

4-1-2010

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Melissa Mastrogiovanni  
*College of DuPage*

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### Recommended Citation

Mastrogiovanni, Melissa (2009) "The Business of War: Understanding the Military-Industrial Complex and How It's Still Used Today," *ESSAI*: Vol. 7, Article 33.

Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol7/iss1/33>

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The Business of War: Understanding the Military-Industrial Complex and How It's Still Used Today

by Melissa Mastrogiovanni

(English 1102)

In Bertolt Brecht's poem, "War Has Been Given a Bad Name," Brecht indirectly attributes the "military-industrial complex" as the primary cause of the devastating destruction in Europe which resulted during World War II. After the war, Brecht becomes especially critical of West Germany due to their incorporation of former Nazis and their sympathizers in their military, government, and business sectors. In response to reading Brecht's poem, the reality of the military-industrial complex manifests itself today with the Iraq war. The US government irresponsibly allows private contractors impunity from taking necessary precautions to protect their "employees" during wartime. In return, these private contractors show their appreciation through political favors and financial contributions.

In Brecht's poem, Brecht points out the faults of the German government during and after World War II. During the rise of Hitler and his Nazi regime, German military personnel who were Nazis, and private business owners worked together to capitalize on the war, for the purpose of gaining monetary wealth or power. This phenomenon later became known as the military-industrial complex. Being a Marxist himself, Brecht viewed this form of Fascism as a scheme, which transferred the power of the "bourgeoisie" (the middle class according to Karl Marx) to the military and industrial elites giving them total control of the government ("War" 9). Brecht went into exile when Hitler took over Germany, for fear of being "arrested" for his Communist beliefs. While in exile, Brecht wrote some of his most famous works which attacked the Fascist Movement. During the war, Brecht moved to the United States where he resided until the "red scare" took over and the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) called on Brecht to account for his Communist allegiances. After being blacklisted by studio executives in Hollywood and giving his testimony before HUAC, Brecht decided it was time to return to Europe ("Brecht Bertolt" 1). While a bane to the United States for his Communist sympathies, Brecht returned to Berlin in East Germany as a hero. He spoke out against the remilitarization of the West and the reinstatement of former Nazis into West Germany's government ("Brecht Bertolt" 1). Brecht's poem, "War Has Been Given a Bad Name," remains just one example of his artistic expression he utilized during his exile, which denounced capitalistic fascist regimes. However, the practice of the military-industrial complex would continue to influence future relations between corporations, the military and state governments.

President Eisenhower first used the term "military industrial complex" during his farewell address to describe a growing threat to democracy. By allowing military, business, and political leaders, driven by mutual interests, to make decisions involving war, this group of elites will continually choose personal profits over the interests of the public. As a result, a substantial amount of political power is surrendered to corporate leaders who cut corners to make profits or worse, they finance the other side as well. In his address, Eisenhower stated:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we

must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist (Marshall 1-2).

Eisenhower recognized the growing abuse of power in the American political, military, and industrial sectors. He understood that the military-industrial complex thrives through war, and the industries involved stand to profit from all conflicts and war at the expense of the American soldier. According to Andrew G. Marshall, who wrote an article for the Journal of 9/11 Studies, he discusses the complexity of the military industrial complex as a highly profitable establishment which provides industrial elites greater political power than ever before.

War is the most profitable industry in the world, and when the industries that flourish during war time, predominantly being the arms and oil industries, are so closely aligned and connected with the political and military establishment, the eventual result is to ultimately lead to a state of constant war, or in the eyes of the war industry, constant profits (3).

Today this military industrial complex is far more powerful and interconnected than ever before. One example that is relevant today deals with the war in Iraq, politicians in Congress, and a notorious private contractor.

On March 31, 2004, four men working for Blackwater USA as security guards -- Scott Helvenston, Wesley Batalona, Jerry Zovko and Michael Teague -- were ambushed by insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq. These men were brutally killed by having their bodies burned and mutilated. After their corpses were dragged through the streets, two were strung up on a bridge over the Euphrates River. The insurgents filmed their attack, and soon the images were broadcasted worldwide. Almost overnight, the issue of private contractors in Iraq became an extremely controversial topic.

According to the documentary "Iraq For Sale: The War Profiteers" by Robert Greenward, the Fallujah mission was to provide security for trucks belonging to a food caterer, ESS. However, the team assembled to carry out the mission soon became anxious. Under the original Blackwater contract signed on March 8, 2004, the security company was supposed to supply two armored SUVs with three guards per vehicle on security missions. However on March 12, 2004, Blackwater signed a subcontract that specified security provisions almost identical to the original contract, except for the omission of the *armored* vehicle. Unaware of these alterations, the men set out the morning of March 31, 2004 in an unarmored SUV with just two men per car, each short a rear gunner (Scahill 162). In addition, the contract stated that they were to know where they were going and who they would be working with. Before they set out on the mission one team member, Wes Batalona, complained to a friend that the team had never worked together before. After the killings, it became obvious that measures were deliberately taken by Blackwater to cut costs and raise profits (Scahill 441). Soon concerns mounted about the regulation and accountability of private contractors during wartime.

Within days, Blackwater hired lobbyists from Alexander Strategy Group (ASG) to meet with some of the most powerful members of Congress, including John Warner (Chair of the Armed Services Committee-Senate), Duncan Hunter (Chair of Armed Services Committee-House), and Rick Santorum (Chair of the Republican Senate Conference Committee) to lobby against any Blackwater investigations or regulatory bills. As a result, the Blackwater strategy saved their company and stopped any immediate investigation from taking place. However, they didn't stop there, Blackwater's founder and CEO, Erik Prince, then went out and contributed over \$2 million dollars in campaign contributions to certain government officials. They retained former high-ranking government officials such as Cofer Black (Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism at the State Dept.), Chris Taylor (Staff Sergeant-US Marine Corps.), and Joseph Schmitz (Inspector General-Pentagon). These officials helped Blackwater obtain new contracts for their business from other government officials. Within a year after Fallujah, Blackwater had received over \$200 million in new government

contracts. These politicians knew that by helping Blackwater while in office, they could count on a high-paying job after their term came to an end.

Brecht's poem portrays a deep understanding of the correlation between corrupted elites in certain industries and governments, also known as the military-industrial complex. He witnessed first-hand the affects of this phenomenon in Germany during and after World War II, when former Nazis returned to power due to their connections with the industrial elites ("Brecht Bertolt" 1). Later, President Eisenhower clearly defined the military-industrial complex and warned Americans against its dangers to democracy, because it transferred critical political power from elected officials to corporation leaders. In return, these political leaders had connections after they served in office to work for the high-paying industries they "invested" in. In Iraq, private contractors such as Blackwater Security were able to have impunity from following their contracts because the US military relied on their mercenaries so much. As a result of this military-industrial complex, it remains questionable that the families ever received a fair trial because Blackwater had so many connections with the US government. The government probably felt that these families were threatening their whole system, which in turn would affect profits for both them and their industrial friends. Unfortunately, these "connections" promote the interests of the elites in society at the expense of the common man, especially the American soldier. Unless drastic action is taken by uncorrupted politicians to hold private contractors accountable for the safety of their "employees" during wartime, cases like Fallujah and Blackwater will continue to increase death rates and turn America into the next Fascist State.

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