Ersi Kalentzi

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"The New US Soldier: The Patriot superhero, the disillusioned drop out and the burned out gamer."

The development of the Hollywood war film after 2010 through the archetypal character of the US soldier.

Abstract:

This study is intended to demonstrate how the image of the US soldier is presented and changes in Hollywood war films from 2010 until the present day, specifically the ones dealing with the conflicts in the Middle East. Previous academic studies have looked at these films, focusing on American soldier and the character's role within the war genre, and concluded that the Iraq War film proved to be critically and financially a failure. This study looks at Iraq War films after 2010 in order to find whether this trend continues into the next decade and whether the genre shows any signs of evolution. Through the character of the US soldier, their politics, motivations and role within the conflicts in the Middle East, it aims to find out, whether the genre is developing towards originality and realism or toward the evasion of harsh facts and headed towards myth. To achieve these aims the primary materials that will be used are feature films, chosen by their main subject and their use of war genre conventions; the secondary sources, used to back up conclusions, range from soldier's autobiographies to cinema studies. Both types of sources are used to present a complete picture of the films discussed, put them in social and historical context and through analysis of mise-en-scene, dialogue, imagery, and themes this study wants to show that the image of the US soldier fighting in the Middle East reflects real anxieties present among the population. The final conclusion of this paper provides very interesting insights on the current films about the Middle Eastern conflicts and signs that the genre has begun to change.

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Let us start with a hypothetical scenario; imagine that John Wayne is in present day Hollywood and was asked to star in a war film that focused on the war on terror. What would he do? Would he view this current conflict like he did in his World War II films like *Sands of Iwo Jima*? Would he make himself the leader of a group of young and aspiring men, go to a single location and fight the enemy in front of them? Would he have to give his men one single and all-important mission that would destroy the entirety of ISIS in a single blow? Or would he make a *Green Berets*-style film that glosses over the complexities of the Middle Eastern conflict in favour of scenes where brave SEALs teach Iraqi farmers and children how to fight oppression and extremism, whilst at the same time embracing and adopting American ideals as their own?

It would be reasonable to think that John 'Duke' Wayne would struggle to truly appreciate the myriad of complexities that the wars in the Middle East bring up, and would instead have offered cinema-goers a reductive and simplified version of the combat zone, much like his unilateral bowdlerised retelling of the Vietnam War. But then, who would blame him? Since the advent of global terrorism, the enemy has become omniscient, with the capability of striking anywhere in the world. The pitched battles of the earlier twentieth century have increasingly diminished and warfare is now a far more fluid concept – no longer bound to a particular geographical location and fought between opposing armies. Constant changes in the geo-political stage and the impact of new technology have necessitated a radical change in the way in which battles are fought – often remotely, and rather than superior numbers in arms or forces, intelligence and undercover missions are most often used to claim a victory over the enemy. This leads us to this study's main focus: can the current conflicts America is involved in be portrayed in film and if so, can that task be done accurately or does it plunge in John Wayne fantasy?

These questions appear when looking at the current literature on the topic of post 9/11 films in which authors such as Martin Barker, Terence McSweeney and Douglas Kellner single out this event as the catalyst to what current American cinema is today. Barker examines the White House and military influence that developed within the

film industry[1], while McSweeney describes how 9/11 plunged Hollywood into a mood of uncertainty with regards to certain film content and imagery (the image of the Twin Towers for example). The latter concludes that the study of American film after 9/11 uncovers 'a period that came to be largely defined by the war on terror'[2]. Douglas Keller also looks at these post-9/11 changes in Hollywood primarily through a political lens, focusing on the Bush-Cheney administration's influence on the film industry and its products concentrating on the War on Terror and the Middle-Eastern conflicts. His analysis covers a wide variety of genres and explains that these films either satirize the domestic and foreign policies advanced by President Bush and his administration or they reproduce them, an argument that Wheeler Winston Dixon. The latter confirms that the appearance of war films in the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks like *Black Hawk Down* (2001)*, Collateral Damage* (2002)*, We Were Soldiers* (2002) and others, all well received by audiences, demonstrated a need to explore narratives of conflict 'reminiscent' of the wave of war films during WWII[3]. McSweeney, Kellner, Cettl and Dixon all maintain that unlike the Vietnam War, loudly contested throughout the country and largely avoided by Hollywood until it was over, the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon mobilised public opinion and the people rallied behind George Bush's call for a 'war on terror'. According to Dixon, American cinema focused on 'replicating the idea of a "just war", in which military reprisals, and the concomitant escalation of warfare, seem simultaneously inevitable and justified'[4]. This idea of the "just war" however was not the sole perspective Hollywood used for their films on the war on terror. Barker and McSweeney look at films that take a different stance on the conflict, that attempt to lift the veil and expose the War in Iraq and the fight against terrorism as ambiguous, politically complex and different in many ways from previous US conflicts like WWII or even Vietnam. These types of films became more prominent in public consciousness from 2004 onwards, a year that Martin Barker views as a 'critical

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[1] Barker M. *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films,* (Pluto Press: 2011), p.4

[2] McSweeney T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames per second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.9

[3] Ed. Dixon, W.W., *Film and Television after 9/11,* (Southern Illinois Press: 2004), p.1

[4] Ed. Dixon, W.W *Film and Television after 9/11,* (Southern Illinois Press: 2004), p.1

year'[5]. He explains that because of Bush's controversial re-election, the signing of the Patriot Act, the release of the Michael Moore documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11,* which garnered huge critical and commercial acclaim, and the public's turning on Bush's post 9/11 triumphalism, the year 2004 saw a major shift in the perception of the war in Iraq and the war on terror. This turning point is made even more evident by McSweeney's use of films made solely post-2004 in his chapter about Iraq war movies that deviate from the conventional stylistic and ideological template of the combat film[6]. This dual portrayal of the Iraq and terror 'wars' ultimately makes this cycle of films multidimensional and significant when trying to understand its stylistic and ideological development throughout the years.

This dissertation looks at the post 9/11 portrayals of the war on terror and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, primarily through the character of the US soldier. In contrast to the research already mentioned above, this dissertation primarily looks at war films made in the US from 2004 to 2015 that focus on the Middle East-US conflicts and the War on terror, after Barker's aforementioned 'turning point' year. With military operations in Iraq officially ending in 2011, US troops to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2016[7] and the constant rise of drone warfare as opposed to boots on the ground, public perception of these conflicts is now more indefinite and less unilateral as it was prior to 2004. As internal scandals erupted such as Edward Snowden disclosing classified NSA documents to media outlets (2013) and the release of the controversial CIA torture report (2014), the policies surrounding the war on terror have become widely contested and works written about the war in Iraq and the soldiers fighting it[8] have made more material available for movies to explore when dealing with these subjects. This dissertation uses these latest developments to advance the discourse launched by authors like Barker, McSweeney and Kellner, while analysing modern

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[5] Barker M. *A 'Toxic Genre': The Iraq War Films,* (Pluto Press: 2011), p.7
[6] McSweeney T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames per second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p. 72
[7] Mark Landler, 'US troops to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2016', *The New York Times,* 27 May 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/us-to-complete-afghan-pullout-by-end-of-2016-obama-to-say.html?hp (accessed on the 16th February 2015)
[8] Kennard, M. *Irregular Army: How the US military recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members, and Criminals to Fight the War on Terror,* (Verso Publishing: London, 2012)

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war films from 2004- onwards and, unlike previous works, uses as a main focal point the image of the US soldier and his role and representation within the context of the war.

The analysis of war films and their message to the audience can be effectively conducted in this dissertation by looking at them as mythic narratives. Myth is a fictional narrative that aims to explain a culture's beliefs and overcome contradictions and has been doing so throughout our history in different forms, therefore it is legitimate to conclude that myth has evolved and was reshaped through mediums such as literature or film, while keeping its ultimate aim and message. Many academics such as John G. Cawelti[9], Will Wright[10] and Jim Kitses,[11] reached that conclusion and used it to better understand genre in film. John Cawelti, author of *The Six Gun Mystique*, uses the word 'formula' instead of genre and defines formula stories as the way '…in which individuals in a culture act out certain unconscious or repressed needs, or express in an overt and symbolic fashion certain latent motives which they must give expression to, but cannot face openly.'[12] Stuart Kaminsky, author of *American Film Genres,* validates this idea by saying that 'On one level, one can argue that genre film, television and literature have to a great extent replaced more formal versions of mythic response to existence such as religion and folk tale.'[13] Myth is traditionally thought of as a verbal narrative, passed on from generation to generation but, much like genre film, it has to evolve to fit its audience's needs and cultural trends. Genre films share the same characteristic, in that their meaning might not change but their content will have to in order to correspond to what the audience knows and recognises. Thomas Schatz, in his article *The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study*, supports the idea that genre films should be treated in a similar fashion to mythic analysis. In the article, he rejects the theory of auteurism

[9] Cawelti, J. G., *The Six Gun Mystique,* (Bowling Green University Popular Press: Ohio, 1971)
[10] Wright, W. *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western,* (University of California Press: Berkeley) 1975
[11] Kitses, J. *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood,* (BFI Publishing: London, 2004)
[12] Cawelti, J. G., *The Six Gun Mystique,* (Bowling Green University Popular Press: Ohio, 1971) p. 33
[13] Kaminsky, S., *American Film Genres; Approaches to A Critical Theory of Popular Film,* (Pflaum Publishing: 1974), p.3

(which he considers outdated), saying that the field of research in popular culture has opened doors to other methods of film analysis that are influenced by other fields, such as anthropology or history. This suggestion that different methods of film analysis could be found in other academic disciplines is applied in this dissertation when looking at the war genre, more specifically Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis of myths and their mythemes. Thomas Schatz even mentions Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay, quoting *Structural Anthropology Vol.I,* on the subject of the process of repetition that produces an infinite number of 'slates' that ultimately constitute a myth's structure, a quote that could '…just as easily be describing the individual films within a genre'.[14] Just like myths, 'a film genre transforms certain fundamental cultural contradictions and conflicts into a unique conceptual structure which is familiar and accessible to a mass audience.'[15]

Within his theory of mythic structural analysis, Lévi-Strauss identifies what he calls 'mytheme', a vital component of the narrative that brings out the myth's meaning and its message to the audience. In the war film, there are various mythemes that comprise the genre's basic narrative, as described by war genre scholars Jeanine Basinger, Robert Eberwein and Lawrence Suid. Among their different definitions of the war films, the two common mythemes that are included in all of them are the soldier and the enemy. Through the development and evolution of the war genre, the US soldiers and their interaction with their enemy can be seen as the most direct and efficient way of transmitting the film's message to the audience. While narrative and imagery also contribute to the film's aim, the soldier character is the personification of the message and the character with which the audience can identify. Therefore, the US soldier character will serve as the primary focus of analysis in order to answer this dissertation's primary questions regarding Hollywood's portrayal of the war on terror in its war films.

At this stage it is important to clarify some terms that will be used further on into this study, namely the war genre itself and how it changes and evolves over the period of time that pertains to this dissertation. According to authors such as Jeanine Basinger

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[14] Schatz, T., **The Structural Influence: New Direction in Film Genre Study***, Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* Vol. 2, No.1, (Feb. 1977), p.307
[15] Schatz, T., **The Structural Influence: New Direction in Film Genre Study***, Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* Vol. 2, No.1, (Feb. 1977), p.308

that defined the war genre, some main characteristics need to be included within the film in order to be a part of that genre. In *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*[16]*,* an outline is usually followed which can be found very frequently in most combat films:

A. Characters
    1. The Hero
    2. The Group
    3. The Enemy
    4. The Women

B. Setting
    1. The Theatre of War (date and place)
    2. The Military Force Involved (air, sea, ground)
    3. Relationship to history (true vent or not)
    4. The Objective

C. Narrative Structure
    1. Episodes
        a. Credits, Dedication, and Opening Sequence
        b. Combat/ Noncombat (action and repose)
        c. Familiar Events
        d. Night/ Day
        e. Comedy/ Tragedy
    2. Organisation of Story Pattern
        a. Time Sequence
        b. Place Sequence
        c. Plot Sequence
        d. Narrative Viewpoint

D. Cultural Attitudes
    1. Death/ Sacrifice/ Loss
    2. Propaganda
    3. Humor
    4. Home/ Family/ Country

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[16] Basinger, J. *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre,* Wesleyan University Press, 2003

          5.   The situation at Hand

   E. Language

        1. Film and Visual Language

            a. Technique (cutting, camera movement, etc.)

            b. Image (includes what is seen as event, gesture, action, etc.)

            c. Iconography (includes all possible coded information)

        2. Dialogue

Basinger's outline is meant to be applied to a particular film and see how it relates to the war genre but also 'its position in the evolutionary process is established, as well as its overall relationship to history and reality[17]. As the tactics and strategies of modern warfare adapt to new threats, the war genre does the same in an attempt to portray its subject more accurately. This means that some traditional characteristics, as outlined by Basinger, also need to change, and so the genre is transformed, in some cases radically. The traditional narrative structure of a war film included 'A group of men, led by a hero, undertake a mission which will accomplish an important military objective…as they go forward, the action unfolds and a series of episodes occur which alternates in uneven patters the contrasting forces of night and day, action and repose, safety and danger, combat and noncombat, comedy and tragedy, dialogue and action.'[18] In this study I found that these characteristics have become a lot more multi-faceted and complex than what they used to be. The group of men could be described as a group of young and driven men, but now also includes women and spies. The hero, once white, all-American and imbued with the mythical figure of John Wayne, could now belong to another racial group, could be an anti-hero, a superhero, a troubled teen, or a even a criminal. The mission, which previously could be summarised as winning a battle or defending a piece of territory, can now simply be surviving, or flying a drone from a computer over a country that is not officially at war with the US. This study started off with the intent of only looking at films where the US military combats a specific enemy, in a foreign country, though I quickly realised that this was impossible, as my case studies would have been drastically diminished. Consequently I had to review my definition of the war genre, giving it a

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[17] Basinger, J. *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre,* Wesleyan University Press, 2003, p. 71-72

[18] Ibid, p. 68

hybrid form that included spies, women, unconventional warfare, US-based settings and sometimes non-combat narratives in order to understand how current US warfare is conducted in Hollywood's view. This is why some of my case studies can be traditionally viewed as spy-thrillers and dramas.

This brings us to the term 'United States Soldier'; a figure that fulfils many roles within the genre. Traditionally the role of the US soldier in film includes training, stating his reasons for joining the military, reminiscing of home, writing to family/wife/girlfriend, experiencing a sense of camaraderie and brotherhood with the rest of the men in his squad, going into battle (aerial/naval/ground), witnessing death, winning and returning home to his family and loved ones. In this study however his role within war has grown to include monitoring checkpoints, guarding prisons and detainment centres, disarming bombs, tasked with assassinations, intelligence gathering and fighting terrorists. Therefore the term soldier in this study has a plurality of meanings, some conventional and others new. Some of the characters' ranks, government branch and gender will be specified however as they are significant within the film's narrative and its ultimate message. It needs to be noted that during this study, it is inferred that the soldier is in most cases male. While there are cases of in the second chapter of women taking a lead role, the majority of subjects here will be male, hence the general use of the 'he' pronoun. When mentioning women, this study will specify.

While the representation of the US soldier is the primary tool for this study to answer its main questions, further analysis is required, especially regarding content and context. While the soldier is the voice of the war film and the main instigator of the plot, the director, screenwriter and producer make conscious choices about the environment the main character acts and speaks in. They also have to take into consideration their audience, popular trends, political climate and the continuous emergence of new information about the conflict in the Middle East (Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, Mahmudyiah, the increasing use of drone strikes). Therefore, apart from Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis, this study also uses a contextual approach to every film it examines. It is vital to bear in mind whether the film was made during wartime, peacetime, in times of economical or political turmoil, during changes in administration, during periods of civil unrest or prosperity, etc. As seen in the works of Suid, Eberwein, Rosenstone and recently Barker, McSweeney and Dixon, context

can reveal a lot of information about the film's aim and message to the 2006 can be linked to the loosening of US military entry standards in an attempt to raise recruitment numbers, a factor this study will examine in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Within the range of contextual approach fall another two methods of analysis: The ritual approach and the ideological approach. Both are linked to context, though they focus on different aspects in the creation of a film. The ritual approach named by Rick Altman in his essay *A Semantic/ Synthetic Approach to Film Genre* attributes 'authorship to the audience with the studios simply serving for a price, the national will.'[19] In contrast, the ideological approach, described also by Altman, maintains that Hollywood does not always bend to audience desires and that it instead takes control of audience energy and investment in order to promote its own agenda. This ideological approach can also be applied in cases where instead of the director setting an agenda, he is the middleman between the audience and government agenda.

By using both structural analysis and the contextual approach (which includes ritual and ideological modes of analysis), the examination of recent war films tackling the war on terror and the conflicts in the Middle East will be divided into three chapters, each with a different portrayal of the subject matter.

The first chapter sees Hollywood's portrayal of the war in Iraq and the war on terror as effective, unilateral and the patriotic duty of each US citizen, one that recalls the outline of Basinger and the films of John Wayne. In them we recognise the ideologies of the Bush administration and their Manichean view of foreign policy, as well as the initial public support of the government's policies both at home and abroad. While in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, war films that pushed such an agenda were popular, this dissertation looks at how this agenda retained its relevance after 2004 a time where the general public was increasingly against US presence in the Middle East[20]. How does the character of the patriotic and dutiful soldier remain credible to an audience that is aware of scandals like Abu Ghraib, Haditha,

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[19] Altman, R., **A Semantic/ Synthetic Approach to Film Genre,** *Cinema Journal,* Vol. 23, No. 3, (Spring, 1984), p. 9
[20] For more information on Iraq approval ratings
http://www.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx

Mahmudiyah and Guantanamo Bay? In this chapter we will look at the ways Hollywood uses to convey this "mission accomplished" message, especially through its soldier characters. Three films will be used to answer these questions. The first two, both directed by Peter Berg (*Friday Night Lights, Hancock*) are *The Kingdom* (2007) and *Lone Survivor* (2013), films about the war on terror based in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan respectively. Both follow highly trained teams in a hostile territory on a mission to investigate and capture terrorist targets. The third case study is Clint Eastwood's 2015 *American Sniper*, starring Bradley Cooper, a film that broke box office records and, at the time of writing, is nominated for 6 Academy Awards. As the most recent film to come out about the Iraq war and receive as much critical and commercial acclaim as Kathryn Bigelow's *Hurt Locker*, Clint Eastwood's film has attracted a great amount of controversy for its simplistic portrayal of the conflict and its unapologetic title character, Chris Kyle. As we shall see, all three films, though made in different times and by two very different directors, stand on common ground when we look at their characterisation of the soldier, the environment around him and the message they ultimately impart to the audience. Their characters' superhero qualities and legend status also tie in the films with Lévi-Strauss structural analysis of myth and mytheme.

The second chapter examines the films that attempt to show the realities of US military action abroad and present the soldier in both a humane and critical way. Though there have been many films (particularly documentaries) that have criticised US military action both in Iraq and Afghanistan, these particular films accentuate the violence, paranoia and aim to be controversial rather than simply critical. Equally, these films also want to accentuate the reality that in war there are consequences, both for soldiers and civilians alike. This chapter will show how these films use the character of the soldier to bring out these messages and how they use true stories to impart their own political commentary. The initial case studies used in this chapter are *Redacted* (Brian DePalma), *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis), both made in 2007 and describe a similar incident that involved US soldiers brutalising local Iraqis in Mahmudiyah. The two main case studies are Kathryn Bigelow's 2012 film *Zero Dark Thirty*, which focuses on the hunt of Osama Bin Laden and *Camp X-Ray* (Sattler: 2014), which takes place solely on Guantanamo Bay. The initial films cover different aspects of the conflict, and all feature at their core female characters that gradually

become disillusioned and lash out at their government in different but equally destructive ways. These two films were chosen because of their strong contrast with the ones from the preceding chapter, as they openly criticise what the previous ones celebrate. However the other two cases feature soldiers in a war that is now not waged on a battlefield but in a dimly light room, where degradation and torture brings information that may lead to victory. This is the chapter where it gradually becomes clear that the role of the soldier expands and evolves to include other duties than just deployment and combat. This is the way that new war is fought and both *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* attempt to show us this in very different ways.

The last chapter of this dissertation turns its focus away from the traditional portrayal of warfare and studies films that look at new technologies and the developing ways of fighting a war without necessarily sending troops on the ground. As an example, with Al Qaeda cells taking hold in countries like Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, drone warfare is increasingly used when manned flights are considered too risky and when troops cannot be sent into the area. From 2009 to 2014, under the Obama presidency, drone strikes claimed 2,400 victims according to a January 2014 *Huffington Post* article and the drone program is now under severe scrutiny from organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International for its secrecy and the collateral civilian casualties it causes. This increasing use of technology such as drones, as well as satellite imagery, recording devices and other forms of unmanned surveillance/warfare when fighting the war on terror has made the traditional on the ground soldier an almost vestigial role within the conflict and that is what this chapter will look at. Although this new type of unmanned warfare has not found its way into many mainstream films yet, there are some that pin the traditional soldier and his technology-oriented counterpart against each other to see how these differences influence them both in work and daily life. One of the first films to explore this is Ridley Scott's often overlooked *Body of Lies* (2008) which shows us two very different soldiers, one on the ground and the other in front of a computer screen, fighting the same war, with different methods and different results. This clash between traditional and new soldier roles is shown more extensively in another more recent film, which focuses specifically on drone warfare. *Good Kill* (2015), by Andrew Niccol, shows the war on terror as it is being fought now and the soldiers struggling with ethical dilemmas and questions of accountability in a war fought from

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the home front. This chapter will compare this clash between traditional and new roles of the soldier within the war on terror and the conflicts in the Middle East.

Ultimately what this dissertation aims to do is expand on the work already done by Barker, McSweeney, Kellner and other authors that look at the War on Terror and its presence within Hollywood. Through the image of the soldier and his portrayal, it will show that when put in film, the subject of terrorism and the Iraq War are as controversial and complex as in real life but equally it is a subject developing and evolving both in style and content as new information comes out and notable events occur. Where this research differs from the rest is that it looks to the present state of the so-called toxic-cycle of films about Iraq and the war on terror, while also looking to its future and how it will evolve through time by including new types of warfare and new types of soldiers as the films' protagonists.

<u>Chapter I: Creating a New Myth Out of Failure with the Superhero Soldier</u>

The soldier has long been the focus of the study of war films, as he is the established main character of the genre and is therefore its main voice. To understand this development of the portrayal of this character type, the opening chapter will involve an analysis of a few case studies beginning with an examination of the role prior to 2007; a year described as being a watershed moment by Martin Barker in the Iraq War cycle. Whether it is a fictional or real figure, the soldier as a character in the war film is still being developed; he/she is given motivations, a back-story and often a voice to express the film's own agenda; this is often achieved by the soldier regularly being embodied by a number of different and deliberately relatable figures that audiences are able to better associate with. Martin Barker in his book *Toxic Genre* explains that 'figures can assemble meanings, possibilities, wishes and hopes around them and make them emotionally more satisfactory.'[21]

Barker identifies a number of soldier types; the ordinary folks, the iconic, even mythic constructs, the troubled individual, and the historical figure. Through his exploration of the history of these figures, he focuses on characters like the 'Doughboys', WWI characters (represented by Gary Cooper as everyman Alvin York in *Sergeant York* (Hawks: 1941), and the 'John Wayne' figure, a kind of legendary heroic archetype. The latter figure will be of central importance to this chapter's discussion of its selected case studies, as it has come to epitomise American heroism outliving John Wayne and creating a timeless figure for the war genre. 'In Wayne's image, wars were fought on clear moral premises in which right was unarguably on America's side.'[22] This is the image that the Bush administration projected onto the American public when declaring war on Afghanistan and Iraq and Hollywood followed suit. However John Wayne's name was never used directly with regards to politics as eventually his name became too synonymous with propaganda in the 2000s[23]. Post-inception of the iconic WWII-John Wayne version of the American soldier, the war films principally turned their attention to Vietnam, Hollywood's first major challenge when portraying a complicated and unpopular war (the intermittent Korean War was

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[21] Barker, M., *'A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Film'*, Pluto Press, 2011 p.47
[22] Ibid, p.50
[23] Ibid, p. 59

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rarely spoken of, even more rarely seen on screen). Initially the soldier in Vietnam was portrayed as fallible, corrupt, disillusioned and misunderstood at home. They were no longer ordinary men possessing the ideals that Wayne had so successfully embodied during his Golden Age within the genre. They were made to be brutal, tough and coerced into fighting (see *The Dirty Dozen*). In the 1980s, the decade that the uncompromising Rambo made his first-ever appearance on screen (1982), the Vietnam veteran had become the catalyst for the creation of a new mythic figure of the genre; a character that recreated history and corrected past mistakes through its fictional heroes. Rambo himself, after the film series' second instalment *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), became a new archetypal figure, a successor of the John Wayne type (though not to the extent of dethroning him) as the refashioned symbol of American heroism, additionally embodying of US impulsiveness and gung-ho mentality. The most contemporary character of the soldier in Barker's chronology (which will be followed throughout this chapter) is the grunt, the figure most people will recognise as the most current one in the genre. Barker closes his chapter on the history of the American soldier with the following statement:

> After Vietnam, then, the 'Grunt' became a moveable feast within popular culture. In most versions, he is a soldier just desperate to survive. Fighting wars he (or she) does not believe in, invading space, alien worlds, even taking alien form, the 'Grunt' becomes a virtual mercenary…It is vital to our understanding of these films to see that the images of 'the American Soldier' were in meltdown. Yet they were somehow supposed to remain heroes.[24]

It is this last type, the grunt, as Barker determines, that is of particular importance to this dissertation's analysis of the soldier in US cinema post the 2003 invasion of Iraq onwards.

