CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org
Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

Cry Havoc: Simon Mann's Account of his Failed Equatorial Guinea Coup Attempt

Simon Mann

Author and Coup Attempt Leader

Discussant: Alex Vines

Director, Regional and Security Studies, Chatham House

Chair: Professor Nana Poku

John Ferguson Professor of African Studies and Dean, School of Social and International Studies, University of Bradford

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Professor Nana Poku:

It is a considerable pleasure and also a bit of apprehension that I sit in this seat, in large part because of some of the accounts in the book and some of the complexities of the issues that have ensued since then.

But I am delighted to welcome Simon Mann who requires no further introduction I'm sure, but for the sake of those of us who like formalities, Simon is a former SAS [officer] and was actively involved – I'm not sure whether I can repeat what was said on a website about being an attempted coup plotter – but certainly there was a bit of an incident in Central and Southern Africa in 2004 which I think Simon has some insight that he has kindly agreed to share with us.

The discussant for the session will be Alex Vines who also requires no introduction as the Research Director for Regional Studies here.

Simon Mann:

My virginity was lost at a women's bra and panty works, the old Knicker Factory in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, but that loss was of my virginity as a soldier not anything else and was thanks to the Provisional IRA, not to any lady.

That was in 1973. We, the British Army, were intervening, an intervention in Northern Ireland that was clear enough - the Catholics were fighting back against discrimination, the Protestants wanted to burn them out - our intervention in aid of the civil power, the minimum use of force.

But that Northern Ireland intervention was a screw-up, even if it was a necessary one, even if it was by the British Army. At the time of my first tour, the loss of my virginity, we were disarming the police, the RUC, sometimes having to use force to do so.

Intervention is messy. By my next tour, North Howard Street Mill, Falls Road, we had that fatuous document to deal with, *The Way Ahead.* The way backwards was how it read. Who here remembers that?

Having disarmed the police we were now to re-empower them and do what they asked despite the fact they wouldn't move out of their police station to serve a summons, not without a platoon of guardsmen to look after them.

As with Northern Ireland, intervention is not always wrong. We were right to intervene against Saddam; right to invade Iraq.

As I wrote in my book *Cry Havoc* – just out and at a good bookshop near you – I was happy to work with the late David Hart towards that intervention coming to pass, both of us working for nothing *pro bono* I have to say, and sending suggestions in to No. 10 - that was in early 2002 - as to how the war could be kicked off.

What am I saying here? I am trying to get to the nub of the issue, quickly. I am going to talk about intervention and the PMC, the private military company. After all, you have taken time out to listen to the man who led the biggest private military company screw-up since the Jameson Raid, an occasion when Queen Victoria herself, Queen Empress, was accused of having been a backer, an investor, in the raid.

So I'll try to be concise. Chatham House, after all, is the ground zero of informed opinion and I am honoured to speak to you. Actually I am not sure who is the braver, me for talking here and taking your questions – later – or Chatham House for asking me.

So the old question arises, at what point do courage and determination become foolhardiness and obstinacy? At the point of failure, that's where. But fear not, I have the doors to this room all covered.

But what about intervention? Sometimes it will be right, others dead wrong. Which of those two will hang off a range of complex factors? Rather like an unpassed question in fact, the directing staff, the DS, out on an army field exercise. And the answer? All will depend Sir on the tactical situation and the opinion of the senior officer present.

But as I said at the outset, my soldiering childhood was Northern Ireland, the yellow card, memorized by rote by all hands and carried in the top left pocket at all times and the yellow card was based upon English common law plain and simple.

Our rules for opening fire had to fall under the rules of the common law but these, on a closer look, are robust. An ordinary citizen for example can use lethal force without a warning if that is the only way to stop an act of violence that will result in the death or very grave injury of a victim. It is an extrapolation therefore of self-defence and remember, going back to Sir William Blackstone and the revolutions of the 17th century, it is a well established principle in English law that tyranny is assault.

Tyranny is assault, so what about intervention? It is justified if it will stop tyranny just as the self-defence of a population who engage in a revolution against tyranny is justified.

One of things that struck me in Chikarubi, struck me quite literally as I was in the hands of the CIO, Mugabe's self-styled Gestapo, was that I had a great opportunity. I could think long and hard, and I had lots of time to do so, about the subject that I had heard so much of as a child. I could think about the reason for my grandfather and father, for their having gone to war, I could think about tyranny, because having been brought up hearing all about it and having read and learned about tyranny from both schoolmasters and my readings of Simon Schama while in prison, I now had a real, genuine, absolutely authentic view of tyranny at work, a worm's eye view first-hand.

Let me tell you, I saw that to get out from under a real tyranny without outside help is very very hard.

Intervention. Intervention is what anyone under tyranny is in need of, believe me, and those who live under tyranny pray that help will come.

