

Private Security Industry must be made transparent and accountable, study concludes

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The true cost of war is being masked by the secretive and largely unaccountable activities of a private security industry, according to a new study.

These invisible costs of war – both in terms of casualties and financial resources – are not reported and are hard to find because contractors are not subject to the same reporting structures and laws as the regular military, and many of their activities are protected from Freedom of Information requests. Private security firms – usually run by former senior figures in the military, civil service or politics – are increasingly taking on the role of the military services, but are not subject to the same scrutiny, says a recent paper published in the journal *Organization*.

Private contractors are widely used by states such as Britain and the United States. In conflict zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan, contractors undertake both military activity and roles such as guarding bases, commercial enterprises and government installations; providing escort services for convoys; or bodyguarding individuals, according to the study. This creates opportunities for investment in the private [security industry](#), at the same time as reducing the financial burdens that military interventions traditionally bring to the occupying state.

The paper from Richard Godfrey, Jo Brewis, Jo Grady and Chris Grocott, all academics at the University of Leicester School of Management, argues that the failure to establish appropriate regulation has resulted in a lack of transparency and accountability. It also argues

that the private security firms and governments that employ them should be more open about the way the industry is organised and managed.

Secrecy over the employment of civilians for roles previously undertaken by the military hampers any real attempt at greater public and political debate, say the authors

"These are commercial organisations that form a global industry worth billions of pounds and which impacts on thousands of lives – civilian and military," comments the paper, *The Private Security Industry and Neoliberal Imperialism – Mapping the Terrain*.

"The lack of oversight and reporting hides the true costs of current military activity. The death and injury count for private contractors is not recorded and there is even less data on the deaths and injuries they cause in any theatre of operations."

Since 1990 the private security industry has witnessed a decade-on-decade market growth rate of 100 per cent and in 2010 the industry's British arm won a record £29 million in government contracts for operations in Afghanistan alone.

As state powers are delegated to the private sector, the study identifies "the emergence of a new security-industrial complex" being run largely by social elites made up of former senior [military](#), public officials and government ministers.

Provided by University of Leicester

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