

**PUSHING THE LIMITS OF THE US WARRIOR  
ETHOS:**

**UNDERSTANDING THE EXTENSIVE USE OF  
PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES IN IRAQ**

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*Dédié à mes parents.*

## **SUMMARY**

**Keywords: US Warrior Ethos, Private Military Companies, Iraq, Mercenaries, Moral Identity, and Ethic.**

This thesis addresses the growing privatization of the US forces through the Revolution in Military Affairs and the War in Iraq and its implications for the purpose of mobilization and individual military commitment conceptualized by the US warrior ethos. Creating a dialogue between the literature on Private Military Companies and the US warrior ethos, this thesis aims at providing a comprehensive understanding of the values sustaining the warrior ethos and how they are jeopardized by the emergence of new actors in the battlespace. I argue that this commercial turn in the US military erodes the warrior ethos by placing business consideration ahead of great personal risk and ultimately raises doubts about civic responsibilities and democratic control of US military affairs.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AVF -	All-Volunteer Force
DoD -	Department of Defense
GAO -	Government Accountability Office
MPF -	Military Provider Firm
MCF -	Military Consulting Firm
MSF -	Military Support Firm
IHL -	International Humanitarian Law
IR -	International Relations
PMC -	Private Military Companies
PSC -	Private Security Companies
RMA -	Revolution in Military Affairs
US -	United States of America

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## **PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence, between wars of liberation and wars of oppression, tend to blur. All violence fades to gray. War itself, regardless of the distinctions one tries to make, is oppressing us. This is Simplicissimus's cynical perspective.

– Hardt & Negri, *Multitude* (2004: 32).

La guerre est le père de toutes choses, et de toutes choses il est le roi ; c'est lui qui fait que certains sont des dieux et d'autres des hommes, que certains sont des esclaves quand d'autres sont libres.

– Héraclite, *Fragments* (2004: 126).

Many academics in International Relations (IR) believe that war and soldiering have played a central role in our societies and continue to do so. For a country like the United States (US), shaped and defined by wars throughout its history, such a statement is poignant and accurate. While war has become a lasting component of US foreign policy, the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened up with a world stage replete with wars that were anything but morally close to what is known as the “greatest” war of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: the Second World War (Gerstle in Kazin 2006: 130). Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, initial hopes for a better world have not materialized and war is enduring; the long lasting “war on terror” that begun in 2001, that threatened for a while to become generational (Bailey), reminding us that the United States is now more than ever a nation in a permanent state of war (Grondin 2010). According to Hughes,

A new ‘Committee on the Present Danger’ was formed by figures like James Woolsey to argue that the terrorist threat was not a ‘law enforcement issue’, but rather an ‘existential war’. The U.S. leadership tried to frame all foreign policy questions in terms of the war on terror, in the same way that a previous generation of leaders had tried to squeeze all international conflicts into the frame of anti-communism (Hughes 2007: 226).

There is no doubt this “existential war” brings the nation on a permanent stance of war. Yet still, despite being perpetually at war, the moral cost of waging war, especially since the advent of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF), has significantly decreased in terms of civic responsibility. For most Americans, life goes on without much disruption, requiring no involvement or personal sacrifice

for the US military apparatus to move forward. Just like Rudy Reyes states in a post-production interview for the mini-series *Generation Kill*, “It is the most publicized war in our history, but still, America’s doesn’t care about it” (Rudy Reyes, *Generation Kill*). For Engelhardt, the “United States does not look like a militarized country, it’s hard for Americans to grasp that Washington is a war capital, that the United States is a war state, that it garrisons much of the planet, and that the norm for us is to be at war somewhere (usually, in fact, many places) at any moment” (Engelhardt 2010: 2-3). Hence, the diminishing civic value of military duty makes it so the most significant impact of continual warfighting for the American people is felt through the “body count” and the Defense budget. Such state of affairs leaves the burden of warfighting to an increasingly small proportion of the US population and the society barely sees the war’s impact. The situation in countries where the US was and is engaged is quite different.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, war left no space untouched. Millions of Iraqis lived in conditions where death is hovering and hope vanishing, thus having become the first real casualty of the lasting occupation of Iraq. According to medical anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom, it is *hope* that becomes the first casualty of any war: “It’s hard to make any plans when you don’t know what the future will bring. The death of hope is an equally traumatic war casualty” (Nordstrom 2004: 67). Such a situation would mean the American hope for a democratic Iraq forced through an invasion based on “Full Spectrum Dominance” might have just turned out to be “dead on arrival”. Living in a climate of fear at home and creating fear abroad, the American way of war might not be as clean, morally right and ethical than that touted by the proponents of the “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA), who fail to provide the “moral clarity desperately sought by Americans and that can’t be easily quenched in Iraq” (Cotkin 2010: 1).

After the vivid failure of Vietnam, the Department of Defense (DoD) undertook the overhaul of the military establishment to be better prepared for future conflicts. In so doing, DoD was forced to abandon a hallmark of the American republic: the tradition of drafting its soldiers. Since 1973, the US has

slowly moved, and not without issues, towards an All-Volunteer Force (Bailey 2009). Three decades later, when the US found itself waging a “war on terror”<sup>1</sup>, new challenges arose regarding recruiting volunteers for an army engaged in a lasting war. Issues regarding morality in war are not as simple as they look and events challenged, on a weekly basis, beliefs and shattered illusions and identities regarding warfare. A new moral era emerges, as Hardt and Negri remind us, where all violence fades to gray (Hardt and Negri 2004: 32). A world engulfed in a blurring of classical definitions, challenging common dichotomies is unfamiliar to shades of gray, a situation that provides very few certainties.

More than a decade after the attacks of 9/11, the United States is still fighting the “war on terror” in Afghanistan, which reflects the effectiveness of the new American ways of war. Regardless, in so doing, it has “established over the past half-century a record of perpetual fighting, engaging for the most part in one winnable war after another, [which may indicate] it is time to face the possibility that the American war machine may be doing something wrong” (Challans 2007: xii). Doubts over the US military are more difficult to dismiss when such a transformation led to a privatization of warfighting capabilities without much public debate (Hughes 2007: 6). Simultaneously, through all the changes in how the Pentagon manages war, the US Army was tasked with fighting effectively in Iraq. The language of service and sacrifice, duty and honour, had largely been absent from US Army advertising since the beginning of America’s AVF. For the decades preceding the war in Iraq, the primarily peacetime army had recruited soldiers with promises of individual opportunity: marketable skills, subsidies for college education, promises of adventure and personal transformation. Following the 9/11 attacks and the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, those promises sounded out of sync with the new generation of possible recruits: unappealing, if not completely absurd. Such a new reality forced the US Army into an unexpected institutional crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough discussion on the meanings of the war on terror, see (Grondin 2011: 256-62).

## 1. CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

Following the success of the First Gulf War (1991), “many soldiers and politicians thought that the Gulf war had put to rest the ghosts and demons of the Indochina war” (Cohen 2002: 199). At the time, and in conjunction with the end of the Cold War, the transition to the AVF was deemed a success. The transition led to a continuous downsizing of its standing army and reserve forces. Such a movement was also emulated in most Western countries, not without raising new problems. As Selber and Jobartah noted, such “downsizing of professional armies after the Cold War led to an abundance of unemployed, trained soldiers who were unattached to an established national army” (Selber and Jobartah 2002: 90). The first months of 2003 saw the United States mobilize in the second major conflict fought under the umbrella of the war on terror. The War in Iraq would, for observers, fix the last deficiencies and questions left unanswered by the First Gulf War in 1991. The supremacy of the AVF was assured to be triumphal and overwhelming. There was no doubt the US would win quickly, cheaply, and with a minimum manning.

The victory would sanction the new hybrid way of war that allowed the massive privatization of support and logistics capabilities of US Forces. This situation had researcher Peter W. Singer allude to the dissolution of the Weberian monopoly at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Singer 2008: 18). It nonetheless remains an enduring illusion in the public views and for most mainstream IR theorists. As author and reporter Madelaine Drohan revealed in the documentary *Shadow Company*, “[t]he system that we have come to think as normal has only really been around for two hundred years”. Similarly, Sarah Percy points out that:

moral objections to mercenary use are deeper and have greater influence than Singer recognizes. As we will see, objections to mercenaries have centred around the fact that there is something morally problematic with being a mercenary and killing for money rather than for an appropriate cause. In turn, because mercenaries are perceived as inherently immoral actors, they have been considered more likely to behave in immoral ways (Percy 2007: 9).

This privatization of war led to a more theoretically informed moral turn where “most of these studies focus on wartime situations, often applying the strictures of Just War Theory” (Cotkin 2010: 3). This “moral terrain” heavily influenced by Just War Theory is an appropriate starting point from which to understand the war on terror. The Americans believe they have discovered a new form of warfare by making use of information technology: a war that is rapid, precise and low in casualties; a war so geographically remote it often seems imaginary from the American point of view – Americans do not have to pay extra taxes or risk their lives (Kaldor 2005: 495). While being “deliberately show-off and dramatic” (Kaldor 2005: 496), such a war was a complete vacuum in moral terms. Declaring the “end” of major military operations in Iraq in May 2003 (after Bush eagerly stated “Mission Accomplished”), thinking it would bring home the sense of war and violence “beyond the battlefield” (Grondin 2011) illustrated well how a desire to accelerate time and the chain of events had foregone proper policy planning for the post-conflict situation and made for policy to be carried out pre-emptively and inefficiently (Martin 2007: 17).

The wartime mobilization was hence to remain in place for a while. In 2006, the Quadrennial Defense Review acknowledged contractors as part of the “Total Force” available to the DoD, together with active and reserve military components and civil servants, and considered as policy the incorporation of commercial activities by contractors in operational plans and orders. Certain allies of the United States mirrored this transition. In Canada, for example, the 1994 White Paper on Defense highlighted the need for the Department of National Defense to adopt a business model incorporating practices such as just-in-time delivery systems, off-the-shelf commercial technology, the contracting-out of support functions, and an enhanced partnership with the private sector (Ortiz 2010: 121). Such an entwined presence and influence between the private sector and the US martial affairs has brought many experts to investigate the ramifications and efficiencies achieved so far and concluded the “privatization of various aspects of modern public force [wa]s pervasive” (Brauer 1999: 4). For

Brauer, a lesson emerging from the debate “on the privatization of force cannot and should not be about privatization at all, as this is simply and merely a matter of fact, but about the *control* and *use* of the force” (Brauer 1999: 4). But more than a cost-benefit analysis, the question this thesis put forth here is: if the new American way of war is here to stay, how does it affect the profession of arms?

## **2. THE SOLDIER’S FIGURE, A LIVING PARADOX: REFLECTIONS ON THE WARRIOR ETHOS**

Certainly, war at its most basic entails pain, dismemberment, death, and the politics of force. But people don’t engage in or avoid war because of the sheer *fact* of death, dismemberment, and the politics of force. The mere *fact* of death is largely meaningless in and of itself. It takes on meaning because of its emotional content. *We feel* death as meaningful (Nordstrom 2004: 59).

The justification and consequence for waging war have always been problematic, despite the narratives created around specific wars like World War II (Gerstle in Kazin 2006) that led the public to think otherwise. Suffices to think about the heroic figure of the citizen-soldier, an enduring American myth (which I will come back to later), to witness the uneasiness and mixed emotions created by war and soldiering. For Benkhe, “Western notions of warfare contain a paradox. Conceived these days as a civilisatory enterprise through which the West promulgates standards of civilization in an increasingly globalised world, warfare has at the same time been devoided of any ontological or existential dimension that relates it to a particular cultural context, a way of life, or a moral purpose” (Benkhe 2006: 937). The dissolution of the ontological dimension of warfare, despite official claims, I argue is one precise intended result of the new way of war. In so doing, it becomes highly problematic for the *existential* dimension of the US warrior ethos to make sense, thus jeopardizing a civic ideal that is already paradoxical in and of itself.

In Western culture, the soldier embodies a living paradox. A deeply conflicted figure who stands as one answer amongst many to apply violence for a political aim (Sorensen 2003: xii). Military historian John Keegan argues that warriors (understood as a lawful bearers of arms), are “an accepted practical

necessity”, since they are “praised for [their] ability to defend the weak and protect a political power, [whilst] [...] also [being] responsible for committing the ultimate taboo: killing” (Keegan 1993: 5). The taboo identified by Keegan is the focal point of legal aspects regarding the right to apply violence onto others as well as the moral considerations upon which it stands. While our recent Western civilization emphasises the dominant role of (public or private) national armies in carrying out state violence, Percy reminds us such historical accounts constitute the exception rather than the rule. According to her, “mercenaries are part of the fabric of the history of war. Battles have been fought by soldiers of fortune since classical Greece and Rome, and their use has continued until the present day, albeit with occasional absences and with new types of mercenary appearing on the international stage” (Percy 2007: 1). Such a reality makes the rise of the private military industry even more problematic, since these companies offer their services while their actions in the battlespace are not as transparent and are often overshadowed. Such activities<sup>2</sup> are purposely obscured forming a web of “layers and layers of invisibility surrounding war, and surrounding the extra-legal. How are these complex relationships of truth, untruth, and silencing produced – and perhaps more importantly, why?” (Nordstrom 2004: 25). These questions remained unanswered with the experience of Private Military Companies (PMCs) in the war in Iraq.

Hence, our understanding of the private-public dichotomy in military affairs needs revision. According to Patricia Owens, “Public and private are not what they used to be: the public-private dichotomy [...] which was once solidly fixed, is now under siege” (Owens 2008: 977), but such a distinction, she reminds us, “has never been ‘solidly fixed’. The identity of these spheres shifts and changes as a way of organizing power. In other words, there is no such thing as

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<sup>2</sup> PMCs have been employed in all spheres of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their role include training, security services, logistics, support, intelligence collection and analysis, supply, transportation and even combat (Kinsey 2006: 151; Singer 2008: 243-260). The war in Iraq saw a constant surge of contractors working for the DoD, to the extent where more PMCs and contractors were employed in Iraq than the number of troops deployed, a unique situation in contemporary military history.

public or private violence. There is only violence that is *made* ‘public’ and violence that is *made* ‘private’” (Owens 2008: 979). These distinctions are at the heart of the uneasiness created by the use of PMCs in Iraq. In patrolling the limits of these terms, further clarifications just add to the general confusion to the point where “the term ‘public’ is taken to ‘denote governmental institutions [...] because *the meaning of public is associated with the pursuit of collective ends*’. Action in public is not an end in itself but a means to an end” (Owens: 981; my italics). Furthermore, we need to assess the reason behind such a transformation. What underlies the challenge and push for redefining the boundaries between public/private is the use of force for private gain (Percy 2007: 9). In Iraq, PMCs were responsible for the entire and complete support of military bases. The scope of their responsibilities was unique, up to the point where “[w]hile in the past security companies might have had responsibility for *things*, the new security companies had authority over *people*. Security firms could lock people up in private detention centres at home and shoot at them abroad” (Hughes 2007: 6). The new American way of war creates a dangerous precedent in introducing PMCs in areas beyond more traditional support roles, where they are becoming deeply embedded with US Forces, to include direct involvement in close quarter security and combat.

Despite these facts, the frontal attack on the image of the citizen-soldier continues. Historically, Percy’s reminds us that:

There was already a history of preferring one’s own soldiers because of a distrust of mercenaries and a belief that a native soldier’s superior motivation was not only morally beneficial but would result in greater loyalty and so in more effective fighting (Percy 2007: 92).

Such a higher calling, the defense of the nation, has been at the heart of the republican understanding of citizenship, a notion entwined with the creation of national armies during the French Revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Christopher Coker argues that “to be a citizen is to participate in the passions and emotions of a community that will inevitably make war” (Coker 2007: 15). The citizen’s participation in war has been a hallmark of citizenship for

many philosophers, like Machiavelli and Harrington, who “emphasize fighting for the republic is not merely the duty of the citizen, but a necessity to secure his freedom. The idea that citizens should fight for themselves is so important that the citizen’s ‘liberty is guaranteed as much by his right to be the sole fighter in his own defense as by his ultimate right to cast a vote in his own government’” (Percy 2007: 124; Hart 1998). The entwined relationship between the two was at the heart of the minuteman<sup>3</sup> ideal of the American republic since its independence in 1776, making the US Army one of the lasting national institutions throughout US history. Creating citizens as a social good, however, was a controversial mission for the US Army – this was carried out with the citizen-soldier tradition. During the twentieth century, such social good, including “the racial desegregation of the military and growing opportunities for women, was perceived as social experiment. And [this] social experiment, in turn, was portrayed as a threat to unit cohesion, to military readiness, and to national defense” (Bailey 2009: 201; Sherman 2005). Even as the army offered, both actually and symbolically, an unprecedented level of equal opportunity and inclusion across the boundaries of race and gender during the 1990s, debates about social experiments versus national defense never quite disappeared, especially when most experts thought that an AVF would be more difficult to deploy (Bailey 2009: 254). Ultimately, it is the opposite that happened.

By the end of the last decade of the twentieth century – well before the beginning of the war on terror – the US Army had begun a complete overhaul. Following the first losses of US soldiers in Iraq, losses that were grieved and commemorated by the American public, the interest for the war (and the casualties) rapidly waned. Headlines reached a level of saturation, with the

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<sup>3</sup> In revolutionary America, the Minuteman – young, mobile, citizen guerrilla – took on heroic qualities that eventually assumed mythic proportions. He has fought in every American war. As an individual, he is never an instrument of the state, but the guarantor of his own freedom” (Hart 1998: 77). The notion of minuteman results from “the idea that free men must be prepared to bear arms, to be known as *jus sequellae*, derives from the Greek city-state that “made it a condition of citizenship that all free men of property should purchase arms, train for war and do duty in time of danger”. This was the origin of the militia idea” (Hart 1998: 22). To this day, the figure of the minuteman carries mythic resonance in American popular culture (Hart 1998: 97).

American public losing its interest for a conflict that was becoming increasingly complicated and blurred. In so doing, the relationship toward soldiers became tainted for the American people, soldiers' death appearing normal, routine even, and, perhaps more shockingly, banal. That situation was denounced by *New York Times'* columnist Bob Herbert who wrote: "For the most part, the only people sacrificing for this war are the troops and their families, and very few of them are coming from privileged economic classes". Thus, it becomes increasingly meaningful to investigate the question of "who" actually bears the burden of waging America's wars.