So, back to the yellow card, common law and the intervention question.

As I said, every situation is different and probably complex but as a principle I would argue that intervention is likely to be okay when it is carried out in order to stop something wrong. It is far less likely to be okay to make something right come about, or something that we think someone else will think right once he's got the hang of it. At which point – this point – the point of doing a bad thing to do a good one or doing a good thing to stop a bad one – I have to check my copy of 1066 and all that – I need to see what comes next: Ah yes, the PMC, the private military company, an analogy.

If I am asked to put out a fire to save someone's house then I will do so if I can, the poor chap. If putting out that fire means the use of much time, that I have to take risks, use my own pumps and hoses, hire other men to help me, then, and if this householder is rich, then I am going to ask him to pay me - you bet I am. You bet that he will gladly pay too.

But does that mean I don't think there should be a fire brigade, that I think that all fires should be put out by PFBs, private fire brigades? No sir, it does not.

But wait a minute, the house is burning, where is the fire brigade?

OK, so let's look at the fires that I have actually been involved with: Angola, 1992-96; Sierra Leone, 1993-97.

In Angola in 1992 I was working for Tony Buckingham's oil and gas exploration company Heritage. UNITA went back to war. They lost the November 1992 elections so went back to fighting – an illegal and terrible act

– and in the face of the UN call that the elections had been free and fair, in the face of their promises and treaty agreements.

I had sat with General Dr Savimbi himself – four of us – Savimbi, an aide, Sir David Steel as he then was and me, David's bag carrier. Savimbi promised us that UNITA would not go back to war, win or lose their general election. But UNITA attacked Soyo which was the Heritage operating base, an oil support base at the mouth of the great River Congo itself, main artery to the heart of darkness.

UNITA attacked our men, took our equipment, threatened our livelihood, my livelihood, so we fought back and we won. Having taken that step and for the same reasons, we had to make sure that the MPLA were the victors of the war overall and we wanted that as quickly as possible. They asked us to help and we did so, for a large fee.

Speed was what was needed – war is bad for business, sure – but it is terrible for the [inaudible]. Even if that is not how everyone involved saw it then, and I'm talking about people on both sides and their proxy masters, the UN were doing nothing effective to end that war, nor was anyone else. Where was the fire brigade?

On the other hand, powerful business motivated forces were at work - big oil and the CIA, De Beers and the White South African apartheid regime - those who found UNITA's return to war useful shall I say.

I say this non-swanks, as Colonel David Stirling used to put it, but it was our involvement, that of Executive Outcomes and of our air operations, especially Operation Cobweb, that shortened the Angolan War and I have to say, non-swanks again, that this is a point upon which even the UN and UNITA agree with the MPLA.

EO won that war – ended it, put out that fire. Were we paid? You bet we were paid. We were paid plenty and we earned it. It was just as well that we were paid plenty too because it was that money that allowed us to respond to the request of the then President of Sierra Leone for help, young Captain Strasser. Sierra Leone had a mining concession that we wanted, the *Kouidu Kimberlite* but Sierra Leone also had a terrible war going and with no fire brigade putting out the fire, despite the UN and ECOMOG standing around warming their hands at it.

Paid for with our profits from Angola, Executive Outcomes put out the Sierra Leone fire too. EO ended another war and this time the enemy, Foday Sankoh and the RUF, were especially in need of being beaten. Their

atrocities placed them high in the world atrocity rankings – I know; I saw – then I retired.

Until 6 years later I was asked to lead the operation against Equatorial Guinea, a private venture-assisted regime change. That happened through the man that I have to call 'the Boss' as I do throughout my book. That isn't how it should be but I don't write the UK libel laws and I can't afford any more lawyers – e.g. it was different. My house fire analogy falls apart. There was no fire.

Here I have to tell you something strange. There are many aspects to the failed coup plot and everything that happened thereafter, up to and including my pardon and release that I do not fully understand or do not know.

My belief however is that 'the Boss', before he recruited me, therefore before March 2003, had a 'beltway' lunch and a 'beltway' conversation. Someone from Langley said to 'the Boss' that if it could be done well, without damage to US assets and without endangering US citizens, then an assisted regime change that would take EG into the realms of a good management democracy and the rule of human rights etc, that would be a good idea.

Of course, over the coffee of that lunch - this lunch never happened - this conversation was never spoken and plausible deniability at all costs will be maintained.

But why do the job? Why did I do the job, the blind horse for whom that nod was as good as the wink? The money - of course the money. We all need money. But then there was official sanction, clear that if nothing else the Spanish government were part of the coup plot, the opportunity to do something big with my life, to come into a job that was not self-defence, not putting out a fire, getting into it because I believed in it. Then there was the business of getting the people of EG shot of a vile and rank ongoing tyranny and please, I was a pounds millionaire before they asked me to do the job, not a *desperado* in a last chance café.

