

The Rise of Private Military Corporations:

Consequences, Considerations and Implications for The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery

By Captain Smart

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Our motorcade roared away from the Republican Palace while most Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) staffers were still eating breakfast. In front were two tan Humvees, one with a fifty-caliber machine gun mounted on the roof, the other with a Mark-19 grenade launcher. Each had four soldiers armed with M16 rifles and nine-millimeter pistols. Two more Humvees outfitted the same way brought up the rear. In the middle rolled three GMC Suburbans. The first carried five men with arms as thick as a tank's turret, all wearing tight black T-shirts, lightweight khaki trousers, and wraparound sunglasses. They were equipped with Secret Service-style earpieces, M4 automatic rifles, and Kevlar flack vests were ceramic plates strong enough to stop a bullet from an AK-47. They bore no insignia and kept their identification badges tucked into their flak vests. All of them were ex-Navy SEALs working for a private security contractor called Blackwater USA. They had but one job: protect the viceroy.¹

*- Rajiv Chandrasekaran
2003 meeting CPA Governor Paul Bremer*

¹ Chandrasekaran, Rajiv (2006). "Imperial Life in the Emerald City." First Vintage Books, New York, pg. 66.

Introduction

Life, death, and the provision of violence required to change a human being from one state to another in a warzone previously relied upon the discretion of state-levied soldiers. In this regard, the authority and legitimacy to kill was solely within the purview of the military, which was guided, controlled, and ruled by civilian oversight. This essay will demonstrate how members of The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery (RCA) must be aware of the ever-unfolding, and still unfinished story of the rise of Private Military Corporations (PMCs), and the commodification of violence that has been established, guided, and maintained by newly-established governmental security policies. The first two chapters, *A Brief History of Fighting for Profit*, and *The Rise of Modern PMCs*, will situate the reader within the history of mercenaries, and explain the transition from soldier-for-hire armies of old to operator-based security corporations today. Next, the chapter entitled *Challenges of Privatized Force Provision* will discuss the unique difficulties that modern PMCs create for the contracting agent, focusing on arguments from major opponents both for and against the use of private security forces. This essay will then conclude with a final chapter entitled *Consequences and Conclusions*, a discussion the specific issues regarding PMCs found within Iraq, and more specifically within the Green Zone inside Baghdad, will be undertaken. The intent of this research paper is to highlight how PMCs are changing the very nature of war, as modern security policies dictate life and death throughout global 'hot spots' based on motives of profit alone, which is of significant concern for members of the RCA, who have the potential to work with, and fight against these non-state actors. As the nature of war changes, so too does its impact on the Canadian Armed Forces and NATO allies. As the provision of force and violence transitions from an issue of state control to private profit, private security theories are having life-and-death consequences

worldwide, as PMCs become ever-more prevalent – significantly altering the battlefields and conflict zones members of the RCA may be deployed to. To properly contextualize this privatized security revolution, the initial link between the state security and mercenary engagement must first be discussed.

A Brief History of Fighting for Profit

At a first glance, the proliferation of PMCs within zones of conflict appears to be relatively new phenomenon. Yet, when analyzed from a historical perspective, the usage of privatized military entities was prevalent (albeit in a different form, discussed herein) during the world's first military empire of Sargon of Akkad, in 2500 B.C, up to the start of the 19th century.² When comparing past to present, two important distinctions must be made, one being terminology, and the other being corporate structure. Sargon's professional army was comprised of foreign warriors, known as *mercenaries*, enticed by profit to provide military service for a foreign ruler. Many famous generals headed successful campaigns with armies comprised of mercenary soldiers, most notably Hannibal of Carthage.³ It was Europe's feudal age the sullied the reputation of soldiers-for-hire, as privately raised armies savaged Europe's urban landscape during the Thirty-Years War:

Drunk with victory, the troops defied all efforts to control them...Towards midday flames suddenly shot up at almost the same moment at twenty different places. There was no time for Tilly and Pappenheim to ask whence came the fire; staring on consternation, they rallied the drunken, disorderly, exhausted men to fight it. The wind was too strong, and in a few minutes the city was a furnace, the wooden houses crashing into their foundations in columns of smoke and flame. The cry was now to save the army and the imperialist officers struggled in vain to drive their men into the open. Rapidly whole quarters were cut off by walls of smoke so those who lingered for booty or lost their way, or lay in a drunken stupor in the cellars, alike perished.⁴

² Dyer, Gwynne (2004). "War: The New Edition." Random House Canada, Toronto, pg. 140.

