

Private Military Companies

Videtur – It is the case that the use of Private Military and Security Forces by the Executive branch of our government is a threat to democracy.

Gentlemen – I pledge allegiance to the flag – of the united forces of G4S, and to the shareholders for which it stands, one corporation under arms, inscrutable, with power and profits for all - its owners.

Bid farewell to the world of George Patton and Dwight Eisenhower. All hail Blackwater and G4S. Enter the age of the private military company – PMC for short. Companies like G4S—the second largest private employer in the world with 620,000 employees. Thanks to PMC's, we can wave goodbye to the sacred bond of soldier and country. It's no longer cost effective.

We are privatizing our security. Today over 50% of our military personnel budget goes to private contractors, companies that operate in more than 125 countries.

This is no accident. It's by deliberate plan of our Executive Branch. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld gave an address on September 10, 2001. He said America faces "an adversary that poses a serious threat to the security of the United States of America." Not the defunct Soviet Union or the "decrepit dictators of the world, whose time is past," in his words. No, Rumsfeld said after pausing for dramatic effect. "The adversary's ... the Pentagon bureaucracy." He advocated turning our security over to private contractors.

He got his chance the next day with the 9/11 attacks. The use of private military companies took off like a rocket. By the time Rumsfeld left office in 2006, PMC's had captured 50% of our military personnel budgets.

So, what's the threat to democracy?

First, PMC's threaten democracy because they are not transparent or accountable. According to the Manual of the Mercenary Soldier, a guidebook for people who want to become private soldiers of

fortune, “You can go your whole career and never be asked to take an oath.” Contract mercenaries are not subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The Geneva Conventions don’t apply. The US insists on immunity from nations where they act, and no PMC employee has ever been indicted in a US court for actions committed abroad.

PMC contracts with the Executive Branch are loose, with virtually no metrics. This cuts Congress out of the action, other than to authorize large blocks of funding the Executive disperses among favored PMC’s.

Now, Armed Forces personnel are not saints. But they’re subject to penalties including public disgrace, jail time and death. Their training is to follow orders and implement US policy, not to be swashbuckling soldiers of fortune.

Not so for PMC personnel. John Geddes, an American mercenary, described Blackwater convoys operating in Iraq: “I know from my days on the Baghdad Highway that they send bursts into every junction

ahead of them like they are spraying disinfectant onto bugs. How do I know? Because I've watched them do it. The whole of Iraq has watched them do it." Blackwater helped turn the liberation of Iraq into a hated US occupation. PMC's don't work to win hearts and minds, but to make money.

Well, one might say, the PMC's are accountable to the President, and we can elect someone else after four years.

In 2007 Senator Obama sponsored an Act to monitor use and abuse by US paid private contractors and for their personnel to be subject to discipline. But as Senator Obama became Commander in Chief, he did an about-face. His defense to the flip flop? "We have 140,000 private contractors right there in Iraq. I don't want to replace those contractors with more US troops, because we don't have them, all right?" By the summer of 2013 there were more private contractors working for the Defense Department in Afghanistan than military personnel. So a liberal president uses PMC's proportionately more

than George W Bush. No Commander in Chief can resist the temptation because PMC's amount to the President's private army. What could be better for the Executive Branch? George W Bush can proclaim Mission Accomplished in May 2003, and President Obama can say he ended the American combat role in Afghanistan and Iraq, while the truth is that uniforms have been swapped for private camouflage, and the missions continue. And when the coffins of American contractors come home, they're not met at the Air Force base. No burials at Arlington. War becomes invisible.

The use of PMC's becomes a curtain. Like the Wizard of Oz, a US Commander in Chief can hide the sausage of war from the awareness of Congress and us, the public. No more nanny congressional committees to interfere with the President's practice of war. No transparency, no accountability, no democracy.

Threat number 2 is the degradation of our Armed Forces. PMC's are hollowing out our military. An infantry soldier makes about \$70 a

day, a mercenary \$500-1,500 a day. NCO's are lured away by \$100,000 salaries. PMC's today offer the full range of military operations. They gather intelligence, purchase weaponry, handle logistics, command fleets of drones, conduct surveillance, operate our IT systems through young employees like Edward Snowden, and engage in armed combat. As their offerings increase, the US military's capabilities decrease.

