

BROTHERS

A Lionsgate / Relativity Media, LLC Presentation

A Sighvatsson Films / Relativity Media, LLC / Michael De Luca Productions, Inc. Production

A Jim Sheridan Film

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

It has been some 9 years since the United States of America started its campaign against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The World Economic Forum listed Afghanistan as the biggest geopolitical risk of 2010. Despite his election campaign pledge to withdraw troops from the region, President Barack Obama ordered some 30000 additional forces to be sent to Afghanistan.

The film I chose for this edition of the *Journal* is a story about two brothers, Sam - a U.S. Marine Captain - and Tommy Cahill (played by Tobey Maguire and Jake Gyllenhaal respectively), and the heartbreaking impact that the U.S. led war in Afghanistan has on the Cahill family. Based on the Danish motion picture "Brødre" by Susanne Bier and Anders Thomas Jensen, the film 'Brothers' attempts a very true-to-life reflection of the psychological and physical effects of the Afghan war on soldiers and their families. Sam returns to Afghanistan from active duty, and during operation "Enduring Freedom" - a serious contradiction if I ever saw one - Sam and a fellow soldier, Private Joe Willis (played by Patrick Flueger) are captured when a missile launched by the Taliban strikes the helicopter in which they were flying. Sam is presumed dead, and his family receives the news from the Army officials. Shortly before Sam's return to Afghanistan, his brother Tommy is released from prison after serving a sentence for robbing a bank in the brother's home town. Significant tension exists in the Cahill family, as one brother, Sam, serves as an 'exemplary' citizen, while the other, Tommy, is a convicted felon. Sam and Tommy grew up in a military family, and their father Hank (played by Sam Shepard) is a proud war veteran himself.

After Sam's capture and presumed death, Tommy straightens out his life, and involves himself with Sam's wife, Grace (played by Natalie Portman) and the couples' two



young daughters, Isabelle and Maggie (played by Bailee Madison and Taylor Geare respectively). Meanwhile in Afghanistan the story takes a very emotional and heartbreaking turn for Sam. Upon his return to America and his family he now has a very important 'new' member, Tommy. Sam and Grace's daughters formed strong attachments to Tommy, and the whole family now has to deal with Sam's return and the physical and psychological scars that he sustained in Afghanistan.

'Brothers' is an excellent film full of tension and drama, and the psychological processes contained in the film are brilliantly portrayed by a stellar cast. The film leaves the viewer wondering whether those in power and authority within the U.S Government and Military fully realize the impact of this

continuing war. World peace deserves every effort assigned to achieving and upholding it, though the 'psychological cost' in the process seems astronomical and under-appreciated.

The film does not portray a solid and adequate emotional support structure in place for individuals such as Sam who now has to face 'normal' life after experiencing what he did. One wonders how adequately equipped those in authority within the U.S Government and Military are in dealing with the psychological fall-out that so many soldiers experience following active duty. The film also leaves one hoping for resolution of the war effort in the Afghan region. 'Brothers' is an excellent film worth every viewing minute. Oh, and please note my emphasis on the vocal advocacy of real and lasting world peace within this review. Get involved somehow, and let us never forget the reason or reasons for us being on earth. Each one of us - in my mind - has a duty towards the betterment of humanity, and the longer we take to do something significant and lasting, the more humanity and the world suffers unnecessarily.