In its earliest form, the Iraq War soldier was regularly portrayed as the unquestioned hero of the conflict. As mentioned before, the initial reaction of the Bush administration was to associate the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with that of the Second World War; the argument being that both share the goal of defeating 'evil' and then spreading democracy in those countries under the yoke of a dictatorship. In the aftermath of 9/11, and alongside the use of appropriate rhetoric (use of the words

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[24] Barker, M., *'A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Film'*, Pluto Press, 2011, p.68

'evil', 'Axis', etc), Hollywood was quick to establish this image in its war films. From 2001 to 2004, Hollywood's big-budget war films[25] included four about World War II, three about the US Civil War, two about Vietnam, two about the conflicts in the African continent, two about wars in Ancient Greece, one about the Napoleonic Wars and one about Bosnia.[26] All these films celebrate the soldier as brave whilst driven by a sense of justice and honour. Excluding the films that do not directly focus on the US soldier, the films made between the 9/11 attacks and the start of the war in Iraq, possessed narratives that were focused on aggression against the US; a good example of this being when the US is presented as divided, only for the country to unify and overcome its hardships. *Black Hawk Down* (Scott: 2001) which turned a failed military mission in Somalia into a victorious narrative of survival, with heroic figures battling evil in order to restore peace and prosperity to a troubled region. As one of the main characters, deliberately named Eversmann, says

"Look, these people, they have no jobs, no food, no education, no future. I just figure that we have two things we can do. Help, or we can sit back and watch a country destroy itself on CNN. Right?"

In Ridley Scott's film, America is not just the heroic leader of the free world, it is also explicitly altruistic; "Nobody asks to be a hero, it just sometime turns out that way." says Eversmann at the end of the film.

The same can be said about Randall Wallace's 2002 film *We Were Soldiers* starring Mel Gibson, in which the loss of the Vietnam War means very little compared to the heroic and selfless nature of the soldiers that fought in it. Gibson (channeling John Wayne as Lt. Hal Moore) plays his part with the rhetoric of a man declaring total war on his enemy. When talking to his men before their deployment in Vietnam, he declares:

> Look around you. In the 7th cavalry, we've got a captain from the Ukraine; another from Puerto Rico. We've got Japanese, Chinese, Blacks, Hispanics, Cherokee Indians. Jews and Gentiles. All Americans. Now here in the states, some of you in this unit may have experienced discrimination because of race

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[25] In 2005, the average for a Hollywood film was 60 million dollars according to the following *Forbes* article. Big-budget films qualify as films made for equal or higher amount of money. http://www.forbes.com/2006/12/18/movies-budget-expensive-tech-media-cx_lr_1214moviebudget.html

[26] See Appendix 1 for details on the films and their release details.

or creed. But for you and me now, all that is gone. We're moving into the valley of the shadow of death, where you will watch the back of the man next to you, as he will watch yours. And you won't care what color he is, or by what name he calls God. They say we're leaving home. We're going to what home was always supposed to be. Now let us understand the situation. We are going into battle against a tough and determined enemy…Dead or alive, we will all come home together. So help me, God.

This speech could just as well be declared in front of soldiers going to Afghanistan. It contains an obvious call for unity in America, and urges the US people/soldiers to band together under one common flag, and fight against the common enemy. The film offers no explanation as to the nature of the Vietnam War or even its origins. The most important factor remains the survival and wellbeing of the men and their unbreakable bond in the face of adversity. The film also recalls legends that developed around Custer's Last Stand, at the battle of Little Big Horn, absorbing and transferring American myths of heroism and bravado from the nineteenth century to a battle in the following one that shared a similarly tragic outcome leading to the inception of a mythic grandeur of its own.

By 2004, neither the attacks on the US nor the situation in Afghanistan had been directly depicted on screen, with the American public still dealing with 9/11 and the immediate invasion and war against Afghanistan. In March of 2003, the invasion of Iraq had commenced and in 2004 the most expensive war films to come out were *Troy* (Petersen: 2004) and *Alexander* (Stone: 2004)[27], two films about ancient Greek conflicts. Both narratives depict a noble, 'civilized' people (the Greeks) invading lands that are perceived as lesser in terms of culture (Trojans/Persians respectively). By 2005 however, Hollywood stopped using allegory and finally included in its war genre actual depictions of the wars in the Middle East. According to Douglas Kellner and Barker the first films to arise in the Iraq War genre were low budget, and in box-office and audience terms not very significant (*American Soldiers, Home of the Brave*)[28]. It is only after 2006 that the genre truly started to develop. In 2006 four films were made, in 2007 there were ten and in 2008, the year *The Hurt Locker* was released, seven more films were released. Most of these directly referenced the wars

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[27] *Troy* had a budget of 175 million dollars and *Alexander* had a budget of 155 million dollars.
[28] Kellner, D., *Cinema Wars: Hollywood and the Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era,* Wiley-Blackwell, 2011 p.219

in Iraq and Afghanistan, with only a few exceptions, examples, which while not depicting the conflict, focused on the War on Terror. Apart from some films, which will be examined in the second chapter, these initial films focus on the US soldier as a victim of this war, alienated from his surroundings, whilst attempting to complete his mission.

Barker's final chapter concerns what he perceives as the end of the toxic cycle of the Iraq war film, mostly due to *The Hurt Locker'* s critical and commercial success. When deconstructing the film, Barker's conclusion saw the character of the US soldier become increasingly detached from society, unable to form stable relationships and a figure doing his/ her job calmly and efficiently. The character ceases to be bewildered by the reasons he/she is in Iraq (unlike for example *Green Zone*'s protagonist played by Matt Damon) and any symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are absorbed into his/her personality, turning it from a psychological disorder, to just another facet of his/her persona. *The Hurt Locker*'s principal character Lieutenant James (Jeremy Renner) '…has just forgotten how to be its (PTSD's) victim, and thus becomes a poster boy of the Iraq war generation…'[29]. Additionally, in Barker's view (and, as we shall mention later on, Terrence McSweeney's), Hollywood is always looking for heroes, especially in the war genre, and so the real depth of most Iraq war soldier portrayals is generated by their fictionalised back-story. In Barker's words:

> Fiction can give us heroes. It can find among the mass of characters one or more that embody the best that can be imagined. Where documentary would struggle to find such idealised people, and would risk much if it claimed to find them, fiction typically focuses, cleans up and simplifies motivation.[30]

He adds that 'removing characters from the possibility of a real checkable history, fiction films, even where they give us a back-story, can suggest and build clean lines from past to future, uncomplicated motives and attractive hopes.'[31]

To add to Barker's conclusions, McSweeney shines light on the dynamic of the soldier's portrayal in film: the victimisation of his figure. 'The cumulative effect of

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[29] Barker, M., *'A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Film'*, Pluto Press, 2011, p.157
[30] Ibid, p.155
[31] Ibid, p.155

these portrayals is the depiction of the American soldier as the principal victim of the war on terror, not, as one might expect, the Iraqis and Afghanistanis who died and were wounded in their hundreds and thousands.'[32]

For McSweeney, the soldier in Iraq is shown in part as a tragic hero, who is on a humanitarian mission to rid the world of evil, showing how altruistic America and Americans can be (much like films such as *Black Hawk Down* and *The Hurt Locker,* discussed in the beginning). In an overtly critical analysis of *The Hurt Locker,* McSweeney tears down the Academy Award winner as a film that spends more time showing US suffering, rather than the real victims of the war, the Iraqi civilian population:

> Once again the mighty behemoth of the US army is depicted as a plucky underdog cautiously making its way though the dangerous streets on Iraq. In the world of *The Hurt Locker* the victims are predominantly American in great contrast to the reality of the war that saw in the region of 100,000 to 200,000 Iraqis dead as opposed to approximately 5,000 Americans.[33]

McSweeney goes as far as to say that if one considers the film's obvious detachment from the realities of the conflict, it in effect ceases to be an Iraq War film, but instead becomes an action film that is merely claiming to be anti-war. The complete omission of political discourse and realistic imagery of the conflict from the screen effectively prohibit it from being an anti-war piece. Ultimately, however we categorise Kathryn Bigelow's film, the portrayal of Lieutenant James is not a novel depiction; it instead builds on existing cinematic predecessors in earlier films. Barker and McSweeney, along with other writers, have commented that the current image of the US soldier in Iraq focuses on the mythologized soldier, the hero and poster boy of his generation's war. While they could never reach the heights of the now glorified and romanticized 'Greatest generation' of World War II, they are characterized as both a hero and a victim in this conflict. Thus they are able to bring the audience on their side and the main criticism is never directed at them but either at the Iraqis for refusing to cooperate with Americans, or people at home that neither understand nor care about what is going on outside their borders. As a fictional character, this portrayal is even

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[32] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: London) 2014, p. 62

[33] Ibid, p.68

more effective as it does not need to answer to historical facts or explain elements like motivation or back-story.

Depictions of a fictionalised soldier can be more malleable than ones based on reality. This chapter looks at how Hollywood, in what will be called the second phase of Barker's war cycle, managed to not only maintain a glut of narratives that focus on this fictionalised portrayal of soldiers but also managed to merge these with real narrative elements; this proved to be the most successful representation of the 'character' type to date in terms of box-office results and both critical and audience responses. How and why did this portrayal manage to become as successful, especially at a time when US forces were retreating from the Middle East and alongside a series of damning government reports surfacing that accused both the US military and Intelligence community of breaching international law regarding the torture of both insurgents and civilians?

What needs to be stressed in order to explain this second phase is the political development of and historical changes in Iraq, post the initial invasion of US forces. In the aftermath of Obama's election in 2008, negotiations had to be reconsidered, with the economic recession and military spending being central to political discussions. Obama's campaign speeches called Iraq the 'wrong war' and pointed out that there was not enough focus on combating terrorist groups in Afghanistan, an opinion which prompted a need to plan the retrieval of US troops from Iraq. In the summer of 2011, the President's plan called for the continuous presence of 3,500 troops and a force up to 1,500 more that would rotate through the country[34] as the Iraqi army was still very much dependent on U.S aid and military training. On October 21st, this plan was agreed upon with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki; however there remained doubt that such a small number of US ground troops would ease tension between the tribal factions in rural towns and between Kurds and Arabs in the North. However, as a senior Obama administration official asserted '…we came to the conclusion that achieving the goal of a security partnership with Iraq was not

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[34] Michael, R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: the Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq from G. W. Bush to Barack Obama*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2012) p.672

dependent on the size of our footprint in country, and that stability in Iraq did not depend on the presence of U.S. forces'[35].

On December 18th 2011, approximately a year after *The Hurt Locker* had its successful night at the Academy Awards, the last US troops were withdrawn from Iraq, leaving only 150 soldiers attached to the U.S. Embassy. Fearing that insurgents might attack the convoys on their way into Kuwait, the troops left silently, without fanfare or extensive media coverage, neither in Iraq or at home. On that day, Barack Obama announced in a televised speech at Fort Bragg, Texas, that this was a historic moment and that the US soldiers could come back with their heads held high. He said:

> Iraq's not a perfect place. It has many challenges ahead. But we're leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq with a representative government that was elected by its people. We're building a new partnership between our nations and we are ending a war not with a final battle but with a final march toward home. This is an extraordinary achievement.[36]

The newspapers and most other media outlets that day covered the story by noting the stealthy troop exit, the muted reaction to the end of the controversial 9-year conflict, the uncertain future of Iraq and what the consequences of the invasion would prove to be for Middle Eastern politics. The *New York Times* reported 'The last troop movement out of Iraq, which included about 110 vehicles and 500 soldiers, began in darkness.'[37] The *Washington Post* was even more pessimistic: 'The last U.S. troops crossed the border out of Iraq shortly after 7 a.m. Sunday, officially ending a war that gave rise to a fledgling and still unstable democracy in Iraq but also cost almost $1 trillion and the lives of some 4,500 American service members.'[38] The *Guardian* newspaper covered the withdrawal in the context of the uncertain future that awaited

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[35] Ibid, p.674
[36] Chris McGreal, 'Barack Obama Declares War a Success' *The Guardian Online,* 14 December 2011, US Foreign Policy section
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/14/barack-obama-iraq-war-success (accessed on the 5th March 2015)
[37] Tim Arango and Michael S. Schmidt, 'Last Convoy of American Troops Leave Iraq', *The New York Times,* 18 December 2011
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/middleeast/last-convoy-of-american-troops-leaves-iraq.html (accessed 5th March 2015)
[38] Greg Jaffe, 'Last US Troops cross Iraqi border into Kuwait', *The Washington Post,* 18 December 2011,http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/last-us-troops-cross-iraqi-border-into-kuwait/2011/12/17/gIQArEyX1O_story.html (accessed 5th March 2015)

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Iraq and its nascent and fragile government.[39] Obama and his administration argued the opposite, maintaining that the mission in Iraq had succeeded and that the troops were leaving behind a stable and democratic country. The reality of this statement was debatable then and assuredly false now given the country's current struggles to maintain not only its democracy but also its geo-political identity.

After bin Laden's death in 2011 and the subsequent US withdrawal eight months later, Iraq was left with an improperly trained army, a dependency upon US security (a problem existing since the 2003 invasion), vulnerable rural territories, with many militant groups lying in wait ready to take advantage of the power vacuum left by the US. Most notably in 2011, the extremist Islamist group ISIS[40] spread and established itself in whole cities imposing its extremist rule among the Iraqis. The group was created out of the spread of the philosophy of Wahhabism (a 19th century religious and ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam) and out of Bush's failed policies in Iraq. It started as an affiliate of Al Qaeda in Iraq and after its involvement in the Syrian Civil War (ongoing since 2011); it broke away from that group and proclaimed its ambition of establishing a worldwide Caliphate with its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as Caliph. The rise of this group, its sudden takeover of Iraqi and Syrian territories in 2014[41] and its far more extremist stand than Al Qaeda made a mockery out of the belief that the US was leaving Iraq with a newfound stable democracy. Even Hollywood, prior to the government's awareness and the media's extensive coverage of ISIS, assumed that the worst had passed with films such as *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow: 2012) concluding that with the death of bin Laden, the 9/11 victims and all other victims of all Qaeda attacks were avenged and this sombre chapter of American history could now enter its epilogue.

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[39]Gary Younge, 'US is Blind to the Price of War that is still being borne by the Iraqi people', *The Guardian,* 18 December 2011
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/18/us-blind-price-paid-iraqis
(accessed on the 5th March 2015)
[40] Islamist State of Iraq and Syria. The group has changed its name since to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and as of June 2014, it goes by simply Islamic State. In the thesis they retain the name ISIS, as it is the most commonly used and recognisable name of the group in the media and the public.
[41] Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution,* (Verso: London, 2015) p. ix

The reality of the situation, however, was and is far more complex with the US currently involved in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan and an end to these conflicts a very remote possibility. Patrick Cockburn, a Middle Eastern correspondent for *The Independent* commented on the upset in the region:

> The conflict has become like a Middle East version of the Thirty Years' War in Germany four hundred years ago. Too many players are fighting each other for different reasons for all of them to be satisfied by peace terms and to be willing to lay down their arms at the same time.[42]

A decade after the invasion of Iraq, the US exited the region silently, leaving behind a country divided; with various religious sects competing for preeminence, a divided Iraqi Army, a crumbling economy which meant a financially uncertain future, these were all familiar problems to the country's immediate neighbours. In June 2014 (two and a half years after the main US withdrawal), President Obama ordered 300 US soldiers to Iraq as advisers, while repeating that these troops would not be taking an active role in combat operations.[43] In his press briefing at the White House he insisted that the US was only there to assess the threat of ISIS and advise the Iraqi army on security measures against any further advances by the terrorist group. In August, Obama authorized air strikes in Northern Iraq with additional humanitarian aid sent to Iraqis that had fallen under ISIS rule. To appease the American public he insisted:

> I know that many of you are rightly concerned about any American military action in Iraq, even limited strikes like these. I understand that. I ran for this office in part to end our war in Iraq and welcome our troops home, and that's what we've done. As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow the United States to be dragged into fighting another war in Iraq.[44]

The re-introduction of US troops into Iraq has had both the media and public look at this move as a step back onto a dangerous path, particularly when coming from a president who vowed that America's role in Iraq was at an end. Critics maintain that

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[42] Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution,* (Verso: London, 2015), p.94

[43] Karen De Young and Anne Gearan, 'Obama sending up to 300 soldiers to Iraq as advisers, says move is limited' *The Washington Post,* 19 June 2014 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-announces-he-is-sending-up-to-300-troops-back-to-iraq-as-advisers/2014/06/19/a15f9628-f7c2-11e3-8aa9-dad2ec039789_story.html (accessed on the 10th March 2015)

[44] Office of the Press Secretary, 'Statement by the President' whitehouse.gov, 7 August 2014 https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/07/statement-president (accessed on the 10th March 2015)

this was a move that could have been averted if Obama had left more troops in Iraq in 2011 to assist the new Iraqi government in dealing with the insurgents[45]. With these complex developments in mind, it is no surprise that production companies in Hollywood chose to simplify the conflict and limit the narrative to the formulaic 'Us' and 'Them' scenario, whilst simultaneously downplaying the involvement of any other party and glossing over the geo-political realities that surround the current war on terror.

With the first phase of the cycle over and the above-mentioned changes in both US domestic and foreign policies (from 2011 to today), the second phase of this genre of films includes a branch that took it upon itself to show a war won and a military force to be proud of. Much like Rambo in the 1980s, it was time for the soldiers to be sent back to Iraq and present a simpler and clearer conflict, with clearly defined enemies, rules of engagement and military tactics. This ushered in the character of the soldier as the embodiment of the mythical hero (as McSweeney noted), and whose narrative is based on real-life experiences, most notably memoirs. As soldiers doing their job, unwilling to question the reasons they find themselves in Iraq, these characters have become quasi-indestructible and are absolutely convinced about undertaking their patriotic duty in the Middle East. McSweeney analyses an early example of this type of character by looking at the film *Act of Valor* (Waugh & McCoy: 2012) that depicts a team of NAVY SEALs hunting down a group of terrorists before they can carry out attacks on the United States. The main characters are played by real-life Navy SEALs, an attempt by the film to present itself as authentic and respectful to the US Army and Navy.

> The SEALs themselves are portrayed as all-American heroes with conspicuously large and adoring families. They are men who regard themselves as the 'watchmen standing guard while the world sleeps'.[46]

The film did not receive the critical acclaim that this chapter's main case studies have; yet the film still opened at number 1 at the US box-office and from its 12 million

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[45] Peter Baker, 'Obama, with Reluctance, returns to Action in Iraq', *The New York Times,* 7 August 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/08/world/middleeast/a-return-to-action.html (accessed on the 10th March 2015)

[46] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.64

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dollar budget it made approximately 81 million dollars back worldwide[47]. The reaction to the film was divided with the left calling it a video-game film that focused on action set pieces as opposed to an involving story, whilst the right applauded it as being suitably respectful to the US Navy. The latter reaction also led to *Act of Valor* being favourably compared with John Wayne's *The Green Berets.* As McSweeney writes:

> *Act of Valor* turns a decidedly complicated conflict into a simplistic battle between good and evil, drawing more from the tropes of Hollywood cinema by evoking films about World War Two (and even the Wild West) rather than establishing any authentic connection to a political or historical reality.'[48]

With such box office performance and positive critical reaction, *Act of Valor* paved the way for the two main case studies of this chapter. Both case studies, *Lone Survivor* (Berg: 2014) and *American Sniper* (Eastwood: 2015)*,* were released in cinemas a year apart from each other; and both films are inspired by autobiographies written by the protagonists of the films, Marcus Luttrell and Chris Kyle. Both men were born in Texas, enlisted in the Navy in 1999, became SEALs, went to Iraq (Luttrell was also in Afghanistan), and both returned home as heroes. They wrote about their experiences during the conflicts[49] [50]and both were on the *New York Times*'s bestseller list. They represent the real-life embodiments of the traditional soldier in the war genre.

Marcus Luttrell recounts his personal experience of Operation Redwings in Afghanistan; a mission that went awry when the SEAL team Lutrell was a part of, was discovered by Taliban militants. Luttrell was the only survivor, who with the help from local Aghanistani villagers, managed to evade the militants and was then rescued by US soldiers shortly after. The *New York Times* reviewer Motoko Rich, when writing about the book, says

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[47] See website for exact figures
http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=actofvalor.htm
[48] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.67
[49] Luttrell, M. and Robinson, P. *Lone Survivor: The Eye Witness Account of Operation Redwings and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10,* Little, Brown and Company, 2007
[50] Kyle, C. and DeFelice, J., McEwen, S. *American Sniper: The Autobiography of Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. History,* William Morow Publishing, 2012

> "Lone Survivor," with its action-packed narrative and patriotic tone, has emerged as one of the summer's biggest publishing success stories…Along with the tragic story about how Mr. Luttrell lost his comrades, the book is spiked with unabashed braggadocio and patriotism, as well as several polemical passages lashing out at the "liberal media" for its role in sustaining military rules of engagement that prevent soldiers from killing unarmed civilians who may also be scouts or informers for terrorists.'[51]

The autobiography is not without its share of controversy, and inevitably the cinematic adaptation that followed seven years later also attracted criticism. Nonetheless, following the release of the book, Marcus Luttrell was viewed as one of the poster boys for the war effort. Five years later, his fellow Texan Chris Kyle with the release of his own memoir achieved a similar reputation.

In Kyle's autobiography *American Sniper*, as well as his own experiences in the war, he includes an episode about Luttrell and his ordeal in Afghanistan[52], in showing how closely interwoven these two narratives are, and this connection is also maintained when viewing the film adaptations as well. Kyle's book focuses on his life, his childhood, his rodeo days, his time in the military, and his four Iraq deployments, during which he was dubbed 'the Legend' by his teammates. The final chapters recount his life back in the US with his family and his efforts to help veterans re-adjust to civilian life. Kyle died in 2013, shot by a man suffering from severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) whom he has taken to a gun range in an attempt to facilitate his recovery. These narratives are significant because they provide the reader with stories about the war in a first person perspective, including the author's personal motivations, ideologies, and emotions. They portray a personal story with a beginning, middle and, more importantly, an end, something that often written accounts of the war itself from political and historical perspectives cannot give to readers. This is in part central to the success of soldiers' autobiographies and also why the films adapted from them began to appear more appealing and engrossing than earlier works that followed solely fictional characters. Real-life heroes with real

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[51]Motoko Rick, 'He Lived to Tell the Tale (and write a Bestseller), *The New York Times,* Books Section, 9th August 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/09/books/09seal.html?_r=0 (accessed on the 15th April 2015)

[52] Kyle, C. and DeFelice, J., McEwen, S. *American Sniper: The Autobiography of Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. History,* William Morow Publishing, 2012, pp. 210-211

experiences have broken through the cycle's first phase and brought it out of its toxicity and elevated the genre to box-office gold. Simultaneously the character of the soldier was not only revived, but reached the status of a superhero, as the character appears not only indestructible, but is also driven by the unshakeable idea that his cause is just, and that to battle against an enemy that is vicious, universally hated, and without morals, is entirely honourable.

This image of invincibility and complete faith in the mission is absolutely clear in *Lone Survivor* (2014)*,* when focusing on the portrayal of the Navy SEALs and the chosen direction of Peter Berg. *Lone Survivor* is the adaptation of the Luttrell memoir. The four main characters are Marcus Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg), Michael Murphy (Taylor Kitsch), Danny Dietz (Emile Hirsh), and Matt 'Axe' Axelson (Ben Foster), all soldiers who took part in the original Operation Red Wings in 2005. The team is covertly dropped near a remote village where they must find and kill high-ranking Taliban 'bad guy', Ahmad Shah. However, while on patrol three goatherds spot them and the mission is compromised. The team decide not to kill the witnesses, and after much debate, they let them go. Predictably the goatherds alert the terrorists about the US presence and heavy fire fight between hundreds of terrorists and four NAVY SEALs ensues, the only survivor being Luttrel.

