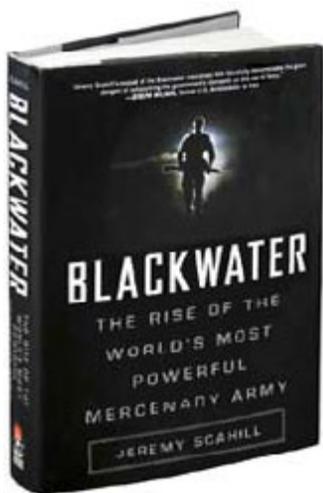


# BOOK REVIEWS



## BLACKWATER: THE RISE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL MERCENARY ARMY

BY JEREMY SCAHILL

NEW YORK:  
NATION BOOKS,  
A MEMBER OF PERSEUS BOOKS GROUP,  
(PAPERBACK ED.) 2008  
464 PAGES ISBN 1560259795

Review by  
Major Gerry D. Madigan, CD1, MA (Retired)

Dwight Eisenhower issued a warning in his closing address as President of the United States in 1960 concerning the growth of the military industrial complex. Eisenhower was concerned for its potential to shape the American economy, its impacts on American liberty and democratic order to the detriment of his citizenry. He sensed that the military industrial complex was capable of subverting United States national policy. It was a power serving its own ends whose growth would be at the expense of the American taxpayer.

Jeremy Scahill's book "*Blackwater – The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*" echoes Eisenhower's warning. The conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is no longer new in the American experience as in Eisenhower's time.

The end of the cold war marked a significant turning point for the military industrial complex. The demand for military expenditure slackened with a concomitant demand for a "peace dividend." The military industrial complex had to restructure in the face of this

reality. Governments began looking to the private sector to divest itself of non-essential services, thereby creating a new opportunity for the military industrial complex.

Blackwater, framed in this context, is a tale of the rise of a private company from relative obscurity to preeminence as one of the most powerful private security firms in the United States. The rise came from a desire to privatize government services to do things more efficiently.<sup>1</sup> The theory maintained that "corporations can deliver government services better and at a lower cost than the government can."<sup>2</sup>

Blackwater was one of the new firms willing to take on this opportunity. It evolved from a small company filling a niche market in the provision of specialist training to an international organization providing "boots on the ground and guns for hire," to satisfy a growing demand for vital physical security needs of both private and public concerns in many of the world's hotspots. Scahill contends that Blackwater morphed into one of the world's largest mercenary concerns whose thirst for growth subverts United States policy to the detriment

of world good. Scahill pays particular emphasis to Iraq to back up his compelling case.

Blackwater's role in Iraq comes under the guise of privatization of government services. Scahill argues that Blackwater now plays a more traditional military role with little accountability to local military command and operates beyond the rule of law or rules of engagement employed by the military. In effect there are two players in Iraq who play by two different sets of rules that operate to the detriment and safety of military personnel on the ground.

Scahill paints Blackwater as a loose cannon that has destabilized the Iraqi security situation, which has made the effort to reconstruct the country more difficult. Scahill cites a number of incidents of Iraqi deaths directly attributable to this organization, but whose citizens and government are left without any recourse for legal repercussion under Iraqi law or under United States military law. The contractors have carte blanche to operate, quite unlike the rules applied to military personnel who, in similar circumstances, have been charged with murder and prosecuted for their crimes. Such organizations have alienated an already dispossessed population who see no hope in future under the thumb of a conqueror. Scahill contends that this has fomented rebellion and stiffened Iraqi resistance as a direct result.

Scahill's work draws to our attention problems in the inherent growth in privatized services; notably cost, accountability, rule of law,

command and control, and governance. Scahill weaves a well documented tale that warns us that public interests and responsibilities of government are being subverted by the private interests of a few individuals and corporations, and *for profit* (italics the author's for emphasis), which is a detriment to the citizenry of democratic states and can likely destabilize democracy and world order.

Scahill's compelling tale highlights the pertinence and the relevance of Eisenhower's warning made at the end of his presidency to today's citizenry. Scahill posits that what has unfolded in the ensuing years since this historic speech was the very thing that Eisenhower prophesized.<sup>3</sup> This is a highly recommended work and is a valued contribution to the discussion on the hidden dangers in the privatization of government services. □

Gerry (GD) Madigan is a retired logistician, Canadian Armed Forces. His career spanned 28 years as a finance officer. His notable postings included time served at National Defence Headquarters, CFB Europe, Maritime Canada and the First Gulf War as comptroller in Qatar. Major Madigan (Retired) is a graduate of the Royal Military College of Canada's War Studies Program.

---

## Notes

1. Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York: Nation Books, a member of Perseus Books Group [paperback ed.], 2008), 20.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 54.