

**The Corporate War Dead:  
Demographics of American and British Contractor Fatalities, 2003-2016**

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***Abstract***

From an obscure sector synonymous with mercenaryism, the private military and security industry has grown to become a significant complementing instrument in military operations. This rise has brought with it considerable attention. Researchers have examined the role of private military and security companies in international relations as well as the history of these companies, and, above all, the legal implications of their use in place of military organizations. As research progresses, a significant gap has become clear. Only a handful of studies have addressed the complex of issues associated with contractors' demographics and lived experience. This paper sheds some light over this lacuna, examining contractors' demographics using descriptive statistics from an original dataset of American and British contractors who died in Iraq between the years 2003-2016. The paper augments our understanding of an important population of post-Fordist contracted workforce, those peripheral workers supplementing military activity in high-risk occupations with uncertain long-term outcomes.

***Keywords:***

PMSCs; Demography; Post-Fordism, New Public Management, Outsourcing Security

Over the past two decades or so, a network of private military and security companies (PMSCs) has grown from an obscure sector synonymous with mercenaryism (Dickinson 2011; Percy 2007) to a lawful executor of state violence (McCoy 2012), at once a semi-autonomous political power in its own right (Bures 2014; Howe 1998; Krahnemann 2016) and a critical complementing instrument of the traditional military operations of many states (Dunigan 2011; Lovewine 2011).<sup>i</sup> This rise has brought with it considerable scholarly attention, with academics examining the role of these companies in international relations (Spearin 2011; Spearin 2008), the historical circumstances that led to this development (Kinsey 2006; Singer 2011), and above all, the legal implications of outsourcing security and war (Gillard 2006; Heinecken 2013; Leander 2010).

As research on the topic progresses, a significant gap has become clear. While researchers now understand the rise of PMSCs and the new roles performed by PMSCs on the macro-social level, there is little that we know, empirically, about those who work in this critical industry (White 2017, Swed and Crosbie 2017). Only a handful of studies address the complex of issues associated with contractors' demographics and life experiences in the wake of this neo-liberal trend of outsourcing "core" state tasks to "peripheral" actors (King 2006, Levy 2010). This paper addresses that gap, adding to our understanding of contractors' demographics by using descriptive statistics from an original dataset of American and British contractors who died in Iraq between the years 2003-2016.

This paper's primary contribution is simultaneously descriptive and theoretical in nature. On one hand, it expands our understanding of fundamental questions about who the contractors are, basing our claims on a large sample of one critically important population. By looking at the demographics of the dead American and British contractors, we learn more about this particular population and are able to tentatively extrapolate to the larger western contractors' population,

which we still know very little about. While the descriptive data are valuable in their own right, they have a secondary significance as a source of new theoretical insight and reflection. Particularly, it adds to the discussion of the neo-liberal aspects of the privatization of security. The data illustrate what global shifts in military organization toward new public management principles (NPM) (Ortiz 2010) and post-Fordism logics (Levy 2010) mean for the PMSC workforce. We hope to steer the scholarship away from its tight focus on the macro-social scale and to encourage examinations of the contractors themselves in their individual and organizational contexts.

### **The rise of PMSCs in the contemporary and security landscape**

The history of PMSCs and military contracting is well known thanks to a number of landmark studies (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009; Avant 2005; Leander 2006; Singer 2011). In brief, several successful military partnerships between traditional state militaries and “corporate warriors” (Singer 2011) in the 1990s demonstrated the military and security potential of the PMSCs sector. According to Freedonia, the global security service market was worth \$138.6 billion in 2007 and was estimated at \$152.5 billion in 2009. The global market for private security services is predicted to continue an annual growth rate of about 7.4% (Freedonia 2008; Freedonia 2011). Today PMSCs are involved in active conflicts across the entire globe. They are also taking crucial part in war preparation and post-conflict and peacetime security in numerous countries.

The rise of PMSC and its implications have been addressed in scholarship from different disciplines. Historians and political scientists have explained how we have gotten to where we are today (Avant 2005; Chesterman and Lehnardt 2007; Singer 2011). This line of research attempts to define the phenomenon by contextualizing it in earlier scholarship on mercenaries

(Avant 2004; Mandel 2001; O'Brien 2000). International relations and security experts have characteristically focused on regulation (Dickinson 2011; Leander 2006; Taussig-Rubbo 2009). Legal scholars have targeted questions of legitimacy and legality (Salzman 2008; Whyte 2003). The law tradition has also highlighted questions of accountability (De Nevers 2009; Dickinson 2011; Gillard 2006) and criminal liability (Finkelman 2008; Leander 2010; Price 2013), which became pivotal as reports of contractors' misconduct and criminal behavior emerged (see Federal Contractor Misconduct Database). Privatization as part of a neo-liberal agenda that prizes cost-efficacy dictated a different line of research. Security scholars and political scientists try to answer whether using PMSCs reduce costs (Halpin 2011) and try assess the quality of their performance (Dunigan 2011; Lovewine 2011; Petersohn 2013; Petersohn 2014).

