



Strengthening security sector governance in fragile jurisdictions: The role of the private sector

By Stephen Buchanan-Clarke

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Executive summary

The private security sector in Southern Africa has expanded rapidly over the last two decades. The extractives industry has helped drive this growth, with private security companies (PSCs) providing essential protection for mining operations in fragile regions. However, these contexts are often 'hybrid security environments' characterised by weak state presence and multiple public and private security providers engaged in ad hoc security arrangements, with varying degrees of legitimacy, authority, and oversight.

For companies, this raises the risk of being implicated in human rights abuses, triggering legal liabilities,

sanctions, and reputational harm. Poor security sector governance can also inflame community grievances and social tensions, potentially sparking protests, violence, and a negative impact on companies' social license to operate. To address these risks, PSCs and mining companies can take a proactive role in strengthening security governance within the areas in which they operate.

This report is part of an ongoing research project and provides an overview of governance challenges and opportunities for the private sector to improve security sector governance in Southern Africa, drawing on insights gathered for a research project on hybrid security governance in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique.

COVER PHOTO: A woman holds her younger child while standing in a burned out area in the village of Aldeia da Paz, outside Macomia in the north of Mozambique, which was attacked by a faceless Islamist group.

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A call to action

The private sector will derive long-run value from a more stable operating environment; it therefore makes business sense to play a proactive role in strengthening security governance in contexts of weak state control and uneven security provision. By committing to transparency, accountability, and respect for local communities, companies can help ensure that security provision fosters stability, protects human rights, and contributes to sustainable peace and development.

Impact

- Strengthened security governance reduces the risk of human rights abuses, protecting both communities and company reputations – an important consideration when attempting to raise capital on international markets.
- Improved compliance and training standards enhance professionalism within PSCs, leading to safer and more reliable security provision for mining operations.
- Establishing grievance and dialogue mechanisms fosters trust with local communities, reducing grievances and social tensions that threaten operational continuity.
- Collaborative industry standards and transparent reporting improve accountability, thereby attracting responsible investment and enhancing companies' social licence to operate.
- By aligning with international frameworks such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) and the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA), mining companies can contribute to broader development goals of stability, peacebuilding, and sustainable economic growth in fragile regions.

Recommendations

- Establish clear internal compliance frameworks and codes of conduct aligned with international standards such as the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers (ICoCA), the Montreux Document on Private Military and Security Companies, and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR)
- Partner with accredited training institutions and ensure staff meet industry-recognised standards, such as the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) 18788, and receive mandatory training on human rights, gender sensitivity, and conflict de-escalation.
- Create an independent grievance and complaints mechanism accessible to employees and communities, and implement regular internal audits, transparent reporting on misconduct, labour conditions, and human rights performance.
- Establish regular dialogue mechanisms with host communities to build trust, reduce grievances, and co-develop security protocols, and engage in joint monitoring with civil society or community representatives to increase legitimacy and reduce reputational risk.
- Both PSCs and mining companies should collaborate through industry associations and joint initiatives to share best practices, develop common governance standards, and pilot innovative approaches to security management over ad hoc partnerships.
- Mining companies should commit to the Institute for Responsible Mining Assurance and, where relevant, join the International Council for Mining and Metals to demonstrate best practice in security sector governance, reduce reputational and legal risks, and strengthen their social license to operate in fragile environments.

ANALYSIS :

The private security sector in Southern Africa

Size and scope

It is difficult to determine the size of the private security industry in Southern Africa. Publicly available data across countries is inconsistent, and where registers do exist, they are often incomplete or outdated. Not all states have well-established regulatory and licensing authorities, making it difficult to maintain accurate registers of personnel or firms. There is also no standard regional definition of “private security”: some include only guarding services while others include a far wider range of security and

risk management functions. The industry is also highly fluid, with fairly low barriers to entry, making the entry, exit, and merging of firms common, while a significant portion of the industry is also informal, operating outside of official licensing systems. In South Africa, which maintains fairly reliable data on the industry, there are over 2.7 million registered private security officers, of which 650,000 are actively employed by just over 16,000 registered security businesses, placing the industry workforce well above combined police and military in numbers.¹ While reliable figures from other Southern African states are limited, in many countries, private security companies are often among the largest employers outside of the state.

