

Live from the theatre of war



Una Riley, our USA correspondent meets Tony Schiena. It's a name synonymous with the intelligence sector, counter terrorism training, counter human trafficking, security for conflict areas, martial arts, a proponent of defensive tactics for special forces operators ... and a Hollywood actor.

Pictured above and next page: Tony Schiena (in black t-shirt) training with a former US Navy Seal

Photo courtesy of Tony Schiena

It was a glorious day as I made my way to the Montage Hotel, just off Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles, to meet Tony Schiena, CEO of MO SAIC (Multi Operational Security Agency Intelligence Company). I had seen him on TV but had not met him. He arrived accompanied by Sakonisa Takavesi, known as 'Sek' or 'Taka' to his friends, who became, in the words of his Army superiors - 'a legend in his own time within the SAS'. I was spoilt for choice. Schiena said: 'Taka is the one you should be interviewing, he is a hero and the highest decorated soldier in the SAS.' That broke the ice, and we immediately started chatting about all things security. I arranged to meet up with Taka when I get back to the UK, and I can't wait to hear more about this intriguing man. In the meantime, I wanted to know more about Schiena, who is something of an enigma. We started talking about Schiena's early life in South Africa where he was born. Apart from his security expertise he is a renowned sportsman. He achieved the highest of accolades, retiring as an undefeated world heavyweight karate champion. He is featured often on a plethora of TV news channels, from Fox to CNN, as a security expert, and he is also a Hollywood actor who has a song written about him by the rapper ICE T, 'Kool Mo Dee' ... check on YouTube. He has packed more into his life at this stage than most people fit into several?

Early years

His early years in South Africa were formative, in that he came from a family of karate black belts. He was eligible for South African conscription, which he tried to avoid by going to college, though ironically he ended up being recruited out by

the intelligence section. It was never his plan to go into security. How did that happen, I asked. 'I had an American law professor, I wanted to be a maritime lawyer so I was doing a business course ... that is when he and I became friends.' Schiena explained that, looking back, this was a common recruitment process. He described how, one day, the professor just disappeared and was not at college any more. 'A few days after that, I disappear from college!' We talked at length and in depth about that period as a young ... spy, for want of a better word, and the historic fall of apartheid. He explained how the left and the right were both obstructive, and the internal tribal terrorism that unfolded. Now a former veteran of the African intelligence and paramilitary community, Schiena operated during a pivotal part of South Africa's history, helping avert imminent civil war, and with the abolishment of apartheid, enabling a smooth transition to the government of the day. Whilst this would become the foundation of his diverse experience and accomplishments, we talked more about how it felt at the time as a young man starting out

Sink or swim

He explained being placed in the middle of dealing with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)



case officer, and the NIS (National Intelligence Service) operatives, having been being thrown in 'no man's land'. It was a case of sink or swim ... It's amazing how life works in a full circle, because the director of CIA Operations at that period of time would have absolutely no knowledge of me, as I would have been insignificant ... and not one of them ... I was probably an expendable asset. However, twenty years later that same man [Jack Devine, Director of CIA] is one of my partners!' Schiena runs the majority of his security operations out of his US-based company MO SAIC, which has training agreements with various other strategic security partnerships in Nevada and New York City, with former special forces operators, intelligence operators, and intelligence heads. His security partnerships also extend outside of the US to London and Dubai, and are constantly expanding into other geographical areas and sectors of security; at present concentrating on the technical side. MO SAIC management and advisers comprise former intelligence operatives from agencies including: CIA, MI6, NIS, plus former British SAS, US Navy Seals, CAG and other special forces groups.

Rise of military companies

The rise of private military companies is astounding. At the start of the Iraq war in 2003 there was one private military contractor for every ten US military. By 2007 there were more contractors than actual US military. A private military corporation (PMC), private military firm (PMF), or private military or security company, is now a term for what used to be called mercenaries. PMCs refer to their staff as security



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perfect example of doing the right thing even if it results in lost business ... which it did. The exposure did not help his business in any way, but he felt it was the right road to take from a moral standpoint. It is examples like this that highlight the difference between old-type mercenaries and the PMCs and contractors of today.



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With Simon Mann in Caracas in 2013

contractors' or 'private military contractors'. Or in Hollywood, actors in the theatre of war. The reputation of past mercenaries cannot be compared with the contractors of today. One of the largest PSCs in the UK has Nicholas Soames as its chairman. Soames, my keynote speaker at my Master's Lunch for the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals has also been a Conservative MP since 1983 ... so the credentials of these organisations are now comparable to other global organisations, and no longer 'soldiers of fortune'.

