardized uniforms, vehicles, or visual recognition signals – some contractors looking like something out of “Mad Max”
7. How are injured international contractors to be handled? Particularly third country nationals (TCNs) and local nationals (LN)
8. The use of armed Iraqis as security guards has created operational security issues for FOB commanders.

The security contractors also have their share of problems and issues. PSCs have complained of:

1. Being fired upon by US military convoys (Blue on White incidents)
2. Being fired upon by soldiers manning vehicle check points (VCP)
3. Lack of recognition of their visual signals (US flags; Union Jack; VS-17 panels)
4. Lack of recognition of their identification cards – particularly non-DOD ID cards such as MNF-I cards.
5. Being detained for hours at check points where junior enlisted personnel had not been briefed on the presence of armed contractors in the AO.
6. Being unable to contact the TOCs for the AOs they move through on a daily basis
7. Lack of access to military bases for security personnel injured by IEDs or SAF.
8. Mortuary services
9. etc

Many of these problems can be traced back to the shortfalls in DOD's formal plans for the execution of Phase IV operations. The role of PSCs and armed contractors operating in the battle space has not been written into doctrine, training or plans so it is no surprise that combatant commanders and ground troops are unclear as to the handling, SOPs and ROEs for these contractors.

DOD, as the source of funds and contracts, is in the position to dictate the minimum necessary operating standards for PSCs and armed contractors seeking to support US military operations. These would include:

1. Minimum hiring and vetting standards
2. Minimum pre-deployment training requirements
3. Make and model of weapons (western not eastern-bloc)
4. Registration of weapons
5. Rules of Engagement (ROE)
6. Minimum uniform and visual identification standards
7. Radio Communications systems and procedures
8. Company registration with PCO, ROC and LMCC
9. Prior notification of the TOC of all movements within their AOR
10. Positioning of Liaison Officers (LO)
11. etc

Once these procedures and mechanisms have been formalized at the doctrinal level, all BCTs and units would receive pre-deployment briefs and training on the role of PSCs in the battle space and essential information necessary for interoperability – particularly identification and communications.

Conclusion

Because of the military's need to focus on the primary missions of fighting and winning wars, combating armed insurgency, and counter terrorism, civilian security contractors have become an integral part of stability and reconstruction operations. This is true in OEF and OIF and will continue into the foreseeable future in areas such as Sudan and the Congo. As such, PSCs and armed contractors need to be written into the operational plans and briefs. Just as the *Situation* paragraph in a five paragraph brief or OPORD has lines for *Friendly Forces* and *Enemy Forces*, a line needs to be added for *Contractors in the Battle Space*. In this way, every unit commander from the brigade down to the squad

level will know to address the issues relevant to these armed contractors supporting DOD S&R and SSR operations.

Without security there will be no reconstruction; and without reconstruction there will be no peace. Security sector reform and police training are also critical to stabilization. Since all these functions are now handled by DOD or DOS contractors, they need to be written into training and doctrine at all levels.

Since most security contractors are former military, many with 10-20+ years of service, retiring as senior NCOs, warrant officers or officers, it should not be too challenging to create a matrix for interoperability between the active military and civilian contractors. IPOA, STTU, Operational Studies and other contractors stand ready to assist the DoD in developing the minimum operating standards necessary for safer, more efficient operations in future conflict and post-conflict environments.

END

Concurrent with his duties at Operational Studies, Mark Lonsdale was the US Director of Operations for a major multi-national security contractor actively involved in security and reconstruction operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lonsdale has also served as a member of the IPOA Standards Committee, is a DoD contractor, and a US military advisor involved in pre-deployment advisory and training of Special Forces and intelligence personnel.