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**CORPORATE WARRIORS:
THE STATE AND CHANGING FORMS OF PRIVATE ARMED FORCE IN AMERICA***

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Abstract

In recent years, and especially with the war in Iraq, the U.S. military's reliance on private contractors as forces in the theater of war has grown and become increasingly clear. We critically evaluate some of the best literature on the emergence of this phenomena—especially Ken Silverstein's *Private Warriors* and P.W. Singer's *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*—and find a neglect of the historical path-dependent character of the rise of the new corporate armed forces. In particular, we concentrate on American experience and two silences that are integral to understanding the path dependent character of this process: (1) earlier historical reliance on private armed force to suppress the labor movement in America, the *template* for this new form of irregular armed force; and (2) the ghost of Vietnam as a continuing political liability in the mobilization of sufficient troop levels under neo-imperialist aspirations and “the global war on terror,” as the main *condition* for the rise of the new private military form. Both elements suggest the theoretical importance of state strength/weakness in any explanation of private armed force. We discuss several important political implications of our findings.

CORPORATE WARRIORS:¹

THE STATE AND CHANGING FORMS OF PRIVATE ARMED FORCE IN AMERICA

The U.S. war in Iraq, ostensibly part of the “global war on terrorism,” has brought important features of U.S. armed force into clearer relief. One significant revelation is the increasing reliance of U.S. military on private corporate-supplied fighting forces, otherwise known as “private contractors.” While this shift has occurred gradually over the last decade (Singer 2003), it took the U.S. invasion of Iraq to bring it to general public attention. Private companies have long been integral to supplying the non-human means of destruction, so much so that at least since the early years of the Cold War an extensive “military-industrial complex” has been deeply embedded in the economic, political, and cultural fabric of America. But private companies in the business of supplying fighting troops and executing other aspects of American foreign policy “by proxy” raise new theoretical questions and important political implications.

Contemporary corporate warriors, especially in the American case, are very much an outgrowth of post-Cold War neo-imperialism in which the military plays a crucial, but constrained role in the business of Empire (Silverstein 2000; Kaplan 2003; Harvey 2003; Johnson 2004; Boggs 2005). With the passing of the Cold War between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., the U.S. was faced with the problem of how to reconfigure its hegemonic global position. What

¹ The base title, “Corporate Warriors,” was borrowed from P.W. Singer’s, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (2003).

broad, even universalistic (not simply narrow national) interests were now to be represented in the absence of the communist threat? The “New World Order” concept was advanced for precisely this purpose. “According to this vision, the USA is benevolently protecting the world against the instability threatened by post-bipolar regional strongmen. The Gulf War was a demonstration of its determination to do so” (Biel 2000: 258). Since September 11, 2001, the rhetoric has shifted to the “War on Terrorism” but this new imperialist regime (a term that is absent from American public discourse as it is present in American foreign policy; Kaplan 2003: 56) is still heavily shaped by Cold War practices and, as we shall see, Cold War ghosts.

Cold War interests and practices remain “sedimented” (see Dahms, this volume) because a small number of powerfully situated Cold War hawks continue to have a significant influence on defense policy (e.g., Silverstein 2000; Wallerstein 2003). These practices continue under the rubric of “New World Order” and “War on Terrorism” because: (1) Cold Warriors remain entrenched in government agencies and still shape policy as if the Cold War never ended; (2) entrenched private arms dealers still reap large profits providing the military machine at home and abroad with the tools of the trade; (3) private mercenary industry thrives on sensitive Pentagon operations; (4) Cold Warriors who continue to work as consultants and lobbyists for the armaments industry; and (5) Cold War strategists situated in consulting firms and think tanks contribute to continuing the intellectual frameworks to support Cold War policy continuity. All of these forms of “Private Warriors” have a financial and career interest in war and conflict, as well as the power and connections to promote hard-line policies” (Silverstein 2000: ix). Their collective influence is one reason that the U.S. seemed unable or unwilling to make the transition to a post-Cold War world even prior to September 11th (Silverstein 2000: viii-x; Greider 1998).

In the post-Cold War world there has been an enormous flood of commentary on its consequent “globalization” which is remarkable not only for its volume (e.g., Fiss and Hirsch 2005), but also for its silence on the role of military and coercive force in which global markets are celebrated and “the U.S. military winds up invisible within an otherwise massive, worldwide power structure” (Boggs 2005: xxxii). This gloss is not unlike the discourse on republican free-markets during the 19th-century when military coercion, both public and private, was integral in the making of America’s “free” markets (Montgomery 1993). Contemporary American militarism is not a radical break from a long-term trajectory but rather a deepening extension of many patterns that have become a more aggressive, globalized form of military-backed Empire (Boggs 2005: x). But this increasing use of military force illuminates perhaps more the fragility and weakness of U.S. global hegemony than its presumed potency (Wallerstein 2003). Moreover, the way it executes war-fighting and the increasingly privatized warrior forms that it uses illuminates the limits of Empire at home.

The role of private corporate warriors has begun to draw scholarly attention. Ken Silverstein’s *Private Warriors* is one of the first major statements. He presents one chapter (“Mercenary, Inc.”) containing mostly descriptive information on this phenomenon which he sees as part of a wider constellation of private military players and interests that have helped extend American Cold War policy far beyond the end of the Cold War. P.W. Singer’s *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (2003) provides a more thorough treatment of the recent emergence of private armed force in America and around the world. It is impressive in scope and important in substance. However, both Silverstein and Singer ignore two crucial empirical dimensions that substantially weaken their accounts of the rise of private

corporate warriors. First, in attempts to locate historical roots, both authors miss the early and lengthy history of private armed force that developed as part of the capitalist countermovement to suppress the labor movement in America between 1877 and World War II. From this early experience, the organizational and industrial template for the contemporary private military firm/industry was established; that is, a model was created in which the commodity being sold on the market (basically to establish the market writ large under particular terms) by a private firm was armed force or coercion. Second, these authors are surprisingly silent on the role of the Vietnam legacy in shaping the contemporary climate for the re-emergence of private armed force in America. Silence on both of these significant historical facts of military force erases the path dependent² character of American political-military culture in shaping the contemporary private armed force industry. The lack of a cross-temporal comparison of private armed force in the U.S. case also misses an opportunity to understand what such forces signal about the state, its legitimacy and strength.

Others have addressed private military forces and transition to citizen-soldiers armies in the history of European state-building (e.g., Avant 2000; Thomson 1994; Tilly 1990). Here we concentrate exclusively on historical and contemporary experience of the U.S. In the first major part of the paper, we review the process by which U.S. military force for both domestic and international purposes became larger and more centralized. Moving from a small central army with decentralized militias (some private) to a highly centralized military apparatus that was the key to U.S. economic and industrial policy (“permanent war economy”) with the inauguration of the Cold War, the U.S. state had developed the world’s most powerful military and was engaged

² We use “path dependency” in a probabilistic rather than a deterministic sense.

in a global hegemony based on the protection of the “free world” from the forces of Soviet domination. The second major portion of the paper addresses the social conditions that gave rise to a call for “flexibility” in U.S. international war-fighting growing out of the Cold War. Ostensibly, Vietnam was to be a testing ground for this new flexible mode of military response, one tied to counterinsurgency activities that would likely increase in the Cold War context.

Current privatization in the U.S. military can be understood in two main ways. First, as an outgrowth of Cold War containment—in both the war-fighting strategy known as “flexible response” and also in the collective memory of the problems of political will that this flexible response strategy generated during the Vietnam War. And secondly, in terms of the right-wing push to privatize as much of the public sector as possible since the end of the Cold War. The use of private military contractors is an attempt to build flexibility (i.e., to circumvent constraints that the military now faces in Empire duty) into U.S. military operations that has roots in earlier American history (private security formations), but its current developments are deeply rooted in the institutions, politics and culture of the Cold War. Traveling this historical path allows for an interesting optic on the forms and meanings of private armed force, the construction of the public/private spheres of influence, and the character of the state.

