



Master Thesis

**The Obama Administration's Increased Dependency on Private
Military Companies in Iraq and Afghanistan: A Comparative Study
with the Bush Administration**

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Abstract

Throughout the Bush and Obama Administrations, thousands of private contractors were hired to help the United States win the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, former President Obama pledged to decrease US dependency on Private Military Companies in armed conflicts and to improve transparency and accountability of these companies to the public. Nonetheless, data shows that the Obama Administration not only failed to reduce US dependency on PMCs, it actually increased its usage. The reasons why the Obama Administration decided to take a different course of action than the one promised to the electorate remain unanswered. In this thesis, I examine the influence of the following factors through a comparative case study between the Bush and Obama Administrations: De-escalation of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, lack of public support to the conflicts and the Obama Administration new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. The results show that while de-escalation of the conflict was responsible for the Obama Administration's increasing PMC dependency in Iraq, lack of public support and the Obama Administration's security strategy to the Afghanistan conflict were the reasons why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in Afghanistan.

Introduction

On June 7, 2013, Scahill (2013) released a documentary titled ‘Dirty Wars’ which caused debate throughout the United States (US). This documentary exposed Private Military Companies (PMCs) working for the US in Afghanistan. It raised questions of whether the US should outsource their wars and interventions in other countries to PMCs. It specifically targeted the Obama Administration, whom by the end of its term was estimated that there were more private contractors under US pay than there were US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq (Schwartz and Kapp, 2017). This documentary also raised awareness about PMCs and what kind of services they perform. PMCs are ‘private business entities that deliver to consumers a wide spectrum of military and security services once generally assumed to be exclusively inside the public context’ (Singer, 2003: 8).

The increase of PMCs used in US interventions in armed conflicts stands in contrast to many initiatives taken by Obama. In 2007, Obama introduced a bill to improve transparency and accountability within the Military and Security Contracting Act. In an address regarding this bill, he described he was ‘disturbed’ with some incidents involving an American-hired PMC and Iraqi civilians and that ‘PMCs actions should not have a negative impact on US efforts’ (Obama, 2007). The Obama Administration also introduced a series of reforms in 2009 ‘designed to reduce state spending on PMCs (...) and return certain outsourced work back to full-time government employees’ (Isenberg, 2009: 15). Nonetheless, an increase of the use of PMCs in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars during Obama’s Presidency was registered. So why would the Obama Administration involve more PMCs in American interventions in armed conflicts

compared to the Bush Administration if it had taken initiatives in the beginning of its term to do the opposite?

Although many scholars such as Isenberg (2009), Dunigan (2014) and Stanley (2015) have analysed and addressed the issue, they have mostly used different descriptive arguments (such as de-escalation of the conflict and existence of a new security strategy for the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts in the White House), without supporting evidence to determine why the Obama Administration decided to increase US dependency on PMCs, therefore contradicting his early promises of reducing dependency on PMCs. I will perform a comparison of the Bush and Obama Administrations, by testing three different factors on why the Obama Administration decided to involve more PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as provide an aggregated analysis of public opinion polls related to the conflicts in order to settle this debate and provide a new interpretation to this issue. I use a comparative study between the Bush and Obama Administrations to determine why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan, something that has not yet been done. I also test the three most used arguments made by scholars to justify this increase of dependency on PMCs by the Obama Administration, and present new evidence in order to settle the debate and prove why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts.

In this thesis, I will first present a Literature Review where an overview of the rise of PMCs will be presented, as well as advantages and disadvantages of PMCs, their current legal framework within international law and how PMCs rose and developed under the Bush and Obama Administrations. The Theory section will show the three potential factors that might explain why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in Afghanistan and Iraq: De-escalation of the conflict, lack of

public support and the Obama Administration new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. The Research Design section will describe how this comparative study will use data sources, hypothesis-related measurements, and show how the hypotheses can be proven or disproven. The Analysis section will show the Obama Administration effectively increased US dependency on PMCs in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and will analyse and present available and new evidence in order to prove or disprove the delineated hypotheses. I will conclude by providing a general overview of this thesis, through a Conclusion section.

Literature Review

Within scholarly literature, PMCs are a recent, 21st century topic. This literature concerns five different strands of research. The first strand concerns the rise and development of PMCs, which has been rampant, with scholars such as Singer (2003), Whyte (2003) and Zabci (2007) attributing many reasons to this. Singer (2003: 49) and Whyte (2003) argue that after the end of the cold war ‘a vacuum in the market of security’ was produced, added by demobilisation of several armies around the world and rise of global levels of conflict, caused a rise and massive increase in PMC activity around the world. Zabci (2007: 2) points out that technological advances eliminated the need to employ vast numbers of men to fight on the battlefields, and that technological wars demand highly skilled personnel, which are mostly present in the private sector. Irvin (2011) argues that besides the technological advances in warfare, the fact several of these highly skilled personnel were demobilised after the cold war, made them search for new employment opportunities in the private sector, helping PMCs develop much faster than it was assumed.

The second strand concerns advantages and disadvantages of PMCs. When compared to state armies, PMCs have several advantages and disadvantages. As advantages, Shearer (1998: 66) argues that PMCs are more capable than state armies to effectively change the outcome of conflicts and can secure stability and settlements on the short term, as well as being a good deterrent against possible enemies to a state. Other advantages of hiring PMCs in armed conflicts are explained by Stanger and Williams (2006:8) whom argue that hiring PMCs has many advantages such as the hiring and policy flexibility they confer to states, the greater military agility compared to standard armies, the minimisation of US casualties and the financial savings they bring to states. Irvin

(2011) argues one of PMCs advantages is their ability to work as complements of state armies when these are over-stretched.

As disadvantages of hiring PMCs, Stanger and Williams (2006: 8) refer the reduced transparency and accountability PMCs provide, the encouragement it gives to other states to also hire PMCs, increasing risks for deplorable behaviour in the theatre of war that can tarnish states' reputation (such as the 'Abu Ghraib scandal'), and possible financial waste generated by hiring PMCs. Shearer (1998: 67) also lists the incapacity of PMCs to influence lasting peace processes and their incapacity to coordinate or cooperate with other allied forces.