And what kind of mercenaries are we? Do we say; 'we want half up front governor and half after the job's done – sniff?' No, we don't. We're just going to go and do it and our money, if it comes, will come after the satisfaction of a whole chain of ifs – not the kind of ifs that your bank manager would extend your overdraft on – and it was a chance to climb a mountain that needed climbing that would be hard and dangerous. 'Because it is there' as Mallory is said to have quipped.

And then there is the flattery because the people who asked me to do it knew of Angola, knew of Sierra Leone and they had sought me out.

So what went wrong? 'The Boss' kept on paying out the small money but never the big. He kept on saying go, then stop; go then stop, until in the end, like an airplane about to crash, we had gotten ourselves too low too slow. We had pissed off everyone with the go-stop, go-stop, we were leaking info, we were compromised, we were running on a shoestring budget and we were out of time.

The absolute deadline cut-off, the Spanish general elections of 14 March 2004 and the sure retirement of Prime Minster Aznar were upon us. My mistake, of course, was not to bin the thing but I had two governments, Spain and South Africa that I knew to be both on side telling me to get on with it and I had more governments, China, the US and the UK, who seemed to be approving. I say *seemed* by their allowing me to carry on; it wasn't as if I was walking around with a false beard on.

So who did torpedo the operation and why? And here again I have to surmise although I do have good info and from more than one good source.

My sources tell me that the CIA torpedoed the operation via Angolan intelligence, via South Africa's national intelligence NI leading to our arrest. Why? Because they were scared it was going wrong and that their fingerprints might be on it. At this point we had tried once already and failed. Now we're going to try again. I was a loose canon but with Uncle Sam's fingerprints. The aircraft that we bought for the second attempt, from whom did we buy it, for how much and just how fast had we shifted that aircraft out of the US and just who had masterminded and ridden shotgun on the ferry flight? Fingerprints.

The CIA worried – and I do not blame them for this by the way – then saw that they could achieve their original objective, by which I mean the better governance of Equatorial Guinea, with no risk from the loose canon that I had become. If they torpedoed the coup then they would be removed from blame for it while at the same time able to argue to President Obiang that if he wanted to keep them as his powerful friends and protectors as they had just shown themselves to be then he must follow their new rules for the governance of EG.

It is a fact that with the coup the US take on EG suddenly changed. A few months before the coup a State Department report slated Obiang and his regime for their human rights records and failures. Riggs Bank that handled Obiang's money was taken down despite having a Bush on the board. Yet

shortly after the coup it all changed. Condoleezza Rice welcomed Obiang as a President of the people of the United States and in EG many changes for the good – which still carry on by the way – started.

Where have we got to? We began with intervention – okay on occasion. We have looked at my involvement with private military company intervention. Actually we could give to that a movie title: *Two House Fires and a Cock-up*.

But what is my take on the future use of the private military company? I think that a regular soldier or a reservist soldier or a private contractor soldier are categories of soldier or of paramilitary or of police that are likely to blur in the future. Surely what is important is the action, not the label of the category. The challenge is to make sure the actions are done correctly. The stakes are high as the Blackwater Iraq incident shows and as other incidents not well reported also show. A My Lai massacre by troops is one thing, by contractors it is another.

As I remember from Northern Ireland any army that is seen as one of occupation is detested. How much worse is that feeling likely to be when the occupiers are a private contractor?

The toughest task in this brave new business sector will be for the customer, i.e. the government, to ensure that corners are not cut. That may sound impossible but is it? The oil industry manage it everyday, so does civil aviation.

But, and this is the nub, the business imperative is profit and that sits ill with the needs of winning a war, it sits even iller with the need to exercise due care for one's own troops on the ground.

I think the most likely source to get the sector into the shape it wants to be in will in fact, in the end, be the insurance sector. PMCs need a set of practical standards and rules, their own yellow card, for any operations, manuals and so forth.

As for intervention itself being a private venture, as the failed Equatorial Guinea coup attempt was, maybe we could call it *'assisted regime changes are us PLC'* but I for one am no longer a player. Having spent 5½ years in prison after trying that business model, I'll leave it to others to try, if they dare.

Alex Vines:

Cry Havoc is an interesting book. It's worth reading if you're interested in this particular private security business model that Simon has talked about and

how it fitted in, and particularly at the period of the end of the Cold War and in Africa, and my comments are focused on Africa.

The book of course follows a tradition of other individuals who've been involved in this period and in these types of projects such as Tim Spicer, his book *An Unorthodox Soldier* and indeed Eeben Barlow who was a co-founder of Executive Outcomes against all odds and in other books also, Adam Roberts' *Wonga Coup*, James Brabazon about Nick du Toit. All these add further colour to what Simon has just described.

