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Armor All: The Self-Conception of Private Security Contractors

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Introduction

Mentioning private security contractors to anyone not affiliated with the industry almost immediately generates images of machine guns, armored vehicles, bullet-proof vests and macho behavior reminiscent of stereotypical mercenaries. Following the Abu-Ghraib prison scandal in 2004 and the Nisour Square shootings in 2007, when 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by Blackwater security guards in a firefight in the heart of Baghdad City, the media and a number of best-selling books have portrayed the industry and those working for it as thrill-seekers, primarily interested in quickly making a lot on money and generally indifferent to human needs (Singer 2008; Pelton 2006; Scahill 2007).

However, much of the evidence presented in these stories is anecdotal and lacks systematic and scientific empirical analysis, raising questions such as: What do we really

know about the motives of the men and women working in the peace and stability industry? Are the incidents that grab media attention indicative of the shortfalls of a rapidly growing industry? Are they evidence confirming the media-dominating picture of security contractors as "gun-slinging cowboys?" Or are they unavoidable side-effects of working in a combat zone? Who are these individuals, volunteering to risk their lives for, according to the common assumption, a paycheck? What really drives them? What are their ideals and motivations?

In this article, I intend to provide some preliminary answers to these questions by examining the occupational self-conceptions and motivations of individuals who provide armed services in post-conflict environments under contract by private security firms. Specifically, the objective of this research is to explore, based on the tenets of social identity theory (SIT), the extent to which there is an emerging professional identity among employees of private security firms and, if so, what that identity is.

Identity becomes salient as the motivations, attitudes, values and norms shared among the members of a social reference group promote or prohibit specific behavior. Indeed, political and legal control mechanisms may function most effectively when the standards and values they are based on have been internalized by those whose behavior they are designed to shape. Especially the still largely un- or at a minimum under-regulated, private security industry requires reliance on effective self-regulation for monitoring the behavior of its members in the field (Franke 2011; Franke and von Boemcken 2010; Elsea 2010; Congressional Research Service 2008).

Doug Brooks, president of the International Stability Operations Association, the private security industry's trade organization, conjectures: "It is critical the international community be proactive in ensuring that the companies doing this work in conflict and post-conflict environments and among highly vulnerable populations are

the most professional and ethical available" (Brooks 2007). Effective (informal) self-regulation will depend on the degree to which ethical standards and professional values have been internalized among individuals in the field. In turn, the effectiveness of formal regulation is enhanced through norms with a clearly identifiable professional purpose. In order to assess the social identities of security contractors, I administered an online survey to more than 200 American security contractors, all of whom were law enforcement officers who had joined a U.S.-based security firm and completed at least one tour of duty on contract with the Department of State in a conflict region. Since contractors assume roles traditionally reserved for military professionals, the survey employed a number of value-scales previously used in cognitive research examining the values and attitudes of officers and soldiers. The survey was designed to assess the effect of respondents' most important social identities on their levels of self-interested individualism (i.e., Machiavellianism), social dominance orientation, job engagement and support for regulatory provisions about their ethical conduct.

To set the stage for the analysis, I will begin by introducing the main tenets of social identity theory (SIT) as they relate to the forming of a professional identity. I will then conceptualize the main elements of the security contractor identity, discuss existing regulations for the private security industry and develop a conceptual model that distinguishes between formal and informal control. Analyzing the data obtained through the Security Contractor Survey, I then explore respondents' social identities and examine the extent to which these identities shape their values, attitudes and professional self-conceptions. I conclude with some preliminary observations for the future of outsourcing security functions to the private sector and the utility of using contractors in peace and stability operations.

The Concept of Identity

Most generally, identity represents "the process by which the person seeks to integrate his (sic) various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self" (Epstein 1978). Individuals draw on multiple, sometimes even competing subidentities (e.g., religious, political, social, ethnic, or occupational) to derive their self-conceptions. These subidentities become consequential for behavior in situations when their salience is invoked (Stryker 1968). A person's various subidentities form specific links between the self and his or her membership in social groups. Hofman (1988) specified salience as the probability by which a subidentity is remembered and activated in a given context. Prolonged salience upgrades the subidentity in the "prominence hierarchy" thereby enhancing its "centrality" and the degree to which it connects with other subidentities (Hofman 1988). The more central a subidentity is to an individual's self-conception and the more interconnected it is with other subidentities, the more committed the individual will be to preserving and enhancing that identity and to display attitudes, values, and social behaviors consistent with it.