This is director Peter Berg's second film that deals with the Middle Eastern conflict, the first being *The Kingdom* (2007), where the director's opinions about the war on terror and how it should be fought are also a prominent theme. The action-thriller starring Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, and Jason Bateman, is set in Saudi Arabia, dealing with a terrorist attack on Americans on a US oil compound, and is loosely inspired by the 1995 Khobar Towers complex bombings. A FBI taskforce is sent to investigate the attack and on the way they find unlikely allies within the Saudi police, who help them catch the 'bad guys'. The attack itself is filmed as if it was a recreation of the 9/11 attacks. The victims are predominately US civilians, working-class people who are attacked by bombers, on a sunny day during a softball game. These aggressors not only kill indiscriminately, but also use any means at their disposal, including planting a bomb in an ambulance as the vehicle arrives to treat the wounded. The FBI taskforce arrives in Saudi Arabia and is initially greeted with suspicion and dismay from the locals. Eventually the Americans and the local police team up to find the terrorist cell responsible for the attacks. The final shots of the film

show both sides determined to eradicate each other in a seemingly endless conflict between radical Islamist terrorists and determined US forces.

This is Berg's recreation of what he felt should have been the US reaction to 9/11; the systematic hunting down and killing of those responsible. A gung-ho premise put on film by cutting away the bureaucratic and diplomatic red tape, striping away any complex truths about the region, and its policies and its shaky relationship with the United States. The Twin Tower attacks are referenced in the film's opening montage, which "recaps" in merely 2 minutes the history of Saudi Arabia, its involvement with the US, and mentions that most of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi nationals. In Berg's film, the narrative is simpler, with a beginning (the attack), a middle (the investigation), and an end (capture and death of the enemy). Additionally the film ends with the option of a sequel as the grandson of the defeated terrorist takes up his grandfather's mantle, and vows to 'kill them all'. US intelligence is made to look tougher, more resilient, and suitable cautious, and extremely determined to avenge its lost compatriots. As *New York Times* reviewer A.O. Scott writes

> Just as "Rambo" offered the fantasy of do-over on Vietnam, "The Kingdom" can be seen as a wishful revisionist scenario for the American response to Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.'[53]

By never once mentioning the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, Berg manages to simplify the 'War on Terror' into a clear cut scenario that involves the FBI going to the enemy territory, finding and killing the terrorists and returning home, after the mission is veritably accomplished. Martin Barker includes this film in his 'Toxic' genre list since it was a commercial and critical failure, yet Berg's agenda and message from *The Kingdom,* seeps into *Lone Survivor,* which was this time met with success amongst audiences and critics alike. Continuing on with his fascination for military films, after *The Kingdom,* Berg directed *Battleship* in 2012, a big-budget science fiction-action film that had extremely poor results in the box-office. Though the latter film is not in anyway part of the Iraq-genre, it still shows the director's ongoing fascination with the US military and his desire to represent them onscreen as godlike guardians of the free world. "I'm a patriot," he says in an interview with *The New*

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[53]A. O. Scott, 'The Kingdom review: F.B.I. agents solve the terrorist problem', *The New York Times,* 28 September 2007
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/28/movies/28king.html (accessed 15 August 2015)

York Times. "I admire our military, their character, code of honor, belief systems. I lived with the SEALs, their families, went to their funerals."[54]

After *Battleship* Universal studios allowed him to make *Lone Survivor* in which he once again enlisted the help of the US military to stay as close to the truth as possible. Like *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Act of Valor* (2012)*, Lone Survivor* is part of the long-standing love-hate relationship between the US Army and Hollywood, about which McSweeney writes '…Films that offer favourable depictions of the military are given extensive support…and those that depict the military in a negative light are denied access to materials and personnel.'[55] For *The Kingdom* and *Lone Survivor,* Berg, having established a positive relationship with the US Army by painting a favourable portrait of their operations, was granted access to materials and specialist consultants in order to bring greater accuracy to his cinematic vision.

> I had worked with the military and the Department of Defense in the past, and I had good relationships with this U.S. military and they didn't view me as a threat, but I think they felt I would be fair and my telling of the story would be fair, particularly if they gave me the access.[56]

With the military's blessing, Berg was allowed into Iraq for a month, embedded within a SEAL team and was provided with US Army material whilst the cast was put through SEALs training in preparation for the film. This cooperation included seven military advisors on set (including real life Marcus Luttrell) and was highly publicized by the media and the Army. Given this help and seal of approval from the US military, the film garnered much publicity and most of the critics applauded this effort as an attempt at realism. The question then becomes what reality is Berg presenting his audience with and how is it different than previous attempts by other filmmakers?

Lone Survivor, much like Berg's earlier film *The Kingdom,* does not linger on realities such as politics, history, or military policies. Its main focus lies on the 'SEAL' as an

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[54] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/magazine/can-peter-berg-redeem-himself-after-battleship.html
[55] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.63
[56] Edward Douglas, 'Interview: Peter Berg on Following the Lone Survivor' 24th December 2013, *Comingsoon.net* http://www.comingsoon.net/movies/features/112643-interview-peter-berg-on-following-the-lone-survivor (accessed on 16th April 2015)

individual soldier and their point of view. Like other directors the choice to remain apolitical and focus on the human perspective of a clearly complicated war, frees him, his cast, and crew, of any criticism surrounding the 'War on Terror' and US presence in Afghanistan. As McSweeney points out, an apolitical stance is telling of what kind of message this film will ultimately impart on its audience. Though unlike Kathryn Bigelow's *Hurt Locker* (2009)*,* this film does not look at US soldiers as a victim but instead celebrates tem as the consummate professional and resilient warrior, who is equipped to perform the job they are trained for without question, much like screen icons such as John Wayne and Rambo. Berg shows us these traits by introducing the characters' ideology and their motivations and through their dialogue and interactions with other soldiers and enemy forces; he develops a nigh-indestructible image of the Navy SEALs.

Lone Survivor opens with a montage composed of stock footage of BUD/S[57] and 'Waking up' by the Austin, Texas band Explosions in the Sky playing in the background. The aim of this sequence is two-fold; firstly it wants to show the effectiveness and discipline of the BUD/S program by presenting army life as both challenging and rewarding (the use of stock footage rather than fictional scenes is to show real-life SEALs in action, which presents the audience with the real equivalents of the fictional characters on screen); secondly, (an observation noted by many critics) this initial sequence is deliberately made to look like an Army recruitment commercial[58]. With its use of imagery and chosen background music, this video is nothing short of a stylised endorsement the US Army and a glamorised vision of its heroic lifestyle.

Subsequently we are introduced to the characters, slowly waking up in their barracks, sending emails to their loved ones at home. One SEAL is planning his upcoming wedding, a subject that is returned to several times during the film that poignantly foreshadows the hero's eventual tragic fate. This introduction is not an attempt at a

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[57] BUD/S: Basic Underwater Demolition/ SEALs
[58] Calum Marsh, 'Lone Survivor's Takeaway: Every war film is a pro-war film', *The Atlantic,* 10th January, 2014
http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/01/-em-lone-survivor-em-s-takeaway-every-war-movie-is-a-pro-war-movie/282812/ (accessed on the 10th April 2015)

realistic depiction of life in the army but is instead used to hammer home the point that these heroes are the American everyman; they enjoy games, messing with each other and drinking American beer. Berg stresses that the bond between these men surpasses what we would expect between colleagues; these men are essentially brothers. Their motives for joining the military are never discussed, neither is their future post deployment apart from brief glimpses of their personal lives. Michael Murphy plans to buy his fiancée an Arabian Stallion as a wedding gift, though never once are we told anything more about her or their relationship. Matt 'Axe' Axelson emails his girlfriend/wife, in a brief shot at the very beginning and then it is never mentioned again. The rest of the characters, including Luttrell, are given no backstory at all. To Berg, these men were born and will die as US soldiers, so any additional character traits are superfluous unless they help the audience empathise with the main characters.

As mentioned before, once dropped into enemy territory and with the target confirmed, the characters are discovered by three goatherds, one old man and two boys. This leaves the SEALs with three options to consider; terminate the witnesses; tie them up and leave them at the mercy of the elements, or simply abandon the mission. Axelson and Dietz side with killing them, reasoning that these people are the very evil they are fighting, 'Look at him. That's not a kid, that's a soldier. That's death, look at death.' It is an opinion that dehumanises both the boy and entire Afghani people. Luttrell opposes this plan, mentioning the media storm an act of this nature is bound to generate, not to mention the many ethical repercussions, and brings up previous examples (though examples like the Abu Ghraib scandal made public 2 years before the operation and 11 years before the film, are not mentioned). While debating what course of action to take, Berg chooses to focus on the prisoners' faces, making them look as malevolent as possible through ominous music and sharp lighting, making Luttrell and Murphy's decision to set them free a doomed act of mercy on the part of the US. As they walk away, in a line of non-subtitled dialogue, though explained by Berg, the old man curses the SEALs in one of the most aggressive expressions in the Pashto language[59]. The entire voting scene and ensuing

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[59] Pod cast *Live with Jeff Goldsmith Q&A* with Peter Berg. Answer related to translations at 1:00.00

debate brings the SEALs ideology to light when forced into action and faced with an unexpected scenario. Axelson and Dietz want to kill these civilians because in their eyes, all Afghani people can be or will eventually become potential threats. The enemy in the Middle East has become so omniscient that everyone is now included in the War on Terror. Murphy and Luttrell vote to let them, however this vote does not stem from an opposing view that the goatherds could be innocent and on their side. Their main argument for letting these men go was because they wanted to obey the rules of engagement and not be court-martialled if the media caught wind of their actions, so this is a purely political decision. This reasoning concords with Berg's fascination with the SEAL and his aim to portray them as honouring the military institution they serve by obeying their orders, even when bringing their lives into peril. In the end, both SEALs are proven right in their suspicions of the threat that the goatherds pose who after their release go on to warn the Taliban of the presence of SEALs in the area.

Almost immediately after the goatherds are released, one of the young boys is seen running through the mountains. While it is never seen onscreen, his intent to warn the Taliban is implicit. The four Americans spot the seemingly omniscient, faceless, countless Taliban soldiers and a firefight ensues. The mise en scene of this battle has won applause with a diverse range of critics, and indeed Berg's direction dynamically maintains the action all the way through. Yet despite the realistic sounds of broken bones, blood-filled lungs and bullets ripping through flesh, the film's agenda and ultimate message ignore realism and instead opt for legend and patriotism. During the fight, the SEALs work together in a calm and efficient way, repelling the constant waves of Taliban. After sustaining numerous bullet wounds and broken bones, the SEALs exit the screen one by one in dramatic fashion. While dying, the Taliban unceremoniously strips Dietz of his military equipment; Murphy sacrifices himself in Christ-like fashion allowing his team to escape; and Axelson is shot numerous times before being fatally shot in the head for the second time. In another show of how effective and tough SEALs are, the Taliban need only to be shot once to die, whereas Luttrell and his team keep on going, exceeding their natural limits. In the third and final act of the film, Luttrell is rescued by a local and brought back to the initial

http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/6/3/5/6351a776fa668547/LoneSurvivorQandA.mp3?c_id=6593624&expiration=1425923509&hwt=a24750a7ef4627e9efa44131cd16e565

Afghani village the audience was shown being terrorised by the Taliban. Berg elects not to subtitle the Pashto lines of dialogue, a choice made to accentuate Luttrell's confusion and doubts about his hosts. However, this reasoning backfires, since by leaving these lines of dialogue out, the audience has no way of either empathising with the villagers and are left without any indication as to their motivation for helping Luttrell. 'Fuck Taliban' is the only English we hear, spoken by one of the villagers.

When we are first introduced to the 'bad guys', we see them beheading Afghani villagers suspected of helping Americans. There are no more than five lines of dialogue, the Taliban leader accuses people of working with the West and threatens the populace that such behaviour will be punished, while the villagers plead mercy. This portrayal of extremism is reminiscent of a scene in Berg's *The Kingdom* when Jennifer Garner's character explains when talking about such an ideology 'If you're a Westerner or a moderate Arab and you won't join us, we will let loose the truly talented murderers…those are the men we are fighting.' Berg applies this same ideology in *Lone Survivor* and paints the Taliban as extremely violent men who kill anyone that stands contrary to their beliefs. Later on, during the SEALs' mission brief, Ahmad Shah is plainly referred to as 'bad guy' and a 'Marine Killer', with absolutely no other exposition provided to the audience as to his background or motivations; there is no attempt to provide any kind of context. Axelson, when debating the fate of the goatherds, states that Shah had killed 20 Marines 'last month', a fact that was not detailed in either the briefing, nor in the debate in the mountains but is there to further emphasise that this man along with his terrorist group is/are indeed the 'bad guy(s)'. For Berg and the army, there is a clear-cut distinction between the tragically doomed heroes and the savage Taliban, a distinction that is already neatly established before the eventual firefight. The intended result of this set up is that by the time both sides collide, the audience is left with no doubt whom to will on to victory.

Berg's film is not the first to dehumanise the enemy, or to keep largely away from political context, neither is it the first to glorify the Navy SEALs and their effectiveness. In fact his film borrows heavily from the likes of *Rambo, Act of Valor* and *Black Hawk Down* and follows their jingoistic depictions of the US Army by presenting clear agenda: protect your 'brothers' and kill the 'bad guys'. However, the

complete lack of any political discussion or context is noticeable. Calum Marsh writing for *The Atlantic* explains:

> Films like this contribute to subtle shifts in public perception, helping to legitimize feelings of xenophobia and American exceptionalism. It's no accident that *Lone Survivor* ignores the question of whether the SEAL team's mission was justified or worthwhile, just as it ignores, even more broadly, the merit of the war in Afghanistan to begin with.[60]

Marsh has since been quoted by Fox News as accusing the film of being pro-war propaganda. He continues:

> Of course, if Peter Berg wants to make a film-length recruitment ad, that's his prerogative. But it's important, then, to accept that the result is enthusiastically pro-war. When you make a film in which soldiers are paragons of excellence and the action they conduct is ruthless and exciting…there is no other conclusion.

Marsh's argument concerns the combat genre in general, though his observations on the film's message seems legitimate, especially when analysis Berg's mythologising of Luttrel's narrative, omitting to question the motivation of his subjects and presenting us with characters on screen that solely possess heroic qualities, an embellishment that ultimately makes the narrative seductive to mass audiences.

When looking at the film's reception, Peter Berg's action-combat film truly stands out as one of the first commercial and critical successes that deal with the Middle Eastern conflict. Released in January 2014 with a production budget of 40 million, it grossed 125 million dollars domestically, made a total of 150 million dollars internationally, and was nominated of Best Sound and Best Sound editing at the 2013 Academy awards. These results took many industry analysts by surprise. According to Box Office Mojo's January 2014 rankings, *Lone Survivor* stands at the top of the list, surpassing Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* and Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* in total gross earnings[61]; two films that have been repeatedly cited in reviews as either using the same filming techniques or sharing similar unexpected commercial

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[60]Calum Marsh, 'Lone Survivor's Takeaway: Every war film is a pro-war film', *The Atlantic,* 10th January, 2014
http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/01/-em-lone-survivor-em-s-takeaway-every-war-movie-is-a-pro-war-movie/282812/ (accessed on the 10th April 2015)
[61]http://www.boxofficemojo.com/monthly/?page=1&view=calendargross&yr=2014&month=01&p=.htm (Accessed 14th March 2015)

success[62]. *Lone Survivor* opened amid a hostile political environment; 2013 saw the twelve-year anniversary of the Afghani conflict, and with Obama's announcement that combat operations would end a further twelve months away, polls showed popular opinion at an all-time low[63]. In spite of this, the film managed to break box office records. Supported by a strong marketing campaign, the film's release benefitted most of all from a nationwide release (screened in 2,875 cinemas) and found its core audience in 'heartland' America (Utah, Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, and Virginia), with Texas enjoying the largest share of attendance figures[64]. Box office results such as these bring to question the 'toxicity' of the genre that Barker cites and clearly show that there is an audience for films set in the Middle East. *Lone Survivor* has divided movie-goers and critics alike, one camp cheering it as patriotic and a testament to the unbreakable bond between soldiers, while the other defines it as a piece of pro-war propaganda that turns US soldiers into heroes and martyrs, equating it with the likes of *Black Hawk Down*[65]. An analysis of the film's message will be undertaken later in this section, but the immediate objective with this case study is to see why and how this film initiated the combat genre's renaissance.

Additionally, to explain the film's success we have to focus on the screen treatment of the source material, remade as a universal tale/myth about survival in extreme adversity. Peter Berg states:

> This story is about working together for something bigger than our ego, bigger than our individuality. It's about coming together as a group—protecting each other, loving each other, looking out for each other—and finding a greater strength as a team than you could ever find as an individual. Marcus wrote a

[62] Justin Chang, 'Lone Survivor Review', *Variety,* 11th November 2013
http://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/lone-survivor-review-1200820276/ (Accessed 14th March 2015)
[63] http://www.gallup.com/poll/167471/americans-view-afghanistan-war-mistake.aspx?utm_source=position4&utm_medium=related&utm_campaign=tiles (Accessed 14th March 2015)
[64] High attendance in the State of Texas was to be expected, as Marcus Luttrell, the film's protagonist comes from Houston, TX.
[65]Peter Bradshaw, 'Lone Survivor Review', 30th January 2014
http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jan/30/lone-survivor-review (accessed on the 15th September 2015)

book that, as much as it's about 19 people being killed on a tragic day in Afghanistan, is (sic) about brotherhood, sacrifice and team commitment.[66]

This interpretation of the material, glosses over context, rejects objectiveness and treats this story as an isolated incident within the War on Terror in turn transforming it into homage to the US military. Neither in the book nor the film is there ever a segment where the validity and effectiveness of US action in Afghanistan are called into question. The failure of the mission arises from a mixture of communication malfunction, paired with the merciful liberation of the Afghan goatherds; there is not blame attached to mistakes in strategy or bad tactical decisions. According to Berg's interpretation of the material, this operation succeeds in showing the US Army as a solid, professional and effective unit, regardless of its failure to actually complete the mission objective. In the *New York Times* review of the film, A.O. Scott mirrors this sentiment by writing 'The defining trait of *Lone Survivor* – with respect to both its characters and Mr. Berg's approach to them- is professionalism. It is modest, competent, effective movie, concerned above all with doing the job of explaining how the job was done.[67]' Seemingly that was Berg's only ambition and while he might have succeeded in recreating realistic make-up, sound effects, and well-paced action sequences, the selective manner in which the material was adapted presents the audience with a story that does not belong in the greater context of the War on Terror. This narrow view allows people to forget about 'the bigger picture' and treat the actions of this film as an isolated incident and unrelated to the wider operational activity in Afghanistan, whose setting could just as well be New Mexico, if it was not for the hundreds of Middle Eastern men, storming the mountain side, shouting 'Allahu Akbar' as they shoot aimlessly at the SEALs.[68]

A similar process was applied a year later with Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper,* the film that constitutes this chapter's next case study. The film adapts the story of the most lethal sniper in U.S. Army history Chris Kyle, who had over 120 confirmed

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[66]Author Unknown, *'Lone Survivor* production notes', Date not mentioned http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid=17087# (accessed on the 15th September 2015)

[67] A.O. Scott, 'Soldiers Fighting but Coping Most of All', *The New York Times,* 24th December, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/25/movies/mark-wahlberg-stars-in-lone-survivor-by-peter-berg.html (Accessed 15th September 2015)

[68] Ibid

kills, and it stands as Hollywood's most successful Iraq war film with 547 million worldwide and surpassing *Saving Private Ryan* as the top domestic grossing film belonging to the war-genre[69]. Much like *Lone Survivor* it is surrounded by controversy. Reviewers and media outlets are split over the representation of the film's subject matter; a particular flash point for discussion is the portrayal of the film's protagonist Chris Kyle. To some he is praiseworthy, very much the embodiment of the heroic US Marine, to others he is the personification of pro-war propaganda. *American Sniper*'s wide success can be attributed to the high calibre direction of Clint Eastwood and the star power of his leading man, Bradley Cooper, which gave this film the Hollywood legitimacy and credentials that *Lone Survivor* could only dream of. The film also had a wide national release with Texas once again as the state with the highest attendance figures, though this should not come as a surprise as Kyle, just like Luttrell, originated from Texas. While this the first Clint Eastwood film to tackle the conflict in the Middle East, it is not his first feature that takes place the war genre. The director received critical acclaim for his work depicting the dual-perspective of the battle at Iwo Jima during World War II in *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima,* both made in 2006. The first explores the story behind the famous flag-raising photograph at the top of Mount Suribashi taken by Joe Rosenthal, while the second switches its perspective to cover the Japanese defence of the island against the United States. This project was the first of its kind in Hollywood and both films were nominated for various awards, much praise centring on the even-handed treatment of the international soldier. Jim Emerson from *rogerebert.com* examines the director's representation of the soldier, 'Eastwood empathizes with the "expendable" soldier on the ground, the "poor bastard" who is only a pawn in a war conceived by generals and politicians, some of whom have never come anywhere near a battlefield or a combat zone.'[70] Eastwood alters his depiction of the soldier and their role in the theatre of war. Kyle is portrayed as strong

[69] Linda Ge, 'American Sniper' overtakes 'Saving Private Ryan' as No.1 Domestic Grossing War Movie of all Time', *The Wrap,* January 30th, 2015 http://www.thewrap.com/american-sniper-overtakes-saving-private-ryan-as-no-1-war-movie-of-all-time/ (accessed 16th May 2015)
[70]Jim Emmerson, 'Letters from Iwo Jima', *Rogerebert.com,* 11th January 2007 http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/letters-from-iwo-jima-2007 (accessed 10th February 2014)

and a believer in the military cause (generals and politicians are neither seen or heard within the events of this film).

American Sniper came out a year after *Lone Survivor* and similarly to Peter Berg's film it broke box office records as the most successful January opening weekend in the United States ever; and remains the most successful New Year release to date. It also ranks as the 2nd most successful R-Rated film of all time. Its total international gross currently stands at 330 million dollars[71] (the film was made on a 58 million dollar budget) and it was nominated for six Academy Awards; including Best Actor; Best Director; and Best Adapted Screenplay. *American Sniper*'s success mirror's *Lone Survivor*'s, with their material both adapted from successful NAVY SEAL memoirs, that both focus on the human element in the Middle Eastern conflict, that were both granted access to resources by the military, both kept the content largely apolitical and elevated what is commonly believed to have been a failed military endeavour into a multi-faceted victory. Before focusing on the main character it is important to view *American Sniper* within its historical context.

Six months before its official release, Obama made a speech at the White House, announcing the intervention of US troops within Iraq. This announcement effectively meant that though Bush's war in Iraq had ended, a new conflict was now underway and amid the critical outcry regarding Obama's foreign policy, *American Sniper* opened in December. Eastwood's film offered a more palatable image of the ongoing struggle in the Middle East, one that US audiences would be more comfortable to view. It offered not only a metaphorical end to the conflict, but also created a new national hero.

American Sniper differs from *Lone Survivor* in its focus on the lone gunman and his mission in Iraq. The legend of Chris Kyle was already an established one before filming began. He was the focus of media attention once news of his exploits in battle were made known in the public domain. Eastwood's task was to humanise the character, transforming him from just a sniper into a national hero, one that the audience could support, in a similar way to Gary Cooper's Alvin York from *Sergeant York* (Hawks: 1941). Casting Bradley Cooper was a part of that humanisation, as the

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[71] These figures are taken from the 5th of March, 2015 and are still subject to change http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=americansniper.htm

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actor has built a reputation for playing likeable and relatable characters in previous films. The next task was to elevate the character into a mythic hero and Eastwood manages that by implying multiple times that it was Kyle's destiny and duty to respond to America's call to arms. This is achieved by constructing the film in an episodic manner; dividing the narrative into chapters each with a different event or obstacle Kyle must surpass in order to become the feted figure of the present day. Using the analytical approach of *Lone Survivor* and applying it to *American Sniper,* by singling out the protagonist's motivations, ideology and interactions with other characters (whether they be friend or foe) it is possible to reach a better understanding of Kyle's character and achieve a greater understanding of how the film came to be so successful with US audiences.

Chris Kyle's motivations and ideology are traits that Eastwood and screenwriter Jason Hall tackle almost immediately within the film. The film opens with Kyle in Fallujah on his first tour of duty. He is on a rooftop, eye to the viewing scope, inspecting the streets as soldiers below make their rounds through the streets. Kyle spots two suspects, a mother and a child, the former hiding something under her clothes. Kyle takes aim, and then the scene cuts to rural Texas where we are introduced to a young Kyle and his father on a hunting trip, having successfully shot a buck. In a much more in depth portrayal of the main character's background than any we find in *Lone Survivor,* Eastwood allows the audience greater access to the history of his hero and to see what led him on that rooftop in Iraq. Kyle is the quintessential cowboy and hell raiser, something he embellishes in his biography. We see him brought up in a strict home; his father preaches a model of social hierarchy, one that is comprised of sheep, predators and sheepdogs with Kyle purposed to be a sheepdog. 'We protect our own' he pronounces at the dinner table and it is evident that his father's lessons have a profound influence on Kyle. When asked by his father if he fought off his little brother's bullies, Chris nods and his father proudly states 'Then you know who you are. You know your purpose.' After leading a seemingly aimless existence within the rodeo circuit, Kyle's first defining moment as 'sheepdog', arises from witnessing a news-broadcast detailing the bombings of the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya; serendipitously coinciding at a time when Chris was questioning his ultimate direction in life. The newscaster can be heard saying that it is unclear who the enemy is at this stage (though the audience can guess it is Al Qaeda) without context; no other

information is provided bar the images on screen. It leads Kyle to say 'Look at what they did to us' and the next immediate shot sees him joining the Navy SEALs.