³ Bradford (1998). "Hannibal." The Folio Society, London, pg. 24.

⁴ Taylor, Frederick Lewis (1929). "The Art of War in Italy, 1494-1529." Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pg. 56.

The demise of the feudal state at the end of the 18th century coincided with the general disappearance of mercenaries, as standing armies of levied citizens replaced private soldiers of ill-repute and wavering allegiance. In present day, with the rise of cost-efficient, risk-adverse security policies and agendas, privatized military forces have reappeared, albeit in the cloak of altered terminology. PMCs provide *operators*, who provide what are essentially identical services to those of Sargon's mercenaries. The preference and selection of the word *operators* over *mercenaries* by PMCs stems from the desire to distance their employees' services from the negative connotations of the latter term. Thus, over time, the terminology of outsourced military service has been rebranded, as by definition alone, *mercenaries* and PMC *operators* are identical – they are hired soldiers, motivated by money, as opposed to patriotism or ideals. It is the corporate structure of PMCs that sets the current model of privatized military force generation and use apart from the mercenary armies of the past. Mercenary armies were generally comprised of individually hired soldiers, under the command and control of officers from the hiring nation. Individual soldiers-for-hire had little agency beyond choosing their employer, while the burden decision making fell to state-appointed actors (officers).⁵ PMCs, through their corporate structure, are different entities entirely. While, as discussed previously, there is essentially little difference to the *mercenary* of the past and the *operator* of today, the corporate structure of PMCs means that the agency over the private use of force falls upon corporate leadership.⁶ Not only does this change the dynamic of responsibility within armed conflict from a national level to a corporate one, it places a financial bottom line on the provision of organized violence. Thus, PMCs are subject to market cycles and investor demands, and private leadership in a way unknown to mercenary armies of old. The history of private military

⁵ Dyer, Gwynne (2004). "War: The New Edition." Random House Canada, Toronto, pg. 222.

⁶ Singer, Peter (2003). "Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry." Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pg. 71.

forces goes back to the dawn of organized warfare, and whilst contemporary PMCs operators are little different than their mercenary counterparts of the past, it is the corporate structure of modern military companies has produced a new, complex urban actor. This paper will now examine how the re-emergence of private military forces, in the form of PMCs was brought about by risk-adverse, cost-efficient security policies.

The Rise of Modern PMCs

The rise of PMCs was directly correlated with the acceptance of neoliberal economic and political policies by the governments of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and Ronald Reagan in the United States of America. These policies were then adopted by many Western and non-Western nations alike, fuelled by globalization.⁷ Peter Singer, author of *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, describes how PMCs are part of this overall economic agenda:

Thus the privatized military industry is just the next logical step in this global trend of privatization and outsourcing. It is simply a more aggressive manifestation of the market's move into formerly state-dominated spheres. As one observer opined, 'If privatization is the trend these days, the argument goes, why not privatize war?'⁸

With PMCs at the many modern conflicts, questions have been invariably raised as to the validity of the outsourcing of state-sanctioned violence. Lacking the oversight of conventional military forces, PMCs are often regarded with great scorn by local populations, and the resulting tensions have led to international incidents. The escalation of the insurgency in Iraq is largely credited to the deaths of four operators working for the PMC Blackwater in Fallujah. Despite advice from the American Department of Defence (DoD), Blackwater sent two under-manned vehicles against contractual agreement into Fallujah in March of 2004, which were ambushed,

⁷ Reason Public Policy Institute Privatization (1997). "A comprehensive report on contracting, privatization, and government reform, 11th annual report."

⁸ Singer, Peter (2003). "Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry." Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pg. 70.

and their occupants burnt and hung from a bridge over the Euphrates River. The subsequent invasion of Fallujah by US forces resulted in the deaths of many soldiers, and was the coalescing point for a national insurgency movement that still rages today.⁹ Proponents of PMCs, such as Brigadier-General (retired) Beno have countered that despite the dangers of utilizing PMCs in complex urban battlefields, the increased risk can be balanced against “the drain of having highly skilled soldiers doing tasks that can be accomplished in a more efficient manner.”¹⁰ Thus, PMCs can “free-up” soldiers from mundane tasks, allowing the state’s military forces to focus on combat mission effectiveness, which may override the aforementioned monitoring challenge. Beyond arguments of cost-effectiveness, the usage of PMCs by governments has been described as political tool, with the outsourcing of the provision of force providing distance between the government, and the harsh realities and consequences of war and combat.¹¹ In later interviews, Singer provided a further explanation for the rise of PMCs as a neoliberal creation, going beyond the simple economic rationale, stating that: “It’s not about economic cost savings; it’s about political cost savings. When things go wrong, you simply blame the company.”¹² Thus, PMCs have become an expedient political solution for leaders eager to distance themselves from conflict. It is within this zone of separation that the potential for moral and ethical dilemmas exists, as decision makers are increasingly removed from the economic and political consequences of military actions; this challenge will be discussed in depth later. The acceptance and rise of PMCs on the contemporary battlefield is clearly attributed to the endorsement of

