

Soldiers of Misfortune: Is the Demise of National Armed Forces a Core Contributing Factor in the Rise of Private Security Companies?

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1 Introduction

The rise of private security companies is the direct and logical consequence of factors that have gradually contributed to the post-Cold War demise of national armies. While Western national armed forces are likely to retain their advantage over private competitors in terms of available resources, they are increasingly facing a deployability-crisis. This means they are experiencing difficulty recruiting, deploying and retaining the personnel required for military operations. The citizen soldier of modern Western societies generally seems less willing and capable of being the primary actor in the future projection of state power. At the same time, senior military officers in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States are expressing concern about losing their most experienced professionals to private military firms (PMFs) (Singer 2005a: 129). This paper will advance the hypothesis that the demise of national armies plays a major role in the privatization of war and that this development is the product of a number of global and societal factors. These include the receding power of the nation-state, the changing status and role of the military, as well as a continued process of civilia-nization. All of these factors are increasingly eroding the war-fighting capabilities of Western armed forces.

2 Receding State Power

The post-Cold War era has seen many states entering a phase of contraction, recession and even disintegration. The latter is particularly visible in so-called failed states. Here, the world witnessed the partial or complete collapse of state structures, with the subsequent security vacuum filled by non-state actors. In industrialized countries state-failure has so far been limited to the disintegration of multi-ethnic countries like the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. However, the unsustainability of the welfare state, as well as the influences of globalization and changing demographics also contributes to receding state power among the politically stable industrial or post-industrial nations. Fiscal constraints have forced the state, particularly where

extensive welfare systems are being upheld, to adjust its role in the field of security through more ‘outsourcing’ to non-state actors.¹

National armies, as the ultimate instrument of state power, depend entirely on the state. Soldiers pledge allegiance to it, enjoy recognized legal status, and function as the “restorer of order”, sometimes both within and beyond the national boundaries (Peters 1999: 32). Consequently, they are directly affected by the state’s attempt to adjust to the mix of centrifugal and centripetal forces triggered, among others, by globalization. One reality they are confronted with is that globalization has apparently reduced the significance of national interests, boundaries and sovereignty. This holds implications for their role and status. Furthermore, the reduced defense budgets of the post-Cold War era were invariably accompanied by lower force levels as bipolarity subsided and the prospect of conventional global conflict faded. Despite the emergence of new challenges in the Balkans, the last decade of the previous century saw all Western armed forces shed personnel. The British military is smaller today than at any other point in its history since the Napoleonic wars (Singer 2005a: 128). The Bundeswehr reduced its standing forces by almost 50% from 500,000 to 255,000.² Even the US-military has seen a 30% personnel reduction between 1990 and 2005, i.e. a decrease by 600,000 troops (Boot 2005: 108).

Demography also presents Western armed forces with a, perhaps insurmountable, human resource problem. In fact, declining birth rates will ultimately challenge the ability of Western states to ensure adequate force levels and may eventually even altogether preclude the projection of power.³ Essentially the number of people that can be mobilized for military service is already limited both in terms of quantity and quality. The soldiers of tomorrow are today neither born in adequate numbers nor subjected to the type of socialization that led previous generations to willingly accept the burden of national military service. As a consequence, almost all Western armed forces are experiencing difficulties in meeting personnel requirements. Britain’s Territorial Army increased the upper age limit for officers to 60 in order to cope with its manpower shortage (Sunday Times, 9 October 2005) while David Segal (cited in Korb 2004: 2) stated in 2004: “Our volunteer army is closer to being broken today than ever before in its 30-year history.” And this, too, is not only a question of quantity. The Bundeswehr, as one Western army still relying on conscription, already rejects 40% of any annual intake

1 The financial burden of maintaining social systems has taken on proportions last seen, as Martin van Creveld (1999: 361) points out, in times of total war.

2 Through the reunification process the armed forces temporarily (in 1990) exceeded 700,000 members.

3 Furthermore, an increasingly ‘greying’ electorate is less dynamic, perhaps less focused on the future and therefore more likely to define other national priorities like health care.

for failing to meet the minimum physical requirements. Where in 1999 7.5% of German high school graduates were deemed fully fit for military service, five years later a mere 4.6% were placed into that category (Focus Online, www.focus.de, 6 October 2005). In addition, the number of conscientious objectors exceeds the number of men willing to serve, resulting in a mere 25% of a potential intake actually serving. While some armies can still cope for a few more years, the demographic force cap is projected to reach dramatic proportions that can only be partly compensated for through technology, e.g., robotics.

