**This is a Job For…: The Role and Social Identity of Military Professionals and Armed Contractors**

**Abstract**

Contractors are ubiquitous on today’s battlefields. I focus on a key factor that affects the likelihood that western PMSC personnel will adopt the norms of the military personnel whom they supplement—the degree to which they are accorded status as members of the military profession by elite members of the military profession. The greater their acceptance, the more likely they will behave like military professionals. I assess hypotheses based upon two aspects of identity—role and social—with the responses of 985 elite field-grade American officers collected annually from 2007 to 2010. I find that evoking different aspects of identity in these officers leads to differential rates of acceptance of contractors as members of the professional military in-group.

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**Introduction**

Contractors are ubiquitous on today’s battlefields. Their numbers have consistently equaled or surpassed the number of military personnel deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan throughout the past decade.[[2]](#footnote-3) Roughly 17 percent of these personnel have been classified as private security contractors by the Department of Defense (DOD).[[3]](#footnote-4) Although contractors have accompanied American military forces into theaters of war in large numbers in the past, the used of armed civilian personnel has reached all-time highs. “As of December 2010, there were 18,919 private security contractor personnel in Afghanistan. This represents the highest recorded number of private security personnel used by DOD in any conflict in the history of the United States.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

These personnel are necessary. “According to government officials, both DOD and the Department of State would be unable to execute their missions in Afghanistan and Iraq without the support of PSCs [private security companies].”[[5]](#footnote-6) This is the result of several trends that have encouraged the United States government to substitute civilian contractors for military personnel for the past few decades.[[6]](#footnote-7) In particular, the shift to an all-volunteer military force while maintaining a traditional system of compensation based upon rank as opposed to skill has made it difficult to develop and retain personnel with esoteric skill sets—i.e., beyond core military competencies—within the military. Demand induced the private sector to supply what was needed when it was needed and to further build demand.

But are these personnel as reliable as the military personnel that they have effectively replaced? Are they controllable? Numerous incidents documented elsewhere suggest not.[[7]](#footnote-8) Over the past decade, there have been numerous parallel efforts to institutionalize control over these private entities. At the international level, the Montreux Document of September 2008 provides a compendium of the formal legal norms and informal business, administrative, and regulatory practices that states have agreed ought to guide PMSC [private military and security company] behavior.[[8]](#footnote-9) At the level of the industry, the International Stability Operations Association (ISOA, formerly IPOA, the International Peace Operations Association) mandates adherence to its Code of Conduct for all member firms and has in place a mechanism to investigate violations by the personnel of member firms and provide incentives to bring member companies back into compliance.[[9]](#footnote-10) For instance, Blackwater USA withdrew from IPOA three weeks after its employees killed 17 Iraqi civilians in 2007, reportedly due to IPOA’s impending investigation.[[10]](#footnote-11) At the national level, the United States government has taken actions to increase its oversight and ability to legally control the behavior of contractors, including establishing Congressional committees on wartime contracting, revising the Military Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction Act (MEJA) to cover the contractors of agencies other than the Department of Defense supporting DoD missions, and expanding the Uniform Code of Military Justice to cover DoD contractors in overseas combat zones.[[11]](#footnote-12) Finally, at the institutional level, the Department of Defense has long regarded contractors as part of the “Total Force”—which also includes active duty military members, reserve military members, and DoD civilians.[[12]](#footnote-13) The idea is to enable the DoD to overcome “challenges that stem from the department’s failure to fully integrate operational contract support within DOD, including planning for the use of contractors, training military personnel on the use of contractor support, accurately tracking contractor use, and establishing measures to ensure that contractors are accountable.”[[13]](#footnote-14)

As the DoD makes progress integrating civilian contractors at the institutional level, it may have an additional effect: socializing them into the “Total Force” and thereby inducing them to adopt the norms and behaviors of other “Total Force” components—the active duty military in particular. A raft of recent literature suggests that employees will be more likely to adhere to norms of behavior when they have developed an identity that encompasses such norms than when they are provided with external motivators such as monetary incentives that require monitoring and evaluation.[[14]](#footnote-15) Therefore, to the degree that socialization of PMSC personnel is possible, it would provide an additional way to control the corporate warrior.