Social Identity

In the present context, the concept of "social identity" refers to "that part of individuals' self-concept which derives from knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978). Theories of social identity are typically based on three premises:

(1) people are motivated to create and maintain a positive self-concept;

(2) the self-concept derives largely from group identifications; and

(3) people establish positive social identities through normative comparisons between favorable in-groups and unfavorable out-groups (Franke 1999).

Based on these premises, Brewer developed a theory of optimal distinctiveness and argued that "social identity derives from a fundamental tension between human need for validation and similarity to others (on the one hand) and a countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation (on the other)." Brewer viewed social identity as a compromise between assimilation with and differentiation from others, "where the need for deindividuation is satisfied within in-groups, while the need for distinctiveness is met through *inter*-group comparisons" (Brewer 1991).

Confirming Brewer's idea of optimal distinctiveness, Sidanius found that individuals created social categories and positive social identities primarily by comparing in-groups with out-groups along those dimensions most likely to generate a favorable outcome for the in-group(s) (Sidanius and Haley 2005; Sidanius, Devereaus, and Pratto 1992). At the individual level, Sidanius labeled this predisposition "social dominance orientation" (SDO), i.e., "the degree to which a person desires to establish and maintain the superiority of his or her own group over other groups" (Sidanius and Liu 1992). This predisposition, in combination with various cultural factors, leads to the establishment of a hierarchical system that consists of at least two "castes:" a hegemonic group at the top of the social system and a negative reference group at the bottom.[1] For Sidanius, caste hierarchy is preserved through attitudes, values, beliefs, and ideologies ("legitimizing myths") that justify the groups' position in the social system.

Social identity research has demonstrated that individuals tend to invoke their group identifications in many decision contexts, since the norms, values, stereotypes and behavior patterns associated with a particular identity provide a sense of certainty and may inform their choice among decision alternatives (Abrahams and Hogg 1999; Franke 2003; Hogg 1996; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood and Sherif 1988).

Professional Identity

A professional, Moritz Janowitz explained, "as a result of prolonged training, acquires a skill which enables him to render a specialized service" (Janowitz 1960). But Janowitz conjectured, "a profession is more than a group with special skill, acquired through intensive training. A professional group develops a sense of group identity and a system of internal administration. Self-administration – often supported by state intervention – implies the growth of a body of ethics and standards of performance" (Ibid 6). As part of an individual's overall identity structure, professional identity reflects the expression of his or her self-perception as a social carrier of the values, norms, skills, and behaviors that define his or her professional in-group. The stronger an individual's sense of professional identity – i.e., the more salient the professional subidentity is within the individual's hierarchy of identities – the more probable it is that this identity will serve as a central cognitive resource to incite and sustain motivation and shape behavior amidst the complex and fluid demands of today's peacebuilding environment. To society, Kennedy argued, professionals provide "reliable fixed standards (of health, of justice, of truth, etc.) in situations where the facts are murky…. They represent the best a particular community is able to muster in response to new challenges" (Kennedy 2000).

Specifically, Kennedy described professional identity as comprising three key elements:

1. *Specialized knowledge* accumulated over time and built up by experience, analysis, and insight from predecessors in the field, that provide the professional with "an understanding not only of *how* things are, but also *why* they are that way" (Ibid 2).

2. *Motivation/commitment to service*, including service to one's professional community, i.e., a public promise to fulfill one's professional responsibilities and

perform one's tasks according to principles and accepted practices defined by the discipline.

3. *Decision autonomy/Control*, granting professionals liberty to choose concrete goals and specific courses of action with little to no interference or within fairly expansive and flexible boundaries. This argument implies that the more unpredictable or unknowable a situation is, the less behavior can be regulated formally through standard operation procedures or predetermined rules of engagement. Consequently, the more individuals in complex and volatile contexts will rely on invoking the values and principles associated with their salient (professional) identities (Franke 2003).

The expectation is that, in conditions of uncertainty, professionals apply prudence and sound judgment based on their professional education, training, and experience. The hope underlying effective self-regulation/informal control is that vetted professionals will be able to respond to emerging challenges reliably, effectively, and efficiently while being committed first and foremost to the well-being of those they serve – especially in complex and uncertain contexts where formal regulation may not exist, may not be appropriate, or may be difficult to implement and enforce.

Contractor Identity

Five decades ago, Samuel Huntington argued that military officers are professionals in the art of war and the management of violence (Huntington 1963). Their area of expertise is in the planning, organizing, and employment of military force. Huntington distinguished between military professionals primarily charged with combat and command and those responsible for technical and logistical support (Huntington 1957). For Huntington, the latter group did not represent members of the military profession since their expertise contained both the management of violence and technical or other professional knowledge not unique to the military (Ibid 12).

