Private Security Companies in Counter Insurgency Operations

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Thesis: Coalition forces should increase the use of private security companies in order to allow combat units to focus on defeating the insurgency.

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Abstract

The presence of private security companies in Iraq is critical to the continued success of coalition forces and their struggle against the insurgents. The U.S. government must identify a single central organization responsible for overseeing all security contractor operations. The Department of Defense should be that organization because the military is already responsible for maintaining the peace. The military can certify the security companies prior to their arrival in theater because the military is already the largest employer and certifier of security contractors. Once in theater, the military should be responsible for overseeing, controlling, and coordinating security contractor operations because the military must maintain control of its battle space.
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Introduction

From a military perspective, PSCs are here to stay. They are doing jobs in warzones that the military previously performed, but which the military no longer has the assets to accomplish. The American government and military must look at PSCs as allies and leverage their capabilities to the greatest extent possible. The mission of the military is to fight the insurgency. The mission of the PSCs is to safeguard the critical elements (i.e. government officials, supply convoys, power plants, etc.) needed to rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure. These are two sides of the same coin. However, there is currently little coordination between the operations of PSC contractors and the military in Iraq.

The analysis of the second and third order effects of this lack of coordination is critical to the government’s success in Iraq. By not integrating the operations of PSCs with those of the military, the rebuilding of Iraq is less efficient and slower that it could be. The slow pace of rebuilding results in the continued disillusionment of the Iraqi people. A disillusioned populace leads to more support for the insurgency, making it stronger and harder to root out. This, of course, makes the mission that much more difficult for the military.

Supporting View – Management and Control

Napoleon once said, “The battlefield is a scene of constant chaos. The winner will be the one who controls that chaos, both his own and the enemies” (Napoleon Bonaparte Quotes, 2007). This has never been as true as it is today in Iraq. Part of that chaos includes the operations of PSCs. The key to their successful use is to manage and control them. The military needs to do this in three ways. First, increase strategic control of the PSCs by certifying (vetting) and managing them through a single government agency, preferably the Department of Defense. Second, increase operational and tactical control by having PSCs answer to the Commander of
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Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I). Third, require standardization of communications (equipment and procedures), identification, and, most importantly, training.

Increase Control of PSCs

There have been many problems with certification and management of PSCs operating in Iraq. Because of the use of sub-contractors, the US government does not know how many private security contractors are actually working in Iraq. There are no formal standards for operating in this capacity and there is little oversight on the duties performed. To compound matters, the U.S. government is not the only entity hiring PSCs. Others include foreign governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and local Iraqi power brokers. However, the largest entity hiring PSCs (between 17,500 and 27,500) is the Department of Defense. This is followed by the Department of State (DOS) with slightly more than 2500 (Elsea & Serafino, 2007, p. 2).

The Department of Defense (DOD) is the logical choice to vet / control the flow of PSCs in Iraq for several reasons. First, the DOD already controls the majority of PSC contracts in the region. Second, there are several bills pending in congress, to include sections of the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which direct the Secretary of Defense (and in some cases DOD or DOS) to manage and provide oversight of PSCs (Elsea & Serafino, 2007, p. 27-30). Third, and most importantly, the U.S. military is responsible for keeping the peace in Iraq in addition to fighting the insurgency. Therefore, any other entity whose purpose is the keep the peace should fall under the control of the U.S. military. If there continue to be multiple vetting processes and no central control of keeping the peace, chaos will continue. Clearly delineating the lines of responsibility is the only way to achieve order.

Within Iraq, nearly everyone views the operations of PSCs and the operations of the military as separate mechanisms in rebuilding the country. A recent DOS panel tasked with
reviewing the use of PSCs in Iraq “found a lack of coordination and communication between
U.S. diplomats and military officials and little oversight over private security contractors”
(Contractor ‘command center’ recommended in Iraq, sources say, 2007). The GAO report,
Rebuilding Iraq: Actions Still Needed to Improve the Use of Private Security Providers (2006),
found that (1) private security providers did not coordinate with the U.S. military
when they entered the ‘battle space’ in Iraq, and (2) military units were not
trained prior to deployment on private security provider operating procedures and
the role of the Reconstruction Operations Center, which is charged with
coordinating interaction between military and private security personnel.
Part of the problem is that the Reconstruction Operations Center is located within the U.S.
embassy, which does not facilitate close coordination between either PSCs or military forces.
Both the military and legitimate PSCs should accept this concept (Elsea & Serafino, 2007, p. 23).

