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Contracting out Support Services in Future Expeditionary Operations: Learning from the Afghan Experience

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Abstract

As with the US led Coalition war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan has seen an unprecedented number of private contractors being utilised in support of military operations in the country. In the case of the United States government for example, over half of its personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq are contract employees, while the same figure in the UK stands at 30 per cent and is set to increase in the coming years. This level of contractor involvement in the 'War on Terror' is not inconsequential. Indeed, their contribution to military operations is so large they are now able to influence NATO's counter-insurgency operations and thus its overall strategy for fighting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Importantly, such involvement can be both beneficial and/or detrimental. This article first sets out to explore how NATO came to rely on so many contractors in Afghanistan and the risks this involves for the 'War on Terror'.

Keywords

Private contractors; Afghanistan; War on Terror

AS THE US MILITARY OPERATION IN IRAQ BEGAN TO SCALE BACK IN THE RUN-UP TO THE departure of the last US troops at the end of 2011, military contractors turned their attention to Afghanistan. Even though there still is considerable business in Iraq, for example an estimated 5,000 private security guards for US diplomats in the country, Afghanistan is seen as the next major market by contractors willing to operate in conflict zones (Bowman 2011). In fact, contractors have been engaged in Afghanistan since 2001 and the start of Operation 'Enduring Freedom', which overthrew the Taliban. However, public interest in their activities in the country was quickly overshadowed by the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. Of the two countries, Iraq was always going to be the priority for the Administration in its fight against "global terrorism", while Afghanistan became a secondary concern. With the troop drawdown in Iraq though, this has changed. Afghanistan has taken on a new degree of urgency, especially in terms of the level of manpower and resources that are now being committed to the country.

As the title suggests, this article examines the problems that need tending to before future expeditionary operations from the experience of contracting out support services in

Afghanistan.¹ Why Afghanistan? First, it is currently seen as the centre of gravity in the “War on Terror” of which contractors are a part through their support to military operations. Second, as a percentage of the workforce in recent NATO operations, there are more contractors supporting NATO troops in Afghanistan than any other NATO operations (Schwartz, 29 March 2011: 2). Moreover, contracting in Afghanistan is under-researched in comparison to Iraq. Also, given this publication’s focus on European countries, the war in Afghanistan involves more European countries than the war in Iraq, in particular Germany and France. Thus, the lessons to be learnt come from these European countries’ own experiences of contracting out, which may furthermore be more representative (in terms of scale) than the US history of contracting. Also, importantly, Afghanistan is likely to be a primary focus for NATO forces² for some time to come. Since the article is concerned with the impact of the market on future expeditionary operations and how it might shape strategy, the focus on Afghanistan makes sense as the war there is ongoing with a high ratio of contractors in the overall military force, so that the findings of this article are particularly and directly relevant to the future of this conflict, as well as future ones.

The article will be structured as follows. First it will briefly discuss the conceptual framework applied here. In so doing, it will justify the focus on outsourced support services. It will present and historically contextualise “counterinsurgency” warfare theory, the self-sufficient military, and present the conceptualisation of a “core-competency” military. It will do so not least by pointing out key political decisions regarding military force structures among others.

The article will then discuss the contracting experience in Afghanistan with a view to its relevance for “counterinsurgency” warfare, security of development projects, and the military supply chains. Despite the focus on European countries it will be necessary to also draw on evidence from the US military, partly because some contracts are jointly operated by the US and other militaries or jointly through NATO, and partly because the US provides the most empirical evidence.

The final section will conclude by systematically drawing together the preceding analyses and findings and from there attempt an outlook at what remains to be improved in outsourcing policy and how contractors should feature in future expeditionary operations. The article will draw these conclusions from the premise that no major political shifts take place in the near future which would make outsourcing obsolete. It acknowledges however the vigorous debates and activism which aim at ending outsourcing altogether.³

Conceptual framework and historical background

Justifying the focus on support services – the links between supply, operations, tactics and strategy

Clausewitz defines the conduct of war as “the formation and conduct of [...] fighting.” Fighting, furthermore, is made up of combats, which in turn are internally organised and then conducted by tactics, and which are tied together for the overall war by strategy (Clausewitz 1997: 74). As he puts it more succinctly, “tactics is *the theory of the use of military forces in combat*, strategy is *the theory of the use of combats for the object of the War*” (Clausewitz 1997: 75, emphasis in the original). Military operations, or the operational

¹ The argument put forward in this article draws on a previous publication by one of the authors on contractors and war. See Kinsey 2010.

² For details of how many European countries contribute, see ISAF, 06 June 2011.

³ An argument from within the US military worth reading is Stiens and Turley 2010.

level which will be studied in this article, is the practical combat on the battlefield, *i.e.* the implementation of tactics on the ground.

Martin Van Creveld, following his historical survey of logistics in a series of wars, stresses the significance of the link between logistics and strategy in his seminal work "Supplying War". He asserts that logistics is a determining factor in strategy:

Strategy, like politics, is said to be the art of the possible; but surely what is possible is determined not merely by numerical strengths, doctrine, intelligence, arms and tactics, but in the first place, by the hardest facts of all: those concerning requirements, supplies available and expected, organisation and administration, transportation and arteries of communication (Van Creveld 1986: 1).

If Van Creveld's point about logistics being a determining factor in strategy is correct, then this also applies to the role of contractors that supply strategy. This should be especially so in the case of NATO forces, as contractors are now a key component in their logistical process. As the quoted figures show, the number of contractors working in Afghanistan means they now represent a sizable part of the US military's force structure delivering a significant slice of its support services to its operation, while the picture is similar for the military forces of France,⁴ Germany,⁵ and the UK.⁶ In the case of Afghanistan, for example, NATO countries have been able to increase the number of combat troops without increasing the overall size of their troop numbers – thereby avoiding politically costly controversies – by using contractors for non-core functions.

Therefore, the choice to focus on the lessons of outsourcing support services becomes clear. If the decision to outsource responsibilities to the market is taken, for military operations to be conducted as efficiently as possible, namely making maximum use of available potentials, and thus as successfully as possible, contractor support has to figure in considerations on all three levels: strategy, which requires knowledge and awareness of the overall capabilities and capacities available; tactics, which must be able to assess feasible courses of action; and operations, which must implement these on the ground and relies heavily on contractor support. Leaving out any element of this chain risks operational problems or even failure, and many of the problems mentioned in the remainder of this article are a result of such a lack of coordination between the three levels and contractor support.