Traditionally, civilian contractors have been employed by the U.S. military to supplement or support, but not deliver, combat functions. In the current Iraq and Afghanistan operations, however, contract employees increasingly also serve in combat roles. As of September 2009, there were 12,684 private security contractors in Iraq, of which 11,162 were armed (88%). According to DOD, the number of armed security contractors had increased by 140% from 5,481 in September 2007 to 13,232 in June 2009. In Afghanistan, the increase is even starker. Between December 2008 and September 2009, the number of armed security contractors increased by 236% from 3,184 to 10,712 (Schwartz 2010; Government Accountability Office 2005; Congressional Research Service 2008). How did this happen?

Regulating an Expanding Industry

Eager to expand business and capitalize on the rising demand for the provision of security services following the Iraq War, a number of security firms began to actively recruit former soldiers and police officers to deploy in Iraq and offered them salaries that dwarfed basic military pay (Thompson 1996; Singer 2008). Some observers have argued that the prospective of extraordinary monetary gain was a central motivator for individuals to sign on with these firms (Singer 2008; Pelton 2006). Although pay-scales have decreased since those early days, sufficiently skilled security contractors from Western countries are still assumed to be paid between U.S. $3,000 and $6,000 a month, with additional allowances of up to U.S. $2,000 when working in particularly dangerous areas (Rarabici 2006).

In addition to high pay, media attention has focused largely on alleged human rights violations committed by contractors. For instance, employees of two security firms were implicated in the Abu Ghraib torture scandal and a number of reports pointed to sexual harassment, and even rape, committed by male contractors either against female colleagues or Iraqi locals (Isenberg 2008).

The most widely reported incident occurred in September 2007, when security guards from the company Blackwater USA, while escorting a U.S, diplomatic convoy for the State Department, engaged in a firefight in crowded Nisour Square in the heart of Baghdad City that left 17 Iraqi civilians dead. Although Blackwater claimed that the shooting had started in response to an ambush against the convoy, eyewitnesses and US military officials at the scene testified that the firing had commenced without hostile provocation (Congressional Research Service 2008). In the subsequent investigation, the FBI concluded that at least 14 out of the 17 shootings were unjustified and that Blackwater guards had "recklessly violated American rules for the use of lethal force" (Thompson and Risen 2008).

A subsequent congressional investigation revealed that "Blackwater has been involved in at least 195 'escalation of force' incidents in Iraq since 2005 that involved the firing of shots by Blackwater forces," for "an average of 1.4 shootings per week" (United States House 2007). Although there are now fewer reports of contractor misconduct, in January 2011, the Afghan government accused several prominent private security companies of committing "major offenses," a move that could expedite their departure from the country (Partlow and Chandrasekaran 2011).

Formal and Informal Regulation

Formal regulation refers to the top-down application of legal prescriptions, drawing an authoritative distinction between the acceptable and the forbidden. Although it is widely believed that security contractors in Iraq were "unregulated" and were operating in a "legal vacuum," (Norton-Taylor 2006) their activities have been subject to quite extensive formal regulation from the beginning of the U.S. occupation in 2003 (Coalition Provisional Authority 2003, 2004). In the aftermath of the Nisour Square shootings, however, formal mechanisms to regulate the industry and the behavior of individual contractors tightened considerably. For example, in January 2009, the Iraqi government lifted the immunity of

contractors to local law, thus making it possible for Iraqi authorities to criminally prosecute security contractors for unlawful behavior. Moreover, already in 2007 Congress passed the MEJA (Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act) Expansion and Enforcement Act (H.R. 2740), subjecting all contractors working for the U.S. government in war zones to the jurisdiction of US criminal law. In a first application of this Act in December 2008, five Blackwater guards were indicted for their involvement in the Nisour Square shootings.

Besides legal accountability, political oversight also seems to have improved, as both the DOD and DOS agreed to extend their oversight responsibilities (Congressional Budget Office nd). The DOD has since established an Armed Contractor Oversight Division and "significantly [increased] the number of Defense Contracting Management Agency personnel" (Congressional Research Service 2008). The State Department has taken steps to improve on-site monitoring of contractor activities through, for instance, video surveillance of privately protected convoys (Ibid 45).