In Kyle's biography, joining the Army was a choice he made, regardless of the rising attacks abroad against the US[72], yet in Eastwood's film, there is a need for the character to establish himself not only as a patriot but a purposeful American citizen, as if it was destiny that led him to the Army. The next few scenes show us the war genre's now clichéd training montage, and then continue to further establish Kyle's driving motivations and increasingly outlines his general ideology. When he first meets his future wife, Taya (played by Sienna Miller), the scene is deliberately staged to present Kyle as the voice of reason. Initially Taya is portrayed as an intelligent, tough young woman, yet when she voices her aversion towards soldiers, calling them arrogant, self-centred and uncontrollable, she is depicted as overly critical with opinions based on ignorance. Kyle responds to her criticisms calmly saying 'Why would you say I am self-centred, I would lay down my life for this country', to him a selfless act which therefore allows him to achieve the moral high ground in the conversation. When asked why he would be prepared to perform the ultimate sacrifice he responds simply 'Because it's the greatest country in the world and I would do whatever I can to protect it.' Later on, during Chris and Taya's first date, she again asks him about his decision to become a soldier. 'I wanted to be a cowboy' he answers, 'but I don't know, I did that, thought I was meant for something more.'

The second defining moment in Kyle's life is the 9/11 attacks. As the now widely distributed footage of the second plane hitting the South Tower plays on screen, Eastwood elects to focus on Kyle's face, echoing the previously used technique when showing the news about the embassy bombings in Africa. After Kyle's marriage to Taya, the location returns to Fallujah, with Kyle staring down at the suspicious woman and her child, which in effect links the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq War without a single mention of the earlier invasion of Afghanistan: This tenuous link will be the subject of this chapter's latter section, examining the film's ultimate message. Unlike the SEALs in *Lone Survivor,* Kyle is allowed to be a lot more vocal about his role in

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[72] Kyle, C. and DeFelice, J., McEwen, S. *American Sniper: The Autobiography of Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. History,* (William Morow Publishing: 2012), p.19

the military and the Middle East, an aspect that is achieved by solely having him as the centre of the story rather than a member amongst an ensemble cast. As the film progresses, Kyle's ideology begins to feature even more prominently thanks to his interactions with his fellow soldiers, one of which is his brother a fellow enrolee to the military. The supporting cast essentially seem to appear in the film to serve the single purpose of making Kyle look like even more of a hero. Kyle's brother, Jeff (Keir O'Donnell), is portrayed as smaller and weaker than his older brother. Their childhood together is summarised by Chris protecting Jeff from bullies. When Chris witnesses the embassy bombings on television, Jeff's reaction is largely off-screen, of diminished importance. During the 'Tour Two' segment of the film, Chris spots Jeff on an airfield tarmac on his way home. The physical difference between the two brothers is made to show Chris's superior status not only as a SEAL but also a character.

> Jeff: You're my hero bro. You always have been. Legend huh? (Fidgets, avoids eye contact)
>
> Chris: What happened? You all right?
>
> Jeff: I am just tired man. I'm going home.
>
> Chris: I'm proud of you. Dad is too. We're proud of you.
>
> Jeff: (mumbles) Fuck this place… (Walks away)

Their reunion is the one of two parts of the film that sees a character mention his doubts about Iraq, though because it originates from Jeff, it is staged as a sign of weakness and dangerous doubt. A similar scene is included minutes later when Kyle organises a task force to track down the Butcher, a main villain of the film.

> Soldier: I just want to believe in what we're doing here.
>
> Kyle: Well there's evil here. We've seen it.
>
> Soldier: Yeah well, there's evil everywhere.
>
> Kyle: Oh, you want these motherfuckers to come to San Diego or New York? We're protecting more than just this dirt.

Through just a few simple lines of dialogue, Kyle's view of the war and the US mission is voiced and overpowers any other dissenting opinion the film temporarily includes. Progressively, through interactions with other characters, Kyle manages to convince everyone that his actions as a SEAL and an American are justified. Near the

end of the film, when talking to his psychiatrist, the latter brings up his shooting record and asks him whether he regrets any of them, and Kyle responds:

> Oh no, that's not me. I was just protecting my guys. They were trying to kill our soldiers and I am willing to meet my Creator and answer for every shot that I took. The thing that haunts me is all the guys that I couldn't save.

In Kyle's book the phrasing of this sentiment is not quite as diplomatic[73], Eastwood making a conscious decision to portray his hero undergoing a martyr's pain, which is eventually followed by a martyr's death at the hand of the person he was trying so dutifully to help. The final chapter of the film bears mentioning as well as Kyle, now returned home after his mission in Iraq is over, is portrayed suffering from the effects of PTSD. However Eastwood spends minimal time on Kyle's recovery, which takes about 5 minutes of screen time, instead showing his newfound mission to help severely wounded veterans to recovery. Yet again, there is no context provided concerning the treatment of veterans or even the public's perception of the war. Kyle explains that brothers look out for each other, presenting the notion that the Army takes care of its own on the home front as well, yet the Veteran Affairs Department has been heavily criticised for its treatment of veterans. Eastwood chooses not to end his cinematic treatment of Kyle's tale by depicting civilian life as difficult because his hero does not deserve such as an ending, neither does he want him dying a victim. The last shot we see of Kyle details him walking towards the man he was tasked to help, his wife almost prophetically gazing at him as if she knows he is walking to his imminent death. The scene abruptly cuts and the epilogue appears onscreen describing Kyle's shooting. It again fades to black and then footage of Kyle's procession on the Texas highway is shown, with numerous crowds of locals waving flags as the hearse passes by. In a clear-cut succession of images, the heroic Kyle exits the narrative, transcending into now timeless legend.

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[73] ' I only wish I had killed more. Not for bragging rights, but because I believe the world is a better place without these savages out there taking American lives.' Kyle, C. and DeFelice, J., McEwen, S. *American Sniper: The Autobiography of Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. History,* (William Morow Publishing: 2012), p.4

The character's ideology is also further developed when he speaks to and about the people he is fighting against; the two most recurring adjectives he uses to describe them to other soldiers are 'evil' and 'savages'. For Kyle there is no distinction between Iraqis and terrorists, ably supported by a script that portrays the natives as either completely helpless or terrorists themselves (whether through collision or direct action). Co-operations between allied Iraqi forces and the US Army are completely excised, with only the failed ventures included. This unilateral portrayal of the enemy as 'savage', or 'evil', validates Kyle's views on the war. In a scene that includes a real-life high-ranking terrorist called the Butcher drilling a hole in a child's skull, Kyle effectively appears as an angel, wielding cathartic and justified rage towards the enemy and such heinous crimes. This view is further compounded in a later scene when Kyle's company find the Butcher's lair; corpses hang limply from the ceiling and dismembered body parts are packed in ice. When such gruesome acts are exclusively shown, with no antithesis, the overwhelming impression that lingers is that this is true of the people themselves and not the actual terrorist murderers. In another scene, Kyle's strength of feeling towards the enemy is again displayed when he berates one of his compatriots for buying his engagement ring from an Iraqi. 'Dude, you bought it from savages? How do you know it's not blood diamonds? Whatever man, that's just hypocritical'. Generally, Eastwood's film solely focuses on the SEALS and their engagement with enemy forces, with the Iraqis portrayed as the 'other', regardless of gender or age.

While the primary narrative recounts Kyle's life and his experiences both in Iraq and at home, the film contains a secondary storyline, written exclusively for the screen, that is worthy of attention in order to better understand the film's message. Steven Spielberg, who was originally attached to adapt the book to the screen, included the fictional character of Mustafa in the script as a totemic symbol, turning each side into mirror images of the other. When Eastwood replaced Spielberg, he kept Mustafa in the narrative though the character's purpose was changed. Having come from a background of the Western genre, the director includes him in his plot, to act as Chris Kyle's nemesis and direct counterpoint. He is first introduced by one of Kyle's comrades who describe him as a legend among the insurgents, an Olympic-level sharpshooter from Syria. The character has no lines of dialogue, no defined role among the insurgents, apart from being a prized gun-for-hire. Throughout the film,

Kyle and Mustafa cross paths, frequently swapping fire. During the Tour Three segment, Mustafa kills two members of Kyle's unit, which cements the marine's desire to track him down and avenge his fallen countrymen. This 'face off' scenario between two equally skilled men is a long-standing trope in the western genre and Eastwood's inclusion of it is suitable fitting for *American Sniper*; with the deserted, sunbathed streets of Iraq and the plentiful vantage points for a sharpshooter, befitting of such a showdown. Ultimately Kyle manages to kill his adversary, making a record-breaking shot of 2,100 yards; eliminating his nemesis in dramatic fashion and solidifying his status as a legend amongst the army and for the audience at home. What is of even bigger importance in this narrative is the eventual impact it achieves upon its conclusion. After Mustafa's death, Kyle's unit finds itself in an ambush and in a rare moment of weakness, the main character calls his wife amid the battle and in tears exclaims 'I am ready to come home'. In Eastwood's world, once the hero has killed his main enemy the mission is over, his destiny has been fulfilled. The hero can finally go home to his family and actually begin living his life. For Kyle, and as Eastwood extrapolates for America, this was a mission for the defence and, most of all, it was one of revenge against all terrorist acts against the United States.

Ultimately, the film's numerous factual omissions and refusal to tackle the political and military issues around Afghanistan or Iraq (or indeed the rising dissent against it domestically) present us with an extremely narrow view of the US in the post-9/11 world. As such *American Sniper*'s refusal to comment on such matters deny the possibility to re-evaluate US involvement in the Middle East. Reception of the film was not merely mixed but it would be fair to state very clearly divided, with those to the right of the political spectrum cheering the film's realism and patriotic message, and those to the left criticising Eastwood's elevation of Kyle to hero. Filmmaker Michael Moore was one of the earliest critics of Eastwood's film, with many agreeing with his view that *American Sniper* amounted to pro-war propaganda, glorifying racism and the indiscriminate killings of Iraqi civilians. This divide between critics was so vast and so vituperative, that is became a black and white topic for debate. Lindy West of *The Guardian* opines:

> 'There is no room for the idea that Kyle might have been a good soldier but a bad guy; or a mediocre guy doing a difficult job badly; or a complex guy in a bad war who convinced himself he loved killing to cope with an impossible situation; or a straight-up serial killer exploiting an oppressive system that,

yes, also employs lots of well-meaning, often impoverished, non-serial-killer people to do oppressive things over which they have no control.[74]

Further on in the same article, West questions why the American public accepts and applauds the portrayal of a US service man as a cold-blooded killer whose autobiography is riddled with not only racist remarks but also demonstrable lies and controversial opinions. *New Republic* writer Dennis Jett responds to this problematic conundrum by pointing out that US audiences still remain in a state of firm denial over their nation's role in Iraq and the Middle East. This feeling was renewed when President Obama re-ordered troops to return and fight ISIS[75], an interpretation as to why the film managed to achieve such success that echoes the conclusions of this chapter.

Essentially, *Lone Survivor* and *American Sniper* represent the imagined accomplishments of the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through Luttrell's ordeal, and Kyle's four tours in Iraq, the audience is shown them avenging their friends, in turn protecting America and American citizens, vanquishing enemies and returning home safely and in triumph. What this study found is that the soldier, as the main character, has been turned into a superhero, a nigh-indestructible man, tasked with clear-cut missions to dispatch all enemies on sight and make his country proud. This is a palatable fantasy, benefitting myth and legend, more digestible to cinemagoers at home that the shameful and catastrophic consequences of wars that in reality they might not fully comprehend. This sentiment is very clearly demonstrated in *American Sniper* when Eastwood follows up a scene of 9/11 with the invasion of Iraq. J. Hoberman writes:

> The causal link Eastwood establishes between the trauma of September 11 and the catastrophe of Iraq is less the dramatization of history than an

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[74]Lindy West, 'The Real American Sniper was a hate filled killer. Why are simplistic patriots treating him as a hero?', *The Guardian,* 6th January 2016 http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/06/real-american-sniper-hate-filled-killer-why-patriots-calling-hero-chris-kyle (Accessed 17th June 2015)
[75]Dennis Jett, 'The real American Sniper had to Remorse about the Iraqis he Killed', *The New Republic,* 13th January, 2015 http://www.newrepublic.com/article/120763/american-sniper-clint-eastwood-biopic-misrepresents-chris-kyle (accessed on the 10th April, 2015)

illustration of historical paralysis—elaborating the implications of an endless, unwinnable war.[76]

Lone Survivor, though not set in the same stage of the conflict, or indeed covering the same time span, suffers from the same historical paralysis and in fact glorifies combat without explanation as to why the soldiers are actually fighting. Instead, the simplistic theme of good versus bad, heroes versus villains is repeated in the place of a more meaningful narrative. A mass audience, both in the U.S. and the rest of the world can understand such basic storytelling, and by loosely occluding nuanced political debate films such as *Lone Survivor* and *American Sniper* guarantee their own box office success. Can this be the future of the genre? Rather than applying a more layered approach the wars in the Middle East, is it safer and more lucrative to fall back on old tropes, classic depiction of the soldier and deny the audience any sense of realism? It appears as though that is one direction that Hollywood has taken and to many peoples' surprise has been a successful one. However Berg and Eastwood are not the only directors with something to say on the matter.

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[76]J. Hoberman, 'The Great American Shooter', *The New York Review of Books,* 13 February 2015, http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/feb/13/great-american-shooter/ (accessed on the 10th March, 2015)

Chapter 2: The voices of Dissent quiet down; The Soldier gets bored

In the case studies from chapter one we saw the NAVY SEAL as the central character of importance in the Middle Eastern conflict. Civilians are not given reign to vent frustration, locals are vilified and dehumanized, and the story itself is shot in a linear sequence, with a beginning, a middle and a conclusion to the mission whether set in Iraq and Afghanistan. Critics of both *Lone Survivor* and *American Sniper* have pointed out the dangers of simplifying these complex wars in order to promote a particular agenda and so attention must turn to films that attempt to show a more realistic depiction of the conflict in the Middle East and the US soldier operating within its parameters. The next question we should ask ourselves is whether the SEAL, the very image of resilience, survival, and honour is the only one Hollywood is willing to show its audiences during the second phase of Barker's film cycle. Is the indestructible male soldier the only representative figure of the war in the Middle East, or are there more layered variations of this character? Additionally, is there an alternative narrative to the 'Us' and 'Them' story line? Does Hollywood acknowledge the US military's failure in the Middle East and the ongoing consequences of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? This chapter argues that although Hollywood has attempted other alternative depictions of the soldier in active service between 2005 and 2008 and after the *Hurt Locker,* it appears that the voices of dissent in this war gradually diminished. In effect only a few directors and production companies still seem willing to take a more original, realistic and critical approach to their subject matter within fictional renderings of the war. However, the two case studies presented further on show that the soldier can still develop rather than be portrayed in the traditional manner shown in the first chapter. There is still room for the war genre to advance. The two main case studies of this chapter are Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* and Peter Sattler's *Camp X-Ray,* both films that rather than showing their protagonists as superheroes, chose to portray them less as poster-boys, but as doing their day to day, without being called legend and without an epic narrative to publish.

In 2007, two years after the Iraq insurgency and the realisation that the country was nowhere near the creation of a stable defence and a self-reliant government (the period around which War films rose to prominence), five films were released whose stories were openly critical about the war. Particular focus was directed at the practice

of torture, the unlawful detainment of suspects, and the persistent use of violence that seemed endemic amongst the ranks of the US Army. These films were *Battle for Haditha* (Broomfield: 2007), *In the Valley of Elah* (Haggis: 2007), *Lions for Lambs* (Redford: 2007), *Redacted* (De Palma: 2007), and *Rendition* (Hood: 2007). Aside from dramatisations, there were also a plethora of documentaries made in 2007 about the war and the occupation of the country, such as *No End in Sight* (Ferguson: 2007), *Taxi to the Dark Side* (Gibney: 2007), and *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (Kennedy: 2007). It seems that 2007 had become the year where Hollywood was willing to criticise, uncover and start pointing fingers at the individuals responsible for what had begun to look like a conflict that had no obvious positive resolution.

Battle for Haditha, directed by documentary filmmaker Nick Broomfield, was filmed with the intent of offering a different form of reflection of reality that included in its cast real US soldiers and Iraqi refugees to play the equivalent roles. In contrast to *Act of Valor,* which also uses real soldiers in its cast, this was not a decision made to glorify the army but to achieve a more accurate portrayal of events by employing individuals with direct personal experience of the war. The film recounts the Haditha killings; an actual event when in 2005 US soldiers murdered 24 Iraqi civilians (among them women and children) in an act of retribution, following the death of a US marine and wounding of two others as a result of a bombing. The film starts with interview footage that asks different characters as to why they are in Iraq. 'The only thing I'm fighting is to get home each day without being killed. Because I don't know why we're here' admits one of the soldiers.

Broomfield does not linger on the politics that guide the conflict but chooses to focus on actual people that find themselves in the middle of it and the consequences of their actions. The character of the soldier in *Haditha* is quite different from the archetypal Caucasian macho male as seen in previous films of the genre, some which have already been discussed. The main soldier, Corporal Ramirez (Elliot Ortiz) is of Latino origin, an aspect that Barker finds essential to the film's overall aesthetic and narrative. 'He was a villain, victim and hero all in one: The perfect Latino grunt.'[77] Ramirez doubts his role within the conflict from the offset and his allegiance to the

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[77] Barker, M., *'A Toxic Genre: The Iraq War Film'* (Pluto Press: London 2011) p. 146

cause solely lies upon his fraternal feelings for his squad mates, rather than for any convoluted reasons concerning their mission in Iraq. He is ordered to take part in the executions of the Iraqi civilians, and when these failings are uncovered, his superiors use him as scapegoat and all blame is placed on his shoulders. The media then catches wind of the story and chooses to publicise it with the headline 'Ramirez: Hero or Bad Guy?', another example of the media's tendency to reduce such a complex and multifaceted narrative into a simplistic binary issue. In these films, unlike their predecessors, the Iraqis are not reduced to caricature, they are not dehumanised, simplified or demonised to the same extent. Broomfield depicts these people as trapped in the war as much as the US marines are. '*Haditha* becomes a rare example of an American film that breaks free of an America-centric view of the war and in doing so destabilises the habitual privileging of American subjectivity and authority.'[78] The director stresses the fact that these insurgents are everyday people who prior to the invasion and occupation were individuals with jobs and families but the daily violence in their neighbourhoods, unemployment and living under the invading force pushed them into joining the insurgency. The disbanding of the Iraqi Army is cited as one of the main reasons for motivating so many men into taking up arms against the US. At the close of the film, we are shown Al-Qaeda, pleased with the US retaliation against civilians, in that such action acts to perfect enrolment for new recruits for the insurgency. Broomfield's film under-performed at the box office, though it did attract positive reviews from critics, principally for its focus on human emotion and strength during wartime conditions. Manohla Dargis, from the *New York Times,* says of the director

> He points fingers, suggests reasons and explores rationales, showing sympathy for the war-ravaged marines without letting them off the hook. He introduces the insurgents who planted the bomb…and then with sickening realism, he shows how those innocent Iraqis, caught between the insurgents and the marines, die.[79]

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[78] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.73

[79] Manhola Dargis, 'The Killing of Innocents faces a Dry-Eyed Dissection' *The New York Times,* 7th May, 2008
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/07/movies/07batt.html?ref=movies&_r=0#
(accessed on the 12th December 2013)

Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian* also praised Broomfield's even handed focus on both sides of the conflict by noting 'This is what they call asymmetric warfare, but Broomfield conscientiously restores a kind of symmetry, attempting to get inside both the American troops' heads and the insurgents'.[80] *Haditha* is a film that not only attempts to show us the different perspectives of the conflict, but also to highlight the vulnerability of the US ground troops, whilst never turning them into martyrs.

In the Valley of Elah and *Redacted* also utilise similar narratives concerning US soldiers committing atrocities against Iraqi civilians, though with a less subtle treatment than *Haditha*. *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis: 2007) sees former Military Police Officer (MPO) Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) investigating the strange death of his son, recently returned from Iraq with his platoon. His body is found dismembered and burned, a death initially thought to be related to drug wars in the area. Deerfield, helped by officer Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron), finds out that in reality it was his son's platoon that killed and burned him to prevent him from confessing to crimes they committed whilst on active duty in Iraq. Deerfield, upon viewing cell phone video footage showing his son torturing, almost gleefully, an Iraqi, becomes heavily disillusioned with the war. This is reinforced by the events of the film's final scene when Deerfield turns the American flag in his yard upside down, signifying a country (and along with it his own personal convictions) in distress.

One of the fundamental differences between Haggis's film and *Haditha* is that the central action of this film occurs on American soil, enabling us to see how returned soldiers, and civilians alike, cope with the war's apparent failure and its damaging effects. We spend little to no time being acquainted with the Iraqis but instead witness US civilians in a domestic setting slowly coming to grips with the grim realities of the situation. That is not to say however that these two films do not have some characteristics in common. Both emphasise the point that this war is the first to include camera footage and photos taken by soldiers and civilians with a mobile device (mobile phone in most cases). These snapshots of the war are admissible as evidence, helping to uncover the real mess that has become Iraq. Additionally the film

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[80] Peter Bradshaw, 'Battle for Haditha Review', *The Guardian,* 1st February 2008
http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/feb/01/nickbroomfield.actionandadventure
(accessed on the 12th December 2013)

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is extremely critical of superior officers in the army chain of command; they are portrayed as out of touch with those serving in the Marine Corps, and who primarily are self-interested. The film cost $23 million to produce and upon release made back a meagre $6.7 million and allowing it to join its predecessors as a 'toxic' film. The film's critical reception was divided, some critics feeling that Paul Haggis did not go far enough with his anti-Iraq war message[81], or that the film reduces itself to award-baiting propaganda[82]. Others applauded its willingness to include so many criminals on screen, reminding audiences that there is no reassuring solution to the conflict, neither domestically, nor abroad[83]. At the end of the film, Haggis' critique is not directed at the reasons of the war but at its consequences at home; how trauma lived abroad can return home and affect those indirectly involved, leading to further suffering. This feeling is enacted with greater force in Brian De Palma's film *Redacted* (2007).

Redacted perhaps is the film, pre *Hurt Locker,* that has attracted the most debates, due to its controversial content. Unlike *Haditha* and *In the Valley of Elah,* De Palma not only transforms the visual format of the war genre to inject greater realism in his work but also presents the character of the soldier in a much more critical and more detached way. De Palma, (having previously already explored the subject of war crimes in his Vietnam film *Casualties of War* (1989))*,* intersects different narrative perspectives on a singular event to present to his audience a multifaceted and more realistic image of this 'video/laptop' war. Shot like a fictional documentary, the film's plot was inspired by true events in Mahmudiyah, Iraq, in 2006, where U.S. soldiers gang-raped a 14-year old girl and then murdered her and her family before setting fire to their home. The case was not made public until one of the soldiers revealed the crimes to an army counsellor. A violent retaliation from the Mujahadeen followed,

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[81] Stephanie Zacharek, 'The Valley of Elah review' *Salon.com*, 14th September 20017 http://www.salon.com/2007/09/14/elah/ (accessed 12th December 2013)
[82] Stephen Hunter 'In the Valley of Elah review' *The Washington Post,* 14th September 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/gog/movies/in-the-valley-of-elah,1135368.html (accessed 13th December 2013)
[83] A.O.Scott, 'Seeking Clues to a Son's Death and a War's meaning', *The New York Times,* 14th September 2007 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/14/movies/14elah.html?_r=0 (accessed 14th December 2013)

who released videos that depicted the executions of the American soldiers who perpetrated the initial killings.

In De Palma's film, the names of the soldiers were changed, though the rest of the story remains closely tied to the events in Mahmudiyah. The group of soldiers are stationed at a camp near a neighbouring Iraqi town and are tasked with surveying traffic at a checkpoint during the day. The work they do is tedious, and the soldiers are not enthusiastic about or motivated by the conflict but are instead disillusioned by the war and the reasons for why they fight it. Politics are not discussed (in fact they are actively discouraged) and De Palma generally portrays the soldiers as frustrated, somewhat racist, dehumanised, detached and act without shame or remorse. Tensions progressively rise, and after their leave is denied, which is then compounded by the death of a respected superior to an IED, the men inevitably lose control and attack, rape, and murder the young Iraqi girl who regularly passed by their checkpoint every day. They cover up the assault and try to blame it as the result of Shiite and Sunny tensions, even though other locals know exactly what happened and who is to blame. The US government and Army both deny any involvement or knowledge of the matter; this obtuse behaviour leads to the kidnapping and execution of one of the main characters by the Mujahadeen Shura Council[84]. The film ends with one of the soldiers (McCoy), in the presence of his wife and friends, suddenly admitting to the crime. Everyone at the table turns away from him and his admission.