⁴ According to Lt Col Enraygues, Headquarters Training Centre, Head of the Afghanistan Unit 2008-2010, in its five military locations in Afghanistan, the French military hires between five and ten French contractors as well as between 45 and 60 local contractors. Such outsourcing is done by the *Economat des Armées*, which is owned by the French government and started supporting French troops in Germany in the early 1950s. When French troops pulled out of Germany in the early 1990s it started to support French troops in Western Africa and the Balkans. In Afghanistan it supplies all cooks for the French military, none of whom are French. It is also responsible for all housing and accommodation for the French in Afghanistan, and it supplies them with all their translators. All these functions have been outsourced using local contractors where appropriate to employ local civilians. Personal correspondence of the authors. See also <http://economat-armees.com>, date accessed 01 October 2011, which however gives almost no details on its work. It is near impossible to access open source information on French military contracting.

⁵ Several requests to the German MoD and Foreign Office were unsuccessful in learning about the number of contractors working for the German ISAF contingent, as both claim that the other ministry is responsible. The MoD stated however, that only catering is provided by a private company in Afghanistan. Furthermore, consistent with what the German government source told us, repairs may, according to the MoD, be contracted out on an *ad hoc* basis. Personal correspondence of the authors, August-September 2011.

⁶ In the case of the British military approximately 30 percent of UK personnel deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan are contractors. See Mackey 2009: 19. See also Uttley 2004, for an overview of the British contracting experience.

“Counterinsurgency” and expeditionary operations since 9/11

Research on “counterinsurgency” warfare, now fashionably called “COIN”, experienced a revival following the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Until 9/11, mainstream military thought regarding conventional warfare expected ground combat to have become a thing of the past. Kilcullen’s discussion of the history of thought at the time reveals that Chinese and other thinkers already pointed to the possibility, that by claiming and indeed holding a total dominance of conventional ground combat (understood as war between states) the West and in particular the United States had forced potential opponents to employ “principles of addition” which combine military and non-military, state and non-state as well as various other techniques and mechanisms when confronting ‘the West’ – in essence what he calls “hybrid warfare” (Kilcullen 2009: 3-5). The COIN ‘bible’, US Army Field Manual 3-24 takes the same standpoint:

The recent success of U.S. military forces in major combat operations undoubtedly will lead many future opponents to pursue asymmetric approaches. Because the United States retains significant advantages in fires and technical surveillance, a thinking enemy is unlikely to choose to fight U.S. forces in open battle. Some opponents have attempted to do so, such as in Panama in 1989 and Iraq in 1991 and 2003. They were defeated in conflicts measured in hours or days. Conversely, other opponents have offset America’s fires and surveillance advantages by operating close to civilians, as Somali clans did in 1993 and insurgents in Iraq have done since mid-2003; these enemies have been more successful in achieving their aims (US Army 2006: 2).

Insurgency was therefore only regarded as a strategic threat after 9/11 and the ensuing wars (Metz 2007-2008: 21). However, it is generally accepted that the reintroduction of COIN into military training was highly inadequate. Metz writes that “Americans now viewed counterinsurgency as a variant of war. [...] This perception was always problematic, leading the United States to pursue military solutions to threats that could only be solved politically. This disconnect is even more dangerous today, largely because twenty-first century insurgencies have diverged significantly from their forebears. [...] Contemporary] insurgencies flow from systemic failures in the political, economic, and social realms” (Metz 2007-2008: 22). In his discussion of contemporary insurgencies, Metz (2007-2008: 26) reminds the reader that “not all armed conflict is war”.

Of central importance to COIN is the merger of military and non-military, economic, social, and political grievances which have to be addressed, rather than “only” a military threat or opponent who is to be confronted. Contemporary insurgencies, such as those which are being called “Islamic” insurgencies, illustrate a further differentiating characteristic in comparison to historical precedents, namely the linkage between globalised narratives and localised insurgencies. In essence, global groups such as al-Qaida exploit local groups’ grievances, incite military operations in the region by provoking the national or international community through violent attacks. This intervention in turn pits the local group against the intervener, turning them into “accidental guerrillas” (the title of his book). 9/11, according to him, falls into al-Qaida’s strategy of provocation, in that it successfully provoked the US to retaliate in Muslim countries (Kilcullen 2009: 30). Furthermore, it catapulted militarily insignificant groups such as al-Qaida or most of the opposition fighters in Afghanistan to prominence and influence unwarranted by their conventional numbers and capabilities, which in turn gave them a stronger stand in the local communities where they operate (Kilcullen 2009: 236).

In order to combat a “globalized insurgency”, Kilcullen (2009: 15) asserts “that an indirect, highly localized approach [...] would probably be much more successful than a policy of direct U.S. intervention.” However, as he lays out, lacking Western understanding of nuances within ‘the’ Muslim world and the intervention in intra-Muslim conflicts resulted

in a military confrontation pitting Western countries against virtually all Muslim actors wherever the West perceives 'terrorism' to exist (Kilcullen 2009: 21).⁷ Consequently, besides in warfare, "[a]nother key aspect of asymmetry is the mismatch between military and nonmilitary elements of U.S. national power. United States military capability not only overshadows the capabilities of all other world militaries combined, it also dwarfs U.S. civilian capabilities." He cites statistics that DoD employs 210 times as many people as USAID and the State Department combined, and that the defence budget multiplies even to 350 of the other two. Comparability of employee numbers aside, the mismatch – at least the budgetary one – is quite telling and underlines what Bacevich called the "new American militarism" (Kilcullen 2009: 26; see also Bacevich 2005). A similar mismatch as that between civilian and military capabilities in US policy exists within the military. Kilcullen (2009: 26) points out the relative weakness of those capabilities and capacities required for contemporary counterinsurgency or stability operations.

In sum, the US opted for a heavily military response to the insurgent threats it perceived or stoked by its presence in Afghanistan, Iraq or the Arab Peninsula, although less military and ideally non-foreign approaches are more likely to succeed. At the same time, it lacked sufficient numbers of qualified military personnel for COIN warfare, fought the war in Afghanistan with minimum resources,⁸ and by opting for geographically wide-stretching confrontation overloaded its military systems. Simultaneously, vastly inferior resources were committed for the civilian portion of the mission in Afghanistan.

It follows that "counterinsurgency" warfare in expeditionary operations will remain the most likely type of war fought by the countries under consideration here, at least for as long as 'the West' maintains its conventional military dominance, as long as inter-state wars remain rare, and as long as insurgency, as pointed out in the quote from FM 3-24 above, remains the most promising strategy for potential opponents to the US and other Western states.

The self-sufficient military of the Cold War: a rare model of military organisation

The self-sufficient military associated with two World Wars and the Cold War was highly different from the manner in which military forces organised their war supplies throughout history. Part of the reason governments chose to ensure their military forces were as self-sufficient as possible during this period (military forces throughout history have never been truly self-sufficient) was because they could no longer depend on civilian support to deliver some of the tasks required for success on the battlefield. This was because civilians were under no legal/moral obligation to stay if the risks became too high. At the same time, the fear that the Cold War may turn hot made it easy for politicians and the military to convince the general population of its vital importance to the security of the state. It was not until the arrival of Thatcher and Reagan that this assumption was eventually challenged.