The idea of a central organization to control and manage PSCs operating in Iraq is not new.
PSCAI, and its membership of legitimate PSCs operating in Iraq, submitted requests to the Iraqi
Ministry of the Interior in order to be certified to carry weapons. The ministry either rejected or
did not issue a response for half of the requests. The other companies still had not received their
permits after four months (Pelton, (2006, p. 338). The Iraqi government is not yet capable of
performing this mission. In addition, it may not be in the best interest of the American
government to allow the Iraqis to manage PSCs, as the recent problems with Blackwater have
illustrated. The Iraqi government wants the company to cease operations, but the American
government will not allow this to occur.

Giving the MNF-I Commander the authority to control and provide oversight of PSCs
provides many benefits. Civilian government employees with few, if any, Soldiers could staff
the office. This is because the purpose of the office would be on coordination and the flow of
information. This increased coordination would yield more efficient and safer operations not only for the PSCs, but also for the military. For example, PSCs escorting individuals or convoys from different locations to Baghdad International Airport currently have no way of knowing whether or not recent military operations are causing road closures until they are on the scene. At that point, they are stuck in traffic. This scenario puts the contractors, their passengers/cargo, Iraqi civilians, U.S. military members and, importantly, U.S. public relations with the Iraqi government at risk. Additionally, it provides for greater accountability of the PSCs to the government paying for their contract.

Require PSC Standardization with Military

If PSCs are to truly be force multipliers for the government and the military, then standardization will need to increase. The standardization needs to include communication (both equipment and procedures), identification, and training. This proposal does not include standardizing practices. Employers hire each company to perform different missions, to different standards. Some companies, like Blackwater, operate large Mamba armored personnel carriers and have a reputation for an “in your face” style of operations (Pelton, 2006, p. 7-13). Others prefer to use means that are more unobtrusive. However, in order to operate within Iraq, the contractors working for PSCs must have certain equipment, know how to use it, know how and when to communicate, as well as be able to accurately identify themselves to military forces.

The current flow of communication between PSCs and the military is ineffective, as previously discussed. Standardizing equipment, frequencies, and, most importantly, procedures would significantly aid both the contractors and the military. Currently, a PSC attacked by small arms fire simply tries to outrun the ambush and may return fire. However, a military unit, several minutes behind the PSC convoy will have no idea what has happened. Standardizing what and when to report, as well as providing a clearinghouse for that information could save
lives and help root out the insurgency.

In the chaos of a battlefield, it is critical to know to be able to identify friend from enemy. If the PSCs are to function as part of the peacekeeping force, it is critical that the military be able to identify them. While identification cards are already standardized, the military must consider other means to identify PSC contractors. This should include the use, by contractors, of blue force tracker or other identification systems.

There is currently almost no training required of PSC contractors prior to deployment in Iraq. While American contractors attend the Continental United States Replacement Center for one week prior to deploying, the training provided is minimal and the focus in on administrative processing. Third country nationals, who make up over half of PSC contractors, do not receive any standardized training (Elsea & Serafino, 2007, p. 7). The contractors must operate under strict rules of engagement (ROE). However, they do not receive standardized training on the ROE. It is left to the PSCs to interpret, train, and monitor compliance. The government cannot allow this to continue. Contractors who fail to support the mission of the U.S. government are no longer force multipliers for the military. The combination of standardized training with oversight will decrease politically damaging incidents as well as save lives.

Conclusion

By combining standardization of equipment, identification, procedures and training with centralized control inside and outside of theater, the DOD can accomplish the U.S. government’s goals in Iraq more efficiently. It will result in safer conditions for the contractors, military members, and Iraqi citizens. It will also increase the accountability, which has been lacking in the past.

While there are many critics of PSCs, it is clear that, under current conditions, the U.S. government has little choice but to continue employing them. The military does not have enough
personnel to perform all of the necessary jobs to fight the insurgency and win the peace in Iraq. Growing the military to a size capable of performing all of the required missions is simply not an option. The process would be long, expensive, and, once in place, the military would need to downsize again. Instead, the government must find ways to reap and expand the many benefits of using PSCs. The American leadership can do this by re-thinking the military’s relationship with PSCs and viewing them as the force multiplier that they are. The U.S. military should consider the PSCs much as police departments view their auxiliaries. The government must provide them with guidance, training, equipment, and oversight to ensure that they do not overstep the policies and procedures set for them. In doing so, America will ensure that PSCs remain an asset and not a liability.
References