The third strand concerns the legal framework of PMCs and their legitimacy to act. Moyakine (2015: 393) argues that the state use of private contractors is an increasingly popular practice, but that unfortunately 'the international legal framework lacks sufficient capacity to address the issues of control and accountability in relation to PMCs'. Calazans (2016: 144) argues that while contractors can be charged for violations under international law, it is extremely hard to prosecute the employer, as there is the need to prove three key elements: superior-subordinate relationship; knowledge of the crime; and failure to take the necessary steps to avoid or punish the crime. However, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, lack of direct evidence and lack of legal obligations and accountability prevents PMCs from being directly prosecuted (Calazans, 2016: 145). Perrin (2012: 228) identified major gaps in international law that he argues should be of greatest priority to address, as current international law for PMCs is 'limited and inadequate'.

The fourth strand concerns the rise of PMCs in the US. Some scholars, such as Petersohn (2014) argue that PMCs are usually used by weak states, whom possess inefficient technical conditions to defend themselves in case of conflict. Other scholars

suggest that it was the US whom initiated this rampant rise of PMCs. Bruneau (2011) and Dunigan (2014) argue that it was specifically ‘the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (that) have triggered an explosion of contracting, measured both in amounts of money and numbers of personnel’ (Bruneau, 2011: 112). While some scholars such as Singer (2003) and Stanley (2015: 124-125) attribute the sudden wave of PMCs working for the US in Iraq and Afghanistan in the beginning of the 21st century to the lack of voluntary US Forces and capabilities within the US military, others such as Scahill (2007) and Bruneau (2011) argue that the rise of PMCs was purely for strategic reasons, stemming from the Rumsfeld doctrine.

The fifth strand concerns the use of PMCs by the Obama Administration. Although many scholars, such as Scahill (2010), Mcfate (2014: 4) and Zenko (2016) have argued that the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs (increased the numbers of contractors per US soldier), they have not clarified why this happen. Other scholars, such as Stanley (2015), Isenberg (2009) and Kaufman (2016) provide different reasons why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. Stanley (2015) argues that this was due to the de-escalation of the conflicts, while Isenberg (2009) argues it was caused by lack of national commitment and public support to commit more troops and keep fighting the conflict. Kaufman (2016) defends that a shift of forces was caused by the Obama Administration’s new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. However, these scholars have failed to prove their arguments, as they are mostly descriptive, not providing enough corroborating evidence.

Through this thesis, I intend to compare both the Bush and Obama Administrations use of PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan and then test the arguments proposed by scholars to determine the reasons why the Obama Administration increased

US dependency on PMCs in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts compared to the Bush Administration, and finally settle the debate.

Theory

As previously referred, scholars such as Scahill (2007) and Bruneau (2011) have argued that US dependency on the rise of PMCs was just not because of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, but also due to the Rumsfeld doctrine. Upon explaining his doctrine, Rumsfeld argued that ‘we must promote a more entrepreneurial approach: one that encourages people to be proactive, not reactive, and to behave less like bureaucrats and more like venture capitalists’ (Rumsfeld, 2002: 29). This doctrine would open way for the widespread use of PMCs by the DoD, according to Scahill (2007). Lovewine (2014: 142) argues that the DoD ‘has gone further than any other country’s armed forces in outsourcing military functions, resulting in an explosion of PMCs operating on the battlefield.’

This appeared to be about to change when during his time as Senator, and during the 2008 Presidential campaign, Obama pledged to reduce US dependency on PMCs (Obama for America, 2008) and took a stance against PMCs. In 2007, for instance, Obama introduced a bill to improve its transparency and accountability to PMCs (Obama, 2007). During the 2008 presidential campaign, Obama also declared that the US should not depend on them to execute military operations (Kinsey, 2009: 147), and in the beginning of his presidency in 2009, President Obama declared in a speech that ‘The American people's money must be spent to advance their priorities, not to line the pockets of contractors or to maintain projects that don't work’ (Obama, 2009). Surprisingly, scholars such as Mcfate (2014), Zenko (2016) and Schwartz and Kapp (2017), argue US dependency on PMCs under the Obama Administration increased. Unfortunately, no scholar has been able to settle why the Obama Administration promised to reduce the use of PMCs but in fact increased it.

Scholars have been advocating three different reasons as to why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. One of the first arguments proposed by scholars is that the de-escalation of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts helped the Obama Administration to reduce the number of US forces or replace them for private contractors, while reducing at a slower pace the number of private contractors present, in order to replace US Forces that were withdrawn from the field of battle, or train Iraqi and Afghan forces (Stanley, 2015:148-169). Rush (2009) adds that while a fixed date for the withdraw of US Forces from Iraq was established during the Bush Administration with the US-Iraq Security Agreement (SA), this agreement did not contemplate any withdraw of American contractors, only referring that they would have to comply with Iraqi law. (Rush, 2009). While the Bush Administration wanted a full withdraw of all US forces and contractors by the end of 2011 from Iraq, the Obama Administration wanted to only withdraw part of the forces, maintaining a contingent of troops in Iraq (Jeffrey, 2014). Nonetheless, this agreement would facilitate the increase or replacement of US Forces for private contractors upon the set date for withdrawal, as the deal did not contemplate any withdrawal for US contractors. Obama has also argued multiple times that the wars were coming to a ‘responsible conclusion’ (Obama, 2014) in Afghanistan and Iraq and that violence had been ‘reduced substantially’ (Obama, 2009).

Hypothesis number 1 can then be stated as: When compared to the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs in the American interventions of Iraq and Afghanistan due to the de-escalation of the conflict.

Other scholars, such as Isenberg (2009: 5) argue this increased dependency on PMCs was not caused by the de-escalation of the conflicts, but rather due to a decrease in national support to the conflict. Public opinion can influence politicians to hire more

PMCs if the public is generally against the conflict, less willing to commit troops and is supportive for a withdrawal of its national troops from the conflict. With a government willing to keep fighting the conflict, PMCs are a quick fix to a lack of national support. While the Bush Administration initially had broad support for the conflicts, this support waned over time through his Administration, and by the time Obama assumed office, support for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was at one of its lowest points, leaving Obama to seek support from the American public, as argued by Jacobson (2010) and McHugh (2015). Both scholars also argue that this influenced Obama's policies and management of the conflict, which might explain the shift towards hiring PMCs. Isenberg (2009: 5) adds that 'The US Government has assumed the role of guarantor of global stability at a time when the American public was unwilling to provide the resources necessary to support this strategy', and that this appealed to politicians whom favoured the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts to increase US dependency on private contractors (Isenberg, 2009:5).

