A Culture for War: Explaining Military Performance in Asymmetric Conflicts Involving Mercenary Forces

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Since the end of the Second World War, mercenary groups have played significant roles in wars throughout the developing world. However, despite being consistently outnumbered by their opponents, these groups have a highly uneven record of military performance. Indeed, some modern mercenary groups have managed to defeat far larger state and insurgent militaries while similar sized groups of private soldiers have experienced crushing defeats at the hands of more numerous adversaries. Taking this into account, how can we explain the military performance of modern mercenary groups in asymmetric conflicts?¹

Scarce literature exists on the performance of mercenary groups, and that which does exist consists largely of descriptive case studies offering an overview of specific groups or the private military industry. In brief, most of the leading works on mercenary

¹ Military performance, the dependent variable in this essay, is specifically concerned with winning and losing battles. It is the outcome of battle; it is not what a military does in battle. Military performance is not a characteristic of an organization but rather the result of an organization’s activity. This concept does not equate with military effectiveness, another major variable in this essay meaning the range of military behaviour that a military force is capable of undertaking. Armed forces may be highly effective yet still be defeated. For example, the German Army was arguably the most effective fighting force during both the First and Second World Wars yet it ultimately lost numerous battles and both conflicts. Indeed, the German army is often cited as an example of extraordinary military effectiveness because it fought so well even when faced with more numerous and better armed foes. Therefore, while military effectiveness and military performance are related concepts, it is important to recognize that they are quite different; military effectiveness is only one possible determinant of military performance. Martin Van Creveld, Fighting Power: German and US Army Performance, 1939-1945 (London, UK: Arms and Armour Press, 1983); Allan Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth Watman, “The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” International Security 11, no. 1 (Summer 1986).
forces are long on empirical data and narrative, but short on theory and explanation.\textsuperscript{2} This paper seeks to redress this failing by evaluating the Normative Theory of Military Performance, which hypothesizes that a military force’s cultural norms influence its tactical behaviour (its military effectiveness), against the evidence of five asymmetric conflicts involving mercenary groups.

These conflicts include three in which a group of mercenaries defeated a numerically superior opponent: the Simba Rebellion, which lasted from January 1964 to November 1965, and saw a force of 300 mercenaries, called 5 Commando, defeat a force of 5,000-7,000 insurgents, called the Simbas;\textsuperscript{3} a stage of the Angolan Civil War, which lasted from March 1993 to November 1994, and saw a force of 550 mercenaries, called Executive Outcomes, defeat a force of tens of thousands of insurgents, called the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA);\textsuperscript{4} and a stage of the Sierra Leonean Civil War, which lasted from May 1995 to November 1996, and saw a separate Executive


Outcomes force of 250 mercenaries defeat a 4,000-strong insurgent force, called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). In addition, these conflicts include two in which a group of mercenaries was defeated by a numerically superior opponent: an earlier stage of the Angolan Civil War, which lasted from January to February 1976, and saw a 2,000 strong force of Cuban and Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) soldiers defeat a 60-strong force of private soldiers, called Callan’s Mercenaries, and, the First

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Congo War, which lasted from October 1996 to May 1997, and saw the crushing defeat of a group of 200 mercenaries, called the White Legion, at the hands of a 10,000-strong insurgent force called the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL). 7

Ultimately, the results of this analysis indicate that the military cultures maintained by the combatants in this conflict played a critical role in deciding the outcome of these conflicts. Taking this into account, the normative theory of military performance appears to offer a convincing explanation of military performance in asymmetric conflicts.

The Normative Theory of Military Performance

The core logic of the normative theory of military performance is that a grossly outnumbered force must be highly flexible and adaptable if it is to perform the range of military tasks required to defeat materially superior opponents. Norms encouraging the pursuit of a wider range of tactical behaviour, such as personal initiative, should, therefore, increase military effectiveness, which, in turn, should increase a group’s prospects for military success. If the theory is correct, a military force’s performance should be conditioned by the degree to which the members of the force have been indoctrinated into norms that encourage them to be militarily effective. Specifically, the theory reasons that military forces that strongly emphasize norms encouraging creative thinking, decentralized authority, personal initiative, technical proficiency, and group loyalty, should exhibit greater militarily effectiveness than forces that deemphasize these norms. Moreover, it reasons that military forces exhibiting greater military effectiveness should experience greater battlefield military performance than less effective groups, all else equal.

Taking this into account, the theory predicts that the materially weaker party in an asymmetric conflict, which the mercenary forces were in these cases, should only be able

to defeat its materially stronger opponent if the weaker party emphasizes behavioural norms that encourage it to perform a wide range of tactical behaviour – that is, be very militarily effective – and the stronger party does not emphasize these norms because this should allow the weaker party to exploit the weaknesses and counter the strengths of the stronger party and, through this, defeat it. In all other scenarios, the balance of military effectiveness should prevent the mercenaries from overcoming the material superiority of their opponents; consequently, in all other scenarios, the mercenaries should be defeated.

With this in mind, the theory correctly predicted that 5 Commando and Executive Outcomes’ forces in Angola and Sierra Leone should have defeated their materially

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superior opponents because, in all of these conflicts, the mercenary force strongly emphasized the five norms of military effectiveness and their opponents did not. The theory also correctly predicted that Callan’s Mercenaries\(^\text{11}\) and the White Legion\(^\text{12}\) should
have been defeated by their materially superior opponents because, in the first case, neither the mercenary group nor its materially superior opponent strongly emphasized the
five norms of military effectiveness and, in the second, case the mercenaries did not strongly emphasize these norms, save for technical proficiency, and their materially superior opponent did.

**How well did the Normative Theory of Military Performance Predict the Dynamics of These Conflicts**

The normative theory of military performance appears to have done an admirable job at predicting how the five norms thought to enhance military effectiveness would influence the behaviour of the military forces discussed in this paper. This section summarizes my findings. In the interests of brevity, I have included only a handful of examples from these conflicts to help illustrate general trends.

**Tactical Innovation**

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should demonstrate significant tactical innovation. Tactical units within these forces should routinely seek tactical advantages over opponents by, for instance, using maneuver warfare, and not rely exclusively on simple frontal assaults when attacking or counterattacking.\(^\text{13}\) This prediction was borne out in these cases.\(^\text{14}\) For

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\(^{13}\) Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 66. The US Army’s *Field Manual 100-5: Operations* defines maneuver warfare as “the movement of forces in relation to the enemy to secure or retain positional advantage,” to gain an advantage over the adversary requires that the commander be able to imagine a situation different from his present situation, one in which he has an advantage over his enemy derived from a different spatial arrangement. William S. Lind, "Maneuver," in *Brassey’s Encyclopedia of Land Forces and Warfare*, ed. Franklin Margiotta (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1997), 662. Contemporary maneuver warfare developed in part out of the German concept of *Auftragstaktik* (mission tactics), which emphasizes decentralized decision-making authority and personal initiative: “orders tell the subordinate what is to be accomplished while leaving him maximum latitude in deciding how to accomplish it. In effect, he is given a goal, and it is left to him to attain it. This is done at all levels of
example, EO’s force in Angola frequently deployed groups of infantry around a battle space so that they could herd, trap, and easily eliminate UNITA fighters.\footnote{Davis, \textit{Fortune's Warriors}, 129.} This often involved conducting fake helicopter landings, known as “dummy deliveries,” which were intended to trick UNITA into thinking that far more groups of EO infantry were in the area than was actually the case.\footnote{Venter, \textit{War Dog}, 433-434.} EO’s heliborne mortar attacks on UNITA guerillas and field camps were especially destructive to the rebels because they not only tended to kill several rebel troops but, since UNITA could generally not react fast enough to engage their attackers, they also undermined the rebels’ will to fight.\footnote{Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 211; O'Brien, "Private Military Companies and African Security: 1990-98," 52; Singer, \textit{Corporate Warriors}, 110.} For example, a mortar and infantry team was deployed to bombard the UNITA-held town of Lubalo with 80 mortar shells before being extracted by helicopter, which caused, “massive casualties,” and took the town’s defenders sufficiently off guard that they could not react in time to reach EO’s men before the extraction.\footnote{Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 238-239.}

Moreover, during the First Congo War, the ADFL consciously chose to employ herding tactics to drive the mercenaries and other forces loyal to Mobutu away from command. As part of mission orders, the subordinate is expected to show a high level of initiative.” \cite{lind2003maneuver} Maneuver warfare demands that the commander quickly develop an operation plan that will allow him to place his forces into the newly imagined, spatially-advantageous position that anticipates the likely reactions of his adversary. Consequently, these forces ought to opt for more complicated flanking and envelopment maneuvers in situations where such maneuvers could be advantageous.