In political terms this also means that demographically exhausted societies, with few children to spare, tend to be risk- and loss-averse and, when faced with real or potential losses, experience difficulty in upholding their political will. Major-General Julian Thompson (cited in North 2005: 1) writes: “[T]he effectiveness of the NATO contingent in Afghanistan is severely limited by some European Governments, notably the German and the Spanish, being unwilling to incur casualties. Governments want the kudos of participation without the pain.” In trying to avoid the negative political consequences of this reality, many Western states have sought to soften the potential impact by abolishing the increasingly unpopular conscription and placing their hope in volunteer armies. Yet, even in the all-volunteer US military, aversion to casualties has been cited for an apparent reluctance to deploy adequate numbers of US troops around Tora Bora in 2001 (O’Hanlon 2002a: 56). Arguably this may have cost the Americans the capture of the Al Qaeda leadership which is believed to have slipped through the cordon of local allies with questionable loyalties. The post-2001 military operations are often characterized by an inability to field adequate high-caliber forces over a sustained period of time.

A further dimension of demographics is migration. It is changing the population composition of most Western countries at a rate that is historical in magnitude. Europe alone will see doubling of its approximately 15 mio. Muslim population by 2025, according to the National Intelligence Council (Leiken 2005: 122). Given the nature and dynamics of the war against terror this might be expected to pose a security challenge and alter the security priorities profoundly. The development of ethnic or ethno-religious pockets of increasingly integration-resistant first, second and even third generation migrants is raising the likelihood of national armies being deployed in internal stability operations. Terrorism expert Walter Laqueur (1999: 228) shares this concern, writing: “The second and third generations of ‘guest workers’ – North Africans in France, Turks in Germany, West Indians and Africans in Britain – could be particularly susceptible to the appeal of terrorism.” Authors such as Davidson and Rees-Mogg (1993: 240) put it more bluntly by

writing: "A growing population of disgruntled Moslems will be the shock troops of change in Europe."

When non-integrated minorities become a reality, states are weakened through a process whereby ethno-religious loyalties tend to penetrate all state-structures, including the military. This has been the experience of almost all multi-ethnic armies during the wave of ethnic disintegration following the end of the Cold War (see Peled 1998). Real or perceived questions of loyalty can impact dramatically on force cohesion, discipline, morale and ultimately impede, paralyze or fragment armed forces as they face the so-called Trojan Horse Dilemma (Peled 1998: 1).⁴ The importance of this was most vividly demonstrated by the disintegration of national armies following state disintegration, particularly in the Balkans, Africa or the former Soviet Union.

3 The Changing Status and Role of the Military

By ending conscription, many Western democracies have revised the social contract, away from the Athenian and deeply democratic principle of citizens sharing the burden of security. This has led to some concern that the citizen army is being replaced by a professional fighting underclass that achieves upward social mobility through entering the military service. However, one of the less anticipated consequences of voluntary armies is that today less people have had exposure to and experience of military life and combat. This has reduced the understanding for military matters at a time when, democracies depend on the sustained support of their voters for the growing number of military intervention scenarios. This is also a problem insofar as most decision-makers in Western societies lack personal military experience, while the intellectual elite has not only avoided military service to a large degree but also actively marginalized military studies at universities (Strauss 2003: 67). The price for this development is widespread ignorance and naivety about military matters to the point where security and foreign policy objectives are compromised while tensions between military and civilian planners or decision-makers increase.

4 Significant ethnic minorities have been seen to serve with dedication, provided the military culture was able to integrate and assimilate them. The French Foreign Legion is one example of this, the British army's increased recruitment among commonwealth members provides another. 7% of the US military are non-citizens from more than 100 countries. However, when multicultural societies develop centrifugal forces, and there are indications that this might be the case in the future, these tend to spill over into the military structures.

The changing role of the military after the end of the Cold War has seen greater emphasis placed on operations other than war. They include predominantly urban policing, stabilization or peacekeeping operations as well as counter-insurgency and the war against terrorism. These generally non-conventional scenarios have forced militaries to rethink force structure, composition, training and tactics. The Western military establishment is increasingly reconfiguring its forces for intervention operations, comprised of combat, stabilization and support elements. Special Forces play an increasingly important rôle in the military transformation process that has also been termed the Revolution in Military Affairs.⁵ This includes the US military's concept of the so-called Future Force, whose brigade-sized Units of Action (UA) can be deployed anywhere on the globe in 96 hours (Gordon/Wilson/Johnson 2003: 21), reflecting the 'expeditionary force' character of future operations.