My own experience overlaps with Simon in three of the countries. I've lived and worked in Angola. Indeed I was there in 1992 when he was there with Lord Steel. I've also been in Sierra Leone and have been a regular visitor to Equatorial Guinea.

I think a key part of the book is the material about the birth of the PMC Executive Outcomes set up with Eeben Barlow, Mr Keller and Tony Buckingham and indeed Simon has already talked to you about the overrunning of the oil installations by the rebel group in Angola after it rejected the election results in January 1993 when Soyo was overrun and jeopardized Tony Buckingham's oil interests.

Simon in the book – he didn't say so just now – but in the book he claims to have thought up the idea himself, with Tony Buckingham present, and that the idea was then sold to the then head of the Angolan state oil company, Kim David, and there's a really good description of that sort of episode in the book.

I do think that this was a key period in Angolan history. I was there in Rwanda in early 1993 and I have to say I felt that actually the MPLA, the Angolan government, might actually lose. It was a really scary time; really quite frightening. I certainly didn't enjoy myself when I was there at that time.

And I think Simon really does describe on how a small unit of the *Forças Armadas Angolanas*, the FAA, the government military and Executive Outcomes operated to try and recapture Soyo indeed to get oil production again and to deny it from UNITA.

What I'm a bit unsure in the book is the chronology of events though. A small FAA-EO unit moved in to Soyo in March 1993 but my memory is they were pushed back and then EO-FAA had to go back in again in May as I remember, but maybe I'm wrong.

There are also talk of Moroccan mercenaries working for UNITA in that period and there I do think Simon that you're wrong. I think what actually was

happening was that UNITA had serious training bases in Morocco and that you had a lot of equipment, magazines and things coming back into Angola from Morocco. I've interviewed lots of UNITA ex-combatants.

But although Soyo was stabilized eventually with the help of EO, it wasn't really Soyo where the money was pumping through to save the Angolan government. 60% of Angola's oil came from the oil rich enclave of Cabinda and it is I think very telling, Simon, that Chevron that controlled the hospital in Malongo, the oil installation was powerful enough to deny access to medical assistance to you and indeed what Chevron was able to do in that period through people like Scott Taylor and Ed Chow was work clearly to get UNITA to not attack the oil installations.

The fear of the United States in that period still meant that UNITA did not conduct any operation on Malongo and that allowed the Angolan government still to get 60% of its oil rent, really significant in this period, given this is a period of enormous arms procurement including stuff that Simon talks about.

He talks in the book about fuel air explosives and how important they were in the conflict. Indeed, only one was ever used as a deterrent and that showed both the discipline I think at the time of the advice of Executive Outcomes but also the Angolan government. This could have been a really serious humanitarian catastrophe on civilians given that the Angolan military told me they don't believe that there are civilians particularly in UNITA areas and there were indiscriminate killings aplenty, but this would have taken it to a different level.

So there was a responsibility there that I think Executive Outcomes at the time has to be partly applauded for avoiding it but it did spook the UNITA commanders.

Other issues were also of course in violation of contracts. For example, Simon talks a lot about the use of training aircraft from Switzerland, Pilatus PC-9s. While the end-user certificates for them all said they're just for training but having hardened points and using them in active military engagement was in breach of the agreements between Switzerland and Angola. In the end the Swiss decided the Pilatus shouldn't go to Angola anymore - well the Angolans just went Brazilian and bought Tucanos - but it just goes to show the kind of issues that are at stake in this book.

It would say that part of the book that is frustrating is that there is very little about African agency in it. It's all about outsiders – the CIA, the Spanish, Simon Mann, South African, Italian people and so on – and yet the African element is really strong in this story. It's really essential. If you really want to

know why the Angolan government was successful eventually over UNITA, it was the key defection of some of their greatest tacticians, Generals like McKenzie, Renato Mateus, Canula, I could talk about many more. It wasn't just about fuel air explosives or air support. There were contributing factors.

So there is a tendency I think in the book at certain moments to exaggerate.

Of course Executive Outcomes was becoming really brazen. It even has had its own wine. This is an Executive Outcomes bottle of wine. I've never tried to drink it – I don't know if you've drunk it Simon; I was a bit worried about opening it – but on the back it doesn't say it tastes of gooseberries or anything like that. It says: *As the leading military advisory company in the world Executive Outcomes provides tailor-made packages creating an environment conducive to peace and stability and a stable climate for foreign investment* – a nice bottle of wine.

And of course that was part of the reason I think for the downfall of that particular brand, Executive Outcomes, so brazen that you can even have your own wine given out to clients or people that visited like myself.