In contrast to the top-down logic of formal regulation, informal regulation refers to the norms, rules and values that are internalized by individuals as a central element of their identity. As a consequence, behavior is guided through continual *self*-surveillance and *self*-regulation instead of the threat of external sanctions (Foucault 1980; Fraser 1981). Informal regulation is a fundamentally social process, in that identity is derived through the identification with others. When informal regulation is effective, individuals will voluntarily conform to an inter-subjectively shared system of rules and values, which, in turn, establishes their social identity and shapes and constrains their behavior. In theory, informal control may well exist in the absence of formal laws and disciplinary practices, hence providing for a modicum of order and predictability, especially in uncertain environment.

More commonly, however, informal regulation extends and intensifies formal regulatory practices. As a result, control is effectively maximized if both formal and informal

regulations reinforce each other. Recognizing the utility of this type of informal regulation, the security industry has begun to provide strong incentives for companies to monitor their employees' behavior and adopt self-regulating mechanisms. For instance, the International Stability Operations Association (ISOA), as an umbrella organization representing the interests of the "peace and stability operations industry," seeks to "promote high operational and ethical standards of firms." For this purpose, ISOA developed a voluntary International Code of Conduct (ICoC) calling on members to respect human rights and operate with integrity, honesty and fairness. Moreover, member firms agree to recognize and support legal accountability, work only for legitimate and recognized governments, international and non-governmental organizations and lawful private companies, and ensure adequate training and vetting of their personnel (ISOA 2009). As of February 2011, the ISOA serves a total of 55 corporate members all of whom have signed its ICoC and have pledged to abide by the ethical standards established therein (IPOA nd). Self-regulation seems an attractive choice for many companies, as ISOA membership has more than doubled since 2006. The ICoC does not put informal self-regulation in the place of national regulation, but rather envisions the ICoC to supplement formal national regulation (Mayer 2011).

Although the impact and effectiveness of industry self-regulation has been subject of recent research (Schneiker 2009), to date there has been no systematic analysis of the professional self-conception of security contractors. Neither has there been an analysis of the extent to which the provisions of the ICoC have been internalized among contractors in the field. The following section presents the results of the first empirical survey of U.S. security contractors with operational experience in post-conflict contexts.

Design, Subjects, Measures

Subjects and Design

Since contractual prohibitions made it impossible to survey contractors currently deployed in the field, I surveyed the members of the CivPol Alumni Association, a non-profit organization founded in 2007 "dedicated to providing the international law enforcement officer a forum to exchange information and maintain relationships fostered in difficult and challenging environments" (CivPol Alumni Organization nd). At the time of survey administration, the Association sponsored some 1,400 members who had completed at least one tour of duty on contract in a conflict region. The members, who were all American police officers, had received a leave of absence from their regular jobs and were recruited to participate in international civilian police activities and local police development programs in countries around the world.

In March 2009, all members received an e-mail from the Association President with a link to the *Security Contractor Survey* and a request to complete the survey online. This approach made any identification of respondents impossible, thus ensuring the anonymity of all information provided on the survey. All of the 223 respondents who completed the survey were U.S. citizens with a law enforcement background and the vast majority were male (216 or 96.9%), white (77.5%), and married (77.1%). All had completed at least high school (34.5%) and almost half (49.8%) held undergraduate and 15.7% graduate degrees. Almost two-thirds (136 or 61.5%) had served in the military and 4-in-5 out of those (108) had been directly involved in combat. Of the respondents with a military background, almost all had served as enlisted personnel (95%) and nearly three-fourths (71%) were honorably discharged as corporals or sergeants (E4-E6). At the time of survey administration, respondents had an average of 4.7 years of experience working for the private security industry, with a median of three years. About one-quarter of respondents (23.7%) had less than two years of private security work experience, 44.9% had worked 2-5 years, 23.7% 5-10 years, and 16 respondents (7.7%) had worked for more than ten years in the private security

sector. Almost one-third of respondents (69 or 30.9%) reported that their job required them to "engage in actual fighting/security detail or security protection" and more than three-quarters (171 or 76.7%) reported providing advisory and training services (multiple responses were possible to this question).

The *Security Contractor Survey* asked respondents to designate their most important in-groups and out-groups, to rank-order their motivations for working as a private security contractor, to indicate their level of commitment to and investment in their job, and to respond to a series of statements measuring their social dominance orientation and their attitudes toward ethical conduct in the field.