In the war on terror, like any other war or moral dilemma, "we often find that even when we begin with the best of moral intentions, things go awry. Rather than questioning the paradoxes of morality or the reign of contingency (moral luck) in situations, we stubbornly ignore complexity and contradictions" (Cotkin 2010: 1-2). Such complexities and paradoxes need to be unveiled and investigated to comprehend the reality of soldiering for US Forces. Nordstrom argues that "in the act of observing alone they could not document the hopes and fears, the complexities of emotions that animated the soldiers" (Nordstrom 2004: 58). This is why it matters to go beyond simple narratives about war and explore the underlying links between citizenship, politics, and warfighting. Jonathan Shay, a psychiatrist who worked at the Veterans Affairs, reminds us of the intimate bond that exists between soldiers and the American people, a *fiduciary* that he defines as:

The vast and distant military and civilian structure that provides a modern soldier with his orders, arms, ammunition, food, water, information, training, and fire support is ultimately a moral structure, a *fiduciary*, a trustee holding the life and safety of that soldier. The need for an intact moral world increases with every added coil of a soldier's moral dependency on others. The vulnerability of the soldier's moral world has vastly increased in three millennia (Shay 1994: 15).

Such a fiduciary, or covenant as Coker refers to it (Coker 2007: 93), is a unique relationship that has been increasingly under threat because, like Jason Dittmer argues, a covenant requires "understanding political connections to distant

events; politics is also about obligations to distant strangers” (Dalby in Dittmer 2005: 641) Such obligation is twofold, it is expected toward soldiers but also toward the people for which state sanctioned violence is directed (a subject that would require much more attention). A community of fate exists between actors in the chaos of violence and death in a conflict, such is the underlying truth behind the claims of the warrior ethos.

Despite confusion and blurring of the traditional roles of the US Army, Beth Bailey argues through Elliott Abrams and Andrew Bacevich that the “identity of the ‘soldier as warrior’ has become obsolete” in the modern army, but insisted that even in a new era of post-Cold War, high-tech warfare, the need remained for “a traditional combat ethos – the mix of physical and mental toughness, discipline, raw courage, and willingness to sacrifice that was the hallmark of effective militaries in the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Bailey 2009: 233). This thesis addresses, from a different vantage point analysing the ethical and moral claims, the moral terrain of the US warrior ethos and the requirements and prescriptions it imposes for US forces in the context of an ever-increasing privatization of warfare – a trend which seems to negate the US warrior ethos.

### **3. OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT**

The main research question this thesis takes on is: How are US soldiering and the soldiers’ experience through the US warrior ethos greatly affected by the presence of PMCs? Creating a dialogue between the soldier’s ideal and the extensive use of private military companies enables me to unpack this inquiry into a set of queries guiding this research reads as follows: (a) What is the US warrior ethos? How does the warrior ethos embody the ethical and fighting spirit of contemporary US servicemen? ; (b) How does the privatization of warfare jeopardize the core of the profession of arms, incidentally the warrior ethos? ; (c) How do issues and new ways of war brought by the privatization of warfare affect the soldier’s ideal? Is the actual warrior ethos up to the task? ; and (d) How is the US warrior ethos shaped and formed, and is he relevant to modern US soldiering to support the

primacy of the mission and assume the responsibility of killing for the common good of the polity?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I will argue that the present US warrior ethos falls short in forming and constituting an ethical and moral identity for US servicemen/servicewomen. While it can sincerely inspire soldiers to sacrifice their life for a greater good or show restraint in their conduct (especially when under fire), the US warrior ethos should more realistically only be regarded as a very successful recruiting tool, keeping in mind it was never conceived as something amounting to more than that, even if the myth of the citizen-soldier would lead one to believe otherwise. At the same time, the extent of the privatization of the war in Iraq brought a significant number of mercenaries and contractors working for PMCs in direct contact with soldiers. As such, I also contend that raising a “shadow army” working for and with the US forces created a new way of waging war where certain aspects of warfare are obscured, hidden and, most critically, depoliticized. Such a state of affairs raises serious doubts about the reliability of the US warrior ethos to provide the ethical grounding required to guide soldiers’ conduct in the performance of their duty. Unfortunately, it rather proves the shallow nature of the ethos as a recruiting tool, and crucially underlines the moral vacuum existing in support of the profession of arms.

In chapter 1, I set out the theoretical framework of this thesis. I adopt a poststructuralist approach based on a discursive analysis to investigate the modern identity of the soldier through the US warrior ethos. Afterwards, I discuss the moral nature of such an identity and how it is presented to the American public through films and media, using HBO mini-series like *Generation Kill* and *The Pacific*.

In chapter 2, I track the origins of the warrior ethos in the development of the All-Volunteer Force in the United States following the Vietnam War. The first section exposes how, through a comprehensive history of the transformation of

the soldier's figure, from a citizen soldier to a professional soldier, we can understand the requirement for the creation and continual development of a warrior ethos that would establish the soldiers new moral identity. In section two, I propose a comprehensive definition of the warrior ethos based on military textbooks and the work of historians, anthropologists, and IR scholars. In section three, I expand on two distinct qualities that set the "public" soldier apart from other "fighters", the dimensions of sacrifice and restraint. These qualities alone provide a unique vision of what is entailed when discussing the profession of arms and how they are jeopardized by the privatization of warfare, as seen in the War in Iraq.

In chapter 3, I address the difficulties faced by the US warrior ethos in Iraq. Experiencing battle constitutes the ultimate test for a soldier, and thus, it is through soldiers' actions that the warrior ethos is witnessed. US forces face a battlespace shared intensively with contractors and mercenaries. The mix of actors is here to stay. In section one, I expand on the requirements for PMCs and their colossal role in the operations in Iraq. Following the transformation of the military establishment with the RMA, it has now become impossible for US forces to be deployed without the support of an entire "army" of contractors. In section two, I address the difficulties of coexistence between PMCs and soldiers and how the contractual obligations of PMCs differ strongly from the covenant into which soldiers find themselves in. I argue that atrocities, innocent killings, and, ultimately, the US way of war jeopardizes the warrior ethos and shatters the soldier's ideal. In section three, I provide an answer to the gray zone and the "shadowed" aspect of warfare created by privatizing warfighting capabilities.

I conclude by assessing the continued relevance of the warrior ethos if the United States continues to wage war as promulgated by the principles enunciated by the RMA (redefined as the "transformation doctrine" under Donald Rumsfeld). The application of violence by the few for the achievements of political means for the state can only be legitimate if it is sanctioned by executive authority. Although the military institution remains apolitical, its role and constraints are heavily

politicized. A public debate must be made possible to discuss the role and the way the US Army can fulfill its tasks. For the professions of arms, the embodiment of the US warrior ethos acts as the internal check-and-balance of American values, to conform to public expectations of what US soldiering entails. In providing an analysis grounded in IR theories that emphasises the moral identity of the US warrior ethos, a true assessment of the philosophical and moral grounds of the American soldier's ideal can begin on the state of US forces with *and* without PMCs.

## CHAPTER 1

### ANALYSING THE DISCOURSE ON US SOLDIERING THROUGH THE WARRIOR ETHOS: A POSTSTRUCTURALIST ETHOS

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History is full of wars  
Fought for hundreds of reasons  
But this war, our war  
What I want to believe  
I have to believe  
That every step across that airfield  
Every man that is wounded  
Every man I lose  
That it is all worthwhile,  
Because our cause is just.

Capt. Andrew Haldane to Pvt. Eugene Sledge  
Part Six – *The Pacific*

This dialogue from the HBO television produced mini-series *The Pacific* is based on the memories of Eugene Field and Robert Leckie, who served in the Marine Corps during the Pacific War (1941 – 1945). It translates succinctly one of the dimensions analysed throughout this thesis explore the myths, realities and ideals surrounding the modern US warrior ethos. First and foremost, like Nancy Sherman points out, soldiers are responsible for their conduct, not the cause they are serving (Sherman 2010: 42). And yet, it does not prevent servicemen continuously asking themselves profound and valid questions about why they are fighting: Is it worth it? In a world surrounded by uncertainty and indifference, answers come in very short numbers. While the HBO television revisits the beaches and islands where the Americans fought during the Pacific War, its rendering of the stories of a few characters through this trial by fire produces, reproduces, and challenges our understanding of the conflict and depicts considerations that would not have been possible without the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan. Following in the footsteps of a previous series, *Band of*

*Brothers*, Spielberg<sup>4</sup> challenges the usually unquestioned moments of silence and boredom of soldiers deployed and, at the end, their return to civilian life. Doing so helps put back in context modern issues involving US soldiers faced with the perceived dissolution of their monopoly over the use of force in the battlespace.

The first section of this chapter highlights the importance of theories and the study of discourses in International Relations and how poststructuralism asks relevant questions regarding the creation of the US warrior ethos as an ethical and moral identity. In the second section, I address the role played by popular culture and cultural studies in the creation, understanding and dissemination of such a moral public and political identity. Section three offers a comprehensive review of the literature on the PMCs and mercenaries to discuss what is entailed by the privatization of warfare and, more specifically, in the Iraqi context. The definition of the US warrior ethos will be discussed in the next chapter, where the main focus will be discussing both identities through the discourses and films mobilized to sustain them. This chapter concludes on the difficulties of drawing a clear distinction between discourses and films, especially when they find themselves tangled in the heat of the battle.

### **1. INTRODUCING THE APPROACH: POSTSTRUCTURALISM IN IR**

Drawing a clear distinction from a past highly influenced by traditional positivist approaches, the book *International Theory: Positivism & Beyond* begins by affirming, “The real world begins here” (Smith, Booth & Zalewski 1996: 1). A world shall thus exist beyond positivist approaches in IR, a field characterized by defining “great debates” and which saw the postpositivist turn allow for the emergence of different approaches available to scholars and researchers. Beyond the common question of objectives and motivations, a fringe of the field of IR realized that the way of framing questions and problems “depends in a fundamental sense on *how* we think about them. In short, how we think about the ‘real’ world, and hence our practices, is directly related to our theories”

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Spielberg was the Executive Producers (with Tom Hanks) of the miniseries *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010) and are considered by critics to be companion opuses.

(Smith, Booth & Zalewski 1996: 1). Poststructuralism offers, among many other considerations, a research agenda that focuses specifically on identities and discourses. Identities are to be constantly revisited since they are flexible and ever changing. Therefore, such a fertile academic ground provides the tools for investigating the creation, representation and meaningfulness of the US warrior ethos at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Too frequently, discussions and analyses of warfare avoid the daunting ethical questions, from which Singer reminds us, “we often steer away [...] and stay within our own worlds” (Singer 2010: 301). The new American way of war is not different. Most scholars and academics, while studying the expansion of the private military industry with the War in Iraq have failed to engage the muddy grounds of morality and ethics (Cotkin 2010). This absence was also more generally noted in the literature on warfare by Nordstrom; she notes that “[a]mong the paradoxes of this long century of violence is the paucity of reflections within contemporary political theory, including democratic theory, on the causes, effects and ethico-political implications of violence” (Nordstrom 2004: 55). The path chosen to tackle a question is just as important as the destination where it leads (Challans 2007: 186), an implicit and important component of any poststructuralist approach. The US warrior ethos is defined as a moral and ethical identity, guiding and ruling the activities of warfare for the armed forces of the United States. As Cotkin aptly puts it,

[t]he best moral decision-making occurs only after internal struggle and recognition of bewilderment concerning means and ends. We invariably act with what Jean-Paul Sartre referred to as “dirty hands”, choosing less between good and evil than between two degrees of evil, and we must therefore begin to address any moral dilemma with a firm sense of our own limitations on the stage of history. [...] True moral thinking, he averred, depended on openness to complexity, willingness to entertain other possibilities, and an imperative to recognize the plurality of the world. Anything that threatens to plunge us into the abyss of fanaticism or nihilism. With this recognition and awareness that moral moments are often muddied and resistant to simple rules and inclinations, we must try to act morally. In the roiling waters of choice and responsibility, our morality needs to be buoyed by humility, self-examination, and a sense of the tragic (Cotkin 2010: 5-6).

Questioning the “dirty hands” of US soldiering and soldiers’ experience through the examination of the warrior ethos in Iraq, which is greatly affected by the presence of PMCs, is thus the main focus of this thesis. In order to sustain the US warrior ethos in the profession of arms, a discourse has been produced and reproduced through military training and education where discourse is understood as “not a way of learning 'about' something out there in the 'real world'; it is rather a way of producing that something as real, as identifiable, classifiable, knowable, and therefore, meaningful" (Bradley Klein, quoted in George 1994: 30). Poststructuralism uses discourse analysis as one of the main tools to understand and question the world. In this thesis, I mainly use doctrine manuals produced by the US Army like the *The Warrior Ethos and Combat Skills Handbook* and *The US Army Leadership Field Manual* to make sense of the institutional definition given of the US warrior ethos, which I then link up to discursive representations provided in American popular culture like US Army advertisement campaigns like *An Army of One* (2001) and *Army Strong* (2006) on national television and popular television miniseries like *Generation Kill* and *The Pacific*. Henceforth, in this thesis, I focus on the discourse on US soldiering as it is shaped by the Pentagon discourse of the warrior ethos. Finally, in the next section, I explore what the US warrior ethos entails in terms of moral identity.

## **2. THE US WARRIOR ETHOS: A MORAL IDENTITY**



**Figure 1.1 – US Army Commercial Campaign 2011  
(‘More than a Uniform - Symbol of Strength’)**

I argue that the American soldier's figure is a sustainable and enduring ideal of the American nation. It is part of the nation's imaginary since the War of Independence where Minutemen faced the troops and mercenaries of Great Britain in their quest for liberty. Yet, very few scholars like Nancy Sherman and Sarah Percy have analysed the soldier's ideal as part of the American culture and tradition. It challenges old assertions of the citizen-soldier, giving additional weight to "what soldiers have said over and over in the above narratives is that they do not just fight war – they fight specific wars, the wars that it is their luck to be in" (Sherman 2010: 63). As such, I assert that the moral identity of US soldiering is best understood through the US warrior ethos, an ethos that finds itself propelled to the forefront of the media by a new recruitment campaign of the US Army launched in 2006.

No better image depicts the moral grounds of the US warrior ethos than Sorensen's definition of paradoxes:

Typically, the case for one solution to a paradox looks compelling in isolation. The question is kept alive by the tug of war between evenly matched contestants. [...] Common sense may seem like a seamless, timeless whole. But it really resembles the earth's surface; a jigsaw puzzle of giant plates that slowly collide and rub against each other. The stability of terra firma is the result of great forces and counterforces. The equilibrium is imperfect; there is constant underlying tension and, occasionally, sudden slippage. Paradoxes mark fault lines in our common-sense world. (Sorensen 2003: xii)

Being intrinsically paradoxical, the warrior ethos finds itself constantly challenged. As Coker mentioned, "Success or failure in battle owes a lot to its 'cognitive enterprise', its dialogue with the real world. A military discourse is difficult to sustain in the face of persistent failure in the field. Indeed, it may even prove to be severely dysfunctional if it does not reflect reality as it is, not as one would like it to be" (Coker 2008: 31). The warrior ethos is hence better understood through a poststructuralist lens because it "emphasizes the structural instability and undecidability of our identity – the way that it is constructed contingently through our social interactions. The point is that our identity is not

fixed or determined by a deeper underlying essence” (Newman 2005: 61). The process of identity construction is as much about what is in it as that what is excluded from it (Hansen 2006; Newman 2005; Williams 2007) and how such a process is rendered possible and morally acceptable.

The transformation of US Forces through the AVF greatly affected the soldier’s ideal. In introducing the AVF as a solution to the failure of Vietnam by “recovering the figure of the citizen soldier and celebrating his exploits, these liberals drew attention to a critical, though largely ignored, development in the post-Vietnam way of war, the turn away from the citizen soldier and how the Pentagon embraced the venue of the professional warrior” is made possible (Gerstle in Kazin 2006: 130-131). The RMA and the War in Iraq would push even further the notion in trying to appeal to the younger generation to try the selfless service, resurrecting the citizen soldier enduring myth as part of the American history and tradition, while at the same time, outsourcing to unprecedented level core functions of its armed forces in an effort to be a cost-effective and efficient organization. Such reality gives credit to the cautionary tale of Cynthia Weber:

As US citizens protested in the streets against the war in Iraq, they reopened debate, for far more of them now seemed to realize that America’s traditional morality tales do not accord well with their post-9/11 realities. These stories do not describe “the enemy” or what it means to be a moral America(n) or what it means to act morally in the contemporary, post-9/11 world. This is the very reason why we ought to remember these stories about the US *we* and about US moral grammars of war. We should remember them not as “true” stories that who we really are, and who we might become. Rather, we ought to recall them as cautionary tales, tales that remind us of the dangers of collapsing “truth” with the *desire* that these stories were true, especially in an atmosphere of fear. There is rarely security, or justice, or a just balance between them in any stories that confuse truth with desire. This might be the most moral thing worth remembering about our tales of moral America(ns) (Weber 2006: 167).

The moral identity of the warrior ethos is thus made of truths, desires and hopes, and is heavily dependant on the personal stories of soldiers themselves. One of the most contested notions of the warrior ethos is the distinction between public and private. Most scholars argue that the introduction of PMCs on contemporary battlefields changes the classical distinction of public/private

violence. But the uneasiness regarding such a distinction was always there and it is specifically that distinction that makes the use of PMCs in Iraq problematic for the warrior ethos that sees its “raison d’être” shared unusually by other actors who are not under the same scrutiny and accountability towards the American public. This situation will be further analysed in Chapter 3. Historically, the soldier’s figure was cast as a profoundly public figure, an embodiment of civic responsibility and duty. As Rabinow explains it, the soldier’s figure has been going through an intense modelling and definition phase through the 17<sup>th</sup> century to become:

[S]omeone who could be recognized from afar; he bore certain signs: the natural signs of his strength and courage, the marks, too, of his pride; his body was the blazon of his strength and valour; and although it is true that he had to learn the profession of arms little by little – generally in actual fighting – movements like marching and attitudes like the bearing of the head belonged for the most part to a bodily rhetoric of honour [...] (Rabinow 1984: 179)

The embodiment of such “rhetoric” for the soldier was to conform to an ideal that was for the most part an aesthetic one. It was a heuristic device meant to dissipate any doubts on the soldier himself/herself. And despite the apparition of the citizen armies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such a life did not provide “a pattern of behaviour for everybody. It was a personal choice for a small elite. The reason for making this choice was the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence” (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 341). In retrospect, the US warrior ethos is appealing to such a tradition, which changed over time but existed well before the ideal of the citizen-soldier itself, adding a layer of complexity to our contemporary American ideal. And while the soldier’s figure is a public ideal, there is also a very private part to it, a dimension that exists through each soldier’s own experience and sacrifice, a “very private world. Yet it is precisely that existential, private realm which our societies now patrol more vigorously than ever” (Coker 2007: 11). The importance of personal motivations and stories for US soldiering and the warrior ethos is best seen through war cinema.

