

## ***The Militarization of Movies and Television***

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### ***Takeaways***

- In exchange for the use of military equipment and personnel, movie and TV program producers must comply with Pentagon entertainment policy, including script changes, to align with military goals, including recruitment and public relations.
- Since the inception of the Hollywood entertainment industry more than a century ago, over 2,500 war-themed movies and TV programs have been made with Pentagon assistance.
- Pentagon-assisted movies and TV shows frame U.S. wars as necessary and glorious, downplaying or ignoring the human, social and environmental devastation war causes, particularly for civilians.
- U.S. soldiers are typically cast as noble protagonists while those non-U.S. peoples deemed “enemies” of America are consistently stereotyped.

Popular entertainment, whether made for the big screen or to be digitally streamed through our television sets and devices, often invites us to escape from the toils and tribulations of the real world. Yet within the fantastical action sequences and dazzling special effects of many entertainment products are military stories scripted and war images made not only by movie and TV screenwriters but also shaped by the Pentagon’s own public affairs officers. In 2023, for example, the Pentagon paid TV studios to integrate military-friendly messaging into widely watched TV programs—including *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, *Guy Fieri’s All-American Road Trip*, *America’s Got Talent*, *Downey’s Dream Cars*, and *The Price is Right*—as part of a calculated effort to publicize its image and persuade Gen Z to enlist.<sup>2</sup> The Air Force’s Entertainment Liaison Office has assisted

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<sup>2</sup> Boguslaw, D. (2024, December 31). Pentagon Approved Funds for Mr. Beast, Kelly Clarkson, Guy Fieri, Last Year. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/pentagon-support-mrbeast-kelly-clarkson-guy-fieri-1235221946/>

hundreds of entertainment productions, from blockbuster movies such as *Transformers* (2007, 2009), *Iron Man* (2008) and *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022) to TV series such as *WandaVision* (2021) and *Air Warriors* (2014–2024).<sup>3</sup>

The source of all of these entertainment productions and many more is what I have called a “DoD-Hollywood complex,” where Pentagon public affairs officers collaborate with creative producers to shape stories and images of the military in movies and TV series in order to influence public perceptions in pursuit of strategic goals.<sup>4</sup> Even without the Pentagon’s payment and assistance, entertainment studios and their workers would likely continue producing military-themed movies and TV series, tapping into the presumed commercial viability of deeply rooted cultural ideologies that glorify U.S. military power around the world. When the Pentagon moonlights as Hollywood’s movie and TV script doctor, war stories hit the screen with a blockbuster budget and a hidden political agenda—military propaganda camouflaged as globally popular entertainment.

### ***The History of the DoD-Hollywood Complex: Military Movie Propaganda***

The idea of the Pentagon joining with Hollywood studios to make movies and TV series that aim to influence people’s perceptions of the military around the world might seem like a conspiracy spun from a script—but the historical relationship is as real as the military-themed pop culture it helps manufacture. For more than one hundred years, the U.S. military has played a leading role in many entertainment productions, both behind the screens and in the scenes, with over 2,500 war-themed movies and TV shows made with Hollywood to serve both the bottom line and military self-promotion.<sup>5</sup>

Dating to World War I, President Woodrow Wilson enlisted filmmakers to rally public support for U.S. participation in the war. D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as heroes, was supported by Army engineers who provided technical expertise to help stage large-scale American Civil War battle scenes. The government’s war-time propaganda agency—the Committee on Public Information—

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Air Force, it has also supported movies such as *American Sniper* (2014), *Man of Steel* (2013), and *The Flash* (2023), and television series including *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2022) and *Mighty Planes* (2012–2016).

<sup>4</sup> This article builds upon and extends some of my previous work on the DoD-Hollywood complex and its role in militarizing popular culture. See, for example, Mirrlees, T. (2016). *Hearts and Mines: The U.S. Empire’s Culture Industry*. University of British Columbia Press; Mirrlees, T. (2017). The DoD’s Cultural Policy: Militarizing the Cultural Industries. *Communication +1*, 1(3), 1–26.