Benghazi attack

Their integrity is being recognised in all sorts of war-torn areas, such as Benghazi, Libya. On the evening of September 11, 2012 Islamic militants attacked the American diplomatic compound. The attack has also been referred to as the 'Battle of Benghazi' which inspired the movie, 13 Hours - hugely topical in the US, as Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was accused of lying to the victims' families, and the public. This 2016

American war film, billed as a true story, follows six members of a private security team who fight to defend the compound after waves of terrorist attacks. The film suggests that PMCs might in fact have more integrity than the state, when dealing with the lives of US citizens. The reputation of these contractors is that of heroes -- and the same goes for Schiana. During Iraq, he was vocal about his support of the Kurdish Peshmerga, and their struggle as the only organised force against ISIS, bringing their plight to the attention of the world. Schiana made worldwide headlines during his exposure of chemical weapon usage by ISIS against the Kurds. This is a



Training Kurds

I asked what he had been doing there: 'We were training Kurdish special forces commanders in escape and evasion, defensive tactics, and counter insurgency.' Schiana talked about his organization and their services to clients, which include intelligence operations which they split in to three categories; strategic and tactical intelligence, and counter-intelligence. He said:

Through strategic intelligence we keep track of global current events, study the actions of foreign leaders and understand all of the basics of a particular country our clients might be considering operating in, or are already operating in. During that process we analyse a country's politics, economy, military structure, and scientific advantages. Tactical intelligence involves assessing the power structure of a country to determine which groups hold influence. In this role, we will analyse foreign policy, public opinion, and voting statistics, as well as economic factors like trade agreements, gross national products, and famines or other natural disasters. Our counter-intelligence process prevents subversion and sabotage, and keeps valuable information away from the enemy.' MO SAIC, like other PSCs of its kind, describes itself as a strategic intelligence and advisory firm, dedicated to helping clients mitigate exposure and minimize loss, both financially and physically, to address current and emerging threats to multinational



You might not need to be told, but that's former US President Bill Clinton with Tony



Above, at a Kurdish front-line base in 2015; ISIS flag visible a mile away. Training Kurdish special forces commanders, left



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Training Cambodian border forces in 2006

Top right, Merced County, California (near San Jose), 2013, training a SWAT team in full counter-terrorism kit and right, making a point on the firing range

More about Tony
To read more and view interviews, visit: www.tonyschiema.com.



corporations, governments and non-governmental organisations as well as private individuals. Of course, none of these individuals could be named:

"We pride ourselves on discretion and relationship building," Schiena said, with a smile. Schiena is not only known in the wider world of military, but also with law enforcement in various capacities. He has provided specialist instruction to police in New York, South Africa, Indianapolis, Merced County (operating as team leader of a National Sheriff Associations team for a US TV show, *The Sheriff*). He was made a deputy sheriff in Virginia, and a lieutenant on the ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children) federal task force.

Trafficking

Schiema has involvement with numerous other prestigious affiliations and memberships, including being a long-standing member of the International Police Association, as well as being awarded the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the Hungarian National Guard for meritorious service. He is like a character from a Frederick Forsyth novel; only, Schiena is the real deal. Of all the things you are, I asked, and have been involved in, what is the most important to you? There are many issues, but one that needs attention is human trafficking and the sex trafficking of children," he replied. We discussed this serious topic further, as I agree it has not had enough attention. This is modern slavery and a heinous crime, and only in 2015 did the Modern Slavery Act come in, in the UK - but will it go far enough to stop this scourge? It is good to know that Schiena is dedicating time to fighting one of the greatest evils facing society. The Mosaic Federation/IC 30, a non-profit organisation based in London, shares trusteeship with the current head of Intelligence for Scotland Yard, Commander Richard Martin. Schiena said: "I had occasion to visit the Yard because I had a case in Romania that was initially human trafficking, that turned into kidnap and ransom. So I met with Kevin Hyland (who worked for Richard Martin) who is now Commissioner of



In Kabul in Afghanistan in 2012, training Mongolian quick reaction forces, left; and Afghan National Army in Mazar-e Sharif, right



anti-slavery in the UK." I asked, how did they all get together to become involved with the foundation. "We had a conflict resolution attorney that brought us all together," he replied. There is no doubt that Schiena is passionate about this subject and is intent on getting it publicised. He has spoken at the United Nations, G20 women's conference in Paris, and other political platforms on human trafficking. Lastly, I asked, what direction did he feel his company will be going. He said: "We are

focusing more on the technical side of security at present. That's why we are here in this beautiful climate. San Francisco has Silicon Valley, but LA is becoming known as Silicon Beach. There is real business here, not just Hollywood. It is very exciting. The education tech and the wi-fi tech is all coming out of LA. I never used to have technical security meetings over here, it was always London and other places on the planet ... not LA! But now it's happening here and it's very exciting." □