Instead of presenting respondents with a forced-choice list of possible in-groups and out-groups, the social identity of respondents was assessed by analyzing group affiliations that are meaningful both cognitively and emotionally to them. While most standard survey approaches rely on prearranged, yet normatively inconsequential in-group categorizations, I examine social identity within the operational experience of private security contractors, thereby extending social identity theory to a new genuine field setting. To assess the social identity of contractors, the *Security Contractor Survey* presented respondents with this statement: "As individuals in society we all belong to a variety of groups, e.g., social (club, family, friendship), religious, ethnic, academic, occupational, geographic, ideological, etc." Respondents were then asked to identify "in order of priority up to five groups that you very strongly identify with, whose beliefs and values you share and that affect how you see yourself as a person." Respondents were then asked to list up to five groups in order of importance to their self-conception. In addition to their in-groups, respondents were also asked to designate their most important out-groups by listing "any group(s) that they would certainly not want to identify with or that they feel might even appear as a threat to any of the groups you identify with." Each respondent's list of groups was recorded verbatim, and

classification codes were assigned to each entry according to general out-group categories.[2]

Two judges independently reviewed the entries and assigned a numeric code to each of the groups listed following instructions in the codebook.[3]

In order to assess their value-orientations and attitudes, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of specific statements. Responses were scored on a five-point numerical Likert scale (from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") and mean response values were calculated. Survey items measuring the same concept were combined into separate scales and mean scale values were computed.[4] For this research, I specifically examined respondents' adherence to the following value-scales (the exact wording of the scale items can be found in Table 2):

- *Machiavellianism (MACH).* Following the writings of Machiavelli, Christie and Geis developed a series of hypothetical personality traits that someone who is self-interested and effective in controlling others (high Mach) should possess a relative lack of affect in interpersonal relationships, little concern with conventional morality, and a focus on getting things done (Christie and Geis nd).

- *Ethical Conduct (ETH).* To explore respondents' adherence to the industry standard for ethical conduct—and to supplement the results of the MACH scale—respondents were asked about their attitudes toward ethical provisions specified in the ICoC.

- *Social Dominance Orientation (SDO).* To assess the extent to which respondents desired to establish and maintain in-group superiority over other groups, the survey measured attitudes that could lead to discriminating behavior in the field (Sidanius and Liu 1992).

- *Job Engagement (JOB).* Psychological research has shown that individuals who view their job as an integral part of their identity will feel a personal commitment to doing

well and, consequently, tend to perform better (Brown nd; Britt nd). The survey asked respondents to indicate their commitment to working in the private security field.

Data Analysis & Findings

Professional Motivation:

The results of the survey show a picture quite different from that portrayed by the media (see Table 1). Contrary to media-generated expectations of profit motivation, only one-quarter (25.2%) of respondents indicated that they were highly motivated by the prospect of making "more money than in their previous job" and fewer than one-in-five (19.1%) listed "adventure and excitement" as among the most important reasons for signing on with the private security industry. Instead, by far the most often cited reasons for working in the stability operations sector were to "face and meet new challenges" (74.9%) and to "help others" (64.6%). About one-third of respondents also hoped that their work would make a difference (38.0%) and saw their contractor service as a way to serve their country (31.3%).

Table 1: Motivation for Seeking Employment in the Private Security Sector (in percent)			
Motivators	**Very important**	**Important**	**Less/not important**
To face and meet new challenges	74.9	20.8	4.3
To help others	64.6	24.1	11.3
To feel like my work makes a difference	38.0	37.1	24.9
To serve my country	31.3	34.1	34.6
To make more money than in my previous job	25.2	44.1	30.6
For personal growth	22.0	33.9	44.0
To seek adventure and excitement	19.1	35.4	45.5
To improve my chances of finding a better job	13.1	36.7	50.2
To travel and visit new places	11.3	32.1	56.6

* Responses to this question were aggregated, so that a respondent's top three choices were classified as "very important," choices 4-6 as "important" and the last three choices as "less or not important." Consequently, the percentages do not add up to 100.

Social Identity: In-groups and Out-groups

Asked about their primary reference group—that is the in-group listed as most important—half the respondents in the CivPol sample listed either a religious (primarily

Christian) group (24.8%) or their family (22.8%). For ten percent of respondents, either the police (10.4%) or the military (9.9%) were the most important reference groups, followed by law enforcement (7.9%) and the United States (6.9%).

To account for contextual variations in the way that multiple identities interact and shape value orientations, respondents were not only compared in terms of their most important in-group, but also in terms of whether they viewed any military, religious, occupational, etc. groups as important to their self-conceptions. Respondents were assigned to one of two groups: those who listed any social, military, religious, occupational, etc. among their five most important in-groups, irrespective of rank order, were considered to have a salient or potent in-group identity. Respondents who did not list any of these groups among their most important in-groups were considered to have a latent in-group identity.