\footnote{Venter, \textit{War Dog}, 433-434.}


\footnote{Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 238-239.}
government-held settlements. This primarily involved coordinating a vanguard made up of multiple 100 to 200-strong groups of infanteers, what Anthony Clayton referred to as “tourniquet groups,” in multidirectional assaults that left open an escape route to encourage their opponents to break and flee in a particular direction. For example, on October 4, 1996, rebel forces seized Lemera, a village north of Uvira, by attacking from three directions at the same time while leaving an escape route for the government troops assigned to the defend the settlement. This tactic was also employed against the mercenaries to successfully seize Watsa on February 2, 1997, and the mercenaries’ main airbase at Kindu on March 1, 1997. Likewise, in mid-March 1997, the rebels employed this tactic to assault the village of Babagulu and, soon after, the city of Kisangani from three directions at the same time.

The normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces emphasizing creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should have little difficulty adapting to unforeseen developments on the battlefield. This prediction was also borne out in these conflicts. For example, 5 Commando were generally able to respond to Simba ambushes along roadways, which tended to proceed as follows: Congolese or Rwandan rebels, sometimes supported by Cuban troops, would spring the ambush by firing wildly from the underbrush at the side of the road, with rifles

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22 Boyne, "The White Legion." 280.
and rocket launchers, in the general direction of the mercenaries, then charge forward from the underbrush in a straight line to finish off any survivors.\textsuperscript{25} On the face of it, this tactic should have proven generally effective, especially if all of the mercenaries were immediately killed. However, this rarely happened, and, if even a handful of mercenaries remained alive and in fighting form after the initial attack, they tended to reverse the situation by inflicting heavy casualties on the advancing rebels and forcing them to retreat.\textsuperscript{26}

Similarly, as Singer put it, EO’s personnel in Angola were, “innovative and adjusted to changing situations by using ad-hoc tactics not found in the books, options perhaps less possible in a public military.”\textsuperscript{27} This seems to have paid dividends because, throughout the conflict, EO’s personnel were able to quickly retaliate against unforeseen moves by UNITA, such as ambushes or large-scale surprise attacks.\textsuperscript{28} With respect to the rebels’ ambushes, very few were successful in the sense that few resulted in the death, injury, or capture of EO personnel.\textsuperscript{29} Rather, in the vast majority of incidents, EO’s personnel responded immediately, launched counterattacks, and put the ambushers to flight. This occurred even in instances where the rebels succeeded in landing the first blow by, for instance, firing before their presence was known to the mercenaries.\textsuperscript{30}

Likewise, Lafras Luitingh, one of EO’s chief executives, argued emphatically that his personnel in Sierra Leone reacted, “with rigor,” when they encountered unforeseen

\textsuperscript{25} Guevara, The African Dream, 86.
\textsuperscript{26} Guevara, The African Dream, 88; Thallon, Cut-Throat, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{27} Singer, Corporate Warriors, 116.
\textsuperscript{28} Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 200-201; Hooper, Bloodsong, 86 and 164-165.
\textsuperscript{29} Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 287; Venter, War Dog, 381-382.
\textsuperscript{30} Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 248, 250-251, and 289.
developments. Venter, similarly, argued that EO’s force in Sierra Leone was, “an extremely versatile fighting group… because they remained flexible in their approach to the kind of problems that might arise. Each situation was handled on its own terms. Nothing was predetermined or fixed.” Of critical importance, the heliborne infantry of EO’s Fire Force, the attack helicopters of its Air Force, and the BMP-2s and infantry of its Mobile Force could rapidly support each other if any of them encountered an unexpected situation, such as a particularly large and well-armed RUF ambush. As a result, the firm usually dealt with these situations swiftly and decisively.

The normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces emphasizing creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should have little difficulty developing tactics to counter unexpected weapons or tactics used by their adversaries. This prediction was also borne out in these cases. For instance, when 5 Commando was spearheading attacks ahead of a larger force of ANC troops, the Simbas would sometimes let the mercenaries pass by their concealed ambush positions and then descend on the unskilled ANC soldiers following behind. To counter this, the mercenaries began driving in small and deceptively vulnerable jeep convoys along contested roads to invite attack. A reserve column of mercenaries would follow closely behind and viciously attack the Simbas when they exposed their ambush points and burst

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32 Venter, War Dog, 478.
33 Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 335-336; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Hooper, Bloodsong, 246; Venter, War Dog, 479, 480-482, 494-495, 497, and 502.
34 Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 66.
36 Dodenhoff, "The Congo," 57; Reed, Save the Hostages, 144.
out into the open. Likewise, EO’s force in Sierra Leone proved highly adept at countering the RUF’s ambush tactics. For instance, to reduce the frequency and effectiveness of the rebels’ ambushes, the mercenaries took to launching preemptive strikes against suspected rebel ambush positions, often by approaching them at night and through the country’s dense forests. As Barlow recalled,

At every anticipated ambush position, our men would debus from their vehicles and sweep ahead on foot, the vehicles ready to race into the area and provide fire support once contact had been made. This was something the SLA had never done and the RUF had never expected. At each position, the rebels were taken by surprise.

Finally, the normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces emphasizing creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should learn quickly from their mistakes. This prediction was borne out as well. For example, during EO’s initial assault on Quefiuena, Angola, near Soyo, one squad of mercenaries decided that carrying their heavy 60 mm mortar and its shells from their insertion point to within range of the UNITA troops was not worth the effort. When the squad later realized that over three hundred rebels were guarding Quefiuena, they were forced to delay their assault while a mercenary went back to retrieve the equipment. Although EO did not suffer casualties because of this oversight, the force subsequently decided that, regardless of the inconvenience, all available equipment must be made readily available at all times.

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37 Germani, White Soldiers in Black Africa, 87; Thomas, Mercenary Troops in Modern Africa, 81.
38 Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Hooper, Bloodsong, 225; Venter, War Dog, 515.
39 Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 357-358.
40 Boyne, "The White Legion," 281; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Guevara, The African Dream, xxxiv-xxxvi; Venter, War Dog, 532-534.
41 Venter, War Dog, 364-365.
The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should demonstrate little tactical innovation. Tactical units within these forces should generally use very simple tactics, if any, such as full-frontal assaults, straight at their opponents, when attacking and counterattacking. These predictions were borne out fairly well by these conflicts.

For instance, although the Simbas exhibited little tactical innovation, they did so despite strongly emphasizing decentralized authority. It appears in this case that the rebels’ near-complete lack of creativity more than compensated for their emphasis on decentralized authority. Indeed, they were so uncreative that they never developed new tactics that empowered junior officers could have implemented. As predicted for a force that deemphasizing creative thinking and personal initiative in favour of their staunch belief in the protective power of dawa, the Simbas were incapable of any tactical innovation whatsoever. As Dreke put it, “they relied on (dawa) to fight, to move.”

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44 Dawa refers to a “magical” medicine that Simba witch doctors claimed would provide invincibility to any rebel under its protection. In effect, the witch doctors convinced their followers that the mercenaries’ bullets would transform into harmless water upon contact with a rebel’s skin or fly back and hit the shooter. Dodenhoff, "The Congo." 46; Geraghty, Who Dares Wins, 118; Gleijeses, ““Flee! The White Giants Are Coming!”: The United States, the Mercenaries, and the Congo, 1964-65," 210; Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 20-21; Thallon, Cut-Throat, 15; Verhaegen, "La Premiere Republique (1960-1965)," 126.

45 Dreke, From the Escambray to the Congo, 137.
Presuming that they were impervious to bullets, the Simbas employed only the very simplest tactics – walking straight toward the enemy while making no attempt to use cover or otherwise avoid being fired upon. The results of this behaviour were disastrous for the rebels.