<sup>5</sup> Stahl, R., dir. (2022). *Theaters of War*. Media Education Foundation. [https://go.mediaed.org/theaters-of-war?utm\\_source=mef-blog&utm\\_medium=blog&utm\\_campaign=theaters-of-war-3](https://go.mediaed.org/theaters-of-war?utm_source=mef-blog&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=theaters-of-war-3). This is the best documentary movie about the DoD-Hollywood complex, noting 2,500 entertainment products shaped by the DoD from the beginning of Hollywood to present day. SpyCulture.com, run by the investigative journalist Tom Secker, is the world’s leading resource on U.S. government involvement in Hollywood. See also, Robb, D. (2004). *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*. Prometheus.; Alford, M. and Secker, T. (2017). *National Security Cinema*. CreateSpace.; Jenkins, T. (2013). *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television*. University of Texas Press.; Jenkins, T. and Secker, T. (2012). *Superheroes, Movies and the State: How the US Government Shapes Cinematic Universes*. University Press of Kansas.

established a Division of Films and worked with studios on *America's Answer* (1918) and *Pershing's Crusaders* (1918) to rally public support. In the interwar years, films like *Wings* (1927) and *Here Comes the Navy* (1934) sustained this collaboration.

During World War II, the U.S. government's war-time propaganda agency—the Office of War Information (OWI)—regarded Hollywood as an “essential war industry” and considered movies as a means to manage minds. As OWI director Elmer Davis stated in 1942: “The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.”<sup>6</sup> The OWI’s Bureau of Motion Pictures combined censorship with content directives to ensure movies such as Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series (1942-1945) would drum up support for the U.S.’s role in the war while suppressing those films depicting the psychological toll of war, such as John Huston’s *Let There Be Light* (1946).

**“The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people’s minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized.”**

*OWI Director Elmer Davis (1942)*

Early in the Cold War, the Pentagon established its own Motion Picture Production Office (MPPPO) to assist numerous war movies, such as *The Flying Leathernecks* (1951) and *The Longest Day* (1962). The Vietnam War strained this relationship, but in the 1980s, films like *Top Gun* (1986), made with extensive Pentagon support, strengthened it. Post-Cold War, Hollywood obsessed over terrorist threats, producing films like *True Lies* (1994) and *Rules of Engagement* (2000) that often-stereotyped Muslims and Arabs as terrorists.<sup>7</sup> *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) evoked nostalgia for “good war” patriotism, while *JAG* (1995–2003) fictionalized U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General (JAG) officers managing court-martial cases and misconduct investigations. The sci-fi series *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007) primed the public for continuous future military conflicts, even in outer space!

After September 11, 2001, the Pentagon worked with Hollywood to build support for the “Global War on Terror” and years later, collaborated on movies like *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *Lone Survivor* (2013) and TV series like *24* (2001–2010), *NCIS* (2003–present), and *SEAL Team* (2017–present). By the 2020s, the Pentagon continued shaping portrayals of the military in productions ranging from action thrillers like *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning* (2023) to Apple TV+’s *Masters of the Air* (2024) and Prime Video’s *The Blue Angels* (2024).

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<sup>6</sup> R. Koppes, C. and D. Black, G. (1990). *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. University of California Press, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Shaheen, J. (2015). *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. Olive Branch Press.

## ***Pentagon-Hollywood Partnerships***

Today the relationship between the Pentagon and Hollywood is regimented and professionalized. The DoD's Public Affairs agency runs an Entertainment Media Office (EMO), and this is the central coordinating agency for military-Hollywood collaborations.<sup>8</sup> The DoD explains it supports “studios, production companies, producers, directors, screenwriters, location managers, actors, and filmmakers in the production of both scripted and unscripted films.”<sup>9</sup> Each military branch also operates its own entertainment liaison office. They are the primary point of contact between producers looking to partner with the military on a movie or TV production, and military public affairs officers enthusiastic about helping to script entertainment that puts the military before the public in the most positive light.<sup>10</sup>

Why do profit-driven entertainment companies so often partner with the military's influencers, and vice versa?

Primarily, studios collaborate with the Pentagon because it gives them a significant financial incentive to do so in the form of free or low-cost military equipment to shoot, which is in effect a subsidy. Movie and TV production is a risky business, with high budgets and no guaranteed returns, so studio heads seek ways to reduce production costs while backing potentially profitable entertainment. When studios aim to make “militainment,” the cost of acquiring or operating the weapons systems that appear in the scenes—such as jets, battleships, tanks, and helicopters—would be astronomically high, often exceeding the total budget of a TV series or movie.

A single F-35 fighter jet costs over \$80 million, while the average production budget for a TV episode falls between \$2 and \$5 million. The USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier cost U.S. taxpayers approximately \$13.3 billion, with daily operational costs running into the millions of dollars. In comparison, the typical budget for a war movie ranges from \$50 million to \$100 million. Partnering with the Pentagon gives studios access to military advisors, as well as technologies and the personnel to operate them, making the production of war-themed movies and TV series feasible.