Comparing respondents with potent and latent in-group identities in terms of attitudinal preferences revealed that potency of family and religious identities had only insignificant effects. Exploring the impact of the potency of military and lawpol (combining potent law enforcement and police in-groups) identities on respondents' levels of Machaivellianism, social dominance orientation, ethical conduct, and job engagement rendered the results displayed in Table 2.[5]

Overall, respondents were highly committed to their jobs and to ethical conduct on the job. They also tended to score lower than average (mean = 3.00) on the Machiavellianism and social dominance orientation scales (Franke 1999; Franke and Heinecken 1991; Franke and Guttieri 2009).[6] Almost all respondents viewed their work as security contractors as a "calling" to serve their country. In this respect, their scores were comparable to the scores of military professionals captured in earlier research (Franke 1999; Franke and Heinecken 1991; Franke and Guttieri 2009).

Although respondents with a potent military identity showed higher job engagement levels than their counterparts with latent military identity, both groups were strongly committed to their jobs. Comparing respondents in terms of the potency of their identity as police or law enforcement professionals rendered only few significant differences between weak and strong identifiers. Significantly more strong than weak identifiers believed that "one should take action only when it is morally right" (59% versus 34%).

Comparing CivPol respondents in terms of their military and lawpol identities shows a higher than expected number of respondents with both potent military and lawpol in-group affiliations (see Table 3). This is an indication that their previous military experiences as well as their current professional experience in law enforcement provide strong cognitive frames for how they view themselves. Given their high levels of professionalism and job engagement, this result is unsurprising and indicates that the professional self-conception of security contractors may indeed be very closely related to that of other, more established security professions.

Out-Group Comparisons:

In terms of their out-group identifications, the analysis revealed that respondents overwhelmingly listed social, religious, political or ethnic extremist or radical groups as their primary out-groups. Specific groups listed can be categorized with labels such as:

- terrorist (a potent out-group for 69 (33.5%) of respondents), including such specific entries as Islamic terrorists(19), Al Queda (18), Hamas (6), Taliban (4) and PLO (4);

- supremacist (52), including KKK (37) and Aryan Nation, Nazi or Neo-Nazi (42);

- communist or socialist (19);

- criminals (46) or some form of organized crime (28).

TABLE 2: Value-Orientations by Social Identity								
	Military Identity				**LawPol Identity**			
	Potent (N=66)		**Latent** (N=128)		**Potent** (N=123)		**Latent** (N=71)	
Scale Items:	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*
Job Engagement:	**4.85**		**4.78***		**4.83**		**4.75+**	
J1. I am committed to performing well at my job.	5.00	100/0	4.94*	98/0	4.97	100/0	4.94*	96/0*
J2. I feel personal responsibility for my job performance.	4.92	100/0	4.86	100/0	4.89	100/0	4.86	100/0
J3. How well I do in my job matters a great deal to me.	4.92	100/0	4.88	100/0	4.89	100/0	4.89	100/0
J4. I really care about the outcomes that result from my job performance.	4.70	100/0	4.66	100/0	4.73	100/0	4.58	100/0
J5. I invest a large part of myself into my job performance.	4.71	100/0	4.55	98/2	4.67	100/0	4.49	96/0
Ethical Conduct	**4.70**		**4.66**		**4.67**		**4.68**	
E1. When deployed in the field, it is important to respect the dignity of all human beings and strictly adhere to all relevant international laws and protocols on human rights.	4.59	95/0	4.59	97/2	4.59	98/0	4.59	94/3
E2. Security personnel in the field should always take every practicable measure to minimize loss of life and destruction of property.	4.77	100/0	4.73	99/0	4.74	99/0	4.75	100/0
E3. Integrity, honesty and fairness are key guiding principles for anyone deployed in a contingency operation.	4.83	98/2	4.76	99/0	4.80	99/0	4.75	99/1
E4. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law should always be fully investigated and, when necessary, prosecuted.	4.59	94/2	4.55	94/3	4.54	94/2	4.61	94/4
E5. Organizations should always take firm and definitive action if their employees engage in unlawful activities.	4.71	98/0	4.70	98/1	4.69	98/1	4.73	99/0
Machiavellianism	**2.37**		**2.34**		**2.31**		**2.40**	
M1. Most people are basically good and kind. (R)	3.79	73/5	3.83	74/5	3.78	71/3	3.87	79/8*
M2. Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're								

