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New Humanitarians? Frame Appropriation through Private Military and Security Companies

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Abstract

Although private military and security companies (PMSCs) are gaining increasing importance, they still suffer from an image problem. In the media, they are frequently referred to as 'mercenaries' or 'dogs of war'. PMSCs are therefore interested in presenting themselves as legitimate and acceptable contract parties. Based on a discourse analysis of the homepages of select PMSCs and the industry association International Stability Operations Association (ISOA), and drawing on the framing literature, we examine one way in which companies respond to such negative labels. We show not only that PMSCs provide supplemental logistics or security for the staff of humanitarian organisations confronted with complex emergencies and ever-more dangerous missions, but also that these companies appropriate the humanitarian frame discursively, emphasising those elements that fit their interests and needs. To present themselves as 'new humanitarians', PMSCs employ primarily two kinds of strategies: naming and forging alliances with more traditional humanitarian actors. Their growing involvement in this field may not be without consequences and may contribute to the blurring of lines between military and civilian missions.

Keywords

humanitarianism, identity, private military and security companies

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Introduction

In the media, private military and security companies (PMSCs) are frequently referred to as 'mercenaries',[1] 'merchant[s] of death'[2] or 'guns for hire'.[3] While, from an international humanitarian law perspective, PMSCs hardly fit into the legal mercenary category,[4] they are 'nonetheless saddled with the mercenary label in the pejorative sense'.[5] PMSCs are non-state actors that challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force, and various studies have highlighted the 'destabilizing consequences'[6] their work might have. Despite such scholarly work and consistent negative press concerning misconduct on the part of PMSCs in the field,[7] the companies have gained in prominence since the 1990s and especially since the war in Iraq in 2003. While the ratio of conventional soldiers to employees of PMSCs was estimated to be 60 to 1 during the first Gulf War in 1990/1, recent figures suggest the ratio of US troops to PMSCs in Iraq and Afghanistan was one to one in 2009.[8] Overall, perceptions of the illegitimacy of PMSCs seem to be less important now than they might have been when the industry emerged. While scholars have identified various reasons for the 'PMSC-boom' in general,[9] and point to changes in the normative

1. Steve Fainaru, *Big Boy Rules: America's Mercenaries Fighting in Iraq* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008); Eugene Robinson, 'A Whitewash for Blackwater?', *Washington Post*, 9 December 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/12/09/ST2008120900107.html (accessed 15 August 2010).
2. Gabor Steingart, 'Kaufmann des Todes', *Spiegel Online*, 24 August 2009, http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/0,1518,druck-644619,00.html (accessed 25 August 2009).
3. Mike Pflanz,'"Guns for Hire" Kill Pirate during Attempted Hijack off Somalia', *Telegraph*, 24 March 2010, available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/piracy/7511919/Guns-for-hire-kill-pirate-during-attempted-hijack-off-Somalia.html (accessed 15 August 2010); Kathryn Westcott, '"Pirate" Death Puts Spotlight on "Guns for Hire"', *BC News*, 2010, http://news.bbcc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8585967.stm (accessed 8 June 2010).
4. Peter W. Singer, 'War, Profits, and the Vacuum of Law: Privatized Military Firms and International Law', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 42, no. 2 (2004): 521–50, 524.
5. Christopher Spearin, 'Private, Armed and Humanitarian? States, NGOs, International Private Security Companies and Shifting Humanitarianism', *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 4 (2008): 363–82, 365.
6. For example, Anna Leander, 'The Market for Force and Public Security: The Destabilizing Consequences of Private Military Companies', *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 5 (2005): 605–22. See also Lisa Rimli and Susanne Schmeidl, *Private Security Companies and Local Populations: An Exploratory Study of Afghanistan and Angola* (Bern: Swisspeace, 2007).
7. Michael S. Schmidt, 'Immunity Gone, Contractor in Iraq Sentenced to Prison', *New York Times*, 28 February 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/world/middleeast/01iraq.html?ref=privatemilitarycompanies (accessed 24 August 2011); Dexter Filkins, 'Rule of the Gun: Convoy Guards in Afghanistan Face an Inquiry', *New York Times*, 7 June 2010, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9503E7DF1130F934A35755C0A9669D8B63&ref=privatemilitarycompanies (accessed 24 August 2011); James Risen, 'Iraq Contractor in Shooting Case Makes Comeback', *New York Times*, 10 May 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10blackwater.html?ref=privatemilitarycompanies (accessed 24 August 2011).
8. Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, *At What Cost? Contingency Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Interim Report to Congress (Arlington, VA: Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2009), 20–1; United Nations Human Rights Council, *Promotion and Protection of all Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development: Report of the Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a Means of Violating Human Rights and Impeding the Exercise of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination*, A/HRC/15/25/Add.3, 15 June (New York: Human Rights Council, 2010), 2.
9. For example, Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

environment[10] in particular, little attention has thus far been paid to the question of *how* PMSCs themselves have managed to be increasingly perceived as legitimate actors. This article seeks to help fill this gap in the literature.

We show that, in addition to their overall performance, companies influence their image in more subtle ways. One is to present themselves as 'the New Humanitarian Agent[s]',[11] claiming that they 'help create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world'[12] and 'serve the greater causes of peace, development, and human security'.[13] Although it has been acknowledged that PMSCs recognise humanitarian operations 'not only [as] an opportunity to do business … [but that] they [also] believe such operations would help legitimate their business',[14] it has as yet not been systematically explored how precisely PMSCs use humanitarianism to gain greater acceptance. Drawing on the framing literature, we offer a theoretically informed explanation for this empirical puzzle.

A framing perspective allows us to identify the strategies that PMSCs use to present themselves as 'new humanitarians'. Defined as 'conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action',[15] framing redirects our attention from what companies actually do in the field to how they actively construct an image of themselves discursively. We show that PMSCs employ primarily naming and the building of alliances with traditional humanitarian actors such as the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance their acceptance. In addition, framing also helps to explain why they are able to present themselves as humanitarians. Given that humanitarianism is an ambiguous and contested concept comprised of heterogeneous elements, PMSCs can pick and choose the elements that best fit their needs and combine military and security with humanitarian elements. Our findings are based on a frame analysis of the homepages of 36 select companies and one of their major trade associations, the International Stability Operations Association (ISOA).[16] The sample pertains mainly to US and British PMSCs since these are important suppliers, if not the most important ones, at least in the Western world, but it also includes PMSCs from other countries.

This study on the humanitarian face of PMSCs contributes to the literature in several respects. Firstly, capturing the self-professed image of PMSCs tells us more about the companies themselves. Given the heterogeneity and the lack of transparency in the PMSC

10. Singer, 'War, Profits, and the Vacuum of Law', 533; Anna Leander and Rens van Munster, 'Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur: Reflecting and Reinforcing Neo-liberal Governmentality', *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 201–16.
11. Title of a presentation by James Fennell, ArmorGroup, cited in Tony Vaux, Chris Seiple, Greg Nakano and Koenraad Van Brabant, *Humanitarian Action and Private Security Companies: Opening the Debate* (London: International Alert, 2001), 14, Footnote 12.
12. MPRI, 'Index', MPRI, http://www.mpri.com/esite/ (accessed 23 October 2009).
13. IPOA, 'About IPOA', IPOA, http://www.ipoaworld.org/eng/aboutipoa.html (accessed 21 January 2010).
14. Daniel Hellinger, 'Humanitarian Action, NGOs, and the Privatization of the Military', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2004): 192–220, 193.
15. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements', in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, eds Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.
16. The ISOA was called International Peace Operations Association (IPOA) prior to autumn 2010.