Hypothesis number 2 can then be stated as: When compared to the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs in the American interventions of Iraq and Afghanistan due to the lack of public support to the conflicts.

Third, scholars refer that the Obama Administration's new security strategy for the Middle East was responsible for drastic changes in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts (Migdal, 2014; Kaufman, 2016). Kaufman (2016) describes the main tenets of the 'Obama doctrine' as mainly focused towards persuasion (usually described as 'soft' power) and towards establishing better relations with the middle eastern countries, towards multilateral compromises (Kaufman, 2016: 19). Shinkman (2019) supports this by defending that the Obama Administration employed a strategy to replace US Forces

for private contractors to publicly claim the war was waning. Gibbons-Neff (2016) argues that the Obama Administration increasingly substituted both combat forces and military logistics support of the US army for private contractors as part of a wider strategy.

This new security strategy was also different from the approach the Bush Administration had before: According to Santos and Teixeira (2013: 142), the Bush doctrine for the Middle East was based on pre-emption against threats, unilateralism when negotiating with other countries to ensure US security, military supremacy in the region and exporting democracy to the region. Obama also confirms his new strategy was different to the Bush strategy and would influence both conflicts. In a speech during his first year as President (2009), Obama laid out his strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan: To withdraw responsibly from Iraq, to engage in sustained diplomacy with Iraq and its allies in the region, and effectively defeat the Taliban or force them to a stable peace settlement (Obama, 2009).

Hypothesis number 3 can then be stated as: When compared to the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs in the American interventions of Iraq and Afghanistan due to the Obama Administration's new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Research Design:

To be able to determine why there was a rise of US dependency on PMCs during the Obama Administration compared to the Bush Administration, a comparative case-study method will be used. As explained by Della Porta (2008, 202), the ‘comparative method is a preferred strategy for political and social scientists when they investigate institutions or other macropolitical phenomena.’ This method goes towards a detailed understanding of historical processes and individual motivations. As George (1979, 62) points out ‘a controlled comparison of each case helps identify an outcome of the dependent variable and provides a historical explanation for it.’

The selected case studies for this comparative case study were the conflicts in Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-2016). These were selected due to their uniqueness: These are the only two conflicts that went on throughout the Bush and Obama Administrations and where thousands of private military contractors were used by the US. This will be a most similar systems design, as I am analysing two Administrations (Bush and Obama) of the same state (US) in the same conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since I am only assessing the effects of the independent variable in each hypothesis, I have to control and keep constant all the other variables, so the independent variable is the only one that will vary, which corresponds to a most similar systems design, as supported by Anckar (2008). Most similar systems designs are used to keep constant as many extraneous variables as possible, so they do not interfere in the influence of another variable, which is meant in this comparative study (Anckar, 2008: 389).

The dependent variable for the delineated hypotheses is the Obama Administration increased dependency on PMCs in Iraq and Afghanistan. The independent variable will vary according to each hypothesis. Hypothesis 1 will have ‘conflict de-

escalation' as the independent variable. Hypothesis 2 will have 'Public support to the conflict' as the independent variable. Hypothesis 3 will have 'Obama Administration's security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan' as the independent variable.

In order to assess whether conflict de-escalation was a reason for the Obama Administration to increase PMC dependency in Iraq and Afghanistan, DoD documents with troop and contractor numbers throughout the Obama Administration will be analysed, alongside contracts celebrated between the US and PMCs and their respective contract duration clauses. Declarations made by top officials of the Obama Administration on this subject, congressional reports and policy documents recommending substitution of US troops for contractors upon the de-escalation of the conflict can also indicate de-escalation of the conflicts was a reason for this increase of dependency on PMCs. To measure de-escalation of the conflict from the American perspective, three types of measurable evidence were used: Number of civilian deaths related to the conflict, number of US soldiers killed in the conflict, and number of terrorist attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For hypothesis 2, it will be possible to see evidence of public support to the conflict as a reason to increase in dependency on PMCs through an analysis of public support and whether there was a decline in public support to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and if that caused a decrease of US forces or increase of contractors in those states. This will be measured through opinion polls regarding approval ratings of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, public opinion polls on whether the US should withdraw its troops and end the conflict, or if public opinion reacts positively or negatively to possible troop increases to the conflict. Scholars and sources within the Obama Administration will also be considered to determine whether the Obama Administration took into account public opinion before making decisions related to the conflicts.

For hypothesis 3, it will be possible to see evidence of the Obama Administration new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan as a reason for the US increase in dependency on PMCs through speeches and papers released by (former) President Obama or by any top officials of his cabinet or military commanders, arguing for a reduction of US Forces contingent in Iraq and Afghanistan, or congressional or national security strategy documents that suggest a strategic increase of PMC dependency.

Analysis Section:

In more recent years, scholars have argued that the Obama Administration increasingly hired more PMCs to fight America's armed conflicts abroad compared to the Bush Administration (Zenko, 2016; Scahill, 2013; Isenberg, 2009). McFate (2014, 22) for instance, describes the United States (US) under the Obama Administration as having a 'co-dependency' on PMCs. Zenko (2016) proves this by showing the disproportionate ratio of contractors to American soldiers in Iraq (1.9 to 1) and in Afghanistan (2.9 to 1). The Obama Administration dramatically increased both the number of troops and contractors by more than 120,000 men in Afghanistan, as it can be seen on Figure 1. In Iraq, the Obama Administration reduced the number of US Forces at a faster pace than the number of contractors. By the end of the US troop withdrawal in 2013, while the amount of US soldiers in Iraq was reduced to a couple hundred, the number of contractors was still high (Figure 2).

