

On January 17 1961 President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave his farewell address to the American people after serving eight years in office. In this speech he warned: “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” (Eisenhower). This warning was given because he recognized that what is known today as the Arms and Military Services Industry was quickly gaining influence by becoming very prominent and entrenching itself as a pillar for the American Economy and was doing so unchecked and unchallenged. Never before in American history was there a “War based” industry that had established itself on a permanent basis, this changed shortly after the end of WWII when governments realized (especially in the U.S.A) that a standing army was necessary even in times of peace to deter future conflicts by displaying readiness and power. This created a huge opening for businesses that would supply materiel and services to militaries around the world. With the advent of the Cold War and all of its related conflicts ex-Military personnel began to offer their services in training and aiding foreign governments in low intensity conflicts, especially in Africa and Indo-China. With the end of WWII also came sudden decolonization of these areas which quickly began to generate fighting from within. Many groups attempted to seize power of the countries that had once enjoyed some stability due to their European colonizers. Men who formed these military “advising” companies recognized the potential that existed for business especially in newly formed countries, and thus the modern Private Military Company was born (Wood).

There are several ethical and moral implications when it comes to PMCs mostly because of their bad reputation. Although there have been examples of companies that actually had a positive impact in an area of their involvement for the most part there is a widespread fear and generalized idea that the men who work for PMCs are nothing but modern-age Mercenaries. This mindset should be changed in favor of a more critical approach to understanding these companies, whose name is somewhat of a novelty but their activities are not. Past events have shown great potential on what a PMC is capable of if operating within the confines of the law and working for a legitimate cause or government. However if there is no consequences or accountability for their actions there have been examples of sheer irresponsibility, even brutality, which outweigh any positive gain on their part and have highly influenced the bad reputation they have today.

Fighting wars has been since the dawn of humanity a black mark on the very things that makes us human. It is by far the most dangerous, deadly and destructive activity that human beings engage in; and while most conflicts are at least blanketed by some form of ideology and pride of nation, the role of the mercenary has always been to fight for personal gain and profit. Throughout history these men who choose to participate in conflicts on foreign lands in exchange of material compensation have been known by several names: Mercenaries, Privateers, Soldiers of Fortune, and most recently Private Military Contractors. Akin to the euphemization of what was once known as Shell Shock, then Battle Fatigue, later Operational Exhaustion and finally Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Carlin); the change in title in an attempt

to remove the negative connotations has not changed the fact that these words refer to things that society would rather see disappear.

In recent years, these Private Military Contractors have come to light and have been exposed because of several blunders documented openly on the media. The hanging of two Blackwater contractors in Fallujah in 2004, followed by the infamous Nisour Square Massacre finally brought international recognition to the dangers of having men-at-arms operating with no concern or consequence of the law (Scahill). Most people thought that this was a new phenomenon brought as a consequence of the never ending conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan but this couldn't be farther from the truth.

In 1997 Elizabeth Rubin, author for Harper's Magazine, published an article in order to shed some light on PMCs. She detailed the story of how in 1989 a retired South African Lieutenant-Colonel named Eeben Barlow founded a company named Executive Outcomes. Despite what imagery its name might convey, it was not an office building full of men in suits crunching numbers on a computer. Its business was strictly war, more specifically low intensity conflicts also known today as COIN (Counter Insurgency) operations, and they were good at it. From its formation in 1989 it was contracted by several governments in the African continent to help their usually substandard armies defeat the some of the many "Revolutionary Groups" that had and continue to caused strife in the region (Rubin). This company set the standard on what the PMC should be today by successfully ending two very destructive and bloody civil wars in Sierra Leone and Angola in the early 1990s, and they did it at a lower cost, both human

