

Iraq: A Turning Point for Private Security

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The extensive deployment of Private Military and Security Contractors (PMSCs) in Iraq has not been without its fair share of controversy. In today's multimedia feature we look at the problems associated with using PMSCs there and elsewhere.

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Staying Put

The withdrawal of American combat troops from Iraq in late 2011 prompted many private military and security contractors (PMSCs) to follow suit, but only temporarily. The US State Department's decision to protect more of its diplomatic personnel with them has reversed the trend. Although this decision has led to controversy, the State Department has what it believes is a suitable [response](#).

The State Department's decision, however, is not unique. According to Crispian Cuss, a defense analyst at the Olive Group, the oil and gas sectors continue to rely heavily on PMSCs in order to safeguard their facilities, even while some of these companies have done little to improve the reputation of an industry that was badly-damaged by the [Blackwater USA](#) incident in 2007.

Indeed, one of the continuing problems with PMSCs is that the ultimate responsibility for their behavior remains unclear, or so argues Hanna Brollowski. While Iraqi authorities insist that all PMSCs operating within their country are now subject to their jurisdiction, Brollowski questions the capacity of the local judiciary to hold contractors accountable for their actions. That's why the shortcomings of the Iraqi justice system should be buttressed up with greater international oversight of PMSCs.

For further observations provided by Brollowski, Cuss and Ali Dabbagh (an Iraqi government spokesperson) about the current role of PMSCs in Iraq, see the following Al Jazeera [Inside Story](#).

Opening a Pandora's Box

Finally, we come to Jeremy Scahill, who shares Brollowski and Cuss' concerns about the Iraq War

being the most “privatized” conflict in US history. Beyond sharing the well-established concerns about PMSC’s lack of transparency and accountability, Scahill argues that they threaten the security of the states that use them in three additional ways - they weaken the state’s traditional monopoly on force and security, they compel the armed forces to compete with the private sector for suitable personnel, and they raise the risk of states being drawn into proxy wars on their behalf. As Scahill notes in the following discussion, the latter problem might already be happening in Somalia and parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

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