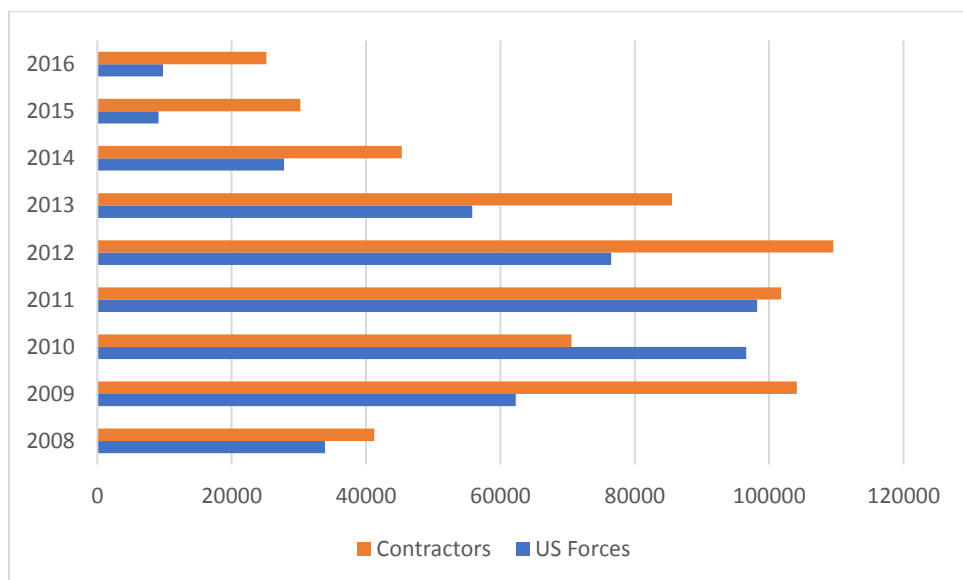


Figure 1: Contractor Personnel and Troop Level in Afghanistan. Data Source: Schwartz and Kapp (2017: 4)

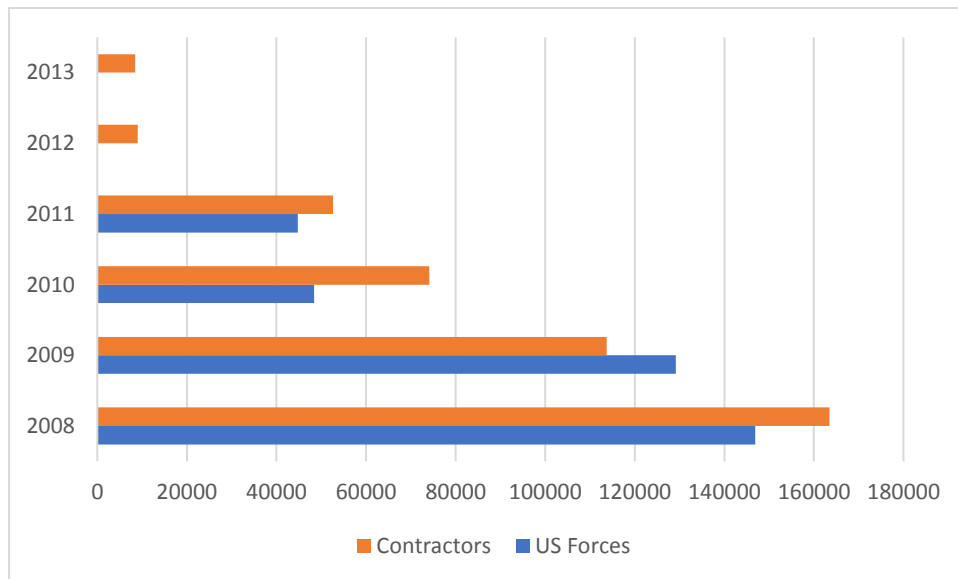


Figure 2: Contractor Personnel and Troop Level in Iraq. Data Source: Schwartz and Kapp (2017: 8)

Three hypotheses were delineated and will now be tested in order to find why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, when compared to the Bush Administration.

De-escalation

Some scholars, such as Stanley (2015) argue that the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs when compared to the Bush Administration due to the de-escalation of the conflict and consequent withdraw of US Forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to test this hypothesis, it is important to assess whether there was a de-escalation of the conflicts in the first place, to then be able to determine whether if it influenced the Obama Administration to increase US dependency on PMCs. The number of US soldiers killed was retrieved from the DoD's Defence Casualty Analysis System (2019) (DCAS), while the number of civilian casualties and terrorist attacks was retrieved from Statista (2019). The evidence shows that there was a clear de-escalation of the

conflict in Iraq since the Obama Administration assumed office compared to the Bush Administration until the conflict ended in 2013, as it can be seen in Figure 3. The number of civilian deaths related to the conflict, number of US troops killed in action and number of terrorist attacks fell substantially. The number of civilian deaths related to the conflict decreased from an average of 17 764 per year during the Bush Administration, to 5635 per year during the Obama Administration. The number of US troops killed in action also decreased, from an average of 703 soldiers killed during the Bush Administration, to an average of 52 killed during the Obama Administration. The number of terrorist attacks in Iraq also decreased to less than half in average per year during the Obama Administration (2236 average per year) when compared to the Bush Administration (5357 average per year).

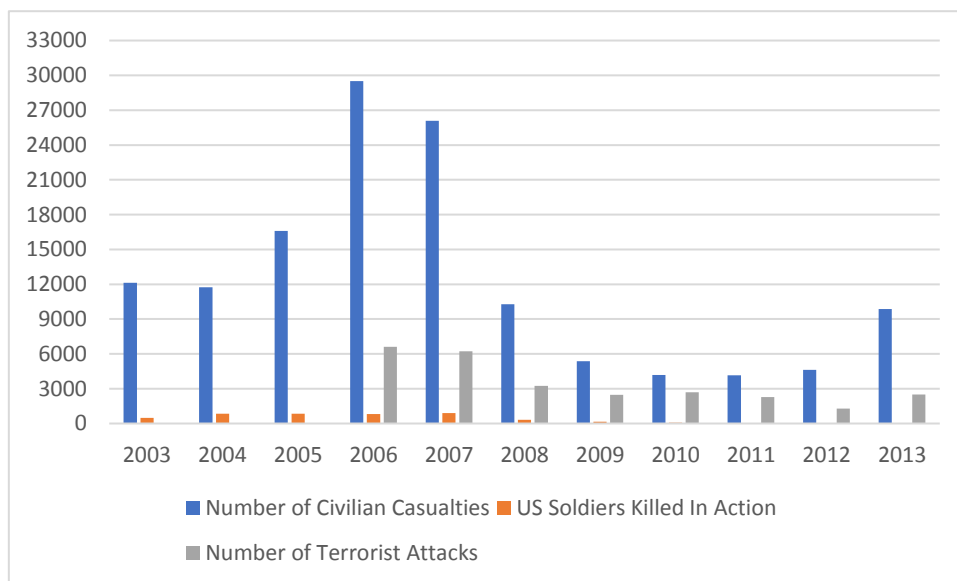


Figure 3: Number of Civilian Casualties, US Soldiers Killed in Action, and Number of Terrorist Attacks in Iraq from 2003 to 2013. Source: DCAS (2019) and Statista (2019)