A review of PMSCs scholarship shows that although debated extensively by different disciplines, little research has been done on the demographics of contractors (Swed and Crosbie 2017). While we assume things about their capabilities and training, our assumptions may or may not correspond with reality. Why do we know so little about the contractors themselves when we benefit from an otherwise rich and exhaustive literature? Though contracted to deliver governmental functions, PMSCs do not share information publicly and are not obligated to the same transparency as government agencies and employees. This barrier makes PMSCs and contractors "hard to reach" research populations (Cohen and Arieli 2011). This barrier also dictates the general propensity in the literature on PMSCs to focus on anecdotes and macro-social trends, rather on data-rich analysis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are of course exceptions, including works as diverse as Christensen (2016), Dunigan (2013), Kelty and Bierman (2013), Petersohn (2014) and several others.

This dissonance between PMSCs' pivotal role in contemporary international security and the lack of reliable systematic data on their contribution has been noted in the political arena. US Members of Congress have begun to demand better information on contractors' involvement in military operations, with varied results. Since 2007, for example, US government agencies have started producing a trickle of aggregated data on labor issues relating to contractors and PMSCs. These represent merely the first step in learning about the industry. Perhaps the most valuable source of government data, the CENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Report, provides detailed information about total numbers of contractors employed in Iraq and Afghanistan, but makes public almost no demographic data about this population.<sup>2</sup>

Scholarship focused on the neo-liberal context of the privatization of security offers a blueprint for the characteristics of this industry's workforce. The neo-liberal agenda promotes cost-efficient policy-making, even in the field of security (Krahmann 2006). It is characterized in the adaptation of new public management (NPM) methods within the armed forces (Ortiz 2010) and a shift towards a post-Fordist workforce structure (King 2006). Both terms have been in use for decades but have only rarely been placed in dialogue with military studies. Significantly, both terms speak to an ever-increasing valuation of flexibility. Where NPM conceptualizes the landscape of policies which replace permanent staff with more precarious and temporary postings (Hughes 1998), post-Fordism contextualizes these personnel preferences within a global shift from mass production to flexible specialization (e.g. Lipietz 1997, Gartman 1998, Steinmetz 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> The CENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Reports have been published quarterly since 2010. They report on category of citizenship (US citizen, third country nationals or local/ host country nationals); location of employment (Afghanistan only, Iraq only or Other USCENTCOM location) and mission category (e.g. logistics/ maintenance, base support etc).

The flexibility of PMSCs is intimately linked to the disposability of contractors. In part, then, this article focuses on the corporate war dead in the hope of contributing to this much broader scholarly effort, namely the quest to understand how post-Fordist and NPM dynamics actually play out in the very closed and hard-to-research security sector. In his analysis of post-Fordism trends in what he calls the “market army”, for example, Levy (2010) predicts that the overspecialization of peripheral workers will lead to outsourcing of core military functions, a pattern we explore below. For the moment, it suffices to note that post-Fordist tendencies have already contributed to the split of the traditional military workforce into a specialist core and a part-time periphery. Though the peripheral workforce is generally low-skilled, the pursuit of efficiency gains alongside shrinking budgets means that some highly specialized professionals also number among the peripheral workers.

To summarize, while we know very little about the PMSCs workforce, we can assume they will have to be able to offer cost-efficient services. These can manifest in two forms, with a low-skilled workforce arising alongside a high-skilled workforce. Both types will have to offer modularity in service and deployment as well as endurance in high-risk environments.

So what do we know about the contractors themselves? A handful of scholarly studies provide some eclectic insights into contractors’ demographics. Congressional Research Service studies show that contractors working for American PMSCs are mostly non-Americans, especially in the service sub-sector (Schwartz 2010; Schwartz 2011). A glance of this sub-sector was presented in the studies of Chisholm (Chisholm 2015; Chisholm 2014a; Chisholm 2014b) on former Gurkha soldiers, Kanemasu and Molnar (2017) on Fijian labor in the industry, and Christensen’s study on former Sierra Leonean child soldiers contracting work in Iraq (2016). Those confirm the core-periphery thesis (King 2006), especially the low skilled workforce

assumption. Several studies have also examined the masculinity of typical PMSC work environments, which together suggest very low rates of representation of women in the contractor population in addition to their potential exposure to sexual assault and harassment (Eichler 2015; Schulz and Yeung 2008; Stachowitsch 2013).