We can indeed turn to media and films on US wars and soldiering, more specifically to miniseries like *Generation Kill* and *The Pacific*, to analyse the US warrior ethos. Following Michael Shapiro, an authoritative scholar on poststructuralist IR, this analysis works from the a priori assumption “that literary texts have a mediated relationship with the social reality they represent; indeed what is “social reality” emerges in the writing of the text and bears traces of its previous constructions in the history of the literary genre” (Shapiro 2009: 11). Social reality can also emerge through other media, films or miniseries (Slocum 2006: 13). Surprisingly, the “renaissance of the war movies genre at the beginning of the century did not translate into a continuous interest. For more than a decade America has been at war and yet the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have produced very few Hollywood opuses” (Slocum 2006: 7). But while Coker reminds us that “[t]he real warrior ethos is difficult to capture on film” (Coker 2007: 39), war cinema is a good discursive vehicle for disseminating personal stories.

### *Let's Roll!*<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in studying war movies in political science and most particularly in IR – it was called cinematic IR. Opuses like *Saving Private Ryan*, *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* were subject to multiples analyses, interpretations and reinterpretations (Shapiro 2009, Weber 2006). One of the major contributions of such an academic endeavour was to clearly state that such movies could not be watched without raising questions about meaning and identity: Why were Americans fighting? What are they fighting for? What does it entail to be a serviceman? Many scholars in IR seized this opportunity to follow an interdisciplinary research agenda linking IR theory with film and cultural studies. This led to a refined understanding of what can be gained through a closer study of the various media, thus enabling new possibilities and new areas if we keep in mind that ultimately, “[n]o medium

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<sup>5</sup> “Let’s Roll!” has become a popular expression following the 9/11 attacks when a passenger of United Flight 93 used that exclamation before launching the attempt to take over the hijacked plane.

today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 15). It is without much surprise that Hollywood war movies offer answers to the very same questions they raised in the first place. They obviously remained *interpretations* of the wars they aim to represent; they were not neutral accounts even if they aspire to offer some sense of truth-telling, if not authenticity. Yet, they all embodied a specific perspective, a vision, and a judgement on war, and, in that sense, they could help us better understand the US warrior ethos.

As mentioned previously, the notion of identity is paramount to any poststructuralist work. Cynthia Weber summarizes well such a state of being in her account of what can be understood from film studies in IR: aspect and identity are not only based on representation, but also on imagination. In her opening remarks, Weber tackles directly the question by evoking the results of such an enterprise:

It leaves us with complex, fragmented, and therefore uncertain moral Americans and moral Americas posed (if they choose) to take ethical responsibility for who they think were/are; who they wish they'd never been; who they really are; and, most important, who they might become (Weber 2006: 9).

Such uncertainty lies at the heart of Nathaniel Fick's account (2006) of *One Bullet Away*, which is also presented in the HBO critically acclaimed miniseries *Generation Kill* (2008) through the personal experience of the embedded journalist Evan Wright who followed a Marines unit in their first three weeks in Iraq. The availability of different media (books, personal stories, footages, and miniseries) to comprehend the same fighting experience constitutes a perfect example of the “immediacy” and “hypermediacy” described by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin: “Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform

inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as medium. Thus, immediacy leads to hypermediacy” (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 19).

The quest for an aura of experiential authenticity becomes a competition between many media, each pretending to appear more authentic than the other. *Generation Kill* then becomes a unique experience relating to Iraq. According to Susanna White, producer of the miniseries, “The most effective part of the Marines is the fact that a very selected few are expected to take individual decision and take responsibilities for what they do, showing the complexity of what went on” (Making *Generation Kill* documentary). Ed Burns (screenwriter and executive producer) adds: “I never met Marines like this, these guys are incredibly knowledgeable and to see these guys take a journey that impacts them as human beings, and they begin to doubt, to see the imprecision to war, and how it strikes them” (Making *Generation Kill* documentary). And yet still, when it gets to the heart of warfare and soldiering, despite being “increasingly mediated, little was done to reduce the awareness that dead humans are the end product” (Randell and Redmond: 7).

In truth, the uneasiness created by the sheer violence that exists on modern battlefield constitutes one of the most poignant conclusions of *Generation Kill*. Rather than falling for a hygienic and pleasurable aesthetic of war, as offered in popular war movies like Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbor* (2000), which reverts back to a more clearly defined moral past, as the one associated with the onset of the Second World War, I contend that cinematographic artefacts like *Generation Kill* and *The Pacific* foster an environment that strives for a greater moral and ethical complexity in discourses by paying a closer look at the motivations and behaviors of individuals immersed in combat (Slocum 2006: 8). Such complexity would allow a more palatable understanding of the US warrior ethos. To contrast, in post-9/11 Hollywood war cinema, as François Debrix points out, “an aesthetic imagination that relies on the sublime had been mobilised. This sublime aesthetic of war, relayed by contemporary media and popular cultural forms consists of producing spectacular, violent and shocking

images of ‘others’ in distress or harm’s way in places where America’s wars are being fought” (Debrix 2006: 767). In addition to the mainstream news media already “selling” the war to the populace with the “Countdown to Iraq” from Summer 2002 onwards (see especially the film documentary *War Made Easy* (Loretta Alper and Jeremy Earp, 2007), popular artifices like Ridley Scott’s *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and Randall Wallace’s *We Were Soldiers* (2002) populated the nation’s collective mind with the citizen-soldier myth. Instead of allowing a more complex and nuanced rendering and understanding of the current conditions of their revered troops, especially in the context that were to become the War in Iraq for those serving as soldiers, they instrumentally provided the moral grounding reciprocating the news media’s jingoistic sound bytes.

Following the transformation of the US military into an AVF in the post-Vietnam era, military professionals increasingly felt the requirements “to separate themselves from the image of rustic frontier minutemen and parochial state militiamen and to establish their credentials as serious military competitors” (Hart 1998: 118). At the time, very few people understood that such a shift would narrow the social base from which the soldiers were drawn and would render the soldier’s ideals of civic responsibility and duty archaic. The increasing deployment tempo of the 1990s combined with a personnel reduction through the RMA prescriptions for quicker, lighter, and more adaptable and efficient forces would create enormous pressure on the US military to fulfil its mandate during the War on Terror. In other words, the “historical recovery of this figure [of the soldier’s ideal] in the 1990s ironically occurred at a time when the US military had all but abandoned him as an ideal around which to organize and legitimate itself” and where the military strived and succeeded to become the “most successfully integrated institution in America” (Gerstle in Kazin 2006: 137-138). Such a situation led to the rediscovery of the US warrior ethos and selfless service but also to the increasing reliance on the private sector to sustain the military effort. The last section of this chapter operationalizing the analytical framework of this thesis thus looks at the PMCs and how they affect US soldiering and the discourse on the warrior ethos.

### **3. EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE PRIVATE MILITARY INDUSTRY: OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS**

Since the 1990s, the existing literature on the private military industry has grown extensively, mimicking the industry itself. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the resurgence of the phenomenon presents distinctive new traits. Nowadays, the main difference lies in the development of mercenaries into corporations, where there is an entire international business offering openly and legally “military-type” services, which are close to or simply nothing else than mercenary services. While their use does not constitute a novelty in the battlespace, the extent to which the DoD employed them in Iraq was. In this section, I intend to provide a broad definition of the industry by examining the academic understanding of the industry.

#### Defining Mercenary Activity

Like many concepts in academic literature, there is no agreement on a specific definition that would properly encompass what a mercenary is. International humanitarian law (also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict) defined mercenary activities on the battlefield. According to article 47 of the Geneva Convention, six points need to be fulfilled together, with no exception, for a legal person to be charged as a mercenary<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, as Christopher Kinsey points out, “such a narrow definition, where all six criteria must be met consecutively for a prosecution to go ahead had rendered Article 47 unworkable. Indeed, to be convicted as a mercenary using the above definition would require the individual, or group of individuals, to be extremely unlucky” (Kinsey 2009: 19). Beyond the issue of being a non-pragmatic concept in international law, such a definition clashes with what was witnessed on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. Other definitions (non-legal) are provided in the literature and usually focus on a specific dimension of the PMCs. However, the corpus produced in the last decade focuses on two distinct issues related to PMCs and mercenaries, either

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<sup>6</sup> Annex B: The Geneva Convention on Mercenaries provides the full definition of mercenaries according to International Law.

shedding light on the history of the industry *per se* and its ramifications, like in the works of P.W. Singer, Christopher Kinsey, and Sarah Percy, while others prefer to denounce the abuses perpetrated by an unregulated and fast-expanding industry, notably following the War in Iraq. Such works provide a thorough investigative and journalistic work, of which the most notable tenants are Jeremy Scahill, Steve Fainaru, Tom Engbrecht, and Pratap Chatterjee. The existing literature not only offers valid insight into PMCs but also creates a necessary corpus of analysis on the use and abuses of PMCs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unfortunately, none of them directly tackle the impacts of such an industry on modern standing armies and, more specifically, on their core values. By reviewing in further details the scholarly work of Sarah Percy, Christopher Kinsey and P.W. Singer, I argue we can provide a thorough comprehensive theoretical and historical understanding of the phenomenon as it unfolded in Iraq.

In her book, Percy analyses the reasons behind the notable absence of mercenaries in nation-states since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Such omission of mercenaries was only made possible in a system where strong norms between nations were agreed and enforced. According to Percy,

[t]he basic agreement about the definition of a norm must be qualified by the fact that, while most scholars agree about what a norm is, they disagree fundamentally about what norms do, which has profound implications for this study. Not all theorists agree that norms can influence state behaviour, and so not all theorists agree that a normative explanation of state action is possible (Percy 2007: 15).

Despite the fact that norms are not explicitly stated between nations, they did play a crucial role in moderating the recourse to mercenaries by states by enforcing a profound discomfort and dislike towards them. Mercenaries were seen not only as a “challenge to the state’s ability to control force,” but also created “a dislike on ethical grounds that is a deeper, older, and harder to shake objection” (Percy 2007: 6). Such an objection regarding the use of mercenaries have influenced nations for centuries and led almost all European countries to abandon their use of them (Percy 2007: 6, 165). The requirements of a citizen-army bolstered by a patriotic fibre could have been jeopardize by the use of

mercenaries. Kinsey concurs with Percy's argument when he affirms it is "only with the arrival of the nation state, commencing with the French Revolution, [that] the general population question[ed] the right of these actors to exist" (Kinsey 2009: 34). In short, Percy demonstrated that not only perception through norms bears great importance for nation-states, but also that the constraint towards the use of mercenaries was also propelled by the rising importance of citizen-armies to fight wars. In the US, this point of view was disseminated through the mythical figure of the minuteman and his contemporary incarnation, the citizen-soldier (Hart 1998).

What is clear by now is that a definition of the private military industry and what is a mercenary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a rather complicated question that requires a great deal of nuance<sup>7</sup>. Since the advent of the RMA and, as witnessed through the unfolding events of the War in Iraq, a wide range of actors were brought to Iraq to work in various roles and capacities to support the war's effort, a trend that renders the Geneva Convention definition of mercenary obsolete (provided in Annex B), which criminalized the mercenary trade without eradicating it (Singer 2008: 43). At the same time, the post-Cold War and the war on terror increased the demand for mercenaries, giving way to a situation where "not only are military forces becoming more reliant on the private sector to operate, civilian contractors are getting closer to the front line" (Kinsey 2009: 158).

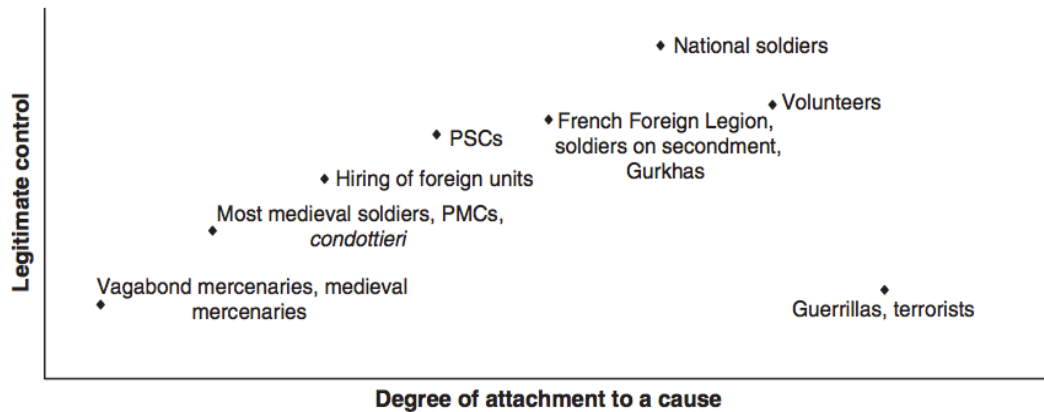
#### Theorizing PMCs

The fast-growing military industries offer an outstanding body of literature, which includes a useful classification based on attachment to the cause and legitimacy, a classification that includes most categories of mercenaries (Percy 2007: 3-5). Unfortunately, most of the literature does not attempt to theorize the private military industry or position itself within any specific International

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<sup>7</sup> The Private Military Industry is understood, in the more narrow context of this thesis, as the entire business (for-profit) sector of the economy that offers services to the US Department of Defense and that are involve in any form or shape in the War in Iraq.

Relations theories: an unsatisfactory situation. But two authors, Christopher Kinsey and P.W. Singer, offer typologies of the private military industry that provide a better grasp of the ramifications and diversity of the phenomenon, thus offering a solid definition of the industry and what is understood to be a contemporary mercenary.



**Figure 1.2 – Spectrum of Private Violence (Percy 2007: 59)**

Their work constitutes solid references on which most of the literature relies upon. Both typologies differ substantially from one another reflecting the overall ambiguity of the field and the lack of in-depth theorizing of the phenomenon. Such a situation is puzzling, especially when we consider the rapid growth of the private military industry since the 1990s. For Kinsey, this situation is exacerbated by the high-mobility of personnel and companies and the creation of *ad hoc* security companies, which make tracking records difficult and drawing clear lines between companies nearly impossible, especially over time (Kinsey 2009: 29). While typologies do not easily lend themselves to drawing distinct categories, they at least offer the advantage of providing a portrayal of the private military industry and most analysts use typologies organized around the services offered by the PMCs (Ortiz 2010: 45). According to Ortiz:

The conventional typological approach classifies private military services according to their degree of lethality and apparent proximity to the battlefield (an approach commonly referred to as “the spear” analogy), and groups them into segments corresponding to aspects of state defense

and security. The six broad segments frequently identified are combat, training, support, security, intelligence, and reconstruction (Ortiz 2010: 45).

### Kinsey's Typology

Kinsey presents a division of the private military industry in a two-axis diagram: the horizontal axis represents the object to be secured (from private to public) and the vertical axis represents the means of securing the object (Kinsey 2009: 10-11). Kinsey categorizes actors (specific companies) by “means of their characteristics,” (Kinsey 2009: 21) reflecting the type of services they can provide to their clients.

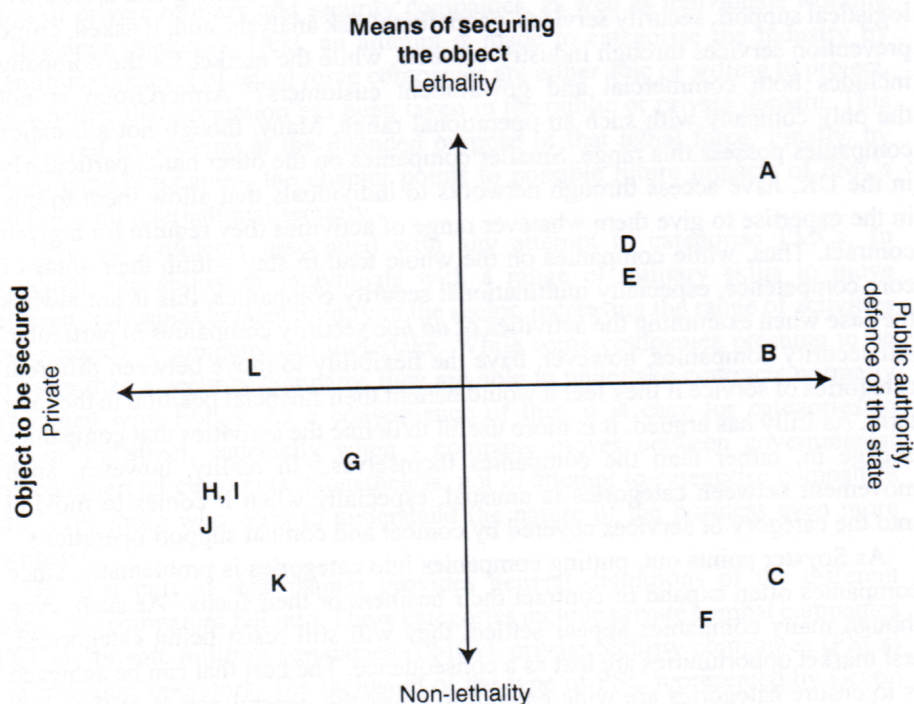


Figure 1 Locating private military and security companies by the object to be secured and the means of securing the object

### **Figure 1.3 – Kinsey's axis of typologies (Kinsey 2009: 10)**

Figure 1.3 makes a distinction between the types of services offered by the private military industry and the means used to fulfil their contracts. The diagram distinguishes between the levels of lethality entailed by the services based on a

private and public axis. Essentially, Kinsey's typology classifies the companies according to the economic standpoint of provided services. It presents a comprehensive panorama of the most important companies since the 1980s: a formidable work that, while not being presented here, deserves to be mentioned and praised<sup>8</sup>. Kinsey's diagram illustrates that most of these companies, while offering military-type services, do not meet the requirements of what would constitute a mercenary according to the Geneva Convention since a few characteristics of the PMCs does not meet the requirements by the convention. Suffice to think to the characteristic of independence<sup>9</sup> where many PMC/PSCs have long-term contracts to provide services to the troops deployed in Iraq or to support the reconstruction efforts. But still, maybe even more importantly, a few companies come dangerously close of meeting such definition in a troubling fashion: the Private Military Companies (PMC) and the theoretical possibility of the Private Combat Companies (PCC).

