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The Modern Mercenary and the Decolonization of Africa: Ten Plus Ten Questions

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Mercenaries are professional soldiers who fight for pay in the armies of foreign countries. They have been employed in armies since ancient times and were the accepted main force of armies in the principalities of Europe. "Mercenaries have been associated with virtually all recorded wars and quasi-wars, on the sides of good and evil, for high pay and low." ¹ They were gradually replaced in European armies by standing volunteer forces in the seventeenth century. In recent times mercenaries have been employed in African Civil wars.

The decolonization of the continent of Africa has brought with it a resurgence of the use of mercenaries. The struggle of many African states to become independent and sovereign entities has plunged much of the continent into multi-factioned civil wars, unrest and uncertainty. This climate has made a great part of Africa fertile and potentially fertile ground for mercenary activity.

My main reason for selecting mercenaries and their association with the African decolonization process as a basis upon which to build a teaching unit, is the prominence of articles on the subject in adventure magazines such as 'Soldier of Fortune', 'Eagle' and 'New Breed'. These magazines are readily available to the public, which includes students. These publications often carry listings for the training and recruitment of mercenaries. They tend to portray the modern mercenary as a romantic warrior, adventurer and soldier of fortune, plying his trade in a useful, meaningful and just cause.

Most other sources available to me view the mercenary and his role in the African peoples' struggle for freedom and independence with repugnance. They deem mercenary activity as criminal, worthless, an impediment to peace and a dangerous manifestation of international terrorism. The mercenary is illustrated by these sources as a racist, fantasist and greedy wanton killer, whose chief motivation is money. The extreme disparity between the viewpoints was my final reason for choosing this subject in the development of a teaching unit.

I shall prepare this unit as a learning package consisting of four major elements: (1) the text, (2) a pre/post test of ten true/ false and multiple choice questions, (3) a practical work project related to the chosen subject and (4) ten essay questions designed to provoke thought and research beyond the text as a post test.

The text of my learning package shall briefly examine the role of the mercenary in the decolonization of Africa by answering the following questions: (1) Who and what is the modern mercenary; pro and con?, (2) What are some of the factors or elements which acclimatized the revitalization of mercenaries in selected regions of

Africa?, and (3) How do inter-African governments, western governments and other world bodies view mercenaries and their activities in Africa.

It is my hope that by the presentation of both pro or anti-establishment views and con or establishment views on mercenaries and their activities in Africa, that a sober and more realistic outlook can be reached in evaluating the good or evil of their presence there.

Pre/Post Test

General directions—Respond to the following questions as indicated below. The correct answers can be found at the end of the text.

I. Circle the correct answer from those given below. Choose either a, b, c, or d.

1. A mercenary

- a. usually fights at home.
- b. is a Peace Corps Volunteer.
- c. fights in foreign armies.
- d. shows jungle villagers how to irrigate their land.

2. Mercenaries

- a. fight for free.
- b. are untrained.
- c. paid to fight.
- d. all of the above.

3. Decolonization is

- a. a tactical maneuver.
- b. the breaking of ties with the Mother Country.
- c. a block of prison quarters.
- d. None of the above.

II. Answer true or false to the following:

- 4. All mercenary activity has been halted throughout the world.
- 5. There were never mercenaries on the Continent of Africa.
- 6. Mercenaries are not paid, but volunteer.
- 7. Most governments applaud the efforts of mercenaries.
- 8. Most mercenaries are United Nations peacekeeping forces.
- 9. Mercenaries are never killed in battle.
- 10. Decolonization in many cases, brought with it Civil War.

(figure available in print form)

THE MODERN MERCENARY AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF AFRICA

Who and What are the Modern Mercenaries?

Pro:

The modern mercenaries hired for service in Africa are for the most part highly skilled and trained soldiers. “The new mercenaries are mostly young, white Western veterans of their countries’ elite armed forces—such as the United States Green Berets and Britians Special Air Service.” ²

A list of forty-four mercenaries captured in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government of the Seychelles—an island chain in the Indian Ocean east of southern Africa illustrates the typical nationalities of those employed for African campaigns. “The 44 mercenaries included 23 South Africans, nine Britons, five Rhodesians, two West Germans, one Irishman, one American, one Australian and one Austrian.” ³

“The typical mercenary adopts his lethal trade out of boredom, joblessness or rightist political views . . . misses the excitement and discipline of military life and seeks a quick fortune.” ⁴ These are men, usually combat seasoned, who have enjoyed a tour of active duty and seek a means to continuing the trade because they enjoy the challenge and experience.

