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Let's Go and Fight: Emergence of Mercenaries in Future Battle Fields



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Introduction

At end of February 2022, I got a call from my friend who said "let's go and fight in the Russia-Ukraine war". His logic was to do what we were meant to do— soldiering and fighting. The conversation continued for a few more days and continues to surface now and then. But it got me thinking – why do people go to fight in other men's wars and how does it affect the outcomes?

The World generally calls such volunteer fighters as mercenaries, soldiers of fortune, sellsword or hired guns who are involved in direct military clashes. In simplest terms, they are armed civilians paid to do military operations in foreign conflict zones.¹ What gave rise to such a force is a simple question which can be answered simply.

Key Points

- Private Military Contractors and volunteers, motivated by money and ideology, are operating across the globe, thus upsetting traditional combat ratios.
- Volunteers range from combat specialists to supporting operations like intelligence, media, paramedical, medical, construction, and supply chain.
- Over tasked CISF has already hybridised Airport Security with RAXA Group and now is better poised to undertake security of entire industrial sector of the country.
- Indian Defence Forces should acknowledge the utility and threat of such volunteers and be ready to make changes to war planning and fighting.



Firstly, an organisation may not have sufficient number of soldiers on the ground and therefore hires mercenaries to increase their combat ratio. Secondly, a specialist may also be hired for a particular job that is 'categorised' as unpleasant or dangerous. *Thirdly*, an organisation may also hire mercenaries to maintain 'plausible deniability'. *Fourthly*, a person may identify himself with a worthy cause and volunteer. In either of the cases, there has to be an understanding between the organisation and the volunteer.

The United Nations Convention prohibits recruitment, employment, financing, and training of mercenaries. Although, it entered into force on 20 October 2001, but was ratified by 35 countries only²; Britain, the United States, Russia, France, China, India, and Japan, so far have declined to sign up.³ Why does a country refuse to sign/ ratify or declare accession to a UN convention? For countries like USA or Russia, it stems from their compulsion to participate in various conflict zones without overt presence. In the game of global domination, such countries will need to adopt 'plausible deniability' and avoid imposing self-moratorium. China is attempting to deepen economic (financial loans) ties with many countries and may require covert efforts to protect its global assets. India's refusal is a form of protest against the non-ratification by powerful countries; this reason was self-evident in various previous Indian stands—in line with the concept of a 'global family' (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) and shared common responsibility.

Private Military Contractors or Companies (PMC) were established to legalise recruitment, financing, training, and employment of mercenaries. After all, mercenaries are 'soldiers for hire' and PMCs recruit these people into an organisation. These contractors came into the limelight during the Global War on Terror and the United States made contracting industry famous. This war was a testing and proving ground for 'how the countries could employ and how the contractors would perform'.⁴ Financial data proves that the industry of mercenaries and private military contractors has a global market worth of more than US\$100 billion.⁵ PMC is created by an ex-military or an ex-law enforcement officer and is characterised by deep connections with several branches of the government and military. Naturally, PMC duplicates



the command structure, leadership, culture, and operational concepts of the host government, which appeals to all and eases the working conditions and facilitates the intrinsic understanding of such jobs. This makes the PMC a formidable option for all governments and will also continue to exist in future conflicts.

Was there always a PMC? Ukraine created 'Legion of Foreign Volunteers' in March 2022 wherein 16,000 people joined. This Legion performed well during the Russian- Belarusian attempt to capture Kyiv. They were successful in defending small towns northwards, but for some reason the first lot was unceremoniously discharged.⁶ There were however reports that, sitting in foxholes through the Russian aerial and artillery shelling, was not a welcome experience which demoralised many volunteers even though they had been through small arm fire fights previously. The Ukrainians learnt their lessons and began screening the new set of volunteers, particularly focusing on previous war experience and specialists. They were also given formal command structures for maintaining discipline and usefulness in national effort. Although, the arrangement took time and delayed employment of volunteers, but it was ultimately successful and Russia lost more than few officers to sniper fire. Hence, in future wars, though the government may formalise volunteers, but it will also continue to 'surreptitiously permit' Lone Wolf Operations.

Belarus based YouTube channel *Military Summary*, on 12 July 2022, summarised a natiowise list of volunteers.⁷ Poland topped the list, obviously owing to humiliation of Polish–Soviet War of 1918-1921. Table 1 below is an extract of top five contributors from the Military Summary Channel. It indicates a high fatal casualty of 33% and desertion of 28% which has the capacity to demotivate newer generation of volunteers.

Table 1: Volunteer Casualty Rate: Russia - Ukraine War 2022 (Till July 2022)

Country	Volunteers Since Feb 2022	Killed	Left Ukraine	Active
Poland	1835	544	347	944
Canada	605	177	189	239
USA	544	220	235	89
Romania	504	123	119	262
UK	429	124	107	198
Total	7107	2347 (33%)	2019 (28%)	2741 (39%)

Source: Military Summary

How does a mercenary affect the conflict? He is a 'for-profit warrior' motivated by money rather than by 'patriotism', though a sprinkling of patriotic diaspora may also volunteer. Patriotism, amongst mercenaries, might be considered as unimportant and may become a liability. The nature of non-volitional grouping makes the mercenary fight unconventionally and ruthlessly at times. Some cult volunteers have developed their style of ruthlessness to cement their image—their presence on the battlefield motivates the fighters to bond and deliver results. Ramzan Kadyrov is a violent and pro-Russian Chechen fighter who is fighting in Ukraine. His experience of previous years taught him to employ a 'psychological war' to demoralise and destabilise the enemy.⁸ Surprisingly, volunteers from the Muslim territory of Chechnya have joined to fight alongside Ukraine (Ukraine is predominantly Christian). Russian Wagners are reported to be fighting in South East Ukraine too. Reports of volunteers fighting on both sides of Nagorno – Karabakh are well known. Nationalist narratives played a significant role in the radicalisation of both sides, amidst reports of 1,500 Turkish-backed Syrian fighters deployed on the Azerbaijani side, who seemed to be more motivated by 'high salaries' rather than 'ideology'.⁹