industry, attempts to define these companies have so far remained on a very general level and do not allow for a deeper understanding of these private actors. Therefore, PMSCs have generally been studied and distinguished based on the services they offer.[17] Often-made distinctions have been those between companies operating in an offensive and a defensive way or between private *security* and private *military* companies.[18] Such categories are problematic. They are far from being clear-cut and hide the fact that PMSCs have multiple identities and are actively involved in their ongoing (re)construction. As Kateri Carmola points out, PMSCs 'combine the worlds of the military, business world, and the humanitarian NGOs in unfamiliar ways', presenting themselves according to their clients' needs, sometimes as force-multipliers for state militaries, other times as genuine firms that follow a client-focused approach and occasionally as humanitarians interested in saving the world.[19] Joakim Berndtsson has demonstrated in his analysis of the Swedish PMSC Vesper Group that such 'differences are found not only between companies but also within single companies'.[20] Given that as yet we know little about the humanitarian identity of PMSCs, and recognising that the different ways in which PMSCs present themselves are interrelated, we examine how PMSCs appropriate the language otherwise used by humanitarian NGOs.

Secondly, studying PMSCs and their humanitarian aspect is also theoretically important because it contributes to the framing literature, which until now has mostly been concerned with frame evolution, frame alignment or frame competition. By comparison, the case at hand offers insights into frame transformation processes. While the framing literature suggests that frames only evolve when there is frame competition, we show that this is not always a necessary prerequisite. Frames can change because they are seized by other actors, a strategy we refer to as *frame appropriation*. Rather than inventing a new and competing frame, PMSCs (re)define the humanitarian frame 'from within'. Given 'the increasingly flexible meaning of the word "humanitarian"',[21] companies appropriate the language of humanitarian NGOs and stress those elements of humanitarianism advanced by NGOs that best fit their own interests or needs.

The article is divided into six parts. Following a brief description of the PMSC industry in the first part, we discuss the role of identity in international relations in general, and the humanitarian identity in particular. We then introduce the concept of framing as a strategic tool for companies to establish themselves as humanitarians and to influence discussions about humanitarian crises. Assuming that humanitarian assistance is not only about material assistance but also hinges on the discursive understanding of what constitutes an emergency, who is most in need, what are the most appropriate remedies and who

17. For example, Singer, *Corporate Warriors*.
18. For example, Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, 'Securing the City: Private Security Companies and Non-state Authority in Global Governance', *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 237–53; Sarah Percy, 'Private Security Companies and Civil Wars', *Civil Wars* 11, no. 1 (2009): 57–74; David Shearer, 'Private Military Force and Challenges for the Future', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (1999): 80–94; Spearin, 'Private, Armed and Humanitarian?', 366.
19. Kateri Carmola, *Private Security Contractors in the Age of New Wars: Risk, Law and Ethics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 28.
20. See the article by Joakim Berndtsson in this issue.
21. Spearin, 'Private, Armed and Humanitarian?', 373.

is best suited to help,[22] we present the results of our analysis in the following two parts, illustrating how PMSCs construct their humanitarian identity using two different framing strategies. We conclude with a summary of our findings.

The PMSC Industry

We define a PMSC as a transnational working company offering military and/or security services. It belongs to an industry which is difficult to characterise given the lack of transparency and the heterogeneity of the companies involved. PMSCs vary greatly in terms of their size, their business practices and policies, and their clients and services.[23] Some are large corporations, while others consist of little more than an office, a fax machine and a few employees. While the industry as a whole offers a broad range of services, including logistics, technical support, reconnaissance, consultancy, training, demining, protection of persons and buildings, escorts, police tasks or border control, demobilisation and reintegration as well as combat, individual companies vary greatly in terms of their portfolios. Some offer only one or two of these services, while others offer the whole range. With respect to their clients, US PMSCs mainly work for the US government, while British PMSCs secure the majority of their contracts with other business actors.[24] PMSCs also work, though to a lesser extent, for the United Nations and NGOs.

In addition to their services and clients, PMSCs also differ with respect to their professionalism. While some companies prefer to work in secrecy,[25] others conceive of themselves as legitimate security actors. In particular, firms belonging to the latter group are increasingly concerned about their image in light of growing competition and negative press following scandals involving employees of individual companies.[26] In this respect, the Director General of the British Association of Private Security Companies (BAPSC), a trade association of British PMSCs, Andrew Bearpark,[27] explains that 'Iraq has frequently been described as a "big cash machine" for unaccountable western PSCs [Private Security Companies] operating in a lawless environment and wielding force without control'. While he admits that, '[f]or a minority of PSCs … this portrayal was very close to the truth', he complains that 'reputable companies are still suffering the consequences of their

22. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, 'Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, eds Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1–48, 41–2.
23. Percy, 'Private Security Companies and Civil Wars', 58–9.
24. Andrew Bearpark, 'We Need Private Security Companies, but We Also Need Clearer Rules for Them', Dossier Security and Defence, *Europe's World* (2007), http://www.europesworld.org/NewEnglish/Home/Article/tabid/191/ArticleType/ArticleView/ArticleID/21131/Default.aspx (accessed 4 May 2010); Andrew Bearpark, 'Securing Standards', *Intersec: The Journal of International Security*, February (2009): 18–20; Sabrina Schulz, 'Private Sicherheit als Exportschlager? Die private Sicherheitsindustrie in Großbritannien im Spannungsfeld freier Marktkräfte und internationaler Rechtsgüter', in *Private Sicherheits- und Militärfirmen. Konkurrenten – Partner – Totengräber?*, eds Walter Feichtinger, Wolfgang Braumandl and Nieves-Erzsebet Kautny (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 147–61, 150.
25. Peter W. Singer, 'The Dogs of War Go Corporate', *London News Review*, 19 March 2004, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2004/0319defenseindustry_singer.aspx (accessed 8 June 2010).
26. Bearpark, 'Securing Standards'.
27. Bearpark, 'We Need Private Security Companies, but We Also Need Clearer Rules for Them'.

competitors' corrupt and criminal behaviour'.[28] Given these developments, the so-called respectable PMSCs are interested in a differentiated representation of the industry and try to set themselves apart from those they consider to be the black sheep of the industry.

They do so in different ways. One way is to present themselves as ordinary businesses by setting up homepages with a corporate design similar to those of insurance companies or consultancies, developing codes of conduct, engaging in corporate social responsibility or by becoming members of a trade association such as the ISOA and the BAPSC. An analyst for the PMSC Aegis stated in this respect: '[the] key to changing the perception of legitimacy [of the British PMSCs] is the BAPSC. It is the vehicle through which the sector as a whole hopes to shape how it is perceived.'[29] This is not to say that membership of a trade association is an indicator of quality services or that member companies are necessarily perceived as more legitimate than non-members. In addition to membership of an association, PMSCs may engage in particular discourses to enhance their legitimacy.[30] According to Anna Leander and Rens van Munster, for example, companies not only present themselves as 'legitimate security experts' but are also accepted as such.[31]

We show that PMSCs also draw on discourses commonly used by humanitarians.[32] They establish their humanitarian identity by either associating themselves with or distinguishing themselves from other humanitarian actors, especially NGOs, international organisations and states. Before presenting our empirical results, however, we discuss the theoretical underpinnings of our analysis.