And Simon doesn't really talk in his book about rebranding. He does write about Tim Spicer, including the Papua New Guinea mission. I get a sense actually in the book you'd have rather liked to have been on that mission and you think it might have succeeded if you had been there, but Tim did it and it didn't work.

But you never mention the word 'Sandline' - it doesn't come up in your book – and I was wondering, in reflection, Papua New Guinea in 1997 and the problems there, Sierra Leone with the Sandline scandal in 1998, weren't these actually warning signs of a changing world?

And that finally brings me on to my final bit onto Equatorial Guinea. You yourself Simon have just said Equatorial Guinea was not a fire, it wasn't a fire situation. In the book you say it's all about oil and it's all about the atmosphere of that period, 2003 and 2004, about assisted regime change which was fashionable. Post-Iraq invasion, certainly many people were considering that as a policy option.

However I have to say, reading the account, it's the naivety of the plot and the lack of understanding of Equatorial Guinea politics that is most striking. The person that you and 'the Boss' and others wanted to replace, Severo Moto, isn't a democratic angel at all. He tried a coup before, stopped by the Angolans. The Angolans know all about Severo Moto. Their intelligence people stopped him from shipping weapons out of Angola to Equatorial

Guinea and indeed Moto has a big mouth. In Washington he was handing out a CV – I got one when I was there – which boasted that he had been head of a failed coup attempt. I mean can you imagine that on your CV? Well maybe you can…

Of course boasting was part of your problem. You talked just now about the go-stop, the leaking. We had a meeting here at Chatham House where again boasting and exaggeration I think were the problem, but anyway this was a few weeks before the coup attempt and after the event, because it leaked out that we'd discussed scenarios, there'd been a coup in Sao Tome, the *Financial Times* says: Well this was the worst kept secret, even Chatham House knew about it.

Finally, what are the other issues that come out of the book? Well I think the election deadline in Spain is a really important point. It's mentioned in some of the other literature but really clearly I can see contextually that is a driver for the date. You've told me why you can't talk about 'the Boss', so I understand that, but there was a name in the book that doesn't appear which I am wondering about myself and that's somebody called Ely Calil. He himself has said to the *Evening Standard* that he was involved in a scheme to fly Moto to EG to protect him for a few days while people rose up, so I'm sure he can't be libellous against me for saying that because he said that himself to the *Evening Standard*.

Another element that I've always pondered about in terms of Equatorial Guinea is the role of insiders in Equatorial Guinea itself and I don't know, but I still have my suspicion, whether Severo Moto was the end-game or whether there was something else that could have been taking place deeper inside Equatorial Guinea and the politics there – we may never know.

So what this whole episode in Equatorial Guinea demonstrates is that, with oil as a motivation, Equatorial Guinea's lack of democracy and due process provided an unstable context in which undemocratic efforts to achieve regime change become attractive.

Sadly that still remains the case today in Equatorial Guinea. There is only one opposition MP. Simon himself concludes on Page 329 *'everything started to change fast after 2004 for the better in Equatorial Guinea, an unintended consequence possibly of the coup attempt.'*

Sadly I don't think that's the case. We have seen a spike in defence spending, there's enormous amounts of paranoia in Equatorial Guinea and my experience actually, being there in 2003 before the coup, was that things were opening up – exiles such as Weja Chicampo and others had been

invited back from Madrid. I was actually really positive as a human rights activist at the time for Human Rights Watch, there were real entry points that all closed down after the coup attempt.

Indeed, if you think back actually and look at Equatorial Guinea, its freest election was its municipal one in 1995. So there has been serious slippage since then despite, with its oil wealth, some improvements.

In sum, I do recommend the book if you're interested in military history and in particular the period of private military companies and their contribution, or lack of it, to peace, stability and prosperity in Africa. Thank you.

Q&A

Question 1:

You spoke about your desire to uphold democracy and human rights and of course the principle of accountability and the accountability of power is crucial to both those sets of values. So I'd like to ask you who are you accountable to and who are private military companies accountable to?

I'd like to ask basically who are you accountable to and who are private military companies accountable to, in particular under international law, because you say you want to promote democracy and human rights and accountability is absolutely crucial to both democracy and human rights.

Simon Mann:

On the Equatorial Guinean job there was no accountability, clearly. That was a private venture.

Normally a private military company is hired by somebody, normally a sovereign state and they must be accountable, although it's perhaps worth mentioning in Angola and Sierra Leone I insisted that all the troops be signed up into the armed forces of the country which was a dangerous thing to do because of course some of the South Africans weren't too happy about being under Angolan military law as you can imagine. But what that does mean is that the individual soldier is not a mercenary according to the 1977 African Convention.

Question 2:

Given the South African links with Executive Outcomes, how do you gauge the ambiguities of your relationship with the South Africans and why did they shaft you in the end?

Simon Mann:

I'm not sure they did.