The overwhelming majority of operations are of a multinational nature. These can include operations like those against Yugoslavia in 1999 and against Iraq in 2003, or multinational UN, humanitarian or peacekeeping missions. The latter have increased by about 45% over the last decade, involving 78,000 members in 1993 and approximately 120,000 a decade later. While multilateralism is a concept well received by politicians and opinion-makers, joint operations are inherently complex.⁶ The success of these operations has been limited to particular environments, mostly where Special Forces operatives were able to ally themselves with local actors as was the case in Afghanistan with the joint operations conducted by the Northern Alliance and Western operators. Yet there are limits and "the Afghan model will not always work as it did in Afghanistan because the United States will not always enjoy allies who match up so well against their enemies" (Biddle 2003: 46). Or as Donald Rumsfeld (2002: 31) correctly states: "The mission must determine the coalition, the coalition must not determine the mission, or else the mission will be dumbed down to the lowest common denominator."

In reality multinational operations become more complex the more parties need to be considered, while commanders need to be extremely diplomatic and have continuously secure political approval for their operations. Problems of command and control are characteristic of this kind of force composition as there is a significant difference between alliance operations and single-nation command.⁷ A consequence of this often is hesitancy, inde-

5 Robert Kaplan (2005: 7) makes the point that even prior to 11 September 2001 US Special Forces were operating in 170 countries per year.

6 Military history provides more than ample evidence for the difficulties associated with joint operations.

7 Swain (2003: 10–18) elaborates on the experiences made in Bosnia in this regard.

cision, operational inertia and loss of initiative. Among the forces involved, misunderstandings, cultural disparities and unhealthy rivalry may further hamper operational success. In the present environment of extremely restrictive rules of engagement, bureaucratic quagmires and complex force structures the result has been sub-optimal performance or even force degradation. All these factors are seldom missed by adversaries of such forces and can even encourage predatory behavior on their part. In Bosnia, officers of predominantly Western armies were taken hostage by Serbs and chained to strategic installations to prevent NATO bombing. The genocidal events in Rwanda in 1994, more specifically the operational restrictions imposed on the international force present, not only led to the unnecessary death of fifteen soldiers attached to the UN, but caused psychological anguish to many more, including the commander of the force, Romeo Dallaire who became suicidal (Dallaire 2004). During the Kosovo war in 1999, Allied commander Wesley Clark successfully mastered the limitations of coalition warfare, with all its diplomatic dimensions. Yet even he was still confronted with a refusal to obey his orders by the commander of the British forces, Mike Jackson, during an incident with Russian forces at Pristina airfield (Clark 2001: 397–400).⁸

Having adopted a ‘lead nation’ concept in subsequent joint operations, whereby one nation takes responsibility for a particular task and area in order to secure compliance and accountability, e.g., in Afghanistan and Iraq, this too tends to be frustrating (Wall Street Journal, 26 August 2005). The problem is that the alliance partners have diverging national interests, cultures and capabilities. The resulting inertia may have been a price worth paying during the bipolar face-off between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, but spells doom for the rapidly changing and multi-dimensional realities of present and future military operations. Alliances are only as good as their members; and membership standards without teeth (as some contend is the case with NATO) “create incentives for delinquency” (Wallander 2002: 4). This reduces military alliances to their mere political value, with members of the European Union investing in prestige and symbolism such as the German-French Brigade, but being less able to forge the much-announced 60,000 strong rapid deployment force. The lack in “military essentials”, as Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth (2002: 26) adequately put it, seems to have slipped past the Europeans. Next to lacking reliable capabilities in intelligence gathering, for both legal and technological reasons, there are also severe constraints in terms of air- and sealift capabilities, suppression of air-defense, combat search and rescue, etc. But more importantly, the Europeans tend to plan

8 While the merits of the case may be a matter of opinion, the implications for the chain of command remain grim.

without adequately considering the conditions required to ensure combat-readiness.

The ambitious concept of a fully integrated European army, as a model for the EU's future ability to project power, flies in the face of all experiences made with regard to military history and is likely to be stillborn as a result. Forfeiting national military culture, command and control, in favor of a military "fruit salad" is seen as an invitation for disaster by some military experts. Tim Collins, a retired British Colonel and former Battle Group commander in Iraq, (cited in Thompson 2005: 1) provides a British perspective when he postulates: "There's no reason why a European army should do the extraordinary things that regiments do. They will be the cause of the first great defeat for the British Army. You will see guys running away – there's no reason to stay, there's no Black Watch or Royal Irish or whatever. It's just a European army." There is concern about the 'dragging down effect' of relatively combat ready units being deployed alongside reluctant and risk-averse allies of low-quality European armies. This concern takes note of the fact that both alliances as well as armed forces amalgamations inevitably result in the partners again agreeing on the lowest common denominator. The implications of this on the future deployability of European armies are outlined in a 2005 report by the Center for Policy Studies which states that "[a]part from the French Foreign Legion, marine infantry, and airborne, plus the Dutch Marines, European armies are armed youth movements" (North 2005: 6).