Some scholars have begun to collect more systematic data on contractors' health (Dunigan et al. 2013; Feinstein and Botes 2009), which in turn provide insights into key demographic categories including marital status, education, age, professional background, and work condition. Feinstein and Botes (2009) surveyed 79 U.S. contractors associated with International Contractors Association (ICA) that work in security regarding their psychological health. Their data show that contractors are mostly single (57%). They tend to be more educated than the general public, with 63% went to college or university. Most of them are veterans (54%), while 33% used to work in law enforcement. These contractors are middle-aged, with Feinstein and Botes (2009) marking the mean age as 43. An online study by RAND, focusing on Western and South African contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan (N = 660), found that over two thirds of the sample are over 40 (Dunigan et al. 2013). That study also provided some insights into the contractors' combat experience and work conditions. Contractors' combat exposure is roughly similar to those of military populations. Their deployment periods are shorter (up to six months) and 65% reported they were deployed three or more times. A longitudinal study, focusing on British veterans who entered the private security sector, finds that transitioning from being a "public military veteran" to a "private military veteran" carries with it a new set of socioeconomic trajectories across the life course, but as to how these will affect the lives of former contractors in the long term, the data remain too limited to say (White 2017).

The consequences of the rise of PMSCs politically, economically and legally have been addressed in multiple studies. Nevertheless, with the exception of the handful of studies previously mentioned, scholarship has remained for the most part on the macro-social level, mapping the phenomenon as a whole rather than explaining who the contractors are.

## **Method**

We use descriptive statistics to analyze our sample of contractors who died in Iraq by block, a technique we employ to make the analysis more accessible. When appropriate, the data is compared to the US active duty population as a reference. This reference group also helps us continue the discussion of post-Fordism's core-periphery division of labor (King 2006). We will then contextualize the results in relation to the existing PMSC scholarship.

## **Data**

To overcome the data collection limitations mentioned above, we use an original dataset of American and British contractors who died in Iraq. First, we compiled a list of American and British private contractors who died in Iraq from open sources. Next, we coded data from their obituaries and from local media announcements. This part provides us with basic demographics and personal history. We then extrapolated from their geographic data to learn about the personal background and social forces that may influence them.

Our dataset has 238 contractors, of whom 184 are American and 54 British. According to open sources, this sample accounts for over 61% of all American contractors' casualties in Iraq and over 91% of the all British contractors in Iraq. Relying on open sources, and particularly on obituaries, encourages us to be very cautious in the data collection process, although multiple studies attest to the fact that obituaries can serve as a reliable and valid source on mortality and

some personal data (MacKay, Moore and Huntingford 2016; Soowamber et al. 2015). Data on the reference group was collected from *2015 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community* (Department of Defense, 2015) as well as other open sources.

We have organized the data in four blocks of variables: 1) basic demographics; 2) personal background; 3) professional background; and 4) work environment and experience. The first block, demographics, accounts for age, gender, race (White, Black, and other race), and nationality (American or British). Finally, we account for education as an ordinal variable (0 = no education or high school; 1= some college or professional diploma; 2 = college degree).

The second block accounts for personal background and includes birthplace and last place of residence at the city and state (or region in the UK case) levels. Building off those variables, we created a list of addendum variables that represent economic, social, and cultural indicators. The birthplace data is historical data fixed on 1980 and represents the economic, and social forces prevalent in the region during the individuals' childhood. Those applied only for the American sub-sample. The first is proportion of veterans in the birth place that is represented in an ordinal variable (1= 0%-1%, 2= 1.1%-2.5%, 3=2.6%-5%, 4=5.1%-7%, 5=7.1%-10.9%) (NCVAS 1980). Other variables are unemployment rates and population size in the region in 1980 (for easier interpretation, population size is divided by 100,000). Finally, we coded for rural or urban birthplace (a dummy variable), using the Census Bureau data.<sup>3</sup>

The data on the last place of residence is fixed on 2016 and gives rise to similar variables as birthplace: urban/rural,<sup>4</sup> population size, unemployment, and proportion of veterans in the

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<sup>3</sup> This measure is fixed to 1990 and used as a proxy due to changes in the Census Bureau definition.