I focus on a key factor that affects the likelihood that western PMSC personnel will adopt the norms of the military personnel whom they supplement—the degree to which they are accorded status as members of the military profession by members of the military profession. The greater their acceptance into the profession of arms the more likely they will behave like military professionals. I draw upon two aspects of identity—role and social—to form hypotheses about the manner and degree to which these contractors may be accepted as brothers in arms. I utilize the responses of 985 elite field-grade officers collected annually from 2007 to 2010 to assess these hypotheses. I find that evoking different aspects of identity in these officers leads to differential rates of acceptance of contractors as members of the professional military in-group.

In particular, I find that officers have a strong social identity vis-à-vis civilian contractors, but it is permeable. Civilian contractors placed in the functional military role of armed combatants overcome their out-group status with many officers along multiple dimensions, particularly with regard to their status as combatants under international law.

I therefore conclude that if inculcating a professional military identity in PMSC personnel is key to influencing their behavior, to make it more consonant with that expected of the military personnel they effectively replace, then a concerted effort to socialize them into the norms of behavior and attitudes of military professionals ought to be undertaken at the company, industry, national, and international level. These parallel efforts should focus on the obligations and rights of combatants and noncombatants in warfare. Not only is this the area in which their involvement has drawn the most attention but it is also the place where military professionals are most likely to accept these private actors as legitimate.

In the sections that follow, I discuss identity theory to establish the framework within which the analysis takes place. I then provide an analysis of the manner and degree to which the officers in my sample accord civilian contractors status as military professionals. I conclude the analysis with recommendations to enhance the identification of contractors with the military profession so as to increase the likelihood that they will adhere to appropriate norms of behavior.

**Identities and the Military Profession**

How are PMSC personnel viewed by officers? How might officer views affect contractor behavior? I turn to identity theory to address these questions. Identity theory posits that individuals are self-aware, exist within a social structure, and interact with others. Being self-aware implies the ability to see oneself as an object and behave toward oneself as one would behave toward others. In so doing, people recognize that they are unique individuals, that they are members of groups, and that they occupy roles in the social structure. They then derive various conceptions of themselves, or identities, from these bases: personal, group, and role. “In general, one’s identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles.”[[15]](#footnote-16) A “social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group.”[[16]](#footnote-17) A role identity is a person’s internalized expectations of the attitudes and behaviors associated with a social position.[[17]](#footnote-18) Finally, personal identity is based upon “idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people”[[18]](#footnote-19) and “the set of meanings that define the person as a unique individual rather than as a role-holder or group member.”[[19]](#footnote-20) As such, they are outside of the current research question and therefore discussed only in passing.

Although the bases for these identities differ, they “all operate the same way. Identities from each basis have identity standards that serve as the reference and guide behavior in situations.”[[20]](#footnote-21) Social identity derives from a person’s identification with a social group. “In real life, and particularly for social categories, we tend to represent categories as fuzzy sets of attributes where members have a ‘family resemblance’”[[21]](#footnote-22) This “resemblance” is refined through comparison, resulting in an identity standard or “group prototype” that embodies “exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features).”[[22]](#footnote-23) These prototypes “chart the contours of social groups and tell us not only what characterizes a group but also how that group is different from other groups.”[[23]](#footnote-24) They maximize similarities among the in-group and differences with the out-group and so are polarizing images.[[24]](#footnote-25) Likewise, “the core of a [role] identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance…. These expectations and meanings form a set of standards that guide behavior.”[[25]](#footnote-26)

These identities guide behavior as part of the identity verification process. As a person interacts with others, s/he receives information about how they are being perceived. “Whether it is a role, social, or person identity, individuals act to control perceptions of who they are in a situation to match the feedback they receive in the situation.”[[26]](#footnote-27) When this information confirms that they are acting in accord with their identity standard, the positive feedback boosts their self-esteem.[[27]](#footnote-28) When they perceive that they are not being seen as acting in accord with their identity standard, this dissonance causes stress that lowers self-esteem.[[28]](#footnote-29) Confirmation of one’s identity standard also reinforces the behavior associated with this standard. Failure to have one’s behavior perceived as in accord with one’s identity standard leads to an overcorrection in behavior in the short term, impellng behaviors far more in accord with the stereotypical prototype than the person’s own adaptation of it. Prolonged dissonance can cause a person to leave the situation or adapt or abandon the identity standard itself so as to relieve the dissonant feedback.[[29]](#footnote-30) Thus feedback that affirms or conflicts with a person’s identity standards, be they personal, role, or social, has a significant effect on their subsequent behavior.

