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Book Review

Wulf, Herbert. 2005. *Internationalizing and Privatizing War and Peace: The Bumpy Ride to Peace Building*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. xv + 263 pp. ISBN 1-4039-4917-4 (hardback). Price: £50.00.

by Bjørn Møller (9 May 2006)

Written by the former director of the Bonn International Center for Conversion, BICC, the work attempts nothing less than an account *cum* analysis of current trends in war and peace and of armed forces worldwide. According to Wulf, the use of military force is becoming increasingly internationalized, in part because of the growth of U.N. peacekeeping operations and the gradual emergence of a military identity for the European Union – the consequence of which is a diminishing role of the state in the realm of security – but also because the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force is being eroded by the growing outsourcing of military tasks to private actors. As a result of these two intertwined processes, civilian and democratic control of the armed forces is being undermined. Since there are no supranational democratic authorities to control the behavior of the armed forces, private actors, such as the arms industry and private military and security companies (PMCs and PSCs), can all too easily escape democratic accountability.

These trends are reinforced by the dynamics of the “new wars” (a somewhat misleading term promulgated by Mary Kaldor) that typically feature confrontation between and among a wide array of different types of armed forces such as Janjaweed-type militias, warlords, and vigilante groups. The emerging picture of the future battlefield is a messy one, as is the “cast” of actors in the great drama of preparations for and waging of armed conflict, where the state as an institution is not even ensured the leading role.

Throughout the book, considerable attention is paid to the costs and benefits of privatization, e.g., with regard to arms production, war fighting, and other military activities, all realms that are merging into a multi-faceted, international security industry. But because of cost-plus pricing arrangements, which remain widespread throughout this industry, and because of the continuing lack of transparency and accountability, Wulf is not convinced that any cost savings are achieved by privatization. He thus reveals privatization to be driven at least as much by ideology as by economic rationality. Wulf also deplores the almost complete disappearance of arms control from the political agendas of the major powers (including the EU which now appears to focus on matching U.S. levels of armaments).

Even though he acknowledges some of the apparent success stories, such as that of the South Africa-based (but not defunct) Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone, Wulf’s view of private military companies is quite critical. Along with a useful and comprehensive (albeit not exhaustive) listing of the main companies, he provides an analysis of the special structure of the modern PMCs that sets them apart from old-fashioned mercenaries, as does the fact that most of them confine their activities to military support functions. Modern PMCs are corporate actors, complete with shareholders, boards, and executive directors. Often spreading themselves across

several industrial sectors besides the military one, they aim for respectability and are determined to nurture good and stable relations with their main customers, i.e., the governments of the West. One might thus argue that the many abuses recorded by the author, not least in occupied Iraq, should be blamed on the buyers of these services rather than on the sellers. The buyers should simply not have relaxed their controls, as especially the United States seems to have done. Whilst offering some suggestions for how PMCs might be controlled and held accountable, one might have wished for an analysis of how market mechanisms could contribute toward this end. The preference of the author, however, is clearly for a strengthening of the role of the state in the military domain.

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