Finally, soldiers are increasingly involved in non-military tasks such as nation-building efforts.⁹ These require a vast arsenal of skills and resources that are essentially non-military in nature. Rachel Bronson (2002: 125) even suggests that future intervention force structures should include police, judges and an effective penal system to ensure the establishment of basic law. Whatever the full extent of non-military tasks in the long run, national armies are already experiencing problems with their own logistical tail and Bronson's proposal would divert additional human resources at a time when these are increasingly scarce. Generally this constitutes an unpopular proposition if it amounts to more political interference and unclear mandates. In a Stars and Stripes poll of troops in Iraq, one third indicated that they felt their mission lacked clear definition while 40% thought it had nothing to do with what they were trained for (Korb 2004: 6).

The price of expeditionary forces in the past was perhaps heavier than today in terms of hardships and losses, but so was the reward in terms of the societal recognition, support and status that victorious troops could earn. In

9 As the imperial armies of Rome and Britain have shown, this is not a problem per se. It is far more the current conditions under which the military is likely to face frustration, i.e. the political framework in which they are to accomplish such tasks.

the absence of the same recognition today, diminishing status and the reduced understanding among citizens for the relationship between their willingness to personally sacrifice in defense of their country, national militaries become less attractive. Surplus societies provide greater incentives and rewards for alternative careers as do private security companies. Yet even if new members were to be found in sufficient numbers, Western armies are facing a further deterrent to many young recruits, namely a continuing process of civilianization.

4 Civilianization

As national armed forces adopt characteristics usually associated with corporations, critics become increasingly concerned with the consequences of this on military performance. With the declining likelihood of large-scale interstate war, the societal military participation ratio also declined and the need to uphold specific aspects of military culture became less recognizable to decision-makers than what it may have been to previous generations. Societal issues related to class, race, gender and sexual orientation have become major issues in militaries and with detrimental results for their deployability. Since the 1970s militaries have become, as one critic points out (Webb, cited in Norton 1989: 210), “a politician’s toy, a way to accommodate interest groups without losing political support in a home district”.

The greatest single component of this development is the impact of gender politics and aspects regarding sexual preferences.¹⁰ The US military has the largest number of women employed (15%) and has gone a long way in trying to create a gender-neutral military, though having upheld the combat-exclusion of women after extensive research. Yet even in non-combat deployment, the large number of women has contributed to the transformation of the military culture. Martin van Creveld (2003: 166) describes these changes as a “feminization” to the point where national armies are fast being reduced to “mere constabularies” (Creveld 2003: 232).¹¹ A closer look at the conditions tends to lend support to this view and includes the following:

10 In 2004 the British military made a point of advertising the benefits of a military career in gay magazines in an effort to demonstrate the new tolerance in the military and compensate for previous discrimination.

11 His view is shared by Anita Blair, Chairman of the Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues in 1994 when she concluded: “As a result of my work on the commission, I became convinced that the objective for many who advocate greater female influence in the armed services is not so much to conquer the military as conquer manhood: They aim to make the most quintessentially masculine of our institutions more feminine.” (Gutmann 2000: 152)

a) *A reduction in combat readiness and deployability:*

Historically, deploying women as soldiers has been controversial and has failed to produce results that could justify the policies adopted in most militaries today.¹² Disregarding biological realities, proponents of the gender-neutral military concept tend to refer to the apparent success of the Israeli military in integrating women. Yet, the alleged role of women as soldiers in combat and combat support units is viewed as a myth by Martin van Creveld (2003: 187), describing the weapons training given to and by women in the IDF as “symbolic”. Their function was and is to fill positions which would otherwise be filled with able-bodied men who are needed in line units. The experience the Israelis made in their struggle for independence until 1948 has resulted in women not being deployed as combatants since then (Grossman 1996: 174).¹³

As military readiness is also a question of training standards, these have been seen to suffer as the system lowers standards in order to accommodate biological limitations. Women, who on average possess 55% of the muscle strength and 67% of the endurance of their male counterparts, fail to keep up. Women under training are far more likely to be injured and on average spend five times more days on limited duty. This results in challenging the training standards, e.g., the need for marching at the average speed which an infantry platoon is expected to march at (women are shorter and slower than their average male counterparts, and many are unable to maintain the 30-inch