#### History of the PMCs in the 1990s

According to Kinsey, the world first witnessed the emergence of PMCs in 1993 in Angola when a company, Executive Outcomes (EO), offered its services to regain control over an oil-rich region captured by a nationalist organization fighting for Angola's independence named UNITA (Kinsey 2009: 14, 80; Ortiz 2010: 43), thus constituting a perfect case study for scholars (Ortiz 2010: 44). PMCs "provide military expertise, including training and equipment, almost exclusively to weak or failing governments facing violent threats to their authority", therefore becoming a force multiplier of active players alongside local forces (Kinsey 2009: 14). Operating like the military (national armies) but with a business front, PMCs use to their advantage a heavily favourable labour market: inexpensive and widely available (Kinsey 2009: 15). Kinsey also developed the theoretical category of Private Combat Companies (something unseen so far according to him). Kinsey's definition of PMCs is useful and provides a rich and accurate historical

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<sup>8</sup> For more in-depth information, please consult Christopher Kinsey, *Corporate Soldiers and International Security*, 2009, p. 22 – 31.

<sup>9</sup> See Annex A: Contemporary Mercenaries.

background, challenging the legitimacy of such an endeavour. While he demonstrates the free-market economic model led to the emergence of the private military, he fails to assess how PMCs are not a contingent occurrence in the world scene but rather an evolved and deeply rooted industry that became essential to the American way of war.

Singer’s Tip-of-the-Spear Taxonomy

P.W. Singer, a political analyst at the Brookings Institute, proposes a more robust and popular typology of the private military industry that takes into account “the duality that is at the very nature of the privatized military industry” (Singer 2008: 91). The metaphor of the “tip of the spear” refers to the division of functions and roles within the military organization based on how close the units are from the actual fighting (level of force). It also represents how the private military industry structures the services offered (Singer 2008: 91). Heavily inspired by the US military organization of labour and role division, P.W. Singer’s typology classifies firms based on the type of service they offer and at what level they operate in the battlespace, as shown in Figure 1.4.

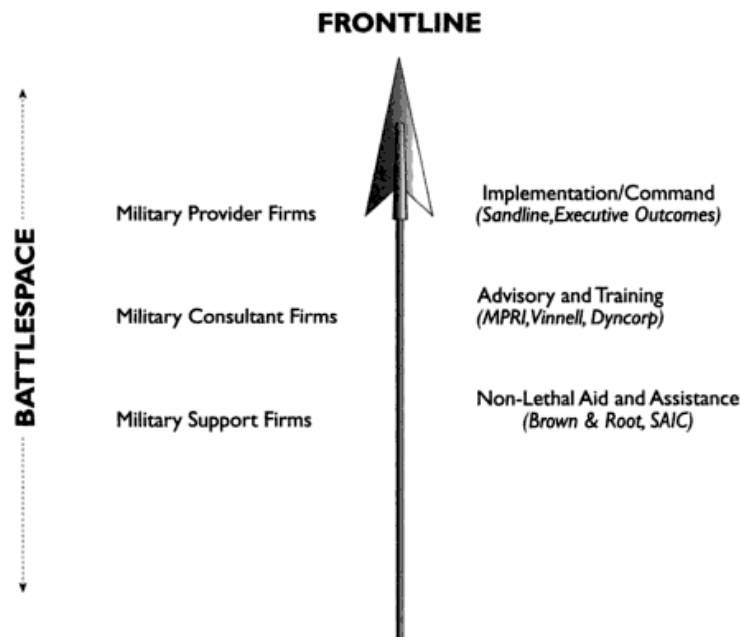


Figure 6.2. “Tip of the Spear” Typology  
Firms distinguished by range of services, level of force.

#### **Figure 1.4 – “Tip of the Spear” Typology (Singer 2008: 93)**

Figure 1.4 shows that private military companies can be divided in three broad categories: the Military Provider Firms (MPF), which are at the forefront (tip-of-the-spear) and engaging in combat; the Military Consultant Firms (MCF), which provide advisory and training services, and the Military Support Firms (MSF), which perform nonlethal aid, assistance, intelligence, supply, and logistics (Singer 2008: Chapter 6). In that regard, MPF share many similarities with our classical definition of mercenaries since they take part in combat: a common recurrent reality of PMCs in Iraq.

The privatization of security has consequences that go well beyond the activities of the individual soldier (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009: 1). By attempting to define and theorize the private military industry, we also need to challenge the dichotomy between private and public violence: a definition that is at the heart of the modern Western civilization’s understanding of warfare. Singer aptly points out, as we have stressed earlier, that “the problem is more acute than a pure exercise of definition; the very heart of the nation state dichotomy of private and public needs to be revisited” (Singer 2008: 7). Such a definition is threatened by a radical privatization of traditionally understood military functions and, for us, it raises some crucial questions, like: “What is privatization? It turns out that everyday terms like ‘mercenary,’ ‘public,’ ‘private,’ ‘privatization,’ and ‘the state,’ have a variety of meanings that do not travel well – across time or space” (Avant 2005: 22). Despite Deborah Avant’s troubling questions that darken our general understanding of what is ultimately *the* private military industry as seen in Iraq, and knowing the drawbacks over the definitions of mercenaries – even the use of such a term – I believe we can draw on the conceptual literature and typologies presented here to make sense of the new American way of war.

#### **4. SUMMARY**

In IR, the historical evolution of violence in Europe and in the United States led to a nearly unanimous understanding that the nation state was successful in legitimating the use of violence within its borders, legislating public violence through military service and criminalizing private violence (Kinsey 2009: 54). New norms led the mercenaries, understood as “anybody who is willing to fight for money, in a manner completely dissociate from political control or moral control” (Phil Lancaster, Major (Ret.) Canadian Army; *Shadow Company*). Mercenaries almost completely disappeared from the “international stage until the 1960s, when they made a spectacular and controversial re-entry” (Percy 2007: 167).

Our understanding and assumptions regarding warfare and military service is a modern idealization. As Jeffrey Herbst has written, “The private provision of violence was a routine aspect of international relations before the twentieth century” (Singer 2008: 20). The RMA and the War in Iraq led the new American way of war to be heavily dependent on the use of private military companies to the extent where “this fledgling industry has grown rapidly and is now firmly rooted in the system. More contractors have worked in Iraq than in any other conflict in American history” (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 231). And yet, despite this rapid entrenchment of PMCs in Iraq, our knowledge and understanding of the industry is extremely limited compared to the one we have of state militaries, to the point “that at present the field appears bare” (Kinsey 2009: 159).

The next chapter will patrol the limits of where the US warrior ethos lies and is deemed to exist. Through a detailed analysis of both discourses and the identity of soldiers and mercenaries, it will become possible to draft some remarks regarding the effectiveness, relevance, and truthfulness of the US warrior ethos. We will explore how we can politically gauge and ethically judge the existence, the use and the impacts of the private military industry in how the US wages war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More specifically, we will ask: how does it affect the soldiers and the act of soldiering? How does such a phenomenon redefine the

mapped boundaries of the US warrior identity, between self and other, inside and outside, civilian and warriors, war and peace (Der Derian 2009: 56)? Even when peace and security are the expected rewards for fighting for one's country in foreign lands, maybe it is appropriate to keep in mind Nordstrom's warning that peace might be understood as the absence of war but it does not necessarily mean the absence of violence (Nordstrom 2004). Thus, we need to recognize the community of faith that warfighting creates: "our ethical codes stem from the inter-subjective relationship we have with other people. Soldiers, after all, live in the same community of fate as those they are asked to fight" (Coker 2008: 126). It is not only the other who pays the cost of one's will to fight but also one's own soldiers who bear the burden of killing and living with the consequences of it.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE US WARRIOR ETHOS

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**Figure 2.1 – GySgt. John Basilone at Iwo Jima  
(The Pacific – Part 8, Copyright 2010)**

Part 8 of the ten part miniseries *The Pacific* ends on the spectacular scene of the landing of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines Division on the atoll of Iwo Jima in February 1945. At his request, Gunnery Sergeant (GySgt.) John Basilone returned to the battlefield after touring the United States as a poster boy to sell war bonds and stamps following the receipt of the Medal of Honor, the highest US military decoration, for his bravery deeds on the island of Guadalcanal in 1943. Many described him as the perfect hero, a heavy machine gunner that loved and excelled at his job and that showed humility in face of his deeds. Images of him pushing forward, out of the beach, and leading from the frontline constitutes one of the most intense moment of the miniseries, the event which ultimately leads to his death after taking over a Japanese pillbox. Running through the bullets, exposing himself to constant enemy fire, keeping at heart the welfare and lives of his men while working hard to accomplish the mission objectives: all of this represents a

very courageous demeanour, but how was he embodying the US warrior ethos that seems timeless in guiding American soldiers' behaviours in combat?

More recently, following the 9/11 attacks, the recruitment campaign "An Army of One" last commercial, "*Generations*," was aired. In order to enhance the appeal of the army to young adults, the Army would moved on to a new promotional company which pushes further the rebranding of the US Army by "recasting its emphasis from social good to a newly articulated Warrior Ethos" (Bailey 2009: 201). Such rebranding constituted the most ambitious recruitment initiative of the US Army since the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973. Based on the concept of a soldier as a social good; vector of equality, justice and American values, it tried to appeal to a new and young generation that desired to be part of something that goes beyond them. The transition was essential in order to rise up to the tremendous challenge of recruiting and retaining personnel in a time of transition to an Army at war following a downsizing for the US Army of one-third of his strength (Bailey 2009: 203). The peace dividend of the collapse of the Soviet Union as a threat and the increased number of deployments through the 1990s provided fertile ground for the creation of the US Warrior Ethos.

Initially envisioned as a new recruitment tool with the 'Army Strong' campaign, the US warrior ethos was also meant to be more than just that by transforming the heart of the profession of arms, providing and reaffirming new guiding principles supporting the soldiers in the heat of the battle and pushing them to achieve mission objectives despite adversity. Was such an ambitious goal with the new US Warrior Ethos bound to fail? While such a question will be in the background for the remainder of this thesis, it becomes clear the US warrior ethos is everything but easy to grasp, imagine, forge, embody or recreate as shown in Chapter 1. This second chapter therefore aims to investigate the various ways of analysing the roots of the US warrior ethos, real and fictive. The chapter will also attempt to provide a better understanding of how the changes to the myth of the monopoly of public violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century battlespace affect the

US warrior ethos. In so doing, the US army attempted to answer the fundamental question – what is the purpose of the Army in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It sought to address it in terms of doctrine, but also attempted to demonstrate its relevance in the new world order.

### **1. THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE: TOWARDS THE RMA AND THE US WARRIOR ETHOS**

The end of the Cold War put the US Army in a precarious position (Bailey 2009: 199-202). Most foreign policy analysts were expecting that the United States would be able to enjoy the dividend of peace following the collapse of the Soviet Union leading to “questions like the *U.S. News* raised could not be so simply put to rest. If the current US military was, more than anything else, a product of the Cold War, what, now, was the purpose of the army?” (Bailey 2009: 199). The reassessment of the role and mission of the US Army was not the first one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a major shift happened earlier in the structure of the US Army after the Vietnam War with the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973.

The creation of the AVF changed drastically how the US fought wars. Since the Revolution War, the United States relied on civilian soldiers to surge in time of crisis, despite constantly struggling “to maintain a purely volunteer militia” (Percy 2007: 126). Such a stance towards military service was also adopted by European nations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where “the armed forces were regarded, not as part of the royal household, but as the embodiment of the Nation” (Kinsey 2009). By linking military service to civic duty, as Rabinow’s argues, it followed the extension of the discovery of the body “as the object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained; which obeys, responds, becomes skilful, and increases its forces” (Rabinow 1984: 180). It enabled the possibility of raising large citizens armies which went through standardized training and were equipped with their nation’s uniform, thus enabling the perception of the soldier’s discipline and aesthetics on the battlefield embodied the nation’s values and spirit (in more ways than one). For most nations, it was

explicitly a moral position based on the “Machiavellian tradition with its emphasis on the morality of citizen duty” (Percy 2007: 142), where discipline was essential to the institution’s success and where “soldiers give up some of the rights enjoyed by other citizens. Commanders explain the need for this waiver to all new soldiers and the great majority accept it” (Straub 1988: 121). The early American republican ideal of relying on citizen soldiers for fighting wars was however not without issues: “Volunteers came with significant drawbacks; they ‘could volunteer their way into an army, but they could also volunteer their way back out again” (Percy 2007: 134). According to Percy, “American leaders’ belief in the moral superiority of the citizen fighter and the necessity of his fighting caused them to overestimate wildly the number and quality of men who would volunteer, and the length of time they would be prepared to offer their services” (Percy 2007: 126-127), a troublesome reality that reached its climax during the Vietnam War, where many lessons were learned and new policies were adopted. The most significant one was the move towards making military service a professional and volunteer choice, overcoming the fact that over the course of US history “American professional soldiers have often found the citizen-soldier troublesome [...] but throughout the country’s history, the citizen-soldier has served the professional well, not least by linking him, even in spite of himself, to the nation at large” (Hart 1998: 148). The US citizen-soldier’s ideal largely inspired by the minuteman, a tribute to American republicanism since the Independence, will have to be transformed in order to inspire the soldier under the AFV. As Percy argues:

[C]hanges in the nature of war did not necessarily favour the citizen over the professional even if warfare did require a better-disciplined, more loyal soldier than it had previously, it is far from clear that a civilian would be either disciplined or loyal. In fact, it was commonly argued that effective troops were created by training and experience; ‘professionalism would trump patriotism’ on the battlefield (Percy 2007: 101).

The introduction of the AFV was indeed a capital moment in the restructuration of the US Army where the core of the army’s values was called to change and adapt to a new reality. The transition towards an AVF was not without raising major concerns. Many politicians in Washington worried about

the level of civic engagement towards the US Army as an institution. In order to keep the American's people engaged in the national defense, "in November 1984 Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger<sup>10</sup>, articulated six principles for the use of force by the United States that became canonical within the defense establishment; they embodied, for a generation of officers, the theory of civil-military relations" (Bailey 2009; Hart 1998). The Weinberger doctrine was later supplemented by General Colin Powell and became the Weinberger-Powell doctrine. General Powell central tenet was "the clarity of the military objective and the ability to gauge when it has been achieved", perfecting the "consolidated lessons of the Vietnam War" (Danchev in Gardner and Young 2007: 52, 268). The Weinberger-Powell doctrine specified "criteria for deciding when and how to use the force" (Bacevich 2008: 129) where:

[T]he United States would fight only when genuinely vital interests were at stake. It would do so in pursuit of concrete and attainable objectives. It would mobilize the necessary resources – political and moral as well as material – to win promptly and decisively. It would end conflicts expeditiously and then get out, leaving no loose ends (Bacevich 2008: 129).

In spirit, the doctrine was intended to avoid repeating the quagmire of Vietnam and build the confidence the nation would never again abandon their soldiers (Bacevich 2008: 129; Danchev in Gardner and Young 2006: 52). Unfortunately, the Weinberger-Powell doctrine never played its intended role, being circumvented by politicians and failing to limit the military participation of the United States abroad or keeping the communities engaged with the army. It did not "survive long in practice (they represented an impossible standard of purity) but they represented an ideal to which succeeding political and military leaders pledged allegiance, often with astonishing directness" (Cohen 2002: 187). The increased level of military operations through the 1980s and 1990s was not the only challenge faced by the US Army.

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<sup>10</sup> The six principles of the Weinberger doctrine can be found at Annex C.

Although it never set aside the understanding that the army's fundamental purpose is to fight wars, during the 1990s, the army also sold itself to the public as a provider of social good (Bailey 2009; Hart 1998) where there was no conflict between:

visions of individual opportunity and public good. Instead, the opportunity the army offered was *itself* a social good. In blunt terms, the army marketed itself as the embodiment of the American dream of full inclusion and equal opportunity. And it presented itself as a force for good in civilian society. It was a provider of good employees, and of good leaders. It took America's youth and from them it created strong, principled, and committed men and women, men and women who made America a better place (Bailey 2009: 206).

The US Army portrayed itself as a site of "equality and opportunity for all American's citizens and it emphasized the plus-value added by the army to American society, as young men and women [...] returned from military service to the civilian sector with education and training and with a heightened sense of responsibility and discipline" (Bailey 2009: 201-202). The US Army as an employer of choice offering excellent individual opportunities would have to be revisited with the changing nature of warfare.

The transition required of the US forces through the RMA meant, "respond[ing] to the crisis of military labour that Vietnam presented. A drafted citizen army questioned mission validity and challenged military command structures beyond what was sustainable politically" (Martin 2007: 17). The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq would continue to erode the civic ideal of the soldier's figure according to Peter Singer and Michael Ignatieff, a situation they described as:

a breakdown in the "Warrior's Honor". In "high-intensity warfare," that is, the large-scale military operations carried out by western powers, combat has become more technological and more civilianized. [...] In many of the ongoing wars around the globe, the traditional rationales behind the initiation, maintenance, and continuation of war are under siege. The profit motive has become a central motivator, equal or greater to analyst puts it, "With enough money anyone can equip a powerful military force. With a willingness to use crime, nearly anyone can generate enough money" (Singer 2008: 64).

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had major impacts on the US Army, the main one being the failure to meet the recruiting targets for 2005 “by a higher number than at any time since 1979” (Bailey 2009: 252). For Army officials, it meant it was time to brand the Army differently to appeal to a younger population. Thus, they hired a new advertisement agency in order to promote enrolment and design a product that was “intended for an army at war. In the signature “Brand Ethos” video, a triumphal symphonic score swelled over images of an army that clearly understood its purpose. [...] *This* was an army that meant to scare potential enemies” (Bailey 2009: 252). Intended to take into account the nature of the battlespace in which the American soldier found himself immersed in and adapting to such a reality, the soldier could now be called to maintain “stability in a dangerous, complex world, day in and day out” (Bailey 2009: 236). When introducing the recruiting campaign of “An Army of One<sup>11</sup>” (that precedes the Ethos one), former Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera stated: “The world has changed dramatically over the past decade. And no one understands this reality better than the American soldier. [...] When American soldiers confront “the inherent challenges” in operations in “Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Haiti,” [...] we “expect them do to what is right.” And “we expect them to get it right with minimal direct supervision” (Bailey 2009: 236 – 237). This direction was only expanded with the US warrior ethos. The mantra of the American soldier is not only expected to accomplish the task ordered but also to do so rightly, which “requires a special individual, someone with mental and physical toughness, someone with a strong moral fibre, someone with a heart, and someone with maturity, and someone that does what is right when no one is looking. This kind of a soldier is what is exemplified is this campaign” (Bailey 2009: 236 - 237). Unfortunately, the rebranding of the soldier’s values made possible by this new advertisement campaign was never a political issue, but rather an administrative one, thus avoiding the debates on the core values of the profession of arms; the introduction of the US warrior ethos in 2006 was a case in point.