Like I said in my speech, I think that the South Africans were given absolutely no choice whatsoever. They were told, you stop Simon Mann and co and get them arrested in Zimbabwe or we're going to stop you. That was the message that I believe came from Angola.

Question 3:

You made a very interesting reference to the retirement of former Prime Minister Aznar. At the time of coup attempt actually the Partido Popular looked like they were going to easily win the election in Spain so that leaves me to conclude that the personality of Aznar was actually very important in terms of support for the coup attempt.

Now you mentioned in your book, you link Mustafa al-Sanusi and another Malaysian oil tycoon as being critical interlocutors in Barcelona with the Spanish government. I'm just interested to know is that you basically hedge everything on Spanish support; you needed Spanish support, an EU member state, to give international recognition for the interim government that you will put in place in Equatorial Guinea.

Now how were you so sure and so who was close to Aznar because really the only problem with Spanish support was that eventually there was just too much of it and that's why you double-crossed the Spaniards and actually let slip that they were sending a naval mission to Equatorial Guinea with special forces and marines on board? Now that could only really be done according to Ana Palacio the former Foreign Minister, by the order of the Prime Minister himself, that this naval mission could only really be undertaken.

So I'm just really curious, at some point between your Malaysian contacts and Barcelona – Spanish weren't privy to the op, they were part of the op – so how were you so sure that the Prime Minister himself was a critical supporter of this coup attempt? Basically, who was the linkage between the Malaysians and your backers and the Palace in Moncloa, the Prime Minister's office in Spain?

Simon Mann:

I had to trust 'the Boss' completely. It was something like this: If I don't trust him then we're not going to go anywhere, and he said to me you have Spanish support, that is dependent on Aznar as an individual – you're quite right – because whether they won or lost that election he was retiring and I don't want to be in court again but you can draw your own conclusions from that, but it was 'the Boss' to him. Whether that was a direct link or not, I don't know.

Question 4:

I covered your trial in Malabo so I read your book with great interest.

Firstly, is it fair to condemn Mark Thatcher the way you do repeatedly in this book when you don't once identify the man you call 'the Boss' who is the real mastermind? I mean a cynic would say you're going after cheap headlines.

Simon Mann:

Well I would love to name 'the Boss'.

[Q: Well you did repeatedly in your trial]

I certainly did and you were there and I don't retract anything from my trial but I cannot say the name here because I don't want to go into court again.

Mark's in a different category. I can name him because he signed a guilty plea in South Africa.

Question 5:

[Same questioner] The second question: I read with some astonishment a few months after your release that you had been employed as some sort of consultant by President Obiang. Is that true? If it is, how can you possibly justify it?

Simon Mann:

No, it isn't true.

They asked me write a security paper while I was a prisoner, which I did and that was fun for me to write it quite honestly, the poacher turned gamekeeper letter, but since my release I've been back to Equatorial Guinea three times. I met the President the first time. The second two times I've been taken from Equatorial Guinea to Beirut because what I've been doing for Equatorial Guinea, unpaid, is that I've been helping them with their enquiries because they are trying to prosecute Ely Calil in Beirut and I've been helping them in exactly the same way as I have been helping also Scotland Yard who have also been carrying out their enquiries.

Question 6:

From your description of 'the Boss', he doesn't sound like the sort that would be hugely interested in governance and human rights issues and I was also a bit surprised, you said that was the CIA's agenda.

At a time when US oil companies owned all of the oil, all of the gas and all of the money from Equatorial Guinea was going to US banks, why they would have initiated this conspiracy in the first place where their interest would have been in all of this.

When it comes to the end-game with this process in Lebanon, isn't it the case at the moment that the lawyers originally engaged by the President have been removed from the case and that that process is also in some limbo with replacement of lawyers and uncertainty over where that's going as well?

Simon Mann:

You may well know more than I do about what's happening in Beirut. There has been a problem with the lawyers. I mean the situation in Beirut itself is pretty chaotic. It's quite possible that that case as you say has died a death but that doesn't change why I went there.

You talk about the American interest. I think that contrary to popular belief the oil companies genuinely do not want to be dealing with out and out tyrants and that is how President Obiang is perceived and going back into 2003, they wanted what hopefully would have happened which was a respectable and elected government. They would much rather deal with that than somebody who back at home they can be painted as sort of doing business with a bad arse.

So far as 'the Boss' is concerned, yes he's not the sort of guy who loses immense amounts of sleep over other people's lack of human rights, you're quite right.

However, he's not stupid either and a big element of the coup plan had to be that the thing be conducted properly after the event; in other words, there would have been an interim government, there would have been free and fair element elections and then hopefully a normal government.

Question 7:

You talked in the beginning a little bit about maybe the ethics of intervention. In your own moral judgment and leaving aside the complexities of international law do you think you were part of a criminal undertaking at the time?