BUILDING THE LOCAL STATE: CAPITALIST FLEXIBILITY AND IRREGULAR ARMED FORCE

As America went through a major transformation from an agrarian to a class-divided industrial society, businessmen found that their needs for local security were not being adequately met by the state—i.e., by municipal, state, or federal policing institutions. In various localities across the northern industrial regions, business elites (“leading citizens” in their self-

designation; see Isaac 2002) turned to the use of irregular armed force-- often in the familiar organizational form of the militia--to protect their businesses and to secure the public order against what they saw as an increasingly menacing working-class (Leach 1993; Isaac 2002). We do not have to point to the Roman military or the development of European states for examples of private armed force in politics and state development (Singer 2003; Tilly 1990; Thomson 1994); private armed force was integral to state formation in America, too. Before Empire can be built, the state must bring its own domestic territory under control. The early private elite militia (staffed and financed by wealthy industrialists and bankers; Isaac 2002), then the National Guard were part of the process of securing the domestic order and providing “homeland security” for elite classes, among other things.³

Independent Militias: Early Industrialists as Corporate Warriors

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Union Army had been demobilized to approximately 25,000 troops (Skowronek 1982), and the militias mobilized by the Northern states during the war had largely evaporated (Cooper 1997: 23). Historically, U.S. armed force was rooted in provincial republican tradition--the locally based militia system--that depended on the amateur citizen-soldier. Within this tradition, strong citizen’s militias were considered the essential bulwark against the dangers of an independent sovereign and centralized state (Skowronek 1982). Early militia were organized through regionally based voluntary social clubs differentiated along ethnic and status lines, fused with state and local political machines through patronage networks, and were minimally subsidized by the federal government (Reinders 1977;

³ The National Guard was also used during this period in international conflicts like the Spanish-American War (Cooper 1997:97-107).

Skowronek 1982; Montgomery 1993). Militias had historically consisted of two basic types. *Common militia* were those that were mobilized and operated under the auspices of a government authority, at the municipal or state-level. *Independent militia* were organized, financed, and operated by private individuals.

During the last several decades of the nineteenth-century, armed force in America went through a major transformation. Part of that institutional change revolved around the development of the militia system into a truly *national* guard, a permanent state-supported institution (Cooper 1997:31). But that national development did *not* follow a smooth trajectory that eliminated independents and added regular common militia units under nationally-integrated state command structures.

Between 1877 and the end of the 1880s, independent militias grew in some cities and were reconstituted in others. This chapter in armed force history is largely connected to the economic, industrial, and class reconfiguration that the nation was undergoing. While class conflict was growing more intense and widespread, the institutional ability to police labor uprisings as large-scale regional or national phenomena had not changed much from the antebellum period. Large economic organizations, employing thousands of men, extending across vast areas, made it increasingly difficult to put down strikes and other contentious collective actions.

The first national labor uprising in summer 1877 made the gap between working-class formation and policing institutions clear to elites for the first time. The uprising began as a railroad strike at the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) depot in Martinsburgh, West Virginia in the context of repeated wage cuts and work speed-ups. The strike spread quickly along the B&O and

other rail lines igniting actions in scores of cities from Baltimore to San Francisco. It overflowed the rails as the rail strikes served as a symbolic flashpoint to mobilize miners, some factory workers, cigar workers, masses of unemployed, and others sympathetic to the struggle and resentful of rails, banks, and the oligarchical character of the newly emerging political economy (Stowell 1999; Isaac 2002).

The big lesson for elites—businessmen, politicians, military leaders—was that the existing local militia apparatus was inadequate in size and ill-prepared to deal with such mass collective actions. In the aftermath of the 1877 uprising, the press was peppered with editorials regarding the unreliable character of the volunteer forces (Isaac 2002). Federal troops eventually crushed the uprising in most major urban centers, but it had taken weeks to do so, given limited troop strength, preparation, the widespread character of the uprising, and transportation difficulties. Some business leaders (Thomas Scott—Pennsylvania rails; Marshall Field—Chicago retail; Amasa Stone—Cleveland manufacturing and rails) unsuccessfully agitated for Congress to provide appropriations for expanding the army and creating permanent garrison outposts at critical locations across the urban, industrial heartland (Isaac 2002).

Under the very realistic belief that the 1877 uprising was no fluke but would likely happen again, given an inadequate/unreliable local militia and an army insufficient in scale to respond to all areas quickly, some “leading citizens” took matters into their own hands and self-organized. Local elite counter-organization followed two major paths. In some urban areas (e.g., Chicago) existing independent militia were recomposed with elites eliminating potentially unreliable ethnic (especially German or Irish) and working-class types from their ranks. Industrial elites and their wealthy associates followed a different approach in other cities (e.g.,

Cleveland) and formed their own independent militia anew.⁴

The key to this self-formation of independent elite militia armed force was its *flexibility* in solving a variety of problems of order that other institutions and the state were unable or unwilling to confront. As Isaac (2002: 393) put it: “Proper military training would ensure skill and readiness, clearly something that had been missing from traditional militia response in summer 1877. Self-organization rooted in local friendship, family, neighborhood, and business networks and autonomy from state-affiliated militia would ensure *independence* from unreliable (classes) and ill-trained militias, as well as from ‘corrupt’ unreliable municipal politicians and police. Local (neighborhood-based) militia could be relied upon to protect not only private industrial properties of members and their friends, but also neighborhood and homes...”

Industrial elites of the Gilded Age felt besieged by evil in a variety of forms—labor movement and unions, immigrant working-class hordes, demagogues and riotous urban mobs, corrupt municipal politics that mobilized the votes of masses of working-class and immigrant voters, the corrosion of morality, feminization of society, and concerns over weakening manliness—all of which had a common denominator: the threat “to the rightful, natural position of power and authority that belonged to elite Victorian men” (Isaac 2002: 392). The first “*corporate warriors*” of modern industrial America undertook to arm themselves and organize collectively in the name of public order and welfare. That they did so was a sign of structural state weakness, one that they helped shore-up with their own private armies.

The National Guard eventually absorbed these independent militia, or they withered and

⁴ The Chicago militia case in point was the “Chicago First Regiment” (Turnbaugh 1979). The newly founded (in 1877) Cleveland militia were “The First City Troop of Cleveland” (a calvary troop) and “The Cleveland Gatling Gun Battery” (a machine gun unit) (see Isaac 2002).

died off (Cooper 1997). As the Guard became a more established institution in the early 20th-century, the U.S. military forces went through a reorganization that made them more professional, centralized, and institutionally stable (Skowronek 1982). In this process, the state acquired a contentious legitimacy over the use of force that was centrally controlled. The standard view was that this armed division of the state existed to defend the nation against external threats, but the development of the National Guard was fueled, in part, by class-based threats within the domestic arena (e.g., Montgomery 1993; Cooper 1997; Isaac 2002).

Overlapping with and extending beyond the independent elite militias of the Gilded era were a variety of other “corporate warriors.” These were hired guns for corporate use, usually in contention with labor. The self-organization of wealthy corporate elite increasingly gave way to state-organized garrison outposts in the form of the National Guard and their armories that dotted large industrial cities (Fogelson 1989) and wage warriors hired by corporations to do various sorts of “security work.” Between the Gilded Age and World War II these two forms of domestic armament constituted a powerful armed force aimed primarily at the labor movement.

Private Industrial Police: Mobilizing Corporate Warriors through the Market

During the last quarter of the 19th-century, business turned to the market to hire private armed forces. These consisted of various “mercenary contingency forces” (Isaac 2002:391) or what others have simply called “private police” (Johnson 1976). One type of market-based armed force came in the form of corporate provision of hired guns, originally known as “detective agencies,” like the Pinkertons (Harrison 1996), and their competitors (e.g., A.A. Anher, Baldwin-Felts, Bergoffs, Burns, Corporations Auxiliary Company, National Corporation Service, Railway Audit and Inspection Company, among many others). Business owners could

contract with an agency to do a particular policing or undercover job, infiltrate a union, or break a strike, as was the case with the Amalgamated Association of Tin, Iron and Steelworkers' strike at the Carnegie works at Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892 (Fusfeld 1984).

A second form of private policing was acquired through full-time wage workers on a company's payroll. Some companies maintained their own full-time police or army, sometimes called "merchant police." Among the more infamous examples of this type of armed force were the "Coal & Iron Police" widespread in Pennsylvania (also known as the "Pennsylvania Cossacks") (Norwood 2002). Pennsylvania and other states, in effect, handed over policing powers to private company forces (Johnston 1992:20). The Ford Motor Company was also notorious for its company police squad (see Johnston 1992:19; Norwood 2002: Chapter 5). The major distinction between these two forms was in the character of the armed agent's contract: In the first instance, a company would contract with another company (hire a detective agency like the Pinkertons) to do a particular job (e.g., break a strike, undermine a unionization drive); in the second form company forces would be maintained as full-time "security" employees of particular mining, railroad, or automobile companies.

