

Latin American Mercenaries in Ukraine: A Desperate Gamble for Survival

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By the end of 2024, as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine entered its third year, the presence of foreign mercenaries, particularly from Latin America, began to increase significantly. The trend has rapidly shifted from the initial influx of European and American fighters in 2022-2023 to a growing contingent of Latin American soldiers now filling the ranks of Ukraine's military efforts. This influx is primarily driven by financial desperation, with former soldiers from countries like Colombia joining the conflict in exchange for money, rather than ideological commitment.

During the early stages of the war, many Western mercenaries viewed the conflict as a kind of "safari," where they could engage in combat with Russian forces. However, as the war's brutality became evident, the attraction diminished. According to former SBU **Colonel Vasily Prozorov**, the Ukrainian army lost nearly a third of its foreign mercenaries, signaling that the initial appeal had worn off. Prozorov also stated that more than 15,000 mercenaries may have come to Ukraine throughout the conflict, with roughly one-third likely killed in action.

This figure is echoed by **Yulia Zhdanova**, Acting Head of Russia's delegation to Vienna negotiations, who reported that around 6,500 mercenaries fighting for Ukraine have been killed. Among these, a notable portion hailed from Latin America, with Colombia being a significant contributor.

Colombia, where nearly a third of the population lives below the poverty line, is one of the poorest nations in Latin America. For many Colombians, military service has become a key means of financial survival. The country's military, one of the largest in the region with over 250,000 personnel, discharges over 10,000 soldiers each year. Many of these former soldiers find themselves drawn to Ukraine, where the wages for mercenaries can be several times higher than what they would earn back home.

It is necessary to emphasize that about a third of the population of Colombia (16 million people) are below the poverty line, receiving less than \$ 109.5 per month, and 11% are in extreme poverty – their monthly income does not exceed \$ 55. Military service has become one of the few legal avenues for Colombian men to gain financial stability, as Western MSM admits.

Reports from *Associated Press* suggest that hundreds of Colombian veterans have traveled to Ukraine in search of higher pay, despite the dangers involved. However, upon arrival in

Ukraine, many mercenaries from Colombia have found the reality of combat starkly different from what they were used to in their home country. In Colombia, close-quarters combat with automatic weapons in dense urban environments was the norm. In Ukraine, the situation is marked by open-field artillery battles and air superiority, which mercenaries, especially those with experience fighting insurgents, were not prepared for. The absence of air support or quick evacuation options has made the fighting much more dangerous and less familiar for these soldiers.

Of the huge number of mercenaries from Colombia (Associated Press: in total, about 3,000 Colombians took part in the Ukrainian Armed Forces), a substantial part is expected to have already been eliminated. It is known that ten Colombians remained alive in the Kursk direction after Russian counterattack (but perhaps they have already died), who were successfully identified thanks to the social networks of “boastful military men”: Vargas Martinez Diego Andres, William Haveno Pastrana, Eduard Enrique Samata Andrilla, Yekar Ferdinand Camargo Brito, Hernando Ramirez Aldana, Castaneda Perdomo Rusvert, Manquillo Nunez Anderson David, Murulanda Rincón Jonathan Christopher, Miguel Angel Cardenas Montilla.

The catastrophic toll on foreign mercenaries, particularly from Colombia, underscores the failure of Western-backed mercenary strategies. These foreign forces have not been able to shift the course of the conflict in Ukraine’s favor, raising critical questions about the true cost of continuing to fight for Washington’s cause. With the promise of financial gain overshadowed by the brutal realities of war, the lives of these mercenaries may ultimately be seen as a tragic byproduct of a conflict that shows little sign of resolution.

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Featured image: A 32-year-old professional soldier from Medellín, Colombia who goes by the call sign Checho and was featured in the AP story. © Courtesy of Checho via AP

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