The characters of the soldiers in the film are from various ethnic backgrounds; Latino, black and white. They also originate from different social stratas: lower, middle, upper class, highly educated, and educated to a poor standard. These differences among colleagues feel all the more realistic and authentic by De Palma using non-professional actors in his cast. However the U.S. soldiers are not the only characters De Palma focuses his attention on. He mixes documentary and blog footage, youtube clips, security footage, handheld videos taken by US soldiers, Iraqi civilians, insurgents and news broadcasts (latterly from CNN and Al Jazeera). These visual fragments, taken from different outlooks provide the film with a broader wealth of

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[84] The Shura Council is to an Umbrella Organisation of at least six Sunni insurgent groups, taking part in the insurgency against the U.S.

opinions, perspectives, and images than other depictions concerning a similar plotline. In her article 'Logistics of Perception', Patricia Pisters explains:

> Each narrative event in *Redacted* is presented on one or other type of screen, telling the story quite literally as a battle of screens…most important is that all these different screens are related to different aspects of the battle. They show fragments and perspectives of the whole narrative, which makes it important to both distinguish between the screens, as well as to understand the communications between them.[85]

It is a very intriguing way of presenting a visual narrative and seems to effectively allow De Palma to demonstrate to his audience how the reporting around the Iraq War differs in many ways to the way the Vietnam War was presented by contemporary media outlets. In the Iraq war, it is possible to find and view footage from a diverse array of sources, rather than just television. If both Vietnam and the Gulf War were purely TV wars, then the Iraq War belongs to the internet age: seen and reported from a laptop screen or a mobile phone. This narrative structure featuring different narrative strands is one of the characteristics that makes *Redacted* such an interesting study within the war genre, as it breaks convention with the genre's traditional narrative forms; McSweeney states 'This fragmented approach destabilises and ruptures the subjective spectatorial position that films like *Act of Valour* and *The Hurt Locker* work so diligently to reinforce.'[86]

Released in 2007, the film was meant as a companion piece to *Casualties of War,* and premiered at the Venice Film festival where it won the Silver Lion prize for best director. However, with a budget of 5 million dollars and a limited release, the film was a commercial failure and received mixed reactions from critics. If we look at the film's international critical reaction, in the UK for example *The Guardian* reviewer Peter Bradshaw gave the film 4 out of 5 stars, called it 'the most controversial picture about that conflict' and concluded that 'De Palma may win no new fans with *Redacted.* But he has intuited something about the nausea, fear and hopelessness of the Iraq war in its long endgame.'[87] *The Telegraph* analysed the film through De

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[85] Patricia Pisters, 'Logistics of Perception 2.0: Multiple Screen Aesthetics in Iraq War Films', *Film-Philosophy 14.1,* University of Amsterdam, 2010, p. 241

[86] McSweeney, T. *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second,* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburg, 2014), p.76

[87] Bradshaw, P. '*Redacted* review', *The Guardian,* 14th March 2008, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/mar/14/drama (accessed February 2014)

Palma's direction, (who is no newcomer to controversy) and the review, written by David Gritten, states that although the film was not well received in his home country, (something De Palma seems to care little about), it is fact that the majority of the US population do not seem to care about the conflict as the director believes they should[88]. In France, the film was generally applauded for its mise-en-scene and use of 'faux-footage' to deliver a potent message about the reality of the war in Iraq. It even made the well-respected *Cahiers du Cinema* magazine's top films of 2008.

Back in the US the division liking the film and loathing it was much wider than any found in Europe. *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times* both found the film messy, repulsive, anti-American, and a work that could imperil the lives of US servicemen abroad. Calling it an 'awful aberration'[89] and 'so naïve, it's an embarrassment'[90], the film was also panned nationwide on Fox News presenter Bill O'Reilly's show, who went on to accuse De Palma and producer Mark Cuban of treason and with the intent of putting US forces at risk in Iraq. In contrast, other critics applauded De Palma's message in *Redacted.* Roger Ebert commented:

> The result of the film is shocking, saddening and frustrating. The latest polls show that the great majority of the American public has withdrawn its approval from the war and its architects. Why should it be a mystery that the Iraqis do not love us?...Yes they are killing us, too, but they live there, and we went a great distance for our appointment in Samarrah.[91]

With *The Hurt Locker* winning at the 2010 Oscars and the war entering its closing stages, Hollywood's willingness to produce and distribute films critical of the conflict seemed to dissipate. To identify nuanced intellectual comment on the situation in Iraq, one that could humanise Iraqis and equally pity the plight of the US ground troops, the subgenre of the documentary rose to pre-eminence as the mouth piece to voice

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[88] Gritten, D. 'Brian De Palma: Veteran Comes out all Guns Blazing' *The Telegraph,* 7th March, 2008
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/starsandstories/3671650/Brian-de-Palma-Veteran-comes-out-all-guns-blazing.html?mobile=basic (accessed February 2014)
[89] Morgenstern, J. 'Old English goes New Hollywood in Epic 'Beowulf': High-Tech wizardry makes classic sing; Redacted is dismal', updated 16th November 2007, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119517337319395051 (accessed February 2008)
[90] Author not mentioned, '*Redacted* review', 21st November 2008, http://www.ew.com/article/2007/11/21/redacted (accessed on February 2008)
[91]Ebert, R. 'Redacted review', *RoberEbert.com,* 15th November 2007, http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/redacted-2007 (accessed February 2008)

such opinions. Paul Greengrass' *Green Zone* (2010), starring Matt Damon and Greg Kinnear is the most well known of the productions post Bigelow's film, after which the critics of the war fell into silence. What were the reasons for this drop off in disputation? Polls indicated that Americans no longer approved of their presence in Iraq and Afghanistan after 2007. In a Gallup poll (conducted from 2007 to 2010) the question of whether the US had made a mistake by going into Iraq was consistently answered with over 50% of those polled agreeing it was a mistake, and supporters of continued occupation did not number over 44%[92]. So how is it possible that after 2007, there was no film that reflected this disillusionment that so many Americans evidently felt?

An answer to this lies within the changing context of the war and the contentious political climate in the US. When *Haditha, Redacted, In the Valley of Elah, Rendition* and *Lions for Lambs* were released, though commercially unsuccessful, these films still offered a reflection of the troubling situation that was developing equally at home and abroad. With their films they tackled three major challenges; firstly, the beginning of the insurgency in Iraq and the US reaction to it, secondly the uncertainty and scrambling for an exit strategy in Washington and finally, the failing standards in the US forces and their subsequent scandals uncovered by the media. It is necessary to hold these three factors in mind in relation to the previous films discussed. By doing so a continued analysis of the development of the genre (how it represents changes in Iraq, Washington, and in the US military) is given greater clout. If we look at the state of Iraq after the 2003 invasion, and President Bush's announcement that the mission was accomplished, it is now common knowledge that the original aims outlined by the US government were never truly accomplished. Late 2003 and early 2004 saw a rise in US casualties in Iraq and the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad made it clear that the security offered by the military and the police were never truly accomplished. 'As the insurgency grew in strength, John Abizaid (US head of CENTCOM[93]) asked his staff to determine just whom the American-led coalition was

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[92] http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm
[93] CENTCOM: Central Command

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fighting.[94]Abizaid openly contradicted Donald Rumsfeld in a press conference, describing the US as confronted with a "classical guerrilla-type campaign" instead of just minor and dispersed pockets of resistance. With attacks continuing to rise, US officials based in Baghdad started recognising that though US troops had not been present, insurgents had been active for a long time, a fact that they had been completely unaware of. This complicated things for the administration's plans of establishing an Iraqi government and devising a viable exit strategy.

At the same time problems with regards to the general Iraqi population began to increase. After 2004, well after the insurgency was under way, the relationship between soldiers and civilians began to decline rapidly, especially after international companies started employing military contractors to protect their assets in Iraq. This tense environment fuelled by misunderstanding and self-interest, proved an effective breeding ground for insurgents and resentful civilians. Unemployment ran rampant, numbers swelling by the men fired from the Iraqi Army, after Paul Bremmer, US appointed governor of Iraq, disbanded the standing army, republican guard, and other branches of the existing Iraqi military. As a result of mismanagement and failure to recognise the insurgency as an organised cohesive movement rather than disparate bands of agitators, the country descended into chaos. Iraq remained in a state of civil war from 2006 to 2007. Rival Shia and Sunni Muslim factions heightened the violence, which led to 'The Surge' in 2007; the deployment of larger numbers of US troops in Baghdad and the Anbar province to maximise and consolidate security. This change in policy was met with virulent criticism amongst the members of the Democratic Party and according to a *Washington Post* poll, 52% of American citizens were avidly against this new policy[95].

This then makes it pertinent to re-evaluate the political climate in Washington, and the US to a broader extent, contemporary to these developments in Iraq. Whereas the invasion of Iraq was initially sold to the American public astutely, the national mood

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[94] Michael, R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: the Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq from G. W. Bush to Barack Obama*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2012) p. 19

[95] Coen, J. & Balz, D. 'Poll: Most Americans opposed to Bush's Iraq War plan', *The Washington Post,* January 11th, 2007 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/11/AR2007011100282.html (accessed on January 2014)

in 2005 had already begun to shift dramatically against the conflict and the US's involvement in the Middle East. Earlier polls (conducted from 2003 to 2005) indicated that the majority of Americans supported the invasion and removal of Saddam Hussein, who was believed to be hiding weapons of mass-destruction. Yet in 2005, a year after the insurgency had begun, the polls for the first time started reflecting opposition to the war[96]. The general populace in the US that took the survey ranked Iraq in what they considered among the lower priorities to be dealt with, the US economy being the first one. This poll result remained the prevalent opinion within the US population till the end of the war while in Washington the government started focusing on domestic and economic issues. The handling of the end of the conflict was still under discussion among politicians, and was a pivotal subject to the 2008 Presidential campaign, where Barack Obama pledged a swift exit from the region and a permanent end to the war, also placing an emphasis on the continued combating of terrorism in Afghanistan.

With the portrayal of the insurgency in Iraq and the negative public reaction to the US troop surge, the other main subject the 2007 Iraq war films reflect, is the state of the US Army, both in terms of internal structure and recruitment. It has to be remembered that the Iraq war was fought with an all-volunteer army, unlike Vietnam, the health of the recruitment process is of fundamental importance. However, under Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the institution went through many changes, including a lowering of recruitment standards (in terms of physical and mental health, as well as social background), which negatively impacted the behaviour of some US troops during their deployment. Matt Kennard, a journalist for *The Guardian* newspaper pursued a story about the modern US Army and the conduct of its soldiers. He details about the transformation of the US Army after Vietnam, stating that at the end of the Southeast Asian conflict the US military was a broken institution that had to be rebuilt from the ground up[97]. After 20 years of restructuring and evolution, the army implemented extremely high recruitment entry standards and became the professional institution it had aimed to become. However, with the end of the Cold War and the

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[96] Milbank, D. & Deane C. 'Polls Find Dimmer View on Iraq War', *The Washington Post,* June 8th, 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/07/AR2005060700296.html (accessed on January 2014)
[97] Kennard, M. *Irregular Army*, (Verso publications: London, 2012), p. 201

realisation that the new threats facing the United States were asymmetrical (with an unclear enemy and no geographical boundaries) and not confined to one nation, for conservatives like Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the need for the military to modernize in a cost effective manner were of paramount importance.

Matt Kennard questions the actual effectiveness of an all-volunteer army, especially during such an unpopular war as Iraq. 'Irregular Army' is the first work of this magnitude on this particular subject. His main argument focuses on the US Army, primarily after the 2004 Iraq invasion and points out that to facilitate sending in more soldiers, standards of recruitment were dropped to the extent where racist extremists, gang members, convicted felons, addicts and mentally disabled men and women were allowed entrance into the military with terrible consequences both overseas and domestically. Politicians like Donald Rumsfeld are Kennard's prime targets, as well as the Department of Defense that he claims were aware of the potential pitfalls such an approach could engender, and failed to offer any potential solution. Kennard explains to *Warscapes Magazine* editor Michael Busch in an interview for the *Huffington Post*; 'What was implemented during the War on Terror was a massive restructuring of the Pentagon under the aegis of Donald Rumsfeld, who had this plan to eviscerate the civilian US military and replace it with private contractors'[98] (such as Blackwater and Dyncorp).

The reason this book is of significance is because it investigates the internal problems the U.S. Army has encountered in recent years; problems that affected active service men on tour. According to Kennard the watershed years appear to be 2003-2005, after President Bush's 'Mission Accomplished' speech on the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1st, 2003. The year 2005 was when recruitment targets were missed by the largest margin since 1979 and when waivers became more commonplace for accepting new recruits[99]. 'Moral' and 'medical' waivers were initially used to absolve any past mistakes or behavior the recruit may have on their record; misdemeanours as assault and drug abuse. These waivers were presented as giving potential recruits a

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[98] Busch, M. 'Irregular Army': A Conversation with Matt Kennard, *The Huffington Post,* 26th Aug. 2013 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-busch/irregular-army-book_b_3135051.html (accessed on the 10.08.14)
[99] Kennard, M. *Irregular Army*, (Verso publications: London, 2012), p.82

start at redemption by allowing them to serve their country[100]. From 2004 onwards, Kennard shows how convicted felons, or people found guilty of serious transgressions or having drug-related convictions increasingly joined the ranks of the US army. Additionally some recruiting stations were extremely ill equipped and poorly trained to recognize Neo-Nazis and gang members by either their tattoos or affiliations.

Kennard attributes most of the atrocities perpetuated in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of the lowering of entry standards; pointing out that the soldiers guilty of these war crimes were not qualified for active duty or even to serve in the military altogether[101]. Most of the soldiers that were convicted of such crimes whilst on duty, already held civilian criminal records or possessed a history of mental instability and violence. Too often these histories only surfaced in the public domain at trial, leaving Kennard to lament:

> So what we have now is a military that is not held up as an exemplar of professionalism around the world, but as an example of what happens to a military when there aren't enough troops and the government is too scared to institute conscription.[102]

This situation, identified by Kennard, failed to go unnoticed with journalists and government officials; who equally see this increase in this trend, and the poisonous results the failure to maintain high standards of recruitment and even proper healthcare for US service personnel come to fruition. For those soldiers on the field on courses of anti-depressants, or battling alcoholism and those who upon returning to their home turn to radical extremism, the potential catastrophic results are starting to become public knowledge[103]. A recent example of the type of ramifications this has given rise to, is the mass shooting of 13 people in the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. by Aaron Alexis, a member of the US Navy since 2007. Alexis was involved in a prior shooting incident that under former recruitment guidelines would have excluded

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[100] Ibid, p. 74
[101] Ibid, p. 72-76
[102] Busch, M. 'Irregular Army': A Conversation with Matt Kennard, *The Huffington Post,* 26th Aug. 2013 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-busch/irregular-army-book_b_3135051.html , (accessed on the 10.08.13)
[103] Trotta, D., 'U.S. Military Battling White Supremacists, Neo-Nazis In Its Own Ranks', *The Huffington Post,* 21st Aug. 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/21/us-army-white-supremacists_n_1815137.html, (Accessed on 11th Sept. 2013)

his entry into the army; yet at the time the navy was handing out waivers to reach their recruitment targets. According to the *Huffington Post*, 2007 was the year the military enlisted 909 recruits with felony convictions, even cases of drug addictions and child molestation[104]. According to Kennard, this trend has resulted in not only creating dangerous, combat-ready criminals in the United States, but has hastened the capitulation of the US professional army as a respected institution.

With an army in such a desperate need of manpower, allowing so many questionable individuals to become personnel, it is no surprise that from the start of the invasion there have been cases of violence against unarmed Iraqi civilians, (though most remain unreported and/or covered up). The *Washington Post* conducted an investigation from 2003 to early 2006 and found that

> (…) Though experts estimate that thousands of Iraqi civilians have died at the hands of U.S. forces, only 39 service members were formally accused in connection with the deaths of 20 Iraqis from 2003 to early this year. Twenty-six of the 39 troops were initially charged with murder, negligent homicide or manslaughter; 12 of them ultimately served prison time for any offense.[105]

These trends are reflected in films like *Redacted* and they are the pivotal themes of the Iraq War films that wish to ignite the critical faculties of their audience when thinking of the conflict. In the years leading up to, and after the exit of the US army from Iraq, these themes started to vanish from the dissenting narratives and the questions these films asked again changed, reflecting even more contemporary concerns. The question ceased to be 'Why are we here?' but 'What are we still doing here?' The soldier is no longer seen as the patriot, but rather an impressionable individual who, with no particular direction in life, saw serving in the army as both a legitimate career choice, one that can provide them with personal validation. The enemy, though still stereotyped and regularly represented as evil doers, have been given a voice; a voice that exhibits intelligence, that often provides justification for

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[104]Wood, D. 'Aaron Alexis Enlisted in Navy During Period of Criminal Record Waivers', *The Huffington Post,* 17th Sept. 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/17/aaron-alexis-navy_n_3941851.html?ir=Politic

[105] White, J. Lane C. Tate J. 'Homicide Charges Rare in Iraq War', *The Washington Post,* 28th August 2006 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/27/AR2006082700770.html (accessed September 2013)

action, whether reprehensible or not. These are significant changes, particularly considering that the American characters in these films have ceded their superiority and have realised that their mission in the Middle East is not always motivated by righteous intentions.

The films discussed in this chapter aim to portray both the operations in Iraq and the war on terror in a critical light, though they fall short of sparking a concrete debate about both conflicts through vague dialogue or the evasion of certain subjects (as will be made clear later on). It was surprising to find so few examples of films that, after *The Hurt Locker'*s release, raised this topic. But after the dismal commercial and critical track record of previous Iraq War films, the subgenre was viewed as one without a core audience, and whose narrative all too familiar with audiences both domestically and on an international scale. Both films have female protagonists and both hope to show the lives of both women and men in the war on terror and what each person does to remain effective but also to remain sane after what they witness. Additionally, this chapter aims to show that a person who is a part of the US military, his role is not just summarised as entering the combat zone and defeating the enemy, like we saw in the previous chapter. It also includes intelligence gathering, following strict guidelines within a rigid Operating procedure and a lot of time is spent just on waiting. Unlike Kyle, this is not a linear narrative that involves a rotation of deployment-family-deployment-family. The life of a soldier within the war on terror in a lot more complex, as it will be shown in this chapter.

Bigelow's follow-up to *The Hurt Locker, Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow: 2012), was an attempt at portraying the realities facing the US as it wages war against terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. But rather than asking prodding questions and highlighting the inadequacies of the chosen approaches to this fight, Bigelow employs cinematic techniques that reduce her subject into the pursuit for unobtainable closure and justice. The film opens with a black screen, the cries of the victims of 9/11 audible in the background. In essence Bigelow presents 9/11 as the opening chapter in her narrative about the war on terror. Via this initial scene, Bigelow intends to remind her audience why the war on terror must be fought and with its ultimate purpose being the protection of America and its people. The scene then cuts to events two years later (2003) in an undisclosed black site (akin to a safe house) where the distinct first lines of dialogue heard are 'I own you Ammar. You belong to me. Look at me. If you don't

look at me when I talk to you, I'm gonna hurt you. If you step off this matt, I am gonna hurt you. If you lie to me, I am gonna hurt you!'; these words are screamed by interrogator Dan (Jason Clarke) to the moneyman (Reda Kateb) for the 9/11 hijackers. Bigelow elects to immediately introduce her audience to the necessary (and violent) process of interrogative torture in order to attain the requisite information to capture the people responsible for the very cries heard at the beginning of the film.

Positioned in the scene's background is the film's protagonist, CIA agent Maya (Jessica Chastain), who is eventually tasked with leading the manhunt to find and kill Osama Bin Laden, aided by other agents and Special Ops. Her character is entirely fictional, placed into the world of the War on Terror, one she fights relentlessly. In many ways she is the personification of the American people; questing for justice (revenge) for the attacks on the Twin Towers. It is intimated that Maya has a family; glimpses of desktop screensavers of her smiling alongside someone offer evidence of such a possibility, yet the two most memorable characteristics that define her character is her gender and job. Inspired by the real CIA agent Alfreda Frances Bukowski who headed the Bin Laden Issue station, Maya is one of the few women in the film, along with Jessica (Jennifer Ehle) and Debbie (Jessie Collins), though she does not seem to want her gender acknowledged by the men around her. After being asked about her personal life, whether she would consider dating, Maya shrugs the question off with a smile, implying that even the concept of dating sounds ridiculous to her. She is a woman shown going to Black Ops sites, taking part in violent interrogations and screaming and swearing at her male superiors. Her use of coarse and direct language confirms to the audience that she is as tough as any man that shares the screen with her. When asked during a meeting discussing Bin Laden's whereabouts who she is, she answers 'I'm the motherfucker that found this place, sir.' Using that noun sounds strange, and even takes some of the men in the room aback, yet that is Maya's way of asserting her identity among them as an agent, not a female agent. What Mark Boal's writing seems to communicate to the audience is that Maya's gender is not important to the story and that her femininity is a relatively unimportant issue, compared to the other facets of her character. More effort is put into showing her passion for her job and her dedication to her mission than anything else.

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When CIA director (James Gandolfini) asks her about what else she has achieved while working for the Agency, she replies 'Nothing. I have done nothing else'. An elicited answer that not only indicates her dedication to the job, but also her dedication to her country. Maya has seemingly sacrificed professional and personal advancement for the sake of her country and to be able to provide it with closure with regards to its darkest moment. After Osama Bin Laden is killed in his compound in Abbottabad, she boards a plane home and the camera pans to a close up of her face. Positioned right in the middle of the frame; bathed in the light of dawn, the camera lingers on her while she slowly loses her calm demeanor and starts sobbing. Bigelow denies an explanation of this shot- the audience is left to question whether Maya is relieved or simply does not know where to go from here, after successfully completing her life's goal. Then the camera fades to black.

During the search for Osama Bin Laden, Maya is pitted against various obstacles. Most originate from within the US, namely the bureaucrats and politicians that have become disinterested in the continuation of this particular manhunt, suggesting that they are reluctant to remember 9/11, the effective catalyst for the War on Terror. Over the course of Maya's investigations, other terrorist attacks are shown, such as in Saudi Arabia and London (which are based on real attacks), suggesting that while the US is losing the war on terror, at least Maya remains fixed in achieving the aim of her mission by eradicating the roots of all this violence. In an argument with her station chief Joseph Bradley (Kyle Chandler) amidst uncovering the Times Square bombing attempt, she pushes him to reconsider her leads on Bin Laden, and he replies 'I don't fucking care about bin Laden' A sentiment that was also mirrored by President Bush (although not quite in the same forceful vernacular) six months after the 9/11 attacks at a press conference[106]. Maya however is adamant that this hunt, though it might not eliminate the current threats of al-Qaeda, must be carried out to its full bloody conclusion. When she finally locates UBL[107], she is frustrated with the repeated delays that the upper echelons of the Agency continually throw up, obstructing the disposal of this threat. Diplomacy and International relations further complicate the

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[106] Reynolds, M. 'Bush 'Not Concerned' About Bin Laden in '02', *The Los Angeles Times,* 14th October 2004, http://articles.latimes.com/2004/oct/14/nation/na-osama14 (accessed September 2015)
[107] Diminutive for Osama Bin Laden

issue, a matter Bigelow and writer Mark Boal stress by highlighting Maya's frustration at the number of days that pass between the discovery of Bin Laden and the eventual move to action.

Despite its reputation for attempting realism and telling the truth about how the US is waging war against the terror, this film proves to be completely unapologetic about its treatment of prisoners and its use of torture. Bigelow and Mark Boal have repeatedly maintained that their film was meant to spark a debate about the legitimate use of torture and to re-examine America's role in the World as not just a military power particularly with reference to the US's status as the moral global arbiter. This is made obvious when during a scene that features an interrogation to try and find one of UBL's courriers, the prisoner states 'I have no wish to be tortured again. Ask me any question and I will answer it', a response that signifies the success of such an extreme process in combating terrorism. The same methodology is shown on other occasions; Maya repeatedly makes progress through information extracted by torture. Contrary to the fictional account, in reality it has been proven that the hunt for Bin Laden was never reliant on torture. Jane Mayer from *The New Yorker* wrote

> […] Contrary to self-serving accounts of C.I.A. officers implicated in the interrogation program, senators with access to the record say that torture did not produce the leads that led to finding and killing bin Laden.[108]

Scandalous incidents and ineffective policies, contemporary to the setting of the film, are not analysed in depth, but are relegated to the background. President Obama appears on *Sixty Minutes* and declares on national TV that the US does not torture, while the torturers barely look up at the television and do not pass comment on the apparent hypocrisy. The CIA officer nicknamed The Wolf (Fredric Lehne) states that 'Abu Ghraib and Gitmo fucked us'. This implies that he feels that scandal and here say have hindered their progress; whilst George (Mark Strong) talks about prisoners who were allowed legal representation in Guantanamo Bay being member of the al Qaeda network. The purpose of this film, according to Bigelow, was to encourage debate about the detainee program and its practices, whereas in effect it serves to unapologetically justify the use of corporal punishment. Because of the success rate of

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[108] Mayer, J. 'Zero Conscience in "Zero Dark Thirty"', *The New Yorker,* 14th December 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/zero-conscience-in-zero-dark-thirty (accessed May 2015)

this brutal methodology of extracting information, it outweighs any Liberal outrage, and affirms it as a viable tool in winning the War on Terror.