Encounters with people who are accepted as being members of a group, occupiers of a role (or counter-role[[30]](#footnote-31)), or embodying certain individualistic traits that reflect one’s identity standards likely provide significant feedback with regard to one’s behavior and identity. Indeed, “the strongest confirmation that one is a group member may come from acceptance by others in the group.”[[31]](#footnote-32) On the other hand, rejection by members of a group would be strong disconfirmation of one’s identity and provoke short-term overcorrection and long-term adaptation or abandonment of the identity or the situation.

*Identity Standards of Military Professionals*

Given this, what are the identity standards against which prototypical members of the military profession—elite officers—are likely to use in their determinations of who is a member of the profession? What are the fuzzy sets of attributes associated with the core role and social identities of military professionals?

The role identity standard encompasses the position of the military professional in society and is focused on the functions performed its members. The core functions of military professionals are the planning, organizing, and employment of military force. Although military professionals perform other functions—such as administration, supply, maintenance, legal, medical, and religious support—it is the art of war and the management of violence that is at the heart of the profession.[[32]](#footnote-33) The social identity standard defines who is a member of the in-group of military professionals.[[33]](#footnote-34) Title X of the U.S. Code defines this as active duty members of a regular component of the armed forces: the army, navy, air force, marine corps, and coast guard.[[34]](#footnote-35) This legal definition is enhanced by international treaties that define members of the armed forces of a state as privileged combatants that enjoy certain rights and bear certain responsibilities for their conduct. Combining these two results in a core professional identity standard that would be an active duty officer in a position of command in the combat arms. Huntington explicitly limited the military profession to these officers.[[35]](#footnote-36) These role and social identities thus form the prototype against which membership in the profession of arms can be judged.

Although private military and security contractor personnel are institutionally separate from members of the military profession, they can bear more than a passing resemblance to these identity standards. Contract employees have performed the functions of combat and command. In Iraq, PMSC personnel constituted the second largest armed force in the country, behind only the U.S. military.[[36]](#footnote-37) These civilians have used force to protect persons and property and have planned and participated in clandestine raids led by elite special forces and CIA operatives.[[37]](#footnote-38) Contract personnel have long been regarded as part of the “Total Force” and a U.S. Defense Science Board report repeatedly characterized civilian defense services firms as the “fifth force provider in addition to the four services.”[[38]](#footnote-39) In addition, although the status of armed contractors under international law is unclear, “conduct that violates international obligations is attributable to a State if it is committed by the government of the State or any of its political subdivisions, or by any official, employee, or agent operating within the scope of authority of any of these governments, or under color of such authority*.*”[[39]](#footnote-40) Thus PMSC personnel perform in roles that are similar to those of military professionals and are in many ways insinuated within the institution of the Department of Defense and the military services.

Given these attributes, as well as others, it has been argued that there is a basis for including contractors within the profession of arms.[[40]](#footnote-41) In particular, we might expect that armed contractors performing in combat roles would have a very strong resemblance to the military professional role prototype. This functional resemblance may encourage PMSC personnel to adopt the social identity of a military professional[[41]](#footnote-42) and perhaps persuade officers to include these contractors in the profession of arms.

**Analysis: Population and Sample**

In order to assess the manner and degree to which the latter occurs, I report the responses of 985 elite officers to 12 items pertaining to civilian contractors on the Officer Strategic Leadership Survey. This survey was administered to officers attending Air Command and Staff College, the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, and the Air War College in May 2007, 20 August–10 September 2008, 1–16 October 2009, and September 2010.[[42]](#footnote-43) Officers from the Naval War College were surveyed in June 2007. These officers are not just a convenient population to sample from: attendance in a resident professional military education (PME) program has proven to be a reliable institutional indicator of an officer’s potential for advancement into the ranks of the elite. “These officers come from the pool of military leaders that shape the military profession in America and function as the custodians of military culture over time.”[[43]](#footnote-44) While the sample is representative of the schools from which it was drawn, it is not representative of the all “elite” officers or the officer corps in general, primarily due to an overrepresentation of Air Force officers and an underrepresentation of officers from the other services.[[44]](#footnote-45)

Respondents were directed to consider Western contractors organically attached to military units or acting as private security forces in support of Western military operations.[[45]](#footnote-46) I utilize their responses to 12 items to make assessments of the degree to which officers grant contractors role or group identity status as military professionals. The responses to these items are compiled in Table 1.