The Pentagon also frequently grants studios access to military locations—bases, barracks, and training grounds—that can serve as ready-made sets. It provides U.S. officers and troops, who can double as extras and whose regular salaries are paid by taxpayers, not

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Defense Public Affairs. *Help Center Listing*. <https://www.defense.gov/Contact/Help-Center/Help-Center-Listing/Category/22677/public-affairs-community-engagement>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. (2021, September 23). *DoD Production Assistance for Movies and Television Productions*. <https://www.defense.gov/Contact/Help-Center/Article/Article/2762716/dod-production-assistance-for-movies-and-television-productions/>.

<sup>10</sup> There is no independent assessment of the total financial cost of the Pentagon's subsidy for movies and TV shows, either annually or on a case-by-case basis. The granular details of the Pentagon's public affairs budget are not publicly disclosed, and there is no dedicated budget line for the work undertaken by its entertainment liaison offices.

the studios. Additionally, the military offers what are effectively free consulting services by providing expertise on military protocols, operational systems, jargon, drill routines, and the intricacies of portraying battlefield strategies and tactics.

With all these incentives, studios frequently opt to partner with the military's entertainment offices, even scripting and pitching movie and TV show concepts with the Pentagon's entertainment policy in mind.<sup>11</sup> This collaboration requires Hollywood producers to comply with Instruction 5410.16, which says entertainment outputs should support "national interests" by contributing to public understanding of the military and aid its recruitment and retention programs.

Collaboration also frequently requires script changes that can result in historical revisionism and play a role in helping the military purvey idealized images of itself and the contentious wars it wages. In the original *Top Gun* (1984) script, Maverick's friend Goose dies in a fiery midair collision. But the Navy wasn't having it—deeming the scene bad for recruitment, they insisted on a rewrite. The result? A new, less damning version of Goose's death that kept the military's image intact.<sup>12</sup> In *GoldenEye* (1995), the nationality of an admiral seduced and killed by a villain was changed from U.S. to Canadian to avoid tarnishing the image of U.S. military personnel.<sup>13</sup> *Black Hawk Down* (2001) emphasized the heroism of U.S. soldiers during the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia, while omitting or downplaying their killing of civilians. The *Iron Man* (2008) script was changed to remove Tony Stark's overt criticism of the military. Across many movies and TV series, such as *JAG* and *NCIS*, the military has requested and received significant script changes. According to David Robb, who documented many of these script changes, "We may think the content of

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. (2023, June 28). *DoD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Media Productions*. Department of Defense Instruction 5410.16. <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/541016p.pdf>. According to this instruction, the Pentagon will approve or disapprove its support for movie and TV projects based on the following criteria, which provide the military with broad latitude to choose which productions it assists. First, Pentagon assistance is only provided when it aligns with the Pentagon's interests or serves what it deems the nation's best interests. Specifically, the policy states that assistance may be granted if the production "presents a reasonably realistic depiction of the Military Services and the DoD, including Service members, civilian personnel, events, missions, assets, and policies," contributes to "public understanding of the Military Services and the DoD," or benefits military "recruiting and retention programs." Second, any Pentagon cooperation with Hollywood must adhere to established safety standards while ensuring that military readiness for waging actual wars is not compromised. The policy states that "diversion of equipment, personnel, and material resources will be kept to a minimum." Third, studios are required to reimburse the government for expenses incurred due to Pentagon assistance, and Pentagon-provided footage cannot be reused or sold for other productions without prior approval. Additionally, the policy includes safeguards against foreign influence, stating that the Pentagon will not support productions if there is "demonstrable evidence" that they comply with censorship demands from the People's Republic of China or entities under its control.

<sup>12</sup> Gunning, C. (2022, November 2). The Navy Changed Goose's Original *Top Gun* Death (& Made It Better). *Screen Rant*. <https://screenrant.com/top-gun-original-goose-death-cut-navy-improved-why/>

<sup>13</sup> Secker, T. How the Pentagon Rewrote *GoldenEye*. *SpyCulture.com*. <https://www.spyculture.com/pentagon-rewrote-goldeneye/>

American movies is free from government interference, but in fact, the Pentagon has been telling film-makers what to say—and what not to say—for decades.”<sup>14</sup>

Under Pentagon influence, the script of *Godzilla* (2014) underwent a striking transformation—shifting from a critical take on the U.S. military’s use of nuclear weapons in World War II to a more favorable portrayal. The original script of *Godzilla* included references to the U.S.’s atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but these were removed by the producers to secure military assistance. One key change involved deleting a Japanese character’s reference to his grandfather surviving Hiroshima—a decision influenced by Pentagon notes stating, “If this is an apology or questioning of the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that will be a showstopper for us.”<sup>15</sup> In the end, the movie portrays nuclear weapons as a heroic force for saving the world, with *Godzilla*—originally a symbol of the nuclear devastation of Japan—revived by a nuclear blast and fighting alongside the U.S. military against two parasitic monsters.