Zero Dark Thirty, while dubious in its politics when it comes to torture, aims to show how the war on terror is truly fought. Though many can consider it as a film not belonging to the war genre, is it is set within a war and its participants, though a part of the central Intelligence Agency, are a kind of soldier, fighting in their own way. Its soldiers are not like Marcus Luttrell, or Chris Kyle. They are like Maya; unassuming, determined, ready to sacrifice their personal lives and constantly on the hunt for threats. Having a woman as the main character adds to the film's original portrayal of the soldier, however it is interesting to see the character reject their gender in order to appear more effective. This can also be seen in this chapter's second study as well.

More recently, a film that offers direct criticism of the war in Iraq (and the War on Terror) or at least attempts to open up a discussion around the nature of it is *Camp X-Ray* (Sattler: 2015). It stars Kristen Stewart, Peyman Moaadi, and Lane Garrison, and details everyday life in Guantanamo Bay from the perspective of a young woman, though in this instance her gender is not completely set aside like Maya's. The reason why this film's inclusion in this dissertation is its inclination to challenge some established war genre conventions by its use of visuals, and making its protagonist a woman interacting with a detainee, outside of a war zone, in what the audience can deem a safe environment for her, unlike in previous films like *Zero Dark Thirty*.

Where the film deviates most from the traditional war genre is in its choice for both leads in the film: a woman and a detainee. This is a very different narrative angle from those of other films, such as *Boys of Abu Ghraib* (Moran: 2014). Luke Moran's film deals with similar themes, chiefly the morality/ immorality of torture, and the overall US goal (or lack of) in the War in Iraq. This particular film is a fictional account of the development of the Abu Ghraib scandal (2003) and the soldiers involved. It reaffirms the traditional gender roles of the war genre, with the men going to war whilst their wives/girlfriends at home, awaiting their return. In contrast *Camp X-Ray* is a fictionalised account of the life of a guard, Private First Class Amy Cole (Kristen Stewart), working in Guantanamo Bay and her daily interactions with detainees, particularly Ali (Peyman Moaadi). By his own account he has been proven entirely innocent, but cannot be released due to his status as a detainee of

Guantanamo Bay precluding any country from offering him a home. As their relationship gradually develops into friendship, the film attempts to portray their interactions from varying angles and because of this it refuses to apportion blame to either party. In its understated way, *Camp X-Ray* offers a greater critical account of the War on Terror than earlier films (Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* or Moran's *Boys of Abu Ghraib*) because instead of depicting the much-publicised horror of Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib, it instead chooses to focus on a human interaction as its narrative centrepiece. Bigelow almost insists on making her audience uncomfortable when shooting a torture scene, but this feeling of unease is almost negated when characters that suffer torture are eventually found to be accomplices of Bin Laden. Their confessions, elicited under extreme duress, ultimately lead to UBL's downfall. In contrast *Camp X-Ray* moves away from such images that became symbolic of national degradation and shame, and elects instead to look at the microcosm that is the daily existence of Guantanamo Bay and the individuals who endure it: the detainees and their guards. It attempts to catalogue their verbal interactions, rather than luridly detail shocking scenes of torture. By using this approach, one that documents the gruelling routine and monotony that exists in such detention camps, it is possible to shed light on the inception of violence via continued misunderstandings across cultural borders.

The film opens with the destruction of the Twin Towers (in a televised news broadcast), an image that by now, as we have seen, signifies the starting point to every narrative regarding the War on Terror. The broadcast is shown in Arabic, it is dated from 2002, and concerns the development of Bush's foreign policy with regards to Afghanistan and Iraq. There are a series of seemingly random shots of US soldiers somewhere in the desert setting that recount the beginning of military action in Afghanistan. The television is located in a room that contains minimal detail; the curtains are drawn, leaving no visual clue for the audience to orientate themselves by. Through the open window the laughter of children can be heard, indistinct Arabic is spoken and an imam begins the call to prayers. Judging by the weather and the clothes lying around, it would be a reasonable assumption that this room is located somewhere in the Middle East, though nothing more specific is given to us. A man then enters the room and empties the contents of a plastic bag on a nearby table, revealing at least five cellular phones (the significance of that action is never fully

explained) although it reasonable to assume these could be burner phones (disposable and untraceable phones). The man is arrested in his home while he prays, a bag is based over his head, and after a succession of short transitional sequences (showing us parts of his transfer through air and overseas), the bag is removed. He is there forced to endure severe beating and after its conclusion is locked in a cage along with other inmates who have likely suffered similar punishment. It is dark; the frame solely lit with harsh artificial light, faint music plays in the background it stands in stark contrast to the domestic setting we were privy to earlier. What is of interest in the opening sequence is that it is the introduction of the character, which later transpires to be Ali. We do not learn until much later that he is one of the central characters of the film. The audience if left to piece together clues about his character from visual onscreen markers. The events of the opening scene, the 9/11 imagery shown on the television screen, the sound of children playing (suggestive of a family neighbourhood), the limited light, the ululation to prayer, are all indicators toward a particular setting- one that is of comfort, security, and located somewhere in the Middle East. With the introduction of a particular action (the cache of cellular phones) hint that figure who occupies the seemingly unremarkable domicile could in fact be hiding secrets. Yet during his transfer to Guantanamo, there is no explicatory dialogue suggesting his guilt. The speed of the unravelling of events allows the audience to believe that he is a figure of the highest suspicion. This feeling is heightened when viewing the actual chronology of events in greater detail. 2002 signified the opening of Guantanamo Bay but Donald Rumsfeld and his office. The following scene reveals that the man later known as Ali was one of the first inmates in the facility.

The following scene is set eight years later (2010), and shows a new group of guards arriving at Guantanamo. The film does not explicitly mention the scandals that have occurred in the facility since 2004 to either these new recruits of the audience. Coercive methods of torture including, both sexual and physical abuse are glossed over. It is unclear if any of the guards have prior knowledge of these scandals, or even if they do, there is no debate or discussion about it. Instead director Peter Sattler invites his audience to engage in the debate through observing his characters and their actions. Corp. Ransdell (Lane Garisson) introduces the soldiers to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), which includes suicide watch every three minutes for each detainee. 'Do not let that repetition lower your guard!' barks Ransdell, though as

we shall see it is the very repetition of that routine that sets the narrative into motion for the characters in this narrative. In the same scene we are introduced to PFC Amy Cole (Kristen Stewart), who alongside Ali, is the other principal character of the film. The shot that introduces her to us features a close up of the back of her head, her nametag positioned prominently the centre of frame. Sattler chooses to introduce her as a name and in so doing denies the audience knowledge of her gender. When Cole is revealed to be female it is a surprising and satisfactorily novel. She is easily the shortest of the new recruits and equally appears to be the youngest.

Cole's appearance is of professional disciplined neatness, accentuated by the regimental military uniform she is almost constantly dressed in. Her tightly assembled bun, her face, and her hands (all physical/ feminine features) are what the camera lingers on. We only see Cole in civilian clothing twice, throughout the entire duration of the film. Firstly in a scene when she holds a Skype conversation with her mother; and secondly when she is joins the rest of her squad on a fishing trip and then later at a frat-style party at the barracks. In both cases, Cole is visibly less comfortable, either with her appearance or with her surroundings. In contrast PFC Mary Winters (Tara Holt), the other woman in her squad, appears to relish dressing down, enjoys flirting with the men, and is in fact never seen working a shift. Even when dressed in uniform, Winters' behaviour does not adopt suitably austere manner, one more befitting the nature and atmosphere of her work, but instead remains carefree and flirtatious. Unlike Maya's denial of her femininity and her personal life, Cole, while uncomfortable with it, still attempts to express it. At the start of the film, in order to prove to her male counterparts that she is tough, she volunteers to contain a difficult prisoner and gets punched in the process. She spends time fishing, a traditionally male dominated pastime, and can beat people at drinking games. She attempts to flirt with men and almost had sex with Ransdell, though does not go through with it. Mary Winters on the other hand uses her gender to carry favour with the rest of the soldiers and it is made evident that she has had at least one sexual encounter with Ransdell. *Camp X-Ray*'s contrasting female soldiers offer interesting insight into how gender can either be concealed or fully expressed and how this can influence the character's interactions with others. Because of Cole's refusal to be characterised solely as female, she distances herself from her compatriots who view her as such, and grows

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closer to Ali, who uses non gender-specific nouns to call out to his guards like 'guys', 'mop-top' and 'blondie'.

The slow revelation of her physical appearance is matched by the gradual unveiling of Cole's back-story. Details are introduced piecemeal through her interactions with others, like her mother, other squad members, her superior officers and finally erstwhile Ali. Through these interaction we learn that she has been deployed once before, (the precise location is never disclosed), and is planning on a second tour, is single, and due to her small-town origins has received more moderate education and has never travelled outside of the US for leisure. She describes her hometown as 'getting smaller everyday'. Her reasoning for joining the military is simply, 'I wanted to do something important', which resonates with dreadful irony once we are introduced to the routine of the facility.

As a character, Cole is reminiscent of Clarice Starling from *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme: 1991), a role that Sattler appears to have taken inspiration from when writing his film. She is young, somewhat naïve, has started a new assignment, and is physically less imposing than other female soldiers brought to life in film (see Demi Moore in Ridley Scott's *G.I. Jane*, 1997). Like Starling, Cole is also on the surface at least in the position of power with regards to the detainees, but is equally challenged and questioned by an erudite prisoner, in this case Ali. When their interactions begin, she is presented as slightly ignorant and is an inveterate stereotyper; assuming Ali was from a country that banned books and films, that his only reading is the Qur'an, and that he believes in the glorious afterlife afforded to the martyr. It must be said however that Cole is not presented as unique in holding these preconceived notions and it is apparent that other of her contemporaries feel the same way.

In another hint at *Silence of the Lambs,* Sattler's Guantanamo set is structured not as prison but more as a sterile mental facility, an apt comparison. As Corp. Ransdell gives the new recruits the tour of the nondescript camp they are assigned to, the surrounding colours and dominated by white and grey, and the occasional brighter colour on the detainee cells' doors. Within this dull and almost monochrome environment, Cole comes to realise that her expectations about this job did not match whatsoever the duties she is assigned. When making her rounds, she looks into the

cells of the inmates through a small overture, almost as is peeping into their world from a seemingly secure position.

If we are to read Cole as Clarice Starling, then does this mean that Ali is the screen equivalent of *The Silence of the Lambs'* infamous anti-hero Hannibal Lecter? Over the course of the film, Ali is presented as unreliable and untrustworthy, yet in spite of these factors he does not inspire hate. Like Lecter, Ali is compelling and charismatic, a truly captivating character- one who beguiles both Cole and the audience. In a memorable early exchange with Cole Ali throws a cup of his own faeces at her; a potentially explosive moment of protest which serves to remind both Cole and the audience that Ali, as sympathetic as he seems, is still a prisoner of the US, and by association her enemy. In one of the rare outdoor scenes of the film, when Ali is permitted to play football and Cole stands guard outside the cage where they play, their interaction borders on genuine warmth of feeling. This is punctured by another prisoner and Corp. Ransdell chastising their respective 'countrymen' for being overly familiar with each other.

As discussed above, Ali's first scene in the film depicts his capture and subsequent and imprisonment in Gitmo. Eight years later, still in captivity, his interactions with the guards, though under restriction, touches the antagonistic, irritating and deliberately casual. He makes up nicknames for them (such as 'Blondie' or 'mop top'), and shouts abuse at them, though there is the inescapable feeling that the other detainees, this invective of protest is more from boredom that actual dissent, a view Ali voices: 'You guys, I don't know why you don't like to talk with us. You and us…we are both stuck here. It's boring for the both of us'. Ali, though less overtly aggressive than other detainees, is still their voice, their collective spokesperson, who continuously points injustices done to them in Guantanamo, and the total disregard for their human rights and personal well being. Through his interactions with Cole, we learn that Ali originates from Germany, is university educated, can speak some German and is an avid reader of Emily Dickinson and J.K. Rowling, a stark contrast to Cole's upbringing and education. Sattler's script purposefully restricts Ali's dialogue to include vague information about his life (possibly hinting at a subterfuge? It is never clear) and never really sheds light on the real reason of his imprisonment. There is no explanation to the first scene when Ali is abducted, nothing more concrete emerges from his mention about his university education, and when asked why he is

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in captivity he deflects the question by saying 'I could tell you that I was not with Al-Qaeda or a terrorist, you wouldn't believe me anyway. Nobody believes me here.' With this, Sattler establishes that even though there is doubt whether Ali is innocent or not, he is still a prisoner, ignored by the laws of the Geneva Convention, and with little chance of ever being released. Without any choice left to him, his fate is to live out the rest of his foreseeable future as a mere shell of the human being he once was.

In regards to the rest of the characters, in relation to Amy and Ali, they are hardly given enough screen time to provide them with any real background. As a consequence they degenerate into stereotypes, bringing up clichés such as sexism, racism, and blind patriotism. It is a shame that Sattler settled for characters like 'Randy' Ransdell, and other supporting characters being so one-dimensional in order to shoehorn some lines of dialogue that uncover the polemical topics he wishes to raise in his film. The conversations between Cole and PFC Rico (Joseph Julian Soria) touch upon the events of 9/11 and the mission that they are currently tasked with. Though these scenes do not attain greater significance, as they are only fleeting on screen. In spite of this, Sattler, with his use of dialogue, judiciously gives voice to the polemical subject matter he wishes to raise by making this film.

Apart from the relationship between Cole and Ali, Sattler chooses to spotlight facets of the War on Terror that have received little attention on screen. Sattler's primary objectives in this film are to show the audience the monotonous nature of this daily grind in Guantanamo, a fundamental part of the US's fight against terror. In doing this Sattler is purposefully confounding false expectations most people have when thinking about how the War on Terror is fought, a view quickly disabused through the eyes of new recruits. The central duty the guards perform throughout the film is the suicide watch, which involves the continued checking of detainees in the cells. Other tedious tasks make up their daily routine; the bi-hourly movement of detainees to new cells as a form of punishment, the surveillance of security monitors; the cleaning to cells; distribution of literature; and the collection of any material that could be used for intelligence gathering as a part of the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). 'Seems like a waste of time' says Cole, to which another soldier replies 'Well that also seems to be the SOP around here'. In another instance, we see a soldier in the surveillance centre playing solitaire,

Previous films met with fierce critical reaction towards their partisan positions regarding their objections to the conflicts in the Middle East; whilst more recent films, although still remaining critical, manage to convey a far more nuanced message. Nick Broomfield and Brian De Palma choose to shock through deploying a realistic approach, by utilising known facts about the unsuitable individuals that infiltrated US Army ranks. They employed non-professional actors, and included footage inspired by other media platforms (YouTube, mobile phone recordings etc), and as a result turned away from more archetypal characteristics of the traditional war film, and in so doing created works with greater originality (films that can reflect these conflicts with a more potent realism). In the post-*Hurt Locker* stage of the subgenre however, these voices of dissent started to quieten down and be more reflective. In comparison to the flow of anti-war films produced from 2007 to 2010, the subsequent years saw Hollywood studios turn away from movies that dealt in anti-war themes, in part largely due to poor box office performance.

Whilst more and more successful documentary films critical about the war, were being released, some directors and writers elected to depict other facets of soldiers' lives, in an attempt to not only bring greater realism to the subject, but to also advance the genre towards a more fitting contemporary direction. Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* wants to show that, in particular, through the character of Maya, and along with the other field agents she works with, that they are the true grunts on the ground; they are the individuals who deliver discernable results and tangible victories in this new method of waging war. This leads to the conclusion that a film like *Zero Dark Thirty* can be considered a new type of entry in the war genre. *Camp X-Ray* can equally be considered a war film, even though it wholly takes place on American soil (Guantanamo Bay), and does not include a single instance of what would be termed 'traditional' combat. Despite this Kristen Stewart's character is a soldier and so are her other comrades stationed at the military base. The job they perform, and its attendant duties have radically changed; instead of active combat in the field they now instead act as glorified wardens, ensuring that their wards do not commit suicide. Bigelow and Sattler's films offer a contradictory viewpoint to the fantastical epic narratives that the films of Berg and Eastwood portray. Instead Bigelow and Sattler suggest that the fight that gains victories in this new era of warfare, is not that which is physically fought in battle, one with a definite conclusion, but that which is a

continuous pursuit of the enemy with no clear end in sight. The only end in sight however is that for the traditional depiction of the 'grunt' that we met in the first chapter, a new breed of soldier enters the frame. Enter scene: the gamer.

Chapter 3: New Warfare, new soldier, new genre?

Looking at the different portrayals of the conflict in the Middle East, ranging from the traditional mythic depictions of the soldier in *American Sniper,* to the painfully monotone and uneventful lives of the soldiers in *Camp X-Ray,* there is still one more facet of this conflict that has only now started to appear in Hollywood war films. It is a subject that challenges the very structure of the war genre itself, showing some of its characteristics as not only irrelevant but also as the remnants of a bygone age. By having fewer active troops on the ground, less expenditure, the constant surveillance of suspects, and the remote nature of the fighting, modern warfare usurps the conventional rules of the war genre as we have come to know it. The advent of new technology, the changes in world politics, the global war on terror, all these developments challenge most, if not all, of Basinger's outline discussed at the very start of this study. This final chapter shows that even though there are no ground troops, no enemy country and no consistent narrative structure, the case studies presented are war films. They might challenge some fundamental rules of the genre, however the same can be said about modern warfare challenging traditional methods of fighting. Is a soldier less of a soldier because he flies a drone? Is a war less of a conflict if it is fought in a territory that has not declared war? In this chapter there are some case studies that might not seem like they belong in a study that has thus far focused on widely recognised films belonging to the war genre. The first one, *Body of Lies,* is tagged on IMDB as 'action, drama, and thriller'. The second, *Good Kill,* a film specifically about a drone operator, is tagged as 'Drama, thriller'! Yet, both of them focus on the current war on terror waged by the US in the Middle East. This study believes it is time to recognise films like these as part of the war genre, films that reflect the changing trends in warfare. Prior to the eventual exit of US troops from Iraq, attempts by filmmakers (most notably Ridley Scott) were made to reflect these trends, most evidently by what they conceived as the traditional hallmarks of warfare with newer innovations more commonly seen on screen. This re-orientated focus could be viewed as an attempt to understand, and even to actively question governmental and military institutions over the chosen tactics in waging such an unpopular war.

In Ridley Scott's 2008 film *Body of Lies* the misconceptions of the war on terrorism are pitted against its realities. Scott uses the espionage genre and creates a hybrid film, sharing traits with both spy and war films to show his audience a comparative study of the effectiveness between technological and human-gathered intelligence. This comparison is embodied by the film's two central characters, CIA official Ed Hoffman (Russell Crowe) and his asset on the ground Roger Ferris (Leonardo Di Caprio). Both men are fighting the same war and want the same results, yet the methods they choose to use are polar opposites of on another, a dynamic that underlines a fundamental problem that exists in this fight: Which way is the more effective way to win a war and to rid the world of terrorism? Can it be fought from the sky, with constant surveillance and collection of information or on the ground, by infiltration, culture study and the forging of alliances with the locals? Though the film itself mostly sides with Roger Ferris and his methods, it still posits questions about which direction the war on terror is taking and what kind of new beast it will transform itself into with the advent of global satellite and drone surveillance.

The film follows Ferris on a mission to track down terrorist leader 'Al Saleem' who operates in the Middle East and Europe. A constant presence in his earpiece is Ferris' superior, Ed Hoffman, who lives and works in Washington D.C. He constantly monitors his agent, which in many occasions borders on interference. After collecting intelligence about a terrorist safe house in Jordan (linked with Al Saleem's terrorist organisation), Ferris is ordered to cooperate with Jordanian Intelligence, headed by Hani Salaam (played by Mark Strong), a cooperation that brings up tensions between Western and Eastern intelligence methods, and inevitably touches upon cultural differences too. Ferris operates on the ground, often using disguises, recruiting locals to help him and immersing himself in the culture of his enemy, in order to better understand him. It is mentioned that he is going through a divorce and throughout the film does not talk to anyone in the States apart from Hoffman and his divorce lawyer. From this it is safe to conclude that his life is constricted to his work in the Middle East.

In contrast, Hoffman is constantly seen doing the day-to-day chores of a father and a husband, while simultaneously guiding Ferris through his mission. In the middle of most of their conversations, Hoffman makes coffee in his kitchen, drives his kids to school and talks with his wife, while Ferris is on the other side of the phone

discussing the mission and openly antagonising his superior about his chosen methodology. During the mission, Hoffman deliberately interferes in Ferris's operations which it turn angers Hani and his intelligence community who have their own ways to deal with the terrorist threat on their soil. It becomes more and more obvious that Ferris, during his time in the Middle East has adopted their culture and respects their methods more than his own government's, which by comparison appear underhanded and unscrupulous. By the film's, Ferris disappears off the grid, in effect leaving the agency with which he knows he has nothing in common with anymore.

Body of Lies opens this chapter because this film was one of the first mainstream films to explore the contrast between technology and human participation when it comes to fighting the war on terror. It also underlines the many roles a soldier can play within this war. As we shall see later on, a soldier can now both be a fighter and a spy, as the battle has now become a hunt rather than a direct confrontation between two armies. In the previous two chapters, the soldiers maintained their traditional role within the war genre and audiences saw them fighting in familiar ways. But as we have mentioned before, the fight has changed and so has the soldier and a new dimension of the character enters the scene that threatens to make their very purpose obsolete. With the advent of surveillance and weapon technology, the waging of the war on terror started shifting from enemy soil and moved back home. From command centres in Washington to air-conditioned trailers in the Nevada desert, the fight is now waged remotely. Roger Ferris represents the old, traditional generation of fighters struggling to remain relevant and necessary, while men like Hoffman utilise technology for surveillance, intelligence gathering and even killing when the situation demands it. While Ferris operates on instinct and is close to danger, Hoffman operates by continuously watching a satellite image of likely targets and stays in a secure environment, a great distance from the war.

The film opens with an attack, orchestrated by Al Saleem in Manchester, England, which is meant to show the audience the omnipresence of terrorist cells. While the camera sweeps over a non-descript flat, we hear Al Saleem preaching to his men through a television monitor about the global war against the infidel and their planned revenge against the Americans in the name of the entire Muslim world. This war on terror is not restricted in the Middle East; it is now global. Then, after the attack is perpetrated, as if to infer to its universally recognised origin, the scene dissolves into

an aerial shot of Iraq, specifically at the city of Samarra when Ferris is stationed. In the background Hoffman's character can be heard, making a speech about the current state of the war and its effects both abroad and at home. His key points are the dwindling support of the war efforts at home, the fact that there is no way to negotiate with terrorist organisations as their only wish is a universal caliphate and lastly, that in order to fight and suppress these people, constant diligence is needed. He states 'We take our foot from the throat of this enemy for one minute and our world changes completely.' In Hoffman's view, this fight needs to be continuous, without borders and unrelenting towards the enemy, which is why he wages this war through drones, satellite imagery and a constant ear piece connecting him to his office and agents at all hours of the day.

With *Body Of Lies,* Ridley Scott and scriptwriter William Monahan have managed to bring to the forefront questions about not only how the war on terror is waged but also the manner in which the West and East cooperate during the conflict. Whereas pervious films have seen both sides as enemies, with few trustworthy allies on either side, this film posits the question on whether an alliance between seemingly polar opposites is even possible. While Hoffman advocates for constant and thorough surveillance, Hani Pasha supports 'on the ground' methods; blackmail, fear, and intimidation are the main weapons Hani uses against his enemies. The protagonist, whom is caught between these two opposing viewpoints, wants to merge these approaches both together, in a desperate attempt to unite modern technological methods of surveillance with the more traditional methods of espionage. Yet at the film's conclusion, it is made clear that these two competing methodologies cannot co-exist in the same war. One must choose either one or the other in order to succeed. Ferris quits the CIA and is literally lost in the crowd while Ed Hoffman orders the drone above to pull away from his agent and to focus on other assets. In the end, Ferris recognises he has become insignificant in this war and his role is entirely futile; the fight has developed beyond his capabilities or even understanding. Hoffman and Hani will carry on with their own methods regardless and though Al Saleem was caught, Al Qaeda still lives. The inescapable conclusion is that the war they are engaged in one without an end.

