

The Role of Sri Lanka's Private Security Sector in Assisting the Nation During Pandemics and Natural Disasters

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Abstract- The role of private security companies (PSC) has become ever more significant in the 21st century as the world faces increasingly complex threats which require holistic and multidimensional solutions. Non-traditional security threats such as natural disasters and pandemics which could imperil the very survival of humanity have become a focal point in contemporary security studies and analysis. Many international organisations and nation states have deployed private military companies to provide a wide range of security services in fulfilling and achieving much broader strategic objectives. Private security companies are certainly not a substitute for a military and should not be considered as one. However, private security companies play a fundamental role in reinforcing the national effort during times of natural disasters, pandemics and national crisis situations. In the wake of the recent COVID- 19 pandemic which has plagued the world, the importance of private security companies as an effective force in preventing the spread of the virus and providing assistance during national crisis situations has been recognised through many success stories which have transpired from across the globe. This paper will explore how PSCs have become an important part of the civil-military relations and homeland security paradigms. This paper argues that PSCs in Sri Lanka have a fundamental role to play in order to meet the demands of a new strategic environment and new sources of non- traditional security threats.

Keywords: *Private Security, Homeland Security, Civil-Military relations, COVID-19, Pandemic, Natural Disaster*

Introduction

Over the past decade, Private Security Companies have become an essential component which is playing a pivotal role in assisting nation states and organizations to meet complex and constantly shifting global security challenges. With non-traditional threats defining the global and national security landscape, the concept of security has evolved from its traditional roots of being solely state and military oriented. Security now consists of a much broader spectrum which includes the safety of individuals, communities and organizations which are a fundamental part of the internal national security framework.

In order to meet the contemporary security challenges, PSCs from across the globe offer a variety of services which have been provided to nation states, international non-governmental organizations, multinational business entities, individuals and communities which is now a trend that is reshaping the global security environment (Avant, 2009). Following the end of the Cold War there has been a steady increase in the number of PSCs and an increase in number of personnel joining these organizations due to the lucrative career prospects for ex-military servicemen. The PSCs provide a range of services which consist of providing threat assessments, providing unarmed/ armed security personnel including static guards, providing armed escort convoys in high risk areas, infrastructure security, maritime security, logistical support and even VIP security etc. Since every individual has an inherent right to life and the right of self-defense, the primary function of a PSC is to provide safety and security to their client while minimizing the risk of any imminent physical dangers.

With the rise of new global security challenges stemming from non-traditional threats such as natural disasters, pandemics and humanitarian

crisis situations, many countries including international non-governmental organizations have used the services of PSCs to assist in humanitarian disasters. Today, in many states the number of private security personnel exceed the number of some national police forces as a result of the private security sector experiencing an exponential growth over the years.

Bhagya Senaratne, a senior scholar from the Faculty of Defence and Strategic Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University has comprehensively analysed and highlighted the significance in advancing human security centred policies in facing multitude of complex non-traditional security threats which transpire in today's world. Senarathna has written that, "Sri Lanka is no longer directly threatened by traditional security threats, it is futile for the country to implement state-centric policies. Sri Lanka is however, being increasingly challenged by various non-traditional security threats such as environment - inclusive of climate change -, food and health, youth unemployment to name a few. Therefore, it is imperative for Sri Lanka to focus on implementing policies which address non-traditional security threats, with the 'human' at the core of its policy formulation" (INNSL, 2018).

With the rise of such non-traditional security threats, many states around the world have adopted holistic and integrated approaches to counter threats to human security. Many international non-governmental organizations and states have used PSCs on countless occasions for humanitarian crisis situations and natural disasters. The government has a responsibility to adopt measures which include the private security sector in their designs to advance human security centered policies which will help mitigate disaster and pandemic situations more effectively. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has proven that PSCs across the globe have become an indispensable part of the national effort in preventing the spread of the virus and helping nations maintain resilience. Sri Lanka has a booming private security sector which has employed thousands of personnel which includes a large number of ex-servicemen and retired police officers. PSCs in Sri Lanka can assist the state by contributing towards achieving resilience during crisis situations while strengthening human security.