<sup>4</sup> The US Census identifies two types of urban area, Urbanized Areas (UA) of 50,000 or more people and Urbanized Clusters (UC) of 2,500 to 50,000 people. We categorize respondent birthplaces as either urban (UA in the Census ranking) or non-urban (UC or rural in the Census ranking).

region. The latter is operationalized as a continuous variable, given the availability of better data. We also account for veteran unemployment in the region. Lastly, we look at GDP per state divided by 1,000 for easier interpretation.

In the third block, we examine the contractors' professional background. We code for if they had military experience (a binary variable), and if so, how long they served and, for the American sub-sample, their military branch (Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, or Reserve/National Guard). We also account for rank (enlisted or officer), special operations background (a binary variable), and deployment into conflict areas. We also account for type of civilian professional experience the contractors obtained. We divide those professions into civil service and administration (a category that includes police, fire fighters, and other law enforcement jobs), logistics and maintenance, and retired (all binary variables).

The fourth block accounts for the work environment, looking at years as a contractor (1 = less than a year; 2 = at least a year; 3 = 2-4 years; 4 = 5+ years), and type of service contracted to provide. Due to the small sample size, we aggregated types of services such as transportation, communication, base maintenance, and logistics under the title "logistics and maintenance". All security functions, whether martial, base-related, or others were titled "security" in our sample. Finally, we account for administrative roles, referring to them as white-collar services. We also examine the location and circumstances of death (in the workplace or on the road) and cause of death, divided into three variables: enemy action, accident, and other cause.

## **Analysis**

In what follows, we use descriptive statistics to analyze our sample of contractors who died in Iraq by block while comparing them to our reference group of active duty US soldiers.

### *Basic demographics*

*Age.* Examination of the contractors' age shows that they are significantly older than their active-duty counterparts. While the average age of American soldiers is 28.5, the mean contractor age stands at 40.12, with a standard deviation of 10.19 (Table 1). This difference is even higher in comparison to the sample of American soldiers that died in Iraq, average age 26, (Babwin and Breen 2011). Those findings correspond with the data provided by Dunigan et al. (2013) and report slightly higher than Feinstein and Botes's (2009) mean of 38. Those employed in security are younger (average age 37.96) than those who provide other services (average age 44.53). The data also shows that British contractors are younger than their American counterparts.

*Gender.* The gender distribution in our sample is extraordinarily small, standing at only three observations. Women represent only 1.26% of the sample, significantly lower than the active duty proportions of 16.8%. Nonetheless, they are closer, though still lower, of the US female casualties in Iraq (2.49%) and the British (3.35%).

*Race/ Ethnicity.* Within the sample, there is racial diversity only in the American sub-sample. The UK contractors are all White. Most American contractors are White (86.39%) with 4.14% Black and 9.47% "other" race. This is different from the racial composition among the active duty of White 70.7%, Black 17%, and other races 12.3%. It is also different than the racial composition of American casualties in Iraq of White 82.54%, Black 9.95%, and 4.51% for other races (Department of Defense 2008). And it is different from the UK armed forces race distribution that stands at 7.1% for Black and minority ethnic (Rutherford 2014). Those figures indicate that White representation in the contractor population is higher than in the armed forces while the Black representation is considerably lower.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Demographics of US and UK Contractors Casualties in Iraq**

	Entire Sample					US		UK		Active Duty Average US	
	Freq	%	Obs.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Age			224	40.12	10.19	41.00	10.47	37.37	8.79	28.50	
Gender			238	0.01	0.11	0.01	0.12	0.00	0.00		
	Male	235	98.74							83.20	
	Female	3	1.26							16.80	
Race			169	2.82	0.47						
	White	146	86.39			0.59	0.49	1.00	0.00	70.70	
	Black	7	4.14							17.00	
	Other Race	16	9.47							12.30	
Married		127	62.56	203	0.62	0.48	0.64	0.48	0.56	0.50	54.30
Having Dependents		133	65.84	202	0.65	0.47	0.63	0.48	0.74	0.44	41.20
Nationality			238	0.22	0.41						
	American	184	77.31								
	British	54	22.69								
Education			105	2.70							
No education		2	1.90							0.20	
High school		58	55.24							76.50	
Some college		14	13.33								
College		31	29.52							21.10	

*Family status.* Most contractors are married (62.56%) and/or have dependents (65.84%). Those figures are considerably higher than active duty members of 54.3% married and 41.2% have dependents. Given the contractors' average age, those numbers are not unusual, yet they differ from the American veteran population, which has a higher rate of marriage (73%) and much lower rate of having dependents (32.28%) (Olsen 2006). Also, those numbers are different

from Feinstein and Botes's (2009) survey that measured only 36.7% as married. Comparing the UK and US contractors, we can see that the British less likely to be married and more likely to have dependents.

