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"Outsourcing the War" by Jeremy Schail*

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July Roundtable: Introduction

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July Roundtable: Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

"Outsourcing the War " by Jeremy Schail. The Nation. May 28, 2007.

Keywords

Human rights, United States, Iraq, Security forces, Privatization

[“Outsourcing the War ” by Jeremy Schail. *The Nation*. May 28, 2007.](#)

An Annotation:

Among the many debates currently underway over the war in Iraq, recent research and investigation has brought to light the outsourcing of war to private security companies. These companies have been hired by the U.S. government to conduct missions, which military forces themselves will not and cannot do because of the risk involved. Individual contractors, under private chains of command, are neither given the training, nor held to the standard of the proper military, even though the U.S. government is ultimately responsible for payment. While the implications of this privatization for human rights and foreign affairs are profound, this trend is increasingly becoming the reality of modern warfare.

“More disturbing is what this means for our democracy: at a time when the administration seems unwilling to subject its war strategy to oversight by the Congress, we face the widespread use of private forces seemingly accountable to no effective system of oversight or law.”

Given what we know of the “fog of war,” accountability and centralized oversight are essential issues for any democracy when conducting war. Since there are laws of war, both domestically and internationally, freelance guns-for-hire represent a threat to these laws, which were developed for the purpose of making conflict as civil as possible. When the U.S. employs security forces that are not subject to these laws and the notions of humane warfare in which they are rooted, the symbolic and actual ramifications are enormous.

“In the current discussion in the Congress on this issue, what is seldom discussed is how this system, the privatization of war, has both encouraged and enabled the growth and creation of companies who have benefited and stand to gain even more from an escalation of the war.”

President Dwight Eisenhower, in 1961, prophetically warned against the dangers of associating the escalation of violent conflict too closely with profiteering. The “military-industrial complex,” of which he spoke, threatens democracy because the preparation for and waging of war is rewarded in the economic arena, thereby side-stepping the checks and balances of representative government. The fact that private firms are responsible for supplying all facets of war—from technology to armory and now troops—has a tremendous impact on future prospects for peace.

“As the country debates current and future Iraq policy, Congress owes it to the public to take down the curtain of secrecy surrounding these shadow forces that often act in the name and on the payroll of the people of this country.”

This notion of “shadow forces” patrolling Iraq, without a framework of accountability, has the potential to compromise the respect for human rights and the rule of law. Arranging the deals that bring together the U.S. military with contractor corporations, like Blackwater USA, is done around a boardroom table and not in a legislative assembly. These relationships are antithetical

to the democratic values upon which the United States was founded and that are supposedly the subject of the struggle in Iraq.

Our panelists discuss these questions and more in this month's Roundtable.

~ *The Editors*