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<sup>11</sup> The US Army recruitment campaign “An Army of One” just preceded the “Warrior Ethos” campaign that is now ongoing since 2006.

The transition towards an AVF in the 1980s and during the following process undergone because of the RMA at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century raises doubts about the survivability of the soldier's ideal since the Revolution War as the citizen-soldier. The new advertisement campaign relies heavily on the warrior figure to inspire a nation and an army at war. The sudden abandonment of the American hallmark of the citizen-soldier for the adoption of a warrior spirit will be investigated in the next sections and we will seek to answer how we can define the US warrior ethos that brings a few in the American society to become "legitimate bearer of arms" (Keegan 1978, 1993). The uneasiness towards violence and killing bring the soldier's figure in a paradoxical position; how to define and understand the core of a profession that is called to adapt to specific context and wars and how such questions are relevant in assessing the viability of the US warrior ethos in the face of the challenges encountered by using PMCs in the battlespace.

## **2. AN EXPLORATORY DEFINITION OF THE WARRIOR ETHOS: A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY IDEAL**

Valour does not offer the measure of an army's greatness, nor does fortitude, nor durability, nor technological sophistication. A great army is one that accomplishes its assigned mission (Bacevich 2008: 124).

What do we ask of a military personnel system? First, we require that it contribute to victory in war. In evaluating any component of a fighting force [...] war must come first (Straub 1988: 85).

In 2006, the introduction of the new US warrior ethos was a reminder of the inescapable truth of the main purpose of the US army: winning wars (Bailey 2009: 245-246; Hart 1998). In order to support the mission statement, it became critical to define the expectations towards the soldier's figure that saw numerous changes in the past decades. In US popular culture, like in the miniseries *The Pacific*, the deeds of courage of ordinary citizens are celebrated (in this chapter's opening, we find a still image of GySgt. Basilone) without hardly addressing how the US forces as an institution (in this specific case, the Marine Corps) trains and foster specific expectations towards their members. Unfortunately, American

popular culture is silent towards questions like how does the US warrior ethos guide and inspire the soldier's conduct on duty, on the battlefield, or while facing the enemy? Such expectations are perceptible in US Army commercials like the last commercial aired from the "An Army of One" advertisement campaign:

It's never been about the hardships, the sleepless nights  
How scared we were, how hot or cold it was  
Or how much we missed home,  
It's never been about the glory  
The medals, or even the parades  
It's never been about any of that,  
It's only ever been about doing the right thing  
And it still is

*"Soldiers are making history every day, will you?"*  
- US Army Commercial, "An Army of One" Campaign, *Generations*

Then, the focus was placed on the civic tradition of military service and duty, a hallmark slowly abandoned by the "Army Strong" advertisement campaign that brought the warrior ethos back to life, a warrior spirit that many scholars have deemed to exist since Ancient Greece. Both in literature and reported by troops serving in all military branches of service, the warrior ethos is a relatively new concept within the US Forces. According to the US Army Leadership Field Manual, the US warrior ethos refers to:

[T]he professional attitudes and beliefs that characterize the American soldier. At its core, the warrior ethos grounds itself on the refusal to accept failure. The Army has forged the warrior ethos on training grounds from Valley Forge to the CTCs and honed it in battle from Bunker Hill to San Juan Hill. [...] It derives from the unique realities of battle. It echoes through the precepts in the Code of Conduct. Developed through discipline, commitment to Army values, and knowledge of Army's proud heritage, the warrior ethos makes clear that military service is much more than just another job: the purpose of winning the nation's wars calls for total commitment (Center for Army Leadership 2004: 42).

Traditionally, for Western civilizations, the first reference to the warrior's soul is found in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odysseus* (Coker 2007: 1; Couch 2007: 22). Considering that "warfare is almost as old as man himself, and reaches into the most secret places of the human heart, places where self dissolves rational purpose, where pride reigns, where emotion is paramount, where instinct is king"

(Keegan 1993: 3), it is neither unusual or surprising to find the roots of a warrior's spirit through the Greeks. Such filiations are linked, according to Hegel and Coker, to the profound existential dimension of war; it is through war that warriors discover their very own humanity: "The true warrior, wrote Hegel, affirms his humanity in a way that is specific to himself, for he fights to impose his own worth on the world" (Coker 2004: 5). The affirmation of life for the soldiers is solidified through the ultimate test: warfighting. Through history, battles were waged for many different reasons, where the warrior/soldier was confronted with:

Danger buried beneath the soil of the battlefield, wafted by its breezes, suffusing in solid form its air space – mines, gas, projectiles – these 'objectives dangers, some new, some as old as warfare, have, through a superabundance of supply, made the killing zone, even at its foremost [...] a yet more dangerous place for the soldier to inhabit in the twentieth century than it has ever been before. [...] [T]he transformation of the very environment of the battlefield into one almost wholly – and indiscriminately – hostile to man (Keegan, 1978: 313 – 314).

Like many warriors' spirit, the US warrior ethos aims to "organize the intake of sensations, to reduce the events of combat to a few and as easily recognizable a set of elements as possible, to categorize under manageable headings the noise, blast, passage of missiles and confusion of human movement which will assail him on the battlefield" (Keegan 1978: 20). Banishing chaos and enabling positive actions on the field is essential in the role and definition of the warrior ethos. Rondeau explains succinctly what makes the soldier's calling an ethos and what it entails:

We use the word *ethos* all the time, but it is well to think for a few minutes about the words we throw around. The etymology of *ethos* and *ethic* is interesting because the *e-t-h* in Greek set up the words for *ethos*, *ethic*, and, of course, *ether* and *ethereal*. They all go to a notion of the air around us, of what we breathe, of the atmosphere. [...] What is that rarefied air around us in our atmosphere that shapes what we believe and the way we believe. For military professionals, the air that surrounds us and that we breathe is our *culture*, and culture drives us to *meaning* (Rondeau 2011: 10).

The military culture "breathes" a description and sets ideals embodied in the warrior figure conceived as a human type (far from being universal) from

which a meaning of life can be derived from (Coker 2004: 5). In US history, the recent turn towards an AVF brought the citizen-soldier's ideal to slowly transition towards seeing military service members as a social good, a more appealing conception for a generation seeking individual opportunities, a vision the US Forces has embraced ever since (Bailey 2009). As a result of the adoption of the Weinberger doctrine, the creation of the US warrior ethos became a natural extension of a "traditional *jus ad bellum* category of just war principles [...] incorporating principles of just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, last resort, probability of success, proportionality, and comparative justice" (Challens 2007: 152). The American serviceman (and servicewomen) became a social and cultural good that ultimately claims, through hardship and a morally demanding life (as a citizen), a special status among the society they serves:

Military service is more than a "job." It is a profession with the enduring purpose to win wars and destroy our nation's enemies. The Warrior Ethos demands a dedication to duty that may involve putting your life on the line, even when survival is in question, for a cause greater than yourself. As a Soldier, you must motivate yourself to rise above the worst battle conditions – no matter what it takes, or how long it takes. That is the heart of the Warrior Ethos, which is the foundation for your commitment to victory in times of peace and war (Department of the Army 2009: 3).

The US warrior ethos constitutes a pledge of total commitment made by the soldier to victory, "to put the mission first, refuse to accept defeat, never quit, and *never leave behind a fellow American*" (Wong 2005: 613). It supports and structures the use of violence with the desired end state being that "the ultimate end of war, at least as American fights it, is to restore peace. For this reason the Army must accomplish its mission honourably" (Centre for Army Leadership 2004: 18; Clausewitz 1984: 83).

Thus, the US warrior ethos supports the personal commitment of the soldier (through an oath) towards serving a higher purpose that is not for one's benefit. This is how, according to Rabinow:

[...] It may be that war as strategy is a continuation of politics. But it must not be forgotten that "politics" has been conceived as a continuation, if not

exactly and directly of war, at least of the military model as a fundamental means of preventing civil disorder (Rabinow 1984: 185).

The continuation of politics through wars makes the two endeavours (war and politics) intricately linked; a reality obvious through the ideal of the citizen-soldier in America. Since the introduction of the RMA, there was a need to revitalize the military ethos to support a professional community of warriors, and thus, despite enlarging the divide between the military community and the American people. Such gap is well perceived with the more demanding ethos of the US warrior ethos, which is highly inspired by an Aristotelian view of courage and aesthetics, a code that encourage a good standing in front of the chaos of battle mentioned by John Keegan. As Nancy Sherman argues:

The Aristotelian view of courage, which orthodox Stoics must reject, is that courage requires not entirely overcoming fear but “standing well” with regard to it. That is, one has not suppressed all fear but stands up to it. So courage is a matter of doing what is noble *at a cost*, where the cost is *felt* in the exposure to danger and sacrifice. The person who is excessively fearless, Aristotle insists, would be “some sort of madman or insensible person,” “immune to bodily and psychic pain.” She would not be a candidate for real courage (Sherman 2005: 109-110).

Standing well and accepting the dangers of the call of duty have been part of the ethics and moral expectations of a soldier since the citizen-soldier ideal but with the US warrior ethos, it became clearly articulated within the ethos. The moral accountability fostered by the new US warrior ethos is witnessed through the officer’s education at military academies. Mullaney’s testimony to his education and training received while attending Annapolis illustrates perfectly the attitude fostered in US military academies: “Everything about training emphasizes [...] that imperative to control and banish chaos, from the manipulation of sails to master the wind, to the daily battle against dust on their mirrors. I wasn’t ready to tell the midshipmen that they could “get it right” and still lose” (Mullaney 2009: 362 - 363). Despite a well-designed training that aims to provide the essential insight required of a Naval or Marine officer, he can still perfectly apply his techniques and end up falling short of fulfilling the mission, or maybe even worst, at the cost of subordinate lives. While contingency may play a

large role in the chaos of soldiering, military training and education exemplifies the need for troops to take risk in order to do things the “right way”, especially since “a warrior code is not something one is born with; it is something one acquires. Every profession has its own. Warriors are tamed to the extent that they are socialised. Their natures formed by living in a civilised society, living in fear of themselves” (Coker 2007: 62). While not all situations require mitigating and taking some risks, the requirement to do the right thing is always a concern. Soldiers learn through military training that sometimes the value of our goals is reflected in the level and types of risk we are ready to assume to achieve them.

Ultimately, regardless of how the situation is presented, the use of violence by a nation involves killing; “soldiering is about fighting, and if need be, killing. The fact can be cloaked in a wide range of fancy garments [...] but when you come right down to it, soldiering is about hitting the enemy before they can kill you” (Percy 2007: 55). In terms of responsibility, “military forces are an obedient arm of the state strictly subordinate to civilian authority; professional officers use their expertise only for society’s benefit; and society is the profession’s client” (Moten 2011: 15). The assumption of risks pertaining to life and death and the responsibility that comes with carrying such taboo in the name of a nation is part of what the US warrior ethos pushes the soldier to do, and in that regard, singles out the profession of arms from any other profession. Like Peter Singer argues:

The military is very different from any other profession and is unique specifically because it comprises expert in warmaking and in the organized use of violence. As professionals, military officers are bound by a code of ethics, serve a higher purpose, and fulfil a societal need. Their craft sets them apart from other professionals in that the application of military power is not comparable to a commercial service. Military professionals deal in life and death matters, and the application of their craft has potential implications for the rise and fall of governments (Singer 2008: 7 - 8).

It is for this specific reason that many scholars have argued that “national defense was seen as something best carried by a tax-financed government force” (Singer 2008: 7). Only a government force can provide the moral justification for the act of killing. Like Percy mentions: “Once military duty to the state is seen in moral

terms, both reflecting the individual's worth and the worth of his sacrifice, the use of mercenaries is morally difficult" (Percy 2007: 142); a difficulty that still exists today.

The US warrior ethos ought to shed some light by providing a moral frame to guide the soldier's conduct on the battlefield, entertaining a reciprocity of humanity when facing the enemy, "a potential empathy to stop the logic of killing, or at least to show us that the faces of its victims are not so different from those of our own" (Cotkin 2010: 5). In a certain way, it is an embodiment of hope, for a better present and future, an inclusionary democratic value. Killing being at the heart of soldiering, it is through sacrifice and restraint, the object of the next section, that we witness the honourable qualities of soldiering, setting a distinctive trait with contractors performing the same duties in and out of America's battlefields.

### **3. ON SOLDIERING: ETHICS AND MORALITY IN KILLING**

I hate to break it to you Ray, but we are no cowboys. (Sgt Colbert, Generation Kill)

The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one. I choose to live humbly for one. My family knows that without the darkness we cannot appreciate the light (Sallinger in Straus 2009: 103).

- J.D. Sallinger

The US warrior ethos defines, in broad terms, the moral expectations towards the soldier's conduct that is enforced through military culture. This ideal is largely influenced by an American view of just war theory, of doing the "right thing" at all times and all costs. Such statement enables the possibility for soldier sacrifice for the cause one serves and instrumentalises sacrifice. Like Christopher Coker affirms:

A soldier who hazards his life may be brave but he must recognise also that he is more useful alive than dead. It is more useful for everyone if he is still alive to continue to fight. To lose one's life usefully is indeed to instrumentalise it. To put one's life in the service of others, not only oneself, is consistent with the warrior ethos (Coker 2007: 63).

Symbolically, such stance towards sacrifice was embodied in American popular culture for many decades, as witnessed in the opening scene of the movie *Patton* (1970), when General Patton asserts in a speech to his troops that their job is about making the enemy die for their country:

The characteristic act of men at war is not dying; it is killing. [...] But for the man on active service warfare is concerned with the lawful killing of other people. Its peculiar importance derives from the fact that it is not murder, but sanctioned blood-letting, legislated for by the highest civil authorities and obtaining the consent of the vast majority of the population. (Bourke 1999: xiii)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US Forces revisit those two notions that are at the heart of warfighting: killing and sacrifice, which constitute hallmarks of soldiering. The new US warrior ethos provides direction in regard to killing and sacrifice that are in line with previous concepts of soldiering, but also enforces a covenant towards serving members that continues to delineate soldiering and outsourcing to private contractors in the battlespace.

#### Restraint

The US warrior ethos recognizes the unique demands that are made upon the soldiers that adhere to it. It reinstates the “insistence upon personal moral integrity on those engaged in fighting. The combatant was not an isolated individual: his actions were taken on behalf of the nation, a hierarchical military establishment, and an intimate, interdependent platoon – this was what distinguished martial combat from murder” (Bourke 1999: xix). The “warrior’s code was both a code of belonging and an ethic of responsibility” (Ignatieff 1998: 112). The importance drawn in making the distinction between martial combat and murder has been at the centre of many controversies, especially in times of war when “radical evil strode” (Cotkin 2010: 79), as has been witnessed during the horrors of the My Lai massacre in March 1968. The moral moment it represented for the US Army history guided the requirement for restraint, an ethical imperative found in the US warrior ethos.

The requirement for restraint, while only explicitly stated in policies regarding the use of force in specific situations, is mostly stated through a commitment for hope and reconciliation: it represents the relationship to the other embodied by the US warrior ethos that supports and foster it. In his studies on the use of Greek mythology to assists Vietnam veterans in dealing with Post-Traumatic Syndrome, Jonathan Shay affirms:

The crucial trait that emerged from this analysis is the absence of restraints – apparently *any* restraint – when berserk. This appears to be the feature that differentiates the unequivocally praiseworthy *aristeia* of Diomédês from the demonic and questionable berserk state of Achilles (Shay 2002: 97).

Greek mythology, especially through the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, still helps nowadays in understanding the specific situation in which a soldier/warrior is confronted with on the battlefield. Coker and Shay share the astute recognition of the special status given to restraint in warfare as part of a shared ethos that recognizes a mutual respect between foes based on the shared fate given by the battlespace:

One of the most important lessons of the *Iliad* is that there is no place for hatred on the battlefield. The moment Achilles in his unrestrained grief dishonours Hector's body is also the moment of self-loathing. Achilles in the end comes to his senses. The *Iliad* ends with the burial of the greatest of the Trojan heroes and the brief suspension of hostilities so that he can be buried in full accordance with the honour due to him by his own side, and the respect he has won in the eyes of the other. Indeed, the poem ends on that symbolic note (Coker 2007: 75).

In such context, restraint becomes expected between enemies, an extension found in the US warrior ethos since it “encompasses the duties we owe our enemies: it provides for the possibility of an ethically conceived life; it makes the soldier aware that he lives in a state of moral consequence” (Coker 2007: 139). The moral consequence of sharing such a community of faith “implies that soldiers on both sides have “an equal right to kill” and enjoy a kind of “moral equality” on the battlefield (Keegan 1978: 321).

What they are accountable for is *how* they prosecute war – for conduct free of atrocities and crimes and excessive collateral damage – not for *what* they fight

for” (Sherman 2010: 42-43). It creates a liability, at least in spirit, on the conduct of warfare (notwithstanding a moral concern). The US warrior ethos continues with a tradition amongst Western nations that traces back to Clausewitz to limit the extent of the use of force to what is absolutely necessary to make your enemy accomplish your will. It creates and enforces a moral duty and responsibility towards one’s brothers in arms; the US warrior ethos goes at the heart of an ideal, a “sacred trust” as called by General MacArthur (Coker 2007: 133). Such ethos is social and sets the expectations of honour and conduct of a soldier (Coker 2007: 92). In fulfilling them accordingly, a soldier can be granted recognition by his peers and even his enemies, a situation that creates accountability and responsibility between the US Forces and the people it serves. According to Sarah Percy, “The ‘bond between the citizens and the army’, however, is crucial. Once the reformers changed the army to reflect the citizen’s worth, and the citizen was tied to the nation’s army by a moral duty, the use of mercenaries was impossible” (Percy 2007: 143). The oath of allegiance the soldiers are bound by from the moment they join the US Army carries the expectations of their duty and is supported by “the involvement of the whole community which makes it a morally sanctioned act” (Coker 2007: 76).