You were jailed for it afterwards. You say you are now willing to help with criminal inquires. In your own view were you part of a criminal gang at the time?

Simon Mann:

The answer to that is 'yes' because we knew that in almost any of the different countries we were operating, in a strict reading of the law, we were on the wrong side of it.

Question 8:

I think you said that the Chinese, US and British seemed to be approving of the coup plan and I think you've been reported recently that MI6 specifically and the CIA did know of it. Could you say what evidence there is and put more flesh on the bone.

Simon Mann:

I was in prison at the time when I think Jack Straw stood up in the Houses of Parliament here and said that the British government were aware. He then sort of threw a smoke grenade by saying that of course they have many such wacky reports and they can't possibly react to all of them, which may have been true or may have been a disingenuous way of getting out of an awkward position.

The reason that I was very certain that they did in fact know happened about two weeks before Christmas 2003 when we had intercepted a report from Johann Smith, a South African private spook whose reports, although they were addressed to his oil company employers, undoubtedly went to both America and the UK without a doubt and many people have confirmed that. And one of the reasons I was very confident that that was so at the time was because Johann Smith used to work with Sean Cleary who was the lead liaison between the White apartheid government and Rwanda and therefore was very much involved with the Americans also.

Question 9:

I represented the Iraqi community in the 1980s. You mentioned that it was justified to invade Iraq, change the regime, but we count a million people dead, today's harvest is about 25 people car-bombed.

Are there any regrets or any comments to be made now or perhaps the Professor can comment on that as well?

Professor Nana Poku:

I think the issue about the invasion of Iraq is a problematic one and it depends I suppose on where one chooses to locate one's moral compass.

It is absolutely right that Saddam had to go but I think at the time of getting rid of Saddam maybe that wasn't the right time and many of us have long argued that even with reference to that and coming back more recently to Libya, there was always a negotiated way out for both Saddam and also Gaddafi.

I can't possibly accept that it was a moral case for intervention. I fundamentally don't believe that at all.

Simon Mann:

Well I was invited to help kick-off the war in early 2002 by David Hart who was writing papers for No. 10 and I had been involved in the first Gulf War serving on the staff of Peter de la Billière for a short while and I felt that Saddam really had to go.

I mean how many people do you have to kill before someone's going to come after you? I mean he started the Iran war did he not? He committed genocide against the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs and so it was time to go in after him.

I think that it's blindingly obvious that what happened next is a disaster and I don't argue with that at all but I don't think I would change my moral point of view of that time if it was run again knowing what I know now. It was the time to get rid of him.

Question 10:

Of course since all this happened the responsibility to protect has been institutionalized by the United Nations. How do you think that might have changed the circumstances under which all this happened?

Simon Mann:

I tried to make the point in my speech today.

I was brought up on the yellow card in Northern Ireland and I was quite surprised as a young soldier to discover that (a) as an officer on the streets of Northern Ireland I actually had less power than a police constable and that (b) I was entirely under the common law, particularly surprising since our anti-riot training at Sandhurst in those days had consisted of drawing a white line across the road and putting up a banner in the local language saying that who crossed the white line would be shot - that was the training and the preparation we had – so it was a surprise to find myself under the common law but then when I began to really study the yellow card I realised how robust actually the English common law was in this respect; that it does support you going to the aid of someone in terrible trouble and it supports you being pretty robust and rough about how you do it if that's necessary.

So I'm not sure, I don't know the ins and outs, I'm not an international lawyer or anything, but the responsibility to protect thing sounds to me like a jolly good idea but it doesn't sound as though it's radically different from what we had before.

Question 11:

I want to respond to the gentleman who asked about Iraq.

Had you lived in Libya and somehow taken the view that George W. Bush had to go, would you feel justified/ entitled to somehow engineer something to get rid of George W. Bush through violence?

Simon Mann:

I think I would identify a fundamental difference between George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein or President Gaddafi in the sense that they haven't been elected.

Question 12:

My question is about the moral position that you said I morally felt with the idea of taking Saddam out.

I was reading an article in the *Guardian* the other day about Equatorial Guinea and it was pretty astounding in terms of how the situation is on the ground in Equatorial Guinea and I know this is putting you on the spot but would you morally believe in removing Obiang's regime as a moral duty because of the violence and the tyranny?

Simon Mann:

It was very difficult for me, having arrived in Equatorial Guinea as a prisoner where I expected to be tortured, interrogated and shot, and then to find that I was being relatively well treated in many respects and many changes – and here we disagree – many changes have been initiated in Equatorial Guinea which are still going on and I would not try and present Equatorial Guinea as a model state today but I would say that it is moving firmly in the right direction. So no, I would not want to try and overthrow President Obiang again.