These forms of private police specialized in providing armed guards, stockpiling weapons, breaking strikes, union-busting, propaganda services, and different aspects of industrial (class) espionage, including spies and agents provocateurs used against labor (Johnson 1976; Fusfeld 1984; Smith 1993; Harrison 1996). Federal troops and militia (both common and independent) played a heavy role in the repression of strikes and unemployed mobilizations between 1877 and the turn of the century (Hacker 1969; Cooper 1977; Adams 1995), but such private police forces were widespread until the Second World War (Johnson 1976). For

example, in 1929 when union membership was 3.4 million, there were also about 200,000 labor spies at work (Johnson 1976: 100). While likely overstated, “in 1936 a member of the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] estimated that American industrialists spent over \$80,000,000 a year for espionage services” (Smith 1993: 70). Between January 1934 and July 1936 General Motors alone spent almost one million dollars on undercover agents, employed 14 different anti-labor detective agencies, and had as many as 200 labor spies embedded in its plants (Smith 1993: 70). Detective agencies not only infiltrated organized labor, they acquired leadership positions: “Of the 304 industrial spies employed by the Pinkerton Agency at the time of the LaFollette hearing [in 1937], nearly one-third held important union positions” (Smith 1993: 72).⁵

The United States is said to have experienced the most contentious (Filipelli 1990) and bloody (Taft and Ross 1969) labor history of any industrialized nation. Whether it was actually at the very top of the heap is unclear; what we do know is that it was extremely violent. “Labor wars,” a term used by Sydney Lens (1973) to describe the violence that the early labor movement encountered, was no exaggeration. Between 1877 and the end of World War II, there were more than 240 strikes in which at least one person was killed and a total death count from strikes of at least 1,086 people (Lipold 2003). Most of the fatalities were from the working-class (Wallace 1970-71; Johnson 1976: 96; Lipold 2003). Corporate warriors, public and private, were responsible for much of this violent history and, as consequence, suppressed the development of free labor unions in the world’s leading democracy. They also served as a prototype for private

⁵ The LaFollette Committee launched Congressional investigations into unfair labor practices and violations of worker civil liberties between 1936 and 1940. The LaFollette-Thomas bill (aka, the “Oppressive Labor Practices Act”) passed the Senate, prohibiting industrial espionage practices, strikebreaking, the purchase and use of military-like weapons, and deployment of private armed guards by industrialists beyond corporate premises. However, the bill was never enacted (Smith 2003:91-96).

corporate armed security forces that would appear a century later.

BUILDING A MASSIVE WARFARE STATE

By the end of World War II, privatized armed forces in the form of domestic corporate warriors had largely disappeared⁶ and the U.S. was on its way to building a massive warfare state. The massive warfare state, or “permanent war economy” (PWE) as economist Seymour Melman (1974) termed it, is important to our story because, while the Cold War that helped bring this PWE into existence has ended, the PWE has not. Moreover, as we discuss below, legacies of the Cold War era are integral to understanding how the contemporary “private military industry” (Singer 2003) and the new corporate warrior have emerged.

Throughout American history, military buildups during wartime would be followed by troop demobilizations when hostilities ended. This was not the case after World War II. Each major war has altered to some degree the culture, structure, and size of the U.S. state, but the Second World War mobilization fundamentally transformed the state with the forging of the military-industrial complex—the large, defense-oriented bureaucratic sector (Hooks 1991: 225).

Demobilization was partially set in motion after the war, but the structural changes in the state as a result of the global conflict, elite political fears about the new postwar world, and unfolding events in the immediate postwar years, all combined to push demobilization off the agenda. Between the latter part of World War II and 1950, the United States launched a massive restructuring of international and domestic institutions and policy. For policymakers seeking to construct an institutional environment conducive to mass production-based capital accumulation

⁶ This is important because it creates a break with the more distant history of, hence America’s amnesia about, the domestic form of corporate warriors used in America’s internal class warfare.

on a global scale, three major destabilizing concerns loomed large: economic depression (the fear that massive economic stagnation on the scale of the 1930s would return when war production and conscription ended); ascendancy of a militant organized labor movement at home and abroad (especially in western Europe); and the threat of external enemies, especially the Soviet Union and “global communism.” In general these fears were legacies of the Great Depression and World War II, but they were quickly underscored by events unfolding in the years following the war: in 1946 a major wave of labor militancy erupted in the mass production industries (Davis 1986); three years later the first postwar recession occurred along with “the fall of China” (Wolfe 1979). *Containment* and *stabilization* became the key policy watchwords designed to: (1) facilitate economic growth while averting crisis-level downturns and stabilizing the macro-economy by smoothing out or containing wild swings in the business cycle; (2) contain the labor movement by regulating and channeling labor into ‘acceptable’ (conservative) forms of unionization that would minimize shop floor militancy and foster productivity growth; and (3) stabilize the international capitalist political economy (especially monetary and trade relations) while containing threats to the system from “global communism” (Isaac and Leicht 1997: 33).

Key institutional restructuring and policy change came in the form of: increased advocacy for Keynesian macro-economic stabilization policy; the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947; and international institutions—the Bretton Woods Accords (1944), United Nations (1945), National Security Act and National Security Council (1947), economic containment in the Truman Doctrine (1947) and Marshall Plan (1948-51) (see Block 1977). These laws and institutions would be either supplanted or augmented by military containment that would feed a massive permanent war economy--an economy that was either at war or continuously mobilized for war

(Melman 1970, 1974; Boggs 2005).

Cold War containment policy has typically meant policy designed to contain Soviet influence and communism from spreading. This was, indeed, an important part of containment policy, but we believe it was more multifaceted. In the name of national defense against the communist threat in general and the Soviets in particular, defense spending as containment militarism eventually became the key to: (1) economic growth (Wolfe 1981); (2) implicit national industrial policy through the Pentagon (Hooks 1991); (3) maintenance of an ‘open’ global political-economic system favorable to U.S. trade and investment (Block 1977, 1980); (4) economic stabilization against large corporate profit squeeze in the form of Pentagon–arms industry “military procurement Keynesianism” (Isaac and Leicht 1997); and (5) was integrated into household, domestic culture in the post-war feminine mystique (Rosen 2000). The broad strategic outlines for this massive military political-economy were first crudely expressed in the top secret planning document known as National Security Council (NSC)-68 written in 1950 for President Truman. With the actions in Korea, the hypothetical plans in NSC-68 would be put quickly into action (Wolfe 1979; Block 1980; Isaac and Leicht 1997). By 1951 the U.S. was on its way to becoming a permanent war economy with its mass military preparedness, and a “bastardized (military) Keynesianism” deployed to varying degrees by different administrations (Turgeon 1996). Military logic and culture became firmly integrated into the fabric of American economy, politics, and culture, even to the extent of shaping gender roles, motherhood, family, and the cult of domesticity during the postwar years (Rosen 2000).

Cold War containment doctrine was an important part of the rationale that took the U.S. deeper and deeper into war in Vietnam. But there were other pieces to the rationale. One was

the development of the Kennedy-McNamara war-fighting strategy variously known as “flexible response/deterrent” (see McNamara in U.S. Department of Defense 1963,1965) or the “multiple options” approach (Kaufman 1964). This strategy followed closely the recommendations of the 1957 Gaither Report that sounded a fabricated warning that there was a “missile gap” between the U.S. and the USSR. Flexible response called for expanding the nuclear arsenal, stockpiling conventional weapons, and maintaining conventional forces. With Vietnam shaping up as the next major test for containment policy, a new emphasis was being placed by the administration on highly mobile conventional and special forces for counterinsurgency and “low intensity” engagements (Sanders 1983: 130). Flexibility meant that there needed to be an enlargement of military options (Melman 1970: 140) beyond that of the conventional war-fighting strategies of the world wars, leading to a greater range of variation in military strategies, capabilities, and intensity levels that could be prescribed for a particular conflict situation (Isaac and Leicht 1997: 37). President Kennedy, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and General Maxwell Taylor were all anxious to try out in Vietnam the new quick-hitting, mobile strategy, while also demonstrating U.S. resolve to stop communism (Karnow 1983). As we will argue below, the need for flexibility has grown dramatically with the post-Cold War global war on terrorism. This new flexibility imperative is, however, operating in the political shadows of Vietnam which is exacerbating its importance.