Ultimately, as Coker’s argues:

If the reality of both worlds is the war of all against all, Homer’s is a deeply heroic vision nonetheless. It is a vision steeped in intense understanding of the cruelty of war, yet one nurtured by the conviction that its evils are outweighed by the warrior ethos or at the very least that it is compensated by the memory of the heroic deed. This is the essence of the Homeric vision, a deep pessimism about war combined with hope of its saving grace which is to be found in the concept of sacrifice. And for sacrifice, in turn, to have meaning for the rest of us the warrior must be *tamed* (Coker 2007: 61; my emphasis).

The taming of the warrior is conceptualized through restraint that must be exercised in carrying on his duties in the US Army. The traditional mark of soldier killing brought scholars to argue that warriors like killing, but as Christopher Coker’s argues, “it is not true of most even though killing is central to their profession” (Coker 2007: 61). In the final scene of the miniseries *Generation*

*Kill*, the members of this elite unit of US Marines watch a montage made from footage taken during the first three weeks of the invasion of Iraq. While they all laugh and enjoy the first minutes together, they all leave one after the other when they have seen enough destruction, explosions and deaths. It is of particular interest and quite telling that they felt uneasy towards their own accomplishment, hinting explicitly to a duty of restraint when applying force and violence. On principle, it is through the exercise of restraint that soldiers reinforce the trust that exists between the American people and the US Army. And it is the existence of such trust that supposedly enables another unique value of the US warrior ethos, a soldier's sacrifice of oneself.



**Figure 2.2 – Generation Kill, Episode 7 “Bomb in the Garden” 2008  
(“Final Scene – Viewing a montage of their videos of the invasion”)**

#### Sacrifice

Another key feature of the US warrior ethos is found in the notion of sacrifice, an expectation and requirement of service embodied mostly through the “Leave No Man Behind” policy. Like Chapell reminds us, “In the US Army, as in Ancient Greece, the most admired trait in soldiers is not their ability to kill but their

willingness to sacrifice for their friends” (Chappell 2009: 22). The US warrior ethos enables the existence of the sacrifice:

Sacrifice is both political (instrumental) and personal (existential) [...]. For the warrior, sacrifice when it comes – and if it comes, for not even the warrior seeks death – must be a grand summation of life, not a negation of it. Sacrifice is not nihilistic. It is the genuine driver of a warrior’s actions, if they are to be moral. Sacrifice, in short, is characteristic of a man who understands his well-being as essentially *political*, that is one who acknowledges that his own well-being and that of the community are one and the same. For him it’s better to die rather than to turn his back on his *political* nature (Coker 2007: 84).

The “Leave no Man Behind” policy strikes at the heart of the US warrior ethos: “sacrificing oneself for the ‘weak and unarmed’ was the very essence and reason of a warrior’s being” (Coker 2007: 135).

Embracing full-heartedly sacrifice is in line with continuing the shift towards a more professional force where “taking risks to recover their dead is expected” (Wong 2005: 616-617), up to the point where a “veritable fetish over the bodies of the dead soldiers has developed in the militaries of the industrial world” (Gray 2005: 218). Many reasons explain such strong position on recovering dead bodies, increasing cohesion and fraternity amongst members of a unit for example, but mostly, it enables closure and grievance of the lost member, for their family at home and at the family that constitute the unit he/she belonged to. The level of risks assumed to “recover the body of a fallen soldier may make no rational sense, it impacts significantly on the unit, the military profession, and the US society” (Wong 2005: 600). In a certain way, it makes it suspicious to outsiders, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that emphasizes on applying principles of risk management in all situations, including warfare with the RMA where “risk replaces progress as the measure of how we are all doing” (Martin 2007: 14).

Investing death with a meaning has never been problematic in victory, according to Shay:

Ancient and modern wars are alike in defining the relationship between victory and the army's dead, *after the fact*. At the time of the deaths, victory has not yet been achieved, so the corpses' meaning hovers in the void until the lethal contest has been decided. Victory – and the cut, crushed, burned, impaled, suffocated, frozen, diseased, drowned, poisoned, or blown-up corpses – mutually anchor each other's meaning" (Shay 1994: 6-7).

The Centre for Army Leadership reminds us that the most important influence on people is the example that we set (Centre for Army Leadership 2004: 88) and it enables a social construction of shared values for the US Army that is so powerful "it can motivate men to get up out of a trench and step into enemy machine-gun fire" (Shay 2002: 6). This is because "sacrifice is the highest embodiment of other institutions including the strongest of all, the family" (Coker 2007: 93). The warrior's willingness to embody such an ethos and sacrifice his/her life invests his action and life with meaning. If his/her death had meaning for others, then he/she can accept that death is his destiny – the natural completion of his life (Coker 2004: 12). It is sacrifice, above all, which legitimises war in the popular imagination, "it transvalues suffering, and secures the warrior in social esteem, in his *thymos*, the search for recognition" (Coker 2007: 80). A warrior may be dispossessed of the ultimate value, life, but in giving up his life he/she is codifying the trust with society and investing it with meaning through the value of its lost life. The soldier embraces sacrifice that is made in full awareness of its consequence. Shay argues that "when Lincoln wrote, 'As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master*,' he did not claim any rational compulsion for what he would not be. This vision of a good life for a human being is an ethical choice and cannot be coerced. It can only be called forth by persuasion, education, and welcoming appeal" (Shay 1994: 209). Ultimately, it is also the call of the US warrior ethos to act according to American values, and at all costs. Such imperative also acts as a reminder that "conflict fought with little regard for ethical considerations is likely soon enough to escape political control" (Coker 2008: 18).

The lack of political control would be a dimension that will be addressed in chapter 3 with the use of PMCs in the battlespace. An aspect that is almost always

forgotten is the private dimension of sacrifice, when it becomes too easy to die because “it betrays a contempt for life, not an affirmation of it” (Coker 2007: 76). Not only does it fail to invest sacrifice with any valuable meaning but it also gets to the hard truth that while a soldier’s body “is in many ways a public investment, and yet the sacrifices he or she makes are harrowingly private” (Sherman 2005: 22). While focusing on the ultimate sacrifice of giving one’s own life for the cause, sacrifices, just like violence, comes in many shades of grey. Shay reminds us “the sacrifice that citizens make when they serve in their country’s military is not simply the risk of death, dismemberment, disfigurement, and paralysis – as terrible as these realities are. They risk their peace of mind, [...] they risk losing their capacity to participate in democratic process” (Shay 2002: 33). As Dave Grossman argues, “killing comes with a price, and societies must learn that their soldiers will have to spend the rest of their lives living with what they have done” (Grossman 2009: 194). To forget such a toll on soldiers is to “overlook the full humanity of soldiering, and the healthy struggle in the best soldier to remain alive to civilian sensibilities without losing the soldier’s steel and resilience” (Sherman 2010: 1-2). Such reality is even more concerning since the war in Iraq and Afghanistan brought significant changes to the US Forces. What is asked and expected of the soldiers is increasingly complicated (Bailey 2009: 256), while the links “between those who wear uniforms and those who won’t” (Sherman 2005: 20-21) seem to be constantly weakening. It raises concerning doubts about the link between the population and their armed forces, which open the doors to a new way of managing warfare that dilutes the meaning and weight of their sacrifice.

The US warrior ethos embraces many dimensions of life. Beth Bailey reminds us that when it gets to sacrifice, we might ask the American people if “[i]s it just or fair for a small number of Americans to bear the heavy burden of military defense while the rest of the nation is asked no sacrifice” (Bailey 2009: 259)? Since the majority of Americans remains untouched by war, is the sacred trust identified by MacArthur enabling the highest values of military service

jeopardized? Such a situation cannot be overlooked considering the fragile grounds upon which relies the US warrior ethos.

#### **4. SUMMARY**

I argued in this chapter that the newly crafted US warrior ethos unveiled in 2006 was mostly motivated and articulated as a commercial turn to boost recruitment requirements following the increased level of military operations around the world since the 1990s. Since the beginning of the new recruitment campaign under the “Army Strong” banner, the US Forces (except the Army) never ran out of new recruits. Such state of affair does not imply that culturally conditioned discourse of the warrior ethos is meaningless beyond attracting young Americans to enrol and serve. In return, a lively military culture was created around it and soldier lives by it while enacting its prescriptions on the field as showed by Wong’s example of the “leaving no men behind” ideal (Wong 2005: 600). And yet, US soldiers deserve some answers to questions related to their services, especially when faced with new actors in the battlespace that challenge the US warrior ethos. These answers are essential to better support and guide them in their life, from training grounds to battlefields and beyond when they get back to civilian life.

The next chapter will investigate the pertinence and meaningfulness of the US warrior ethos where it matters most: as represented on the battlefield of America’s wars; especially in Iraq where the introduction of new actors was the most tangible. These new actors present in the battlespace confront the US warrior ethos to a new reality where soldiers are not the only ones engaged in killing with a motive, a “traditional mark of the warrior” (Coker 2007: 61). Non-state armies actors like PMCs and contractors now also carry it. In that regard, the American invasion of Iraq challenged countless times the limits of what is understood as soldiering and what inspires it, the newly forged US warrior ethos. As a national institution, US Forces have created a way to invest sacrifice, killing and death with meaning; the core of such justification can be found in the warrior ethos. The problem lies when contractors are utilized to perform similar functions in the very same battlespace than the US Army. Tangible risks exist

then that the justification for the use of violence erodes and that warfighting is condemned to be rubbish and lawless man's slaughter. In effect, as Peter Singer reminds us, "contemporary organization of global violence is neither timeless nor natural" (Singer 2008: 39), a warning that the implementation of the RMA and the use of contractors might become the norm rather than the exception in fighting actual and/or future conflicts.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES AND THE WAR IN IRAQ

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“We do hesitate, it’s not a bad thing. It really take that extra moment, assuming that risk for the future reward of avoiding some mistakes and maintaining that relationship, it’s worth it<sup>12</sup>”.

- 1Lt Dave Keltner

“Do you ever consider flying an helicopter in the civilian, as an alternative career? No. (Laugh) No. There is not enough excitement. (Laugh) You know, it’s all a game. War is a game. It’s the ultimate game. There is nothing to touch it<sup>13</sup>”.

- Neall Ellis, Private military contractor

In 2003, the US forces were embarking in their most difficult journey to this date in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the attempt to “gain the hearts and minds” of the Iraqi people. The main combat phase was declared over by the President shortly after the invasion but the “real” commitment of the United States in Iraq was only beginning. This time, the Army was not alone in spearheading the reconstruction efforts but was also followed by an armada of contractors and subcontractors who would support the military in various capacities. It was the first time in US military history that PSCs and PMCs were involved in all spheres of military activities, from more traditional logistical functions like providing food and reconstructing dams and oil wells damaged during combats, to getting involved in direct combat side by side with US forces. The War in Iraq was setting a unique scene for organizing military operations, where two armies existed, with quasi-different mandates, different accountability requirements and very limited integration.

In so doing, the PMCs have been reported to be involved in numerous ruthless killing of hundreds of civilians over the years. In a conflict that strive and

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<sup>12</sup> PBS Frontline, *Rules of Engagement*, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Neall Ellis, *Shadow Company*

promise the American population to achieve “*Full Spectrum Dominance*” through strategies like “*Shock and Awe*”, the US forces rather seemed to have achieved a near complete privatization of their core capacities, especially logistics.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Western civilization culture, the meaning of “mercenary” carries a pejorative connotation. The first impression that comes to our mind is one of a freelance operator, a classic mercenary (Kinsey 2009: 18-19); a ruthless killer offering his services to the highest bidder, living from his martial skills that he acquired through years of fighting different conflicts. Far from being endangered by the actual international legal system, the slow breakdown of the “perceived” Weberian monopoly of the state during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave to the private/commercial side of war plenty of new opportunities (Singer 2008: 18). Similar to the phoenix rising from the ashes, the mercenaries would be going through a rebirth at the end of the Cold War propelled by a series of new conflicts where they assumed multiple supporting and active roles in various Africans and Balkans conflicts (Kinsey 2009: 111; *Shadow Company: Security Contractor*) through the 1990s. The contractors and mercenaries would get the opportunity of a lifetime with the war in Iraq; a war that would test a new conception of warfare, where privatization has definitely become the flavour of the decade. The first conflict of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the United States would mean for the American forces a massive transformation of the battlespace in which they operate; “as the war in Iraq has been shown, not only are military forces becoming more reliant on the private sector to operate, civilian contractors are getting closer to the front line” (Kinsey 2009: 158). A parallel army of private contractors would rise to the challenge, attracted by various reasons almost all related to earnings and money, offering a just-in-time solution to America’s way of waging war (or doing business). In such a volatile context, a heavily privatized military battlespace was created where “[t]he explosive growth in the use of PSC employees to carry out tasks formerly reserved for the armed forces of states has outpace[d] efforts to assess the consequences for the IHL of this increased reliance on PSCs” (de Nevers 2009: 170). Thus, it becomes essential to investigate the conduct of the private military industry and how their integration

raises serious questions regarding the survivability and relevance of the US warrior ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In this chapter, I investigate the conduct of the PMCs in Iraq and how their presence and conduct challenge unexpectedly many certainties regarding the US warrior ethos. In the first section, I discuss the reliance of the Pentagon on the private sector for various aspects of warfare, going beyond a logistical support. In so doing, I show it has become impossible for the US forces to be deployed anywhere on the globe without the support of PMCs and large corporations like Halliburton. In the second section, I focus on the unusual cohabitation and cooperation between PMCs and the US forces in Iraq and how it raises questions and doubts about the notion of public interest, politics, the warrior ethos and, more specifically, the notion of sacrifice and restraint in achieving the mission objectives. In the third section, I pay a closer look at how the US warrior ethos is challenged and jeopardized when PMCs are used for fighting wars and seen as another asset in the battlespace.

#### **1. WITHOUT YOU, WE CAN'T SUCCEED**

Lieutenant General David McKiernan, who was in charge of the ground war, would tell the planners that “The guys back in Washington and the guys back in Central Command in Tampa are probably not going to understand this – but the biggest concern we have is logistics. If we can’t sustain the force on the battlefield, we’re wasting bringing the force over here. A tank without ammunition and fuel is just a piece of metal. You guys have got to make us succeed. Without you we can’t succeed (Chatterjee 2009: 110).

For military strategists, logistics is a primary concern. The term escaped the purview of martial affairs to be integrated to commercial and business operations following massive investments in operational research and time and cost-savings measures from production to delivery of services and products. These efforts permeated to the state operations especially in a post-Cold War era, where foes of yesterday became the business partners of today. In such a context, the requirements of a vast, resourceful, costly, and centralized support system for the US forces disappeared in the eyes of most policy makers. The end of the 1990s led

the political class to rather aim at deficit reduction measures, thus being open at the idea of outsourcing and privatizing state functions that were not deemed “essential”. Such a context led policy-makers and businesses to push an agenda that led to vast privatization of logistics functions until then always managed by uniformed personnel of the US forces. The main arguments were linking these measures to:

[E]fficiency and effectiveness, privatization has been portrayed as a major step forward, its purported benefits contrasting sharply with the failures of over-centralized government bureaucracies. This approval for private-sector performance has resulted in many countries adopting this management system in virtually every conceivable sector, including the most fundamental of government functions: the provision of security (Kinsey 2009: 3).

Such a transition was promoted through the RMA and led the United States to see “PSCs as a tool to be used for the government's advantage. The success of this strategy has been enhanced by the US government's procurement of security services” (Avant in Jäger and Kummel: 422). It enabled a triple win scenario for logisticians and managers. It enabled more troops used in combat roles, it diminished the overall charges of maintaining a large standing army and the private contractors keep a low profile, to the opposite of the US Forces (Engbrecht 2011: 68). I argue that the absence of a political signature in the battlespace made possible with a contracted force is the ultimate plus-value of using PMCs. Not only it enabled the complete circumvention of the Weinberger doctrine, a tactic used since it was enacted but also led to the situation in Iraq where “the public is generally unaware that as of late 2007 there were over 180,000 contractors (*not* including security firms) in Iraq to only 160,000 military personnel” (Engbrecht 2011: 68; Scahill 2008). That was the theory behind the RMA, it went “beyond a few insiders trying to capitalise on politics: the whole direction of transatlantic responses to the terrorist attacks relied on profit-making companies. This shaped the nature of the new political, military and security strategies gathered under the umbrella of the ‘war on terror’ ” (Hughes 2007: 3). The reality proved to be different; “privatization has had a negative impact on the troops in war zones” (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 231). For

Tom Engelbrecht, the war in Iraq created the perfect storm and enabled unique opportunities based on three key factors:

The first was the U.S. administration's abysmal preparation for the occupation, which created a window of opportunity for PMCs. The second was a complete lack of regulatory oversight coupled with unlimited funding. The third was the driving political pressure to complete the job as rapidly as possible, thus tacitly legitimizing marginal business practices. Nobody was concerned about the details (Engbrecht 2011: 87-88).

Following the end of the Cold War, PMCs saw the opportunity to move away from the fringe of the system to have leading roles in the War on Terror, offering services that get tacit approval from governments (Hughes 2007; Engelhardt 2010). The privatization of "non-core military roles" finds its roots in the "engineering sector of the US economy" since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kinsey 2009: 98). The arguments in favor of the use of PMCs in the battlespace led to a modified warfighting vernacular where unexplained and considerable cost-saving measures were expected benefits of privatization (Hughes 2007: 108). The risks entailed with warfighting were assumed by new partners to the national armies, the PMCs, who were eager to capitalize on an "occasion for gain and profit" (Dillon 2008: 320). The invasion of Iraq led "firms like Control Risks Group, DynCorp, Erinys, Aegis, ArmorGroup, Hart, Kroll, and Steele Foundation, many of which already had some presence in the country, began deploying thousands of mercenaries in Iraq and recruiting aggressively internationally" (Scahill 2008: 140). The situation was already highly problematic in 2005 when the Government Accountability Office (GAO) admitted in April 2005 that "it is difficult to aggregate reliable data due in part to the large number of contractors and the multiple levels of subcontractors performing work in Iraq" (Chatterjee 2009: 142 – 143). In other words, it meant that as early as the beginning of the invasion of Iraq, the main accountability office responsible to supervise reconstruction efforts in Iraq was unable to assess the costs of actual work done by PMCs. The involvement of PMCs in Iraq kept a steady increasing pace and led to the unusual situation in 2008 when Congress admitted that:

[T]he number of private contractors in Iraq was at a one-to-one ration with active-duty US soldiers, a stunning escalation compared with the 1991 Gulf War. “To have half of your army be contractors, I don’t know that there’s a precedent for that,” said Congressman Dennis Kucinich, a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Some estimates actually put the number of contractors at higher than active-duty soldiers in Iraq, but exact numbers are nearly impossible to obtain. According to a March 2008 report by the GAO, the Pentagon “does not maintain department wide data on the numbers of contractor employees working side-by-side with federal employees” (Scahill 2008: 460).