⁷ Kilcullen points out the current counterinsurgency-insurgency cycle: "they fight Westerners primarily because we are intruding into their space. Ironically, it is partly our pursuit of terrorists that has brought us into sustained contact with traditional nonstate societal hierarchies [...] whose geographical and demographic terrain interests Western governments mainly because terrorists hide (or are believed to hide) in it." That is the West perceives threats and enters for example Afghanistan, where it soon faces the local "accidental guerrilla" which also spreads to neighbouring countries, so that elsewhere, for example Pakistan, military strikes become "necessary". See Kilcullen 2009: xiv.

⁸ Kilcullen quotes Admiral Michael Mullen as testifying to the US Congress in December 2007 that essentially the war in Afghanistan is run with minimal effort and supplies, while Iraq receives all resources the military operation requires. See Kilcullen 2009: 43.

Consequently, there is nothing new about relying on contractor support in war. Such support includes a variety of services other than combat, in particular logistics, base construction and management, and supplying military forces. Throughout much history, contractor support to militaries was an ordinary occurrence. In the case of Europe, contractors are older than the Continent's modern armies. As Fernyhough notes in the case of the British Army, "there were Master Generals and Boards of Ordnance before there were Secretaries for War or Commanders-in-Chiefs" (Fernyhough 1980: 7). With respect to France, "[...] supplying the [F]rench Army was a considerable business in eighteenth-century France, and private contractors were in charge of the supply of muskets as well as of nearly everything else soldiers needed" (McNeill 1984: 182). The US military, on the other hand, has been reliant on private contractors ever since the American Revolution. Indeed, as the diagram below shows, contractors have been part of the US way of war ever since it won its independence from Great Britain (Commission on Wartime Contracting, June 2009: 21).

A further prominent example is the appointment of Sir Eric Geddes, a civilian, to General Haig's staff in the First World War to sort out the British Expeditionary Force's transportation system (Brown 1998: 142). Governments today might try to ignore contractors, but they do so at their peril when they simultaneously enforce force structures and sizes which cannot meet the requirements for example of a "global" war such as the "War on Terror". Haig realised this when he emphasised the fact that it was not always necessary, or even advisable, for the military to perform all the functions associated with war. The General's words are worth repeating in some length here:

There is a good deal of criticism apparently being made at the appointment of a civilian like Geddes to an important post on the Headquarters of an Army in the Field. These critics seem to fail to realize the size of this Army and the amount of work which the Army requires of a civilian nature. The working of the railways, the upkeep of the roads, even the baking of bread, and a thousand other industries go on in peace as well as in war! So with the whole nation at war our object should be to employ men on the same work in war as they are accustomed to do in peace. [...] To put soldiers who have no practical experience of these matters into such positions merely because they are generals and colonels, must result in utter failure (Brown 1998: 142).

While outsourcing, then, was a recurring theme throughout history, what is different today is the high ratio of contractors to uniformed personnel giving direct support to military forces. Nowhere is this more evident today than in the cases of the UK and the US.⁹ Two factors are primarily responsible for this situation. First, the increasing use of technology on the battlefield means that fewer soldiers are necessary to conduct military operations. Second many contractors working for the military are involved with nation building and therefore involved with winning over the hearts and minds of the local population. These tasks were not expected to be executed by the military even when it was self-sufficient; this could be called a kind of militarisation driven by civilians in that politicians expect the (now smaller) military to deliver more (civilian) services than ever before. Given the continued political drive to outsource military responsibilities, as noted above, the overall capacities of uniformed personnel were stretched thin and therefore supplemented with contractors.

⁹ It is generally accepted as fact that the US military cannot go to war without contractor support, while Germany and the UK are also very dependent on private contractors to support their operations. This is particularly so in the German case with respect to strategic airlift and logistical support to troops in theatre. In the case of Germany, see Germany Federal Ministry of Defence 2006.

That militaries for most of time could not do without contractors suggests that the relationship between the two actors may be more than one of convenience, but is structural in that it is the result of how society, particularly Western society, organises war. This should be kept in mind, regardless of someone's political standpoint towards outsourcing, when the self-sufficient model is evoked as a sort of gold standard as if it had been a historical norm. Accordingly, while there are highly important debates being held regarding how states should organise their militaries and consequently whether any responsibilities should be outsourced (Stiens and Turley 2010), this article will be based on the assumption that no major policy shift will take place in the near future. Any substantial shift would take considerable time to implement and face strong opposition from the industry and political advocates of privatisation, making doctrinal shifts unlikely. In this article therefore, the issue is not whether the military should rely on contractors in Afghanistan, but how to manage their presence in the battle-space so they do not undermine military operations and perform as they are hired to.

Therefore, although it is not yet well established in academic and political debates, the evidence presented in this article suggests that the military core-competency model is an accurate description of most militaries involved in Afghanistan. Importantly, from a theoretical perspective the model goes some way to explaining the reality on the ground in Afghanistan regarding how and why NATO forces may have structured themselves in this way as well as why NATO forces focused on counterinsurgency warfare while certain responsibilities were outsourced to the market. Such an organisation of military forces, however, is not without its problems as the remainder of this article explains.

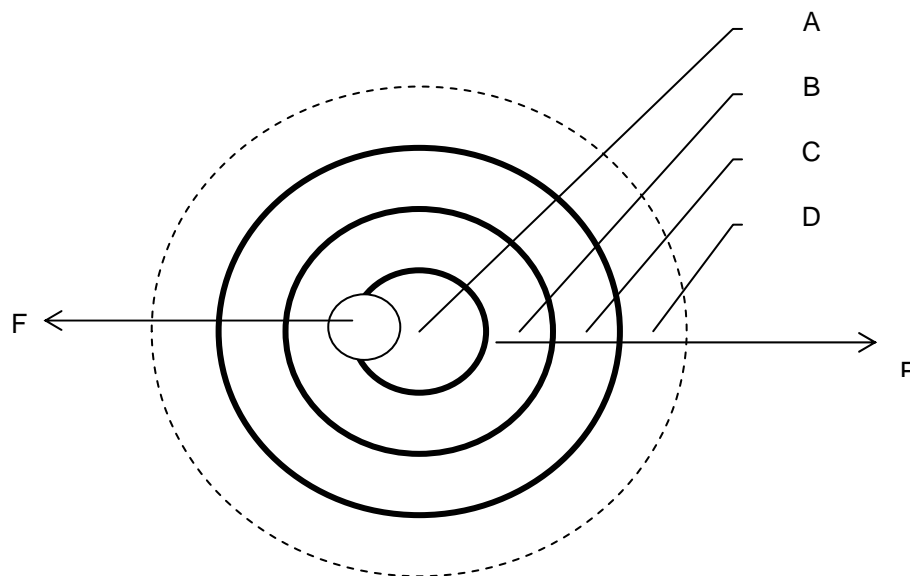
A new model of military organisation: core-competency

Only after the end of the Cold War and with the expectancy of a peace dividend and the onset of a new peaceful age was the self-sufficient, comprehensive, and large-scale military gradually replaced by one that increasingly resembles the core-competency model laid out here. As will be pointed out throughout this article, the determination to continue outsourcing growing proportions of military responsibilities despite the rapid onset of armed conflicts throughout the world, many of which resembled counterinsurgency or other low-intensity warfare and in many of which Western powers intervened or participated, clearly indicates the role of political decision-makers in the determination of a military's force structure beyond functional requirements or constraints.