Humanitarianism and the Humanitarian Identity

Ever since constructivist and post-structuralist positions have made inroads into International Relations (IR), scholars have taken the role of identity more seriously. Rather than treating it as an exogenous factor, constructivists and post-structuralists in particular have illustrated the constitutive, but also causal, qualities of identity. The concept is also useful for analysing PMSCs, because the growth of the industry despite persistent negative press and scandals suggests that a great deal of their success hinges not necessarily on what they actually do on the ground but rather on how they present themselves and how others perceive them. In that respect, they are no different from other companies that seek to sell their goods and services. According to two representatives of the BAPSC, it is precisely one's reputation that 'distinguishes a company in a market that is growing and diversifying' and helps to

28. Bearpark, 'We Need Private Security Companies, but We Also Need Clearer Rules for Them'.
29. Dominick Donald, *After the Bubble: British Private Security Companies after Iraq*, Whitehall Paper no. 66 (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2006), 34.
30. Leander and van Munster, 'Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur'; Anna Leander, 'The Paradoxical Impunity of Private Military Companies: Authority and the Limits to Legal Accountability', *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 5 (2010): 467–90.
31. Leander and van Munster, 'Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur', 205.
32. Andrew Bearpark and Sabrina Schulz, 'The Future of the Market', in *From Mercenaries to Market: The Rise and Regulation of Private Military Companies*, eds Simon Chesterman and Chia Lehnardt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 240; Christopher Spearin, 'Humanitarians and Mercenaries: Partners in Security Governance?', in *New Threats and New Actors in International Security*, ed. Elke Krahmann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45–65; Spearin, 'Private, Armed and Humanitarian?', 368.

secure contracts.[33] Moreover, focusing on identity helps to correct a bias running through the PMSC literature. It makes apparent that PMSCs are not, as is often assumed, apolitical, but are involved and interested in shaping both societal relations as well as perceptions about the industry. As Christian Olsson has pointed out: 'Only a political reading, that is, a reading that considers the effects of processes of (de-)politicisation and (de-)legitimisation on social relations, can account for the fact that the privatising trend might have important political consequences.'[34] Conceiving of humanitarianism as a social identity, we will discuss how identities are constructed more generally in this section, and through framing strategies more particularly in the following one. At the same time as we assume that companies engage in a humanitarian discourse because it serves their business interests, we acknowledge that this discourse may also be reflective of a certain self-understanding that individual firms have of themselves.

Social identities contain ideas that indicate membership of a certain group and, by the same token, difference with regard to other groups. They specify, according to Fearon and Laitin, '(1) rules of membership that decide who is and is not a member of the category; and (2) content, that is, sets of characteristics … thought to be typical of members of the category, or behaviors expected or obliged of members in certain situations (roles)'.[35] In addition, identities are neither singular nor static. Identities are social categories that are influenced by both material and ideational factors, including culture, religion, international norms and events. Both individuals and corporate entities have multiple identities. These are historically contingent, tenuous, sometimes in conflict with each other and subject to contestation and reconstruction.

In the case of humanitarianism, moral duty, obligation and responsibility are characteristics expected of agencies, organisations and individuals assisting those in need.[36] Although 'humanitarianism' can, according to J.D. Fearon, 'refer to almost any activity motivated by the desire to improve the conditions of those considered less well-off', it requires 'partly non-self interested motivations'.[37] In the case of PMSCs, which are primarily motivated by profit, this may be difficult to prove and is not our goal. Instead, what we aim for here is to document how, and in what ways, PMSCs appropriate the narrative of humanitarianism. Nevertheless, and as we will show in the subsequent sections, there is evidence that companies conceive of assisting victims of natural catastrophes and violent conflicts not only as a business strategy but also as a mission.

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33. Bearpark and Schulz, 'The Future of the Market', 240.
34. Christian Olsson, 'The Politics of the Apolitical: Private Military Companies, Humanitarians and the Quest for (Anti-)Politics in Post-Intervention Environments', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 10, no. 4 (2007): 332–61, 349.
35. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity', *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (2000): 845–77, 848.
36. Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder, 'The Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, eds Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 143–71, 143.
37. James D. Fearon, 'The Rise of Emergency Aid', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, eds Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 49–72, 51; see also Hugo Slim, 'Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War', *Disasters* 21, no. 3 (1997): 244–57, 245.

In addition to obligation, responsibility and motivation, the triad of principles comprised of neutrality, impartiality and independence is traditionally considered a major characteristic of humanitarianism. Neutrality means 'not taking sides in hostilities or engaging at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature'.[38] Furthermore, the delivery of aid shall be 'impartial and not based on nationality, race, religion or political point of view',[39] and aid agencies shall act 'independently of government policies or actions'.[40] However, humanitarian actors disagree as far as the adherence to these principles is concerned. While some organisations, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), seek to adhere very strictly to these principles, others work from the assumption that humanitarian assistance can never be neutral since it always affects the conflict.[41]

These differences reflect the diversification of the humanitarian community. Alongside the United Nations and the ICRC, more and more non-governmental not-for-profit organisations are engaging in humanitarian assistance, and they themselves have very different and often competing notions of what constitutes humanitarian action and how it should be carried out. Similar to PMSCs, NGOs are far from a homogeneous group. In the humanitarian field, they differ, for example, with respect to their philosophies. Whereas some NGOs seek to help all groups affected by a conflict, others deliberately choose to assist only one side. In addition, NGOs differ with respect to the relations they maintain with states. Organisations range from ones that do not receive any money from governments and are therefore independent to ones that are akin to public service contractors, which calls into question the non-governmental character of the organisation.[42] Furthermore, NGOs differ with respect to their mandate. While some are 'single-issue humanitarian agencies', others are 'multi-mandate organisations' delivering both humanitarian and development assistance.[43]

Given the diversity of actors, and their different aims and priorities, it is not surprising that there is no unanimity over what constitutes a humanitarian activity. While traditionally, humanitarianism was considered only to provide a 'bed for the night',[44] ever since the end of the Cold War 'new humanitarianisms' have taken hold,[45] owing in part to the increasing number of aid organisations and agencies, greater competition for funding,[46]

38. EU, 'European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid', Communication Department of the European Commission, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/humanitarian_aid/r13008_en.htm (accessed 2 September 2010).
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Thomas Gebauer, 'Zwischen Befriedung und Eskalation: Zur Rolle der Hilfsorganisationen in Bürgerkriegsökonomien', in *Ungeheuer ist nur das Normale: Zur Ökonomie der 'neuen' Kriege*, ed. Medico International (Frankfurt am Main: Medico International, 2002), 50–61.
42. Dennis Dijkzeul, 'A Typology of International Humanitarian Organizations', *Humanitäres Völkerrecht Informationsschriften* 4 (2004): 216–25.
43. Hugo Slim, 'With or against? Humanitarian Agencies and Coalition Counter-insurgency', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2004): 34–47, 35.
44. David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (London: Vintage, 2002).
45. Joanna Macrae, 'Analysis and Synthesis', in *The New Humanitarianisms: A Review of Trends in Global Humanitarian Action*, ed. Joanna Macrae, HPG Report 11 (London: Humanitarian Policy Group 9, 2002), http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/243.pdf (accessed 28 April 2009).
46. Alexander Cooley and James Ron, 'The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action', *International Security* 27, no. 1 (2002): 5–39.

the growing complexity of emergencies and new security situations. Based on the concept of 'human security',[47] security is no longer exclusively associated with the military protection of the state. Instead, the security of the individual and of societal groups has gained in importance, accompanied by attention to threats other than military attack, such as environmental pollution, pandemics and poverty.[48] Consequently, aid plays an increasing role in stabilisation and peacekeeping efforts within situations of so-called 'complex emergencies' and multidimensional responses such as 'integrated missions'.[49]