and material, than any conventional army or U.N. intervention (Weiner). For this reason they became known as the “go-to” people for unconventional conflicts which centered around the “pacification” of usually hostile areas in order to bring peace and of course, economic development. This was seen as a big breakthrough in Africa, especially because of the constant instability many countries in the continent continue to experience. EO became a major player in Africa by proving that they could effectively replace a conventional army and save countless lives, and of course dollars. They were so influential during this time that in beginning of the Rwandan Genocide, Subsecretary of the U.N. Kofi Annan briefly considered the option of letting EO intervene to stop the carnage, but decided against it because, as he put it: “the world is not yet ready to privatize peace.” (Weiner). Instead, the U.N. opted for sending a small contingent of international “Peacekeepers” to secure major cities and several refugee camps. Within days, heavily outnumbered and underequipped U.N. peacekeepers lost control of key areas and the result was one of the most horrific events in history. Extremist rebels raided cities and refugee camps to kill members of the opposing tribe and in less than 100 days at least 800,000 people lost their lives (some estimates say that 1,100,000 is a more realistic figure) (Weiner). This catastrophic failure on the part of the U.N. showed clearly that Africa was not a priority for the countries that make up the international organization the promotes “World Peace”, also it showed that nearly a million human lives were the price to save face and avoid the formality of accepting that Private companies could replace the U.N. in peacekeeping operations.

Rwanda however, was not the first instance when a PMC tried to intervene in world conflicts. In 2006 vice Chairman of Blackwater, an American PMC which in recent years has

come under attack by media and international organizations for their unsavory practices, argued during a conference about intervention in Darfur, that his company could stop the conflict at a cost "10 to 20 percent of what the UN would normally charge" (Wiener). However, there is a higher cost associated with accepting the use of these companies as a replacement for U.N. missions and what would otherwise necessitate intervention from a state or government. This would mean that politicians would have to come to terms with the idea of private entities dictating foreign development and, by association, foreign policy by means of a business transaction. The implications of letting PMCs operate freely are a harrowing preview of things to come if these are not kept in check. Private armies run by Corporations used for intimidation, gaining of power and even conquest are surely what most people fear when the topic of PMCs is discussed. However this is not, and should not be the case.

Eeben Barlow, a career military man, serving in several Special Forces and Unconventional Warfare units during the Apartheid Conflicts is highly regarded as a pundit when it comes to the issues surrounding PMCs. During his time in the South African Defense Force and at the helm of EO he learned a lot about conducting COIN operations, and the mechanics of how to deal with extremist rebellions, and general civil and political instability. Better stated in his own words: "I believe that only Africans can truly solve Africa's problems... I founded the PMC Executive Outcomes and was its chairman until I left in 1997. Until its closure in 1998, EO operated primarily in Africa helping African governments that had been abandoned by the West and were facing threats from insurgencies, terrorism and organized crime" (Barlow). While it may sound idealistic and somewhat naïve, this notion drove the company and

the people that worked for it to bring peace, albeit temporarily, to places that had not known a day without suffering in a very long time (Rubin). The peace in Sierra Leone was temporary in this case because after the rebels were defeated, several international organizations including the U.N. forced the Sierra Leonean government to cancel its contract with EO. Barlow protested claiming that the insurgents would once again take over and continue their reign of terror in the country once the company left. Sure enough 95 days after EO was forced to leave Sierra Leone, a new civil war erupted killing thousands (Wood). The work of EO in Sierra Leone shows a clear contrast between the popular view of the malicious mercenary and what a man envisioned to be the future of military operations in order to bring a measure of peace to usually neglected and unstable areas of the world.

During her time writing her article on EO, traveled Sierra Leone to get a firsthand account. There she was taken to a distant diamond mining town which in years past had been a battleground between the frail government forces, untrained and poorly financed, and the RUF (Revolutionary United Front). This group of self-named "Freedom Fighters" were financed by illegal diamond trading and often used child soldiers to do their fighting. Overlooked by the West entirely, RUF forces were being equipped, financed, trained and aided by the infamous Charles Taylor, a tyrannical and bloodthirsty dictator in the neighboring country of Liberia (Wood). EO had been contracted by the de facto regime in Sierra Leone which was quickly losing ground to the rebels, to help train and advise their army in order to finally end the bloody conflict. Rubin had arrived nearly two years after the last bullet was fired and the RUF were eliminated. There she met and interviewed one of the men that worked for EO who gave

her some powerful insight into the moral and ethical uncertainties of PMCs: "If you're killing for your government, your people, your fatherland, you have some loyalty. It's here," he said, grabbing his breast. "But if you're no longer killing for your government or your country, you're a murderer. So what does that make me?" (Rubin).