For example, on September 15, 1964, Lieutenant Wilson led 15 members of 5 Commando in an attack against the port town of Lisala, which was guarded by approximately 400 Simbas. Believing themselves to be invincible, the rebels grouped together in a single mass of troops on a highly exposed hilltop and made no attempt to take cover while their witch doctors chanted and fanned them with palm branches. In addition to numerical and magical superiority, the Simbas also fielded superior weapons, including heavy machine guns and bazookas, while the mercenaries only had rifles. Although the mercenaries assessed the situation and were prepared to employ creative tactics to address the threat, the Simbas’ demonstrable lack of creativity made this unnecessary. Indeed, how could innovative tactics possibly improve their changes of hitting a huge cluster of targets that made no attempt to avoid being shot? Wilson later described the scene, in which 160 Simbas were killed in only a few minutes, as, “a shooting gallery.” The mercenaries only suffered a single slight injury during the assault. This example is typical of how the mercenaries’ attacks on Simba-held settlements played out: what should have been an easy victory for the materially superior rebels, instead turned into a slaughter at the hands of a tiny force of private soldiers.

48 Reed, Save the Hostages, 140.
49 Reed, Save the Hostages, 140.
This prediction was, however, completely borne out in the other conflicts. Indeed, Callan’s Mercenaries, which deemphasized creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority, utilized the same tactics during each of the six major engagements that took place between January 24 and February 3, 1976. These involved establishing an ambush position and then launching a full-frontal assault straight at the enemy.\(^{50}\) Once an assault was launched, the mercenaries never attempted to use cover, suppressive fire, or any other tactics more advanced that standing-and-shooting or running-and-shooting at any enemy target.\(^{51}\) After launching three near identical attacks on February 3, and two more in the previous week, against a single unit of Cuban-MPLA soldiers, the mercenaries’ opponents finally learned the “secret” of defending against Callan’s straightforward tactics, which required them to merely stand their ground for a few minutes and use their numerical and technological superiority to dispatch the mercenaries while they were in the open and exposed.\(^{52}\) This is precisely what the Cuban-MPLA unit did at the beginning of February 3, which allowed them to eliminate about half of Callan’s 22-strong killer group very quickly and send the remaining mercenaries fleeing in disarray.

The normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces that deemphasized creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should have difficulty adapting to unforeseen developments on the battlefield and should learn slowly from their mistakes, if at all.\(^{53}\) This prediction was borne out as well in these


\(^{52}\) Dempster and Tomkins, *Fire Power*, 366-367.

\(^{53}\) Pollack, “The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness,” 66.
cases. For example, when faced with the ADFL’s multi-directional combined-arms assault on Kisangani during the First Congo War, which involved infantry, “shooting at the same time as the armoured column was moving toward the (Kisangani) airport,” the White Legion fell into disarray very quickly because they could not mount a coherent response to these unexpected tactics and vehicles.

Finally, the normative theory of military performance also predicted that forces that de-emphasize creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority should experience considerable difficulty developing tactics to counter unexpected weapons or tactics used by their adversaries. This prediction was borne out as well. For example, despite facing Callan’s unchanging ambush/full-frontal assault tactics in six major engagements, including four times in a single day against the same group of soldiers, the Cuban-MPLA force did not adapt to these straightforward tactics until the sixth and final major battle of the conflict, on February 3, when they belatedly launched an effective counter-attack that killed at least nine mercenaries and drove the rest into the jungle. Although this adaptation proved decisive in allowing the Cuban-MPLA force to win the conflict, their inability to adapt much earlier to the mercenaries’ tactics is telling of their general de-emphasis on creative thinking, personal initiative, and decentralized authority.


At the same time, the mercenaries, who also deemphasized these norms, failed to develop any new tactics after February 3. Instead, over the subsequent two weeks, every attempt by the few surviving mercenaries to launch ambushes and full-frontal assaults failed miserably as the Cuban-MPLA troops had adapted and were able to quickly eliminate their attackers in every encounter. Taking this into account, the mercenaries’ complete inability to develop new tactics helped doom them in the end.

Similarly, the RUF never developed effective counters to EO’s tactics, which included combined-arms assault, preemptive strikes against ambush positions, counter-ambush pursuits, and a variety of other behaviours. To a force accustomed to mounting and facing roadside ambushes followed by quick withdrawals, EO’s tactics proved to be both novel and unassailable. For example, captured RUF personnel revealed that their ambush parties had never been counter-attacked and pursued before, and admitted that these tactics greatly confused them. However, even after encountering these tactics dozens of times, the rebels failed to adapt. As a result, groups of rebel fighters encountered toward the end of the conflict were just as easy for the mercenaries to defeat as those encountered at the beginning of the conflict.

**Decision-making Patterns**

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting personal initiative and decentralized authority should maintain decentralized patterns of decision-making. Within these military forces,
tendencies toward demonstrating personal initiative and decentralization of authority should mutually reinforce each other because junior officers should demonstrate personal initiative if they have been delegated sufficient authority to permit them to do so, and senior officers should delegate authority if their subordinates have demonstrated sufficient personal initiative to warrant it. Therefore, most tactical-level decisions in these forces should be addressed by tactical level commanders (junior officers and senior enlisted personnel), which should significantly increase the pace at which the tactical units of these forces are able to act and react against their opponents. 

This prediction was borne out in these conflicts. For instance, 5 Commando was made up of eight subcommandos, with approximately 30-40 personnel, each of which could operate separately and independently from each other. For example, 53 Commando, commanded by Lieutenants Jack Maidan and George Schroeder, spent much of the fall of 1964 operating completely apart from Hoare and the rest of the subcommandos. During this period, Maidan’s sub-group captured the towns of Kabare and Uvira near the Congo-Rwandan border, then Lubero and Butembo as it moved north. The subcommandos could also seamlessly recombine into any combination of new groupings to suit the requirements of the mission. Indeed, following 55, 56, and 57 Commandos’ successful recapture of Kamina in southern Congo and Kindu in the central part of the country in the early fall of 1964, they united with 51 Commando at Kindu for

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a north-westerly advance on the Simba strong-hold of Stanleyville, capturing Punia and Lubutu as they went. At the same time, 52 Commando retook the northern town of Aketi; 53 Commando captured Lubero, Butembo, and Mambasa in the north-east before advancing on Stanleyville; and 54 Commando advanced on Stanleyville from the south-west, capturing the towns Ikela and Opela along the way.

Following the capture of Stanleyville, the united subcommandos split up again in November, 1964, and spent several months capturing more towns from the Simbas all over the Orientale Province, including, among others, Aketi, Buta, Poko, Paulis, which were captured by 52 Commando; Butembo, Olenga, Beni, Mambasa, and Bunia, which were captured by 53 Commando; and Wamba, which was captured by 54 Commando. In the process, they saved thousands of Congolese and foreign civilians from certain death at the hands of the rebels.

Similarly, the tactical-level commanders in Executive Outcomes’ force in Sierra Leone reportedly lead, “from the front, not the back.” Jos Grobler, a Mobile Force commander, earned a reputation as a particularly, “aggressive and uncompromising,” leader who would take it upon himself to figure out how to best implement any general mission plans handed down from the firm’s senior officers. Cobus Claassens, a Fire Force commander, was equally adept at taking a set of general orders from a senior officer and implementing them in a manner that suited the tactical situations he and his men faced. As Venter put it, when in the field with his unit, “Claassens would run the

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67 Rogers, Someone Else’s War, 22.
68 Rogers, Someone Else’s War, 22-25.
69 Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 167-170.
70 Davis, Fortune’s Warriors, 138; Venter, War Dog, 476.
71 Davis, Fortune’s Warriors, 138; Venter, War Dog, 476.
show.” For example, when ordered to seize Kailahun from the RUF, Claassens decided to deploy the mortar team and multiple infantry teams around the battlespace to conduct the assault. Similarly, after an SLA unit refused to assist the Fire Force in an operation intended to herd and trap a group of RUF fighters, the Fire Force’s commander quickly modified the plan to draw exclusively on EO’s personnel and launched the operation.