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- 12 The large-scale inclusion of women in the Red Army during World War 2 resulted in what recent research suggests, could be called massive sexual abuse. Max Hastings (2004: 146) cites numerous accounts by men and women who confirm that abortions and deliberate pregnancies were equally widespread, with a former Red Army doctor concluding: “Whole trainloads of girls were sent home pregnant.” Even four decades later, in Afghanistan during that country’s civil war, officers and NCO’s of the Red Army duelled with handgrenades and pistols over the few women attached to combat units as medical assistants and signals personnel (Navroz 1995: 11). In Guerilla organizations, women have been able to compensate for the above mentioned differences by the nature of this type of warfare, changing into their feminine civilian roles at will and consequently often avoiding detection through being regarded as non-combatants unless discovered with weapons in their possession. In conventional warfare this advantage is lost, while men have also been inclined to eventually leave those arms of service where women are introduced into what was previously regarded to be a “man’s domain” (Creveld 1991: 121).
- 13 The reasons for this are found in both the morale and disciplinary problems associated with outbursts of irrational violence among male comrades of women that have been killed or wounded in combat, as well as the reluctance of their Arab opponents to surrender to women, which in turn can raise casualties as the enemy now tended to fight with greater resolve (Creveld 1991: 184).

regulation army stride) or; the need to be exposed to physical and psychological pressure that simulates combat conditions.¹⁴

Military institutions are expected to adapt, with scant regard for the implications in terms of time schedules, combat performance and survival rates. A study at Parris Island concluded that 45% of female marines were unable to throw handgrenades far enough to avoid injury had they used live grenades (US News & World Report, 11 August 1997: 14). Countering such considerations is the notion that the asymmetrical military threats of the future will no longer require the kind of combat-readiness of past conflicts. Yet, this is not the lesson of Afghanistan or Iraq, where basic combat skills and discipline are proving to be as relevant as ever (O'Hanlon 2002: 61a). While technology may reduce the burden of conventional warfare, the infantry-intensive urban counterinsurgency or peacekeeping operations of the foreseeable future are going to require more military skills rather than less. Military history also provides ample evidence that unit morale tends to crumble when there are too many soldiers unable to perform their tasks, whatever these tasks may be. Even in the field of logistics, maternity leave, breast-feeding breaks, physical limitations and relationships compromising the chain of command have been seen to result in a wide range of problems.¹⁵ A mere combat environment, let alone combat itself, is physically demanding beyond the physical ability of most women. During the first Gulf War US Army Captain Mary Rouo (cited in Gutmann 2000: 258) concluded that "[t]here is no way that women can dig foxholes or as many as may be required, as men!" And she adds: "Unfortunately, when you're in basic training and stuff like that, those foxholes are already dug." The likelihood of women being killed or wounded in combat conditions is, as a result of these factors, estimated to be at least four times higher than that of men. While it is generally deemed irresponsible, if not criminal, to send 16-year old boys or 60-year old men into combat because most are unable to meet the physical demands of the battlefield, it is considered enlightened and progressive to commit women to combat conditions in spite of the physical disadvantage they face.

14 After a ten year effort in the US military to ignore these differences, it was found that of the 65,000 army women assigned to tasks requiring considerable physical strength, only 3% performed adequately. It requires ten women to handle stretchers which are usually carried by six enlisted men (Freedmann 1985: 77). Repeated studies in several countries, many commissions of inquiry, research of every kind have confirmed the physical limitations of women in military environments. Women are generally unable to even change the tires of the very supply trucks they drive. (Gutmann 2000: 244-260)

15 Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba observed in his scathing report that military police soldiers at the Iraqi Abu Ghraib prison were weak in basic military occupational skills. The sexual relationships between the men and women involved in the abuse of prisoners were found to have contributed significantly to the deterioration of military discipline (<http://www.cmr.org>).

Complicating these matters, the US Navy estimated in the 1990s that of all the women at sea about 500 leave ship annually as a result of pregnancy (Washington Times, 8 September 1996). The army also indicated that it knew of no initiatives to reduce the pregnancy rate, after 5% of its women in Bosnia fell pregnant during the first year of deployment (The Washington Post, 15 September 1996). After a Marine Sergeant deployed in Iraq gave birth on a US Warship in May 2003 Center for Military Readiness President Elaine Donnelly renewed her call for a full and detailed review of all Clinton-era social policies in the military, saying they “offer overly generous education, housing, and medical benefits to pregnant sailors, regardless of marital status or number of pregnancies” adding that such measures “have created a perverse incentive for irresponsible behaviour and single parenthood, especially in the enlisted ranks” (<http://www.cmr.org>, 12 June 2003). A related consequence of these policies, particularly for the US military, is that in 2005 it had 168,000 members married to other members of the military, a total of 84,000 married military couples. A further 7.8% of the total armed forces personnel are single parents, 10.7% of the Army and 4.7% of the Marines fall into that category (<http://www.usmilitary.about.com>). The sociological implications of this force the military to consider a wide variety of non-operational aspects when deciding on deployability. The impact on unit cohesion, reaction time and force-level projection should require little further elaboration.

b) Disciplinary problems and sexual misconduct:

The impact of the gender debate becomes more explicit when considered within the context of sexuality and military discipline. When, in 1994, the US military dropped the gender barrier and started to conduct co-ed training it was rocked by revelations of sexual misconduct two years later. An independent advisory committee studied the issue in 1997, and declared unanimously that “[co-ed basic training] is resulting in less discipline, less unit cohesion, and more distraction from training programs”. In 2002 an Army briefing conceded that gender-integrated basic training was neither efficient nor effective, seeing positive aspects “only in sociological terms” (<http://www.cmr.org>). This influences the military culture profoundly and holds implications for the general ability of military institutions to focus on their primary tasks. In surveys taken during separate studies in 1998 and 1999, 78% of US-Army leaders expressed the view that discipline had declined in gender-integrated basic training. Deployed operationally, the impact was also evident by the particular group-dynamics of the Abu Ghraib incident, which amounted to an absolute collapse of military discipline with the well-known and far-reaching consequences involved. Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, leading the inquiry into the incident, confirmed the lack of military and occupational

skills among the military police detachment at the prison (<http://www.cmr.org>). It may be of interest to note that this occurred under non-combat conditions in a non-combat unit.

The presence of both sexes in the military influences processes of group bonding and -dynamics differently than in a civilian office environment. This may be particularly the case when this presence is on a 24-hour basis and involves matters of life and death. Yet, sexual harassment, real and alleged, has become a factor that continues to plague Western militaries and is resulting in the dismissal of personnel which might otherwise have remained in the military. The Pentagon released a report on the results of a 2002 survey suggesting the number of service-women who said they had been sexually assaulted had fallen to 3% from 6% in 1995. Yet, in 2004, more than 100 alleged rapes of fellow soldiers were being investigated among US forces deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq alone (The Guardian, 27 February 2004). In June 2005, a survey among women serving in the British military revealed that 22% of Navy women claimed they had experienced sexual harassment, 9% of Royal Air Force women and 1% of those serving with the Army. At the same time there have been calls to end the ban on sexual affairs between officers and other ranks. A former senior Army officer and current lecturer at Queens College Cambridge made such a call in March 2005, describing the existing rules as outdated and unrealistic given the growing number of women in the military (The Daily Telegraph, 9 March 2005).

The Center for Military Readiness (<http://www.cmr.org>) sums up a number of conclusions from a wide variety of studies focusing on the impact of co-ed training: “(1) Less discipline, less unit cohesion, and more distraction from training programs; (2) voluntary and involuntary misconduct, due to an emotionally volatile environment for which leaders and recruits are unprepared; (3) higher physical injury and sick call rates that detract from primary training objectives; (4) diversion from essential training time due to interpersonal distractions and the need for an extra week of costly ‘sensitivity training’; and (5) a perceived decline in the overall quality (...) and lack of confidence in the abilities of fellow soldiers; and the need to provide remedial instruction to compensate for military skills not learned in basic training. This often leaves basic trainees deficient in critical building block skills necessary for advanced training.”

There is a link between this civilianization of the military and the apparent attractiveness of PMFs. One study found that only 25% of navy members, who planned to leave, did so due to “better opportunities as a civilian” while the rest provided reasons like “change in culture” and “loss of confidence in leadership” (<http://www.cmr.org>). PMFs are attractive to military personnel

that want to avoid the negative aspects mentioned above and yet remain in their profession.

5 The Rules of Engagement Trap

Having mentioned the devaluation of sovereignty, Western states today increasingly make their military actions subject to an expanding international legal framework. Military unilateralism on the part of Western states is a rare occurrence and even the United States saw itself compelled to at least create the impression of some kind of multilateral dimension during the war against Iraq. While multilateralism and a “moral foreign policy” (Gelb/Rosenthal 2003: 2) may seem a sound proposition by the standards of a co-operating globalized world, it is based on the bold assumption of an existing universal value system that is able to support the idea of a universal legal framework. Ignoring power realities and cultural disparities with regard to when and how much force is deemed legitimate or acceptable, this framework places extreme restrictions on armed forces and the way they are deployed. Measured by the relatively spectacular failures of the UN to impose international rules in the past, the lesson should be that the premise of universally applicable rules is what has produced failure and paralysis. International rules must be “derived from the way states actually behave, not how they ought to behave” (Glennon 2003: 31).¹⁶ In addition, international conflict regulation tends to focus its efforts on avoiding a repetition of the previous human catastrophe rather than proactively anticipating future conflict patterns. In the kind of conflict scenarios that are currently unfolding, adherence to a reactive international legal framework may well condemn governments and armed forces to remain strategically reactive and defensive.