THE NEW CORPORATE WARRIOR IN THE PRIVATE MILITARY INDUSTRY

Private Military Firms and Global Security

The private military industry, comprised of more than 70 companies by 2002 (see Singer 2003:Appendix I) is estimated to be over a \$100 billion per year business (Keefe 2004). Private

military firms (PMFs) have been deployed by a variety of clients, including the U.S. military on an increasing scale. Ken Silverstein's (2000) *Private Warriors* was the first major study to describe some aspects of the private military industry, "Mercenary, Inc." (Chapter 4) in his terms. But in *Corporate Warriors*, P.W. Singer tells a more comprehensive story of the private military industry--what happens when the military, "the force that protects society" (Singer 2003:7) becomes deeply commodified. At the heart of the matter is the question of private corporations, many of which are made up of former government officials and ex-military personnel (and who owe their very success to this experience in public service), offering private military service for governments, and often at the public's expense.

PMFs are involved in "combat operations, strategic planning, military training, intelligence, military logistics, and information warfare" (Singer 2003:73). In the extreme, entire national militaries (e.g. that of Saudi Arabia) are managed and controlled by private companies. Although the industry was well established by the end of the 1990s, the 9/11 attacks and subsequent "war on terror" insure plenty of work (and profits) for these firms over the coming decades. Singer gives us an idea of the breadth and significance of the industry when he writes that, in the war in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, private employees were "deployed with U.S. forces on the ground, maintained combat equipment, provided logistical support, and routinely flew on joint surveillance and targeting aircraft." He also notes that "Hamid Karzai is protected by a DynCorp security force, made up of roughly forty ex-U.S. special forces troops," and that the military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, which is housing enemy combatants picked up during the war in Afghanistan was "built not by U.S. soldiers, but by Brown & Root for \$45 million" (Singer 2003:17), and is serviced, in part, by Wachkenhut Corrections

Corporation (White 2004). Private military firms are, in effect, an arm of U.S. foreign policy, “foreign policy by proxy,” as one defense expert put it (quoted in Silverstein 2000: 145). The fact that private warrior firms can be used by the U.S. to pursue geopolitical interests without deploying U.S. military forces is especially convenient when it comes to training fighters in regimes with poor human rights records (Silverstein 2000: 145).

Not just a product of Republican administrations, the industry grew during the Clinton Presidency.⁷ Private military firms offer another way to get things done without the publicity, accountability and political consequences that often accompany official military actions. The industry is attractive to firms because there is an enormous amount of money to be made, from top executives to contractors in the field. Firms generate profits by using “cost-plus” contracts. These funding formulas guarantee “profits for a firm even if costs escalate...” (Sennott 2004: A1). Workers in the field can make upwards of \$100,000 annually and often get paid generous overtime wages (Silver 2003). They are also eligible to get “danger pay” which can range from 20 to 30 percent (Bredemeier 2003) of their base pay. Cost-cutting and efficiency rationales are the usual explanations for reliance on private contractors (Wayne 2002; Brooks 2005). In 2002, Secretary of the Army, Thomas White claimed that “as much as a third of [the Army budget] was going on private contractors” (Leigh 2004:4).

Singer’s book raises a number of questions about and provides a way to understand the role of contractors in the war in Iraq. The private military presence there is significant. PMF employees “operate communications systems, repair helicopters, fix weapons systems and link

⁷ However, the Clinton administration invoked OMB A-76 (the bureaucratic vehicle for cost-benefit logic to shift to privatization) far less than either Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush (Kelty 2004:3-4).

the computers with the troops to command centers” (Bredemeier 2003: E1). In May 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld produced a list of “60 companies, half a dozen of them British” (Leigh 2004: 4) then doing business in Iraq. In August 2004, it was estimated that there were 20,000 armed contractors in Iraq working with American forces, and another 10,000 working in a non-combatant capacity (Keefe 2004). And the demand is growing for civilian warriors in war zones. Since the invasion of Iraq, the private military industry “has been on steroids,” according to Singer (quoted in Fidler 2005:2). The Iraqi Department of Interior claims about 50,000 contractors in Iraq as of spring 2005 (Levinsky 2005). Blackwater Security recently estimated [early 2005] that “We will probably require at least 3000-4000 professionals above and beyond what we have in the Blackwater employment and resource system” (quoted in Townsend 2005). As of this writing, at least 234 military contractors (from a variety of nationalities) have died in Iraq (Levinsky 2005), approximately 15 percent of U.S. military casualties. More than a dozen contractors have been beheaded.

Civilian personnel have been employed as interrogators and translators during the Iraqi conflict and that PMF employees were involved in the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal. According to the *Toronto Star*: “Of the 37 interrogators at Abu Ghraib prison, 27 did not belong to the U.S. military but to a Virginia private contractor called CACI International. Twenty-two linguists who assisted them were employed by California based Titan International” (Hurst 2004: F3). The “Taguba Report” which investigated abuses at Abu Ghraib, noted that “contractors in civilian clothes roamed freely in the prison, answering to no one, and [were] effectively outside the chain of command” (Keefe 2004: 49).

The U.S. military command finds private military firms advantageous but their use has generated serious problems (Wayne 2002) with the potential for much more damage. PMFs and their employees have been accused of not having the requisite integrity for combat operations, of overcharging clients, of corruption, and of war profiteering. Singer (2003) also criticizes PMFs for not being subject to the normal pressures of market competition, and also for contractors' ambiguous legal status (Singer 2004) that affords them immunity from virtually all forms of prosecution. Moreover, the need to protect corporate "proprietary information" makes the Freedom of Information Act largely useless (Silverstein 2000: 145).

Some military spokespersons claim that there are sufficient review mechanisms in place to ensure that the military contractors are doing their jobs. For example, Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, said the following of civilian interrogators: "They appear to me to doing work to standard...If they do not follow our standards, then we discharge them. If there are acts that are beyond the level of discharge, then we will take appropriate action to hold them accountable" (Washburn and Bigelow 2004: A1). Singer argues the opposite--that there is not nearly as much accountability and regulation of this industry as there should be. As he puts it, the private military field "has virtually no laws, oversight or any public understanding of how to deal with it" (quoted in Collier 2004: A1).

Nation States and the Use of Force

Corporate Warriors presents itself as a more accurate description of the realities of global (in)security than one finds in much contemporary international relations theory. The main difference in the current situation, Singer tells us, is that it is no longer nation states and agents of governments that can legitimately exercise the use of force. Sociologist Max Weber, in his

1918, “Politics as a Vocation,” defined the modern state as an entity which “claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (Weber 1959 [1918]: 78, emphasis in original). Singer’s big theoretical claim is that this is no longer the case. With the rise of private military firms, it is clear that Weber’s claims that “force is a means specific to the state,” and that “the state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence” (Weber 1959 [1918]) are simply no longer accurate. PMFs “deliver to consumers a wide spectrum of military services,” which were previously “generally assumed to be exclusively inside the public context’ (Singer 2003: 8).

However, Singer does seem to overstate the novelty of this claim. In the same passage from which the above quotations were drawn, Weber writes, “at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it” (Weber 1959 [1918]: 78), that is to say that the state’s imprimatur has been acquired. Here it seems that Weber is still partially correct, after all. For example, the U.S. government, as the leading client for these privatized military services, obviously knows (although its accounting seems quite poor [Price 2005]) that these firms exist and it allows them to operate. Singer’s larger point, of course, namely that today “the state’s hold over violence is broken” (Singer 2003: 18) is beyond dispute. In the past and, we would argue, today that privatization of force signals a serious weakness in the state itself.

The U.S. in the Global Military Services Industry

The private military industry spans the globe and can include any country concerned with security. Britain, Israel, South Africa, Russia and the United States are some of the countries that are most involved in the field. The position and power of U.S. firms in particular is significant.