Likewise, the, “well-organized and effectively led,” ADFL encouraged their junior officers to exercise considerable autonomy when making decisions about how and when to employ the units under their command and to avoid relying on senior commanders to tell them precisely what to do. The rebels were able to conduct multiple assaults in different parts of the country at the same time. For example, one contemporary observer wrote in February 1997 that, “the rebels were advancing on several fronts, including the Oso River, east of Kisangani, and the Nia-Nia crossroads north-east of it.” Providing greater detail, Thom notes that the rebels opened up three fronts during the war, a northern front in the province of Haut Zaire, a southern front in the Fizi-Barak region, and, of greatest importance, a central front that progressed toward Kisangani and Kinshasa. Reflecting on this situation, a senior Zairian Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Nufuta B. Kosanga, observed in February 1997 that the rebels, “seem

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72 Venter, War Dog, 542.
73 Venter, War Dog, 536.
74 Hooper, Bloodsong, 243-244.
to be able to push wherever they want to.”79 Indeed, being able to make decisions for
themselves allowed rebel junior officers to implement the force’s direct attack strategy,
which involved seizing settlements from pro-Mobutu troops, much faster than they could
have had they been grouped together as one large force because the small, centralized
White Legion simply could not engage multiple dispersed rebel units at the same time.80

These examples illustrate how effective these forces could be, as a whole, since
their autonomous constituent sub-units could achieve multiple objectives simultaneously.
This, in turn, almost certainly allowed these forces to defeat their opponents much more
quickly than they would have if they had remained clustered together under their senior
commander’s direct command and control.

The normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces
that emphasize personal initiative and decentralized authority should rarely miss
opportunities to harm their opponents or fail to respond quickly to sudden moves by their
opponents because officers at all levels of command can make tactical-level decisions
without the need for higher approval. This prediction was borne out as well in these
conflicts.81 For instance, within EO’s force in Angola, tactical-level commanders
frequently sought out engagements with the rebels without being ordered to by their
superiors.82 For example, while leading a BMP patrol toward a UNITA-held village on
June 23, 1994, Hennie Blaauw, a Mobile Force commander, noticed fresh rebel tracks,
which he decided to follow to determine the extent of UNITA’s presence in the area and engage any rebel troops he encountered. Likewise, after seizing Cafunfo on July 15, 1994, Blaauw took it upon himself to consolidate the area around the settlement by launching sweeps for any remaining UNITA personnel. This drive to engage the enemy whenever possible extended down through the ranks as well. For example, Blaauw recalled that his, “small infantry contingent was outstanding and they never hesitated to debus under fire and close with UNITA to do battle.” In addition to this, EO’s PC-7 and MiG-23 pilots frequently took it upon themselves to seek out and engage targets of opportunity, particularly UNITA vehicles, heavy weapons, and troop concentrations, over and above the targets that senior commanders and the mercenaries’ ground troops requested for destruction. This increased the number of rebel settlements, personnel, weapons, and vehicles destroyed from the air during the conflict.

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting personal initiative and decentralized authority should maintain centralized patterns of decision-making. Within these military forces, tendencies toward general passivity and over-centralization of authority should mutually reinforce each other because junior officers should not demonstrate personal initiative if they have not been delegated sufficient authority to permit them to do so, and senior officers should not delegate authority if their subordinates have not demonstrated sufficient personal initiative to warrant it. Therefore, most tactical-level decisions in these forces should be referred to senior commanders for resolution, which should

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83 Barlow, *Executive Outcomes*, 245.
84 Hooper, *Bloodsong*, 136-137.
significantly decrease the pace at which the tactical units of these forces are able to act and react against their opponents.88

This prediction was borne out in these conflicts.89 For instance, most of the Callan’s Mercenaries were generally passive and inactive much of the time because all decisions were deferred up to the highest levels of the chain of command for resolution and no operations were attempted in the absence of direct authorization and participation by senior officers.90 This, in turn, greatly slowed the pace at which the force could operate because the mercenaries were not able to conduct several strike missions at the same time. Had they been able to do this, it would certainly have enhanced their capacity to wear down the main Cuban-MPLA column arrayed against them by allowing them to strike the column at multiple points at the same time as it slowly advanced toward the mercenary-held settlements.

Similarly, this prediction certainly played out during the Sierra Leonean Civil War because RUF field commanders felt they needed to seek Sankoh’s direct approval for virtually any tactical actions.91 This was problematic because radio transmissions intercepted by the mercenaries suggested that Sankoh had little idea how to respond to

90 Other observers characterized their behaviour as highly unmotivated. McAleese, No Mean Soldier, 95; Rogers, Someone Else’s War, 79.
91 Venter, War Dog, 458.
EO’s actions. Moreover, in contrast to the mercenaries, rebel units rarely divided their field units into several smaller groups, and could, thus, not conduct multiple simultaneous operations in a given area of the country. This tendency to stay bunched together also made RUF units easier to see and target from the air.

Finally, the normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting personal initiative and decentralized authority should frequently miss opportunities to harm their opponents and fail to respond quickly to sudden moves by their opponents because only senior commanders can make decisions. This prediction was borne out as well. For example, although Callan organized killer groups and sought out combat with the Cubans and the MPLA, no junior members of his force did. Rather, virtually all the members of the force who were not chosen for a mission simply sat around while Callan was away from their base camps, which further undermined their capacity to engage multiple threats at the same time. Furthermore, unless junior personnel were specifically ordered to do something by Callan or one of his senior officers, even tasks that were critical to their survival would not get

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92 Venter, War Dog, 516.
93 Venter, War Dog, 501.
94 Venter, War Dog, 501.
95 Abdullah and Muana, "The Revolutionary United Front," 190; Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 235-237, 329-330, 357-358, 362, and 381; Dempster and Tomkins, Fire Power, 352-354 and 365-366; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claasens; Gberie, A Dirty War in West Africa, 81; George, The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991, 108; Gershoni, "War without End and an End to a War," 68 and 71; Guevara, The African Dream, 44-45, 51, 87-89, 111, 119, 164, 226; Hooper, Bloodsong, 122-128, 220, 224-225, and 234; Macdonald, Soldiers of Fortune, 95 and 98; Mockler, The New Mercenaries, 189-190, 197, and 199; Peters and Richards, "Why We Fight," 186; Richards, "War as Smoke and Mirrors," 387; Roebuck, The Whores of War, 97; Rogers, Someone Else’s War, 80 and 86-87; Spikes, Angola and the Politics of Intervention, 298, 303, and 305; Thomas, Mercenary Troops in Modern Africa, 35 and 89; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary, 87-90 and 173; Venter, War Dog, 417, 481-483, 515, 519, 546.
96 Roebuck, The Whores of War, 97; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary, 81.
97 As Thomas summarizes, “eventually, 141 British and 6 American mercenaries came under Callan’s control; but, without any organizational structure... the situation floundered quickly.” Thomas, Mercenary Troops in Modern Africa, 37; Venter, "Angola Flashbacks," 29.
done.\textsuperscript{98} For example, all of the defensive ambush sites along the approaches to the mercenaries’ base camps were usually inadequately manned.\textsuperscript{99}

Likewise, the Serbian mercenaries that made up the vast majority of the White Legion’s personnel were indoctrinated into believing that they should not conduct any combat operations unless they received specific monetary rewards for doing so. Since the members of the force had been paid salaries of several thousand dollars in advance for their mere presence in Zaire, they saw no incentive to risk injury or death without additional monetary rewards.\textsuperscript{100} These were not forthcoming, and so the force rarely conducted any operations away from their main base at Kisangani.\textsuperscript{101} Indeed, by early spring 1997, “the East European mercenaries pulled back (to Kisangani) and refused to fight because of lack of pay.”\textsuperscript{102} A \textit{Newsweek} article from late February 1997 similarly argued that, “the mercenaries… haven’t helped much. They’ve remained in Kisangani while the rebels… extended their control.”\textsuperscript{103} Although, as discussed below, the mercenaries were adept at using explosives, their general disinclination to venture far from Kisangani precluded them from demolishing any of the numerous distant bridges and ammunition dumps that the rebels eventually used to capture ever-more government territory.\textsuperscript{104} Overall, it is clear that the mercenaries were truly soldiers of fortune because they had effectively stopped fighting within a month of their arrival in the Congo after

\textsuperscript{98} Roebuck, \textit{The Whores of War}, 97.
\textsuperscript{99} Dempster and Tomkins, \textit{Fire Power}, 176, 199, 206, 211, and 429.
\textsuperscript{103} Mabry, “Soldiers of Misfortune,” 40.
\textsuperscript{104} Clayton, \textit{Frontiersmen}, 190.
realizing that they would be paid regardless of whether they risked their lives in combat.\textsuperscript{105}