**Table 1: Officer Responses, 2007–2010[[46]](#footnote-47)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Neutral** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** | **Total** |
| The privatization of military support functions, such as logistics and maintenance, has been beneficial to military effectiveness in my country | 4% | 35% | 24% | 28% | 8% | 975 |
| Civilian contractors do their jobs more effectively than uniformed personnel could. | <1% | 4% | 25% | 52% | 19% | 975 |
| There are certain functions performed by military personnel that *should never* be performed by a civilian contractor. | 61% | 32% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 971 |
| There are no functions performed by military personnel that, in principle, *cannot* be performed by a civilian contractor. | 2% | 8% | 5% | 44% | 42% | 975 |
| Civilian contractors performing in combat roles should be regarded as military professionals. | 4% | 28% | 17% | 36% | 15% | 971 |
| Civilian contractors performing in combat support roles should be regarded as military professionals. | 2% | 19% | 16% | 46% | 18% | 258 |
| The use of civilian contractors in combat roles is compatible with military ethos. | <1% | 20% | 26% | 38% | 16% | 972 |
| Civilian contractors performing in combat roles and employed by *Western* governments in a combat zone should be regarded as combatants, not civilians, under international law. | 22% | 53% | 11% | 9% | 5% | 259 |
| Civilian contractors performing in combat roles and employed by the *enemy* in a combat zone should be regarded combatants, not civilians, under international law. | 23% | 55% | 10% | 7% | 4% | 258 |
| Civilian contractors employed by the enemy in a combat zone should be regarded as unlawful combatants. | 11% | 31% | 21% | 31% | 7% | 974 |
| Civilian contractors employed by Western governments in a combat zone should be regarded as unlawful combatants. | 9% | 27% | 22% | 34% | 8% | 971 |
| Civilian contractors and military members deployed to a combat zone should be treated equally under international law. | 15% | 44% | 10% | 24% | 7% | 259 |

*Analysis: Evoking Role and Social Identification with Armed Contractors*

First, officers were asked about the perceived efficacy of contracting out support functions. Support functions do not directly involve command or combat and therefore are not central to the role prototype of the military professional. Indeed, these functions have been most extensively privatized for the longest period of time. We might therefore expect that civilian contractors who perform these functions are considered to be members of a non-military out-group and therefore evaluated negatively by officers. As can be seen in Table 1, only 39 percent of officers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “The privatization of military support functions, such as logistics and maintenance, has been beneficial to military effectiveness in my country,” while 36 percent disagreed, and a quarter were neutral. Privatization of support functions in particular has been justified by its efficacy[[47]](#footnote-48) and yet these officers displayed ambivalence toward its value.[[48]](#footnote-49) This suggests contractors are not viewed in an overwhelmingly positive light—as we might expect of an out-group.

Second, we asked whether “Civilian contractors do their jobs more effectively than uniformed personnel could.” This question was designed to more directly elicit a social categorization response from the officers, wherein the positive characteristics of the in-group (military members) should be emphasized and favorably compared with those of the out-group (civilian contractors).[[49]](#footnote-50) As expected, 71 percent of officers identified with their in-group and disagreed with the notion that civilian contractors are more effective, as opposed to less than 5 percent who agreed and 25 percent who were neutral.

Next, we wanted to directly evoke the social identity of the officers by eliciting their judgment as to whether “There are certain functions performed by military personnel that *should never* be performed by a civilian contractor.” By phrasing the question in normative, as opposed to empirical, terms, we expected to isolate role identity from social identity and tap officers’ views of the legitimacy of their professional identity. In so doing we expected that officer judgments would more precisely capture their social identity. We found that 93 percent of officers believed that there are functions that only military members ought to perform, 3 percent were neutral, and 4 percent disagreed. It is clear that this normative question required respondents to evaluate contractors in terms of the social prototype of the military professional and the vast majority of officers deemed them to be members of the out-group.