Paul Bremer, former head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, was protected in Iraq by guards from the Blackwater corporation, a leading U.S. firm.⁸ In terms of Singer's (2003: 93) "Tip of the Spear" typology, Blackwater (as well as DynCorp, another substantial and controversial U.S. firm) would be an example of what Singer calls a "military provider firm." These entities "engage in actual fighting, either as line units or specialists" (Singer 2003: 92). According to Blackwater's company website (blackwaterusa.com), the firm can "customize and execute solutions for our clients to help keep them at the level of readiness required to meet today's law enforcement, homeland security, and defense challenges." Blackwater's "clients include federal law enforcement agencies, Department of Defense, Department of State, and Department of Transportation, local and state entities from around the country, multi-national corporations, and friendly nations from all over the globe" (blackwaterusa.com).

The second type of private military firm Singer classifies as a "military consulting firm." Such firms "provide advisory and training services" and "offer strategic, operational, and/ or organizational analysis" (Singer 2003: 95). A U.S. exemplar of this type is MPRI (Military Professional Resources Incorporated), which was founded in 1987. MPRI's "employee pool draws from the highest levels of retired U.S. military personnel" (Singer 2003:119). Headquartered in Alexandria, VA, MPRI is active both domestically (e.g. in helping to "administer the ROTC and Staff College programs" (Singer 2003:121), and globally. At the international level, MPRI offers clients "doctrinal development, restructuring defense ministries, advanced war gaming, training on every types of weapons system, and military instruction down

⁸ Blackwater Security recently made the news for a memo issued by its corporate president to employees stating that "actually it is 'fun' to shoot some people" referring later in the memo to terrorists (Townsend 2005).

to squad-level tactics” (Singer 2003:142). The firm has been credited with “helping to alter the entire course of the war” in the Balkans (Singer 2003:123). More recently, MPRI has been awarded millions of dollars by the U.S. government to help in the fight against narco-terrorists and Marxist guerillas in Colombia.

Singer refers to the third type as the “military support firm.” Activities in this sector “include nonlethal aid and assistance, including logistics, intelligence, technical support, supply and transportation” (Singer 2003: 97). Brown & Root Services (BRS, a subsidiary of Halliburton) is an example of a prominent firm of this type. Founded in 1919 as an “oil well cementing company” the Texas company “transformed the oil well construction and service industry” (Singer 2003: 137) for the next half century. Halliburton gained exposure during the first Persian Gulf War in helping to “bring 320 burning oil wells under control” while BRS “was selected to assess and repair all the damaged public buildings in Kuwait” (Singer 2003: 138). Headed by Dick Cheney in the 1990s, “a major boost to BRS came from the crisis in former Yugoslavia” (Singer 2003: 143) where the company played numerous military logistics roles. It continues to be a major player in military operations in the post 9/11 environment.

One important characteristic of these firms is that many of them operate “virtual companies,” as Singer calls them. They “save by limiting their expenditure on fixed (‘brick and mortar’) assets” and “do not maintain large numbers of permanent employees [or] ‘standing forces.’” Instead, many PMFs rely on electronic “databases of qualified personnel and specialized subcontractors” (Singer 2003: 75). This allows teams of contractors to be deployed very quickly and in a manner specifically crafted to the conflict at hand. Many corporate warriors, then, are contingent workers for the private military industry. Most PMF employees

“have served at least some time in the public military” (Singer 2003: 76). This affords private military firms a number of advantages: they have plenty of ex-military personnel to choose from; their new employees have already been trained and pre-screened; and their former military status can increase a firm’s legitimacy in the military services market.

THEORIZING THE RISE OF THE NEW CORPORATE WARRIOR

Why the rise in private armed force in recent history? What sort of theories are offered by these two leading studies?

The Silverstein Thesis

The purpose of Silverstein’s study is primarily to demonstrate how various forms of private military interests rooted in the Cold War era have furthered their own interests and, as a result, preserved a Cold War military culture long after the Cold War has ended. One of those many forms is the private “mercenary, inc.” industry. While he does not attempt a systematic theorization of this phenomenon, he does make a claim about the central driving force. The chief factor pushing the expansion of corporate mercenary firms, according to Silverstein (2000:144), has been the cutbacks in U.S. armed forces personnel since the end of the Cold War. So the post-Cold War “peace dividend” has found its way into the bottom lines of private military firms.

The Singer Thesis

Much of Singer’s book is also descriptive. But one chapter in *Corporate Warriors* is devoted to explaining the rise of recent security privatization. The argument has three main dimensions and hinges on: (a) security problems accompanying the end of the Cold War; (b) changes in the nature of warfare; and (c) the pressures of privatization.

Security issues in the post-Cold War era. The first dimension of this explanation is the security vacuum that occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War. Cold War bi-polarity created a form of international conflict containment, conflicts confined to separate spheres of influence. With its demise, however, these conflicts have released “unresolved tensions and new pressures” and have led to a “resultant massive increase in instability” (Singer 2003: 51) around the world. The implosion of once stable nation states, renewed cross border conflicts among states, and growing inequalities from globalization (a.k.a., neo-liberal economic policies) all feed the conflicts that have led to the emergence of the privatized military industry.

In addition to new conflicts in a post-Cold War landscape, the contemporary period has given rise to what Singer calls “non-states in violence.” It used to be the case that warfare occurred simply between representatives of nation-states. Battlefield identity is no longer so easily determined, and Singer argues that the “lines between civilian, soldier, guerilla, terrorist, or criminal have become more blurred than ever, and small numbers of individuals can now embody greater threats than entire armies” (Singer 2003: 52). There are myriad examples of non-states engaging in violence, from the actions of al Qaeda and the Washington Snipers, to groups in Colombia and Chechnya. Singer claims that “the PMF industry benefits from the business opportunities that open up as a consequence of the actions of these new conflict groups...and the failure of the world community to regulate them” (Singer 2003:52).

A third element to the changing parameters of conflict in the post-Cold War situation involves the downsizing of military personnel either through government cost-cutting measures [echoing Silverstein] by or through the implosion of national militaries. The upshot has been

large numbers of military personnel pushed onto the labor market looking to practice their trade. Most people who work for these private military firms are “retired military personnel or former special forces” (Van Dongen 2003: 6).

Some claim that governments have no other choice but to rely on PMFs because there are no longer people within the regular military who are capable of doing the work. The armed forces are simply leaner than in other periods and budget cuts especially in the 1990s have deteriorated the skill base for many operations. For example, a spokesman for the Army, Major Gary Tallman, commented: “The Army is much smaller than in the past...When you run out of soldiers and they don’t have an expertise [sic], one way to put capability on the battlefield is to contract it” (Washburn and Bigelow 2004: A1). Others suggest that the new division of labor makes sense in that “American soldiers are expensive and uniformed military don’t want to be cooking food or doing lots of other tasks, so PMCs are more efficient” (Kurlantzick 2003: 17).

Contracts can be very lucrative for firms and their employees. Singer writes that salaries for private soldiers can be “2 to 10 times as much as in the official military and police” (Singer 2003: 74). More senior employees can stand to earn a great deal of money, too. Singer claims that “in developed regions many ex-soldiers are drawn into the industry by the prospect of combining their public retirement pay with a full private salary. Occupational stability and corporate rewards (including stock options in the more established firms) are further draws” (Singer 2003: 74).

Singer argues that a fourth change that has happened to global security in the post-Cold War period that has spurred the development of this industry is that the tools of national security, the “primary means of warfare” (Singer 2003: 55) have, like soldiers, also appeared on the global

marketplace. Outdated and surplus Soviet era weaponry has been bought up by PMFs as states sell munitions to survive or to get rid of inventory. Firms have also benefitted from the technological development in the weapons industry more generally, which has seen weaponry become much more inexpensive, sophisticated, and increasingly available to private customers on the open market. As a fifth plank in his argument about the changing nature of security in the post-Cold War period, Singer suggests a host of fundamental changes in the power of the nation state and its role in international affairs. He describes “the striking weakness of the majority of states in the present world system...Most are so enfeebled as to be incapable of carrying out their most basic functions” (Singer 2003: 55). As a state becomes weak, so does its military, which creates a power vacuum that private military firms can fill. Interestingly enough, the role of state weakness plays a part in explaining the demand for private warriors in Third World regions, for Singer, but not in his account of the U.S. We return to this issue below.