**Use of Hand-operated Weapons**

The normative theory of military performance predicted that, to the extent that the members of military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency are willing to familiarize themselves with the functioning of military technology, these forces should be adept at using hand-operated weaponry, such as rifles, bazookas, anti-aircraft guns, and dismounted artillery.\textsuperscript{106} Specifically, the marksmanship of the personnel in these forces should be quite good.\textsuperscript{107} This prediction was borne out in these conflicts.\textsuperscript{108} For instance, several accounts of the Sierra Leonean Civil War refer to EO’s ability to lay down, “very accurate,” fire during contacts with the rebels, using all manner of hand-operated weapons. These include accounts of the mercenaries hitting and killing large numbers of RUF fighters with fire from AK-47s; 7.62 mm light PKM machine guns and 12.7 mm heavy machine guns, which were deployed with the ground forces and on the firm’s two Mi-17s; 60, 81, 82, and 120 mm mortars; and 105 mm mortars.\textsuperscript{108}


\textsuperscript{106} Timothy Lupfer, ”Tactics,” in *Brassey's Encyclopedia of Land Forces and Warfare*, ed. Franklin Margiotta (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1997), 1022 and 1031; Millett, Murray, and Watman, ”The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” 62.


artillery. The firm was particularly adept with mortars: “we’d hurl a few mortars at where we thought they (the RUF) might be. Our guys had a lot of experience with this stuff and they were accurate. They’d sometimes get them spot on. Then the rebels would disappear into the jungle and there would be no resistance.” The firm used these weapons to hammer groups of fleeing rebels and to besiege rebel camps. For example, EO’s infantry trapped several dozen rebels inside their camp near Gandorhun while the firm’s mortar team systematically eliminated them from afar.

EO’s ability to use hand-operated weapons effectively was essential to their success in Sierra Leone because, in virtually every contact with the rebels, they were severely outnumbered. In other words, because the mercenaries fielded comparatively few rifles, they had to ensure that a comparatively high proportion of their shots hit useful targets. As Claassens summarized,

The world thinks that Executive Outcomes was successful because of the use of overwhelming technology and superior firepower, which is absolutely untrue…. If you look at the amount of rifles they had as opposed to our rifles, it was 80 rifles against thousands. The reason why we were successful is because we were able to utilize it better… the guys who came with me into Executive Outcomes were…. very, very good at what they did and that’s the main reason why we did so well.

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance predicted that, to the extent that the members of military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency are unwilling to familiarize themselves with the functioning of military technology, these forces should not utilize hand-operated weaponry very well.

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109 Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 358, 364-365, 384-385; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Hooper, Bloodsong, 224-225, 228, 231-232, 246, and 248-250; Venter, War Dog, 521 and 545-547.
110 Venter, War Dog, 521.
111 Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 364-365; Hooper, Bloodsong, 224-225 and 231-232.
112 Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens.
Specifically, the marksmanship of personnel in these forces should be quite poor.\footnote{Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 73.} This prediction was borne out in these conflicts.\footnote{Thomas K. Adams, "The New Mercenaries and the Privatization of Conflict," Parameters 29, no. 2 (Summer 1999); Arnold, Mercenaries, 34; Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 202-203, 215-216, 255-256, 270, 275, 288, 336, 353, and 384-385; Beah, A Long Way Gone, 24; Breytenbach, The Buffalo Soldiers, 46; Dempster and Tomkins, Fire Power, 62, 74, 77, 135, 149, 171, 176-177, 204-205, 365-366, and 400; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Fitzsimmons, Second Interview with Des Burman; Lloyd Garrison, "Another Vietnam Feared in the Congo," New York Times, December 13, 1964, E3; Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, 258, 267, 269, and 317; Guevara, The African Dream, 38, 48, 63-64, and 196; Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 157 and 307; Hooper, "Angola," 45; Hooper, Bloodsong, 45, 107, 129-130, 142, 159, 168-169, 171, 193, 195, 200-201, 208, 222, 224-225, 228, 246, and 248-250; Macdonald, Soldiers of Fortune, 95; McAleese, No Mean Soldier, 93, 99, and 354; Mockler, The New Mercenaries, 183 and 198-199; Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 660 and 749; Reed, Save the Hostages, 196; Richards, "War as Smoke and Mirrors," 387 and 390; Roebuck, The Whores of War, 108; Rogers, Someone Else’s War, 76 and 86-87; Stockwell, In Search of Enemies, 224; Thomas, Mercenary Troops in Modern Africa, 25 and 67; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary, 66, 74, 76, and 89-90; Venter, War Dog, 349, 369, 422-423, 433-434, 443-444, 479, 481, 494-496, 502, 509-510, 519-520, 533, and 546.} For instance, due to their general deemphasis on technical proficiency, the Simbas rarely conducted training to learn how to use their weapons. For example, in a letter to Comrade Muteba, Guevara argued plainly that, “There is a general lack of the minimum training necessary to handle firearms, a lack all the graver in the case of weapons requiring special combat preparations.”\footnote{Guevara, The African Dream, 34.} Despite his pleas to start a training program, Guevara never received authorization to do this. However, it seems likely that, even if he had received authorization, few rebel foot soldiers would have submitted to training because they too placed little value on technical proficiency. Contemporary observers on both sides of the conflict frequently remarked on the near-total lack of technical competency among the Simbas.\footnote{Piero Gleijeses, for example, who is somewhat sympathetic in his portrayal of the Simbas nevertheless admitted that they had “poor fighting skills.” Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, 137.} Front-line observers, like 5 Commando’s Hugh van Oppen, recalled that, despite often fielding far superior equipment than the mercenaries, including artillery with much greater range than anything in the mercenaries’ inventory, the rebels inflicted few casualties because they simply could not aim.\footnote{Baker, Wild Goose, 189.} The Simbas were equally inept with small-arms, which they tended to fire far above the heads of the mercenaries. Indeed,
Guevara commented in his diary entry for April 24, 1965, that, “The main defect of the Congolese is that they do not know how to shoot, so ammunition is wasted.”\textsuperscript{118} As a result, the Simbas rarely hit their targets during ambushes and larger operations if the targets were beyond point-blank range.\textsuperscript{119}

The Cuban-MPLA force sent to destroy the Callan’s Mercenaries was similarly inept in the use of hand-operated weapons.\textsuperscript{120} Despite fielding far more rifles and machine guns in every encounter, and often fielding hand-operated heavy weapons, including BM-21s and heavy mortars, the members of this force rarely succeeded in hitting any of the mercenaries.\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, even sympathetic sources suggest that the, “Cuban soldiers… do not seem to have been terribly good shots.”\textsuperscript{122} For example, member of this force fired several volleys of BM-21 and heavy mortar shells on January 24, 1976, presumably in an attempt to soften up the mercenaries’ forward position before launching an assault with infantry and tanks. However, as with each of their other attempts to use hand-operated heavy weapons during the campaign, they failed to inflict any casualties.\textsuperscript{123}

**Use of Ground Combat Vehicles**

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting creative thinking, personal initiative, and technical proficiency should be adept at using their ground combat vehicles. These forces should

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\textsuperscript{119} Guevara, *The African Dream*, xxxiv.
\textsuperscript{120} Bainwoll, "Cuba," 234.
\textsuperscript{121} Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, 298.
\textsuperscript{122} Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 657; Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, 267.
\textsuperscript{123} Dempster and Tomkins, *Fire Power*, 204; Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, 298.
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capitalize on both the maneuverability and firepower of their ground combat vehicles.\textsuperscript{124} Moreover, vehicle crews in these forces should be able to fire the vehicles’ weapons fairly accurately. These predictions were borne out in these cases.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, as predicted, 5 Commando employed their armoured vehicles as part of highly mobile long-range maneuver actions to attack settlements from unexpected approach angles using rapid dash assaults that took advantage of the cars’ speed rather than merely their armoured plating. For example, these assets were used to help take Kamini in October, 1964, Kindu in November, 1964, and Baraka in September, 1965.\textsuperscript{126} Specifically, at the battle of Kindu on November 5, 1964, 5 Commando used their armoured cars to shock the Simba defenders out of the defensive positions and into the streets where the mercenaries then utilized the vehicles’ machine guns to eliminate several hundred of the fleeing rebels.\textsuperscript{127}

Likewise, EO’s personnel in Angola employed their BMP-2s, which were organized into multiple independently-manoeuverable teams, during its successful assaults on Firiquich, Dala, Valodia, Cafunfo, Cacolo, and a host of other settlements.\textsuperscript{128} During these engagements, the accuracy of EO’s fire was reported very high. For example, statements along the lines of, “the BMPs’ 30 mm guns decimated the enemy,” and references to BMPs, “cutting… (UNITA) to shreds,” appear frequently in accounts of


\textsuperscript{126} Baker, \textit{Wild Goose}, 187.

