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Book Review: The Invisible Soldiers: How America Outsourced Our Security By Ann Hagedorn

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THE INVISIBLE SOLDIERS

HOW AMERICA
OUTSOURCED OUR
SECURITY

ANN HAGEDORN

New York, Simon &
Schuster, 2014

320 pages

\$28.00 (hardback)

The Invisible Soldiers: How America Outsourced Our Security

By Ann Hagedorn

Reviewed by Steven L. Schooner, Nash & Cibinic Professor of Government Procurement Law, George Washington University Law School (US Army, retired).

Military historians may someday conclude that, despite the emergence of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or drone) as a modern marvel of information collection, targeting, and weapons delivery, this generation's most significant battlefield evolution involved people. Never before has a nation's military enjoyed the capacity, facilitated by the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP), to deploy an unlimited number of warfighters swiftly, without geographical limitation, and indefinitely sustain that fighting force with an unprecedented level of readiness. Such surge capacity and flexibility come at a steep price, both fiscal and moral, which will be debated for many years to come.

But for all the controversy generated by the government's pervasive outsourcing of battlefield support, it is the post-millennial proliferation of *arms-bearing contractors* that roiled the human rights community and catalyzed a global conversation about the nature and future of modern warfare. This new breed of weapon-toting contractors – serving as guards, escorts, police, advisors, and trainers, but cumulatively perceived in the contingency area as *soldier-like*, and called everything from private military and privatized security to mercenaries—draws Ann Hagedorn's ire and anxiety. And she is not alone.

Peter W. Singer's now familiar *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, introduced professional readers to the increasingly sophisticated arms-bearing contractor industry and the accelerating trend of state reliance on these firms. Others, including, but by no means limited to, Deborah Avant, *The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security*, James Jay Carafano, *Private Sector, Public Wars: Contractors in Combat - Afghanistan, Iraq, and Future Conflicts*, David Isenberg, *Shadow Force: Private Security Contractors in Iraq*, Allison Stanger, *One Nation Under Contract: The Outsourcing of American Power and the Future of Foreign Policy*, and Laura Dickinson, *Outsourcing War and Peace: Preserving Public Values in a World of Privatized Foreign Affairs*, further illuminated a shadowy, seemingly unregulated, globalized, and disaggregated population of former soldiers, shrewd businessmen, soldiers of fortune, adventurers, opportunists, and, of course, the occasional cast-off, rogue, ruffian, and scoundrel.

Hagedorn, like many of her predecessors, struggles for objectivity, but makes no effort to hide her frustrations. Still, *Invisible Soldiers* fills a niche in that its publication follows the peaks and the drawdowns of the Bush and Obama administrations' deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which contractors (of all types) outnumbered uniformed service-members, in both service and, at times, sacrifice. Accordingly, *Invisible Soldiers* offers a more complete retrospective on the proliferation of arms bearing contractors in contingency environments peppered with a healthy dose of skepticism for the future.

A gifted story teller, Hagedorn displays the journalistic skills and instincts she honed at the *Wall Street Journal* by introducing her book with a lengthy, engaging, and compelling, but, ultimately irrelevant, anecdote. To be fair, Hagedorn deserves credit for leading with the unique and poignant tragedy of Kadhim Alkanni, rather than resorting to Blackwater's Nissour Square debacle, now destined to occupy, for Iraq, the inflammatory space that the 1968 My Lai Massacre carved out in Vietnam. (That said, Nissour Square receives fully adequate coverage in Hagedorn's book.) Other critical, and admittedly colorful, players—Tim Spicer of Sandline and Aegis, Blackwater founder Erik Prince, and Doug Brooks, who for many years was the burgeoning security industry's organizing and sophisticated voice—feature prominently. Yet serious policy readers and military historians might be more interested in analyzing the policy role of Gary J. Motesk—DoD's point person—on outsourcing of military and security functions, who somehow escaped mention in this volume.

Ultimately, Hagedorn recognizes the military had little control over the policy vacuum that led to the swift and dramatic dilution of the government's traditional monopoly over the use of force. Rather than resulting from a careful, reasoned, and voluntary delegation of authority to the private sector in conformance with global trends, the US government's outsourcing of military and security functions was necessitated by politically popular but empirically unjustified Congressional troop caps, requiring *non-DoD actors* to rely on arms bearing contractors for, among other things, personal security in a hostile environment. (138) “How else could the nation have engaged in two wars—Iraq and Afghanistan—simultaneously without reinstating the draft?” (160).

The poster child anecdote was the State Department's reliance on its Worldwide Protective Services (WPS) contract—originally a centrally managed source for private security at embassies—which morphed as the population of diplomats and related officials, employees, and support staff multiplied in Iraq. Meanwhile, scores of security firms from around the world entered the region under commercial *subcontracts* with the unprecedented number of contractors supporting every conceivable aspect of the Defense, State, and Agency for International Development departments' missions in the region. References to the eclectic and incendiary *Star Wars* cantina scenes frequently prompted knowing head nods in conferences discussing the private security proliferation phenomenon.

Hagedorn appears to overstate the policy debate between proponents “who firmly believe...in the importance of the private military contractors and ha(ve) no intention of regulating them” (101) and opponents of the government's reliance on private security in contingency operations. No doubt, her clear abolitionist preference is tempered by her recognition the outsourcing train left the station long ago. The realists, or, if you prefer, cynics, realize—for the foreseeable future—the heart of the matter lies in government regulation and management, not the esoteric aspiration of elimination, of private security.

Here, Hagedorn's extensive notes and index demonstrate she took her homework seriously. As a late comer to the literature, *Invisible Soldiers* is able to introduce readers to the Montreaux initiative, an important and laudable global coalition aspiring to bring regulatory order to this

rapidly evolving and chaotic industry. Closer to home, Hagedorn's frustration with the US government's lackadaisical management of the industry is palpable: "The British, including journalists, human rights advocates, politicians, military experts, and private security executives, began sorting out the issues of private military companies years before the Americans." (255) Hagedorn also remains justifiably skeptical of industry self-regulation. Alas, she fares no better than her colleagues in suggesting practical, concrete alternatives.

Hagedorn's perspective and insights on arms bearing contractors, democracies, and empires—intensely personal, yet thoughtfully cognizant of policy, political theory, and philosophy—should interest readers new to the field, as well as those well versed in the issues. Outsourcing the use of force is sufficiently important to the future of democratic states that this book—as well as the growing corpus of literature it adds to—merits serious contemplation.