Question 13:

From outside Equatorial Guinea what do you think the impetus was that led to your release and from inside, from within Equatorial Guinea, why do you think President Obiang assented to those requests?

Simon Mann:

When I saw him he said that he absolutely hadn't had to let me go. That his decision to let me go was entirely his despite having an enormous range of different people asking for it and I think that the main reason that he let me go was because he knew that I'd done the very best I could in the course of my interrogation to help him and to help the authorities of Equatorial Guinea.

External pressures to release me? I've heard a lot of different stories and I think probably there's probably a germ of truth in many of them although I'm not sure about the Vatican or the senior Rabbi either actually which are two of the stories that genuinely I have heard.

I think, in fact interestingly, oil companies had quite a big part to play because they wanted me out of there because my ongoing presence there upped the human rights issue around their doing business with that country. That's another thing I've been told. I actually just don't really know why.

Question 14:

Would you agree that most interventions in Africa at the moment, whether state sponsored or private military sponsored, stem from resources or needing to defend and protect resources which are mostly owned by multi-nationals like Exxon and Chevron and so on?

Simon Mann:

It has to be that you're right. I wish that wasn't really true but it is true.

On the other hand, intervention is always going to be the art of the possible isn't it? If you look at the Equatorial Guinea thing and why did I sign up for this, I signed up for it because firstly I believed at the time that Equatorial Guinea was a rank tyranny and secondly because there was a whole load of gold at the end of the rainbow. That was the double whammy, that was the attraction and I suppose maybe perhaps in a microcosmic way that's fairly typical.

Question 15:

Once you were helping with their inquires where were your loyalties?

Simon Mann:

To myself – to get home. I wanted to get home and by then I felt that my erstwhile brothers in arms had betrayed me because they hadn't supported the men, they hadn't supported the families, they had done nothing for legal fees and I thought right, my interests were now pretty close to that of President Obiang so far as these guys are concerned.

Question 16:

Would you favour intervention in Zimbabwe?

Simon Mann:

Yes – I cannot tell a lie.

Question 17:

You spoke about private military companies and I was wondering, given the blurring effect that also referenced, if you actually saw a distinction between PMCs and private security companies which is the term that is most in use in the industry today and if you do see a distinction, do you see any future for private military companies at this point?

Simon Mann:

How can you not see a future for them when they're being used all over the place? And historically we always think of PMCs, they must come from here or America, but now you've got foreign companies doing it. You might have a Chinese private military company available for hire soon.

As for the private military company and private security company difference, there is a big difference I think and Executive Outcomes kind of defined it in the sense that if you go back to when Executive Outcomes started in 1993 at that point, let us call them the private security companies that control risks, the Defence Systems Limited, the KMSs, they without exception all went out of their way all the time not to be guns-for-hire and they would always deny that they were prepared to actually get their sleeves rolled up and fight a war.

Executive Outcomes came along and said the opposite basically: You pay us, we'll fight.

Question 18:

Thank you very much for speaking honestly and particularly on the point of the law of the pot of gold in Africa.

Do you not see the difficulty in instigating such interventions where the key reward or objective is to increase profitability for multi-national companies if there isn't a specific and consistent and ideally transferable model of corporate responsibility and social investment, and I say that not as a communist but as the managing director of a company that specializes in African joint venture facilitation? But it does seem to me that without a tangible and consistent plan for how governments are actually going to benefit their own people then you're actually exacerbating a system that is going to result in further political stagnation.

Simon Mann:

I can only really talk now actually as someone who has managed a diamond mining company in Africa and actually you're crazy if you don't have a serious social uplift programme and a good one too because you're going to be there for a long time – if you're mining you've got to be there for a long time or there's going to be no pay-back – so you've got to have a secure situation and you've got to have a relatively crime free one and the only way you're going to achieve that is by a proper social programme.

So I absolutely agree with you that that is needed. Whether a code of conduct would actually work is more difficult because the people who don't want to do it will always find a way around it.

Question 19:

Having had experience with both Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe's legal systems, could you draw a comparison between the legal systems of the two countries and say something about your experience of the rule of law in the two, if there is a difference or if you have any comments on them.

Simon Mann:

I used to explain the Zimbabwe legal system basically like this. It's an English system and you've got a house with plumbing. So you've got a header tank, you've got pipes, you've got valves and you've got taps etc and it's all there and it all basically works. The only trouble is you turn the tap on and the water that comes out is filthy dirty. That's Zimbabwe.

Equatorial Guinea you've basically got a very different system. You've got a Spanish system and it's completely different.

I mean in Zimbabwe they had jury service. In fact the Smith regime did away with jury service, so it's a very English system but it isn't working very well.

In Equatorial Guinea it's a much more fundamental system, Spanish and very foreign – very foreign to me anyway