Overall, reports have estimated that “at least 310 companies based in numerous states have contracted or subcontracted to carry out security functions for the USA in Iraq. PSCs conduct a broad array of activities, ranging from combat to the provision of intelligence interrogation, and security advice and training” (de Nevers 174). At best, these numbers were estimates and up to this day, no precise data exists on personnel employed by PMCs at any given time in Iraq. Jeremy Scahill sums it up when he quotes *The Times* of London: “In Iraq, the postwar business boom is not oil. It is security” (Scahill 2008: 148). It thus became evident in Iraq that PMCs were essential to US Forces. Embracing the ideas behind the RMA, the invasion of Iraq enabled the possibility of a hybrid public-private culture that was now permeating the state monopoly of violence, an illusion that was rapidly dissipating (Ortiz 2010: 6). Put differently, Iraq demonstrated that it was now impossible for the US Forces to be deployed anywhere in the world without an unprecedented level of support from PMCs. It was only the beginning of the lessons learned in Iraq, the cohabitation of PMCs and the US Forces was difficult and raised troubling concerns regarding the ethical conduct of PMCs in the battlespace and how they threaten the US warrior ethos.

## **2. SHADOWS OF THE WAR IN IRAQ: A TALE OF TWO ARMIES**

The implementation of the outsourcing policies linked to the RMA marks the official failure of the Weinberger Doctrine for mobilizing troops in times of conflict and war. The precept behind the RMA was pushed even further with the unique experience that Iraq represented. For many scholars, it meant that “the mercenary companies were not only in a good position to profit from future wars;

their existence actually made these wars more likely. Politicians like Straw (Jack Straw, Home Secretary under Tony Blair) thought that wars were easier to launch because they had a new pool of fighters to mobilize. The existence of the private armies lowered the bar on launching military action” (Hughes 2007: 108). The influx of new fighters in the battlespace would bring tales of two armies working together and apart: the US Forces being public and the contractors being in the shadow, where their actions, roles and numbers remained/remains unknown to the population of Iraq and the United States.

Early in the new battlespace of Iraq, the cohabitation between both types of forces was difficult and chaotic. Jeremy Scahill affirms: “Those mercenaries officially hired by the occupation would be contracted for more than \$2 billion of security work by the end of the “Bremer year” and would account for upwards of 30 percent of the Iraq “reconstruction budget” (Scahill 2008: 141). During that period, large corporations like Halliburton and Blackwater implemented a new business model with the support of Washington:

Blackwater’s style fit in perfectly with Bremer’s mission in Iraq. In fact, one could argue that Bremer didn’t just get protection from Blackwater’s highly trained mercenaries but also from the all-powerful realities of the free market lab he was running in Iraq. Indeed, it seems that those forces were what Bremer banked on to survive Iraq job – if he died, Blackwater’s reputation would be shot. “If Blackwater loses a principal (like Bremer), they’re out of business, aren’t they?” asked Colonel Hammes. “Can you imagine being Blackwater, trying to sell your next contract, saying, “Well, we did pretty well in Iraq for about four months, and then he got killed.’ And you’re the CEO who’s going to hire and protect your guys. You’ll say, ‘I think I’ll find somebody else.’ ... The problem for Blackwater [is] if the primary gets killed, what happens to Blackwater is they’re out of business. For the military, if the primary gets killed, that’s a very bad thing. There will be after-action reviews, etc., but nobody’s going out of business (Scahill 2008: 137).

Based on a contractual partnership tied up through commercial interests for PMCs, problems quickly rose, as major discrepancies existed between the mission and commercial imperatives.

As the story relating to the close protection of Bremer by Blackwater, the commercial interest meant that PMCs were highly adverse to risk, and therefore,

would use violence pre-emptively in the streets of Iraq in order to secure their principals. At the same time, PMCs would not risk the lives of their employees if a situation was deemed too dangerous, regardless of the consequences of disrupting the service. According to Peter Singer, “concern for their private personnel and assets was valued as more important than the public mission. [...] Under conditions of great danger such as open warfare [...] they will discontinue operations. Our logistics system is a house of cards” (Singer 2008: 253).

One of the main assumptions made regarding outsourcing security and logistics was that “a company normally wants to have a continuing corporate existence: if it acquires a bad reputation, it will rule itself out of certain business” (Hughes 2007: 108 – 109). When it gets to warfare, the situation is rather the opposite since the continual fighting guarantees continual employment, the commercial interests of companies being at odds with the primacy of the US Forces to make the transition towards the end of the mission in Iraq. This striking reality was apparent on the ground where the Iraqi population was confused by the actions of PMCs, thus, bringing fatal consequences for the civilians and where the US troops were taking the brunt of the anger (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 239). As a mix amalgam of US Forces and private contractors roamed the country:

[T]here was no official explanation given to Iraqis as to who these heavily armed, often non uniformed forces were. It would be a year before Bremer would officially get around to issuing an order that defined their status – as immune from prosecution. Iraqis who were killed or wounded by these mercenaries had no recourse for justice. Many Iraqis – and some journalists – erroneously believed that the mercenaries were CIA or Israeli Mossad agents, an impression that enraged citizens who encountered them. The mercenaries’ conduct and reputation also angered actual US intelligence officers who felt the mercenaries could jeopardize their own security in the country (Scahill 2008: 143).

Numerous reports made by Iraqi police and civilians alike mentioned incidents involving contractors, but no actions was taking by the transition government until the incident of Nisour Square where 17 civilians where killed and many more wounded when a contractor working for Blackwater conducting an escort

mission mistakenly thought he heard a gun shot. After firing at anything moving in the square, they all left the scene at high speed rendering no assistance to civilians (Scahill 2008). The aftermath of Nisour Square<sup>14</sup> led “the House to approve a legislation that would ensure that all contractors would be subject to prosecution in US civilians courts for crimes committed on a foreign battlefield” (Scahill 2008: 460). This was a step in the right direction considering that contractors were completely immune from Iraqi law since 2004 (de Nevers 2009: 170).

To this day, no contractors were found guilty of crimes while operating in Iraq and the fate of the members involved is unknown, but no charges were pressed in any US courts and back in Iraq, military legal jurisdiction over civilians is limited and lead to no sanctions (Sherman 2010: 241). Following the massacre, Blackwater “signed more that \$144 million in contracts with the State Department for ‘protective services’ in Iraq and Afghanistan alone and, over the following weeks and months, won millions more in contracts with other federal entities like the Coast Guard, the Navy, and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (Scahill 2008: 449). The reprehensible conduct of contractors abroad was left unpunished. The lack of restraint (a key component of the US warrior ethos) showed in their risk-adverse attitude was encouraged, especially since their actions were insufficient for the US government to stop using their services. The lack of accountability and oversight led many contractors and scholars to call Iraq the “Wild West” (Robert Pelton, Shadow Company; Scahill 141). Following the securing of further business contracts between Blackwater and the US government, their partnership was celebrated in a political event on the Hill where Blackwater was heralded as being “a silent partner in the war on terror” (Scahill 2008: 181), its role being deemed so essential that “without

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<sup>14</sup> On September 16, 2007, a convoy of four armoured vehicles operated by Blackwater indiscriminately opened fired on cars and bystanders after taking a one-way in the wrong direction in Nisour Square, Baghdad. The incident resulted in seventeen Iraqis killed and more than twenty wounded. Immediately following the incident, Blackwater tried to cover up their actions claiming they have been violently attacked, claim that was false (Scahill 2008: 3-9).

Blackwater, the State Department itself would have been cancelled in Iraq” (Fainaru 2008: 181).

Securing numerous contracts abroad was only part of the strategy used to increase the profit margin of PMCs. For instance, large corporations like Halliburton diminishes the cost of their personnel by hiring people from around the world with troubling consequences. The working conditions offered by PMCs in Iraq were varied, ranging from excellent to American citizens to mediocre and inhumane to foreign nationals. The problems of discrepancies between the mission goals and the commercial interests of the corporations operating in Iraq were noticeable through hiring practices that would be illegal in the United States. Halliburton put in place a pay system tied to the country of origin of the employee:

Thus, a Bangladeshi cleaner would be paid less than a Pakistani, a Georgian truck driver more than a Fijian, and a white South African security guard would make more than an Indian for doing the very same job. The poorer the country of citizenship, the less the workers were paid, which is not unlike the caste system in India or the apartheid system in South Africa before the African National Congress came to power (Chatterjee 2009: 144-145).

More shockingly, such situation was known to US Army officials that had no other choice but to accept these practices, avoiding the moral dilemma happening right under their nose: “The (salary) decision is not based on the value of his life but on the cost of training and equipping the workforce. Nor would it be right for the US Army to enforce US-based salaries where no one else could match it. Life sometimes isn’t fair” (Army Corps spokesperson Richard Dowling) (Chatterjee 2009: 156). If the pay system was not enough to be offended, Halliburton was also instituting unacceptable practices towards their employees (as one mentioned):

We were locked up in a small area, which had heavy wiring all around. We were made to do menial tasks for U.S. soldiers like picking up their excreta, washing their clothes, picking up their cigarette butts – all this for US\$50 a month, and a plate of boiled rice once a day. If we raised our voice, we were tortured.” “We were made to drive trucks right into the areas where bombs

were being dropped. We could not protest either, for our passports were with the company authorities” (Chatterjee 2009: 147).

The conditions were so mediocre and the reports so shocking that the Defense department launched an investigation regarding practices of large PMCs. The investigators unfolded illegal practices unthinkable in the United States:

Defense Department investigators have found evidence of a practice, widespread among contractors and subcontractors in Iraq, of “holding and withholding employee passports to, among other things, prevent employees ‘jumping’ to other employers.” This practice is in direct violation of human trafficking laws. Complaints have also surfaced of foreign nationals being subjected to poor sanitation, squalid living conditions, and poor medical care. On April 19, 2006, the Joint Contracting Command—Iraq/Afghanistan issued a memorandum to all contractors ordering them to cease the practice of withholding passports and requiring a minimum of 50 feet of acceptable square footage of personal living space per worker” (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 236).

The administration that allowed unacceptable working conditions in Iraq also raised major concerns on another front, that of oversight. As early as 2004, the GAO found “significant problems in almost every area, including ineffective planning, inadequate cost control, insufficient training of contract management officials, and a pattern of recurring problems with overseeing subcontractors” (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 240), hinting at issues with accountability. Even organization like the CIA were aware of the state of affairs when it got to PMCs in Iraq, as an senior analyst of the CIA affirmed that his “major concern is the lack of accountability, the lack of responsibility, the entire industry is essentially out of control” (Scahill 2008: 454). Evidence points out to problems being “systemic, much of it attributed to insufficient government oversight over these contractors (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 231). And while the abuses continued, the steady increase of PMCs activities in Iraq led to further employment opportunities for serviceman and servicewomen ending their tour of duty.

The endless possibilities for profits and personal enrichment led many “soldiers [to seek] more lucrative posts with private companies, which also aggressively headhunted Special Forces men for private work in Iraq. “We were

bigger than life to a lot of the military guys,” said ex-Blackwater contractor Kelly Capeheart. “You could see it in their eyes when they looked at us – or whispered about us. A lot of them were very jealous. They felt like they were doing the same job but getting paid a lot less” (Scahill 2008: 140). According to Sherman, “contractor salaries are sometimes four times as high as those of uniformed soldiers doing the same job” (Sherman 2010: 241), creating a feeling of envy but also eroding the confidence between soldiers in the US Army more often just deepening the sense of betrayal (Sherman 2010: 241). Simply put, “the historical cases of placing better-paid, hired forces alongside lesser-paid, local public forces do not bode well” (Singer 2008: 199).

Even the best soldiers have considered the offers made by PMCs. Like Fruity Rudy Reyes, acting as himself in the miniseries *Generation Kill*:

[H]e left the Corps after his second deployment in Iraq to teach martial arts and believes mercenary work corrodes the warrior ethos of those lured into it. “A true warrior can only serve others, not himself,” he says. “When you become a mercenary, you’re just a bully with a gun.” He adds, “But these companies offer so much money, even I have almost signed up a couple of times.” (Wright 2008: 368)

PMCs targeted military personnel with the highest tactical skills, like the Special Forces. For the US Army, this process was a completely self-defeating since the investment in their training was publically funded and the returns (via working for PMCs) was made by the private sector (Singer 2008: 257). Such hard feelings are not surprising since politicians have been highly troubled with the cohabitation of contractors/mercenaries and citizen-armies since their instauration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a series of debates related by Sarah Percy regarding citizens’ armies in Europe, almost all countries came to the conclusion that “the sacrifice of the citizen in defense of the state was a moral good, and in its morality, was also practical” (Percy 2007: 144), creating a norm that left no space for other actors on battlefield. Most European countries start doubting the loyalty of foreign troops, and as the moral value of their own soldiers was valued, placing them side-by-side would endanger that moral character embodied by the citizen-soldier (Percy 2007: 160). While it remains “simply unargued that

organized violence centred on strong group identification is in itself morally better” (Percy 2007: 55), the accountability, ability of oversight and the moral character (through the US warrior ethos) expected from the US Forces is incompatible with PMCs. Peter Singer argues that “public military forces are more tightly controlled by a series of domestic political and legal institutions, public opinion, and international law than are private militaries (Percy 2007: 10; Singer 2008: 220), a position shared through the lens of the US warrior ethos.

The context in Iraq where PMCs were operating in conjunction with US Forces constituted a first in history by degree of magnitude and marked a clear transition witnessed through most current engagements of the United States that “are unconventional conflicts or low-intensity conflicts that fall in the gray zone between war and peace” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 52). The problems linked to the cohabitation of PMCs and serviceman/servicewomen is not only regarding pay or working conditions but also about the fundamental mismatch of goals and expectations (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 19). The primary goal of the Army is

[T]he success of the mission, while the goal of the contractor is profit. This mismatch manifested itself in the run-up to the war when the Army, although short on logistics support personnel, still worked with a sense of urgency. The contractor, on the other hand, did not have the same sense of urgency. It had an economic incentive to extend the work as long as possible with as many employees so it could increase its profits (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 19).

This situation resonates at the heart of the US warrior ethos and the commitments serviceman/servicewomen are ready to make in the accomplishment of their duties. In the shared community of faith that troops shares with their enemies and keeping in mind the importance of peace in US manuals, the use of foreign fighters by Britain during the Independence War of 1776 indicated “to the Americans that she was interested in conquest and not reconciliation” (Percy 2007: 126). The use of contractors meant the impossibility of thinking a shared future, a philosophical objection that is hard to shake. In the same spirit, like Christopher Coker argues, a critical distinction also exists between a contract and the *covenant* linking the American people and the US Forces:

[W]e must draw a critical distinction between the professional contract which binds the ordinary soldier to the state and a warrior's personal *covenant* with his own profession. Social contracts produce governments, nations and centralised power: they are the basis of all political society. A covenant, by contrast, produces families, communities, traditions and norms. [...] What makes a covenant more 'virtuous' than a contract is that it is unconditional (Coker 2007: 93).

That covenant enables the personal sacrifice of troops and the duty of restraint in the exercise of their duties, an obligation that cannot be legally requested from PMCs. The best example for this difference lies in the numerous examples of PMCs stopping supply convoys in dangerous areas because they were not willing to accept the risks (Chatterjee 2009: 162), which represents a "fundamental danger of outsourcing the critically important supply chain lies in the contractor's ability to quit the battlefield, to decide not to perform because of the dangers involved. There is no constitutional basis for compelling a contractor to perform on a contract. In short, military commanders cannot rely on contractors to be there when it counts" (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 232). It is interesting to note that such scenario has been envisioned by the Department of Defense Inspector General "warned them of the possibility as far as 1991" (Rasor and Bauman 2007: 232). This transition is also palpable with the "traditional rationales behind the initiation, maintenance, and continuation of war are under siege. The profit motive has become a central motivator, equal or greater to analyst puts it with enough money anyone can equip a powerful military force. With a willingness to use crime, nearly anyone can generate enough money" (Singer 2008: 64). The unfortunate truth mentioned by Singer fuels the use of PMCs in Iraq where "we have achieved this idea of the contract army. We are not starting the process; we are close to finishing it" (Armstrong 2008: 247).

Especially with the results obtained in Iraq, "Machiavelli's criticism still stands today: effective mercenaries will feel their power and act in their own interests. A mercenary force that can use violence effectively will not feel subservient to its government paymaster, and can ignore or bend instructions to its own interests. The ineffective mercenary, on the other hand, will let the

government down ‘in the usual way’, by delivering a military disaster of failure” (Hughes 2007: 95). But the advantages of using PMCs were different in Iraq, in considering the staggering profits accrued through the decade in Iraq, a “politics of invisibility” (Nordstrom 2004: 34) was made possible and it was not an accident. It was created in order to enable a cost-effective, radical and unethical practice of warfighting the US Forces was unable to deliver by themselves. The RMA causes a “serious corruption of the art of war. Armed mercenaries are an army of corruption – corruption as the destruction of public ethics, as the unleashing of the passion of power” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 48). In this sense, importance should be put in restoring accountability to these citizens, the American people from which the state’s right to use the force derived from, enforcing the “idea of democratic control of the armed force” (Baker 2011: 85). Many options exist to address the privatization failure of Iraq but it remains harder for the US government to re-establish the trust between the soldiers in the institution of the Army. I echoed Armstrong’s feeling that in face of the experience of Iraq, the American people “would feel more comfortable if the soldiers sent to save the innocent, keep the peace, protect our borders and fight our wars were drawn from regular volunteer armies, made up of men and women who fought for our ideals and projected our beliefs, nor cold-hearted killers who were in it for the cash” (Armstrong 2008: 249). In the meanwhile, the market for PMCs will remain because there is a requirement for “these not so respectable firms because of their fungibility; there is a market for operations better be kept in secrecy, for clandestine politically dubious and morally questionable security, military and, particularly, combat operations” (Jäger and Kummel 2007: 462). The future for PMCs is promising and that state of affairs is more than threatening for the moral character of the public soldier and the US warrior ethos.

