

The Cost of the US Colonial War Against Iraq

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Most citizens of the world assume that when their country declares war, the country's army and weapons industry will be called upon to fight the battle. But what we find today is that a group of CEOs heading privatized military firms are sharing the power once vested exclusively in the President and Congress. Private military contractors are the new corporate face of war. They have sent their own mercenaries to Croatia, Macedonia, Columbia, Afghanistan and Iraq. These contractors enable the United States to wage war by proxy and without the kind of congressional voting or media coverage to which conventional wars were earlier subjected.

The US government increasingly relies on corporate enterprises such as Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI), which specializes in supplying military training and expertise to the US government and other countries. MPRI sees war as a commercial enterprise. On March 24, 1994, the defense minister of Croatia appealed to the United States for military assistance against Serbia. Under the United Nations arms embargo, the US could not legally provide any military assistance to the entities of the former Yugoslavia, but the Pentagon simply referred the Croatian minister to MPRI for aid. Just months after MPRI was hired, the Croatian army under their guidance launched a stunningly successful military operation [Uluja] or "Storm" against Krajina, a region of Croatia inhabited almost exclusively by ethnic Serbs. The MPRI employed air power, artillery and infantry forces, resulting in the death of countless Serbs and causing 250,000 of them to flee the country. And so Krajina was ethnically cleansed.

A large number of the private military corporations have crossed the fine line of legality, employing illegal business practices and hiring employees with criminal records while serving potentially illegal clients. Congress, the Defense Department and the Pentagon inadequately supervise the use of private military contractors, allowing them to break down the traditional norms of control.

Some 15,000 to 20,000 contractors are stationed in Iraq. There is a mercenary in place for every ten occupation soldiers. The contracted individual has a free hand in threatening or killing an Iraqi citizen. As mercenaries, these contractors do not fall under the UN charter, the Geneva Accords or the Nuremberg doctrines. On October 6, 2003, the Washington Times reported that military contractors guarding ministries killed Iraqi citizens without punishment or inquiries. Many of these contractors are not US citizens and are not subject to US laws

Blackwater USA, one of the largest of these corporations, flew in a group of sixty former commandos from Chili. Many of them were trained under the military government of Augusto Pinochet. Squads of Filipinos, Bosnians and US men are trained and hired for tasks

ranging from military training, intelligence, combat, and local security including protecting administrators like Paul Bremer. The salaries paid these mercenaries are as high as 1,000 to 1,500 US dollars a day. Philipinos, often referred to by their employers in racist terms, usually get \$4000 a month.

These are good times for recruiting mercenaries. Since the end of the Cold War some six million service men have been thrown into the unemployment market. With minimal job skills, they use their combat training to find work with private military corporations which offer them high salaries.

Private military corporations now do an estimated \$100 million in business world-wide each year. Much of it goes to top US corporations like Halliburton, its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root, or DynCorp and Raytheon. These corporations frequently overcharge the government for their services, and Congress and the Pentagon have begun investigations into how the money is being spent. Some \$1.6 million is now being withheld from Halliburton for overcharging for meals that were never sent to soldiers in Iraq. (1) Another Halliburton scam was to charge exorbitant amounts for delivering equipment in Iraq, using trucks that carried nothing. Such practices cost US taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

DynCorp has a contract worth tens of millions of dollars to train an Iraqi police force. This same corporation had an earlier contract to train the police force in Bosnia, but a scandal developed when the contractors were implicated in a sex slavery scandal which involved the buying and selling of young girls from Eastern Europe. No one was prosecuted, but the two whistle blowers were fired.

DynCorp also functions as an intelligence network for the Pentagon and the CIA. Following DynCorp advice in Haiti, the US occupation force in Haiti integrated former members of Ton Ton Macoutes, the private death squad begun by Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier, into the Haitian National police (HNP) and installed military officers involved in the 1991 coup d'etat in prominent positions. (3)

Private military corporations have penetrated Western warfare so deeply that they now constitute the largest portion of coalition forces in Iraq after the US military. Corporate power has always played a role in war, but it has never been so blatant in exercising its power. When their activities are questioned, corporations claim that private businesses cannot be subject to government scrutiny. Vice President Cheney refused to release the notes and attendees of his energy Plan to the Supreme Court, claiming "executive privilege" and protection of "national security." All of this to protect corporate power.

The US army estimated that of the \$87 billion earmarked in 2004 for the Iraqi campaign, Central Asia and Afghanistan, thirty billion of this money will be paid to private military corporations. On July 22, the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to approve more than \$400 billion in defense spending, including some \$25 billion in emergency funding for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the House of Representatives rubber-stamps billions of dollars for the war, the budget for children in poverty, the disabled and the elderly

had been drastically cut, leaving 36 US states in deep crisis. Aside from eliminating proper services for US citizens, the US government is now running a \$444 billion deficit.

According to estimates provided by the US Law Report and US Labor against War in June 2004, the war in Iraq has already cost the United States \$118, 518, 293, 319. As we move into 2005, the increased budget for the rebuilding of Iraq will cost billions more.

References

- (1) Associated Press, May 14, 2004
- (2) Guardian, UK, Article by Ian Traymore, December 10, 2003
- (3) Silverman, Ken, "Privatizing War", The Nation, July 28, 1997

For more information on Halliburton--recommended reading: "The Halliburton Agenda" by Dan Briody, published by John Wiley and Sons.

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