

**09 April 2008**

**IRONICALLY GOVERNMENTAL:**

**The Study of the Privatized Military Operations  
Industry in Joint Professional Military Education**

Presented to the

**PATUXENT DEFENSE FORUM ON  
THE PRIVATIZATION OF NATIONAL DEFENSE**

**ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND**

by

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## IRONICALLY GOVERNMENTAL

A strategic study of privatization in military operations has the ironic effect of teaching students more about their democratic system of government than it does about corporate behavior or economics. Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) is a vehicle through which dialogue with the Captains of Industry and analysis of corporate culture—intended to ascertain the strategic health of the national security industrial base—leads to a moment of discovery about our democratic system of government. Students should recognize through the course of their studies that contracting for military operational capability is a *leadership* decision—not a *process* to be relegated to an acquisition management system—and deserves the full measure of their cognitive efforts to comprehend. This requires a historical and contemporary understanding of the evolving concept captured by the phrase “inherently governmental.” Indeed, deciding “what *is* an inherently governmental task” *is itself*, an inherently governmental decision.

This period of US history—where it is prudent to be militarily vigilant and governmentally resilient—is arguably reflective of other eras past when our nation called upon its great leaders to stand tall and be seen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was one such leader. The words from his farewell speech to the nation after the completion of eight-years as President resonate not as a warning to add to our collective list of worries, but as a calling to seek education and a deeper understanding of our societal behaviors.

“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

--Eisenhower, Dwight D.

Public Papers of the Presidents, 1960

President Eisenhower challenged us to find the equilibrium point where the public good and the private means to provide that good are in balance. His words reverberate through the halls of a building that bears his name on the campus of the National Defense University, where a “little school” was established by the federal government for the expressed purpose of “keeping in touch” with our industry partners.

### **One Small Step Towards an Alert and Knowledgeable Citizenry**

In the continuum of JPME, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) provides a resource focus to strategic leadership development. This resource focus intends to set it apart from its sister senior service colleges—those being the National, Air, Naval and Army War Colleges. The ICAF curriculum postures the emerging executive with an understanding of the economic pillars that create wealth in our society and drive the health of the industrial base upon which rests the national security strategy. Small seminars—usually 16 students—are organized around the study of industrial sectors of relevance to national security. In recognition that the phenomena of “Contractors on the Battlefield” was moving faster than the curriculum could reasonably track, I was appointed to lead a 10-session elective course on the subject in Academic Year 2004. I used the elective course as a proto-type to model an Industrial Analysis Seminar for introduction into the mainstream program and was successful at obtaining the Commandant’s approval to stand-up the Privatized Military Operations Industry Study (PMOIS) in Academic Year 2005. Leveraging the body of knowledge provided by P.W. Singer, author of *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, this seminar used classical service sector industrial analysis *only as a vehicle* to extract strategic issues for consideration through all the

instruments of national power. The four months of concentrated study—research augmented by guest speakers and field study—achieve the notable goal of raising student awareness about the issues surrounding this services-oriented sector of the US national security industrial base. A more valuable outcome was the exposure of JPME students to the rich discussion surrounding “inherently governmental” decision making and the opportunity to contribute to current debate on the pressing military issues of our time. The findings of the first two years of the PMOIS seminar can be found at the ICAF website, (<http://www.ndu.edu/icaf/industry/index.htm>). An abstract from the Spring 2006 Study reads as follows:

The Privatized Military Operations (PMO) industry is a service industry whose firms provide a myriad of support functions to the Department of Defense and civilian government agencies, including services such as security, logistical support, and weapons maintenance. The Iraq war has focused particular attention on the narrow security subset of these services. The activities of armed contractors have served to demonstrate that neither the U.S. nor international legal regimes have kept pace with the realities of contractors in a war zone. The war has also served to underline the demands being placed on the military acquisition system. This paper recommends regulatory changes for the management of private military firms and the acquisition process.

The Spring 2007 Study abstract continues the debate:

The Privatized Military Operations (PMO) industry has operated in conflict zones throughout history. Today, its use by the United States and coalition partners in Iraq and Afghanistan is unprecedented, both in scope and sheer numbers. With the contractor headcount in theater nearly matching U.S. troop strength, the industry’s use has outpaced regulatory, doctrinal, and management practices. This paper assumes that the PMO industry will continue to be a force multiplier for the U.S. military and many of its allies and prescribes regulatory, doctrinal, and policy remedies to address shortcomings exposed in current operations.