States with Dedicated Regulatory Frameworks for Private Security	Primary Regulatory Mechanism	Primary Regulatory Authority	States without Regulatory Frameworks for Private Security
Angola	Private Security Companies Law No. 10/14 ² (2014)	Ministry of the Interior (Mol)	Comoros
Botswana	Private Security Services Act ³ (2016)	Private Security Services Licensing Board (PSOB), Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security (MDJS)	Eswatini
Lesotho	Private Security Officers Act (2002) ⁴	Private Security Officers Board, Ministry of Defence and National Security (MDNS)	Madagascar
Democratic Republic of Congo	Ministerial Order No 25/14 (2014) ⁵	Ministry of Interior (Mol), Security, Decentralisation and Customary Affairs	Malawi
Mauritius	Private Security Service Act (2004) ⁶	Private Security Section, Commissioner of Mauritius Police Force (MPF)	Seychelles
Mozambique	Decree No. 09/07 ⁷ (2007)	Ministry of the Interior (Mol), Ministry of Police (MPR)	Tanzania
Namibia	Security Enterprises and Security Officers Act ⁸ (1998)	Security Enterprises and Security Officers Board (SESORB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security (MHISS)	Zambia
South Africa	Private Security Industry Regulation Act ⁹ (2001)	Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PsiRA)	
Zimbabwe	Private Investigators and Security Guards Act ¹⁰ (1996)	Private Security Regulatory Authority, Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage (MHAC)	

TABLE 1: Private Security Sector Regulation Across Southern Africa¹¹

1 Public Security Industry Regulatory Authority. (2025). Annual Performance Plan 2025–26.

2 <https://angolex.com/paginas/decreto-presidencial/regulamento-da-lei-das-empresas-privadas-de-seguranca.html>

3 https://botswanalaws.com/consolidated-statutes/principle-legislation/private-security-services?utm_source=chatgpt.com

4 https://www.labour.gov.ls/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Private-Security-Officers-Act-2002.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

5 https://www.droitcongolais.info/files/471.08.14-Arrete-du-12-aout-2014_Gardiennage_modifications.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

6 <https://mauritiuslii.org/akn/mu/act/2004/5/eng%402017-06-30?utm>

7 https://www.vertic.org/media/National%20Legislation/Mozambique/MZ_Regulamento_de_Armas_e_Muncoes.pdf?utm

8 https://namiblii.org/akn/na/act/1998/19/eng%402006-11-01?utm_source=chatgpt.com

9 https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a56-010.pdf?utm

10 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Mercenaries/WG/Law/Zimbabwe.pdf>

11 Source: Adapted from Gumedze, S. (Ed.). (2020). Baseline study on private security regulation in the Southern Africa region. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)



Photo: John Wessels / AFP

ABOVE: Street vendors are seen through a bus windscreen bullet hole alongside the Mozambican Main North South road (NH1) at Nhamapaza, Mozambique.

Legislative and regulatory frameworks

Southern Africa does not have an inter-state regional protocol on the regulation of private security, and across the region, regulatory oversight of the private security industry remains inconsistent. In many cases, the sector is either left entirely unregulated or subject to weak and ineffective controls. Nearly half of the sixteen countries in Southern Africa lack dedicated frameworks for governing private security operations and even fewer have independent regulatory agencies in charge of monitoring compliance.¹² Legislation is also often outdated, given the industry's rapid growth, the impact of technological innovation, and the expanding range of activities that private security companies now undertake.