Sri Lanka's Private Security Sector

As a result of the rapid growth in the private security industry in the country, the Sri Lankan government decided to regulate PSCs in 1992 by enacting the Regulations of Private Security Act No. 45 of 1998 (De Alwis, 2020).

The origins of Sri Lanka's private security sector can be traced back to 1956, when two school leavers, Newton Senarat Dassanayake and Fuard Uduman who had been rejected by the Ceylon Police Force at the time established what eventually evolved into an industry that provided employment to thousands in the private security sector (Daily Mirror, 2015; De Alwis, 2020; Business Today, 2016).

Dassanayake and Uduman who are considered as the pioneers in the private security sector in the country, initially provided security with two guards clad in khaki coats and equipped with a torch, batons and whistles to cover Second Cross Street in Pettah. The duo later expanded to provide security to some of Sri Lanka's renowned commercial establishments and also went on to provide security to the Colombo Port. At the time cat burglars and thieves were able to enter into business establishments through the roofs and the burglars at the time had devised creative ways of conducting their robberies. Due to the crime rates soaring from robberies, the khaki clad watchmen guards were hired to cover the entire Pettah shopping complex. The local police authorities praised the venture initiated by Dassanayake and Uduman as they were able to minimize the local crime rate by providing a service which is a fundamental human need. The company established by Dassanayake and Uduman eventually grew into the industry it is today.

Based on the Sri Lanka Labour Demand Survey 2017 conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics, there were 45,316 vacancies for security personnel which is second to sewing machine operators in terms of demand in the job market (Sunday Observer, 2019). According to the Industrial Security Foundation, Sri Lanka, over 70,000 security personnel are employed by registered security companies around the island.

The private security sector in Sri Lanka is represented by the Sri Lanka Security Service Providers Association (SLSSPA) and the Industrial Security Foundation, Sri Lanka

(ISF). Both the SLSSPA and ISF have played a pivotal role in maintaining the standard of professionalism, efficiency and growth of the private security sector in the country.

Private Security an Emerging Paradigm

PSCs have become a significant part of the homeland security paradigm and it is an essential component in civil-military relations. Due to institutions of state no longer being able to cope with the vast amounts of multifaceted tasks alone, many non-state actors such as multinational organizations, non-governmental organizations, business entities and civil society groups are playing an influential role in assisting in key areas which support national objectives in order to confront complex security threats and challenges that are prevalent today.

As a result of the constantly evolving non-traditional security threats, the military is now sharing the battlespace with other actors, including those from the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Private-public partnerships in security have taken place in many cases with PSCs playing a role in strengthening internal security and further strengthening civil-military relations.

Many scholars have shed light on the complex nature of PSCs, which is characterised by a mix of public, private, civilian and military features (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011). The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (1957) authored by Samuel P. Huntington and Morris Janowitz's The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait (1960) highlights the evolution of global defence establishments and changes in traditional military functions which has been integrated with civil functions and private sector service personnel.

The concept of homeland security which is an emerging area of study within the civil-military spheres provides an understanding of the integrated and multidimensional security strategy which has been adopted by many countries. The concept of homeland security took shape following the 9/11 terror attacks on the U.S., which eventually led to the government of President George W. Bush establishing the Department of Homeland Security which integrated many national securities and defence functions which deal primarily with internal

security and non-traditional security threats. Homeland Security can be defined as a concerted national effort to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism and other hazards (DHS, 2010). The conceptualization of the homeland security revolves around the theme that the homeland security initiative combines a federal, state, local, and tribal government and private sector approach that requires coordination; homeland security can involve securing against and responding to both hazard specific and all-hazards threats; and homeland security activities do not imply total protection or complete threat reduction (Reese, 2013). Homeland security is an integrative concept that brings together domestic preparedness, response, and recovery efforts with respect to threats ranging from large-scale terrorism to natural disasters to pandemics (Morag, 2011).

Even though the U.S. Homeland Security strategy has certain shortcoming, it is certainly a concept which many states across the globe have adopted in a bid to maintain internal safety and security while sustaining resilience in the face of natural disasters and crisis situations. Within this integrated mechanism the PSCs have been given a crucial role in terms of providing assistance during humanitarian crisis situations and pandemics. PSCs are mostly employed with the oversight of the state actors and with a clear mandate to operate within a non-military capacity and within the sphere of providing support to achieve the overall strategic goals.

