

Dear Editor,

Terrorists or Mercenaries?

Terrorists and terrorism have become most frequently used words in the world media without authentic research into the credentials of the people involved. In fact certain media groups successfully label genuine freedom fighters as terrorists and dangerous killers as Muslim Jihadis etc. There is another category of fighters and murderers i.e. mercenaries, which never catch the attention of the media.

A simple definition of a mercenary that he(or she) is a person who takes part in an armed conflict, who is not a national or a party to the conflict, and is "motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party" (Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention of August 1949.)

There is enough evidence that groups, organizations or governments hire mercenaries to fulfill their own bloody agendas and then if need be, apportion blame at a chosen party. It is quite easy to engage killers nowadays of any identity and get the job done at any level. This is very critical and a dangerous situation and thus requires a thorough investigation and research before any blame is labeled or retaliation is planned.

For example in the mid-1970s John Banks, a Briton, recruited mercenaries to fight for the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) against the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the civil war that broke out when Angola gained independence from Portugal in 1975. When captured, John Derek Barker's role as a leader of mercenaries in Northern Angola led the judges to send him to face the firing squad. Nine others were imprisoned. Three more were executed: American Daniel Gearhart was sentenced to death for advertising himself as a mercenary in an American newspaper; Andrew McKenzie and Costas Georgiou (the self styled "Colonel Callan"), who had both served in the British army, were sentenced to death for murder. Obviously both Daniel and Andrew

are termed as mercenaries and not terrorist, although they may have slaughtered many a civilians for personal gain. No journalist would dare term the British or the Americans as terrorists because of a few Daniels and Andrews holding respective nationalities.

As a result of the assumption that a mercenary is essentially motivated by money or other arrangements, the term "mercenary" carries negative connotations, though that can be a compliment in some contexts. There is a blur in the distinction between a "mercenary" and a "foreign volunteer", when the primary motive of a soldier in a foreign army is uncertain. For instance, the French Foreign Legion and the Gurkhas are not mercenaries under the laws of war, since although they may meet many of the requirements of Article 47 of the 1949 Additional Protocol I, they are exempt under clauses 47(a)(c)(d)(e)&(f); some journalists describe them as mercenaries regardless. This leaves us in even more confused hence the need for threadbare investigation and cooperation between the warring parties who exchange the blame. The tragedy is that a small group of people with their evil designs can flare up wars between establishments and their countries and the sole sufferers are none but the poor masses. May sense prevail among all our leaders.

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21st December 2008