

COMMENT

Privatising War

MAYBE 'SALWA JUDUM' IS THE beginning of privatising counter-insurgency plan in India. In reality it is the extension of American policy of privatising war. In many ways Chattisgarh is a laboratory for India's ruling elites as Iraq and Afghanistan are for America to test the effectiveness of non-state actors in combat zones. Deploying private armies, rather mercenaries, costs less and involves less life-risk for regular security forces.

With anti-war agitation gaining momentum in America as war veterans are out in the streets in large numbers sending the message "Mr Obama : End These Wars. No tomorrow. Not next year. Now", the crisis-ridden American administration is likely to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 2014.

The US invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 2001 and after a decade of high-tech war they have planned to pull out, leaving dozens of private army units to defend their strategic and economic interests.

Right now 52 bands of private military and security companies (PMSCs) are working in Afghanistan. Repeated complaints by human rights bodies about gross violation of rights by these armed bands—or bandits—fell to deaf ears in Washington. What awaits in store for ordinary Afghans after 2014 is anybody's guess.

Afghanistan is currently one of the two biggest theatres of operations for PMSCs. In conflict or post-conflict situations, PMSCs often fulfil a demand for protection from a wide variety of clients, including national institutions, foreign forces, multinational companies, and governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The government of the United States is the main employer of PMSCs in Afghanistan, employing about a quarter of all private security personnel, according to the Commission on Wartime contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The companies are usually managed by US staff and employ about 85 percent Afghan nationals with sometimes a small proportion of third-country nationals.

Human Rights watchers across the globe have been voicing concern for quite some time over the lack of prosecution in Afghanistan and in contracting states of private security contractors accused of having committed gross human rights abuses. Then Uncle Sam is not going to bring those responsible for atrocities to justice. Using mercenaries as a means of violating human rights while impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination is now an integral part of American strategic policy in third world countries. The days are not far when Pakistan will have to tolerate the presence of PMSCs. The hard reality is that they are already tolerating the presence of American troops on Pakistani soil though officially both sides deny it. And spill-over effect in India can well be guessed in advance.

As PMSCs have no accountability and Afghan government in Kabul remains a puppet, Afghan people will have no respite from being haunted by terror network even if American soldiers return to barracks in 2014. □□□