#### ETHICS AND MERCENARIES: A PRIVATE DILEMMA

Baker’s book, *Just Warriors, Inc.: The Ethics of Privatized Force* tries to provide an answer to the ethical question of the use of mercenaries and private

contractors in modern theatre of operations. In her book, she makes a frontal assault on many assertions condemning the use of private soldier:

But the private warrior's former military service can hardly be considered to make him less suited to the task of ending conflict than his counterpart still in uniform! The assumption here seems generally to go in the opposite direction – the private warrior, once a respectable and respected member of his nation's military, has, by dint of signing a commercial contract requiring him to make use of the skills learned while in the military, suddenly developed a sleazy and untrustworthy character. Of course, the assumption is never put this badly, because so described its unsustainability is obvious (Baker 2011: 57).

Baker's argument is valid to question how the moral and ethical foundations of a private soldier would be drastically different from a state's military force soldier when considering that most of the recruits of PMCs are ex-servicemen who decided to leave the Army for multiple reasons. A priori, on that specific point, she is right; both (private and state's military soldiers) are sharing the same martial education, including their exposure to the US warrior ethos. Such argument is often used to comment on the good nature of the contractor and thus legitimize the continual privatization of the battlespace but goes up so far and comes short to offer answers to other pressing issues. A more detailed look brings far more questions to which the answers are not obvious and becomes heavily tainted for the private soldier.

And what if the recruits are not coming from a previous serviceman pool? What's the ethical background of a security agent who decides to go work for a specific PMC? What attracted him to the job? I doubt it was only because it was "the right thing to do". And even if it was, why has he not joined the US Army? Quickly, it becomes obvious that the main recruiting tool of those companies is the financial compensation related to working in dangerous environments and overseas. As mentions Baker, "the really important ethical issues come down to the responsibility of the state for its decisions about the exercise of armed force and the agents that exercise force on its behalf" (when a plan to withdraw most US troops from Iraq involves the removal of more than 1.5 million pieces of equipment). The possibility of withdrawal led the Pentagon to issue nearly

billion-dollar contracts (new ones!) to increase the number of private security contractors in that country?” (Engelhardt 2010: 4). It is now admitted that the PMCs are here to stay and that the impacts on the US warrior will be felt for a long time.

### **3. SUMMARY**

In the last two years, the US Forces have started pulling back from Iraq paving the road for an “after” Iraq war. Meanwhile, contractors are still at work in Iraq and chances are they will still be there long after the last American soldier left; thus, it is impossible to forecast when the contractors will be home themselves. Like Christopher Kinsey’s reminded us in Chapter one, “there is nothing unique about privatization of violence. [...] What is unique today about private security is the manifestation it has taken” (Kinsey 2009: 157 – 158). While we can still wait to pass “final judgments about the performance of enlisted men and women during the war America’s soldiers were praised by their leaders and, despite profound division over the legitimacy of their mission, treated with respect by the American people” (Bailey 2009: 256-257). At this time, it is utopian to believe we can expect the same level of accountability and scrutiny from the private sector and contractors working in Iraq. The combination of an absence of law and political will (Singer 2008: 251) led to the unfortunate situation where “money changed everything” and where the ultimate goal of the war was “not peace, not victory, not a better Iraq” (Fainaru 2008: 215). The contractors themselves worked at making Iraq a remote place, keeping their roles “as vague as the war itself” (Fainaru 2008: 215), and in this way, “the military companies move from consultants to stakeholders, complicating the objectivity of their stated role” (Selber and Jobartah 2002: 91). In the best-case scenario, we can hope PMCs and contractors are apolitical and in the worst, they work at maintaining their contract alive by fostering instability: “the mercenary needs war to survive, that’s what his business is all about” (Frances Stonor Saunders, Author & Historian, *Shadow Company*). Also, the experience allowed in Iraq with the RMA was unable to shake off the lasting uneasiness towards the motivation of PMCs and contractors to participate in a conflict, especially taking into account the value of

selfless service and the political decision behind compelling a soldier in the US Forces to fight (Percy 2007: 55). How one can cope with such an unforgiving truth when “the long-term future for the private military/security industry has never looked better” (Kinsey 2009: 109)?

## CONCLUSION

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**Figure 4.1** US soldiers patrolling in Afghanistan, Copyright Washington Post

The recent resurgence of contractors on modern battlefields has not been without issues, especially in the context of Iraq as shown in Chapter 3. The contractors and their employers continue to constitute one of the quintessential love-hate relationships of IR. The invasion of Iraq, with a minimal commitment of forces (upon Rumsfeld's request) that were unable to impose order during the early days of the occupation, led the US to turn even more towards outsourcing, which became the easiest and quickest solution to the occupation of Iraq. In that regard, the use of PMCs in Iraq was not only essential but also constituted the last resort option for the United States, who seemed to care more about the footprint left in the Middle East than truly restoring peace after removing the regime of Saddam Hussein. The constant increase of PMCs and mercenaries in Iraq was justified through a doctrine embracing a reliance on the private sector to provide logistics and warfighting capabilities fuelled by an inadequate planning

of the reconstruction phase by the Pentagon. Unfortunately, moral clarity and reality clashed at that junction (Cotkin 2010: 199).

This thesis had for objective to explicitly and systematically examine the US warrior ethos in the face of the increased privatization of warfare and to examine the importance of the relationship between civic identity and the US warrior ethos. I investigated the gray areas of warfare created by the simultaneous employment of private and public forces in Iraq. How such privatization of the military affairs affect the public soldier and his moral identity? I argued that the US warrior ethos falls short in forming and constituting an ethical and moral identity for US servicemen/servicewomen. Simultaneously, the extent of the privatization of the war in Iraq brought a significant number of contractors working for PMCs in direct contact with soldiers. I contended that raising a “shadow army” working for and with the US forces created a new way of waging war where certain aspects of warfare were obscured, hidden and, most critically, depoliticized. Following the practices promoted by the RMA, the process of hiring a private force was intended and deliberate by the DoD. The unaccounted consequence was the erosion of the US warrior ethos by placing business considerations and personal safety ahead of the core civic commitment to protect the community at great personal risk. This growing tension raises serious doubts about the reliability of the US warrior ethos to provide the ethical grounding required to guide soldiers’ conduct in the performance of their duty for the American people.

In this thesis, I created a dialogue between disciplines that usually operates in confinement from each other, building bridges between IR, cultural studies and ethics, especially in providing an understanding of the US warrior ethos. Using the main values of a poststructuralist approach, hope and reconciliation, I studied the foundations and patrol some defining limits of the warrior ethos as a moral and ethical identity. The main intention was to create a comprehensive understanding through different media (academic literature, film, mini-series and documentaries) of the contemporary identity that constitute the

US warrior ethos. To do so, I described the existential crisis that exists within the US forces with the duality (public and private) of forces seen and employed on US battlefields. I defined an approach linking multiple sources in an ongoing effort to built bridges between disciplines, more specifically between the literature on PMCs and the historical birth of the US warrior ethos. By focusing primarily on two distinctive values of the warrior ethos, sacrifice and restraint, the thesis was able to describe the impossibility for private forces to embody a commitment to these values. In describing the atrocities, incidents and clear misguided efforts of PMCs in Iraq, I showed the inner contradictions of objectives between the US forces and the PMCs, a situation adding to the uneasiness related to their employment in the same theatre of operations.

Refocusing our attention on material that was left untouched, to include additional personal accounts of PMCs working in Iraq or official films produced for the US Army regarding the military ethos, could provide us a wider and more comprehensive scope to the research project. The results of this thesis create many avenues regarding the use of force by the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has become apparent that the resources invested in warfighting have reached epic proportions and constitute large portions of the national budget. Since the extent of services provided to the US Forces by PMCs in Iraq confirms the tale of two distinct armies working for the same employer, focusing our studies on these ad hoc “shadow armies” would enable a better understanding of the privatization of force and what it entails, especially with the dimension of depolitization of the conflict and how it affects democratic control in the United States. For reasons of space, I was not able to investigate testimonies from private soldiers on how they view their services, and most interestingly, if they were previous servicemen/servicewomen, why they chose to leave the US Army to join the PMCs. Most scholars researching PMCs also fail to engage that aspect of the problem, and interesting insights could be obtained by addressing that side of the story. At last, let us go back to our assessment of the warrior ethos.

## **TOWARDS A BRAVE NEW US WARRIOR ETHOS**

Education, training and experience are the dimensions provided by the military establishment to citizens joining its rank. Through education and training, recruits are provided the skills and tools to become effective soldiers when deployed to fight America's wars. Through experience, they acquire the wisdom to foresee outcomes and difficult situations (trusting their instinct), becoming more efficient while also being sold to the warrior ethos ideal. In effect, a US soldier cannot escape the hard truth; you might do everything right and still lose comrades or subordinates, fail the mission or kill innocent civilians. Such toll is also part of the memories brought back home by soldiers when their tour of duty is done.

If the warrior ethos is more than a recruiting tool, then we need to pause and reflect on what it means, how it is carried out by US forces and what it ought to be. There is one main victim in hiding the real cost of waging war through a series of subcontractors: the political truth of what the US foreign policy stands for and how it is carried out. Meanwhile, soldiers will carry on their missions abiding to the US warrior ethos. If the American people believes in violence and killing as a legitimate tool to achieve political objectives, then, there is an urgent need to reengage the population in the nation's defense, not only by patrolling the limits of soldiering but also by comprehending the suffering in people's lives (Nordstrom 2004: 34). Ultimately, avoiding asking and answering the questions raised throughout this thesis regarding the way Western civilizations use violence and how it impacts the public figure of the soldier would be missing the overall underlying picture regarding the meaning of American civic responsibilities. Like Hardt and Negri remind us, "[w]ithout the horror of war there is less incentive to put an end to it, and war without end, as Kirk says, is the ultimate barbarity" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 46).

## ANNEX A: CONTEMPORARY MERCENARIES

### What Makes a Mercenary<sup>15</sup>?

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Seven essential characteristics distinguish modern-day mercenaries from other combatants and military organizations:

*Foreign:* A mercenary is not a citizen or resident of the state in which he or she is fighting

*Independence:* A mercenary is not integrated (for the long term) into any national force and is bound only by the contractual ties of a limited employee

*Motivation:* A mercenary fights for individual short-term economic reward, not for political or religious goals

*Recruitment:* Mercenaries are brought in by oblique and circuitous ways to avoid legal prosecution

*Organization:* Mercenary units are temporary and ad-hoc groupings of individual soldiers

*Services:* Lacking prior organization, mercenaries focus on just combat service for single clients

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<sup>15</sup> P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, p. 43.

## **ANNEX B: THE GENEVA CONVENTION ON MERCENARIES**

The actual definition in international law as set out in Additional Protocol I to Article 47 of the Geneva Convention (1977) classifies a mercenary according to the following criteria<sup>16</sup>:

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- a. Is specially recruited locally or abroad to fight in an armed conflict;
  - b. Does, in fact, take part in activities;
  - c. Is motivated to take part in hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain;
  - d. Is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of a territory controlled by a party to the conflict;
  - e. Is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict;
  - f. Has not been sent by a state, which is not a party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.
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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Kinsey, *Corporate Soldiers and International Security*, p. 19.

## **ANNEX C: THE CASPAR WEINBERER DOCTRINE FOR US MILITARY INTERVENTION**

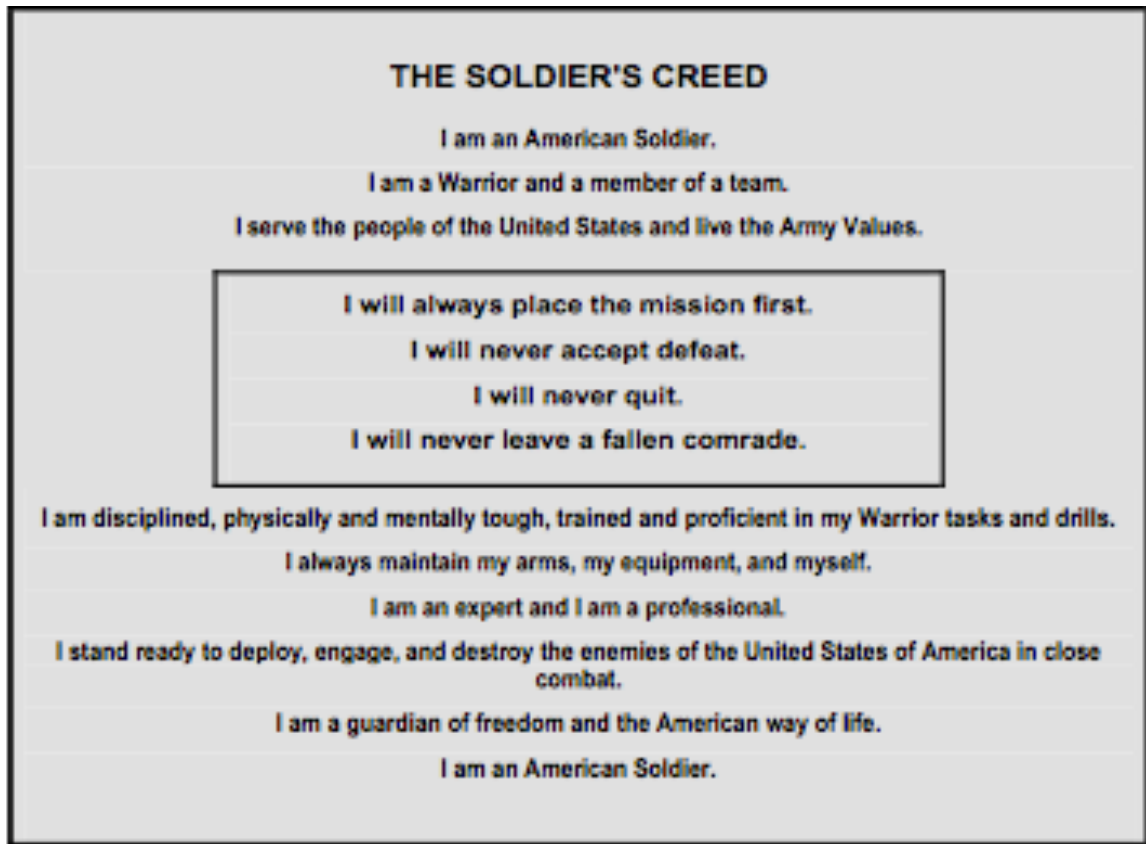
In November 1984 Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who had served under General Douglas MacArthur in the Pacific and had admired him greatly, articulated six principles for the use of force by the United States that became canonical within the defense establishment; they embodied, for a generation of officers, the “normal” theory of civil-military relations<sup>17</sup>.

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- (1) The United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest.
  - (2) If we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning. If we are unwilling to commit the forces or resources necessary to achieve our objectives, we should not commit them at all.
  - (3) If we do decide to commit forces to combat overseas, we should have clearly defined political and military objectives. And we should know precisely how our forces can accomplish those clearly defined objectives. And we should have and sent the forces needed to do just that. As Clausewitz wrote, “No one starts a war – or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so – without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it.
  - (4) The relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed – their size, composition, and disposition – must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary. Conditions and objectives invariably change during the course of a conflict. When they do change, then our combat requirements must also change. We must continuously keep as a beacon light before us the basic questions: “Is this conflict in our national interest?” “Does our national interest require us to fight, to use force of arms?” If the answers are “yes,” then we must win. If the answers are “no,” then we should not be in combat.
  - (5) Before the United States commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress.
  - (6) The commitment of US forces to combat should be a last resort.
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<sup>17</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, p. 187.

## **ANNEX D: THE US ARMY WARRIOR ETHOS**

This is a copy of the Soldier's Creed or the Warrior Ethos of the US Army since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> Department of the Army, *The Warrior Ethos and Soldier Combat Skills*, Department of the Army, p. xv.

## **ANNEX E: THE MERCENARY AND THE PATRIOT**

Here is a copy of Hardt and Negri, *The Mercenary and the Patriot* from *Multitude* (p. 49 – 50)

The end of the Roman Empire and the collapse of the Italian Renaissance are two examples, among many others, of the triumph of mercenaries. When the general population no longer constitutes the armed forces, when the army is no longer the people in arms, then empires fall. Today all armies are again tending to become mercenaries armies. As at the end of the Renaissance, contemporary mercenaries are led by condottieri. There are condottieri who lead national squadrons of specialists in various military technologies, other condottieri who lead battalions of guardians of order, like global Swiss Guards, and still others who lead armies of the satellite countries of the global order. Some of the most horrible massacres are conducted at the hands of mercenaries, like those at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut in 1982. Or rather, as Jean Genet wrote after visiting those camps, they were mercenaries of mercenaries.

Today, however, war is no longer conducted as it was at the beginning of modernity. The figure of the condottiere is often filled by an engineer or, better, someone linked to a number of industries that develop new weapons, communication systems, and means of control. Today's mercenaries have to be biopolitical soldiers who must master a variety of technical, legal, cultural, and political capabilities. A mercenary can even serve as the head of state in an occupied country destined to be marginal in the global hierarchy: a Gauleiter, like the district leaders of the Nazi party, or a Karzai and a Chalabi, businessmen thrust into power, or simply a Kurtz, reigning over subordinated peoples like a god. A small group of highly skilled mercenaries with the ominous name Executive Outcomes, for example, mostly former members of the South African Defense Force, determined governmental power and controlled central industries, such as the diamond trade, for almost a decade in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and other neighboring countries of central and west Africa.

The relationships that form between the imperial aristocracies and the mercenaries are at some times intimate and at others quite distant. What is most feared is that a condottieri will turn against the imperial aristocracy. Saddam Hussein did that after having served as Swiss Guard against the threats of Islamic Iran; Osama Bin Laden did that after having liberated Afghanistan from the Soviets. The mercenary taking power, according to Machiavelli, signals the end of the republic. Mercenary command and corruption, he said, become synonymous. Should we expect an uprising of mercenaries against today's global Empire, or will the mercenaries tend simply to assimilate and serve supporting roles in the ruling structures? Machiavelli teaches us that only good weapons make good laws. One might infer, then, that bad weapons – and in Machiavelli's language, mercenaries are bad weapons – make bad laws. The corruption of the military, in other words, implies the corruption of the political order.

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