\textsuperscript{127} Hoare, \textit{Congo Mercenary}, 92-93.

\textsuperscript{128} Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 262-263; Davis, \textit{Fortune’s Warriors}, 130; Hooper, \textit{Bloodsong}, 113 and 168; Howe, \textit{Ambiguous Order}, 199.
these engagements, along with descriptions of BMPs providing accurate covering fire in support of dismounted infantry assaults.¹²⁹

Conversely, the theory predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting creative thinking, personal initiative, and technical proficiency should not utilize their ground combat vehicles very well. These forces should generally use their ground vehicles as static roadblocks rather than mobile fire support platforms.¹³⁰ Moreover, vehicle crews in these forces should generally not be able to fire the vehicles’ weapons accurately.¹³¹ These predictions were borne out in these cases.¹³² For instance, the Simbas tended to simply drive their armoured cars to a narrow point in a road and park them to try to block the mercenaries’ advance. Moreover, because the Simbas could not fire the cars’ machine guns accurately, they failed to cause significant casualties and permitted the mercenaries sufficient time to counter-attack and disable the Simbas’ vehicles with accurate bazooka fire.¹³³

Similarly, although the Cuban soldiers that fought against Callan’s Mercenaries in Angola fielded a far greater quantity and higher quality of armoured vehicles than their opponents, including approximately 20 Soviet-made T-34, T-54, and T-55 tanks and at least six Soviet BRDM-2 armoured scout cars and BTR 60 armoured personnel carriers equipped with one or more turreted machine guns, their crews simply did not use them very well.¹³⁴ Scholars of the conflict have concluded both that, “Cuban tankers were

¹²⁹ Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 256, 259, 262, and 288; Hooper, Bloodsong, 148.
¹³⁰ Leonhard, The Art of Maneuver, 49; Pollack, “The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness,” 73.
¹³² Clayton, Frontiersmen, 141; Dempster and Tomkins, Fire Power, 352-354 and 363-367; Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 89; Macdonald, Soldiers of Fortune, 98; Mockler, The New Mercenaries, 197-200; Rogers, Someone Else's War, 86-87; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary; 31-33, 87-90, and 173.
¹³³ Reed, Save the Hostages, 196.
mediocre marksmen,” and that, “Cuban… weapon crews do not seem to have been
terribly good shots.”¹³⁵ For example, despite the fact that scoring even an indirect hit in
the general vicinity of the mercenaries’ parked unarmoured Land Rovers would have
ether severely damaged or destroyed them, a group of four Cuban tanks only succeeded
in destroying two Land Rovers during the February 2 battle, in exchange for the loss of
all four tanks, because the tankers had great difficulty hitting these stationary targets.¹³⁶
Finally, when Callan’s Mercenaries acquired reasonably good equipment during the first
week of February, 1976, including several Panhard armoured cars, two Chinese-built
tanks, and two miniature “Stalin’s Organ” truck-mounted rocket launchers, they made
little effort to learn how to use them properly, and so these potent assets had no influence
on the course of the conflict.¹³⁷

**Air-to-Ground Attacks**

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that
strongly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency, creative thinking, and
personal initiative should have little difficulty conducting air-to-ground attacks. Air-to-
ground attacks conducted by these forces should demonstrate adaptation to the specific
tactical threats being addressed and should generally hit their intended targets.¹³⁸ This

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¹³⁵ Heitman, *War in Angola*, 653; Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 75-78, 231,
233, and 657.
197; Rogers, *Someone Else’s War*, 86; Tickler, *The Modern Mercenary*, 87-88 and 173.
Troops in Modern Africa*, 73.
¹³⁸ Accurate delivery of ordinance on target has, for example, been described as “the most difficult part of close air
Margiotta (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1997), 179.
prediction was borne out in these conflicts, for all of the military forces that strongly emphasized norms promoting technical proficiency, creative thinking, and personal initiative did, indeed, adapt to the specific threats they faced and proved to be quite accurate shots.\footnote{Abdullah and Muana, "The Revolutionary United Front," 185; Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 157, 202-203, 210-211, 213-215, 234, 253, 260-261, 265, 270-271, 330-331, 336, 358, and 368-371; Douglas Brooks, The Business End of Military Intelligence: Private Military Companies, Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin July-September 1999, 42-46; Clayton, Frontiersmen, 80; Davis, Fortune's Warriors, 137; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Fitzsimmons, Second Interview with Des Burman; Gershoni, "War without End and an End to a War," 68; Hooper, Bloodsong, 64, 93, 98, 106-107, 112-113, 117-118, 141-142, 162, 172-173, 178-179, 189-190, 192-193, 221, 240-241, 245-246, and 249-250; Howe, Ambiguous Order, 199 and 202; Pelton, Licensed to Kill, 234, 259, and 262-263; Reed, Save the Hostages, 196 and 202; Shearer, Private Armies and Military Intervention, 53-54; Singer, Corporate Warriors, 9 and 109; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary, 33; Venter, War Dog, 391, 415-420, 429-430, 435, 480, 485, 487-488, 492-495, 501-503, 508, and 545-548; Alex Vines, The Business of Peace: 'Tiny' Rowland, Financial Incentives and the Mozambican Settlement (Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives, [cited]; available from http://www.c-r.org/acc_moz/contents_moz.htm.}

To highlight but one example, EO’s pilots in Sierra Leone, flying two Mi-17 “Hip” transport helicopters and one Mi-24 “Hind” gunship, offered crucial support to the firm’s ground operations by engaging rebel troops with accurate rocket, machine gun, and gatling gun fire.\footnote{Adams, "The New Mercenaries and the Privatization of Conflict.", 87; Davis, Fortune’s Warriors, 137; Fitzsimmons, Interview with Cobus Claassens; Francis, "Mercenary Intervention in Sierra Leone," 327; Gbere, A Dirty War in West Africa, 93; Gershoni, "War without End and an End to a War," 68; Hooper, Bloodsong, 221; Howe, Ambiguous Order, 202; Abdel-Fattau Musah, "A Country Under Siege: State Decay and Corporate Military Involvement in Sierra Leone," in Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma, ed. Abdel-Fattau Musah and J. Kayode Fayemi (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000), 89; Will Reno, "African Weak States and Commercial Alliances," African Affairs 96, no. 383 (April 1997): 180; Richards, "War as Smoke and Mirrors," 395; Shearer, Private Armies and Military Intervention, 54; Singer, Corporate Warriors, 93; Venter, War Dog, 54, 64, and 391.} They were able to do so effectively because, as predicted, they combined a strong emphasis on technical proficiency, which motivated them to train hard to learn how to use unfamiliar Eastern Bloc equipment, with an equally strong emphasis on creative thinking and personal initiative.\footnote{Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 329; Hooper, Bloodsong, 222; Venter, War Dog, 491.} Although initially taken aback by the conditions of fighting a war in heavily forested Sierra Leone, which were radically different from those present above the wide-open grasslands of Angola, EO’s pilots quickly set to work analyzing these conditions and determining how to best modify their own behaviour to effectively adapt. One pilot recalled, for example, that discussions...
about air-to-ground tactics took place on a daily basis, as pilots and ground commanders worked through problems encountered during the day’s operations. One important tactical innovation that developed out of these discussions was that the firm’s ground troops began to provide a steady stream of updates to the pilots about the location of nearby rebel fighters, which helped the pilots and gunners target their weapons accurately through the triple-canopy jungle. The firm’s ground troops also began launching flares toward groups of rebel fighters, again, so that the air crews could accurately target them through the thick foliage.

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency, creative thinking, and personal initiative should have considerable difficulty conducting air-to-ground attacks. Air-to-ground attacks conducted by these forces should demonstrate little or no adaptation to the specific tactical threats being addressed and should generally not hit their intended targets. This prediction was borne out as well during the First Congo War. Although the White Legion’s technically proficient pilots certainly knew how to fly their aircraft and aim their air-to-ground weapons fairly accurately, which they did, for example, at Walikale, Snabunda, and Bukavu on February 17, 1997, the force’s deemphasis on creative thinking and personal initiative severely hampered its overall ability to conduct air-to-ground attacks. Indeed, despite having access to potent ground attack aircraft, including four Mi-24 Hind helicopters, one SA-330 Puma helicopter, five

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; Igric, "Alleged 'Assassins' Were No Strangers to France," 2; Mabry, "Soldiers of Misfortune," 40-41;
SA-341 Gazelle helicopters, a mixture of three Yugoslav-built G-4 Galeb and J-21 Jastreb tactical strike jets, and three SIAI-Marchetti S.211 light attack aircraft, the mercenaries’ uncreative pilots reportedly had a very difficult time figuring out how to safely coordinate their airstrikes with allied ground forces. This prevented the force from being able to conduct combined-arms attacks against the rebels.