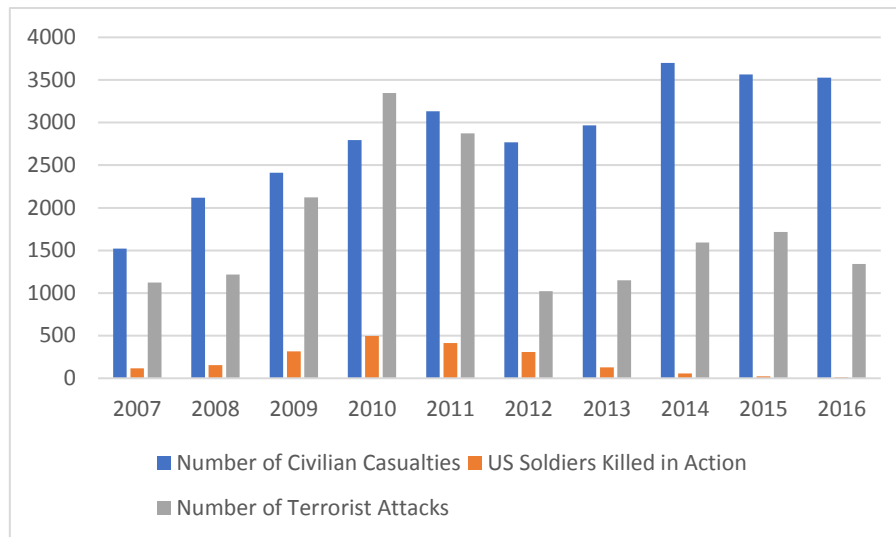


Figure 4: Number of Civilian Casualties, US Soldiers Killed in Action, and Number of Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2016. Source: DCAS (2019) and Statista (2019)

The numbers regarding Afghanistan (Figure 4) tell a different story: The average number of US soldiers killed in action per year during the Bush Administration (78) was lower compared to the Obama Administrations' (220). The number of killed civilians as a result of the conflict rose significantly during the Obama Administration, from 2118 in 2008 during the Bush Administration's last year in office to an average of 3108 killed civilians per year as result of the conflict during Obama's presidency. The number of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan was also superior during the Obama Administration (average of 1907 per year) when compared to the Bush Administration last two years in office (average of 1170 per year). This evidence contradicts Obama, whom several times argued that the war was coming to 'a responsible conclusion' and that the US was 'finishing its job' in Afghanistan (Obama, 2014), even though it is still going on today. This evidence also contradicts the Obama Administration's strategy to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, as it withdrew almost 165,000 troops between its peak (2011) and the end of the Administration. Hypothesis number 1 does not hold in the case of the Afghanistan conflict, as no de-escalation of the conflict happened.

It is nonetheless important to verify whether de-escalation of the conflict in Iraq is one of the reasons why the Obama Administration increased US dependency on PMCs. The de-escalation of the Iraq conflict in 2008 led to the signature of the US-Iraq security agreement (SA), which asserted the full withdraw of US troops from Iraq until December 31, 2011. The agreement, however, did not contemplate a withdrawal of US contractors. In fact, the agreement shows that Iraq wanted to integrate and hold private contractors accountable, as well as encouraging the US to hire Iraqi contractors: The agreement asserts that contractors would have to comply to Iraq's laws on uniforms and armament, and altogether with Iraqi law, prohibited US contractors to wear any uniforms that would link them to the US (US-Iraq Security Agreement, 2008). In addition, the agreement contemplated Iraq would have jurisdiction in criminal cases involving US contractors, which is a clear attempt to hold contractors accountable for their acts in Iraq and to avoid another situation as the Blackwater/Nisour Square massacre of 2007. This would also severely difficult US ability to hold PMCs accountable for their acts, as Iraq has taken jurisdiction, therefore contradicting Obama's ambitions of increasing accountability to PMCs.

Upon the signing of this SA by the Bush Administration, various US politicians were sceptical, and many wondered how this deal could impact the Obama Administration policy flexibility, one of them being Obama's Vice-President (then Senator) Biden (Rush, 2009: 40). Although Obama had promised as President assumed to 'remove all US troops by the end of 2011' (Obama, 2009), his Administration attempted to renegotiate the SA in order to keep thousands of US troops in Iraq, as argued by former US Ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey (2014), whom blamed the failure of the renegotiations of the SA agreement due to lack of Iraqi parliamentary support.

This failure to renegotiate the SA would change the US contractor presence in Iraq dramatically: The percentage of security contractors under DoD pay in Iraq during the Obama Administration until the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) increased compared to the percentage of security contractors in the last year of the Bush Administration (2008). DoD reports show that while on the last quarter of 2008, upon the signature of the agreement, only about 8% of the US contractors contingent provided security services, but in last the last quarter of 2013 that percentage was 36%, almost five times more than what the Bush Administration had left (Department of Defence, 2016). As security contractors are most likely armed (94% of them were in 2008), they also perform convoy security and missions besides private or personal security, as indicated by the DoD (Department of Defence, 2016).

Some politicians and members of the Obama Administration also exposed some of their opinions regarding the withdraw of US troops from Iraq. Emma Sky, political adviser to general Odierno (who was commanding general of US Forces in Iraq from 2008 until 2010) expressed that ‘Obama’s only interest in Iraq was ending the war’ (Sky, 2015). McKeon (2018), whom worked for the Obama Administration argues that Obama attempted to leave 5,000 US Troops in Iraq beyond 2011, when they were scheduled to withdraw. Upon the rejection by the Iraqi Parliament and Government, Obama maintained a similar (yet higher) number of contractors in Iraq until the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which was deliberated. It is therefore possible to prove that de-escalation in Iraq was one of the reasons why the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs in Iraq. In the case of Afghanistan, it was not possible to confirm hypothesis number 1 as the Afghanistan conflict did not experience a de-escalation.