Though we sympathise and support Ferris in *Body of Lies* it is difficult not to recognise that it is Hoffman and his army's approach, that constitute the way of the

future. As the fight against terror has now extended across international borders and does not purely limit itself to traditional combat between nations, conventional narratives of the war genre are not only dated but have also become completely unrealistic. Modern warfare has changed the public's perception of what fighting actually consists of, and consequently war films now have to acknowledge that in an attempt to accurately portray wars on film, matters pertaining to imagery, structure, and narrative form need to alter accordingly. *Body of Lies* touches upon these shifts and the films that have followed it explore these changes more deeply.

The concept of an unmanned remote-controlled vehicle going into hostile territory is not a new idea and certainly not one that was solely linked to warfare. A hostile environment can mean among other things ocean depths, irradiated zones or distant planets. The choice was either to send a machine into these areas or a clad protected human. Eventually the option to send remotely controlled machines into hostile environments via individuals operating them from secure locations became the norm.[109] Engineer John C. Clark in 1968, wrote

> In the telechiric system, the machine may be thought of as an alter ego for the man who operates it. In effect, his consciousness is transferred to an invulnerable mechanical body with which he is able to manipulate tools or equipment almost as though he were holding them in his own hands.

The origin of the drone as we recognise it today goes as far back as World War I when England first tested the Curtis-Sperry aerial torpedo and the Kettering Bug, both were unmanned airplanes without pilot seats, and were carrying torpedoes. Both of these relied on a 'dolly and track' system similar to the one used by the Wright Brothers when launching their aircrafts. Their role during World War I was mostly experimental however, and after the start of the Second World War, this technology advanced with the creation of the Nazi V-1 (also known to the Allies as the Buzz Bomb or Doodlebug) and the V-2s. The V-1 was first launched at London on the 13th of June 1944 and in effect was the first guided missile of its time. The Germans would launch it from the French and Dutch coasts with the intention of landing as far as London. The V-2 was first launched in 1944 and was the first ever long-range guided ballistic missile in the world. It was meant as a retribution weapon against the Allies for the bombings of German cities such a Dresden, but as the Reich was collapsing,

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[109] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.21

the English, Americans, and Russians appropriated examples of this missile and introduced it into their own arsenals. The Americans also took with them the majority of the V-2 scientific team to the United States and started developing this technology even further (though at the end of the war greater emphasis was placed upon the development of nuclear weapons).

During the Vietnam War, unmanned vehicles called 'Lightning bugs' were used for reconnaissance purposes, spotting and counteracting Soviet surface-to-air missiles. However by the end of the conflict they were scrapped. At the close of 1970s the further planned development of military drone were abandoned by the United States, as more weight was placed on nuclear weapons and their stock piling during the height of the Cold War. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israeli Defence Forces used drones to spy on Syrian defences, fool their radars, and attack them. In the end, Israel had destroyed about 100 Syrian Jets with no losses on their side. Unlike the US, the IDF also hugely benefitted from the live video transmission received from the drone, thanks to line-of-sight data links. It was after witnessing this use of the remote-controlled weapon that the United States went back to the drawing board to perfect the drone, and its potential in the battlefield and thusly developed the Predator. 'Ultimately it was Israel, not America, that revived the use of drones in warfare.'[110]

Built as a mainly surveillance drone, the strength of the Predator was to stay aloft in the air, allowing enough time to record and relay information, rather than just capturing brief snapshots, like a piloted jet or a satellite would. Of course the first Predator models were problematic, especially when operating in less than good weather conditions as their flight becomes unstable and its satellite connection can falter. Despite these problems, they have become the weapon of choice in the arena of modern warfare. They are able to fly anywhere, remain undetectable, and replace the option of deploying US soldiers but flying into hostile territory in their stead. The Predator was first introduced in the Balkans in 1995, and then first flew in Afghanistan in 2000 in a reconnaissance flight. After 9/11, the Predator was

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[110] Benjamin Sutherland, Ed. *Modern Warfare, Intelligence and Deterrence: the technologies that are transforming them,* 'The Economist', (Profile Books: 2011), p. 108

militarized, equipped with Hellfire missiles and regularly engaged in flights over Afghanistan, in a mixture of surveillance and armed missions.

At this point it is important to point out that the development of drones to carry out military and strategic objectives, is a result of continued technological advances made in the field of not only robotics but also of increased camera quality, satellite imaging and the heightened speed of data transference from one server to another. Had these advances not been made, the drone would still be constricted to the role of guided missile, rather than a fully functioning surveillance tool, with the capacity of being equipped with added weapons if needed. Alongside the Predator is its 'big brother', the Reaper drone. First introduced in 2007, during the war in Afghanistan, the Reaper can travel twice as fast as the Predator, and carries a higher payload of weapons, including 225kg of precision bombs[111]. In contrast to its predecessor, the Reaper is mainly a counterinsurgency drone rather than a reconnaissance one. After the inception of the Predator and the Reaper, drone technology is now advancing at a rapid rate, largely down to the cost of construction falling considerably, to the extend that even members of the public are able to build and then fly them with relative ease. Currently there are more military models in development, including mid-flight refuelling drones, and 'wingmen', that accompany manned aircrafts. The Global Hawk, a large reconnaissance drone, can take off, travel across oceans, and land, all without guidance. This shows that with increased processing power drones will become more autonomous and less reliant on bandwidth (the US military buys around four fifths of it from the commercial satellite operators). With many more models in development and construction, the drone has risen to become the preeminent tool in combating terrorists and insurgents; equally adept at operating as both a surveillance and offensive weapon on a global scale.

Before introducing more recent war films that deal with the rise of drone warfare as the focal point of their narratives; the common usage of the drone in the fight against terrorism must also be seen within the wider context of the war they function in. As discussed previously, the concept of drone's war capability was not arrived at its

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[111] Benjamin Sutherland, Ed. *Modern Warfare, Intelligence and Deterrence: the technologies that are transforming them,* 'The Economist', (Profile Books: 2011) p. 110

current state until the late 20th century (when war itself became asymmetrical and independent from the constraint of a single battleground). In its early beginnings, an unmanned weapon like the aerial torpedo of WWII was designed to produce heavy damage in a largely urban area, with no specific target. However now, the paradigm has changed, from a pitched battle to more of a hunt for prey that constantly moves across borders in an attempt to avoid discovery. George A. Crawford explains:

> In the competitions between two enemy combatants, the goal is to win the battle by defeating the adversary: both combatants must confront to win. However, a manhunt scenario differs in that each player's strategy is different. The fugitive always wants to avoid capture; the pursuer must confront to win, whereas the fugitive must evade to win.[112]

In effect, this means that the current war against terrorism has become an elaborate and international game of hide-and-seek. If the pursuer wants to win, he has to find the fugitive, who in turn, in order to win needs to evade and hide away from his pursuer. The key to finding the enemy is by constantly watching for movement, tracking, and targeting. Additionally, the aim is also to try and capture an enemy before he strikes, therefore this hunt is essentially preventative in nature as well[113]. In this type of war, the drone acts not only a guided missile; it is also becomes the eyes and ears for a nation, whose enemies are not restricted by international borders, and whose reach is therefore limitless.

The drone was produced to follow six principles that guide this new type of warfare:

1. The persistent surveillance of its subjects. Staying in the air for as long as possible, relaying information back to its base. An armed drone can remain in the air for up to 26 hours and an unarmed one up to 72, (longer than a piloted aircraft could). This is a great asset when establishing continuous and ongoing surveillance.
2. To feed back to base a synoptic viewing. A drone can be equipped with dozens of state of the art cameras, and the images that are captured can be combined to create a complete image of a place at any particular time.

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[112] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.33
[113] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.34

3. To help develop an archive in film-form of a certain individual's life. The images the drone can record when received back at base are stored and compiled electronically for later use if needed.

4. To fuse data together. Drones not only have 'eyes' (cameras), but they record sound ('hear'), and can 'read'. They have the capacity to interpret calls, emails and other forms of communication, which are also archived and can be revisited later on.

5. Thanks to the drones' capabilities, it is possible to create a 'cartography of lives'[114], a technique with which the military is able to detect anomalies. By the 'schematization' of people's lives, it is easier to spot something out of the ordinary and then preventative and precautionary measures can be implemented.

6. The detection of anomalies within a tracked individual's life. 'Images are scanned in order to pick out, amid masses of activity, events that seem pertinent to the focus on security'[115]. This sort of strategy can be best described as akin to detective work, combined with sociological study. In essence, if the subject follows a 'pattern of life', on a day-to-day basis, this is viewed as normal behaviour. However, if one day they deviate from this pattern, then this is abnormal behaviour and suspicious. 'Activity becomes an alternative to identity.'[116]

So what about the operators, the soldiers that are confined to a cockpit in Nevada, launching missiles on the other side of the Atlantic? These airmen have attracted a lot of publications' interest; *Wired, The Huffington Post, Der Spiegel,* amongst others, have interviewed different pilots on their experiences from flying drones, firing its weaponry, to the seemingly inevitable familiarity that develops with the people they have to monitor. This surveillance sometimes lasts for 12 hours at a time (or for the full duration of a drone's flight that can last up to 18 hours). These men and women are able to fight the war without putting their lives at risk. Their job allows them to go back to their families and homes in the evening. Does this mean that they can legitimately be viewed as soldiers? How can flying a drone from a controlled space,

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[114] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p. 42
[115] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.42
[116] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p. 49

without any risk of personal endangerment be comparable to flying an aircraft in enemy airspace where the fear of being shot down is a genuine cause for concern?

The men's magazine *GQ* on October 22nd 2003 published a piece about Airman First Class Brandon Bryant, who from 2006 to 2012 flew missions as a drone pilot in Iraq and Afghanistan[117]. The piece focuses on Bryant's views about his role within the military and the trauma he had to live with when his missions started to take their toll. The airman is not inherently against the use of drones, in fact he views them as a viable tool that can be put to good uses, unrelated to warfare. However his primary objections concern the lack of transparency that the military and the Intelligence community continue to demonstrate. Bryant comments 'There's got to be transparency. People have to know how they are being used so they are used responsibly'. This directly references the clandestine drone wars waged in places like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, ordered by the CIA and fought by operators drawn from Air force ranks (a subject of the film *Good Kill*, which is analysed later on). Mark Bowden (famous for writing the 1999 book *Black Hawk Down* which was adapted into the highly successful film of the same name) writes in *The Atlantic,* 'Secrecy is a big part of the problem. The government doesn't even acknowledge most attacks, much less release details of their aftermath.'[118] This sentiment is mirrored by George Chamayou's book *Drone Theory* in which he writes, 'Given the opacity of both the targeting criteria and the real result of the strikes, critics have tended to focus on a demand for transparency, with exact figures and precise information about procedures.'[119]

Bryant's interview also focuses on his state of mind, and his PTSD diagnosis in 2011, which is a disorder still widely misunderstood by the public when associated with drone pilots. PTSD, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health (DSM) defines the illness as

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[117] Power, M. 'Confessions of a drone Warrior', *GQ,* 22nd October 2013, http://www.gq.com/story/drone-uav-pilot-assassination (Accessed August 2015)

[118] Bowden, M. 'The Killing Machines: How to think about Drones', *The Atlantic,* September 2013 Issue, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/09/the-killing-machines-how-to-think-about-drones/309434/ (accessed July 2015)

[119] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.148

exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation. The exposure must result when the individual "directly experiences the traumatic event", or "witnesses the traumatic event", "experiences firsthand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not through media, pictures, television or movies, unless work-related)[120].

Drone operators according to that definition are technically excluded from having these pathologies. Yet in 2011 Air Force psychologists conducted a mental-health survey that found that among 600 combat drone operators, 20% were found suffering from emotional exhaustion and burnout similar symptoms to that of PTSD[121]. Since the accepted definition of PTSD occludes drone operators, psychologist Rachel McNair suggested expanding this overly narrow notion by coining a condition called "Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress" (PITS). This isolates the active component of the anxiety, making it the perpetrator of the violence, rather than the agent of it[122]. McNair's study was conducted before the rise of drone warfare, but currently psychiatrists are looking to redefine the understanding of PTSD to include Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operators. Clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay follows the same line of thought, focusing from the violence that has been suffered by a person in wartime to their feelings about what they have done to others- or what they've failed to do for them, '[…] The mechanisms of death may change- as intimate as a bayonet or as removed as a Hellfire – but the bloody facts, and their weight on the human conscience, remain the same.'[123]

With the principles of drone warfare outlined, the actual process of successfully hunting down prey and neutralising the threat it carries, relies on the video feed and the concept of a 'kill box'; an area on the screen, echoing the crosshairs on a gun scope but this time comprised of diagonal black lines within a square. Essentially, the kill box is a temporary autonomous zone of slaughter and where one may fire at will.[124] With modern warfare, the battlefield now has become a detached fragmented zone, constructed out of these static miniaturised kill boxes, which in ideal situations

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[120] American Psychiatric Publishing
http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
[121] Power, M. 'Confessions of a drone Warrior', *GQ,* 22nd October 2013,
http://www.gq.com/story/drone-uav-pilot-assassination
[122] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.112
[123] Power, M. 'Confessions of a drone Warrior', *GQ,* 22nd October 2013,
http://www.gq.com/story/drone-uav-pilot-assassination
[124] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.55

contain the targeted quarry (this is called the principle of 'precision' or 'specification').

> By redefining the notion of armed conflict as a mobile place attached to the person of the enemy, one ends up, under cover of the laws of armed conflict justifying the equivalent of a right to execute suspects anywhere in the world, even in zones of peace, illegally and without further procedures, one's own citizens included,[125]

The terrifying lethal potential of this new technology calls into question the legality of the use of drones as well. Jurist Mary Ellen O'Connell states, 'Drones launch missiles or drop bombs, the kind of weapons that may only be used lawfully in armed conflict hostilities.'[126] However in the case of countries like Pakistan where there are no armed conflicts between distinct and organised groups, O'Connell's statement is largely ignored.

Before looking into these questions in more depth, it is important to outline one very important point about the genre. So far, most films that include the use or the appearance of the drone in their narrative do not belong to the war genre. Since 2005 when the drone was first used in the political thriller *Syriana* (Gaghan: 2005), it has been shown in dramas (*Captain Phillips:* Greengrass: 2013), thrillers (*Body of Lies*: Scott: 2008), comedies (*This Means War*: McG: 2012*, The Interview*: Goldberg: 2014), Science Fiction (*Oblivion*: Kosinski :2013*, Interstellar*: Nolan: 2014), and action films (*Mission Impossible III*: Abrams: 2006*, Furious 7*: Wahn: 2015). In each of these films, while the drone does appear, it is not put to use in the context of the War on Terror, but rather as solely an object of surveillance, often a companion to the US soldier. Sometimes, as is the case in *Syriana* or *Oblivion,* the drone can be a threat to the film's protagonist, though it is regularly destroyed with easy before it can create any serious damage. In each of these films however, the one uniting characteristic, (though it is used for different purposes), the drones do not in appear against the

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[125] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.58
[126] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.59

backdrop of open war apart from one feature length films[127]: *Good Kill* (Niccol: 2014).

As previously mentioned, the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) categorises *Good Kill*, which will be the main focus of this chapter, as a Drama-Thriller film, and the tag 'War' is absent. As we will see, the film includes soldiers, a war in a foreign country, and an assortment of enemies, so what is it about *Good Kill* that denies it its place in the war genre? Even its theatrical posters (Appendix 2) suggest a film that belongs to a genre that is often relevant with visual symbols like soldiers in uniform, Middle Eastern landscapes in flames, and poster taglines such as 'Everyday War' and 'War has become a First Person Shooter'. If we consider *Good Kill* against Jeanine Basinger's outline of the classic narrative structure in the war genre, then absolutely, this film hardly belongs in this company. The enemy is indistinct, the war itself is an indirect conflict rather than a battle between clearly defined armies, and the soldiers do not fight first hand, or physically view the horrors of war unlike those featured in *Lone Survivor* or *American Sniper.* These men and women do not even leave the United States, whereas previous troops on tour have at least crossed the border outside the United States at one point or another during the course of their service. However to deny these films a place in the genre would ultimately be to deny the clear role the drone and its remote pilot are now playing in the current conflicts in the Middle East.

At the beginning of the chapter, it is clearly stated that modern warfare has not only ceased to follow the traditional model, but that it also now uses different weaponry and that combat strategy has significantly changed. War films like *American Sniper* followed the traditional structure of the genre, but only because the type of warfare it was portraying (the early stages of the Invasion of Iraq) features pitched firefights and utilised clearly defined enemies in a specific location. The soldier in these films would remain at their core the same totemic figure as they always were presented as in the genre, albeit with small changes such as language, or ethnicity, indicating an increased modernity. However now, with the changes in foreign policy and military tactics, how can the genre retain this structure and still be plausible? Since the drone

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[127] There are documentaries and shorts that look at the drone, most notably *Drone* (Schei: 2014) and *Drone* (Lee: 2015) and its use in modern warfare, however their genre and format do not apply in this thesis' filmography.

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made its first appearance in Afghanistan in 2000, it has become the symbol for fighting the War on Terror and the default armament for more strategists now. So in order for the genre to stay relevant, this type of new warfare necessarily needs to be incorporated. The genre itself has remain unchanged over a fairly long duration of time, but this chapter is suggesting that in order to remain relevant and truly reflect the nature of modern warfare, films like *Good Kill* should be added to it ranks. These new films will serve as exemplars for updating the genre.

Good Kill (2014) directed by Andrew Niccol and starring Ethan Hawke (Major Thomas Egan), Zoe Kravitz (Airman Vera Suarez), Jake Abel (MIC Joseph Zimmer), Dylan Kenin (Capt. Ed Christie) and Bruce Greenwood (Lt. Col. Jack Johns), deals with a group of drone operators in Nevada and their personal struggles regarding the morality of their job. As their missions start to be dictated by the Central Intelligence Agency (another case where a soldier's work is now closely connected to espionage) and their targets are chosen based on patterns rather than identification, the disillusionment of some of the characters reaches its zenith and places their future in the military in jeopardy. Written by Niccol (who previously worked with Hawke on the 1997 science-fiction film *Gattaca*), the film opened at the Toronto Film Festival to largely positive reviews, and won support due to its overall portrayal of drone warfare and the life of their operators. Henry Barnes from *The Guardian* writes, 'Niccol creates an atmosphere that is airless and dull, an unusual tone for a modern war film, but one that fits the subject matter perfectly'[128].

Not only does it question the morality of drone warfare but perhaps more interestingly questions the future for soldiers like Ethan Hawkes' character, Major Thomas Egan, whose job will now entail being confined to a metal box in the middle of the Nevada desert, killing insurgents in the other side of the globe. Egan, along with Lt. Colonel Jack Johns, find themselves not only fighting an asymmetrical war they do not understand but also fight it through satellite relay rather than via traditional way of direct combat that their formative military training would have prepared them for. In contrast Zoe Kravitz's considerably younger character, airman Vera Suarez, belongs

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[128] Barnes, H. 'Good Kill: righteous take on US drone warfare- Toronto Film Festival review', *The Guardian,* 12th September 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/12/good-kill-review-ethan-hawke-toronto (Accessed July 2015)

to the military generation that is more au fait with drone warfare and accepts its use as entirely necessary and extremely useful. Suarez's accepting view of this military tactic is one shared by the rest of the younger characters in Egan's team, which further accentuates the rift between past and present generations of the military over what they perceive their true roles to be within the conflict. By analysing *Good Kill* in this way*,* though the morality of drone warfare and its effect on soldiers is touched upon, the theme of the soldier's role within the war in Afghanistan and Iraq remains central to this study, as well as the growing generational gap created between the old/archetypal generation of US military and the technologically savvy emerging breed.

The way Niccol starts the film is interesting because he wishes to introduce his main character and his role as a typical Air force pilot, flying over a war zone, battling insurgents. The film opens with the broad statement 'After September 11, 2001, the US military began to use weaponised Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the War on Terror. This Story is set in 2010, during the Greatest Escalation of Targeted Killings.' Then the screen fades into its second statement 'Based on Actual Events'. This gives way to an aerial view of non-descript Middle Eastern town. The entire frame is that of a computer screen, with the coordinates on the left and focus brackets surrounding an area of the settlement, while the familiar sound of aeroplane turbines can be heard. A radio communication is audible in the background announcing 'Eyes on the objective'. The next shot identifies the person who the voice belongs to, though does not yet introduce the character fully. A rapid succession of images follows, going back and forth between the character's eye, mouth and his flying equipment in extreme close-up. The view then switches to an aerial shot of the town closing in on the as yet unspecified objective.

All the while radio communications continue between the character on-screen and another, talking about non-combatants, insurgents, when to engage in targets, which is jargon used to describe the people targeted or monitored. As the aerial vehicle closes in on the targets (specified as insurgents), the camera zooms in on the pilot's woven nametag, identifying him as Thomas Egan. Once the target is locked on to and missiles are fired, the camera angle widens around Egan and then changes view to show the Middle Eastern town where the incendiaries have reached their targeted destination resulting in a huge explosion. It is a scene of impact is shot in utter

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silence, lacking of feeling of empathy or even glory at what Egan calls a 'Good Kill'. As the camera angle widens, it reveals these soldiers are based in a makeshift bunker, successfully conducting operations in foreign war zones from the US soil, specifically Nevada (a clue we learn by reading Egan's license plates). These details indicate that this not the typical war film audiences are used to. Niccol's initial introduction of Egan hinted at a pilot flying a mission over the target zone but unveils trough the use of close ups and wide angle shots, the narrative is set closer to home and is therefore one unfamiliar to the genre. At the end of the scene, Egan drives away from the military base, the song 'Bang Bang Boom' from Unknown in the background, with a wide angle shot revealing the cityscape of Las Vegas in the background.

The next scene is even more telling of the kind of film Niccol wants to bring to his audience. The initial scene in the bunker and Egan's drive through Las Vegas, we see him shop at a convenience store. We see a brief one second full close up of his uniform tags and his aviator sunglasses (all summarising him as a pilot), the young clerk behind the counter asks him 'Is that real? You ever get to like fly in a war or something?' In films like *American Sniper,* when Chris Kyle goes out in public, doing everyday chores, people revered and thanked him for his service. In Egan's case however, his military career is continually questioned by the public, which also makes a broader reflection of how audiences might perceive drone pilots and their work. Egan's visibly cynical response to the clerk is, 'Blew away six Taliban in Pakistan just today. [Brief pause] Now I am going home to barbeque.' Hawke's delivery of this line, perfectly catches his utter contempt towards people like the clerk, though probably unaware of the reality of Egan's occupation and by questioning the validity of his wearing of the uniform, the clerk in effect casts doubt on a drone pilot's place in the War on Terror. The clerk shrugs off Egan's response with a chuckle and a 'Yeah, right.' and Egan leaves, resuming his drive back to his suburban home.

These first two scenes summarise Niccol's two main subjects of the film: The first is the distance between soldier and insurgent in this modern form of warfare and the second is how the man and women who function within this remit make sense of their jobs in the civilian world. The first topic almost exclusively unspools in the drone command bunker and the second theme always on 'neutral' ground. Four soldier characters are central to these examinations; Egan, the protagonist, Lt. Colonel Jack Johns (Bruce Greenwood), Airman Vera Suarez (Zoe Kravitz) and M.I.C. Joseph

Zimmer (Jake Abel). Egan is the archetypal representation of the past generation of soldiers, is the one who assigns great meaning to what he perceives to be the traditional act of fighting. Johns embodies the top brass of the US military, fully aware of the new tactics and stratagems, and whilst accepting of their benefits remains cynical of their usage. Suarez and Zimmer are the new generation, raised at a time when drone warfare has begun to supersede and outgrow former models of conducting command. Interestingly though, Suarez and Zimmer hold opposing views about this conflict, with the former questioning its morality and the latter supporting the administration and their mission. The civilians that feature in the film are mostly present to repeatedly question and/or misunderstand the role of this new kind of soldier, especially in encounters with Egan's.

Egan's character remains extremely taciturn throughout the majority the film, diligently obeying orders and choosing to shy away from the controversial discussions. He quietly resents his position as a drone pilot, continuously asking Colonel Johns to 'put him back on a plane', clearly at odds with the person he has become. Without a hold on his true purpose he asks Johns, 'Why do we wear our flight suits sir?' as if to point out the fundamental irony of the army's vision of the drone program. Glenn Whip of the *LA Times* writes 'It's not that Egan opposes war. He's begging to be shipped out for another tour. He just can't wrap his head around what war has become'[129].

Unlike the other films that this dissertation has touched upon, the soldier in *Good Kill* is not absent from his family and friends; therefore personal matters and domesticity are seen to a greater extent. There are no montages of emails, or other written correspondences to loved ones, promises of future proposals, or pregnant/ normal partners waiting at home, or scenes of eventual tearful reunions. Additionally, Egan's interactions with civilians often tend to be hostile in most cases. The shop clerk scene introduces the audience to the general scepticism (and even sometimes disbelief) the public display towards the drone program. The clerk doubts that Egan is part of the military twice, the police officer that stops Hawke's character on the road for

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[129] Whipp, G. 'Good Kill, with Ethan Hawke, targets human costs of drone warfare', *The Los Angeles Times,* 14th May 2015, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-good-kill-review-ethan-hawke-20150515-story.html (accessed July 2015)

speeding, only to let him go after he assumes their mutual bond as US military men. The drone pilot is all too aware of how different the nature of their soldiering is. At this point Egan is certain that nobody is able t0 relate to his situation and that what he now performs is essentially a coward's job when compared to his flying days, when the emotions of fear and courage were always present.