Moreover, the force’s lazy pilots were generally slow to deploy when ordered to conduct strike missions, and often declined to deploy at all, which caused them to miss numerous opportunities to strike the ADFL. As a result of this, they were only able to briefly slow the rebels’ advance at Goma and Bukavu but did little to alter the general course of the conflict. Rather, as Thom summarized, the mercenaries’ pilots, “flew a few missions, but were ineffective,” against the rebels.

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Maintenance

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency should generally maintain their military equipment in good working order. Military forces with considerable appreciation for the importance of well-maintained military equipment should be willing and able to undertake such tasks under combat conditions. Therefore, at least some members of such forces are likely to be interested in serving as mechanics and most members of the force are likely to demonstrate aptitude for maintaining their own military equipment.\(^{152}\) As a result, such forces should have little difficulty repairing damaged equipment and should experience generally high operational readiness rates.

This prediction was borne out in all of the conflicts, for all of the military forces that emphasized technical proficiency proved to be adept at maintenance.\(^{153}\) Specifically, these military forces routinely cleaned and maintained their weapons and vehicles between combat operations.\(^{154}\) Moreover, these forces attempted to repair their damaged equipment and restore captured equipment to working order, which, in every conflict, allowed these forces to field greater quantities of weapons and vehicles than they

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\(^{153}\) A major exception to the general deemphasis on technical proficiency within both Callan’s Mercenaries and the Cuban-MPLA force arrayed against them during the Angolan Civil War was a strong emphasis on the importance of maintenance.

otherwise could.\textsuperscript{155} Perhaps the clearest example of the importance of maintenance occurred during the Angolan Civil War, where Executive Outcomes’ personnel performed daily maintenance on their BMP-2 armoured infantry fighting vehicles while, in contrast, their Angolan Army allies virtually never attempted to maintain their BMP-2s. Several of the poorly maintained Angolan Army BMP-2s broke down throughout the conflict and many were subsequently abandoned; in contrast, virtually all of EO’s well-maintained BMP-2s remained in good working order throughout the conflict.\textsuperscript{156} Overall, the efforts of the military forces that strongly emphasized the importance of technical proficiency seem to have paid dividends because no accounts of their operations suggest that malfunctions and breakdowns occurred frequently or that these issues contributed to defeats or other significant setbacks. Rather, virtually all of their equipment was maintained in working order at all times, which allowed them to field virtually all of their available weapons during engagements.

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency should generally not maintain their military equipment in good working order. Military forces that deemphasize the importance of maintaining military equipment are unlikely to attract many personnel interested in serving as mechanics and few, if any, members of the force are likely to demonstrate aptitude for maintaining their own military equipment.\textsuperscript{157} As a


\textsuperscript{156} Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 241 and 253; Hooper, \textit{Bloodsong}, 134 and 203.

\textsuperscript{157} Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 73.
result, such forces should have significant difficulty repairing damaged equipment and should experience generally low operational readiness rates.\textsuperscript{158}

This prediction was borne out fairly well in these conflicts. However, given that maintenance is frequently performed off the battlefield, historical accounts of these conflicts did not always yield detailed descriptions of every force’s maintenance practices. For example, it proved particularly difficult to evaluate the accuracy of this prediction in the case of UNITA.\textsuperscript{159} Nevertheless, for the conflicts where detailed descriptions of maintenance practices are available, it is clear that military forces that deemphasized the importance of technical proficiency did not maintain their weapons and vehicles very well.\textsuperscript{160} For example, although the Simbas had been given a number of motorboats and ferries by the Soviet bloc and their African allies, which were vital toward the end of the Simba Rebellion for moving personnel, weapons, and supplies across Lake Tanganyika to and from Tanzania, they made no effort to learn how to maintain them. Consequently, the watercraft were prone to breakdowns and almost all eventually ceased functioning. Guevara wrote to Fidel Castro on October 5, 1965, informing him that, “Three brand-new Soviet launches arrived a little over a month ago, and two are already useless and the third… leaks all over the place.”\textsuperscript{161} Likewise, the RUF did not maintain their weapons during the Sierra Leonean Civil war, and, as a result, they were routinely forced to discard damaged or malfunctioning weapons.\textsuperscript{162} This, in turn, undermined their ability to engage EO’s forces.

\textsuperscript{158} Skinner, "Maintenance," 655-659.
\textsuperscript{159} Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 252 and 260-261.
\textsuperscript{160} Guevara, The African Dream, 15 and 25.
\textsuperscript{161} Guevara, The African Dream, 127.
Combat Engineering

The normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency should have good combat engineering capabilities. Military forces with considerable appreciation for the importance of technical proficiency should have sufficient appreciation for the utility of combat engineering to undertake such tasks under combat conditions. Therefore, at least some members of such forces should be interested in serving as combat engineers and the skill level of those who do serve as combat engineers should be relatively high. As a result, such forces should have little difficulty overcoming man-made and natural obstacles, such as large rivers. Moreover, they should experience little difficulty breaching well-fortified defensive lines and constructing defensive positions for their own force. Finally, they should be able to utilize explosives safely and effectively.

These predictions were borne out as well. For instance, accounts of the conflicts include a number of descriptions of amphibious operations launched by the military forces that emphasized technical proficiency. For example, 5 Commando conducted a decisive amphibious assault during on the Simba stronghold of Baraka, which helped bring a swift end to the Simba Rebellion. Accounts of the conflicts also indicate that the forces that emphasized technical proficiency routinely constructed...

165 A major exception to UNITA’s general deemphasis on technical proficiency was the force’s strong emphasis on combat engineering, particularly mine warfare.
166 Barlow, Executive Outcomes, 248; Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 110, 150, 183, 222, and 226; Hooper, Bloodsong, 147-148 and 209; Venter, War Dog, 412.
167 Hoare, Congo Mercenary, 253.
defensive positions, such as trenches, foxholes, and tank traps, particularly after making camp for the night.168

Finally, the military forces that emphasized technical proficiency also made frequent and safe use of explosives, ranging from prefabricated landmines and dynamite to improvised explosive devices.169 For example, after occupying an RUF base, EO’s personnel in Sierra Leone set up dozens of booby traps using a mixture of primed grenades, tin food cans, trip wires, and the bodies of dead RUF personnel.170 They also placed several mortar bombs, on time-delayed fuses, in the rafters of the rebels’ mess hall.171 Finally, the firm deployed trip-wired grenades and anti-infantry landmines along known rebel transit routes.172 These weapons produced numerous casualties when the rebels were later allowed to return to the base. The White Legion also made skillful, if belated use of mines, dynamite, and other explosives during the First Congo War, which slowed but failed to stop the ADFL’s advance.173

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting technical proficiency should have poor combat engineering capabilities. Military forces that lack appreciation for the importance of technical proficiency are unlikely to have sufficient appreciation for the utility of

171 Venter, *War Dog*, 551-552.
combat engineering to undertake such tasks under combat conditions.\textsuperscript{174} Therefore, very few, if any, members of such forces should be interested in serving as combat engineers and the skill level of those who do serve as combat engineers should be relatively low. Consequently, such forces should experience considerable difficulty overcoming man-made and natural obstacles.\textsuperscript{175} Moreover, they should have difficulty breaching well-fortified defensive lines and constructing defensive positions for their own force.\textsuperscript{176} Finally, they should generally not be able to utilize explosives safely and effectively.