### ***Captain Marvel Propaganda***

*Captain Marvel* (2019) epitomizes how the Pentagon uses Hollywood to boost its public image and its recruitment of new troops.<sup>16</sup> The story centers on Carol Danvers, a U.S. Air Force pilot who gains superhuman powers during a previous intergalactic conflict she cannot remember. As Danvers uncovers the truth about her past and the space war between the Kree and Skrulls, she becomes one of the galaxy’s most powerful superheroes, a protector of the United States, Earth and beyond. Dubbed “Captain Marvel,” she uses her superpowers to liberate an oppressed alien race (the Skrulls) from an authoritarian intergalactic colonizer (the Kree). In reality, the U.S.’s military superpowers are applied inconsistently, often prioritizing strategic interests over human rights. The U.S. has ignored—or even supported—human rights abuses by its allies, supplying weapons and diplomatic cover. In this way, *Captain Marvel* promotes a myth about the U.S. military and its role in the world as a force for good.

The Air Force had a heavy hand in the film, whose credits thank the Air Force’s Public Affairs divisions, key commands like Air Combat and Air Education and Training Commands, and bases such as Edwards Air Force Base, where scenes were shot in hangars and on flight lines. Public affairs officers like Lt. Col. Nathan Broshear and Lt. Col. Kristin “Mother” Hubbard played roles in advising Marvel Studios on this production. Real airmen piloted F-15C jets for authentic aerial footage that would have been prohibitively expensive to simulate. Air Force pilots, including Matthew “Spider” Kimmel and Stephen “Cajun” Del

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<sup>14</sup> Robb, D. (2004). *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Censors and Shapes the Movies*. Prometheus Books, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Rose, S. (2022, May 26). Top Gun for Hire. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/may/26/top-gun-for-hire-why-hollywood-is-the-us-militarys-best-wingman>

<sup>16</sup> Mirrlees, T. (2021). “Marveling” the World with Hollywood Militainment: The US Air Force and Captain Marvel Go Higher! Further! Faster! *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Media and Globalization*,  
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780367816742-6/marveling-world-hollywood-militainment-tanner-mirrlees>

Bagno, appeared in scenes on base, in bars, and in jets. The head of the Air Force Recruiting Service, General Jeannie Leavitt, personally coached Brie Larson, who plays Danvers, in fighter pilot protocols like saluting, handling gear, and cockpit entry.

Leavitt and the Air Force in turn used *Captain Marvel* as a recruitment tool. Coinciding with the film's release, the Air Force launched a targeted recruitment campaign, including a 30-second "Origin Story" ad that mirrored the superhero narrative. Featuring female fighter pilots, F-15Cs soaring through sunlight, and a narrator proclaiming, "Every superhero has an origin story," the ad aimed to inspire young women to pursue careers as pilots. Shown in 3,600 theaters and promoted on Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms, the "Origin Story" video garnered 11 million views and 200 million impressions overall.<sup>17</sup> This campaign reportedly worked, with Military.com describing a "Captain Marvel effect" on Air Force recruitment. Female applicants to the Air Force Academy for the class of 2023 rose to 31.2%, the highest in five years.<sup>18</sup> Despite *Captain Marvel's* girl-power take on the Air Force, however, the reality is far less cinematic—as of 2023, there were only 103 female fighter pilots in the entire U.S. Air Force. Out of 10,964 total pilots, just 6.5% (708) were women, making Carol Danvers' story quite the marvel.<sup>19</sup> Also, recent research suggests that over the course of the war in Afghanistan, 24 percent of active-duty women experienced sexual assault, a cost of war conveniently absent from the military-backed Marvel Cinematic Universe.<sup>20</sup>

**“Together, these economic and political dynamics forge and sustain a powerful synergy between Hollywood and the Pentagon, cementing a mutually beneficial relationship between the means of making war spectacles and the means of making war.”**

For studios, the cost savings and production value gained from collaborating with the military often outweigh concerns about creative control, and there are yet more factors that motivate them to support the military's public relations. These partnerships imbue war-themed movies and TV shows with an air of "realism," enhancing their promotional campaigns and audience appeal. Hollywood's major studios, owned by vertically integrated media conglomerates, also benefit from cultivating friendly ties with the security state, whose foreign policies of audio-visual free trade often align with their global market interests.