Governance risks

The lack of strong regulatory oversight across Southern African states creates a range of potential risks. Where there is an absence of oversight, reporting mechanisms, and appropriate disciplinary measures, malpractice and rights violations can occur without consequences. Conflicts of interest, such as police officials having vested interests in private security companies, can distort state security provision and generate unfair competition practices. A lack of proper vetting for private security

officers allows individuals with criminal records into the industry, while undermining the credibility and safety of the sector. Similarly, the absence of minimum training standards allows for unqualified personnel to provide security services, exposing the public to greater risks. Low barriers to entry can be exploited by the industry, and without proper monitoring, labour laws can be skirted, with security officers working long hours, for low wages, in adverse conditions. The industry also tends to be male-dominated, and where regulation and monitoring are weak, women can face additional systemic risk of exploitation.

Sector specific risks

In recent years, the extractives industry has emerged as one of the largest clients of private security, fuelling rapid sectoral growth and demanding a broad spectrum of security and risk management functions. However, the regions in which mining companies operate are often characterised by weak state institutions, high levels of poverty and deprivation, and complex social and political dynamics. In such contexts, the state's security presence is frequently limited or contested, creating space for a wide range of security actors, ranging from national military and police forces to private security companies, community-

¹² In countries without dedicated regulatory frameworks, there are various existing corporation laws that are applicable.

Risk Category	Description	Potential Impact
Public-Private Security Relationships	PSCs often operate alongside state security forces with poor human rights track records and limited oversight	Increased risk of implication in human rights abuses and excessive use of force leading to legal liabilities, reputational damage, and loss of social license to operate.
Human Rights	Use of excessive or unlawful force due to inadequate training	Civilian harm, legal liabilities, reputational damage, loss of social license to operate.
	Male-dominated industry prone to gender-based violence and harassment	Civilian harm, legal liabilities, reputational damage, loss of social license to operate.
	Lack of adequate accountability mechanisms and oversight functions	Undermining of trust, credibility, and professionalism of PSCs.
Public Security	Distortion of public security provision away from communities	Erosion of public confidence in state security forces, and new social grievances.
	Poorly managed expectations and confusion over roles and responsibilities between state and private security providers	Public uncertainty over authority, erosion of trust in state security forces, new social grievances.
	Heavy PSC presence and over-securitisation of communities	Intimidation of civilian population, social grievances, damaged community relations.
	Displacement of local firms by foreign PSCs	Reduced local economic opportunity, social grievances.
Conflict Dynamics	Mishandling of protests and excessive use of force	Increased social tensions and community grievances.
	Overdependence on PSCs in fragile settings	Entrenchment of PSCs in core state security functions, weakening of public security institutions.

TABLE 2: Private Security in the Extractives Sector - Risks

based protection groups, and, in some cases, non-state armed actors. Today, security services in the extractives sector are commonly delivered through secondments of police officers or military personnel, along with various types of partnerships between government security forces, PSCs, community groupings, and other stakeholders, such as NGOs. This multiplicity of actors, each with different mandates, levels of accountability, and relationships to local populations, makes effective security sector governance in these contexts exceptionally challenging.

For companies operating in these environments, the presence of multiple, and sometimes competing, security actors raises the risk of being implicated in human rights abuses, which can trigger legal liabilities, sanctions, and reputational harm in global markets. A mining operation's security provider often becomes the most visible face of the project to local citizens. Therefore,

poor security sector governance can inflame community grievances and social tensions, potentially sparking protests, violence, and negatively impacting companies' social license to operate. It can also impact negatively upon operational continuity – particularly important to extractives projects which require large capital outlay and require continuous revenue to reach break-even points.