A further controversy that is apparently causing operational paralysis is the legal status of terrorists and the question whether the war against terrorism is in fact a war or a law enforcement operation against criminals. If the latter definition prevails, the role of the military as the appropriate instrument is questionable. The lack of clarity remains an impediment to decision-making on all levels, which in turn places militaries on the defensive while terrorists retain the initiative through the legal bickering among lawyers and bureaucrats. The same can be said to apply to the notion that the International Criminal Court (ICC) should judge the alleged misconduct among Western

16 George Kennan (cited in Glennon 2003: 31) also points out that the international concept of sovereign equality is a myth and that the United Nations are thus based on wrong assumptions from the onset.

armies.¹⁷ In July 2005, six former heads of the British Armed Forces condemned the investigations and prosecutions against troops who had served in Iraq, with the likelihood that these could face charges before the ICC. The impact on morale and personnel retention was cited as a one of the consequences. Lord Guthrie, former British Chief of the Defense Staff, voiced his concern by saying: "It is so demoralizing for soldiers being pursued by lawyers and civil servants and indeed by some in the MoD [Ministry of Defense] who have no idea about war. There is a lack of trust now because soldiers do not believe that the politicians support them. It is already putting people off staying in the Army." (Daily Telegraph, 12 July 2005: 1)

Restrictive rules of engagement pose a direct threat to military personnel and have been criticized by numerous veterans of recent conflicts. It contributed to the spectacular failure in UN missions where national contingents were deployed and which have partly been discussed above. The ultimate low-point may have been reached with the conduct of the Dutch Blue-helmet contingent during the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia in 1995. It ranks among the greatest humiliations ever seen in military history. Yet, while the UN can be expected to fail, governments are also increasingly inclined to risk failure by stipulating restrictive rules of engagement. The Clinton administration contributed to the Mogadishu debacle in 1993 by refusing to deploy armor and gunships as requested by the military planners. When the events then took their course, the Administration succumbed to the 'CNN effect', reinforcing the challengers of Western forces in their belief, that the public killing and mutilation of Western soldiers can serve as a force-multiplier and erode the will of Western decision-makers. The Bush administration has also seen the military curtailed and inhibited, based on concerns for public opinion and diplomacy. Some of the more dramatic consequences have been the escape of Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora and the case of a Special Forces A-team that had to pass on an opportunity to kill Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2001 (Boot 2005: 115).

Special Forces, though stretched by the sheer number of missions, have been and are still being deployed below their operational potential, with their offensive capabilities severely restrained by political considerations that reflect the above-mentioned sensitivities and the reality of the media age (The Weekly Standard, 26 January 2004). They complain of micro-management from superior headquarters and restrictions that pose a threat to the

17 This approach is based on a deep trust of Western European societies in rule-based systems in the form of a relatively reliable bureaucracy, as opposed to the far more relationship-based systems of their adversaries. As Robert Kaplan (2000: 179) writes, this is based on the Northern European experience with bureaucracies that functioned well due to the ethnic homogeneity ensuring that the bureaucrats themselves were "the man next door" who broadly shared the same value-system.

success of their missions (Kaplan 2005: 215–220). Richard Schultz (2004: 31) makes the point that it has become fashionable among US Government advisors and even conventional military planners to portray bold operational proposals as “cowboy Hollywood stuff”. Those who propose risky operations with high-yield potential become stigmatized and turned into pariahs. Since PMFs are able to circumvent restrictive aspects of international law and offer comparatively attractive low-risk alternatives to the direct commitment of national military assets, governments may become more favorably disposed toward them. In Colombia, for example, political limitations on force levels have been circumvented by employing private military contractors. They are able to achieve, often covertly, foreign policy objectives that might not otherwise be popular with Western electorates and that do not require public or parliamentary approval (Singer 2005a: 126).

6 Operational Realities

As governments and their militaries reconfigure their forces to suit the changing operational environment, PMFs increasingly fill the gaps by providing three types of services, namely: tactical military assistance which include combat missions; consulting services comprised of former specialists that provide advice and training; military support firms whose primary services deal with intelligence, logistics and maintenance. The growing deficiencies of national armies in a number of these fields become evident in the increasing number of contracts, with the US military having engaged in more than 3,000 of them since the mid-1990s (Singer 2005a: 120). In Iraq they play a substantial role in the military effort involving more than 60 firms and 20,000 men being deployed by the first half of 2005.¹⁸ This makes them a bigger role player than most of the national contingents deployed as allies.