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Scale Items:	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*	*Mean*	*%Agree/ %Disagree*
forced to do so.	2.47	21/65	2.15	13/79	2.32	17/71	2.16	13/80
M3. One should take action only when it is morally right. (R)	3.44	52/27	3.26	50/35	3.53	59/25	2.96***	34/46**
M4. Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.	2.58	21/58	2.65	23/55	2.63	22/54	2.61	24/61
M5. It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak, and it will come out when they are given a chance.	2.33	15/68	2.30	14/73	2.27	13/71	2.39	17/72
M6. It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.	2.06	12/64	1.99	16/67	1.98	6/82	2.08	8/85
Social Dominance Orientation	**2.16**		**2.14**		**2.13**		**2.17**	
S1. No group should dominate in society. (R)	4.20	86/6	4.13	80/9	4.17	83/7	4.11	81/9
S2. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.	2.02	8/76	1.90	12/81	1.93	11/79	1.94	10/80
S3. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally. (R)	4.05	83/11	3.89	79/10	3.98	83/10	3.87	76/11
S4. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups. (R)	3.68	65/9	3.63	65/13	3.64	64/11	3.65	66/11
S5. It would be good if groups could be equal. (R)	3.71	70/9	3.75	72/12	3.76	70/14	3.69	72/9
S6. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.	2.15	5/76	2.01	6/80	2.07	6/78	2.03	6/80
S7. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.	2.00	6/83	1.98	7/82	1.98	6/81	1.99	8/85
S8. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.	2.30	12/64	2.28	16/67	2.24	13/67	2.37	17/65

Scale items were measured at a 5-point numerical Likert scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Responses of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" were combined as "% Agree;" responses of "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" were combined as "% Disagree." Responses to individual items were scored so that a high mean indicates a high level of agreement with the statement.

Comparing potent in-group and out-group identities, the analysis shows only a few significant results. Table 3 indicates significant correlations between military or lawpol in-group and terrorist out-group identities and between lawpol in-group and criminal and radical out-group identities. For contractors to have strong anti-terrorist group affiliations is unsurprising given the military backgrounds of a large portion of them and their professional service for an industry that contributes to the Global War on Terror efforts of the U.S. government. Similarly, given their backgrounds as law enforcement professionals, it is also unsurprising that respondents who strongly identified with this background viewed criminals, organized crime and radicals as important out-groups.

TABLE 3: CivPol Alumni In-group-Out-group Social Identity Matrix (observed frequencies; expected frequencies in parantheses)				
	Military Identity		**LawPol Identity**	
In-Groups	**Potent** (N=67)	**Latent** (N=139)	**Potent** (N=128)	**Latent** (N=78)
Military	--	--	54 (42)***	13 (25)
LawPol	54 (42)***	74 (86)	--	--
Out-Groups				
Terrorists	36 (22)***	33 (47)	59 (43)***	10 (26)
Criminals/Organized Crime	24 (21)	40 (43)	51 (40)***	13 (24)
Radicals	18 (18)	36 (36)	40 (34)*	14 (20)

Chi-Square level of significance: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

Discussion and Conclusion

With this research, I intended to explore the self-conceptions of individuals who sign on with private security firms and find out whether there is an emerging professional identity among private security contractors. Much of the media reporting and the academic research that has accompanied the rapid rise of the industry have portrayed contractors as money-grabbing, gun-toting, thrill-seeking Rambo-type mercenaries with little to no moral inhibitions or concern for ethical conduct.

The results of the survey show a picture very different from that portrayed by the media. Although it is impossible to draw conclusions about the industry as a whole from this small and relatively homogeneous sample, the data at hand point to some interesting preliminary conclusions. Contrary to media-generated expectations, only one-quarter of respondents were highly motivated to seek employment in the private security field by prospects of monetary gain. Indeed, a majority of respondents were "proud" of what they did, wanted to do "something worthwhile," and help others.

Virtually all respondents appeared highly committed to their professional work and cared about their job outcomes. Respondents also overwhelmingly supported the industry's ethical standards and showed lower than average levels of individualistic self-interest and social dominance orientation. In fact, their most important in-groups were professional in-groups with military and law enforcement being the most potent social identities. In turn, respondents' most significant out-groups reflect social identities at the fringe of or outside society (radicals, terrorists, criminals, racial extremists). Therefore, respondents achieved optimal distinctiveness by juxtaposing established and socially accepted security relevant (military/law enforcement) professional in-group identities with socially unacceptable out-groups. Confirming these results, respondents also showed strong adherence to socially and professionally acceptable ethical standards and a keen sense of serving the community. These results suggest not only that respondents share value-orientations similar to other professionals working in comparable roles in the public sector (i.e., police or armed forces), but also that informal control seems to structure the thinking and acting of security contractors in this sample.