There is also a reluctance on the part of powerful nation states to intervene in world affairs. Although Singer notes that “when terrorists strike directly at the United States, it is easy to ramp up unified public backing for troop deployments” (Singer 2003: 58) he says that a more typical response is for great powers to not get involved. Relatedly, it is becoming clear for a number of reasons that the United Nations also lacks the ability to effectively intervene in theaters of conflict. Singer claims that the UN does not have the financial backing to be successful, that the organization is simply not “designed for fighting wars” (Singer 2003: 59) and that there are also many internal organizational difficulties that limit its efficiency. These developments, when combined with the fact that regional and neighboring powers are also too often anemic and ineffectual, all serve to create market openings for military firms and the

outsourcing of war.

Changes in the character of warfare. The second major dimension that Singer argues is responsible for the growth of the private military industry “is that warfare itself is under going revolutionary changes” (Singer 2003:60). It is simply possible now for “smaller organizations to wage war” (Singer 2003: 61). The types of skills needed to defend states today no longer require huge deployments and massive use of force. The changing nature of military technology, especially in fields such as “microelectronics, software engineering and biotechnology” (Singer 2003: 62) has altered the playing field substantially, and most breakthroughs in these fields have come from the private sector. Singer also contends that many conflicts in the present era have become “criminalized” in that some states are ruled by criminals and are simply incapable of proper government. Private military firm “professionalism stands in sharp contrast to local irregular forces” (Singer 2003: 66).⁹

⁹ This was also a claim made by the private independent elite capitalist militia during the Gilded Age—their professionalism, skill, training would produce “reliable” force not achieved by existing irregular (common militias) manned by suspect working-class and ethnic members (Isaac 2002).

The privatization revolution. The third dimension that Singer points to as crucial in explaining the rise of the new private military firms is the privatization revolution that has been sweeping across developed countries since the late 1970s and early 1980s. The public sphere is becoming obliterated as government contracts outsource more and more of state functions to private firms.¹⁰ Singer writes that “governments have found it expedient to transfer some of their public responsibilities to the private sector...[b]ecause of issues of cost, quality, efficiency, or changing conceptions of governmental duties...The ideas of garbage collection, prison administration, and even public schools being run by for-profit firms have all become generally accepted as ways to make public services more competitive” (Singer 2003: 7, 213). Military services are just one more area of public life commodified, contracted out to private firms for profit.

The Weakness of the U.S. State as a Weakness in Singer’s Argument

Singer recognizes state strength (or lack thereof) as an element in the rise of the new private armed force industry. However, his recognition congers up images of “enfeebled,” small Third World states, not that of Empire. This may be, in part, the result of his breadth of coverage rather than in-depth historical analysis of the relevant U.S. history. Singer misses the significance of state strength/weakness and, thereby, weakens his own explanation for the recent significant reliance on private armed force by the United States. The current weakness of the

¹⁰ This ethos of privatization can be seen in the discourse of contemporary conservative politicians. For example, Jeb Bush, Governor of Florida, giving his second inauguration speech, surrounded by throngs of government workers and others stated: “In the past, our response has been to raise more taxes, grow more government, and embrace the thin fiction that if only we can hire one more social worker or complete one more form then we can somehow reverse these corrosive trends and salvage these lives ... [W]e can embed in society a sense of caring that makes government less necessary. There would be no greater tribute to our maturity as a society than if we can make these buildings around us empty of workers; silent monuments to the time when government played a larger role that it deserved or could adequately fill” (Bush 2003).

U.S. state is, at root, a limitation of military-enforced Empire; its abstract roots are in Cold War containment policy, manifested concretely in Vietnam.

Private armed force was a central part of the capitalist countermovement to suppress the labor movement in America between 1877 and the Second World War. This early capital-labor history indicates how capital, when faced with constraints of a weak state, improvised to create its own local (flexible) armed force. This was particularly relevant during a period when the labor movement was being framed as “outlaw” and even terrorist in character. Private purchase of armed force was relied upon when public mobilization through state institutions was insufficient to provide the “security” that private businesses desired. These private armed forces served as a form of local quasi-state: they were typically sanctioned, often informally, by existing state officials (e.g., municipalities or governors) and functioned as an extension of the state apparatus. But the building of these local quasi-state forms had a powerful class character for two important reasons: they targeted and sought to undermine the labor movement; and as these private armed forces came to be selectively sanctioned by state officials, ethnic-based and/or workers’ militias that were unexceptional prior to the early 1880s became increasingly repressed out of existence.

What is the significance of these observations? It was not only in early European state formation (that Singer points to) that irregular, private armed force played a significant role in the character and making of state power, it was central in 19th and early 20th-century U.S. experience, too. Importantly, this early experience trained both private and public (army) armed force on elite concerns with domestic “order.” What this suggests is that if the threat is sufficient and private resources are available, private mobilization of armed force will emerge to “patch”

(Skowronek 1982) or fill the vacuum in public state provision. In the current period, private armed forces are being relied upon, in part, by the U.S. military because of constraints on the state's ability to mobilize military forces at sufficient troop strength levels.

In other words, the U.S. is faced with drawing on private warriors because it lacks a sufficient supply of public "citizen soldiers" ("regulars") to handle self-imposed fighting obligations, especially in Iraq. Singer builds supply and demand of military forces into his explanation, but he fails to link these concerns to conditions of state strength, especially in the form of political-cultural constraints. In short, the U.S. has been and still is constrained, and in some sense weakened, by the misadventure in Vietnam, and the related abolition of the draft. As Roxborough (2003: 348) claims: "Any assessment of the modern American military must start with Vietnam" (Roxborough 2003: 348). Yet Singer never even mentions Vietnam.

An important dimension of the meaning of state strength rests with state capacity to mobilize against external threats to its territorial integrity and to its citizenry. A strong state demonstrates its military capacity through its pre-existing legitimacy and the legitimacy of its campaigns, and mobilizes the military forces it needs either through conscription, volunteers, or a combination of the two. Before the Vietnam War was ever over, conscription ended as a vehicle for mobilizing U.S. armed forces personnel. With the extraction of U.S. troops by 1973 and the collapse of Saigon by 1975, Vietnam became the major constraint on the military branch of the U.S. state apparatus. The legacy of Vietnam was not only a constraint on the military, but also a constraint on politicians seeking to mobilize extensive military forces for less than direct threats. Those that lamented this constraint most keenly gave it a name, "the Vietnam Syndrome," which stated simply is "the American public's disinclination to engage in further military interventions

in internal Third World conflicts” (Klare 1982:1). This is, of course, especially the case if such interventions were of sufficient magnitude to require conscription to fill manpower obligations.

The “Vietnam Syndrome” shaped the politics of the U.S. military. For many military leaders the big lesson of Vietnam was to never again get into a situation where the nation cannot be fully mobilized behind a declared war and all-out, high-intensity fighting. Once national support was realized, it would also be absolutely necessary to have clear goals and clear exit strategy. “No more Vietnams” meant no more low-intensity quagmires with unclear goals (Roxborough 2003). It also meant the avoidance of a draft and reliance on an all-volunteer military to minimize over-politicization of military ventures.¹¹

Even before the Iraq quagmire, the U.S. was having difficulty sustaining the all-volunteer force. In fact, a group of military experts met for a symposium in the summer prior to 9/11 to discuss changing citizenship, military service, and problems with the all-volunteer force (Abrams and Bacevich 2001; Burk 2001; Moskos 2001; Cohen 2001; Morgan 2001). One of the major points of consensus from this group was that the sixties cultural revolution and the Vietnam War changed the relationship between citizen and state—“the federal government has effectively forfeited its ability to compel citizens to serve in the military. Conscription has become and will remain implausible” (Abrams and Bacevich 2001:19-20).

¹¹ While President Bush proclaimed that we had kicked the Vietnam Syndrome with the Persian Gulf War, he knew he could not restore the draft even if he wanted to do so (Burk 2001:48).