*Education.* On education, the data show that about 57% of contractors have low level of education (no high school or high school diploma). Those are higher than active duty reference group with 76.7%. Yet, given their age it is expected. By contrast, the rate of American veterans with "no education" or high school diploma only stands at 40.1%, "some college" is 32.8% and having a college degree stands at 27.1%. Feinstein and Botes (2009) report 38% completing high school, 13.33% have some college and 29.52% have an academic degree. The contractors in the sample were therefore less educated than their American veteran counterparts as well as the contractors in Feinstein and Botes's (2009) sample.

### *Personal background*

In order to learn about the contractors' personal background, we concentrate the second block on two geographical points in the life-course of these individuals. The first is their birthplace and the second is their last place of residence (Table 2). By examining those two points, we extrapolate on social forces those individuals were exposed to growing up and later as adults who decided to work for PMSCs in Iraq.

*Place of Birth.* Starting with the background from the contractors' birthplace we see that most of them came from urban areas (55.26%), same as the active duty. Unemployment rates in 1980 in birth place stands at 5.98%, lower than the national rate (7.1%), but higher than the active duty population (5.55%). Most of the contractors (44.83%) came from states with veteran

populations of between 1.1%-2.5%, which is relatively low, similar to the active duty population (53%).

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Personal Background of US and UK Contractors Casualties in Iraq**

	Entire Sample				US		UK		Active Duty Average US
	Freq	%	Obs.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Birth Place</b>									
Location			154	0.55	0.49				
Rural	68	44.74							44.00
Urban	84	55.26							56.00
Population Size			145	79.97	61.95				82.93
1980									
GDP			149	100.47	89.66				105.25
1980									
Unemployment Rates			146	5.98	1.36				5.55
1980									
Veteran Population			145	2.66	1.19				2.62
1980									
0%-1%	18	12.41							0.11
1.1%-2.5%	65	44.83							0.53
2.6%-5%	26	17.93							0.08
5.1%-7%	20	13.79							0.11
7.1%-10.9%	16	11.03							0.53
<b>Last Place of Residence</b>									
	Freq	%	Obs.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Location			194	0.46	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.49	0.42
Rural	103	53.09							44.00
Urban	91	46.91							56.00
Population Size				134.51	109.81				138.94
GDP				770.12	701.92				1165.81
Unemployment Rates			158	5.26	0.96	5.21	0.92	5.78	1.26
1980									
Veteran Population			147	6.85	1.20	11.8	1.77	5.80	1.36
1980									
Veteran unemployment			198	4.49	1.30	4.19	0.93	5.40	1.78

*Residence.* Unlike birthplace, the contractors' last place of residence more rural than urban, higher than the reference group. The level of unemployment in last place of residence

before death stands at 5.26%, higher than the national rate of 4.6% in the US and the active duty sample rate (5.02%). The rate of the local veteran population for the US sub-sample is 6.85%, similar to the national level of 6.82% and active duty population (6.88%). The level of veteran unemployment in those states is 4.49%, higher than the national rate of 4.3% and the reference group (3.71%).

***Professional background***

A common assumption about western private contractors is that they are former soldiers, and indeed this is the case for 82.5% of our sample. Those are higher proportions than Feinstein and Botes (2009) report the rate at 54% and closer to the Dunigan et al. (2013) rate of 84%. The average years in service is 11.25 with a standard deviation of 6.47, complementing earlier data on the contractors’ average age. The ratio of officers to enlisted within the contractor population is about 11:39, better than the current active duty ratio of 9:41. A significant number of the contractors are former special operations forces (47.37%), with representatives from the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Command (AKA Green Berets, USA), 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (USA), 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment (USA), and Special Boat Service (UK). Those numbers are very high, especially in comparison to the active duty sample where special forces accounts for only 4.66% of the population. The high proportions of former special operations forces complement earlier data on average age since these servicemembers are generally older than regular enlisted servicemembers (Table 3).