While the actual number of combat soldiers is low in modern armies as a result of their large logistical tail, the infantry-intensive tasks of urban stabilization or counter-insurgency operations are demanding more people on the ground. The lessons of Enduring Freedom, where the “tip of the spear” was deployed, are that: “Basic infantry skills, foreign language capabilities, competence and care in using and maintaining equipment, and physical and mental toughness of U.S. troops contributed to victory every bit as much as did high-tech weaponry.” (O’Hanlon 2002a: 61) The lessons for the Iraq campaign, both in the conventional and in the current counter-insurgency phases

18 These include just the number of men involved in tactical support and do not include the many more involved in reconstruction. By the beginning of 2005 they had already seen 175 killed and 900 wounded, giving some indication of the extent of their involvement.

where “the shaft of the spear” is also committed, seem to be similar. Lacking the basics has led to avoidable setbacks.¹⁹ The battle for Fallujah in 2004 again emphasized the need to uphold the classical infantry and urban warfare skills. Yet, these are the very capabilities that have been neglected as a result of the factors mentioned above and inertia regarding force-reconfiguration. The lesson of the post-conventional phase of operations seems to be that the longer the operation takes the more difficult it is to sustain the effort. The US military, for example, has an infantry component that makes up a mere 4.6% of total force strength. The Army has 51,000 infantry soldiers, while even the Marine Corps has a mere 20,000 (Boot 2005: 107). This forces an increasing reliance on National Guard units and reservists for operations in Iraq which is starting to impact the willingness to serve (Cohen 2002: 44).²⁰ Among the proposals to alleviate the shortage of combat soldiers has been the suggestion to initiate a so-called Freedom Legion that would recruit foreigners and reward them for their sacrifice with US citizenship. Other Western countries are already reaching the limits of their operational commitments.

The Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns both indicate that blind faith in technology is also misplaced. As with the battle for Fallujah there was considerable close combat, while the adversaries faced by Western forces in Afghanistan learned quickly to adapt to the technological advantage of the Allies. Effective counter-measures made the conflict far less revolutionary than often reported (Biddle 2003: 32).²¹ A further operational problem is posed by the lack of continuity. Officers of many Western armed forces spend no more than 30% of their careers in the field and more time in the classroom than any other group of professionals (Cohen 2002: 44). Consequently, Western militaries experience a lack of continuity and create generalists, as two thirds of personnel in the US army change stations every year, while officers spend an average of 18 months per assignment over a 25-year career. Furthermore, the rank inflation among those who have never experienced combat may have a negative impact on military performance. British Army Colonel Tim Collins told an audience in October 2005 that the military risked “disaster” with what he called “civilian soldiers” who made poor

19 The circumstances of the capture of Jessica Lynch and five other members of an ambushed maintenance unit in Iraq 2003, as well as the media and public response to it, provide some indication of the price attached to having women in combat zones.

20 In fact, the recruitment realities and the idea of having a lean but mobile force, is exacerbating the problem in the sense that the need for more operational brigades is not to be met by new recruitment. Instead, 30,000 men and women, rather than the 100,000 that some contend are required, are to be reassigned in such a way that a further ten brigades are formed (Boot 2005: 108).

21 The Taliban and Al Qaeda forces started smearing their vehicles with mud, apply communication security, disperse and camouflage their positions, etc.

frontline generals and who “cripple” the army (The Sunday Times, 9 October 2005). The lack of continuity, together with other personnel problems, erodes unit cohesion as some US units deployed in Iraq experience up to 40% personnel turnovers, resulting in them not unfolding their full combat potential (Boot 2005: 109).

7 Discussion and Conclusion

In view of these developments taking their toll in terms of deployability, national militaries are increasingly forfeiting their competitive advantage. They are outdone by privatized professionals, mainly in the non-conventional field. This is often accomplished by former members of national militaries who, as members of PMFs, simply make use of the greater operational freedom and lack of constraints. They implement those training and operational procedures in PMFs that they would have also implemented in national armies, if these had provided a more suitable environment. This has less to do with salaries than with employment and deployment conditions. The retention problem reflects their unwillingness to fight ‘gender wars’ or see their status reduced to civil servants in uniform. Social engineering and political interference is taking away the very factors that make the military attractive to the “quiet professionals”, those who chose to join the military not for housing, education or social benefits, but for patriotic considerations and/or the lifestyle of a soldier instead.²² Military success, as Julian Thomson (cited in North 2005: 2) points out, “is all about cohesion and ethos, of which important ingredients are one’s standards of training and attitude to war fighting”. And it is here where the damage is done.

As Western armed forces prove increasingly unable or governments unwilling to project power, the current trend towards their demise, as institutions capable of fighting wars, is likely to continue. The undesirable aspects of privatized security can only be addressed through the introduction of an armed forces renewal program that focuses on the human resource requirements of modern conflict and thereby makes the national military more attractive to people who are able and willing to become and remain soldiers.

22 This is the term used to refer to special forces operatives (Kaplan 2005: 17).