Prior to 9/11 and the expanded “war on terror” that moved into Iraq, some observers were already calling the Army’s manpower levels and recruitment difficulties “desperate” (Morgan 2001). Military sociologist Charles Moskos (1999) stated that “no problem is more serious in an armed forces than recruitment shortfalls.” Now deep into the Iraq campaign, the manpower problem has been seriously exacerbated. Signs of the times in the first quarter of 2005 include: (a) Army and Reserves have missed monthly recruitment targets for several months in a row;¹² (b) recruiters are under extraordinary pressure to produce new bodies, with all sorts of physical, psychological fallout, including illegal exit; since October 2002, 37 members of the Army Recruiting Command have gone AWOL (Cave 2005a); (c) standards for recruitment have been lowered and while the cost of each successful recruit increases; (d) combat rotations are longer; (e) the Reserve is over-deployed; and (f) some military analysts like Michelle Flournoy of the Center for Strategic and International Studies concluded recently that U.S. policy is currently in the process of “breaking the army” (also see Krugman 2005).

Many authorities have worried about the disconnect, the civilian-military gap (Morgan 2001). This military-civilian cultural gap is manifested in a variety of different ways, but most significantly in growing difficulties with recruitment and retention even before the problems created by the Iraq War. For instance, during the mid-1990s, the number of junior officers who left the military after one term of duty increased 50 percent; and surveys of young people indicate that the number of those saying that they “definitely will not serve in the military” is going up, from 40 percent in 1980 to 63 percent in 1999 (Moskos 2001:39-40). This is not just a youthful

¹² Even the Marine Corp missed their recruitment targets in January 2005 (then again in April) for the first time in a decade (Cave 2005a, 2005b).

opposition to military service either. It has been growing among parents, too.¹³

This “disconnect” is the manifestation of the limits of Empire coming home to roost. Empire involves much more than just global military strategy and foreign policy. It carries with it accumulated culture—images, symbols, stories, heroes, villains, fools—all legacies of earlier military adventures and with an all-volunteer force we are finding a political, cultural, and psychological divide, a lack of identification of young people with the military. Kaplan (2003: 56) puts it this way:

“An empire is defined not only by its foreign policy, but also by the style and psychology of its military. The military expert Eliot Cohen notes that a mass conscription army of citizen soldiers are people who fight in a war in which you can make a distinct separation between good and evil, as in World War I and World War II, in which soldiers fought, for example, to make the world safe for democracy or to eliminate fascism and Japanese militarism. He defined an imperial soldiery, who likes the soldiering life for its own sake... This is their job, and they enjoy it. They are always looking forward to the next mission, and they find themselves increasingly separated psychologically from civilian American society.”

It is not only that “the cause” is different now (Empire requires a different kind of military outlook), but fighting for a cause in which elites do not spill the blood of their young becomes less and less acceptable for everyone else. As Charles Moskos (2001:46) put it: “The advent of the all-volunteer force in 1973 [generated by Vietnam] ensured that the children of our national elites would not be found in the military, especially in the enlisted ranks.” “In the case of the true citizen-soldier, military service is either an obligation imposed by the state or the

¹³ As part of the “No Child Left Behind” Act (passed in 2001), military recruiters must get equal time with college recruiters if schools want to receive federal aid. But recruiters are facing increasing parental resistance on this front. The latest Department of Defense survey (November 2004) indicates that only 25 percent of parents would recommend military service to their children, a steep drop from the 42 percent level in August 2003 (Cave 2005c).

result of mobilization for some pressing cause” (Cohen 2001:23-24). Currently in Iraq, we have neither. Therefore, we have a lower tolerance for combat casualties due to the cause and expectations about who should fight for it. Class inequality in combat casualties is always bad for a democracy, so much more so when it is in the service of Empire.

The post-September 11th “global war on terrorism” has, because of the way it has been constructed politically, brought the U.S. military back to those very conditions that in the post-Vietnam era it had sought to avoid: vague ill-defined goals, lack of exit-strategies, and the need for low-intensity counter-insurgency war-fighting. With direct attacks on the U.S., like the 9/11 assaults, the U.S. has no difficulty ramping up support at home or abroad. But incursions like the current war in Iraq (unlike the previous Gulf War) with its chief characteristics—long duration, low-intensity, unclear goals, and lack of exit strategy, nation reconstruction, and growing body counts—are a different story.

Our central point is this: A major pressure on the U.S. military to move to private armed forces in the current period is due to state weakness, its inability to mobilize sufficient fighting forces for the Iraq campaign, and ostensibly other engagements, through the regular public military. The global war on terror as launched by the U.S. government and the Bush administration in particular has an important path dependent quality—what we as a nation can and cannot do today is, at least in part, shaped by what we as a nation did yesterday--that has been ignored in the major accounts of the rise of the corporate warrior industry. The war on terror, with its immense and amorphous global implications, in the shadow of the Vietnam Syndrome has put serious limits on what the U.S. military has been able to do in terms of manpower obligations. Numerous experts, including high-ranking military officers, have pointed to the

insufficient troop strength in Iraq.¹⁴ This insufficiency is manifested in heavy reliance on National Guard and reserve units, their extended stays, and the feeble “coalition of the willing” international forces. A significant part of the demand pressure for private warriors is due to echoes of Vietnam, as the denouement of Cold War containment militarism’s long legacy continues to shape the current supply of volunteers for the “war on terror” through regular military service. This is the central *condition* which operates as constraint because the state is unwilling and/or unable to build sufficient troop strength through a combination of conscription and volunteers for wars like the one in Iraq.

These circumstances have generated considerable debate among military experts, some of which has appeared in the mass media, about what might be done to bolster U.S. troop levels. But most of these debated approaches--e.g., slick advertising, removal of recruitment competition among military branches, linking military service to basic citizenship rights [Cave 2005b]--are not likely to be sufficient under current conditions. Instead, the U.S. will be faced with more of the same: (a) an inadequate level of volunteers through the regular military, to be supplemented by (b) private warriors from military contractor firms, and (c) the “sepoy strategy.” Sepoy is a traditional imperial approach to training “native” soldiers to do the brunt of the military work (Johnson 2004: 134-35), used by earlier empires (e.g., British), by the U.S. in Vietnam, and is currently underway in Iraq. The private warrior approach has certainly been stimulated by relatively recent events (e.g., Vietnam Syndrome, privatization revolution), but its organizational

¹⁴ Early in the Iraq campaign, military experts and commanders were calling for greater troop levels. But after Army Commander John Riggs paid with a forced retirement at a reduced rank for a public disagreement with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld over this point, military commanders have been less vocal in public forum. But their concern is still there. For instance, a Marine major in Anbar Province, speaking anonymously, said: “Basically, we’ve got all the toys, but not enough boys” (quoted in Krugman 2005).

template was cast over a century ago in the form of the corporate security services (read: union-busting) industry.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Numerous analysts have concluded that the U.S. is currently engaged in a clear effort of Empire-building, a high-risk neo-imperialism designed to shape a new global hegemony in the aftermath of the Cold War and to stave-off accumulating problems at home (e.g., Biel 2000; Harvey 2003; Wallerstein 2003; Johnson 2004; Boggs 2005). Harvey (2003:75) claims that the U.S., no longer dominant in the realms of production or finance, must expand its Empire to maintain hegemony. As he puts it: “The Bush administration’s shift towards unilateralism, towards coercion rather than consent, towards a much more overtly imperial vision, and towards reliance upon its unchallengeable military power, indicates a high-risk approach to sustaining U.S. domination.” The concept of “preventive war,” now claimed as a special “right” held in Washington, destroys the notion of international law (Amin 2003).¹⁵

The new corporate warriors are an integral part of America’s new imperialism which is being extended under the guise of fighting the war on terror. In *The New Imperialism* (2003:3), Harvey quotes Michael Ignatieff writing in *The New York Times*: “America’s entire war on terror is an exercise in imperialism. This may come as a shock to Americans, who don’t like to think of their country as an empire. But what else can you call America’s legions of soldiers, spooks and special forces straddling the globe?” Certainly private military firms, given that they are, in part, supplying the very “soldiers, spooks and special forces” to which Ignatieff alludes, must be

¹⁵ “Preventive war” or “pre-emptive military action” is a foundation for the current transformation in U.S. global military basing strategy (see Klare 2005).

understood as agents of the new imperialism currently underway. Military force is increasingly important for U.S. Empire (Boggs 2005) because “military muscle” is “the only clear absolute power [the U.S.] has left” (Harvey 2003:77). But, as we have argued, even this military muscle is encountering its own problems that stem largely from the limits of Empire, the cultural aversion to on-going wars of Empire that involve no real direct threat to nation. Private military forces are part of the stop-gap solution to these limits of Empire associated with maintaining a sufficiently large standing army from volunteer sources. The corporate warriors of the private military industry are, therefore, integral to neo-conservative dreams of withering away the state through privatization while it extends its platform for corporate Empire abroad.