As a result of these policies, the force structures of the militaries under consideration in this article have undergone considerable modifications. As the model by Christopher Kinsey below explains, future counterinsurgency operations are likely to be conducted using a small fighting force supported by contractors, who may even outnumber their military counterparts in certain cases.¹⁰ The reality is that contractor support is no longer a marginal activity. Indeed, the option as to whether or not to rely on contractors for some activities no longer exists unless political decisions are made to adapt the force structure for it to become more self-sufficient again. What this means is that contractors of every type are now a permanent feature of the military's force structure and must for now be taken into account when planning operations.

¹⁰ The model was first presented in Kinsey 2009.

Figure 1: Military core-competency model



The innermost circle (A) represents the military's core function(s), their *raison d'être*. These functions include combat operations and the combat portions of counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, peace enforcement, and classic peacekeeping operations and Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA). It is possible that some of these functions could be outsourced if government chose to change its policy and allow the market access to this area of responsibility, though this is unlikely at the moment. A major reason for this is because only the military have the requisite knowledge and skill sets to be able to undertake these functions efficiently and with a high probability of success – much like it had regarding the support responsibilities in the past which now have been outsourced to the market. Furthermore, militaries are unique organisations in terms of training, equipment, and doctrine and are thus able to support the political/strategic aims of states much more easily in executing the above functions than private sector actors. Finally, a military force can draw on the resources of the state in a time of great peril whereas a commercial organisation only has the market to draw on. Taken together, it is easy to understand why the military see these as core functions that should remain their responsibility.

The next inner circle (B) is concerned with core-close activities. These activities are directly linked to the core activities undertaken by the military. Such activities may include, for example, technical support to intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities or technical support to command, control, communication, coordination, and intelligence (C4I). Contractors are frequently involved in these activities normally working alongside uniformed personnel. They typically give technical support, while the activities, themselves, remain under the direct control of the military. This is necessary because they provide direct support to the military's core function(s). Failure to perform, or only partially perform, a core-close activity can have a serious impact on operations. There may also be legal issues that prevent these activities from being outsourced. It might also be necessary to retain control of these activities to ensure there is continuity between the different aspects of an operation.

The two outer circles represent core-distant activities (C) and disposable activities (D). In each case, these activities can be easily purchased from the market. In the case of core-distant activities the military may, for example, purchase storage space for its equipment, logistical support and vehicle maintenance from a commercial provider, while disposable activities include estate management to home bases along with catering, cleaning and laundry facilities.

As the diagram highlights, the privatisation/outsourcing of activities cuts across all the circles (E) except A, suggesting the military is now concentrating its efforts on its core activities. There are, however, exceptions in the form of mission critical activities (F). These are activities that can have a direct impact on core activities influencing the nature of strategy, tactics, and operations. Importantly, they are critical because they can determine battlefield success or failure even though they may not be a core military function.

The demise of the self-sufficiency military model suggests a return to the organisation of militaries and war which prevailed throughout most of history, particularly in the West. There certainly appear to be similarities between the core-competence model and what went before the self-sufficiency model regarding the means and arrangements that are necessary when planning for war. Such means and arrangements are the responsibility of the logistician. Clausewitz sums up this situation by arguing that “in a wider sense, all activities that have their existence on the account of war, therefore the whole creation of troops, arming them, equipping them, belong to the art of war”, though he makes no mention of contractors (Clausewitz 1997: 74). He does, however, point out that the maintenance of troops in camp or quarters includes activities that should not involve the employment of the military, such as the construction of huts, pitching of tents and subsistence, and are therefore neither strategy nor tactics (Clausewitz 1997: 78). A similar situation exists in Afghanistan with contractors taking over responsibility for the type of activities Clausewitz talks about.

Contracting out support services in Afghanistan

The reasons for large-scale contractor engagement in Afghanistan

The urgent need to gain the initiative in the (military) “counterinsurgency” operation in Afghanistan was apparent from Obama’s decision on February 17 2009 to approve an additional 34,000 troops for the “counterinsurgency” effort (US Department of Defense, 17 February 2009). This very significant move within his first year in office saw troop levels increase to the present number of 90,000 soldiers now serving in the country (ISAF Troop Numbers USA). Over the same period the total number of contractors averaged out at 70,000. There was a nine per cent increase (from 68,000 to 74,000) in contractor personnel compared to the second quarter fiscal year (FY) 2009 census due to increased operational tempo (US Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, August 2009). In a newspaper article published in September 2009, it was hinted at that “US officials are planning to add as many as 14,000 combat troops to the American force in Afghanistan by sending home support units and replacing them with *trigger-pullers*” (Barnes, 2 September 2009). This raises the likelihood of further increases in contractor support as such a move is designed to increase the size of the combat force in the country without raising the overall numbers of uniformed personnel beyond the cap set by the US Congress.¹¹ In short, uniformed non-combat personnel are replaced with contractors,

¹¹ Capping the number of troops for a contingency operation is common practice among NATO countries. In Germany, for example, the Chief of Defence Staff proposes the number of troops needed to the Ministry of Defence. The government then places the proposal before Parliament (Bundestag) and if it receives a majority vote the proposal is accepted. This mandate is then binding for the military. The mandate is normally renewed on an annual basis. See German Bundestag 2011.

while the uniformed contingent is then filled up with combat troops. The plan according to Barnes was “a key step in the Obama administration’s drive to counter Taliban gains and demonstrate progress in the war nearly eight years after it began” (Barnes, 2 September 2009).

The scope of outsourced responsibilities and numbers of contractors in Afghanistan

The first point, which needs explaining, is that contractors working for the US military in Afghanistan do not take a direct part in offensive operations (they are prohibited from doing so by US and various other laws) but only support them.¹² The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has also used contractors to support intelligence work.¹³ Other European militaries have so far avoided using armed contractors to a large extent, but they do employ contractors to provide and protect logistical support.

Support services

Support services include base support, construction, translator/interpreter, transportation, and communication among others. The profile of the contractors supporting DOD’s operations in Afghanistan as of July 2011 is detailed in Table 1.