Fourth, we asked whether “There are no functions performed by military personnel that, in principle, *cannot* be performed by a civilian contractor.” This question was designed to evoke an empiricalassessment of the general level of skill, expertise, and competence that respondents attributed to civilian contractors when performing in a military role. Responses should tap both role identity and social identity: positive responses indicate that the out-group of civilian contractors are not so distant that they are deemed functionally incompetent and that they can be perceived as filling any and all military roles. The responses of the officers indicate that civilian contractors are deemed to be members of the social and role out-group: 10 percent of officers agreed that there are no functions that cannot be performed by contractors, another 5 percent were neutral, and 86 percent judged that there were indeed functions that could not be performed by civilian contractors. This suggests that the vast majority of officers do not see civilian contractors as embodying the role prototype of the military professional. The shift in responses from the previous question however, shows that social identity is stronger amongst military professionals than role identity when judged against the out-group of civilian contractors.

But what happens when we posit that the out-group closely resembles the role identity of the in-group? How do officers evaluate the differences between themselves and civilian contractors when this out-group is narrowed to armed civilian contractors performing in a combat role? We asked a series of questions to tap different dimensions of the social identity prototype of military professionals to address this issue.

First, we directly asked respondents whether “Civilian contractors performing in combat roles should be regarded as military professionals.” By asking about social out-group members performing in the core military role, this question provides the ability to again assess the relative strength of social and role identities in these military professionals. We found that 32 percent of officers judged contractors in an armed combat role were military professionals while 51 percent judged that they were not—and 17 percent were neutral. The 21–28 percent increase in the acceptance of contractors compared to the responses to the discrete functional and normative questions discussed above is striking. It confirms that officers’ conception of the military profession is a function of both social and role identity and that out-group members that embody the role identity prototype of the in-group can dilute the social identity of its members.

The role of armed combatant is central to the social identity of military professionals, yet military professionals also perform support functions and these are sometimes not regarded as core military functions.[[50]](#footnote-51) Indeed, support functions such as logistics, maintenance, and transportation have been the areas where civilian contractors have most penetrated the military. Yet these remain key career fields for military personnel. Therefore, we wanted to compare the degree to which support functions evoked the ideal type military professional as a social identity. We asked whether “civilian contractors performing in combat support roles should be regarded as military professionals.” We found that 21 percent of officers accorded civilian contractors performing support functions status as military professionals—11 percent fewer than in the previous question—while 64 percent did not accord them such status—13 percent more. These responses suggest that characterizing the out-group as performing a military role, even one that is not central to the role identity standard, softened these officers’ conception of the scope and limits of their in-group.

To further explore this phenomenon, we asked whether “The use of civilian contractors in combat roles is compatible with military ethos.” Given that the military ethos would characterize the exemplar of this group, we might expect that responses would be similar to those regarding armed civilians as military professionals. Almost 21 percent of officers agreed that civilian contractors in combat roles would be compatible with military ethos—a bit of a decline from the 32 percent that granted these contractors professional status. 54 percent disagreed, which is practically equivalent to the 51 percent that declined to give armed contractors in combat roles professional status, and 26 percent were neutral. Such responses suggest that presenting the in-group prototype in a normative manner evokes a stronger social identity response than presenting the out-group empirically—i.e. “civilian contractors performing in combat roles.”

We also approached this interaction of role and social identity by introducing a legal component. Uniformed military personnel are recognized as a privileged group under international law: they are legal combatants. This status includes military professionals but also members of militias not under the command of the armed forces of a state and civilians of a non-occupied territory that spontaneously take up arms to resist invading forces.[[51]](#footnote-52) It does not include civilian contractors who accompany the armed forces.[[52]](#footnote-53) This legal component constitutes an important aspect of the social identity of a military professional, as it defines who can legally kill and destroy property on behalf of the state. As Biderman put it, “[i]t is ‘combatant’ that the uniform signifies. Its function is to distinguish … those who may kill and be killed from the bystanders.”[[53]](#footnote-54) It therefore provides another basis for assessing the degree to which contractors assuming the role of an armed combatant softens the social identity of military officers. We asked whether “Civilian contractors performing in combat roles and employed by the *enemy* in a combat zone should be regarded combatants, not civilians, under international law.” We found that 75 percent of respondents agreed, 10 percent disagreed, and 11 percent were neutral. We also asked whether “Civilian contractors performing in combat roles and employed by *Western* governments in a combat zone should be regarded as combatants, not civilians, under international law.” We found that 78 percent of respondents agreed, 11 percent disagreed, and 14 percent were neutral. The significant degree of agreement with this proposition, regardless of whether the armed contractor is performing a combat role for a Western government or for an adversary, suggests that “combatant” evokes a role identity far more than a social identity for these officers.