Private corporate warriors have existed in earlier American history. One of the key conditions motivating their emergence then was a state that was not sufficiently omnipresent and strong in the face of domestic industrial disorder. During the Gilded Age the U.S. state was weak in this structural sense. The contemporary private corporate warriors, too, are, in part, a product of a weakened U.S. state. In the current case, the weakness stems from the need to mobilize enormous military personnel for a continuous global war on terror under the political constraints of the weighty ghost of the Cold War, Vietnam. Today it is a weakness of political-cultural will that forms part of the limits of military-enforced Empire.

Historical comparison of different forms of private armed force in America suggests several important implications about the understudied role of irregular forces in understanding the state-as-process.¹⁶ Our analysis suggests at least two key theoretical implications. First, the

¹⁶ Davis and Pereira (2003) is a major exception on the politics of irregular armed forces, but their excellent volume does not deal with contemporary corporate warriors as a form of irregular armed force.

notion of state held force monopoly, per the Weberian ideal-typical nation-state, is more fluid and flexible than most scholars have typically assumed. The state can reallocate and decentralize its force authority into private forms in ways that reconfigure the very location and meaning of public/private boundaries. But when the state does so, it quite likely signals a form of weakness in its power and authority. Second, theories of the state and of capitalist markets would benefit from greater attention to the role of military force (including irregular armed force) in their explanations for how states and markets develop. Military force, both public and private, was integral to the making and consolidation of the *national* market economy during America's late 19th-century industrial revolution. Today there is a parallel deployment of armed force, both public and private, in the project of U.S.-led globalization and Empire.

There is every reason to expect the use of private corporate warriors to expand. This is the case because there are no other clearly superior (i.e., politically feasible) alternatives under current conditions.¹⁷ And the U.S. military has built the use of private contractors into its new global military base strategy (Klare 2005). Given the likely growth in private warriors, what are the major political implications? Most significantly, far from spreading democracy and reducing terrorism, increasing reliance on private military firms is likely to exact just the opposite.

Democracy will suffer for several important reasons. First, this private military industry adds a whole new layer to the Cold War military-industrial complex. When President Eisenhower warned the American public of the potential threat of the "military-industrial complex" he was warning of the power that was being accumulated and could be turned against

¹⁷ Others agree that private military contractors will continue to grow, but often see force reductions and high technology warfare as the causes (e.g., Kelty 2004), as if these were somehow independent of the politics of strategic selection.

domestic citizenry. The growth of the contemporary private military industry raises important questions about the power of these companies and political-economic interests influencing U.S. policy. That early Cold War military-industrial complex that Eisenhower worried about was primarily focused on the production of inanimate commodities of warfare. In the cozy relationship that developed in this “complex,” large military contractors actually came to shape Pentagon actions and policies (Melman 1974; Hooks 1991; Isaac and Leicht 1997). The growth of the new privatized military industry creates the potential for a new source of profit demand, from war-fighting experts, on public policy, and an expanded conflict of interest between military officers and private industry (Silverstein 2000; Kelty 2004). Currently, most private military activity has been in the tactical realm. However, experts in the industry are predicting an increasing role for private sector input on strategic planning (Fidler 2005). If this comes to pass, the private military industry will gain an even greater influence on U.S. military policy and operations—one in which war is viewed as a good-- independent of Congressional oversight. The increase in access to and control over the means of violence by the private military industry will likely serve to further erode state power (Kelty 2004:19).

Second, the power associated with these private military firms is a concern because of the potential for it to be used against domestic and international forms of dissent, like the labor movement. We have drawn a historical link between the anti-union corporate security industry that formed in the 19th-century and the contemporary private military industry, two forms of irregular armed force. Some of these contemporary military firms are flexible enough in the services they offer (e.g., “asset protection”) to allow for a wide range of security services against defined “insurgents.” This is especially troublesome when some of these companies have

horrific anti-democratic and anti-labor records. Executive Outcomes (EO) from the pro-apartheid regime in South Africa was especially notorious (Singer 2003:ch. 7). But there are U.S. firms that are also viciously anti-labor, too. A prime example is the Vance International Protection Team recently merged with Decision Strategies (DS) and Fairfax Consulting to form DS Vance Iraq, operating under U.S. military contracts in Iraq.¹⁸ Vance International was one of the most aggressive union-busting specialists in the U.S. over the last two decades (Smith 2003; White 2004).¹⁹ Another case in point is the Seattle-based Stevedoring Services of America. SSA is a notorious anti-union company with a record of union-busting among west coast dockworkers in the U.S. and in Bangladesh. It was recently awarded a \$4.8 million military contract to manage the crucial seaport of Umm Qasr (Mattera 2003).

Third, the use of private military firms allows for greater secrecy in military operations, less openness in an arena where citizens are already sadly under-informed. It permits the executive branch to: (a) evade Congressional limits on troop strength; and (b) carry on low-level conflicts around the world without concern over media attention that would be generated when regular soldiers are sent home in body bags (Wayne 2002). Moreover, it is currently not clear how many or what sort of contracts exist between the private military sector and the Pentagon. A report released in April, 2005 by the Governmental Accountability Office stated that “federal record-keeping on the contracts was so poor that there were not enough data to determine how

¹⁸ This merger is owned by SPX Corporation which trades on the New York Stock Exchange (White 2004).

¹⁹ The Vance web site lists “Labor Unrest Protection” as one of their specialties and boasts that: “Consistently providing security and guidance in the face of adversity, Vance has supported more than 1,500 labor unrest situations, providing a range of solutions for small, family-owned businesses to Fortune 1000 companies nationwide.”

many contractors are working in Iraq or how many had been killed there” (Price 2005:A6). The fact that these are private contracts will make the Freedom of Information Act of little use. So rather than making the most serious business in which a democratic state can become involved subject to political scrutiny, it helps occult and depoliticize warfare.

Fourth, there are differential rules for regular and private military forces. Private contractors are not obligated to take military orders or to be bound by military codes of conduct. Their obligation is to the private employment contract, not to their country (Wayne 2002; Fidler 2005). To make matters worse, private warrior contractor firms often hire, both knowingly and unwittingly, highly unsavory ex-military personnel. Sometimes private firms recruit from anti-democratic regimes from around the globe.²⁰ Lack of accountability connected to private warriors with questionable positions on human rights being deployed in sensitive regions where the U.S. is claiming to be planting the seeds of democracy is likely to undermine democratic culture and inflame more terrorist ambitions. Private warriors are in a different legal status than regular military and negative fall-out from these differential rules and legal statuses is not just likely, it has already happened in at least several notorious cases: DynCorp employees running a sex-slave ring of young women in Bosnia; local troops trained by MPRI in Croatia used their new skills to undertake a massive “ethnic-cleansing” operation (Wayne 2002); and the Abu-Ghraib prison, torture scandal in Iraq. No private military employee has been charged in any of these incidents; the worse that has happened is that an employee has been discharged from their employment contract and sent home (Wayne 2002; Fidler 2005). Congress passed the Military

²⁰ For example, the London-based Hart Group hired from South Africa’s apartheid personnel for a big contract in Iraq (see Yeoman 2005).

Extraterritorial Act (MEJA) in 2000 which is designed to impose some accountability on military contractors. But so far it appears to have had little impact (Singer 2003; Yeoman 2005).

Present conditions, sustained over time, could also have serious negative effects on the regular military. First, the growing introduction of private providers into the formal hierarchical military system, especially in the theater of war, will likely pose significant logistical, technical, and organizational (including cohesion, discipline, morale) problems (Kelty 2004:9-18). Second, the continual military personnel squeeze generates conditions under which large numbers of soldiers face the harrowing experience of repeated combat tours in an unending war for Empire. This could force young officers to reconsider their military careers. A mass exodus of mid-career military professionals, like that of the Vietnam era, could produce another layer of deep and long-lasting damage to the military (Krugman 2005).

The contemporary large-scale corporations that provide fighters are similar to early mercenaries because they are guns for hire. But they are also different in important ways because of the institutional relations in which they are embedded. Just how different modern corporate commodification of the warrior is and what it will mean for American politics, war and peace, is a significant question that deserves further attention.

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