What is interesting about contracted personnel outlined in the table is the large number of locally employed contractors working for DOD. They made up 76 per cent of the contractor personnel in March 2009, or 51,776 of a total of 68,197. As of June 2011, following the surge which was – as anticipated – followed by increased numbers of contractor personnel, they accounted for only 47.4 per cent according to the figures below, declining primarily in relation to non-locals rather than in total numbers.¹⁴ Their generally high ratio (especially when compared to Iraq) is worth noting because of the central importance “counterinsurgency” warfare assigns to the relationship to and winning over of the local population. This is commonly seen as easier to accomplish when the occupying military employs locals especially for tasks which involve direct interactions with the civilian population. In short, the reasoning goes that by employing in particular young men, the occupying force generates wealth in the host country while the young men tend not to join armed opposition forces. This is but one instance where support services and overall strategy are closely interlinked.

¹² The Federal Activities Inventory Reform Act of 1998 (FAIR) and guidance provided by the Office of Management and Budget calls for roles classified as “inherently governmental” to be carried out by government employees. Inherently governmental roles are those that are so intimately connected to the public interest as to only authorise performance by government employees. Warfighting missions would fall under the ‘inherently governmental’ label. See US Congress, 1998, Section 5, Definitions.

¹³ The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is known to have employed contractors in Afghanistan. Although the numbers employed there are not clear, it is known that overall in some of the major US intelligence agencies the numerical majority of employees are contractors; see e.g. T. Shorrock, 2007. A Human Rights First report mentioned that David Passaro, a former Special Forces Soldier, worked on a contract directly for the CIA for six months in 2003. Passaro was assigned to the US Army forward operating base (FOB) in Asadabad to work with a team of US Special Forces and CIA personnel responsible for capturing and interrogating suspected terrorists. Human Rights First 2008: 29. Also see S. Chesterman, 2008, for an academic account of the issue, and S. Gorman, 8 February 2008, for a news report. Finally, the blog *The Spy Who Billed Me*, run by R. J. Hillhouse, also hosts extensive reports and commentary on private intelligence.

¹⁴ In Iraq support functions and construction represented 77% of the total DOD contractor workforce. See Schwartz, 17 December 2008.

Table 1: DOD Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan¹⁵

	Total Contractors	U.S. Citizens	Third Country Nationals	Local/Host Country Nationals
Number	93,118	23,294	25,666	44,158*
Percent of Total	---	25%	27.6%	47.4%

Source: US CENTCOM Quarterly Contractor Census Reports, 3rd Quarter, FY 2011

The main area of their employment is in base support functions and construction. Support functions primarily consist of activities such as catering, laundry, waste management, postal services, truck driving, and specialist maintenance. These functions are not seen as controversial although US legislators have raised concerns over contract fraud and waste (Commission on Wartime Contracting 2011). Carrying out these functions usually requires little formal education from the workforce while training is often given on the job. Most Western citizens involved in these functions are blue-collar supervisors/technicians. In the past, military personnel performed these functions. However, with fewer people volunteering for military service and the high cost of training soldiers, using contractors in this way is, according to Cancian, an attractive option (Cancian 2008: 63). After all, it furthers the core-competency military and increases its 'firepower'. These outsourced supply functions are delivered to the US Army under an enabling contract called LOGCAP (Logistics Civil Augmentation Program),¹⁶ while the UK military also use an enabling contract for the same purpose called CONLOG (Contractor Logistics).¹⁷ Germany, though, still adopts an *ad hoc* approach entering into contracts if or when they have to. Furthermore, Germany is still some way behind the US and UK militaries in developing a contingency contracting capability similar to LOGCAP and CONLOG.¹⁸

Counterinsurgency operations always also require interpreters so that the expeditionary force can communicate with the local population. While militaries are usually able to find some in their ranks who are able to speak the local language it is never in sufficient numbers for large-scale operations such as Afghanistan. In such circumstances the bulk of the resources required will come from local and other private contractors (Chesterman 2008; Shorrock, 1 June 2007).

¹⁵ The total numbers are taken from US Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, July 2011: 1. The total was given as 90,000 at ISAF Troop Numbers and Contributions.

¹⁶ LOGCAP was created by the US Army in 1985. Its purpose is to pre-plan for the use of contractor support in contingencies and crises and to utilise existing resources in the US and overseas to augment active and reserve forces. See Kinsey 2009: 76-79.

¹⁷ The CONLOG Contract is a non-exclusive, 7 year contract with Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) which provides the Chief of Joint Operations (CJO) with a more efficient and cohesive contractor logistic planning capability jointly using military and embedded KBR staff. It gives CJO an ability to let non tendered, enabling contracts for operations and exercises at short notice to meet complex requirements against changing planning assumptions and increased operational tempo utilising KBR as a sole prime contractor. Kinsey, 11 September 2008, Interview with Lt Colonel Andrew Preston. It should be noted here, that such an arrangement provides the prime contractor with a private monopoly on logistical services, which runs counter to outsourcing theory which is concerned with ending (public) monopolies in service provision. See for example Hartley 2011: 233-235.

¹⁸ The UK MoD is the only European military to sign an enabling contract, Contract for Logistical Support (CONLOG), which provides the planning capability and procedures for UK Permanent Joint Head Quarters (PJHQ) to secure the support services that are needed for military operations and exercises worldwide. For details see KBR Projects, 'CONLOG'.

Security for support service contractors

So far, many support service contractors are only protected by the military while inside military bases. In these cases, the provision of their security adds another layer of contractor involvement in the theatre of war. Security in general is the most controversial activity being outsourced to the market in the most recent armed conflicts around the world. Eclectic legislation, enforcement of existing laws, and understandings and pursuit of accountability in addition to the well publicised problems of governmental oversight over contracting in general and security contractors in particular have made this aspect of outsourcing – despite its being the vast minority of existing contracts and contractors – appear as the epitome of military outsourcing. It has also contributed to what Abrahamsen and Williams call the ‘mercenary misconception’ (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011).

It is difficult to gauge the total number of armed contractors working in Afghanistan. We do know, however, that their clients include the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the DOD, the Department of State and other European governments and EU organisations.¹⁹ In other words, they are hired not only by the military or the defence agencies, but also by those political and other actors (such as NGOs) who represent the foreign element of the country’s reconstruction effort. The DOD began counting security contractors but stopped providing these numbers after the May 2010 census. Until then DOD provided the only reliable figures on the number of private security contractors working in the country; see Table 2 below for the latest total numbers of PSCs in Afghanistan. A 2009 newspaper article by David Zucchino put the number of security guards working in Afghanistan at 70,000 (Zucchino, 13 August 2009), while Aunohita Mojumdar noted that there may at the time have been as many as 3,000 former Afghan militia fighters directly employed by the US military (Mojumdar, 7 July 2009).

Table 2: DOD Private Security Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan

	Total**	U.S. Citizens	Third Country National	Local/Host Country National
DoD PSCs in Afghanistan*	15,305	693	1,282	13,330

Source: US Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, July 2011: 1.