This profound personal statement sheds some humanity into the whole issue from within. It shows that even for a man whose livelihood depends on the existence of PMCs there are uncertainties to whether or not what they are doing is right or wrong. More so, it brings up the issue of what would happen if these highly trained, military "peacekeepers" were put under different management? As most military men, the people that work for PMCs are there to follow orders and get the job done and as stated before, EO was directed by a man who by all accounts proves to be level headed, and who is driven by an ideal of a peaceful African continent. If that were to be changed, these "contractors", hired because of their expertise in the art of war, could be put to use in a different manner.

A frightening example of what could happen was seen throughout the world when contractors from Blackwater shot to death 17 innocent Iraqis, among them women and children, in an incident that sparked outrage against PMCs. According to Jeremy Scahill, author of **Blackwater: The Rise of the World's most Powerful Mercenary Army**, the firm's CEO and founder Erik Prince lied when probed by Congress to provide answers for the senseless killings saying the men had acted in self-defense, and most of those directly involved in the shootings walked away without spending a single day in jail (Scahill). Also alarming is the fact that

member countries of the UAE (United Arab Emirates) have contacted PMCs in order to train special units in controlling civil unrest and guarding key buildings and oil fields (Hager). This is a disturbing fact because it appears as a response from the relatively recent Arab Spring revolts that have toppled despots in Libya, Yemen, Tunisia and Egypt and have caused civil war in Syria and Bahrain, also causing several incidents of civil unrest in many other Arab countries. The rulers of several Emirates, most notably Abu Dhabi, enjoy almost total control of their country's oil proceeds while their populations are in many cases quite poor and have stifled independence. The fact that PMCs could be used in the future to impede a successful revolution that changes the balance of economic and social power in the archaic system that exists in the UAE is a stark contrast to Executive Outcomes and their ideals as a PMC and shows that there is also great potential for these companies to be used to impede social progress in the Arab world. On a more general note, PMCs, if unchecked could be contracted by anyone with enough money, to force subjugation upon people and thus in Eisenhower's words: aiding the "rise of misplaced power".

These varying viewpoints on the benefits and harm that PMCs could cause show that, like many complex issues, nothing is simply black or white. Although in the past companies like EO showed the world what could be done with the proper ideals and discipline, the PMCs that are active today don't display the same characteristics that would cause a positive impact in current conflicts. The many scandals that these companies have gotten involved in have given people and governments no reason to trust PMCs to obey their laws and end conflicts successfully, for this should be their main goal. Also, the potential for Private Militaries to be

used for subjugation and seizing of power is great and there is no judge or jury to decide which governments should or should not be allowed to hire them. There is still instability in the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East, and this will continue to be the case unless there are some drastic changes in how the world as a whole approaches the many wars and conflicts that are constantly occurring. When talking about the quintessential task for PMCs now, Eeben Barlow states: "The responsibility of the PMCs is to ensure that the industry cleans up its act and gets rid of the wannabe-Rambos and their irresponsible actions. It is time that PMCs realize that they are guests in the contracting country and ought to behave in accordance to the laws of that country..." Unfortunately, Barlow is now far removed from the actual industry today and it is doubtful that the current directors of PMCs will change their practices in a way that their industry is better perceived by the media and public. The only answer to this is to eliminate the need for "Privatizing Peace". It is time for the U.N., NATO and the like to realize that we all are not only citizens of nations but also citizens of the world, and that they should come together to decisively stop the people who constantly infringe on other's human rights. This critical change in mentality is too, unlikely to happen, so long the pain and suffering occurs away from the eyes of the mass media and is contained within the poorest, most underdeveloped and most neglected countries in the world. If the media portrayed the reality of it perhaps more people would push for decisive action. However, shown by the recent lack of determination in mediating the breakup of Sudan, a serious conflict is intensifying. There is a civil war in Mali and Syria, a coup in Guinea-Bissau, Somali Pirates continue to terrorize the African coast, and this is just this year, so far.

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