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Professional Background of US and UK Contractors Casualties in Iraq**

Entire Sample					US		UK		Active Duty Average US
Freq	%	Obs.	Mea n	SD	Mea n	SD	Mea n	SD	

Military Experience	165	82.50	200	0.85	0.38	0.80	0.39	0.88	0.32	
Years in Service			102	11.25	6.47	11.20	6.73	11.45	5.41	
Rank				56.00	0.21	0.26	0.44	0.07	0.26	
Enlisted	44	78.57								82.30
Officer	12	21.43								17.70
Special Forces	63	47.37	133	0.47	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.40	0.49	4.66
Branch										
USA	54	46.15	117	0.46	0.50					36.60
USMC	32	27.35	117	0.27	0.44					14.20
USN	15	12.82	117	0.12	0.33					24.80
USAF	9	7.69	117	0.07	0.26					24.30
Reserves	22	18.8	117	0.18	0.39					
Deployment	67	56.78	118	0.56	0.49	0.67	0.47	0.51	0.50	
Civilian profession										
Civil Service	52	21.85	238	0.21	0.41	0.24	0.43	0.12	0.33	
Administrative	13	5.46	238	0.05	0.22	0.05	0.23	0.03	0.19	
Logistics/ Maintenance	39	16.39	238	0.16	0.37	0.17	0.38	0.11	0.31	
Other experience	16	6.72	238	0.06	0.25	0.06	0.24	0.07	0.26	
Retired	35	14.71	238	0.14	0.35	0.16	0.37	0.07	0.26	

*Military experience.* Examining the American contractors' affiliation, we see that most of them are from the Army (46.15%). Others served with the Marine Corp (27.35%), Navy (12.82%), Air Force (7.69%), and Reserve/ Guard from all branches (18.8%). Those proportions differ from the active duty members' numbers. The Army represents the biggest branch, accounting for 36.6% of the US military active duty personnel; among those in the sample, their representation is even higher. Also, the former Marines are overrepresented in the sample given they account for only 14.2% of the active duty personnel while in the sample for 27.35%. Deployment experience is widespread among contractors in the sample with 56.78%. The overrepresentation of Army and Marine Corps veterans as well as formerly-deployed veterans is suggestive of infantry and combat skills being disproportionately valued in the industry relative to the specialist skills of the technical branches, the Navy and Air Force.

*Civilian employment.* Many of the contractors joined PMSCs after a career in the civil sector. The most common civilian employers are law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and police forces, all of which we defined as civil service (21.85%). Among those we find a higher rate in the sample. Civilian experience in logistics and/or maintenance is also significant with 16.39%. Finally, 14.71% of the contractors are retired, with more American than British.

*Work environment and experience*

The contractors were working for 65 different companies. Most of the contractors were new, with 82.31% of the sample having experience of one year or less. However, in a one-year period, they could have been deployed more than once (Table 4). We believe that those figures tell us about the nature of employment rather the risk of this occupation. We interpret them as an indication of the high turnaround and short employment periods and not as high mortality rates.<sup>5</sup> Only a small segment stayed for a long period while most seem to treat contracting as a temporary or a short-term job. This complements existing research that indicates that deployments are typically short, lasting for a few months (Dunigan et al. 2013).

A 2011 congressional report stated that most contractors in Iraq (61%) were providing base support services (Schwartz 2011). The second most frequent type of service mentioned was security (18%). In our sample, most contractors (61.9%) provided security services. The proportion of those who provided administrative or logistics/maintenance services stand at 9.09% and 29% respectively. The difference here is clearly related to the relative danger of the types of positions, and so these items teach us more about the lived experience of those contractors than of the contracting industry per-se.

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<sup>5</sup> In other words, while our entire sample is deceased (since we sample on mortality), we assume that a comparable sample of still-living contractors would have similarly brief employment tenure.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Work Environment and Experience of US and UK Contractors Casualties in Iraq**

	Entire Sample					US		UK	
	Freq	%	Obs.	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Years as contractor			130	1.67	0.85	0.83	1.32	0.92	1.38
Less than a year	70	53.85							
At least a year	37	28.46							
2-4 years	18	13.85							
5 years and more	5	3.85							
Type of contract									
Security	143	61.90	231	0.61	0.48	0.90	0.29	0.53	0.50
Administrative	21	9.09	231	0.09	0.28	0.11	0.31	0.01	0.13
Logistics/ Maintenance	67	29.00	231	0.29	0.45	0.35	0.47	0.07	0.26
Place of death			238	0.42	0.49	0.41	0.49	0.48	0.50
At work or base	136	57.14							
Roads	102	42.86							
Cause of death									
Enemy action	200	85.11	235	0.85	0.35	0.84	0.36	0.87	0.33
Accident	21	8.94	235	0.08	0.28	0.09	0.30	0.05	0.23
Other cause	6	2.55	235	0.02	0.15	0.01	0.10	0.07	0.26

To that end, we also examined the place and circumstances of contractors' deaths to learn about their work environment. Most deaths took place at work or on base (57.14%), with most in Baghdad (37.82%). Common deaths on the road (42.86%) occurred when contractors come into contact with IEDs, ambushes, and convoy attacks. Cause of death was attributed mostly to enemy action (85.11%). Accidents (e.g. helicopter crashes, friendly fire, or vehicle accident) and other causes of death (e.g. suicide, or natural causes) represent the minority of the cases with 8.94% and 2.55% respectively.