Lack of Public Support

There is an ongoing debate amongst many scholars, such as Berinsky (2009), Holsti (2004) and Shapiro (2011) on the impact and effects of public opinion on US foreign policy and on Administrations. However, as Soroka and Wlezien (2010: 2-3) argue ‘public opinion and its relationship to policy is central to everyday politics (...) the connection between public preferences and public policy is one of the most critical components of representative democracy’.

Two events impacted the conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan: The Obama Administration promise of withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq until 2011 and the US troop increase in Afghanistan. While Jacobson (2010: 602) shows that these measures taken by Obama had bi-partisan support, his data was collected taken after Obama had already announced two troop increases in Afghanistan, and the Iraq ones include samples with various different questions, which can produce different results and compromise the final result. It also does not consider possible effects that public opinion might have had on the Obama Administration before taking these decisions.

I compiled every poll made after Obama assumed office until his final announcement of his biggest increase of 30,000 US troops on December 1st 2009, all with questions as similar as possible to the question ‘would you support a troop increase in Afghanistan?’ to avoid different results due to different wording in the questions. The data was selected and compiled from Polling Report (2019), a database that collects all public opinion polls related to a certain topic, a data source also used (although differently) by Jacobson (2010). This new evidence reveals that in fact, before Obama made the announcement of the troop increase of 30,000 on the 1st December 2009, public opinion on the US troop increase in Afghanistan was heavily polarised, with 46% of

Americans opposing this troop surge, while 46% supported it. This new evidence also shows that public opinion heavily supported the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, with 73% of Americans supporting the withdrawal, while only about 22% opposed it.

Lack of public support and national commitment can lead to less willingness to fight the conflict or commit more troops as Isenberg (2009) explained. This can then lead to support for an ending of the conflict or withdrawal of US troops, as it happened in the case of US conflicts in Iraq and Vietnam. The percentage of people who oppose the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, individually, can be seen in Figure 5. These results are averages of every opinion poll gathered from 2006 onwards with the exact question: ‘Do you favour or oppose the (country name) War?’. This new evidence shows that when Obama assumed office in 2009, opposition for the conflicts was at one of its highest points for both conflicts (Figure 5). Politicians can, however, use PMCs to reduce US troop commitment to the conflict, to reduce US troop casualties and improve the outcome of a conflict. Ramirez and Wood (2018) explain that the fact PMCs are more cost-effective increases support for them to operate in both non-combat and combat operations. Ramirez and Wood (2018: 12-13) also demonstrate through various public opinion reports that public opinion finds acceptable for PMCs to perform non-combat operations on US conflicts and disagrees on PMCs performing direct combat and security operations for the US military.

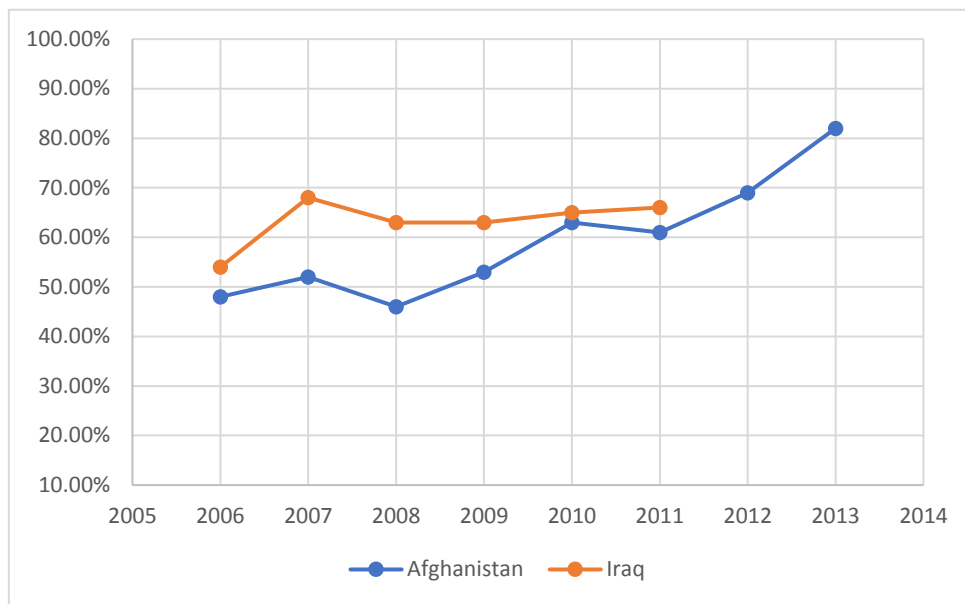


Figure 5: Percentage of People Who Oppose the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts: Average Result. Source: Polling Report (2019)¹

It is possible to conclude that public opinion in general would only agree with a non-combat PMC force in Iraq and Afghanistan (Ramirez and Wood, 2018). It is also possible to conclude that it opposed the troop increase in Afghanistan and favoured a withdrawal of US troops in Iraq. With the exception of the withdrawal from Iraq, Obama did not adopt the other solutions to which public opinion seemed to agree more upon.² In fact, the statistics indicate that the Obama Administration has most likely put private contractors under more combat situations with the enemy than US Forces, as during his Administration more contractors died than did US Forces (Department of Labor, 2019). On December 1, 2009, Obama made a speech explaining the situation in Afghanistan and that he was deploying an additional 30,000 US troops in Afghanistan where he explained that ‘these are the resources we need to seize the initiative’ (Obama, 2009). However,

¹ These results are averages of every opinion poll gathered from 2006 onwards with the exact question: ‘Do you favour or oppose the (country name) War?’

² In the case of Iraq, although the Obama Administration did withdraw US troops from Iraq, this meant increasing the dependency on security contractors and decreasing on non-combat contractors.

since during 2009 until the end of his Administration, he deployed more than 60,000 contractors in Afghanistan. Interestingly, General McChrystal (at that time commander of the troops in Afghanistan) had asked in the summer of 2009 for an increase of 80,000 US troops, which was rejected, although he later received slightly more than that: around 60,000 contractors and 30,000 US troops.

Some scholars, such as Rosner (2014) and McHugh (2015), agree that Obama has taken public opinion into consideration before making decisions regarding both Iraq and Afghanistan. Rosner (2014), whom had contacts inside the White House, argued that ‘in too many cases, President Obama has avoided sharp-edged actions abroad, partly out of a fear that the American public will not support him’. McHugh (2015) compared Bushes’ 2007 Iraq surge and Obama’s 2009 Afghanistan surge and concluded that when compared to the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration was capable to successfully shape public opinion around the surge, by emphasising the humanitarian and terrorist concerns in Afghanistan, and by proposing a short deadline for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. According to McHugh (2015), the Bush Administration was incapable of rallying support for the conflicts in his second term.