Our brightest and best can build their resumes in the US military and then follow the money right out of the Service and into private contracting. Maybe we should complete the privatization. We can rent out Arlington, with a Blackwater columbarium and a Halliburton Grove. We can put the whole cemetery up for bids, offering naming rights to G4S. And while we're at it, we could auction off the Navy, sell the Army on eBay, merge the Marines into G4S and contract the Air Force to Richard Branson or the Koch brothers.

A third threat arises because America suffers the damage from what PMC's do abroad. Unprovoked PMC killings of innocent civilians

throughout Iraq are well documented. Less known is their role at Abu Ghraib, or at our Benghazi mission, where a UK-based PMC hired without background checks the Libyan guards who controlled security access. We are tarred by a brush we don't control.

Threat number 4 – Mercenaries don't have to accept deployments like a flock of sheep. If they want to sit out a conflict, not a good day to get Osama Bin Laden? No problem. No more hype about duty to serve one's country. Contractors don't get purple hearts. Service is to company, not country.

As the Manual of the Mercenary Soldier teaches: "NO. It's the most important word in your vocabulary. ... [P]eople seem to think mercenary types are basically hellbent on suicide ... with the corollary attitude that if you *do* get killed – shrug – no great loss to society. ... You have every right, compadre, to take both the kamikaze proposition and the above crack as insults. You're no throwaway. Go ahead, throw

one right back at the sonofabitch. 'It's not that, boss. But suicide is not in my rules of engagement. *Go yourself, you piece of shit.*'"

A bit different from how privates respond to lieutenants? In the military, desertion is a capital offense. In the PMC world, it's a breach of contract, and you might be asked to leave.

Threat number 5 arises because PMC's operate everywhere a government or insurgent force will hire them. US law does not prevent their operating for the greatest foes of our democracy. American PMC's fought on both sides in the Sudan civil war. When PMC's have multiple contracts, which client gets priority? There's no loyalty factor. Maybe we should embrace globalization. How much more sophisticated it would be to contract soldiers from every part of the world. Why limit our personnel of war to citizens or would be citizens? We could recruit from ISIS and Boko Haram. They have pretty good fighters, and we can outbid their current employers.

There's one more threat more insidious than the others. History warns.

Consider Machiavelli from The Prince, written as the condottieri were seizing control of the city states that hired them:

“Mercenaries are both useless and dangerous; and if anyone attempts to found his state upon them, it will never be stable or secure.”

Perhaps you won't take advice from an Italian. So here's Dwight Eisenhower, our last general to be President in his farewell address 54 years ago. “We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

Ike's concerns are magnified today by the private companies that suck up the greatest share in history of our funding of the personnel of

war. This time what's at stake is not just the making of things but the people who defend us.

The only way PMC's can grow is to expand conflicts and increase military and security budgets. War is business, good business.

Businesses have to keep expanding their market, bringing customers in.

Their biggest risk is not competition. It's from a public that might want

to spend less on conflict. PMC's fear we are infected by Vietnam or

Mogadishu Syndrome. PMC's will do best if we are a chickenhawk

nation, where our Presidents use behind-the-curtain spending on

private contractors to draw us into wars we cannot win, wars with no

ending. And after the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United,

PMC's can spend unlimited amounts to get what they want. We've had

a Vice President from Halliburton. Why not Senators from Blackwater

and congressmen from DynCor?

So let's sum up. Is there a threat?

Undoubtedly. Whether and how we confront it is the test of our age. We can demand the transparency, install the controls, obtain the accountability, and maintain the primacy of our Armed Forces as the heart and brains of our defense. But that won't happen unless we first recognize that the PMC threat exists. If we do not recognize it, we are a herd of ostriches with heads in the sand.

I look forward to the response of former Naval officer McGavran. Because there's no rebuttal, I congratulate Fred in advance on his mastery of the art of - fiction.

Which pledge will our children and our grandchildren recite? Will they salute the flag of the United States of America, or a private military company?

The choice is ours.

Joseph J Dehner, For the Literary Club, January 26, 2015