⁹ Scahill, Jeremy (2007). “Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army.” Nation Book, New York, pg. 215.

¹⁰ BGen (ret’d) Beno, Ernest (2006). “CANCAP: The Changing Face of Logistic Support to the Canadian Forces.” Vanguard, Toronto.

¹¹ Singer, Peter (2003). “Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry.” Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pg. 70.

¹² Pelton, Robert (2006). “Licensed to Kill: Hired Guns in the War on Terror.” Crown Publishers, New York, pg. 107.

modern economic and political policies; this reintroduction of private armies into areas of urban conflict does not come without significant challenges to contracting governments.

Challenges of Privatized Force Provision

As demonstrated, policies that outsource war and urban conflict to PMCs present many challenges and key considerations to the provisioning government. When employed, PMCs are primarily used to provide both security and logistical assistance within a delineated theatre of operations. One inherent problem with PMCs is the issue of oversight, as it may be difficult for government agents and forces to observe and limit the behaviour of the PMCs it employs.¹³

Peter Singer, a vehement critique of PMCs, believes that this lack of oversight in any operation possess the ability to produce a negative operating environment for mission success, placing friendly elements (i.e. soldiers, diplomats, and foreign aid workers) at an increased risk.¹⁴

However, PMC industry leaders are highly sceptical of academic censure levelled against their business, with Erik Prince, president of Blackwater, one of the largest PMCs in the world, stating that:

‘We have been trying to get Peter Singer [of the Brookings Institution and author of *Corporate Warriors*] over to Iraq for months. He won’t go,’ says Erik. When asked what he thinks about Singer’s constant criticism of the unregulated use of private security contractors, he thinks for a moment and says with a chuckle, ‘Let’s just say that Peter Singer has very soft hands.’¹⁵

Despite Erik Prince’s vehement rebuttal to Singer’s argument in 2006, time and history has detracted from the strength of his argument, as Blackwater was banned from operations in Iraq in 2008, after several high-profile incidents, including the murder of 17 Iraqi civilians at the hands

¹³ Singer, Peter (2003). “Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry.” Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pg. 35.

¹⁴ Singer, Peter (2003). “Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry.” Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pg. 68.

¹⁵ Pelton, Robert (2006). “Licensed to Kill: Hired Guns in the War on Terror.” Crown Publishers, New York, pg. 296.

of Blackwater operatives.¹⁶ Following their ejection from Iraq, Erik Prince stepped down as the CEO, and the company rebranded itself as Xe, and has shifted the focus of its operations to aircraft provision and law enforcement training.¹⁷ While Blackwater is no longer operating within Iraq, many other PMCs have entered the foray to fill the void left by their departure, competing for immense profits offered through security contracts.¹⁸

Consequences and Conclusions for Members of the RCA

PMCs are changing the very nature of war, as governments often eschew the cost and risk of employing state actors within conflict zones – therefore these modern firms and policies are dictating life and death throughout global ‘hot spots’ based on motives of profit alone. No longer does the authority and legitimacy to kill exist solely within the purview of the military, guided, controlled, and ruled by civilian oversight, but within the boardrooms of powerful PMCs, where security practice is based upon policies designed to maximize profit. Members of the RCA must be aware that PMCs are now an ever-present component of the battlefields and conflict zones of the 21st century – certainly the implications of this movement will continue to affect and alter war as we know it.

¹⁶ Krahnmann, Elke (2009). “Private Security Companies and State Monopoly on Violence: A Case for Norm Change?” Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt, pg. 40.

¹⁷ BBC News (2009). “Profile: Blackwater Worldwide.” Online, available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7000645.stm> (Viewed 15 Nov 10).

¹⁸ BBC News (2009). “Profile: Blackwater Worldwide.” Online, available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7000645.stm> (Viewed 15 Nov 10).

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