In order to capture the social identity within this legal distinction, we asked whether officers included civilian contractors in the group of lawful or unlawful combatants. “Unlawful combatants” is not a standard term in international law although the Third Geneva convention defines combatants who are privileged in that they cannot be held personally accountable for violating civilian laws when acting in accordance with the laws and customs of war. Rather the term was defined in U.S. law in the 2006 Military Commissions Act.[[54]](#footnote-55) It defined “unlawful combatants” as “(i) a person who has engaged in hostilities or who has purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States or its co-belligerents who is not a lawful enemy combatant (including a person who is part of the Taliban, al-Qaida, or associated forces).”[[55]](#footnote-56) It seemed possible that officers may accord combatant status to armed contractors performing in a combat role but deny them the legitimacy of legal status, reserving it for themselves and other members of the military in-group. We therefore asked them if “Civilian contractors employed by Western governments in a combat zone should be regarded as unlawful combatants.” We found that officer views were ambivalent: 42 percent regarded them as lawful combatants, 36 percent grouped them as unlawful combatants, and 22 percent were neutral. We also asked about contractors employed by the enemy: “Civilian contractors employed by the enemy in a combat zone should be regarded as unlawful combatants.” We again found that officer views were ambivalent: 38 percent regarded them as lawful combatants, 42 percent grouped them as unlawful combatants, and 31 percent were neutral. The similarity of responses suggests that the officers see “contractors” as a stronger identity for civilians employed on the battlefield than “Western” or “Enemy.” And while officers in general are unsure whether armed contractors in combat roles are or are not members of the privileged in-group of legal combatants, they are more discriminating (by roughly 38 percent) than when according them status as combatants. This suggests that “lawfulness” taps an important aspect of the social identity of military professionals.

Finally, we asked whether “Civilian contractors and military members deployed to a combat zone should be treated equally under international law.” This would establish parity if not identity between the military in-group and the civilian out-group and remove one basis for distinguishing between the two. We found that 59 percent of respondents agreed, 31 percent disagreed, and 10 percent were neutral. These responses fall squarely between the those regarding combatant status: at least 78 percent of officers believe that civilian contractors in combat roles ought to be considered combatants under international law and only 42 percent believe that they ought to be considered legal combatants. These responses suggest that equal treatment under international treaties does not evoke a strong social identity response.

**Conclusions**

How do elite military professionals categorize private military and security company contractors in relation to themselves? In general, the officers in my sample clearly differentiated between their in-group and the out-group of contractors. They evinced ambivalence toward the efficacy of contracted support (39 vs. 36 percent), they clearly evaluated uniformed personnel as more effective than contracted civilians (71 vs. 5 percent) as well as more broadly capable at performing military functions (86 vs. 10 percent), and they were quite emphatic with regard to who should perform military functions (93 vs. 4 percent). This evidence supports the findings of previous studies that demonstrated the meta-contrast principle of social categorization theory[[56]](#footnote-57) in relations between military and civilian personnel.[[57]](#footnote-58)

Yet individuals hold multiple identities that can reinforce or contradict one another—in terms of how an individual views him or herself, the prescribed norms of behavior, their feelings of self-esteem, and how they are perceived by others. Civilian contractors working for private military and security companies in theaters of war have taken on roles formerly filled by military professionals. In particular, many have been armed and placed in positions where they have engaged in combat—and this is well known by the officers surveyed. Positing this role identity for PMSC personnel had a significant effect in the permeability of the social identity of military professionals. 32 percent of officers accorded these civilians status as military professionals, as opposed to only 21 percent who accorded civilians in support roles such status, and 21 percent agreed that allowing civilians in combat roles was compatible with military ethos. Unlike many social groups, the military profession is one that is defined by law in contrast with the rest of the civilian population. When presented with this contrast, officers still accepted armed civilians in combat roles far more readily than one would expect: 75–78 percent agreed that they should be regarded as combatants rather than civilians—regardless of who they are fighting for, 38–42 percent regarded them as legal combatants, and 59 percent believed that they ought to be treated equally with military members under international law.

These results demonstrate that the *de facto* boundaries of the military profession are permeable and that elite officers are not universally opposed to accepting privately employed civilian brethren into the profession of arms. Indeed, in the area in which formal regulation of corporate warriors requires the most progress, international law, officers are willing to see these new combatants incorporated into existing frameworks of control.