The modern mercenary does see a just cause. In most cases money is not the primary motivation. Robert K. Brown, founder and publisher of ‘Soldier of Fortune’ magazine says, “Ninety-nine percent of the people who have contacted me about mercenary work are motivated by ideology.” ⁵ He further states, “. . . they’re looking for a chance to get back at the Communist some place else in the world.” ⁶

The modern mercenary may be employed in a variety of common positions between combat jobs. He may be an actor, photographer, writer or teacher.

Con:

Today’s mercenary employed in the African States has financial gain as his main motivation. He is willing to fight and kill a designated enemy strictly for money.

“He is not a national of the country for which he is fighting nor is he connected with the cause of those with whom he is fighting.” ⁷ Further, “he has no racial connections with those whose cause he is fighting or those he is fighting against.” ⁸ He is one who fights for fightings sake, sometimes armed with a twisted political point of view.

The modern mercenary is fed reason with the spoon of his employer. Promised rank, honors, superior weaponry and an inferior enemy, he ventures into battle believing that all of the odds are stacked greatly in his favor.

“And so, from the inadequate, the discarded, the cruel, the bully, the unimaginative, the fantasist, the racist, and above all the greedy, are recruited human resources to make the war machine work.” ⁹ The modern mercenary is available to anyone who can afford him.

What are some of the factors in Africa which nurtures the resurgence of mercenaries there?

(1) No single nationalist movement for the immediate transfer of power.

The decolonization of Angola provides a primary example of an African State's lack of a single nationalist movement for which to transfer immediate power. When Lisbon pulled its troops out of Angola in 1974, "a quadrilateral transitional government was set up consisting of (1) FNLA (The National Front for the Liberation of Angola), (2) UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), (3) MPLA (The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and (4) Portuguese representation by a High Commissioner." ¹⁰ There was no decisive authority. Each faction began competition for complete control. The result was civil war.

Supported with arms by the Soviet Union, "the Marxist MPLA Angolan Government, with the strong surrogate support from Cuba and Eastern Europe, has come out largely on top" ¹¹ in the fight for dominance at this writing.

In see-saw battles for control of Ongiva, Angola's southern most city, "Jonas Savimbi's pro-Western Unita Movement also took the town a couple of times, usually in conjunction with another indigenous movement, the FNLA—unlike Unita, FNLA didn't balk at using European and American mercenaries if convenient, but they were generally no match against the better trained and equipped Luanda force (the MPLA), invariably bolstered by the Cubans and East Germans." ¹²

(2) Individuals wishing to keep or come to power.

The Congo became independent in June of 1960. Tshombe became President of Katanga, a secessionist state set up outside of the Congo State. Tshombe hired mercenaries to aid in maintaining the State of Katanga as a separate pro-Western State. This effort failed. He later became Prime Minister of the Congo where he again employed mercenaries to help stamp out the radical revolutionary movement which became known as the Simba Revolt, which was not loyal to the Western powers. This effort also failed and he was imprisoned.

Pro-Western mercenaries continued to work on behalf of Tshombe, trying to bring him back to power. "Thus Tshombe and the mercenaries worked for the same objectives: secession of Katanga, disunity of the Congo and the establishment of a pro-western government serving the interests of the monopolies." ¹³

(3) Ideological conflicts—Communism vs Socialism and Democracy One of the major justifications for the use of mercenaries is to halt the spread of Communism. As most mercenaries employed for service in Africa cling to Western ideals, they see themselves as agents of anti-communism.

"As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, its policy in Africa is extremely clear. We want the African peoples to be totally free from colonialism and neo-colonialism and we do not want a single region or territory where colonialism, racism or apartheid rules to remain on the African continent. The rendering of aid and support in every possible way to peoples who have freed themselves from colonial dependence is an integral of Soviet foreign policy." ¹⁴

(4) Inter-African interference

There is a strong Libyan presence in Chad at this time. There is a relative peace since President Goukouni Oueddei came to power with the aid of heavily armed Libyan troops. Fear runs rampant throughout Africa, especially in the neighboring Sudan and Senegal, that Colonel Muammar Qaddafi will have a destabilizing

affect on the whole area.

“Already there are known to be several European organizations recruiting mercenaries to fight for one side or another.”¹⁵ “At one stage there were a hundred mercs, most of them of West German and French origin, waiting to go in from Cameroun.”¹⁶

(5) Racism

A Colony is a body of people living in a new territory but retaining ties with the parent state. Decolonization is the breaking of those ties.

Racism was an inevitable product of decolonization, in many cases, because the colonizers were white Europeans who held all or most of the power. Independence in Africa saw many black majority movements seek or come into power. There were those who employed mercenaries (soldiers who fight for pay in foreign armies) in order to keep the white governments in power.

How does Inter-African Governments, Western Governments and other World Bodies view Mercenaries and their Activities in Africa?