Against this backdrop, a more ambitious kind of humanitarianism has developed. Instead of solely providing assistance in emergency situations, it also strives to address the root causes of conflicts by delivering human rights, development, democracy and even responsible states.[50] In contrast to 'bed for the night' humanitarianism, Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder define this type of humanitarianism as 'comprehensive peace building' humanitarianism.[51] Humanitarians belonging to the latter category no longer claim to be apolitical but conceive of themselves, and are perceived by others, as political agents.[52] Moreover, humanitarian assistance increasingly forms part of both political and military strategies such as counter-insurgency (COIN).[53] COIN operations are 'primarily a political struggle and not a military confrontation. The battle is for the support or control of the people. … Whoever wins the people will win the war.'[54] As David Kilcullen has put it: 'Counterinsurgency is armed social work.'[55] Aiming to 'win the hearts and minds' of local populations, military actors are involved in the delivery of humanitarian assistance directly and/or indirectly by transferring the task to humanitarian agencies.[56] Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell has even called NGOs 'force multipliers' for the US military and considered them 'an important part of our combat team'.[57] In this context, we witness the growing involvement of different kinds of actors carrying out humanitarian services. In addition to the diversification of the humanitarian NGO community, other actors such as state militaries[58] but also commercial firms seek to deliver humanitarian

47. UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 2004, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en.pdf (accessed 19 May 2010).
48. Peter J. Burgess and Taylor Owen, eds, 'What Is Human Security?', *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2004): 345–87; Keith Krause, 'Human Security', in *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, ed. Vincent Chetail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147–57.
49. Michael Schloms, 'Humanitarian NGOs in Peace Processes', *International Peacekeeping* 10, no. 1 (2003): 40–55.
50. Michael Barnett, 'Evolution without Progress? Humanitarian Organizations in a World of Hurt', *International Organization* 63 (2009): 621–63.
51. Barnett and Snyder, 'The Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism', 150.
52. Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); David Chandler, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2001): 678–700; Sarah Kenyon Lischer, 'Collateral Damage: Humanitarian Assistance as a Cause of Conflict', *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 79–101.
53. Slim, 'With or against? Humanitarian Agencies and Coalition Counter-insurgency'.
54. Ibid., 39.
55. David Kilcullen, 'Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency', March 2006, http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf (accessed 25 August 2011).
56. Macrae, 'Analysis and Synthesis'.
57. Colin Powell cited in Slim, 'With or against? Humanitarian Agencies and Coalition Counter-insurgency', 43.
58. Victoria Wheeler and Adele Harmer, eds, *Resetting the Rules of Engagement: Trends and Issues in Military–Humanitarian Relations*, HPG Report 21 (London: ODI, 2006).

assistance,[59] leading Peter Redfield to conclude that '[e]veryone, it seems, is a humanitarian now'.[60] These actors not only challenge the monopoly thus far enjoyed by NGOs but also compete with them 'to (re)define the humanitarian identity'.[61]

These observed changes are an indication that '[t]he very meaning of humanitarianism has become elusive'.[62] The 'traditional' neutral, independent and impartial not-for-profit humanitarian actors no longer 'own' the humanitarian frame. Because the humanitarian frame is undergoing change, it allows for different interpretations: humanitarianism can be more or less neutral, independent and impartial, but also political; it can be carried out by state and/or non-state actors, by non-profit and/or for-profit organisations; and it can comprise a variety of services ranging from emergency relief to long-term assistance. The variable meaning of humanitarianism, we argue, makes it easier for new actors, such as for-profit organisations, the military and PMSCs, to present themselves as humanitarian agents. They can select those elements of the humanitarian frame that fit their interests best and that suit their commercial character.

Identities condition what options individual actors can entertain as well as what may be considered legitimate by others. In the case of PMSCs, presenting themselves as humanitarians may enhance their popular acceptance and increase their pool of clients, such as NGOs, who might be less apprehensive about relying on their services. As the chairman of the Board of Directors of RA International, a former member company of the ISOA (as of July 2010), explains:

> One should never underestimate the power of private companies who offer aid. Companies are almost always focused on efficiency, good negotiation, building their reputation (their brand) and getting things done on time and on budget. The basic rules of capitalism that work for the good of the communities they aid can in turn aid them in business and ultimately help post-conflict societies to recover and progress.[63]

Identity politics can also raise the costs of certain policy options if actions intended by certain actors are perceived as undermining rather than strengthening and protecting the identity of a particular group. Seen this way, humanitarianism can be a means for the industry members to rid themselves of the 'mercenary' and 'Rambo-type' image and to establish themselves as regular security actors. Relatedly, identities lead to group boundaries and involve 'othering' through spelling out who belongs to a group and who does not. By referring to themselves as humanitarians, individual PMSCs may be able to set themselves apart from the less reputable firms in the market. Finally, identity politics may also prompt reactions from those who do not fit the professed social categories. In the case of PMSCs, acquiring a humanitarian identity may trigger opposition or resistance from humanitarian NGOs.

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59. Stephen Hopgood, 'Saying "No" to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, eds Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 98–123.
60. Peter Redfield, 'Sacrifice, Triage, and Global Humanitarianism', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, eds Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 196–214, 196.
61. Barnett and Weiss, 'Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present', 5.
62. Ibid., 9.
63. Soraya Narfeldt, 'Role of the Private Sector in Humanitarian Response', in *FMR* 29 (n.d.): 67.

Identity Construction and Framing

Language and discourse play a crucial role in the construction and reproduction of identities. As J.D. Fearon and David D. Laitin point out,[64] 'social categories, their membership rules, content and valuation are the products of human action and speech'. We therefore employ framing as a heuristic device to capture the humanitarian identity of PMSCs. Generally defined as 'a way of selecting, organising, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality so as to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading, and acting',[65] frames contribute to the 'construction of individuals or groups as social actors in a particular field'.[66] They legitimise some groups or forms of political action rather than others,[67] by defining who or what aspects are in line with a frame, and are hence 'in frame', and which ones are excluded and thus 'out of frame'. Hence, while the identity concept determines the normative criteria that constitute in-groups and out-groups, the framing approach tells us something about the strategies by which these groups are constructed.

One of these is (1) *naming*, which may be accomplished either by invoking particular attributes or by referring to oneself and others in a certain way.[68] However, naming may also include the definition of problems, or what Snow et al. refer to as diagnostic framing, which, in turn, can create in-groups and out-groups by signalling who the 'affected' are and who is qualified to help.[69] Anna Leander, for example, has shown that PMSCs engage in securitisation through their discourse,[70] and Anna Leander and Rens van Munster have argued that 'the trend in the security field to frame security provision as a matter of responsibility best taken on by private actors'[71] contributes to the acceptance of PMSCs 'as a caste of new security experts'.[72] While self-attribution already establishes boundaries and implicitly defines 'the other', out-groups may also be constructed in a more explicit manner, for instance by blaming other actors for a condition or an event. By designating, as Wright put it, 'culpable agents',[73] the belonging of some actors to a particular group may be questioned or even denied.