In terms of the three key elements defining professional identity – specialized knowledge, commitment to service and decision autonomy – respondents certainly meet the first two criteria. The ICoC can be seen as an attempt to provide ethical standards to guide the

behavior of security professionals in the field under conditions of uncertainty. While the data at hand does not allow conclusive inferences about actual behavior, the responses of the CivPol alumni indicate that informal control seems to effectively shape the thinking and perception among this sample of security contractors.

Generally, their law enforcement backgrounds seem to prepare this sample of contractors well for constabulary roles in peace and stability operations, as indicated by their strong adherence to ethical standards and their high levels of job engagement. In addition, earlier research found that contractors in this sample did not view themselves as, nor did they want to be compared to, classical mercenaries (Franke and von Boemcken nd). These results suggest a desire for the development of a corporate identity reflecting specialized skills in the provision of tactical security services in peace and stability operations, supplementing but not replacing services provided by the armed forces.

At present, however, when enforcement of industry regulations is still sporadic and inconsistent, the lack of regulatory enforcement mechanisms combined with the highly fragmented nature of the industry, its multitude of firms, heterogeneous labor pool, and short-cycle deployment rotations have made it difficult to forge such a common corporate identity, indicating the need for coherent and consistent professional socialization, training, and educational experiences.

Recognizing the private security industry as a quasi-profession for the provision of tactical security services in post-conflict stabilization contexts may boost the development of a corporate identity along with occupational controls that, in the long run, may also strengthen formal regulation. The private security industry is here to stay; recognizing it as a quasi-profession will likely enhance democratic control and accountability of a sector still in need of more effective regulation. The results of this first survey of private security

professionals indicate that the men and women who serve the industry are ready to take on

this kind of professional responsibility and scrutiny.

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Notes

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[1] For Sidanius, "caste" refers to an endogamous social group that exists in a relatively stable hierarchical relationship with other endogamous social groups, e.g. ethnic groups, social classes, or religious sects.

[2] For instance, specific law enforcement affiliations (e.g., "FBI", "California Highway Patrol", "Texas Crime Prevention Association") were classified as "law enforcement" and subsumed under the overall category of "professional/occupational" in-group. Similarly, survey entries of "Army", "Marine Corps" or "American Legion" were coded separately and also subsumed under the main category "military in-group." Based on respondents in-group entries, similar super-categories were devised for "social" (including "family"), "religious/church," ethnic/racial," "geographic" (including "US/ American/ country"), "ideological/political," and "social issue group" (including "National Rifle Association").

[3] Initial agreement among the judges was high (interrater reliability of .9197). The interrater reliability was computed as (n-d)/n, where n = number of total ratings and d = number of disagreements. Note that consistent disagreements, i.e., coders consistently disagreed on how to classify a particular response, were included only once in the number of disagreements. For instance, one judge consistently coded "Fraternal Order of Police" with the code for "Police," while the other judge consistently coded this more generally as "Professional Organization." Discussing coding differences among the judges led to agreement to the same numeric code for each entry, thereby improving interrater reliability to 1.00.

[4] The following scale results were obtained for the sample: (1) six-item Machiavellianism scale (MACH: M = 2.36; SD = 0.47; range = 1.00-3.83; Cronbach's alpha = 0.45); (2) five-item job engagement scale (JOB: M = 4.80; SD = 0.27; range = 4.00-5.00; Cronbach's alpha = 0.75); (3) nine-item social dominance orientation scale (SDO: M = 2.15; SD = 0.51; range = 1.00-3.78; Cronbach's alpha = 0.75); and (4) five-item ethical conduct scale (ETH: M = 4.65; SD = 0.45; range = 2.80-5.00; Cronbach's alpha = 0.84).

[5] Means difference tests of scale and statement mean scores were conducted as t-tests using SAS software; differences in terms of levels of agreement with individual statements were conducted as χ^2-tests using SAS software.

[6] For comparison purposes, respondents in the present sample tended to score about as high on the MACH scale as respondents in military samples had in the past. See Franke, *Preparing for Peace;* Franke and Heinecken, "Adjusting to Peace: Military Values in a Cross-National Comparison", *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1991; Volker Franke and Karen Guttieri, "Picking Up the Pieces: Are Officers Ready for Nation Building?" *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Summer 2009: 1-25.