Comparing those figures to the US military deaths between 1990 to 2011 highlights two things (AFHSC 2012). First, their work environment is safer in comparison to the military regarding accidents as cause of death with 9% versus 20.94%. Second, contractors' likelihood of dying of enemy attacks is considerably higher than soldiers with 85.11% in comparison to

29.62% combat-related deaths in the military. Those proportions are very high and can explain the rise of contractors' deaths to the point where it surmounted US active duty deaths in Iraq (Ricks 2011). Likewise, Dunigan et al.'s (2013) comparison between the combat experience of contractors and veterans shows that contractors' rate of being part of a team that suffers casualties is higher than veterans.

## **Discussion**

In this paper, we explored the demographics of the American and British contractors who died in Iraq. By doing so, we extend our understanding of the large population of western private military and security contractors who occupy such a central role in international security, a population about whom we know very little. The obituaries and related documentary records of the American and British dead contractors teach us about contractors' basic demographics, personal and professional background, work environment, and experience.

There are, of course, limitations we would like to emphasize. First, the sample focuses on contractors from two Western countries, which together account for a relatively small portion of the global contractor population (US Department of Labor). This is an important point given that most of the periphery workforce is not western. Secondly, our sample focuses on "shooters" and other contractors in the industry who go to the field rather than work in the administrative part of the sector. Thirdly, our sample comprises of those who died in contract, which may have a selection bias. Though it is unlikely that they differ significantly from the same living population, this is something to take into account. Finally, our data collection method, focusing on obituaries and open sources, has its own distinctive limitations. While avoiding some of the selection biases of online surveys (a common approach to sample contractors), it selects based on mortality, which here is in turn closely correlated with higher-risk occupations, personalities and lifestyles.

Likewise, the obituaries themselves are written for the most part by family members, with all that this implies in terms of accurate representations of the deceased.

So, who are the American and British dead corporate warriors? They are mostly White men in their forties. They are mostly veterans, although not all had previous military experience and they differ from their veteran peers statistically in a number of ways. They are less likely to be married, for example, but much more likely to have dependents. The American contractors were likely to live in more rural parts relative to the active duty population and in places with higher rates of unemployment, both for the general population and veterans in particular. Those areas seem to be more familiar with veterans, having higher proportions of veteran than other parts of the country. They worked short-term jobs with high turnover for more than 65 different companies. They worked in security or logistics and administration. They died on the job, often on their way to work, and mostly due to enemy action. Their jobs were safer than their military counterparts, but their deaths were more likely to occur due to enemy action. The obituaries of the 235 men and 3 women in our sample reveal that there are however many different stories to tell about this population, many different personal and professional backgrounds that lead to someone risking their life in a foreign war as a contractor.

This information augments previous scholarship on the post-Fordism trend in the military (King 2006; Krahmann 2006; Levy 2010; Ortiz 2010). The contractors' profiles bring to life the periphery workforce mentioned in the literature, in this case, the highly skilled one. The greater part of these contractors are professional soldiers with vast military experience. About half of them are special forces with about a quarter of them officers. Their average years in service stands at 11.25. Those proportions represent considerable experience. Indeed, this high-skilled

periphery workforce is more experienced than the average active duty personnel, complementing Levy (2010) argument.

The high proportions of special forces can also explain the homogeneity of this population. Special forces are an elite club that is very hard to get in. For a long period of time women were not allowed in and even after opening the ranks for some positions within those units the number of women remain negligible (Seck 2017). This complements the gender scholarship on PMSCs that underscores its gender imbalance within the workplace (Eichler 2015). Special forces units are also predominantly White (Harrell et al. 1999). A glance on this club's demographics shows that Black operators account for less than 2% of Navy Seals and about 5% of Special Operation Forces (Brook 2015). Within the sample, Whites account for 92% of the special forces sub-sample with the other 8% other race.