The United States, Great Britain, Belgium, France, The United Nations, The Organization of African Unity, and many other countries and organizations condemn mercenaries and their activities. There are laws and initiatives that define mercenary activity as criminal and set fines and penalties. The practice of recruiting and enlisting mercenaries is considered a crime with fines and penalties.

One example is the United States Code. Section 959 of Title 18, headed ‘Enlistment in foreign service’ states, “Whoever, within the United States, enlists or enters himself, or hires or retains another to enlist or enter himself, or to go beyond the jurisdiction of the United States with intent to be enlisted or entered in the service of any foreign prince, state, colony, district or people as a soldier or as a marine or seaman on board any vessel of war, letter of marque, or privateer, shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than three years or both.”¹⁷

Whether more stern or less, the laws on the books of most Western countries and African states prohibit the use, recruitment and enlistment of mercenaries. A 33-member Committee, which met for the first from January 20 until February 13 and is formally known as the Ad Hoc Committee on the Drafting of an International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, was established by the General Assembly. “In the general debate, speakers pointed out that the time had come to elaborate a convention to stop mercenaries, . . . and that their activities should be condemned as constituting interference in the internal affairs of other States.”¹⁸

There has been little cessation of mercenary activities. The mercenary is, at this time, employed in Africa, Indo-China and the Middle East. Perhaps in the future we will hear of more men dressed in black, wearing camouflaged grease paint, descending quietly from ropes and trees thinking—AIRBORN-DEATH FROM ABOVE.

RELATED WORK PROJECT

Tactical positions undertaken in Africa are more often remote jungle villages or small settlements. An effective scale model relief map of an African village landscape can be made in the classroom.

This can utilize either paper mache or prepared modeling compounds, used by model railroaders. For paper mache; you mix wheatpaste and water—and tear up fine strips of newspaper or paper toweling. Dipping each strip of paper, one at a time apply to a wooden board about a square yard in size.

In preparing the paper modeling compound which is superior because it gives a more earthlike result:

1. Put measured amount into a container.
2. Add water and mix completely.
3. Stop adding water when mix clings together.
4. Let mixture stand for 15 minutes.

Work it onto the board with a small putty knife in order to make hills, valleys and lakes. Keep wetness to a minimum. Make small farm houses out of blocks of wood: fences can be constructed from ice cream sticks that are broken and glued. Small figures of people and animals can be bought inexpensively in hobby stores to complete the rural construction. Native huts can be made out of thimbles or thread spools covered with twine.

From this base the imagination is the only limitation.

Answers Pre/Post Test

- I.
 1. c
 2. c
 3. b
- II.
 4. false
 5. false
 6. false
 7. false
 8. false
 9. false
 10. true

POST TEST

General directions: Respond to the following essay questions.

1. In the event of decolonization, with several factions in direct competition for power in a particular country, what would be your recommendation for a peaceful transfer of power?
2. What would you say is a legitimate role for the mercenary in today's world?
3. Are the listings in adventure magazines, providing contacts for mercenary employment possibilities, a possible threat to the young or idealistic mind? Explain.
4. What is your personal definition of a mercenary?
5. What should be the ultimate aim of decolonization? Who should set the ground rules?
6. In terms, other than black and white, what is your definition of racism?
7. Do you visualize Africa as a Continent composed of individual countries or as a nation composed of States? Explain.
8. Under what circumstances would you consider becoming a mercenary?
9. What would be your formula for determining whether or not a particular front or faction was truly representative of the people they aspire to serve?

NOTES

1. Esquire, 'Killing Time with the War Dreamers', April 1978, p.138.
2. Time, 'Mercenaries: No Grounding the Geese', Dec. 14, 1981, p.562.
3. Soldier of Fortune, 'Seychelles Fiasco', March 1982, p.85.
4. Loc Cit p.562 'Time'.
5. Loc Cit 'Esquire' p.138.
6. Ibid.
7. Ambassador Mohed Omer Beshir 'Mercenaries in Africa', p.1.
8. Ibid.
9. *The Whores of War*, Wilfred Burchette & Derek Roebuck, p.8.
10. 'Angola After Independence', p. 1 Council of the Institute for the Study of Conflict.

11. Ibid.
12. Eagle, 'SWAPO Chased from Angolan Stronghold', Oct. 1982 p. 37.
13. Loc Cit. 'Mercenaries in Africa', p.5.
14. Pravda, 26 March 1975.
15. Eagle 'War in Chad', Aug. 1982 p. 37.
16. Ibid.
17. Loc Cit *Whores of War* , p.8.
18. UN Chronicle, 'Committee Hears Range of Views on Mercenaries', April 1981 p. 12.

MERCENARY TYPE INSIGNIA

(figure available in print form)

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