CASE STUDY: Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, provides a stark example of a “hybrid security environment.”¹³ The province's vast natural gas and mineral resources have attracted significant foreign investment over the past decade, while simultaneously being gripped by a violent insurgency which has displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians and disrupted multiple mining operations. Several

¹³ Hybrid security environments emerge in contexts of limited statehood, where state institutions are either unable or unwilling to assert exclusive authority over security, development, and rule enforcement. In such environments, non-state actors, ranging from PSCs, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community organisations, and militias step in to fill gaps in state provisions. Andrews, and Grant (2020) argue this hybridization is not only a response to weakness but also reflects a reconfiguration of authority shaped by global capital, donor influence, and local socio-political dynamics: Enns, C., Andrews, J.N. Grant, A. (2020). Security for whom? Analysing hybrid security governance in Africa's extractive sectors, *International Affairs*, Volume 96, Issue 4, P. 995-1013.

formal and informal security providers operate in this environment, including national and international state security forces, community self-defence militias, and a wide range of PSCs, each with varying degrees of coordination, legitimacy, and accountability.

Instances of poor security sector governance by both public and private security units have had severe consequences. Instances of abuse have seen companies face legal liabilities¹⁴ and suffer reputational harm,¹⁵ while mining operations have been forced into temporary closure due to protests from local communities.¹⁶ Provision of public security has been drawn away from local citizens towards extractive projects, undermining public safety and fuelling social grievances. These grievances have been effectively exploited by armed groups in recruitment and radicalisation efforts, deepening long-term instability and the viability of mining projects.

Opportunities for strengthening security governance

Although regulation and government oversight of the industry remain uneven and limited across the region, international efforts to define legal standards and promote best practices have driven the creation of key initiatives. At the same time, mining companies, which are some of the private security sector’s largest clients, are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating human rights and good governance into their security requirements.

Two of the most significant are the Montreux Document on Private Military and Security Companies,¹⁷ which outlines states’ obligations under international law, and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers (ICoCA),¹⁸ which establishes principles of responsible conduct for private actors. Complementing these initiatives are the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs)¹⁹ – a multi-stakeholder framework designed to promote accountability and align

security operations with human rights standards, which an increasing number of leading industry companies have joined as signatories. Within the UN, a draft Convention on Private Military and Security Companies has been developed, and debate around business and human rights have been captured in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP).²⁰ In addition, the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) 18788 (Management System for Private Security Operations) provides a risk management system anchored in principles of accountability to law and respect for human rights.²¹

Together, these initiatives provide robust frameworks for strengthening security sector governance in fragile contexts and offer valuable insights for extractive industry players and their private security providers.

Conclusion

Strengthening security governance in fragile mining regions is both a business imperative and a development necessity, as it reduces risks of human rights abuses, reputational harm, and operational disruption. Aligning with international standards and fostering transparent, accountable practices, PSCs and mining companies can contribute to stability, community trust, and sustainable growth across Southern Africa.

Signature:	
Approved by:	Dr Ross Harvey
	Chief Research Officer at Good Governance Africa
Date:	12 September 2025

¹⁴ Leigh Day. (2019, January 29). Statement by Leigh Day in relation to the settlement of the human rights claims against Gemfields Ltd.

¹⁵ Perry, A. (2024, September 26). “All must be beheaded”: Revelations of atrocities at French energy giant’s African stronghold.

¹⁶ Sánchez, W. A. (2024, December 30). Protests shutter Mozambique’s Balama graphite mine. Geopolitical Monitor.

¹⁷ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), & Government of Switzerland. (2008). The Montreux Document: On pertinent international legal obligations and good practices for States related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict.

¹⁸ International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA). (2021). International code of conduct for private security service providers (amended 2021). International Code of Conduct Association.

¹⁹ Voluntary Principles Initiative. (2000). The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. Voluntary Principles Initiative.

²⁰ United Nations. (2013). Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2013/433).

²¹ International Organization for Standardization. (2015). ISO 18788:2015 – Management system for private security operations – Requirements with guidance for use.



ABOVE: One of the 30 houses burnt down during an insurgents' attack on the village of Pulo, in the Metuge region, in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, on March 2024.

Photo: Juan Luis Roca / AFP

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