In addition to naming, PMSCs may also establish their humanitarian identity by engaging in (2) *frame alignment*.[74] Either they may enter into alliances with other, perhaps more

64. Fearon and Laitin, 'Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity', 848.
65. Martin Rein and Donald Schön, 'Frame-Reflective Policy Discourse', in *Social Sciences and Modern States: National Experiences and Theoretical Crossroads*, eds Peter Wagner, Carol Hirschon Weiss, Bjorn Wittrock and Hellmut Wollmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 262–89, 263.
66. Yves Surel, 'The Role of Cognitive and Normative Frames in Policy-Making', *Journal of European Public Policy* 7, no. 5 (2000): 495–512, 500.
67. Ulrika Mörth, 'Competing Frames in the European Commission: The Case of the Defence Industry and Equipment Issue', *Journal of European Public Policy* 7, no. 2 (2000): 173–89, 173; Surel, 'The Role of Cognitive and Normative Frames in Policy-Making', 499.
68. Rein and Schön, 'Frame-Reflective Policy Discourse', 270.
69. David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr, Stephen K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review* 5, no. 4 (1986): 464–81.
70. Anna Leander, 'The Commodification of Violence, Private Military Companies, and African States' (2003), http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/lea10/lea10.pdf (accessed 28 October 2005); Leander, 'The Market for Force and Public Security', 612.
71. Leander and van Munster, 'Private Security Contractors in the Debate about Darfur', 206.
72. Ibid.
73. Stuart A. Wright, 'Strategic Framing of Racial-Nationalism in North America and Europe: An Analysis of a Burgeoning Transnational Network', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (2009): 189–210, 191.
74. Snow et al., 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation'.

powerful, actors that already enjoy recognition, such as states, NGOs or international organisations, or they may try to link their own frame to already existing frames by matching up the ideas, beliefs and interpretations comprising them. Overall, conceiving of framing as an element of symbolic politics, understood as 'the narrative structuring, interpretive resonance, and projection of affective information' that produce collective action,[75] PMSCs can use symbols that can be or are already associated with a particular group.

Framing is highly political. Given different understandings and the quest for membership, acceptance and legitimacy, '[f]raming agents compete with others using counterframes to provide singular interpretations of problems and appropriate solutions'.[76] Which frames succeed and become accepted hinges less on their content,[77] and more on how they resonate with other actors,[78] which itself hinges on various factors, one of which is the centrality of the values promoted by the frame within the larger belief system. Put differently, frame resonance is more likely if the values promoted by the frame inventor align with those of the frame audience.[79] New frames therefore do not make 'a clean slate of the past' but 'must in effect be composed of previous cognitive and normative structures';[80] that means they have to build on already existing frames and belief systems.[81]

A second factor is the empirical credibility of a frame, defined by Snow and Benford as the degree to which, for example, the proposed diagnosis and solutions correspond to and verify events within the broader environment.[82] Thirdly, frame resonance also depends upon the experiential commensurability of a frame as well as, fourthly, the 'inter-network dynamics'[83] of its carriers. While in the case of the former the frame content has to be congruent with the way these problems are experienced by frame targets,[84] inter-network dynamics refer to the degree of consensus among the frame innovators and advocates, which can enhance the credibility of a particular frame.[85] Fifthly, the success of a frame also depends on the power of the frame innovators and advocates.[86] By power we mean not only material resources, such as money or human capital, but also less tangible forms, for example, expertise. Although frames are intended to convince and mobilise the support of others, they can, in turn, enhance the power of their carriers.

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75. Alison Brysk, '"Hearts and Minds": Bringing Symbolic Politics Back', *Journal of the Northeastern Political Science Association* 27, no. 4 (1995): 559–86, 561.
76. Rodger A. Payne, 'Persuasion, Frames and Norms Construction', *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 1 (2001): 37–61, 44.
77. Ibid.
78. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 27.
79. Brysk, '"Hearts and Minds"', 578; Payne, 'Persuasion, Frames and Norms Construction', 43; David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization', *International Social Movement Research: A Research Annual* 1 (1988): 197–217, 205.
80. Surel, 'The Role of Cognitive and Normative Frames in Policy-Making', 508.
81. Payne, 'Persuasion, Frames and Norms Construction', 43.
82. Snow and Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization', 208–10.
83. Charli R. Carpenter, 'Studying Issue (Non-)Adoption in Transnational Advocacy Networks', *International Organization* 61, no. 3 (2007): 662.
84. Ibid., 205–8.
85. Charli R. Carpenter, 'Studying Issue (Non-)Adoption in Transnational Advocacy Networks', 660–2.
86. Payne, 'Persuasion, Frames and Norms Construction'.

Based on the assumption that PMSCs engage in discursive strategies to demonstrate that they are legitimate security actors, we analysed the homepages of select companies. Homepages can be considered instruments through which companies can shape and influence their public image. As Craig Warkentin has shown with respect to NGOs, by 'creating an online persona' actors 'engage in framing activities … shaping the ways that issues are conceptualised and understood'.[87] In the case of PMSCs, the homepages are not only important sources of information for their clients but also a means through which companies establish their humanitarian identity. We examined written text as well as images, including photos or symbols, and searched for elements indicative of humanitarianism. While it might seem logical also to conduct interviews with representatives of PMSCs, we deliberately decided not to do so because – assuming that PMSCs have different identities that they strategically employ – we are not interested in how they present themselves vis-a-vis interviewers.

With the help of the literature pertaining to the privatisation of security and PMSCs and scanning through different company websites, we identified over 200 PMSCs with an online representation. Of these, about 25 percent either directly refer to themselves as humanitarians or emphasise their humanitarian qualities and services. Out of these companies, we analysed the pages of 36 firms[88] that represent the whole spectrum: companies offering different services, companies working for different clients and companies adopting different practices and policies. Despite the differences between them, all of the analysed companies either directly or indirectly present themselves as humanitarians. Furthermore, we identified three industry associations with a homepage, of which we analysed that of the ISOA. In addition to websites, we examined other online publications, especially of the ISOA, such as the organisation's *Journal of International Peace Operations* (*JIPO*).

We conducted a discourse analysis of the websites and publications, looking for elements fitting into either the category 'naming' or the category 'frame alignment' that were established on the basis of the theoretical framing literature. Based on the latter and on the empirical material, and hence combining deductive and inductive approaches, we divided these two categories into subcategories. The category 'naming' consists of the following subcategories: names that PMSCs give themselves, symbols that PMSCs use, aims that PMSCs claim to follow, services that the companies offer, qualities that PMSCs ascribe to their services and charitable activities that PMSCs conduct. The category 'frame alignment' is composed of the following subcategories: contractual relationships between PMSCs and 'traditional' humanitarian actors, other forms of cooperation between those actors and PMSCs, the type of personnel that PMSCs hire, the ideas and ideology that PMSCs refer to, and the symbols that PMSCs use.

Contrary to what one might expect, PMSCs do not engage in counter-framing to the established humanitarian frame. Instead, these companies use the humanitarian frame

87. Craig Warkentin, *Reshaping World Politics: NGOs, the Internet, and Global Civil Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 36–7.

88. Aecom, Aegis, Agility Logistics, Allied Security, Assured Risks, Atco, Ayr Group, Blue Hackle, Burton Rands Associates, CACI, Centurion, Control Risks, Cubic, DynCorp, Edinburgh International, EODT, Erinys, FSI Worldwide, GardaWorld, Greystone, Hart, ICI of Oregon, Mission Essential Personnel (MEP), MineTech International, MPRI, Olive Group, Overseas Security & Strategic, Inc. (OSSI), Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE), Pax Mondial, RA International, Reed, Relyant, Ronco, SOS International (SOSi), Triple Canopy, Unity Resources Group (URG).

advanced by 'traditional' humanitarians, emphasising those elements that fit their interests and needs: a broad understanding of humanitarian assistance (a) including the delivery of human rights, democracy and development, (b) by a variety of means, including peacebuilding. While the respective PMSCs and the ISOA rely first and foremost on naming as a strategy to establish themselves as humanitarian actors, they also forge alliances with other humanitarian actors. Promoting values that are central to the humanitarian belief system contributes to the normalisation and legitimacy of PMSCs. Given the rising number of humanitarian crises, on the one hand, and the growing reluctance of Western governments and (non-)governmental organisations to intervene, on the other hand, the promises of companies to provide humanitarian assistance are also empirically credible.