A majority of natural disasters, humanitarian crisis situations and pandemics are home-based and in order to be successful in developing a comprehensive strategy to minimize the impact of non-traditional security threats, the private security sector needs to be considered and given certain responsibilities which can be carried out in coordination with the relevant state actors. Within the framework of homeland security strategy, the private security guard posted at a facility or a business establishment is often the first responder and first preventer of a crime, terror plot or a disaster situation. Due to this vital role private security personnel play, law enforcement agencies and military establishments are now building strategic public-private partnerships with PSCs. Public-private partnerships is a key factor which recognizes human needs and corporate interests which has

now become intervened with certain internal security measures.

The phenomenon known as “deputizing,” which encompasses the private sector, along with citizens and other organizations, serve as a force multiplier for homeland security purposes (Michaels, 2010). Jon D. Michaels (2010) writes that withing a framework of private-public partnership, private security personnel which currently outnumber police officers three to one in the U.S. can be deployed in a manner which would help law enforcement agencies to focus on their strategic and operational priorities while delegating certain functions. In certain instances, employing the services of PSCs can be financially beneficial for the government while it also helps saves time and money of the state agency by delegating specific activities during natural disasters and pandemic situations.

Civil society participation and focus on security of the citizen and society as key element of the emerging human security discourse is evident within the realms of humanitarian crisis management, emergency response and civil protection. On several instances, during natural disaster and pandemic situations PSCs are employed to act jointly with a range of state actors and INGOs. There is an increasing trend to delegate specific state responsibilities such as the security of critical infrastructure and assistance in humanitarian situations in peace support operations which has pushed PSCs further towards participating in civil-military cooperation roles.

PSCs Success in Combating Covid-19

There are several success stories of PSCs in their handling of natural disasters and the most recent COVID- 19 pandemic. PSCs have been outsourced to handle complex humanitarian emergencies in which the armed forces were assigned functions to work directly alongside civilian partners which is a phenomenon that has emerged in an age of human security threats.

During the lockdown periods as a result of the COVID- 19 pandemic, PSCs were tasked with certain functions performed by the police and in today’s context private guards under supervision of state actors can perform certain functions which law enforcement agencies performed during emergency situations. Most private security personnel possess a previous law

enforcement or military background which provides PSCs the added advantage of having a comprehensive knowledge on policing and security procedures at strategic, tactical and operational levels.

The PSC industry which has experienced exponential growth during recent times is currently employing an estimated 20 million private security workers worldwide and is expected to grow even further to \$240 billion by 2020 (Provost, 2017; McCarthy, 2017)

According to a recent survey, there are an estimated 7 million private security workers in India which only has just 1.4 million police officers, while China has approximately 5 million private personnel compared to their police strength of 2.7 million (McCarthy, 2017). The U.S. has around 1.1 million private security personnel, while they have a total strength of 800,000 in their police force, followed by Brazil which has around 1.7 million private security personnel which is more than double their entire police strength (McCarthy, 2017). The demand for private security soaring and there is clear indication that security which was once the sole responsibility of the state has gradually shifted with the private sector directly being involved in individual and commercial safety.

In the recent war against the COVID-19 pandemic, private security personnel around the world are putting their lives in the line of duty in order to ensure safety and security to the people and organizations PSCs protect. Many PSCs have been deployed to assist the national effort to counter the pandemic and private security guards have now been recognized by many European states as an essential service for the contribution they are making in the fight against the pandemic which has claimed the lives of many engaged in the profession (CoESS, 2020). Some countries have even made use of the large number of private security personnel to assist the state in enforcing lockdown laws and assisting the local police authorities.

Private security personnel have been categorized as “workers exercising critical occupations” by the European Commission. In the U.S., The National Association of Security Companies (NASCO), which is the apex body of the American private security industry has praised security officers across the U.S. who are playing a crucial

role in public safety amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (NASCO, 2020). The Prime Minister of Belgium and the National Director of the Portuguese Public Security Police also praised the PSCs for their contribution in their fight against the recent pandemic. The Spanish National Police also applauded the Spanish private security sector which has deployed over 100,000 guards in managing the COVID-19 crisis and supporting the Security Forces in the daily protection of people and property, in supermarkets, hospitals and other critical infrastructure.