By dividing the two US troop increases in Afghanistan, the Obama Administration managed to gather some support, or at least polarise public opinion when compared to what the Bush Administration had left it. I decided to measure the average public opinion on the two troop increases to see whether there was a change in opinion. The data was retrieved from Polling Report (2019). The evidence shows that upon the first troop increase of 17,000 US Forces, public opinion reacted positively, with 61% approving this, while only 34% opposed. However, public opinion reacted in a polarising way upon the second US troop increase in 2009: The four opinion polls found at Polling Report (2019) asking exactly whether they would support or oppose this increase found a more divided

public support, with 49% of Americans opposing this increase, while 46% approved it. McCrisken (2012) and DiMaggio (2015) also analysed various elements of the American media and of the Obama Administration on the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and proved the Obama Administration employed communication strategies to rally public support for its plans for Iraq and Afghanistan, thus showing that the Obama Administration cared about public opinion regarding these two conflicts and that it needed public support for these measures. This data and evidence suggest that the Obama Administration cared and sought public support for its policies in Afghanistan, being able to manage a controlled increase of US troops without producing anti-war public opinion, but needed to compromise by hiring contractors to stabilise the situation, or else employ more US troops and face (or risk) lower public support. Therefore, Hypothesis number 2 is confirmed for the Afghanistan conflict.

The Iraq conflict poses a different problematic. Obama had personally been against the war since it began (Obama, 2002), and responsibly withdrawing from Iraq was one of his first and most important electoral promises during the Presidential election of 2008 (Obama, 2008), which already had a wide public support when the Obama Administration assumed it would do so. The US-Iraq SA also obliged the Obama Administration to withdraw all US troops involved in the conflict, as explained on Hypothesis 1, so it simply could not increase US dependency on PMCs in the Iraq conflict due to lack of public support. The evidence found throughout this thesis suggests that while Obama has tried to gain public support for his withdraw of US troops from Iraq, lack of public support was not a reason for the increase in PMC dependency by the Obama Administration. Therefore, Hypothesis number 2 is not confirmed for the Iraq conflict.

The Obama Administration's New Security Strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan

Some scholars, such as Zenko (2016) argue that the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs when compared to the Bush Administration due to the adoption of a new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. It is therefore important to compare Bush's and Obama's security strategies for the conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan. The Bush security strategy to the conflicts can be analysed, on a wider prism, through the US National Security Strategy Documents (NSSD) of 2002 and 2006. In those documents, the Bush Administration asserted its security objectives, but also the values it would bring to Iraq and Afghanistan: freedom, human dignity, democracy, free trade and free markets.

These, however, are not a model offered by the US. They are a set of 'non-negotiable demands' which the end of the cold war proved to be the 'single sustainable model for national success' (White House, 2002: iii; 3). This unilateralism is one of the main characteristics of the Bush Administration security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. Ikenberry (2009: 7-8) argues that 'the Bush Administration was not simply acting a bit more unilaterally than previous administrations' but rather it was 'articulating a new logic of global order that would be based on US unilateralism, US leadership and US power.' Another aspect of Bush's security strategy is the willingness to use US hegemony and power to act and force other states to comply, be it through threats, coercion or war, as defended by Ikenberry (2009) and Santos and Teixeira (2013: 142).

The Obama Administration's security strategy revealed to be different. Obama openly engaged in a multilateral security strategy, which sought to improve relations with all Middle Eastern states, while attempting a permanent solution for the Iraq and

Afghanistan conflicts with US allies (Kaufman, 2016: 13; Migdal, 2014: 253). The Obama Administration's security strategy can also be analysed through its 2010 NSSD. In that document, the Obama Administration parts way from many of Bush's key elements of its security strategy: the Obama Administration claimed that it would only resort to the use of force when all other options are exhausted (White House, 2010: 22). It also departed from Bush's approach of regime change through force: Obama blamed Bush for causing people around the world to associate western freedom with 'war, torture and forcibly imposed regime change' (Kaufman, 2016, 10). Obama established as priority behavioural change that would lead to spontaneous regime change.

These differences in both Administration's security strategies are also noticeable in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. For the Bush Administration, victory would be achieved in Iraq and Afghanistan through the implementation of a new democratic political process, the restructuring of the country and the implementation of effective security forces in both states, as Shillinger (2005) argues and Bush's 2002 and 2006 NSSD demonstrate (White House, 2002; 2006).

The Obama Administration had different objectives. Obama divided his strategy in three parts: the responsible removal of US forces from Iraq by the end of 2011, the creation of sustained diplomacy channels between both states for a more peaceful and prosperous Iraq, and comprehensive American engagement across the region for promotion of peace (Obama, 2009). In another speech on December 1st 2009, Obama outlined his four objectives for the Afghanistan conflict: pursuing a military strategy that would break the Taliban's momentum, work with US partners and allies and Afghanistan itself to pursue a more efficient civilian strategy for improved security, improve relationships with Afghanistan and Pakistan, and ensure a responsible withdraw of US

forces starting on July 2011, handing over US functions to the Afghan Army (Obama, 2009).

There is then no doubt that the Obama Administration's security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan quickly changed their possible outcome compared to the Bush strategy. Several sources and top members of the Obama Administration have declared Obama's true intentions with his security strategy. Feldman (2017), who served as special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2014 and 2015 referred that 'the President (Obama) does not want to hand off to his successor the mess he inherited' in Iraq and Afghanistan (Feldman, 2017). Robert Gates, former Secretary of Defense of the Obama Administration, argued that Obama did not trust 'his commander Petraeus, (...) does not believe in his own strategy. For him (Obama), it is all about getting out' (Gates, 2014). It is then possible to see that Obama's top priority was to withdraw US troops and stabilise the conflicts.