These numbers should include most subcontractors and service contractors hired by prime contractors under DOD contracts. For comparison, in May 2010 (the last census that differentiated between armed and unarmed DoD PSCs) total DoD PSCs in Afghanistan numbered 16,733, with only 140 of them US citizens and 980 third country nationals, while

¹⁹ For the UK see for example UK Parliament, 26 July 2010, Column 671W, where the cost for private security ‘contracts [which] provide services to other Government Departments’ are compiled. As the answer to a Freedom of Information request by Kinsey in June 2011 has shown, all contracts awarded to private security companies in Afghanistan by the British Foreign Office were signed with G4S. Details other than the purpose (for example, static security) about these contracts, such as values or numbers of contractors, were not given as this would have requested “disproportionate cost”. Personal document of the authors. On the US State Department see hearing transcript of Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, 6 June 2011. According to a report of the House of Lords, the European Union Police (EUPOL) Mission in Afghanistan receives its own protection from PSCs, see UK House of Lords, 1 February 2011.

the vast majority was armed (US Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, May 2010: 2).

Recent concern over the impact of private security companies (PSCs) on the local population and how their behaviour may be undermining coalition attempts to win them over has resulted in the US military looking into the possibility of implementing an overarching contract to control PSCs. The idea came from Iraq, where the US military implemented a similar overarching contract in May 2004 to coordinate the movement of PSCs in the country.²⁰ However, nothing appears to have come of the idea yet.²¹

Implications and Lessons

Force structure

According to Van Creveld, adopting a different strategy usually demands new means to carry it into practice (Van Creveld 1977: 40). In the case of Afghanistan, the new strategy is counterinsurgency operations instead of conventional warfare, and the new means by which it is being carried into practice revolves heavily around contractors.

In pursuit of a military resembling the core-competency model outlined above, by capping the number of NATO troops in Afghanistan, in effect the military has to focus on combat and military logistical core functions, for example combat logistical patrols (CLP), while the majority of support activities are outsourced.²² What is more, as noted earlier, changing the force structure in this way, namely by making the military rely on contractors for non-critical functions, is intended to maximise the use of combat troops in theatre.

The operational level: supplying the forces in theatre, and risk in operational planning

This change carries additional operational risk for the commander. Failure on the part of a contractor to perform an activity in theatre might jeopardise a whole operation. This is especially so as the military no longer has certain capacities, sometimes even capabilities, and therefore cannot take over if the contractor fails to deliver on a contract. A pressing concern, then, remains the ability of contractors to provide the services expected of them in such dangerous environments. As British Lt Col Mike Caldicott told us, throughout 2008 and 2009 “the winterisation of UK Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) fell behind because the contractors could not deliver sufficient aggregate past insurgent operating areas and the military did not have the capacity to take the task on”.²³

Accordingly, one of the advantages, if not the major advantage, of the military undertaking logistical activities over the employment of contractors is that it removes the risk to the military of a contractor not performing an activity at a critical moment and of keeping under immediate control the supply of his troops in theatre. After all, unlike contractors, military personnel can be ordered to perform an activity where as a contractor cannot. For the commander on the ground therefore, relying on contractors can increase

²⁰ The contract was held by then newly-founded British company Aegis for 293 million US Dollars over two years at the time. See Kinsey 2009: 79-87. According to Aegis’ website the contract has evolved to include various other security tasks and is now worth over 500 million US Dollars.

²¹ The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, Final Report, was published on 31 August 2011 and contains several policy recommendations. It remains to be seen whether and how they will be transformed into policy.

²² For a brief account of what is meant by the term combat logistical patrol see Chambers 2009.

²³ Lt Col Mike Caldicott pointed out to us the concern with contractor ability to provide services and the example of winterisation. Personal correspondence, August 2011.

the level of operational risk he perceives he would face in comparison to if his own troops performed the activity instead. The commander could therefore reduce the ambition of his plan in anticipation of lower contractor performance and ultimately not make use of the entire military potential at his disposal. This situation can have a harmful impact on strategy as well as tactics in that strategy and tactics can become the hostage to a contractor's fickle behaviour. Consequently, it may become necessary for the military and its industrial partners to develop a risk model that will enable informed judgements about the future delivery of activities by contractors.²⁴ Ultimately though, commanders may decide simply to be more cautious, rather than choosing to adopt the robust approach to operations that is sometimes needed.²⁵

Strategy

For the military commander on the ground, reliance on so many contractors can thus have a significant impact on his operational planning or even his wider strategy. The use of more contractors may see commanders reassess or even change their strategy to take account of this change to the operational environment. The decision to redirect part of the supply route via a new northern route through Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan is evidence of this already happening (Harding, 30 March 2009). Militant attacks on the overland supply route from Pakistan had grown in number and intensity over the last few years, destroying material and trucks and killing contractors.²⁶ As foreign militaries cannot step in to protect the supply routes in Pakistan, the question of whether more troops should be deployed to protect convoys was necessarily answered in the negative, so that the military searched for safer supply routes. Furthermore, redeploying troops to protect supply routes would have led to a reduction in the number available for combat operations, which as shown above runs counter to the foundations of the current military and outsourcing strategy.

Another illustration of the impact of outsourcing on overall strategy is pointed out regarding Afghanistan by Caldicott. "High-bar and policy-compliant contractors" often refuse to take on contracts when they are liable to health and safety litigation. The alternative, "low-bar and policy non-compliant contractors" are typically (but not exclusively) those making the headlines with violent misbehaviour. A report by the US Congress furthermore criticised the widespread occurrence of corruption and extortion along the supply chain for the forces in Afghanistan, much of which funds the "insurgency" which the "counterinsurgency" operations are fighting elsewhere and harms the trustworthiness of ISAF as the money spent in its name fuels corruption and extortion in the country.²⁷

²⁴ This issue was discussed at a meeting with the National Defence Industry Council (NDIC) Contractor Support Operations (CSO) Working Group held on 1 April 2009. At the meeting it was felt that what was needed was a common understanding between the military and industry of the application of a process of due diligence to assist with determining acceptable and non-acceptable risk to contractor's employees in the operational theatre.

²⁵ No research about this has been conducted so far, so no direct evidence is available as of now. This conclusion can however be inferred from some of the existing literature. Higginson 2010: 17, for example, criticises that the UK so far has been reactive in its employment of contractor capabilities, has failed to integrate them into the total deployed force, and consequently both the MoD and the industry have not exploited the full available potential.

²⁶ Wikileaks reveals that the majority of leaked incidents involving contractors were reports of attacks on supply trucks for the ISAF militaries. According to an anonymous British government official, logistics contractors suffer about 180 casualties per year in Afghanistan. An official though more conservative estimate is given by Higginson 2010: 16. He estimates, following his own research, that from 2003 until 2010 over 500 contractors hired by MoD in Iraq and Afghanistan were killed.