These predictions were borne out fairly well in these conflicts. The military forces that weakly emphasized technical proficiency did not conduct amphibious operations. Similarly, they rarely constructed defensive positions.\textsuperscript{177} For example, Guevara recalled multiple occasions where Simbas refused to dig defensive trenches and foxholes.\textsuperscript{178} The RUF, similarly, rarely employed defensive measures, and those they did employ, such as felling trees to block road ways, placing large sheets of metal on roadways to act as noisemakers, and digging large pits covered in elephant grass, were crude, easy to detect, and ineffective.\textsuperscript{179} Likewise, most of these forces only rarely made use of explosives, and those that did failed to employ them safely.\textsuperscript{180} For example, Callan’s Mercenaries proved so inept at placing and keeping track of landmines that they suffered eleven casualties and lost two vehicles after accidentally driving through one of their own minefields.\textsuperscript{181} Given the small size of their force and their limited stockpile of equipment, these losses

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[175] Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 74.
\item[176] Pollack, "The Influence of Arab Culture on Arab Military Effectiveness," 74.
\item[177] Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 330-331.
\item[178] Guevara, \textit{The African Dream}, 57-103.
\item[179] Venter, \textit{War Dog}, 543 and 545.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
were considerable. Their Cuban-MPLA opponents were, likewise, poor at detecting
landmines and lost a number of soldiers and vehicles to these devices during the
conflict.\textsuperscript{182}

**Unit Cohesion**

Finally, the normative theory of military performance predicted that military
forces that strongly emphasize norms promoting group loyalty should maintain strong
unit cohesion, manifested in consistently cooperative behaviour between group
members.\textsuperscript{183} To put it differently, members of these forces should feel that the other
members of the force both can and will help keep each other alive and accomplish their
assigned tasks. Therefore, members of these forces should demonstrate discipline in the
face of enemy fire and not simply abandon the force without authorization.

These predictions were borne out as well in all of the conflicts. For example, no
accounts of the behaviour of 5 Commando or EO’s military units suggest that they ever
lost cohesion or retreated in panic from a battle, despite facing much larger enemy
forces.\textsuperscript{184} On the face of it, this may not seem like a noteworthy accomplishment;

\textsuperscript{182} Dempster and Tomkins, *Fire Power*, 256, 273, and 482; Rogers, *Someone Else’s War*, 76; Thomas, *Mercenary
Troops in Modern Africa*, 84.

\textsuperscript{183} Millett, Murray, and Watman, ”The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” 66.

\textsuperscript{184} Abdullah and Muana, ”The Revolutionary United Front,” 185; Baker, *Wild Goose*, 174; Barlow, *Executive
Clayton, *Frontiersmen*, 189; Davis, *Fortune’s Warriors*, 127 and 137; Fitzsimmons, *First Interview with Des Burman;
Fitzsimmons, *Interview with Cobs Claassen*; Howard W. French, ”Zaire Crashes,” *The New Republic*, April 14,
1997, 12; Gershoni, ”War without End and an End to a War,” 68; Hooper, *Bloodsong*, 53, 111, 133, 161, 168-169, 240-
241, 245-246, and 250; Howe, ”Private Security Forces and African Stability,” 317; Integrated Regional Information
Network, ”Great Lakes: IRIN Update 74,” (New York, NY: Integrated Regional Information Network, Department of
Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations, January 8, 1997); Margolis, ”The Great Race for Africa Resumes.”; Chris
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Under Siege,” 94; Ngolet, ”African and American Connivance in Congo-Zaire,” 69; John Pomfret, ”Evidence Mounts
of Atrocities by Kabila’s Forces,” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1997; Reed, ”Guerillas in the Midst,” 147; Reed, ”The
New International Order,” 140-148; Roberts, *The Wonga Coup*, 10; Schatzberg, ”Beyond Mobutu: Kabila and the
Congo,” 76-77; Shearer, *Private Armies and Military Intervention*, 43 and 53-54; Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, 44 and
116; Thom, ”Congo-Zaire’s 1996-97 Civil War in the Context of Evolving Patterns of Military Conflict in Africa in the
however, if one of these small forces had ever broken and been routed during an engagement, its members would likely have suffered tremendous losses because they would have ceased to utilize the other components of military effectiveness, such as creative thinking and technical proficiency, which, in turn, would have removed the primary mitigating factor allowing the mercenaries to survive asymmetric engagements. Moreover, very few members of these forces deserted.185

Conversely, the normative theory of military performance also predicted that military forces that weakly emphasize norms promoting group loyalty should maintain weak unit cohesion, manifested in consistently uncooperative behaviour between group members. Individualistic members of these forces should tend to feel little loyalty and obligation to their fellow members, which, in turn, should reduce their will to fight. Therefore, members of these forces should demonstrate little discipline in the face of enemy fire and desertion should occur relatively frequently. These predictions were borne out as well by the behaviour of every military forces that deemphasized group loyalty.186

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For instance, the most visible effect of the Simbas’ deemphasis on group loyalty was that their fighters were undisciplined in the face of enemy fire; instead, they tended to run from battle once the fighting began. For example, on June 30, 1965, a force of 160 Cubans and Africans attacked the mercenary-controlled town of Katenga. Despite vastly outnumbers the mercenaries defending the settlement, 60 Simbas fled in panic right before the battle began and several dozen more Simbas followed soon afterwards, abandoning the Cubans to their fate.\footnote{Guevara, \textit{The African Dream}, 48.} The attack instantly turned into a complete rout during which at least 20 Simbas and four Cubans lost their lives.\footnote{Gleijeses, \textit{Conflicting Missions}, 116.} The mercenaries suffered no casualties. Likewise, significant portions of RUF units fled during every engagement with the mercenaries, often only seconds after a contact began.\footnote{Barlow, \textit{Executive Outcomes}, 357-359 and 364-365; Fitzsimmons, \textit{Interview with Cobus Claassens}; Hooper, \textit{Bloodsong}, 221, 241, and 246; Richards, "\textit{Forced Labour & Civil War}," 190; Venter, \textit{War Dog}, 59, 511, 514, and 521; Zack-Williams, "Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone," 459.}

Moreover, a diary found on the body of a dying member of Callan’s Mercenaries noted, in an entry dated February 11, 1976, that, “the problem of retreating troops has become acute.” Indeed, although that force’s campaign in northern Angola officially came to an end when the Cuban-MPLA force captured Callan and his few loyal followers on February, 6, 1976, it was a lost cause by that point for virtually the entire rest of the force had already deserted.

Conclusion

The normative theory of military performance reasons that the military performance of opposing military forces is primarily the result of the interplay of their relative military effectiveness. In other words, the interactive clash of tactical behaviour is the primary determinant of military victory or defeat. Based on this, the theory predicts that the materially weaker party in an asymmetric conflict, which the mercenaries forces were in these cases, should only have been able to defeat its materially stronger opponent if the weaker party emphasized behavioural norms that encouraged it to perform a wide range of tactical behaviour – that is, be very militarily effective – and the stronger party did not emphasize these norms because this should have allowed the weaker party to exploit the weaknesses and counter the strengths of the stronger party and, through this, defeat it. In all other scenarios, the balance of military effectiveness should have prevented the mercenaries from overcoming the material superiority of their opponents; consequently, in all other scenarios, the theory predicted that the mercenaries should have been defeated.

192 Quoted in Roebuck, The Whores of War, 94.
193 Dempster and Tomkins, Fire Power, 179, 186, and 361-362; Mockler, The New Mercenaries, 200 and 204; Tickler, The Modern Mercenary, 90.
With this in mind, the theory correctly predicted that 5 Commando and Executive Outcomes’ forces in Angola and Sierra Leone should have defeated their materially superior opponents because, in all of these conflicts, the mercenary force emphasized the five norms of military effectiveness and their opponents did not. The theory also correctly predicted that Callan’s Mercenaries and the White Legion should have been defeated by their materially superior opponents because, in the first case, neither the mercenary group nor its materially superior opponent emphasized the five norms of military effectiveness and, in the second, case the mercenaries did not emphasize these norms, save for technical proficiency, and their materially superior opponent did.

The implications of these results are profoundly important because they suggest that governments, international organizations, and anyone else considering using mercenaries to implement their foreign and defence policies should attempt to understand the military culture of the private security organizations vying for their business. In other words, the potential clients of private security organizations cannot afford to determine the suitability of an organization based solely on the size of its inventory of weapons and vehicles or on the length of its personnel roster. Rather, prudent clients must demand access to the inner-workings of these organizations, particularly the junior and senior personnel who would be charged with implementing the terms of any contract, to assess how these individuals think and how they are encouraged to behave. Only then can a client determine whether a private security organization emphasizes the five norms of military effectiveness discussed in this paper and, in turn, determine whether this organization will likely accomplish its required tasks, even in the face of materially superior opponents.
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