The Obama strategy for Iraq had to compromise to an already existing and signed SA, which implicated the total withdrawal of US forces before the end of 2011. Although Obama attempted to renegotiate and extend the stay of US forces in Iraq, negotiations failed, leaving Obama with a troop withdrawal he wished but on an undesirable schedule. However, during the two years of the Obama Administration before the announced withdrawal (2009-2011), Obama rapidly reduced the number of US Forces present, while the number of contractors was reduced at a slower pace (Figure 2). US congressional documents confirm the existence of a security strategy within the Obama Administration to reduce the number of US troops, while increasing dependency on PMCs in Iraq: The Commission on Wartime Contracting (CWC) argued the 'State has turned to contracting in the face of this huge new security, governance, and development mission' during the Obama Administration (Commission on Wartime Contracting, 2011: 138). This implies

that instead of handing the functions over to the Iraqi government, which would have been agreed upon in the SA, contractors were executing them.

However, data and top officials of the Obama Administration reveal a different thing: The numbers and percentages (as part of the total number) of all logistics, maintenance, transportation and construction contractors, whom could also provide services to the Iraq military went considerably down when compared to the last year of the Bush Administration (Department of Defence, 2016), and the number of security contractors remained constant between the transition period of 2008-2011. US commanding general in Iraq between 2008 and 2010, General Odierno wrote a directive ordering a 5 per cent reduction in contractors per quarter, and argued that while he was commanding general, contractors were only being used for specialised work (Lubold, 2009). This conflicting information might be explained by the de-escalation of the conflict that and to the specificities of the SA agreement, which allowed contractors on US payroll to stay and operate in Iraq, and ultimately leaving the Obama Administration to operate within the framework of the signed deal, or else face deteriorated relations with Iraq, something that went against the Obama strategy for Iraq.

The Obama Administration also employed many civilian personnel, of which many could be described as contractors, from both the Department of State and USAID in Iraq, and according to Schwartz (2011: 11-12), many security contractors would provide services to the Department of State. Unfortunately, information regarding contractor hiring by the Department of State and USAID is not made available as regularly as the DoD does, and is not as specific. A security contractor for the Department of State might be operating security to an embassy, therefore not being connected to the conflict, as they are part of embassy security protocols, but are not distinguished from combat, convoy, or training security contractors. It is then possible to conclude that

although the Obama security strategy was different from the Bush strategy, it only had limited effects on the conflict. The failure to renegotiate the SA in order to make a more 'responsible withdraw' of US troops appears to have made Obama operate within the framework of the agreement signed by the Bush Administration, and as he privileged good, stable relations with Iraq, breaking the deal could have produced undesired effects. Therefore, hypothesis number 3 in the case of Iraq is not confirmed.

The Obama Administration's security strategy was also affecting US troops in Afghanistan: In 2016, Obama imposed a force management level of 8,448 US soldiers for Afghanistan. This low limit of men for the required operations made Generals select which men to exactly send to the areas of conflict, and then hiring contractors to perform the work of the soldiers whom could not be deployed, as argued by congressmen Cooper, congresswoman Hartzler, and the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (Committee on Armed Services, 2016). Gibbons-Neff (2016) corroborates this and refers the existence of a US Army document that criticised Obama's strategy of restricting deployment of soldiers and placing a 'heavy reliance' on contractors due to this. This document argues the existence of a 'constrained troop level environment' that favours contractors, whom have been performing the work of many non-deployed soldiers (Gibbons-Neff, 2016).

Upon another troop withdrawal in 2016, the DoD reinforced the idea of commitment to the conflict, without compromising US troops, by training, advising and assisting Afghan troops (Cordesman, 2016: 4). However, in a different report the DoD assumed it would not commit personnel to training or assisting Afghan forces (Cordesman, 2016: 10). Instead, contractors and US allies would have to perform the tasks: the 2016 report assessing the number and type of contractors present in Afghanistan shows there is almost 12,000 contractors (more than US troops present in 2016) dedicated

to assist and train Afghan troops (Department of Defence, 2016). In the beginning of 2016 and upon becoming commander of US forces in Afghanistan, General Nicholson said in a Senate meeting that he would work to ensure that 'private security contractors are able to support DoD and our contractors when necessary, particularly for DoD contracted logistic support to the Afghan Armed Forces' (Nicholson, 2016). This confirms that instead of the Obama Administration providing the necessary training and assistance to Afghan soldiers, it was strategically withdrawing soldiers and employing contractors to provide training and assistance to Afghan soldiers. This, therefore, confirms Hypothesis number 3 for the Afghanistan conflict.

Conclusion:

Since the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, PMCs have been fighting alongside the US in those two conflicts, in an ever-rising fashion. Its widespread use started during the Bush Administration and was bolstered by its Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and the 'Rumsfeld Doctrine'. In 2008, during his Presidential campaign, Obama pledged to reduce the dependency the US had on PMCs and hold them accountable. However, not just that did not happen, the Obama Administration even increased said dependency. Various scholars, such as Stanley (2015), Isenberg (2009) and Zenko (2016) attempted to justify why that happened, but none appears to have succeeded beyond doubt, as the debate went on. Three possible reasons emerged out of this debate: De-escalation of the conflict, lack of public support, and the Obama Administration's new security strategy for Iraq and Afghanistan. I attempted to finally settle the debate by presenting new evidence under an unprecedented comparative analysis on both the Bush and Obama Administrations and by testing and comparing the arguments of the different scholars, top officials and military officers of the Obama Administration on the subject. I presented new types of evidence never done before: I presented a comparative analysis of the different types of contractors that work for PMCs and compared the exact amount of each type between both Administrations. I also provided an aggregated comparative analysis of public opinion polls related to the conflicts. The evidence shows that de-escalation of the Iraq conflict was a reason why the Obama Administration increased its dependency on PMCs there, while lack of public support and the Obama Administration's security strategy were the reasons for increasing PMC dependency in Afghanistan. Solutions to diminish PMC dependency range from domestic to international measures: Banning PMC use for the most important inherently governmental functions inside the

DoD and increasing oversight and accountability through hiring of more contract managers in the DoD are possible effective domestic measures, as the Commission on Wartime Contracting (2011) presents, while the establishment of an international legal framework for PMCs and increase of international enforcement of mechanisms to prevent widespread use of PMCs can be effective solutions at the international level, as suggested by Moyakine (2015) and Calazans (2016). Future research should focus on potential effects each of the selected independent variables for this study have on PMC usage by states during conflict, in order to possibly establish possible correlations between these independent variables and increase of PMC dependency, which is undoubtedly a serious (and expensive) issue.

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