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<sup>17</sup> Pawlyk, O. (2020, January 5). 'Captain Marvel' Effect? Air Force Academy Sees Most Female Applicants in 5 Years. *Military.com*. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/01/05/captain-marvel-effect-air-force-academy-sees-most-female-applicants-5-years.html>

<sup>18</sup> Pawlyk, O. (2020). 'Captain Marvel' Effect? Air Force Academy Sees Most Female Applicants in 5 Years.

<sup>19</sup> Shirar, J. (2024, May 13). Shattering the Glass Ceiling at Mach 2.5. *173rd Fighter Wing*. <https://www.173fw.ang.af.mil/News/Features/Display/Article/3773696/shattering-the-glass-ceiling-at-mach-25>

<sup>20</sup> Greenburg, J. (2024, August 14). Deserted: The U.S. Military's Sexual Assault Crisis as a Cost of War. *Costs of War*, Watson Institute, Brown University. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2024/sexualassault>

Furthermore, while Hollywood executives across the liberal-conservative partisan divide may disagree over domestic policies, support for the military and foreign wars often unites them. Together, these economic and political dynamics forge and sustain a powerful synergy between Hollywood and the Pentagon, cementing a mutually beneficial relationship between the means of making war spectacles and the means of making war.

### ***Glorifying Empire: The Consequences of Military Entertainment***

The consequences of the DoD-Hollywood complex are many. To start, U.S. taxpayers are helping pay for military propaganda in the guise of commercial entertainment that they are then unwittingly targeted by. The Pentagon selectively supports productions that align with its policy goals while withholding assistance from those that challenge its narratives, inadvertently censoring Hollywood story lines. Films like *Platoon* (1986), *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), and *Redacted* (2007) were denied support, likely due to their depictions of the human costs of U.S. warfare and war crimes.

Moreover, the DoD-Hollywood complex's products frequently construct and uphold racist stereotypes of U.S. enemies.<sup>21</sup> In *The Green Berets* (1968), for example, U.S. troops are glorified as heroes, with their Vietnamese adversaries villainized and the suffering of Vietnamese civilians largely ignored. In *Black Hawk Down* (2001), Somalis are shown as a horde of combatants indistinguishable from civilians, either enemy threats or collateral damage. *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) and *American Sniper* (2014) lionize U.S. special forces and intelligence agencies, obscuring the humanity of the Afghan and Iraqi peoples harmed by their black ops and extrajudicial killings.

This complex's entertainment products depict the U.S. Empire—and the continuous and expansive violence of its military—as necessary for the security of “America” and the wider world. With the Pentagon's backing, Hollywood has produced many military-themed films that glorify American exceptionalism—the idea that the U.S. is a uniquely good and altruistic global power. These stories often show heroic American soldiers using violence to liberate the oppressed from various evils, making it seem like U.S. wars are fought to spread freedom, democracy, and human rights. But these movies hide the profit motives that feed many wars and distract from their real consequences.

Pentagon-backed entertainment that depicts the U.S. military's worldwide reach, personnel and weaponry as essential to combating threats to America's security reinforces arguments that escalating annual defense budgets are imperative. The U.S. defense budget is massive, approximately \$850 billion was requested in 2025<sup>22</sup>, and a significant portion of this public expenditure has historically flowed to big weapons firms like Lockheed Martin,

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<sup>21</sup> Jimenez Murguia, S. (Ed.). (2018). *The Encyclopedia of Racism in American Films*. Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. (2024, March 11). *Department of Defense Releases the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Defense Budget*. Release.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3703410/department-of-defense-releases-the-presidents-fiscal-year-2025-defense-budget/>

Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman<sup>23</sup>, as well as big tech firms from Google to Amazon.<sup>24</sup> Military-backed entertainment products lay the groundwork for American perceptions that huge Pentagon budgets are an unquestionable requirement for national security, rather than a subject of democratic debate about where public resources flow, and who benefits from these outlays.<sup>25</sup>