In Egan's mind the traditionally assumed virtues of a soldier such as courage in the face of danger, sacrifice, heroism, et cetera, serve the ideological function of making the killings bearable, and even to some extent acceptable[130]. However these virtues become obsolete with drone warfare (the detached existence of the role central to this feeling), it therefore creates a crisis in military ethos, and with their removal the vacuum left behind consumes Egan. As Chamayou in *Drone Theory* states '[…] initially the most violent criticisms of the drones come not from hopeless pacifists but from Air Force pilots, in the name of the preservation of their traditional warrior values.'[131] For Egan, what once viewed cowardly is now considered bravery and duty.

In addition to this capitulation of traditional values, Egan is also shown as suffering from extreme mental duress over the nature of his job, which is framed in a similar way as a traditional soldier suffering from PTSD. One day he arrives back home after a night shift and tells his wife Molly (January Jones) 'I did something good today.' Perplexed by the statement she asks him, 'Don't you always?' He fails to answer. When Egan reaches his eventual breaking point at the film's climax, he details one of his most violent missions to his wife, revealing to her how tortured he has become. After seeing Egan in such a state of mental anguish she opts to leave him. After witnessing so many people he has blown up under orders and unable to help the injustices he is privy to due to their irrelevance to the mission, Egan starts to 'burn out'. This is one of the most questionable moments of the film. Though Niccol's manages to introduce us to drone warfare in a way that can be accessible to the audience, he also broaches the widely debated subject of whether it is possible for a drone operator to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This dynamic hinges on whether a drone pilot who is physically removed from the field of operation, can ever be said to feel the same things as the traditional soldier.

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[130] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.99
[131] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.99

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In the film, this state of mind is explained by showing Egan being denied his identity as a pilot and making him aware of his new job as an executioner (a fact not lost on the drone operator). In effect he has become '…a killer in the morning and a father in the evening, a daily switch from the "peace ego" to the "war ego"'[132]. This constant shifting of personas brings Egan closer to his mental breakdown as there is no clear separation between his demanding and emotionally draining job and all other aspects of his life. As Gregoire Chamayou writes,

> We are thus faced, for the moment, with two hypotheses regarding the psychic life of drone operators: either this weaponry creates intensive killers, or else it produces a mental process that involves being tormented by guilt, potentially to the degree of inducing neurosis.[133]

In contrast to Egan, Colonel Johns does not live his day-to-day life in quiet cynicism. He is openly critical about the way the army is heading towards the use of UAVs that he manages to excuse this type of warfare to himself, in a more effective way than Egan. He acts as the counterpoint of balance to Egan in this film as he reaffirms the need to calmly accept what the US Army is becoming, and offers some exposition to the audience about how a drone war is fought. Its is a war that comes with its own unique set of problems: 'The blocky exposition, although highly informative, lends "Good Kill" a heavy handed didacticism that undercuts the still shocking vision of the direction of modern warfare.'[134] We first see him briefly during the opening scene in the bunker with Egan, though his first full introduction comes later when he briefs new recruits on their roles within his command. His speech to them includes some inescapable truths about the drone program and the state of modern warfare:

> Ladies and gentlemen, the aircraft you are looking at is not the future of war! It is the here and fucking now. Anytime of day or night there are dozens of these things in the sky, above our theatres of operation, and most are working in the Garden of Eden they call Afghanistan…There is one thing I want to say about this program: We get a lot of shit from the public. And I heard all the bleeding heart arguments, read all the fucking bumper stickers about how the Air Force is the chair force, how we are waging a Wii war, it's all a waste of breath. Because the United States Air Force is ordering more drones than

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[132] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.120
[133] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.113
[134] Holden, S. 'Good Kill Stars Ethan Hawke Fighting Enemies Half a World Away', *The New York Times,* 14th May 2015
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/15/movies/review-good-kill-stars-ethan-hawke-fighting-enemies-half-a-world-away.html (accessed on July 2015)

jets…excuse me 'Remotely Piloted Aircrafts', but you can call them whatever you want. Drones aren't going anywhere! In fact they are going everywhere. And don't think I believe my own shit either. 'Cause we like to dress it up in fancy language; 'Prosecuting a target', 'surgical strike', 'neutralising a threat'. Make no fucking mistake about it: We are killing people. So I am going to drill this into your heads every goddamn day, this ain't fucking Playstation. Even though, and the brass don't like to admit it, our operation was modelled on Xbox, and half of you were recruited in malls precisely because you are a bunch of fucking gamers and war is now a first person shooter. But you pull the trigger here and it's for fucking real. Ain't a bunch of pixels you are blowing up. It's flesh and fucking blood. (See full transcript in Appendix 3).

In this speech, Johns summarizes what many scholars and analysts like Gregoire Chamayou, Medea Benjamin have been reporting in publications like *The Economist* detailing the radically changed nature of warfare. The camera switches between close-ups of his face and wide angle images of Johns standing in front an American Flag, deliberately recalling the opening of the film *Patton* (Schaffner: 1970) where George C. Scott (as the famous general) delivers a address to the men. If we were to simultaneously watch these two scenes, it appears Niccol is consciously invoking the imagery of pre-existing classic of the genre to refute that war can continue unchanged. The audience must know get used to this typology of warfare, as realise that the days of Patton and the philosophy he aspires are now anachronistic in the genre. In *Patton,* an American is described as loving the sting of battle, and as loving a good fight and winning it. An army is a team, a place where individualism should never be present. In *Good Kill,* Johns maintains the opposite is true. He talks about the brass in a derogatory manner, sneers at his recruits as if they were unwanted children, and describes this war as if there is no end in sight, let alone the possibility of emerging form it victorious. In a subsequent conversation with Egan, he talks about his men in comparison to the actual 'grunts' on the ground, almost as if they are two different entities, part of two different armies.

We really can't complain. I mean try telling our sob story to the grunts on the ground. Shit, they already thought we were candy asses when we were up in the air with our fucking planes. No, no one's throwing a pity party for us…it used to be we go to war with a country, we'd go to the country! Guys enlisted! (Johns)

As the film progresses, the main characters start receiving assignments from the CIA, which are presented on screen as faceless and bodiless entities on the phone, giving the order to kill, yet never pulling the trigger themselves. Niccol apparently wishes to

show them as even more detached from the fight than the drone pilots. At this stage, Egan and Suarez, the two characters who act the moral compass in the film, begin to doubt the legality and efficacy of their missions, particularly when ordered to kill children and seemingly innocent civilians. Johns, though aware that these missions are morally dubious, and potentially war crimes, puts his doubts to one side knowing that actions like these are the direction the army is heading to. It is a war conducted through a computer screen, based on observing patterns of behaviour, with actions of dreadful finality perpetrated at the push of a button. Johns elucidates upon the moral conundrum that drone warfare has become, and in doing so betrays his meek resignation to that fact: 'In many minds, out of all the bad options, we're the least bad. Don't ask me if this is a just war. That's not up to us. To us, it's just war.'

I comparison to Egan and Johns, Suarez and Zimmer are both younger and are far the most vocal in throughout film. Though they support very different ideologies about the War on Terror and their enemies, at the beginning they are both naively enthusiastic about their mission. In probably one of the very few genre-familiar scenes of the film, the recruits discuss their reasons for joining. 'Come on, battlefields and Black Jack? Every girl's fantasy!' says Suarez. 'In my line, this is the next best thing to Langley' explains Zimmer. Finally Capt. Ed Christie (Dylan Kenin) states, 'If you want to be where the action is, this is the tip of the spear.' However, as their mission progresses and they start launching CIA-ordered strikes, Suarez and Zimmer find themselves at opposite sides of the drone debate, the former supporting counterinsurgency and the later supporting anti-terrorism. Chamayou sees these two radically competing terms as the central problem in conducting drone warfare and how it they have affected the current conflict. Suarez and Zimmer act as the mouthpieces for this debate.

Suarez represents the counterinsurgency strategy. A tactic purported by men like David Kilcullen, a former advisor the General David Petraeus in Iraq and a leading figure in the counterinsurgency movement. Counterinsurgency is in essence a primarily political tactic that aims to defeat the insurgency movement, rather than target specific threats. Inspired by the works of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara (and from observing previous counter-revolutionary failures such the French-Algerian war (1954-1962)), it was concluded that any counterinsurgency struggle should focus on the local populace: how to disconnect from the enemy in order thus depriving the

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latter of any new recruits. In an article he co-wrote in the *New York Times* entitled 'Death from Above, Outrage from Below'[135], Kilcullen outlines the main issues that would arise if antiterrorism were to overtake counterinsurgency as the chosen strategy when fighting the War on Terror. The most prominent difference being the perception and the conception of the enemy, and how to combat them without antagonising passive civilians into supporting the cause of the terrorist. In the context of a counterinsurgency tactic, an 'insurgent' is a 'representative of deeper claims at the heart of society'[136], whereas 'terrorists' are regarded as 'aberrant individuals, dangerous figures, quite mad or as incarnations of pure evil'[137]. In a number of scenes, Suarez sees the people she targets as mainly civilians, not terrorists, and like Kilcullen, stresses that these tactics might work in the short term but will lead to long-term damages. When ordered to target a group of men in a market place by 'Langley', a young boy survives the strike, Suarez realises the potential repercussions of this. Suarez 'take awhile for the boy to get big enough to hold a Kalashnikov. But no question we are a regular fucking terrorist factory! Best recruitment tool Al Qaeda ever had.' This stance is mirrored by Kilcullen's own conclusion that persistent drone strikes are counter-productive to long term American interests, and that people are congratulating themselves on short-term tactical successes, falling to see that they will pay dearly for these actions on a larger strategic level[138]. Suarez's opinions though fall on deaf ears. Egan, tired, largely stays away from the conversation, and Johns, though clearly tortured by these tactics, acquiesces to authority. The only character that responds to Suarez's challenges is Zimmer, who supports the anti-terrorism strategy. By the end of the film, it is Suarez, and by association the counterinsurgency strategy that fail. She quits her position while Zimmer remains.

Zimmer's character is presented in many scenes as obnoxious, ignorant, and disrespectful. An example of this is seen when he is be heard singing 'Two Tickets to Paradise' by Eddie Money when two hellfire missiles are about to be fired onto an enemy position. He professes very right-wing views on the subject of national

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[135] Kilcullen, D. & Exum A., 'Death from Above, Outrage from Below', *The new York Times,* 19th May 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/opinion/17exum.html (accessed August 2015)
[136] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p.68
[137] Ibid p. 68
[138] ibid. p.65

security and his definition of who the enemy is, is extremely simplistic and in accordance with the definition of terrorist mentioned above: the are inhumane, pure evil and should be eliminated. He also agrees with Richard Andres, an Air Force special advisor, who reports that old weapons did not have the advantage of killing insurgents fast enough and in effect failed to stop renewed recruitment[139]. However with drone warfare this is now an issue of the past: 'Never mind if the enemy ranks thicken, since it will be possible to neutralise the new recruits as fast as they emerge.'[140] 'We can kill 'em faster than they can make 'em' concurs Zimmer in the film. Both he and Christie, voice opinions that Niccol obviously disagrees with. The way both actors deliver their lines, their Right wing influenced political thought and their cold impassive reactions towards their victims, show that Niccol regards them as fundamentally misguided both about their job and its results. The systematic reaping of terrorist cells based in countries that are either at war or not against the United States, does allow for a war without defeats and without losses, though it is also a war without a clear victory. Zimmer, along with Christie and the CIA only see every individual kill as a ticking counter towards ultimate success, without necessarily considering the deep long term effects on the population. Zimmer and Christie remain on the base at the end of the film and Egan and Suarez that depart. Niccol demonstrates to the audience that the traditional way of fighting a war and the counterinsurgency strategy have lost ground within the larger conflict that is the War on Terror and that for better or worse that anti-terrorist methodology has been adopted as the preferential option to move forwards with.

It is evident that *Good Kill* will not be the final film made about drone warfare, and the soldiers fighting it. *Eye in the Sky* (Hood) opened in the Toronto Film Festival on the 11th of September 2015 (not yet available on general release) It features Helen Mirren, Aaron Paul and Alan Rickman, and is shot in the *12 Angry Men* style of the debate film, but instead of jurors arguing over one man's innocence it features a group discussing the legality of a decision to launch a drone strike. Cinema has only just started using the drone in its war films, and has hardly fully explored their wider

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[139] Andres, R. 'The New Role of Air Strike in Small Wars', *Small Wars Journal,* 19th July 2009 http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/the-new-role-of-air-strike-in-small-wars (accessed August 2015)
[140] Chamayou, G. *Drone Theory,* (Penguin books: London) p. 71

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significance within the genre. With Niccol's film acting as the stepping stone for other films to follow on the same path, the drone could very well lead to the re-structuring of the war genre and radically change the way we view war on film, mirroring the way the advent of the drone has altered the practice of warfare in reality. This could signify a major shift in the portrayal of the soldier in US war films and lead to the inception of a new soldier character type, one previously unseen on screen or in film.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this study, the various ways in which the character of the soldier on screen has been analysed, examining the differing opinions regarding what capacity his/her role within the war should be, and in turn what the nature of the character's future might shape into. In the first chapter, Eastwood and Berg displayed their own projection of the conflicts in the Middle East and the soldier, personified largely by the figure of the navy SEAL. In their films, both central characters exhibit the traits we find in traditional war films; the successful completion of gruelling training regimes; the revelation and vocalisation of personal motivations for going to war; and the eventual deployment into combat territory, allowing for emotional communications with family and loved ones back at home. Additionally the narrative structure of both *Lone Survivor* and *American Sniper* follow Jeanine Basinger's outline of the war film, which she constructed while studying the war genre and its cinematic representations of the Second World War. The films of Berg and Eastwood received mixed reviews critically but were still hugely commercially successful at the box office. The logical conclusion for this inverse relationship of critical praise and gross profit, leads this study to the conclusion that the deliberate omission of the difficult and uncomfortable complexities inherent in contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts (controversial events and actions that may have proved unpalatable for the everyday cinema goer), were a deliberate attempt to simplify the potential minefield of an opaque theatre of combat, and to reduce the role of the soldier and their mission, to the totemic figure of the screen representations of early twentieth century cinema – a vision more ably embodied by the stoic and morally righteous John Wayne.

This move brought the war genre back closer to its traditional roots, yet with the fluidly changing nature of warfare, this created a tension between the reality of contemporary armed conflict and the dramatic representation of those actions on screen – it was therefore necessary to breathe fire into a more realistic approach to this new stage in the development of the war film. The second chapter illustrates this shift in direction, by analysing Kathryn Bigelow and Peter Sattler's, *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Camp X-Ray* respectively. Though still critical about the conflicts, Bigelow and Sattler choose to mollify their critique by showing how the tactics and strategies used to wage war on the current stage have changed, and how in turn the nature of the adverse affects upon its practitioners and participants are equally evolving. In *Zero*

Dark Thirty, Maya pursues her target, unrelentingly, at the expense of her personal life. Amy Cole in *Camp X-Ray*, after serving a tour of the Middle East, upon returning home finds herself stationed in the internment camp of Guantanamo Bay, where we can imagine the adrenaline fuelled daily activity of physical deployment in the field, is replaced by the relative monotony and tedium of the routine life of the facility that she now works in - with neither a definite end, nor a palpable sense of achievement in sight. Maya and Cole are both fighting a new kind of warfare, one that is removed from the battlefield, a role that reaches its apotheosis in the final chapter, when the study examines the relatively new phenomenon of the drone operator.

This new breed holds all the traditional accoutrements of their military progenitors; they wear uniform, have gone through rigorous military training, have spent time on active service, but do not physically enter enemy territory themselves. Despite the remote aspect of their field operations, drone operators can similarly experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, even with the close proximity of loved ones offering a potential respite from the trauma. It is argued in the concluding chapter, that a new type of soldier is emerging and whereas it is only possible to identify slight indicators of this development in Ridley Scott's *Body Of Lies*, in Andrew Niccol's *Good Kill* they are given their own narrative. Earlier depictions of the war film and their screen iterations of the character of the soldier, such as Eastwood's *American Sniper* and its protagonist Chris Kyle, whilst enjoying tremendous financial success, it is in fact a film like Niccol's *Good Kill* that begins to reinvent the genre, making a film and a matching character type that more accurately suit the developing nature of the war that these cinematic pieces attempt to reflect. The soldier will start to inhabit a plurality of roles; as spy, gamer, and grunt. This in turn has ramifications for the war genre itself; its narrative structure will have to be largely revised, with hazardous military deployments in enemy territory regularly replaced by the commute to remote drone bases. The theatre of operations, which was traditionally set in combat zones and put military personnel through arduous and traumatic events that shaped their identities as soldiers, is more likely to be a remote bunker in the Nevada desert, with screens, joysticks and keyboards the chosen form of weaponry, rather than firearms and grenades. Warfare, as we have come to recognise it whether in history or film is not fought anymore, but almost played. Not exactly what John Wayne would have had in mind, if given a role today.

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Primary Sources:

Main Case Studies:

Chapter 1.

American Sniper (Clint Eastwood: 2015) with Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, and Kyle Gallner

A Navy S.E.A.L. recounts his military career, which includes more than 150 confirmed kills.

The Kingdom (Peter Berg: 2007) with Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Garner, and Jason Bateman

A team of U.S. government agents is sent to investigate the bombing of an American facility in the Middle East.

Lone Survivor (Peter Berg: 2013) with Mark Wahlberg, Ben Foster, Taylor Kitsch and Emile Hirsch

Marcus Luttrell and his team set out on a mission to capture or kill notorious Taliban leader Ahmad Shah, in late June 2005. Marcus and his team are left to fight for their lives in one of the most valiant efforts of modern warfare.

Chapter 2.

Redacted (Brian de Palma: 2007) with Patrick Carroll, Rob Devaney, Izzy Diaz

A montage of stories about U.S. soldiers fighting in the Iraq conflict, focusing on the modern forms of media covering the war.

In the Valley of Elah (Paul Haggis: 2007) with Tommy Lee Jones, Charlize Theron, Jonathan Tucker

A retired military investigator works with a police detective to uncover the truth behind his son's disappearance following his return from a tour of duty in Iraq.

Zero Dark Thirty (Kathryn Bigelow: 2012) with Jessica Chastain, Mark Strong, Jason Clarke

A chronicle of the decade-long hunt for Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden after the September 2001 attacks and his death at the hands of the Navy S.E.A.L. Team 6 in May 2011.

Camp X-Ray (Peter Sattler: 2014) with Kristen Stewart, Peyman Moaadi, Lane Garrisson

A soldier assigned to Guantanamo Bay befriends a man who has been imprisoned there.

Chapter 3.

Body of Lies (Ridley Scott: 2008) with Leonardo DiCaprio, Russel Crowe and Mark Strong

A CIA agent on the ground in Jordan hunts down a powerful terrorist leader while being caught between the unclear intentions of his American supervisors and Jordon Intelligence.

Good Kill (Andrew Niccol: 2015) with Ethan Hawke, Bruce Greenwood, and Zoe Kravitz

A family man begins to question the ethics of his job as a drone pilot.

Eye In the Sky (Gavin Hood: 2015) with Helen Mirren, Aaron Paul, Alan Rickman, Barkhad Abdi

Col. Katherine Powell, a military officer in command of an operation to capture terrorists in Kenya, sees her mission escalate when a girl enters the kill zone triggering an international dispute over the implication of modern warfare.

<u>Additional material:</u>

Black Hawk Down (Ridley Scott: 2001) with Josh Hartnett, Ewan McGregor, Tom Sizemore

123 elite U.S. soldiers drop into Somalia to capture two top lieutenants of a renegade warlord and find themselves in a desperate battle with a large force of heavily armed Somalis.

Jarhead (Sam Mendes: 2005) with Jake Gyllenhaal, Jamie Foxx, Lucas Black

Based on former Marine Anthony Swofford's best-selling 2003 book about his pre-Desert Storm experiences in Saudi Arabia and about his experiences fighting in Kuwait.

Battle for Haditha (Nick Broomfield: 2007) with Matthew Knoll, Elliot Ruiz, Eric Mehalacopulos

An investigation of the massacre of 24 men, women and children in Haditha, Iraq allegedly shot by 4 U.S. Marines in retaliation for the death of a U.S. Marine killed by a roadside bomb. The movie follows the story of the Marines of Kilo Company, an Iraqi family, and the insurgents who plant the roadside bomb.

The Hurt Locker (Kathryn Bigelow: 2008) with Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie, Guy Pearce

Forced to play a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse in the chaos of war, an elite Army bomb squad unit must come together in a city where everyone is a potential enemy and every object could be a deadly bomb.

Stop-Loss (Kimberly Pierce: 2008) with Ryan Phillipe, Abbie Cornish, Joseph Gordon-Levitt

A veteran soldier returns from his completed tour of duty in Iraq, only to find his life turned upside down when he is arbitrarily ordered to return to field duty by the Army.

The Men Who Stare at Goats (Grant Heslov: 2009) with Ewan McGregor, Jeff Bridges, George Clooney, Kevin Spacey

A reporter in Iraq might just have the story of a lifetime when he meets Lyn Cassady, a guy who claims to be a former member of the U.S. Army's New Earth Army, a unit that employs paranormal powers in their missions.

All summaries have been pulled from the Internet Movie Database. For more information: http://www.imdb.com/?ref_=nv_home

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Appendix 1

Film	Director	Wars in focus	Year of Release	Budget/ Domestic total gross
Black Hawk Down	Ridley Scott	Somalia	2001	$92 million/ $108 million
Enemy at the Gates	Jean- Jacques Annaud	Battle of Stalingrad	2001	$68million/ $51 million
Pearl Harbor	Michael Bay	WWII	2001	$140 million/ $198 million
Behind Enemy Lines	John Moore	Bosnian War	2001	$40 million/ $58 million
Going Back Also known as 'Under Heavy Fire'	Sidney J. Furie	Vietnam	2001	(estimated) $13 million/ unavailable
We Were Soldiers	Randall Wallace	Vietnam	2002	$75 million/ $78 million
Hart's War	Gregory Hoblit	WWII	2002	$70 million/ $19 million
Windtalkers	John Woo	WWII	2002	$115 million/ $40 million
The Last Samurai	Edward Zwick	Satsuma Rebellion	2003	$140 million/ $111 million
Cold Mountain	Anthony Minghella	US Civil War	2003	$79 million/ $95 million
Master and Commander	Peter Weir	Napoleonic Wars	2003	$150 million/ $93 million
Gods and Generals	Ronald F. Maxwell	US Civil War	2003	$56 million/ $12 million
Saints and Soldiers	Ryan Little	WWII	2003	$78 thousand/ $1.3 million
Troy	Wolfgang Petersen	Trojan War	2004	$175 million/ $133 million
Hotel Rwanda	Terry George	Rwandan Genocide	2004	$17.5 million/$23 million
Alexander	Oliver Stone	Greco-Persian Wars	2004	$155 million/ $34 million

Figures found at www.boxofficemojo.com

Good Kill Official Poster

Good Kill additional posters

Appendix 3:

This is the full speech transcript from *Good Kill* made by Colonel Johns in front of the new recruits.

'Ladies and gentlemen, the aircraft you are looking at is not the future of war! It is the here and fucking now. Anytime of day or night there are dozens of these things in the sky, above our theatres of operation, and most are working in the Garden of Eden they call Afghanistan. They are starting to think it's their new national bird. Now I assume you know we don't fly them all the way there from here in Vegas, but I guess I shouldn't assume anything. I got food in my fridge that's older than you. Now all take offs and landings occur in and around whatever God forsaken place we're at war with that day. These things are a bitch to take off and land. So once they are airborne, that's when we take over and these gentlemen here are going to take you through the nuts and bolts of what exactly how we do that here. But before they do, there is one thing I want to say about this program: We get a lot of shit from the public. And I heard all the bleeding heart arguments, read all the fucking bumper stickers about how the Air Force is the chair force, how we are waging a Wii war, it's all a waste of breath. Because the United States Air Force is ordering more drones than jets…excuse me 'Remotely Piloted Aircrafts', but you can call them whatever you want. Drones aren't going anywhere! In fact they are going everywhere. And don't think I believe my own shit either. 'Cause we like to dress it up in fancy language; 'Prosecuting a target', 'surgical strike', 'neutralising a threat'. Make no fucking mistake about it: We are killing people. So I am going to drill this into your heads every goddamn day, this ain't fucking Playstation. Even though, and the brass don't like to admit it, our operation was modelled on Xbox, and half of you were recruited in malls precisely because you are a bunch of fucking gamers and war is now a first person shooter. But you pull the trigger here and it's for fucking real. Ain't a bunch of pixels you are blowing up. It's flesh and fucking blood. You pull the trigger here, someone is going away. Now, go away. Dissmissed.'