Why worry about mercenaries? Their unconventional way of battle procedures makes them invisible. Their concentration is not easily identified and is hidden in the fog of battle. A mixed group of American Special Forces supported by bombers, fighters, gunships, Apache helicopters and drones took four hours to counter 500 mercenaries supported by tanks at Khasham, located on the Euphrates River in Syria on 07 February 2018.¹⁰ They were not sure as to who the amassing horde was till it was too late. This decision dilemma is accentuated by reports of mercenaries in the conflict zone. Such delays in operational decision has a detrimental effect on conflict outcomes. In a combat scenario, the presence of a mercenary force will increase the enemy's combat ratio and traditional warfighting will fail. Hence, India has to develop and declare clear rules of engagement to avoid the American experience at Khasham.

It is often stated that, ruthless mercenary unit in a conflict zone affects the morale of troops, thus India will need a concept of 'surgical elimination' of such a personality quickly to regain psychological high ground. The morality of engaging a mercenary will rate high on the Indian mind since it conflicts with 'Ahimsa' (non-violent) ideology.

PMC or a mercenary is not an exclusive fighting variety. Instead, they may include intelligence operatives, paramedical, doctors, construction engineers, media specialists, public amenities' workers, fire fighters, teachers, and supply chain managers. These will generally volunteer far away from the active fighting or "Zero Line" as it is called in Ukraine. This non-combat variety exists beyond active combat zones, it does not affect the combat rations significantly, but it can relieve trained combat personnel for special duties on the frontline. Ukrainian Minister for Digital Transformation, Mykhailo Fedorvo, tweeted on 27 February 2022: "We are creating an IT Army. We need digital talents. All operational tasks will be given".¹¹ Irrespective of the motive of the advertisement and subsequent recruitment, it has certainly assisted the nation in information warfare efforts.



Will India see PMC in Future?

On 06 March 2022, Union Home Minister Amit Shah attended the 53rd Raising Day ceremony of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) at Ghaziabad where he directed the training of security agencies by CISF. CISF is preparing a security framework and hybrid arrangement with security agencies for guarding the private sector industries and installations. Once they are ready, they will take full charge of security from CISF. “Efficiency of private agencies will have to be increased because CISF alone cannot ensure the security of industrial sector of the entire country”, the Union Minister added.¹² This innocuous bit of news has a major revelation for the Indian future, since CISF is a government organisation which provides consultancy services to various PSUs, airports and 11 major private corporate houses.

The security agencies are governed by The Private Security Agencies (Regulation) Act, 2005 and modelled by the Private Security Agencies Central Model Rules (Ministry of Home Affairs). Therefore, security agencies mainly perform the duties of detecting, observing, and reporting. FICCI includes Manned Guarding—providing guarding services in the client premises against unauthorised access, and guarding property against damage for industrial security duties. The agencies also provide Cash Services to the banks for safe transit and cash or valuable collection facilities to large corporate and retail customers. Their Electronic Security Services include system integration, operations, and maintenance of electronic security products on customer premises.¹³ This aspect makes the agency incapable of most of the security tasks which is to be ‘hybridised with CISF’. Thus, the Union Minister’s directive will see a major upgrade in the training capacity of the private security agencies and their ability to employ & discharge weapons. These new security conditions cannot be met by Non Prohibited Bore (NPB) weapons, hence, there could be an Act soon permitting selected security agencies to operate Prohibited Bore (PB) weapons.¹⁴ Due to the nature and vulnerability of such industries and installations, security agencies will have to launch quick reaction teams around the estate and the perimeter which requires special vehicles,



automatic weapons and body armour. This increase in capacity may be a step closer for Indian security agencies towards PMCs.

As of September 2022¹⁵, CISF has already dissolved some of its posts at the airports from its Aviation Security Group (ASG) and re-appropriated the staff to other airports for increased security needs. Private security companies have already been inducted at airports (RAXA is hybridising with CISF at IGI Airport, New Delhi) for non-sensitive duties like queue management, security assistance to airlines staff, passengers, and manning of certain entry and exit points. CISF continues to be responsible for the 'core tasks'—checking passenger credentials at entry, frisking of passengers, anti-sabotage drills and providing an overall counter-terrorist cover to the airports. The Hybrid model suggested by MHA is already in place.

Private enterprises, who have sought CISF consultancy, will look into and follow up the hybrid model of the ASG. There is an obvious cost reduction in this model as CISF will reduce and restrict its focus on core duties only. Private Security Agencies, with lesser financial liability, will fill in for other duties under the overall control of CISF.

National level cost cuttings will cause a decrease in the number of soldiers. Technological development cannot fully relieve manpower, rather merely re-appropriate towards more human intensive activities. PMCs can provide contractual personnel who can relieve the soldiers from static guarding to more frontline contact duties. Specialists contractors can be directed to deep dive into intelligence, paramedical, medical, construction, media, and supply chain. If this becomes a reality then, there will be a major change in India's planning, fighting, and prosecuting war. This suggestion is not intended to 'recommend an end, but to indicate a pathway to the means'. And the discussion on "let's volunteer to fight" goes on.



End Notes

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¹⁴The Arms Act 1959 defines Prohibited Bore weapons as pistols (9 mm) and handguns of caliber .38, .455, and caliber .303 rifles. They also include semi-automatic and fully automatic guns. Issuing of PB license is specifically notified and controlled by the Government of India.

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