There are many examples of movies and TV shows that radically simplify or distort the real history of the U.S. Empire and the brutal and bloody consequences of U.S. wars. In Marvel Studios' *Iron Man* (2008), Tony Stark, a weapons manufacturer turned self-appointed global liberator, symbolizes the post-9/11 "state of exception," unilaterally deploying missiles to obliterate Afghan "terrorists" and save Afghan civilians. Yet, the real U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, launched under the banner of "Operation Enduring Freedom," resulted in at least 46,319 civilian deaths.<sup>26</sup> *American Sniper* (2014) depicts Navy SEAL Chris Kyle as a protector of Iraqi civilians, shooting insurgents to keep them safe. But the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and U.S.-led military operations since that time killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, with estimates ranging between 100,000 - 500,000 or more people killed.<sup>27</sup>

Rather than informing the public and encouraging democratic deliberation about the complex motives behind, and impacts of, U.S. militarism, Pentagon-supported movies and TV shows promote comforting myths about U.S. actions in the world. The military's many collaborations with Hollywood movie and TV productions normalize the U.S.'s permanent involvement in war and war preparedness, usually sidestep war's ethical complexities, dehumanizes and stereotypes groups of people, and, with a few exceptions, gloss over the civilian deaths caused by U.S. military actions. Building on over a century of positive Pentagon/Hollywood renditions of America at war, these popular forms of entertainment create misshapen public views of what war is like, lay the foundation for a widespread public failure to question U.S. foreign policy choices, and recruits service members with a distorted view of what they will be called on to do when they join.

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<sup>23</sup> Peltier, H. (2022, August 9). *Wartime Contract Spending in Afghanistan Since 2001*. Costs of War, Watson Institute, Brown University. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2022/WartimeContractSpending>

<sup>24</sup> Gonzalez, R. (2024, April 17). *How Big Tech and Silicon Valley are Transforming the Military-Industrial Complex*. Costs of War, Watson Institute, Brown University. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2024/SiliconValley>

<sup>25</sup> Geis, T. (2024, February 20). *Top Gun & 9 Other Movies Backed by The Department of Defense*. *MovieWeb*. <https://movieweb.com/movies-written-with-help-of-department-of-defense/>

<sup>26</sup> Crawford, N. and Lutz, C. (2021, September 1). *Human Cost of Post-9/11 Wars: Direct War Deaths in Major War Zones*. Costs of War, Watson Institute, Brown University. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/WarDeathToll>

<sup>27</sup> Studies have estimated a range of mortality figures stemming from the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. See eg. Iraq Body Count, [www.iraqbodycount.org](http://www.iraqbodycount.org); Crawford, N. (2023, March 15). *Blood and Treasure: United States Budgetary Costs and Human Costs of 20 Years of War in Iraq and Syria, 2003-2023*. *Costs of War, Watson Institute, Brown University.*; Burnham, G.; Lafta, R.; Doocy, S.; Roberts, L. (2006, October 11). *Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey*. *The Lancet* 368(9545), 1421-1428.

## ***Telling Figures***

- 200: average number of requests for “assistance” the Pentagon receives from Hollywood movie and TV studios each year.<sup>28</sup> On average, it assists seven feature film projects and approximately 93 smaller film and TV projects per year.
- The all-time top two highest worldwide box office grossing war movies were made with Pentagon assistance: *American Sniper* (2014) (\$547.6 Million) and *Saving Private Ryan* (\$482 million).<sup>29</sup>
- After helping produce the film *Captain Marvel*, the Air Force used it for recruitment, and female applicants to the Air Force Academy in 2023 rose to 31.2%, the highest in five years.
- The 2019 Air Force recruitment ad “Origin Story”, released as a tie-in with *Captain Marvel*, achieved vast reach, amassing 173,000 visits, 11 million views, and 200 million impressions across social media platforms.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Defense. (2024, July 16). DoD Assistance to Non-Government, Entertainment-Oriented Media Productions. *Federal Register*. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/07/16/2024-15091/dod-assistance-to-non-government-entertainment-oriented-media-productions>.

<sup>29</sup> Federico Furzan, F. (2024, August 11). 10 Highest-Grossing War Movies at the Box Office. *MovieWeb*. <https://movieweb.com/highest-grossing-war-movies/>

<sup>30</sup> Pawlyk, O. (2020, January 5). ‘Captain Marvel Effect? Air Force Academy Sees Most Female Applicants in 5 Years. *Military.com*. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/01/05/captain-marvel-effect-air-force-academy-sees-most-female-applicants-5-years.html>. A website visit is when a user actively clicks and interacts with a webpage, while an impression happens when content (like an ad or link) is displayed on a user's screen, regardless of whether they interact / engage with it.