Naming PMSCs as 'New Humanitarians'

PMSCs increasingly refer to themselves as 'the New Humanitarian Agent[s]',[89] emphasising, like AECOM, that they 'are committed … to make the world a better place'.[90] Most indicative of this trend is the fact that, in autumn 2010, the trade association International Peace Operations Association (IPOA) changed its name to International Stability Operations Association (ISOA). In addition, the organisation has eliminated the sleeping lion from its logo, which might have alluded to the military realm. The organisation claims to 'serve … as a valued and trusted association representing ethical and professional organizations partnering in stability, support and development efforts worldwide'.[91] But even individual companies, such as Pax Mondial or SOS International, try to set themselves apart from the rest by choosing names for their firms that are typically associated with, and reminiscent of, humanitarian NGOs.[92]

Naming strategies such as these are, however, exceptions. Most companies establish their humanitarianism through their professed aims. MPRI, for example, insist that they 'help create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world'[93] and 'make an enduring contribution to global security, justice and well-being',[94] while DynCorp offers 'support … stability and human progress across the globe'.[95] Such statements are accompanied by what we consider to be humanitarian imagery and symbols that either suggest misery or convey hope. The *JIPO* of the ISOA is quite telling in this respect. The ads of companies quite frequently show babies being fed,[96] or boys laughing and waving.[97]

89. Fennell cited in Vaux et al., *Humanitarian Action and Private Security Companies*, 14.
90. AECOM, 'Social Responsibility', AECOM, http://www.aecom.com/About/Social+Responsibility (accessed 4 May 2010).
91. *Journal of International Peace Operations* 6, no. 6 (2011): 32.
92. Pax Mondial, 'Main', Pax Mondial, http://www.paxmondial.com/ (accessed 26 January 2010); SOSi, 'Main', SOSi, http://www.sosiltd.com/ (accessed 17 June 2010).
93. MPRI, 'Index'.
94. Ibid.
95. DynCorp, 'International Development', DynCorp, http://www.dyn-intl.com/international-development.aspx (accessed 4 May 2010).
96. *Journal of International Peace Operations* 2, no. 2 (2006): 2.
97. *Journal of International Peace Operations* 3, no. 3 (2007): 2.

In addition, PMSCs offer advice and consultancy, security management, training, and physical security for humanitarian actors.[98] The mission of Garda World, for example, is 'to make the world a more secure place and we are honored to assist humanitarians around the globe',[99] and Agility Logistics claim to 'have a genuine impact in matters of life and death' by 'donating our services to our humanitarian partner organizations'.[100] Furthermore, PMSCs increasingly offer humanitarian services themselves.[101] One of these is demining.[102] While one might question whether demining is a humanitarian activity, it is conceived of and presented as such by the ISOA[103] and individual companies. Several companies, such as MineTech International, Olive Group or Ronco, are active in this field. DynCorp has even been awarded a contract by the US Department of State 'to establish a humanitarian Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to respond globally to urgent humanitarian operations that require the removal or mitigation of explosive hazards to protect civilian populations'.[104]

Moreover, companies also carry out other humanitarian services. Following the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, the company Unity Resources Group, for example, declared to have 'a deployed logistics, security and medical team in Port-au-Prince'; more generally, it prides itself on the fact that it 'can provide the following services: … Camp management and full turnkey remote area life support options …, remote area medical services including clinical support, preventative medical support and assessments'.[105] Overseas Security & Strategic, Inc. (OSSI) claims to have 'emergency medical personnel, rapid housing structures',[106] and Relyant 'understands that humanitarian efforts need to rapidly provide medical and education resources to internally displaced persons (IDPs) to prevent additional trauma'. The company has 'worked with, can provide resources to and especially assist those persons most at risk, the elderly, women and children, from additional harm'.[107] MPRI is 'providing relief assistance through food distribution, supporting reconstruction efforts, and developing new ways to generate electricity, and maintain clean water and sustainable energy sources'.[108]

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98. Bearpark and Schulz, 'The Future of the Market', 241; Peter W. Singer, 'Humanitarian Principles, Private Military Agents: Some Implications of the Privatised Military Industry for the Humanitarian Community', in *Resetting the Rules of Engagement*, eds Wheeler and Harmer, 67–79; Emily Speers Mears, *Private Military and Security Companies and Humanitarian Action*, SMI Professional Development Brief 1 (Geneva: Security Management Initiative, 2009).
99. GardaWorld, 'What's New', GardaWorld, http://www.garda-world.com/whatsnew/news/?id=191&action=fullnews (accessed 21 July 2010).
100. Agility, 'Corporate Social Responsibility', Agility, http://www.agilitylogistics.com/EN/Pages/Agility_Corporate_Social_Responsibility.aspx (accessed 15 August 2010).
101. Bearpark and Schulz, 'The Future of the Market', 239.
102. Spearin, 'Private, Armed and Humanitarian?', 368.
103. *Journal of International Peace Operations* 6, no. 6 (2011).
104. DynCorp, 'DynCorp International Wins New $12 Million Contract for De-mining and Explosives Removal', press release, http://www.dyn-intl.com/news2008/news102908.aspx (accessed 17 June 2010).
105. ISOA 2011, 'ISOA Members and Disaster Response', http://ipoaworld.org/eng/disasterresponse.html (accessed 22 June 2011).
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
108. L3-MPRI (formerly MPRI), 'Sustainable Development', L3-MPRI, http://www.mpri.com/web/index.php/content/what_we_do/sustainable_development (accessed 2 June 2011).

Such statements are reflective of an expansion of the range of services that PMSCs have started to offer over the past decades in response to the growing competition among companies.[109] Two representatives of the BAPSC declare, for example, that British:

> PSCs are trying to open up business opportunities by moving into new fields such as state-building, supporting and providing humanitarian and disaster relief, and development tasks. … Once a company has acquired a certain degree of expertise in one of these areas, such as security sector reform in the Balkans, it may want to use its expertise and apply similar principles to health sector reform in other post-conflict environments.[110]

Even a notorious PMSC such as Blackwater set up a subsidiary company called Greystone Ltd seeking to carry out humanitarian work.[111] José L. Gómez del Prado of the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination, however, criticises the fact that, '[b]ehind the humanitarian façade, one of the main objectives of the corporation, as indicated by its founder, Erik Prince, would be to obtain for his own private military force a substantial piece of the current UN peacekeeping $6–10 billion budget'.[112]

PMSCs build on already existing variants of the humanitarian frame. While the activities of some companies are closer to the more traditional humanitarian services and the 'bed for the night' approach, others, by comparison, offer a wider range of services, including development assistance. Consider, for example, the services sold by AECOM, which 'range from rapid post-disaster stabilization to disaster mitigation, planning, and from supporting basic livelihood recovery to longer-term reconstruction of critical institutions'.[113] Similarly, Pax Mondial states on its homepage that, '[w]ith our core service offering and breadth of expertise, Pax Mondial is uniquely positioned to bridge the continuum from emergency response in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or conflict to longer-term sustainable development'.[114]

Moreover, some PMSCs engage in activities that correspond to the 'comprehensive peace building'[115] type of humanitarianism. DynCorp,[116] for example, claims to 'foster