As an optional course of study at a small school with a humble, though important mission, the PMOIS seminars at ICAF are providing senior leadership education on a relevant topic. Albeit, the national security issues raised by the seminars have exceeded the school’s capacity to absorb and digest due in equal part to the limitations inherent in JPME institutions and the complex nature of the topic itself.

## **The Next Leap into the Councils of Government**

The JPME limitation is simply one that restricts the college to teach senior leadership in accordance with approved guidance from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the direct superior of the National Defense University enterprise. Approved guidance is an iterative process worked through bureaucratic channels. The colleges' internal business practices are not unlike other government organizations, which tend to favor status quo with change over time only at the margins. Focusing on commercial ventures into the national security domain has to compete with a plethora of other strategic leadership development topics. With no private-sector equivalent to Sun Tzu or Clausewitz, the topic is immediately dismissed as strategically irrelevant or relegated to the status of acquisition training.

The complexity limitation is a more notable one. Privatization of Military or any Government Operation requires an in-depth study of political science and civil-military relations. The subject matter is rich in technical content with policy issues related to science, technology, law, and ethics. The curriculum structure and time allocated to JPME institutions will continually fall short in providing the leadership education adequate to the task. Internal campus practices and financial constraints on education as a whole further constrain the development of meaningful study. It is perhaps time to "zero-base" our JPME curriculums and take a hard look at the leadership education necessary to produce a Senior Executive or Flag/General Officer who can see "public-private partnerships" as a National Security imperative. Eisenhower-like stewardship and a deep-dive into the contemporary meaning of "inherently governmental" should be among the first principles of any rebase line effort.

## **To Compel a Proper Meshing**

Sound public policy surrounding the PMO industry is currently lost in the fog of contemporary news cycles and tit-for-tat book publishing. The procurement system that manages contracting for services is suffering the same fate of our military hard-ware procurement system—it is perpetually demonized and rendered incapable of rising to any level of public acceptance. If the United States is to move any closer to the modern equivalent of President Eisenhower’s “proper meshing” of the “National Security-Globalized Industrial Partnership,” then government leadership must move the conversation about privatization out of the political-news cycle and into the leadership-education domain. The context for exploration of “partnership” must orbit around the question of what is “inherently governmental.” Though senior-service colleges exist to enrich the military perspective for the national security establishment, debate, research and rigorous study must move quickly to the graduate level of other public and private institutes of higher learning to include the business schools, law schools, and engineering institutions. There is near term opportunity to “zero-base” this education with the introduction of the National Security Professional as the standard bearer. But, the National Security Enterprise—Defense, State, Homeland Security, et. al.—should also consider educational grants and scholarships to private and state run institutions of higher learning as a necessary step toward President Eisenhower’s goal. As more of our national security tasking is embraced by the “interagency,” it will be incumbent upon our leaders to promote a comprehensive understanding of the full capabilities resident in the commercial marketplace to provide for “the common defence” and to identify the limitations that might challenge the nature of our liberties. In the search for President Eisenhower’s equilibrium point between liberty and

security, only an educated government can define this balance—that government being appointed and elected by, of course, an informed citizenry.

How will we know when the mesh is proper? I conjecture that if leaders in our military and foreign policy apparatus are keen to this issue of “inherently governmental,” then the citizenry should observe deployments of future expeditionary forces as “hybrids” comprised of public-private entities in unambiguous roles and missions. The expeditionary force of the future—kinetic or diplomatic or a subtle combination of the two—will be a blend of joint, interagency and contracted professionals. They will be deployed smartly on missions that have the full backing of our nation and its allies. Smart deployments will have personnel organized, trained and equipped to operate in a public-private venture where all players know their roles and missions and execute a common strategy that transcends their disparate cultures. Our national goal will be realized when all of our expeditionary men and women return home from their smart deployment victorious—both politically and militarily—with honor and with the just rewards offered by the vehicles of their employment, be it the “terms of the contract” or the “oath of office.” The *proper mesh* will always present a set of policy and practical challenges which will be left for the national security establishment to act upon. But these challenges are best met from a position of confidence based upon the first principles garnered from a solid educational base, rather than from ignorance or assumption-based leadership. And if these challenges are not met, an informed citizenry will be sure to let us know.