The relative openness of officers to accepting armed PMSC personnel as members of the profession in terms of their status as combatants suggests that this is an area ripe for pursuing identity development among civilian contractors. Individual PMSC companies, industry trade associations such as ISOA, and governments ought to require education and training in the appropriate conduct of persons performing in the roles of armed combatants in conflict just as it is required for military professionals. The adoption of these aspects of the behavior and attitudes of military professionals by civilian contractors would be welcomed and reinforced by members of the military profession. This would buttress the basis of acceptance that already exists within the officer corps based upon the role identity of these contractors. In this way, the basis for a professional culture amongst these private actors that has been found to already exist[[58]](#footnote-59) could be built and sustained.

1. The views expressed herein are those of the author and not of any agency of the Danish government. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See Moshe Schwartz, The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: Background, Analysis, and Options for Congress. R40835, (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 21 February 2011), pages 8 and 12, Figures 3 and 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (P.L. 110- 181 Sec. 864) defined private security functions as the guarding of personnel, facilities, or property, and any other activity for which contractors are required to be armed…. In June 2010, DOD stopped providing data on armed versus unarmed personnel. As a result, PSC data used in this report includes both armed and unarmed PSC personnel…. Historically, the percentage of armed PSC personnel working for DOD was 90% or greater,” (Schwartz, The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors, page 2, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Schwartz, The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors, page 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Schwartz, The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors, page 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Peter W. Singer, Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Deborah Avant, The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Allison Stanger, One Nation Under Contract: The Outsourcing of American Power and the Future of Foreign Policy, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Christopher Kinsey, Private Contractors and the Reconstruction of Iraq, (London: Routledge, 2009); David Isenberg, Shadow Force: Private Security Contractors in Iraq, (London: Praeger, 2009); and Trevor Taylor, “Review Article: Private Security Companies in Iraq and Beyond,” *International Affairs* 87, 2 (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See T. X. Hammes, “Private Contractors in Conflict Zones: The Good, the Bad, and the Strategic Impact,” *Strategic Forum* 260 (November 2010); Peter W. Singer, Can’t Win With ‘Em, Can’t Go To War Without ‘Em: Private Military Contractors and Counterinsurgency. Policy Paper #4, (Washington: Brookings Institution, September 2007); David Isenberg, Shadow Force: Private Security contractors in Iraq, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009); Molly Dunigan, Victory for Hire: Private Security Companies’ Impact on Military Effectiveness, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. James Cockayne, “The Montreux Document’s Statement of Formal Law and Informal Good Practice: The Corporate Warrior’s ‘Bible’—or an Empty Promise,” in (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Connolly Butterfield and Charlotte Gambling with Doug Brooks, “Establishing Industry Norms: The IPOA Code of Conduct,” (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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24. This is known as the “metacontrast principle.” See Hogg, “Social Categorization, Depersonalization, and Group Behavior,” page 60; Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, pages 118-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Stets and Burke, “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory,” page 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, page 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Self-esteem has three components that correspond with each type of identity: verifying one’s personal identity increases feelings of authenticity, verifying one’s group identity increases feelings of self-worth, and verifying one’s role identity increases feelings of self-efficacy (Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, page129). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, page 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, pages 66, 181. Also see George J. McCall and J. L. Simmons, Identities and Interactions, (New York: The Free Press, 1978) for an interactionist account of the manner in which the prominence and salience of identities are affected by feedback. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, pages 115-116, [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
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32. Harold D. Lasswell, “The Garrison State,” *American Journal of Sociology* 46, 4 (January 1941), page 455; Morris Janowitz, The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait, (New York: The Free Press 1960), Chapter 1; Huntington, The Soldier and the State; Samuel P. Huntington, “Power, Expertise, and the Military Profession,” *Daedalus* 92 (Fall 1963), page 785; and Donald J. Campbell and Kathleen M. Campbell, “Soldiers as Police Officers/Police Officers as Soldiers: Role Evolution and Revolution in the United States,” *Armed Forces & Society* 36, 2 (January 2010), page 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. One of the traditional aspects of a profession is licensure by the state. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Title X also includes members of the Army and Air National Guard when in Federal Service, but generally National Guard forces are more akin to the reserves than the active duty force. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Huntington, The Soldier and the State, pages 13-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. These figures refer only to individuals employed by *non-Iraqi* security companies. See Congressional Budget Office, “Contractors’ Support of U.S. Operations in Iraq,” (Washington, DC: CBO, August 2008), at <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/96xx/doc9688/08-12-IraqContractors.pdf>, accessed 03/31/09. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. James Risen and Mark Mazetti, “Blackwater Guards Tied to Secret Raids by the C.I.A.,” *New York Times* (11 December 2009), page 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Institutionalizing Stability Operations within DoD, (Washington: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, September 2005), pages 14, 31, 33, 38, and 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Elsea, Schwartz, and Nakamura, Private Security Contractors in Iraq, page 14, note 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. David R. Segal and Karin De Angelis, “Changing Conceptions of the Military as a Profession,” in Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, editors, American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), page 212; Gary Schaub, Jr. and Volker Franke, “Contractors as Military Professionals?” *Parameters* 39, 4 (Winter 2009-2010); and Gary Schaub, Jr., “Civilian Combatants, Military Professionals? American Officer Judgments,” *Defence Studies* 10, 3 (Autumn 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Volker Franke, “Civilian Contractors: Developing a Corporate Identity,” (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. The survey was exempted from human experimentation requirements by the Air Force Research Labs Wright Site Institutional Research Board on 28 June 2006 (protocol # F-WR-2006-0057-E). It was approved annually by the Air University Institutional Assessment office and the commandants of each school. It was approved by the Dean of Students of the Naval War College. All U.S. students were sent an e-mail invitation with an embedded link to a web-based survey built using *Inquisite*. Their consent to participate was gained when they proceeded to the survey website. They were able to not respond to any question with which they were not comfortable and were able to discontinue at any time. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Peter D. Feaver, Richard Kohn, and Lindsay P. Cohn, “The Gap between Military and Civilian in the United States in Perspective,” in Peter D. Feaver and Richard Kohn, editors, Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pages 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. The leadership of sister service institutions whose student populations would have corrected this bias were repeatedly approached but declined to participate. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. “For this survey, ‘civilian contractors’ are defined as those who are either organically attached to military units (such as mechanics or IT specialists) or those who operate as private security forces (such as Blackwater security personnel) in support of Western military operations, not those who provide unskilled support services (cooking, cleaning, maintaining grounds) and do not work directly with military units. The civilians we would like you to think about are not locals, such as Iraqis or Afghanis, but from Western countries including the United States, Europe, Australia, and South Africa.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. The four items added in 2010 have far fewer responses. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Stanger, One Nation Under Contract, passim; [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. This finding supports that of Ryan Kelty, “Citizen Soldiers and Civilian Contractors: Soldiers’ Unit Cohesion and Retention Attitudes in the ‘Total Force’,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 37, 2 (Winter 2009) and Lindy Heinecken, “Discontent Within the Ranks? Officers’ Attitudes Toward Military Employment and Representation—a Four-Country Comparative Study,” *Armed Forces & Society* 35, 3 (April 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Michael A. Hogg, “Social Identity Theory,” in P. J. Burke, editor, Contemporary Social Psychological Theories, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), page 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Huntington limited the concept of a military professional to officers in the combat arms. (Huntington, The Soldier and the State, page 12, 17–18). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Third Geneva Convention, Article 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Although Article 4.1.4 of the Third Geneva Convention specifies that civilians who have non-combat support roles with the military and who carry a valid identity card issued by the military they support are to be accorded the protections of prisoners of war if captured during a conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Albert D. Biderman, “What is Military?” in Sol Tax, editor, The Draft: A Handbook of Facts and Alternatives, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), page 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Public Law 109-366; Title X, U.S. Code Sections, 948–949. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. As well as “a person who, before, on, or after the date of the enactment of the Military Commissions Act of 2006, has been determined to be an unlawful enemy combatant by a Combatant Status Review Tribunal or another competent tribunal established under the authority of the President or the Secretary of Defense.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Hogg, “Social Categorization, Depersonalization, and Group Behavior,” page 60; Burke and Stets, Identity Theory, pages 118-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Kelty, “Citizen Soldiers and Civilian Contractors” and Heinecken, “Discontent Within the Ranks?” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Volker Franke and Marc von Boemcken, Attitudes, Values, and Professional Self-Conceptions of Private Security Contractors in Iraq: An Exploratory Study, (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, August 2009); Schaub and Franke, “Contractors as Military Professionals?”; Franke, “Civilian Contractors: Developing a Corporate Identity,” (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)