109. Bearpark and Schulz, 'The Future of the Market', 240f.
110. Ibid., 241.
111. David Robertson, 'Blackwater: U.S. Security Firm in Iraq Shooting Claim Looks for Peace Work', *Sunday Times*, 19 March 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article3578660.ece (accessed 25 August 2011); Greystone Ltd, http://www.greystone-ltd.com/humanitarianPeace.html (accessed 8 December 2007).
112. José L. Gómez del Prado, 'Private Military and Security Companies and Challenges to the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries', conference paper, http://www.google.de/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=18&ved=0CGMQFjAHOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.havenscenter.org%2Ffiles%2FJLGomez%2520del%2520Prado-Conf%2520Paper_0.doc&rct=j&q=greystone%20blackwater%20subsidiary%20humanitarian%20services%20image%20public%20relation&ei=ygRWTsfEDsLMhAew482mDA&usg=AFQjCNE36bmAM3WvpDidJGRnIRSHCnFPRA&cad=rja (accessed 25 August 2011), 8.
113. AECOM, 'What We Do – Crisis Response and Stabilization', AECOM, http://www.aecom.com/What+We+Do/Government/International+Development/Humanitarian+Response+and+Stabilization (accessed 17 June 2010).
114. Pax Mondial, 'Stabilization and Development', Pax Mondial, http://www.paxmondial.com/services/stabilization-development/ (accessed 31 May 2011).
115. Barnett and Snyder, 'The Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism', 150.
116. DynCorp, 'Protecting What Really Matters', DynCorp, http://www.dyn-intl.com/protecting-what-matters.aspx (accessed 26 January 2010).

peace negotiations, reconciliation, citizen security, open elections, anti-corruption programs and good governance'. Furthermore, PMSCs advertise their services by stating that they address the root causes of suffering and work towards the transformation of states and societies. On the homepage of EODT, for example, one can read that the company 'promote[s] freedom, stability, and environmental stewardship worldwide',[117] and that it is '[d]riven by [its] purpose to enhance and sustain the world's built, natural and social environments'. AECOM works 'with local, regional and national governments, charitable organizations, hospitals and schools to develop and deliver awareness programs that help communities make informed choices'.[118] 'Serving those who make the world a better place', DynCorp promises '[r]apid response capabilities in emergencies, world-class post-conflict and transition programs, and sustainable solutions for long-term development, with an emphasis on building local capacity'.[119]

In addition, PMSCs attempt to demonstrate their commitment to humanitarianism in yet another way. They either establish and maintain their own charities[120] or support charitable organisations.[121] In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, the philanthropy committee of Triple Canopy, for example, 'researched established charities located in Port-au-Prince, hoping to support an organization and make an immediate impact by purchasing, transporting aid to those in need'.[122] Rather than engaging in charity quietly, PMSCs use it as part of their marketing strategy. In a press release, the director of marketing of Triple Canopy announced proudly that the company had emerged as one of many heroes because it assisted and helped thousands of displaced Haitians. Faced with a 'daunting task' and 'backbreaking' labour, it was compensated by 'the smiles on the faces of delighted children'.[123]

Many companies claim to be capable of carrying out such services because of their experience. To lend empirical credibility to their frame, they insist they have knowledge that is comparable with the experiences of their frame targets, in this case traditional humanitarian actors such as NGOs. Olive Group, for example, advertises its services by referring to its 'first hand experience of the human and commercial costs of conflict, and has seen the effect that abandoned explosive remnants of war have, blighting areas for

117. EODT, 'About Us', EODT, http://www.eodt.com/AboutUs/ (accessed 4 May 2010).
118. AECOM, 'Social Responsibility'.
119. DynCorp, 'Home', DynCorp, http://www.dyn-intl.com/index.aspx (accessed 26 January 2010).
120. For example, Aegis, 'Code of Conduct', Aegis, http://www.aegisworld.com/LEGAL_Code of Conduct_V2.pdf (accessed 4 May 2010); FSI Worldwide 2010, 'Introduction to FSI Worldwide', FSI Worldwide, http://www.fsi-worldwide.com/about-us/introduction-to-fsi/ (accessed 7 April 2010); ICI of Oregon, 'Sudan', ICI of Oregon, http://www.icioregon.com/Sudan2.htm (accessed 17 June 2010).
121. For example, Triple Canopy, 'Corporate Social Responsibility', Triple Canopy, http://www.triplecanopy.com/triplecanopy/en/about/corp-social-responsibility.php (accessed 7 April 2010); Olive Group, 'About Olive', Olive Group, http://www.olivegroup.com/about.htm (accessed 7 April 2010); Edinburgh International, 'Corporate Social Responsibility', Edinburgh International, http://www.edinburghint.com/about-us/CSR/ (accessed 17 June 2010).
122. Jayanti Menches, 'Providing Cover: Assisting with Life Support for Thousands of Displaced Haitians', *Journal of International Peace Operations* 5, no. 6 (2010): 10–11; Triple Canopy, 'Triple Canopy Donates and Delivers Humanitarian Aid to Haitian Earthquake Victims: Partners with GHESKIO HIV/AIDS Clinic for Timely Philanthropic Mission', press release, 12 March 2010, http://www.triplecanopy.com/triplecanopy/en/news/20100312-haiti.php (accessed 7 April 2010).
123. Menches, 'Providing Cover', 10f.

decades, creating human tragedies'.[124] Reed declares that '[p]ast experience in remote and challenging third world environments makes Reed, Inc. highly suitable for humanitarian assistance missions under challenging circumstances',[125] and AECOM states that with regard to:

> [n]atural or man-made disasters … timely intervention is crucial to avoid falling on the backside of recovery and into deeper crisis. For over 40 years, AECOM has delivered assistance to countries and communities affected by natural or man-made disasters … AECOM's programs are innovative, flexible, and focused on long-term results. Our emphasis is always on identifying and addressing the structural causes of crisis.[126]

Experience with crisis used to be what humanitarian NGOs considered their exclusive asset. This, however, no longer seems to be the case. PMSCs also claim to have intimate knowledge of the needs of the victims of conflicts and natural catastrophes as well as the humanitarian community who they assist. With respect to the former, Mission Essential Personnel, for example, meets 'humanity's most difficult challenges' and 'help[s] improve the lives of those who deserve better'.[127] Regarding humanitarian organisations and agencies, Blue Hackle declares: 'If you are a[n] … NGO … and need either security or logistics support for a planned or existing deployment to Haiti, we can help. … We understand the business of aid agencies, NGOs.'[128] And Control Risks declares that:

> Combating the increasing risks faced by aid workers across the globe is a difficult balancing act: too much overt security and aid workers risk being associated with armed forces, too little and an organisation's duty of care can be questioned. Control Risks' humanitarian sector practice is dedicated to helping non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to overcome the difficulties associated with operating in hostile environments.[129]

Statements such as these are in line with the finding of Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams that 'a reputation for expertise and trustworthiness becomes a key asset for PSCs to acquire'.[130] Moreover, they reveal that 'knowledge' is an important factor not only in the construction of PMSCs as private security experts, as Joakim Berndtsson has argued,[131] but also in the construction of PMSCs as humanitarians.