²⁷ According to Lt Col Mike Caldicott, Royal Logistics Corps, 'high-bar' contractors are those who comply with UK Contractor Support to Operations (CSO) policy guidelines, who refuse to take on high risk contracts for fear

All such problems on the operational level harm the overall strategy of the “counterinsurgency” operation in Afghanistan. Part of this is the making of policy: besides the policy of not providing security for contractors or not ensuring standards of behaviour and security are implemented by contractors, it should be stressed, that this situation was also the result of the (political rather than military) decision to cap troop numbers while keeping spending on civilian engagement at a low level as was noted earlier.

Logistics, strategy, and the political-military working relationship

It must also be asked whether strategy was becoming an appendage of logistics or supply services as a consequence of employing contractors. This is a much harder question to answer, notably because of the limited research into the subject. As was just noted, military commanders may opt for a strategy or course of action that demands less from the contractor but means that the commander does not utilise his military force to the maximum possible.

The military’s use of contractors to perform certain tasks has reshaped the nature of the relationship between the commander on the ground and ministers, senior officers and civil servants responsible for implementing government defence policy. Today, it is much easier for ministers to influence the contracts that support operations than was the case during the Cold War. Importantly, such influence must surely affect how commanders think about strategy given the intimate linkages of both domains.

In the case of Afghanistan, the shortage of Chinook helicopters, which are able to carry large numbers of men and equipment over long distances, for example, appears to be the result of political dithering on the part of ministers who failed to realise the mammoth task facing British troops in Afghanistan. A group of MPs who visited the country “were told repeatedly about the deleterious effect the lack of helicopters continues to have on the military’s ability to prosecute operations there” (Doxford, 2 August 2009). The shortage of helicopters has meant troops having to move by road making them vulnerable to roadside bombs leading to a significant number of troops killed as a result of the Taliban using powerful roadside bombs to deadly effect (Baker, 13 July 2009). Signing further contracts with industry to enhance air capability must be weighed up against the additional cost of the improvement to the taxpayer. At this point the government can choose to do nothing, delay enhancement, choose another less expensive option, or give the troops exactly the air capability they demand. It is the government’s input into the decision making process that allows politicians and their advisors to influence strategy. The commander’s war plan, on the other hand, is dependent on the choices made by the politicians. This has in effect led to a political/technical revolution in military logistics, while its impact on strategy and tactics is not yet realised. Future research should address this link.

Similarly, the German mission relies almost entirely on commercial transport and supply capacities. As an anonymous German government source pointed out, even with the A-400M transport aircraft, militaries relying on it would not fulfil NATO’s transportation capability standards (Anonymous German Government Official 2011).

These are not the only logistical problems facing commanders in Afghanistan. As the article argues, expeditionary operations have become the most regular form of military operation for Western militaries in the first decade of the 21st Century, while it is

of litigation. Thus, what he calls ‘low-bar’ CSO non-compliant contractors take on these contracts at potentially high strategic cost to the overall operation, for example due to the higher occurrence of misconduct resulting in civilian casualties which ultimately harms the core of counterinsurgency strategy, namely winning over the civilian population. See Caldicott 2011: 22, 28. See also US Congress 2010.

anticipated that contractors will comprise a significant part of the total expeditionary force structure (the ratio of soldiers to contractors in Afghanistan is 1:1, see diagram above).²⁸ While contracting has become part of operational planning, commanders are still being educated in the importance of contractors to their operations. Simultaneously, tactical planning still almost fails to consider the contractor workforce (Anonymous British Government Official, August 2011). Without strong leadership, supported by a robust strategy able to cope with increasing contractor support, commanders are likely to face similar, if not the same problems that commanders faced in Iraq, which have led to criminal investigations of contract fraud and mismanagement and contracts not being fulfilled because of inadequate overall planning and working environments.²⁹

The triangular relationship between the military, government, and contractors

As with Iraq, Afghanistan has highlighted the struggle the military is having adjusting to the challenges of receiving and cooperating with timely, efficient, and effective contracting support to operational theatres. Certainly in the case of the US and UK militaries the increase in contractor numbers has not been matched by sufficiently trained military contracting officers with the tools and resources to adequately support contracting activities in theatre.³⁰ Part of the problem is the drive to downsize the public workforce in government departments.³¹ Another part of the problem is to do with military culture. In the case of the US military, for example, the Army appears for a long time not to have sufficiently valued or recognised the importance of contracting, contract management, and contractors on expeditionary operations (US Army, Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations, October 2007). Worse still, poor contract practice can damage military professionalism and thereby in theory undermine military operations (Latham 2009).

²⁸ For an account of the importance the UK military place on contractors support to operations see UK Ministry of Defence Working Group Contractor Support to Operations, 16 March 2010.

²⁹ Erinys, for example, was hired to train a force to protect oil pipelines in Iraq. Their work was however hampered by unclear lines of communication, unrealistic expectations, and the lack of inclusion into the wider reconstruction agenda among others. See Kinsey 2009: 79-82. See also the Commission on Wartime Contracting in the US, whose founding was motivated by such misconduct and waste of taxpayer funds.

³⁰ In the United States, among other measures DoD has begun to increase its oversight personnel already before the Commission on Wartime Contracting issued its final report. See Garamone, 31 August 2011. For more detailed information, see the hearings of the Commission on Wartime Contracting which addressed issues of oversight, for example those from 14 September 2009 and 19 April 2010.

Regarding the UK, David Shouesmith, Maj. Gen. (Retd) and Senior Vice President of PRTM in London, regards it as unlikely that the increase in contractor numbers has been matched by sufficiently trained contracting officers. According to him, "certainly there has been a lag between the explosion of contractors and our ability to manage them. The US set up a contracting command - UK didn't. There have been efforts to improve the training of RLC officers to improve their skills and while this addresses the tactical level and broadens the skill base there is a broader educational point about understanding contractor skills, limitations and risks for all staff officers, which I don't see happening." Personal correspondence of the authors, September 2011.

As the German government source pointed out, the concerns in the German military are much more about *how* responsibilities were being outsourced rather than *which* or how strong oversight was. The source stressed that it was much about internal or cosmetic politics (for example reducing the number of uniformed personnel by shifting soldiers to newly constituted, government-owned corporations which are awarded contracts for maintenance, clothing and so on); the source did not mention oversight or contract management as primary concerns. It remains to be seen how this will change once the end of conscription has made its full impact on the Bundeswehr (the German military), that is whether and how hurriedly larger swaths of military responsibilities will be outsourced to the market. The German defence minister recently pointed out, that a core-responsibility policy would be implemented which, it appears feasible to assume, may well have as a corollary a restructuring of the Bundeswehr to something resembling the core-competency model outlined above. See Wittke and Möhle, 3 September 2011.

³¹ See Krahmman 2010, regarding the force of neoliberal ideology in the political decisions made in the US and the UK in particular.