The data also highlight the modular format of this workforce's employment as well as its endurance to high risk. Over 80% of the sample were deployed several times in a period of a year or less. This indicate for short deployment for particular missions and functions. Moreover, the high proportions of casualties complement the notion of outsourcing risk to the periphery workforce. These contractors seem to be more exposed to risk from enemy combatants than active duty members. This trend raises important questions about their terms of employment, regulations, and the protection of those corporate soldiers, echoing general concerns of weak regulation on the industry (Leander 2006).

The dead corporate warriors' demographics also touches upon the issue of veterans' reintegration and lifelong earning potential. Veterans' transition to civilian life can be difficult, entailing the acquiring of a new habitus and releasing the military one (Cooper et al. 2018). Transition difficulties include the loss of military community and camaraderie (Westwood et al

2010), identity crisis related to change in status and cultural adjustment (Cooper et al. 2018; Smith and True 2014), changes in family routines (Cooper et al. 2018), and the challenges of obtaining a job in a civilian sphere (Loughran 2014). Contracting offers those veterans who struggle and find it hard to reintegrate an “easy” outlet, a job that is the closest thing to the military without being the military. This way they may defer from making real adjustment to civilian life, and instead continue do what they are used to doing but now with more flexible work conditions. Furthermore, it may allow them to secure a job prior to their contract termination, a privilege that is uncommon among veterans (Loughran 2014). The analysis examines the PMSCs population at two time points, 1980 and 2016. The first looks at the economic trends that shaped their childhood, while the latter examine those trends influencing their day-to-day life. Examining the two we see that those contractors come disproportionately from rural areas with weak economic performances compared to their active duty counterparts. These are areas with high unemployment and large veteran populations. Together, the picture that emerges is of environments that harden the transition and encourage reenlistment into a periphery workforce after having left the military core workforce.

Moreover, it seems that there is more of a pull than a push involved in this process. Those who could not stay in the military due to cuts are the ones getting pushed toward these jobs. Those contractors are less educated than their veteran counterparts. Their main specialization is military related, which makes it harder for them to translate it to the civilian market (Loughran 2014). They are married with children, living in states with high unemployment rates. They have duties and obligations but struggle to find a job. PMSCs are a way out. Only a handful of non-veterans are employed in this sector, per our sample. And so, we are faced with an industry

recruiting less based on the compensation being offered, which would attract non- veterans, but more likely on something else instead.

### **Conclusion**

The paper underscores the other side of the shift towards post-Fordist NPM policies (Ortiz 2010), examining workforce demographics. The quest for cost-efficient security drives states to shrink their armies and military budgets, retaining only a core of professionals (Krahmann 2006). As they file out of the core workforce, they are confronted with either overcoming the challenges of adjusting to a civilian workforce or delaying that adjustment while reenlisting in the military's contracted, peripheral workforce. For some, this may be just what is needed. For others, this new exposure to risk will have very negative and even life-ending consequences. In particular, rural, White middle-aged veterans who struggle with local weak economies and face potential unemployment may view PMSCs as their way out of economic and reintegration problems.

Paradoxically, as PMSCs become more pervasive and consequential within the security apparatus (both in foreign and domestic settings), the less we know about them. Contracting is essentially the outsourcing of public functions, functions that in public hands are accountable, well-regulated, and documented. Missing as a consequence of privatization is rich, accessible data about the workforce, data which would allow us to ask questions regarding inequality, misconduct and exploitation. The standard quality of public sector data allows us to examine the long-term consequences, intended and unintended, of state policies. For example, this is how we know that women in the military suffer from discrimination or that Black people are more likely to be stopped by the police. We have no comparable data for the private sector, and certainly not for the PMSCs that increasingly take on the state's monopoly of legitimate violence. Our data is not the comprehensive portfolio of this industry, but merely the beginning of the discussion. We

encourage other scholars to follow through and shed light on this important development in military affairs and security in general.

The outsourcing of national security concerns to PMSCs allows national security walls of secrecy and over-classification (Setty, 2017) to obscure the violence done in our names – equally, it prevents us from understanding the welfare and long-term costs borne by those tasked with actually doing that violence. In this paper, we attempted to shed some light into a very dark room. We offer a unique if imperfect snapshot of the demographics of a segment of this industry workforce. We do not claim that it is a representative sample of the industry. Yet, given the severity of this data chasm, we hope this article will offer future researchers a clearer perspective on who *are* the contractors – and particularly, who *were* the American and British corporate war dead, the men and women who died on the job in Iraq and whose names appear on no war memorial.

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<sup>i</sup> Given there is no common definition for those companies and the lines between private military and security companies are blurry, we define PMSCs as companies that provide military and/or security services to the military in conflict areas.