New Zealand which has been one of the most successful countries in managing the recent COVID-19 outbreak listed their private security sector as an essential service after taking into consideration the tireless service private security guards are providing to keep the pandemic at bay by protecting communities, businesses and ensuring proper health and safety measures are followed. The New Zealand Security Association initiated a campaign to recognize the dedicated service provided by private security personnel who are engaged in the national effort to counter the Covid-19 pandemic.

China which has a private security force which is almost double the strength of their local police has entrusted the responsibility of controlling movements in urban communities across the country to private security guards (Chen, 2020). China has a relatively small state police force to provide local security to a large population. The private security sector in the country was used as a force multiplier to assist in their national drive towards preventing the spread of the pandemic.

In the Indian Union Territory of Puducherry, private security guards were given the responsibility to enforce the lockdown and ensuring social distancing was followed in public places. The Indian Union state decided to use private security personnel due to the shortage of manpower in the Puducherry Police and a request for assistance was sent to over 90 PSCs (Deccan Herald, 2020). Highlighting the vital role of the private security sector in India, the country's Union Home Ministry in a letter sent to the most prominent private security industry bodies appealed to Indian PCs not to lay off guards or deduct their salaries during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into consideration the

essential service they are providing (The Economic Times, 2020)

Conclusion

PSCs in Sri Lanka can play vital a support role during national emergencies, natural disasters and pandemic situations. In order to face the complex challenges and threats to human security, an integrated approach should be adopted. The philosophy of homeland security is driven by the fundamental principles of prevention, protection, and response and Minimize disruption and restore the functioning of critical infrastructure (Wickramasinghe, 2015).

Private security personnel should be considered as an essential service in Sri Lanka taking into consideration the frontline work they are engaged in and the tremendous national service the industry is providing. the private security sector functions not only as a unique career option for ex-members of the armed forces and former police officered, but also it has become an indispensable part in global security. The contribution PSCs can provide a state during natural disasters and pandemic situations are as follows below.

Identifiable main contributions the PSCs can provide the state during natural disasters are;

1. The security officers are supposed to make sure the prompt assistance to victims of the disasters.
2. Achieve rapid and effective recovery through search, rescue and emergency relief.
3. Private security is to provide immediate assistance to maintain life, improve health and support the morale of the affected population.
4. Work in collaboration and support the police, armed forces and disaster management agencies.
5. Security should know all the possible exits from the facility, evacuation routes, and be able to provide guidance on how large groups of people should navigate a disaster, even if there are unexpected circumstances such as an obstructed exit.
6. Some security companies are able to provide Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to assist the state authorities during disaster situations.

Identifiable contributions PSCs can provide the state during the COVID-19 pandemic are;

1. Help the local authorities enforce lockdown laws act as a force multiplier for the police force.
2. Enforcing Covid -19 regulations and following recommended security procedures.
3. Officers are to work in collaboration with police, armed forces and health and medical officers to control the pandemic situation.
4. The presence of a security officer in uniform will act as a deterrent in preventing crime and other illegal activities taking place within the locality private security is provided. Pandemic situation does not stop burglaries, assault and other crime. Therefore, private security services can play a major role in preventing crimes during the pandemic situation.
5. In the event of an accident, the private security officers to sure the proper evacuation and control the virus transmit.
6. Trained security officer will be able to monitor volatile situations and take precautionary actions to safeguard and protect business establishments, factories, employees, customers and other infrastructure when an event occurs.
7. Assist the local authorities with CCTV and physical surveillance.
8. Some security companies are able to provide Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to assist the state authorities during pandemic situations.

In the end, the role of the security guard is to provide security, safety and to respond to changing situations. PSCs are a force multiplier and should be employed with clear operational guidelines and in subordination to state authority. In an era where national security is challenged by complex threats, Private security personnel can be used as the first line of defence for the state in overcoming the constantly evolving non-traditional security threats.

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