The idea of drawing up a contract for the provision of certain activities also changes the nature of the relationship between the military commander and the government whose policy he is there to implement. Under a contractual arrangement it is easier for politicians to interfere with strategy through involving themselves with the drawing up of contracts for logistical support activities. Worse, in this situation strategy can become an appendage of logistics when logistics should be an integral part of strategy.

To what extent, then, are contractors included in military doctrine and strategy?³² In the case of Iraq, contractors were seen as a bolt-on to the deployed military force. This in turn led to tensions emerging between the two sides. The causes of such tensions were many, though a contributing factor was usually the feeling from contractors that their efforts were being undervalued by the military, while members of the military are sometimes put off by the significant pay gap.³³

Any plan aiming to alleviate such problems will need to recognise the contribution made by contractors, that they are currently an integral part of the military force structure, and by performing non-combat activities they release uniformed personnel to perform combat missions – their core-competency. Crucially, the market can usually respond faster than the military to develop an internal capability. This is a very important consideration in counterinsurgency operations, where reaction time to changes on the ground is critical to operational success. What gives contractors an advantage over uniformed personnel is their ability to draw on a global network of technical and service providers to enable them to quickly deploy to give critical support capability when called upon to do so. They can also provide expertise in specialised fields that the military may no longer possess. In essence, the limits imposed on national militaries (capped numbers on deployed operations, core-competency models and so on), which have been addressed in this article, do not apply to contractors to a similar degree. By contracting out support services, national militaries, then, are able to both deploy on a global scale while being understaffed and to reduce the ‘uniformed’ military footprint. In other words, contractors become force multipliers at a time when militaries are being downsized, when they are demanded to operate on a global scale and in complex environments, and when simultaneously contractors are not accounted for in long-term planning or doctrine as was noted earlier. The inherent contradiction at the defence-political level is manifest.

So far, Afghanistan has managed to avoid the extremes in contractor behaviour that Iraq experienced. The most important lesson Iraq can offer commanders is to include contractors at every stage of operational planning in order to avoid undermining the military’s legitimacy in counterinsurgency operations. Contractors require clear guidance from military commanders concerning what capabilities and services the military need from them to operate effectively on the ground. Failure by a contractor to perform not only risks undermining the military’s ability to conduct operations, but can ultimately damage its legitimacy in the eyes of the local population (which is of critical importance in “counterinsurgency” warfare) if it cannot do what it says it will do for them. Such a move also needs to include better oversight and control to prevent wasteful spending by contractors, a problem that has beset the operation in Iraq in particular. Such behaviour simply diverts limited resources away from critical areas. Ultimately, commanders need to address within their plans the use of contractors on operations including improving the level of coordination of contractors working across all the services and government agencies in the theatre of operation.

³² In the case of the US military, mention is made of contractors on operations in US Army, 2006. The UK military has produced some doctrine on the subject. See UK Military, December 2001.

³³ Tyson 2005 quotes former US Special Forces member Frank Antenori as saying: “You can stay in the military if you are patriotic, but then your ideals are outweighing your pocketbook.” As quoted in Krahnman 2010: 219.

Yet again, these assessments points out among others the very clear yet under-debated phenomenon of an apparent mismatch of foreign and security political commitments and the resources their implementation would require on the one hand, and the military force structure (which to a large extent is also the result of political decision-making) which is incapable of serving the political commitments without contractor support on the other hand.

Conclusions and outlook: avoiding pitfalls before future expeditionary operations

Contractors have supplied militaries with the means to wage war for hundreds, if not thousands of years, making some degree of outsourcing a regular recurrence throughout most of history. Similarly, the war in Afghanistan has clearly revealed the extent of contractor involvement in supplying military operations. The role of contractors is to enhance the military's performance by taking over responsibility for the provision of partly mundane services, which in turn allows the military to concentrate on its core functions. Contractors also bring to operations a pool of knowledge combined with many years of experience, usually in a technical field such as communications, which is simply no longer available within the military's own ranks.

However, it was not always this way. During the Cold War commanders knew exactly the equipment and capability they had to fight with. Militaries at the time also had the expertise and experience of the full breadth of military technologies and responsibilities. Forging a strategy was thus far simpler. Crucially, strategy was not subordinate to the military's supply chain. This situation appears no longer to exist. Today, the military's reliance on contractors has changed the nature of the risks facing commanders in the field. Furthermore, this article's findings suggest that strategy may no longer be determined by military necessity as it should be, but by political expediency that may well have little to do with strategy.

As the article has shown, the appropriate force structure, the tactical and operational levels being subordinate to rather than hurting the overall strategy, the doctrinal accounting for contractors into an overall framework, and the possibly unintended consequences of political decisions on all of these aspects are the main issues that need to be taken into account in future expeditionary operations which rely on private contractors.

That contractors deliver more and more support capability in theatre suggests that contractors are now strategic assets the military now needs to manage. But this can only happen if the military recognises them as such. Until very recently, the military saw contractors as a bolt-on asset they could utilise in an *ad hoc* fashion when it suited their purpose, instead of as an integral part of their force structure. Some changes in attitude in the military have however come about, while more remains to be done. Crucially, until they accept contractors as strategic assets they will struggle to concentrate on their core-business, warfighting, as otherwise much time and energy is necessarily lost to managing a non-standardised military-contractor relationship (US Army, Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations, October 2007). Similarly, all the political and military levels must be synchronised in terms of their doctrinal understandings of how to pursue military operations. An addition to the recent Tiger Team Report in the UK, for example, expects that up to 60 per cent of the future workforce will be drawn from the market (Tiger Team Report, 'Total Support Force').

However, contractors as part of the overall force structure were not accounted for in the UK's most recent Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010.³⁴

If counterinsurgency operations, such as those being conducted in Afghanistan, become the most regular kind of warfare in the coming decades, the military's force structure will in all probability resemble the core-competency model. By allowing contractors to take over large swaths of responsibility from the military, the military will in turn be able to concentrate its efforts on warfighting activities in mostly low-interest conflicts. Such a move though raises serious questions not only about whose interests are followed in the planning process, but also, as was argued in this article, about the commander's ability to decide on his own strategy based on military necessity and on secured supply services and not political expediency or even political will. The worry is that the introduction of contractors onto the battlefield will make the latter far easier, and that could harm military operations.

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³⁴ Great Britain, HM Government, 2010. Also implicating the political level (that is besides formulating strategy), and although this was not discussed in this article, as it is not directly relevant to contracting out support services, the legal issues which dominate much of the debate surrounding private military and security companies require addressing on the political level. Besides establishing much needed accountability and oversight over contractors, in particular armed contractors, this additional layer of uncertainty contributes to the mismatches on the intra-military as well as the political-military levels which this article has pointed out. See in particular Dickinson 2011, and Francioni and Ronzitti 2011, for recent contributions to this debate.

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