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124. Olive Group, 'Demining and Ordnance Disposal', Olive Group, http://www.olivegroup.com/service_demining.htm (accessed 4 May 2010).
125. Reed Inc., 'Humanitarian Assistance', Reed Inc., http://www.reedinc.com/web/page/591/interior.html (accessed 4 May 2010).
126. AECOM, 'What We Do – Crisis Response and Stabilization'.
127. MEP, 'MEP Advertisement', *Journal of International Peace Operations* 5, no. 6 (May–June 2010), 22.
128. Blue Hackle, 'Natural Disaster Recovery and Assistance Services', Blue Hackle, http://www.bluehackle.com/pages/haiti.aspx (accessed 17 June 2010).
129. Control Risks, 'What We Do – NGOs', Control Risks, http://www.crg.com/Default.aspx?page=334 (accessed 17 June 2010).
130. Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, *Security beyond the State: Private Security in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 80.
131. See the article by Joakim Berndtsson in this issue.

Alignment and Alliances between 'New' and 'Old' Humanitarians

The ideas and interpretations contained in individual frames are rarely convincing by themselves. Instead, their carriers and advocates need to work for their acceptance. PMSCs establish themselves as 'new humanitarians' by seeking alliances with actors that already enjoy recognition in general, such as states, or as humanitarians, such as NGOs and international organisations.

The most common strategy appears to be to refer to the contractual relationships that PMSCs maintain with such actors. Logistic companies like ATCO, for example, pride themselves on the fact that 'NATO, the United Nations and the Canadian and US military leverage ATCO Structures & Logistics' expertise and capability to deliver integrated logistics and real life support solutions including turnkey emergency and disaster relief support requirements'.[132] Similarly, companies like Aegis, Allied Security or Edinburgh International emphasise the fact that they are registered UN contractors,[133] and Agility points out that it 'currently supplies food rations to the UN Peacekeeping troops in Somalia'.[134] Moreover, Cubic states on its website that it worked for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the ICRC.[135] Edinburgh International, Aegis, Ayr Group, Control Risks, Erinys, Mission Essential Personnel (MEP), RA International, Reed and Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) are members of the UN Global Compact, and Edinburgh International has even put the logo of the UN Global Compact on its website.[136] Some companies provide even more details about the kinds of tasks they perform for their clients. Hart, for example, 'conducts detailed, multi-layered security risk assessment programmes that cover all aspects of World Food Programme activities'.[137] When reading such statements the privatisation of security does not seem to be something irregular and ugly, but, instead, something normal, acceptable and even desirable.

PMSCs also claim to have close links with what are considered the 'true humanitarians', that is, NGOs, but which for reasons concerning their credibility are generally more apprehensive about working with or enlisting the services of PMSCs. AYR Group prides itself on having provided 'turn-key aviation operations for government agencies and many international NGOs, including Oxfam, MSF, Red Cross and Merlin',[138] and the clients of

132. ATCO, 'Disaster Relief', ATCO, http://www.atcosl.com/DisasterRelief.htm (accessed 17 June 2010).
133. Aegis, 'About Us', Aegis, http://www.aegisworld.com/index.php?page=53 (accessed 26 January 2010); Allied Security, 'About Allied Security', Allied Security, http://www.alliedsecurityglobal.com/about-allied-security (accessed 26 January 2010); Edinburgh International, 'Clients', Edinburgh International, www.edinburghint.com/about-us/clients/ (accessed 26 January 2010).
134. IPOA Haiti Relief Effort, 'List of IPOA Member Capabilities Available for Haiti Earthquake Response', IPOA, http://www.ipoaworld.org/eng/haiti.html (accessed 16 June 2010).
135. CUBIC, 'Defense Support Services', CUBIC, http://www.cubic.com/cda1/prod_&serv/defense/support_services/multinational_planning.html (accessed 17 June 2010).
136. Edinburgh International, 'UN Global Compact', Edinburgh International, www.edinburghint.com/about-us/un-global-compact (accessed 26 January 2010).
137. Hart Security, 'About Us – Selected Experience', Hart Security, http://www.hartsecurity.com/aboutus_selected experience.asp (accessed 4 April 2010).
138. AYR Group, 'Main', AYR Group, http://www.ayrgroup.co.uk (accessed 17 June 2010).

Blue Hackle 'range from the pan-global media houses to the supranational aid agencies, from national government's international development programs to domestic charities helping solve local shortcomings'.[139] Companies like Triple Canopy declare that they 'provide security and risk management services for … non-governmental organizations worldwide',[140] and GardaWorld 'is providing advice and assistance in Haiti to our global clients who include USAID [US Agency for International Development] implementers and international NGOs',[141] while Erinys has expertise in 'the protection of small NGO contingents'.[142] 'Burton Rands provides information support and advisory services to NGOs operating in South Sudan.'[143] This includes 'the development of incident and crisis response plans for USAID sponsored democracy and elections programs'.[144] Finally, Centurion goes a step further. It quotes representatives of NGOs, including Amnesty International, Christian Aid and Human Rights Watch, who praise a company-run training course as '[b]rilliant. Extremely professional, sensible.'[145]

PMSCs rent the legitimacy that other humanitarian actors enjoy. As José L. Gómez del Prado explains, '[c]ounting humanitarian agencies as clients has multiple advantages for such companies as enhancing their reputation, providing distance from the mercenary label, and gaining a foothold in a potentially lucrative market'.[146] In addition, PMSCs rent legitimacy in ways other than through a client and service provider relationship. Many of the companies we researched also recruit their personnel from NGOs and governments. Control Risks, for example, prides itself on the fact that 'all of the team members come from an NGO background and understand the unique situations in which NGOs find themselves across the globe'.[147] However, when reading through the homepages of PMSCs, one also finds quotations such as the one by Assured Risks Ltd that refers to itself as a security specialist whose 'security consultants are the very best in the market having gained extensive experience from careers in the British Military'.[148] According to Blue Hackle, its employees 'are of the highest caliber and include experienced former Special Air Service (SAS) personnel',[149] a special forces regiment of the British Army. Such quotes are reflective of the tensions that exist within the industry. They lend weight to the argument that PMSCs have different identities and use them to appeal to different types of clients.[150]

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139. Blue Hackle, 'Natural Disaster Recovery and Assistance Services'.
140. Triple Canopy, 'Triple Canopy Donates and Delivers Humanitarian Aid to Haitian Earthquake Victims'.
141. IPOA Haiti Relief Effort, 'List of IPOA Member Capabilities Available for Haiti Earthquake Response'.
142. Erinys, 'Public Sector and NGOs', Erinys, http://www.erinys.net/#/public-sector-ngos/4532629540 (accessed 17 June 2010).
143. Burton Rands, 'About Us', Burton Rands, http://www.burtonrands.com/aboutus.html (accessed 2 June 2011).
144. Ibid.
145. Centurion, 'About Us – Client Testimonials', Centurion, http://www.centurionsafety.net/About/Client_Testimonials.html (accessed 5 July 2010).
146. José L. Gómez del Prado, 'A United Nations Instrument to Regulate and Monitor Private Military and Security Contractors', *Notre Dame Journal of International, Comparative, and Human Rights Law* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–79, 40.
147. Control Risks, 'What We Do – NGOs'.
148. Assured Risks Ltd, 'Main', Assured Risks, http://www.assuredrisks.com/ (accessed 4 May 2010).
149. Blue Hackle, 'Operating in Remote, Hostile and Austere Environments', http://www.bluehackle.com/en-GB/Environments/ (accessed 1 April 2011).
150. Carmola, *Private Security Contractors in the Age of New Wars*, 28. See also the article by Joakim Berndtsson in this issue.

Just as the identities of the companies are not fixed, so the boundaries between the public and the private sector are far from clear-cut. People switch from one sector to the other. A prominent example is Andrew Bearpark, who, prior to becoming president of the British Association of Private Security Companies, had been Director of Operations and Infrastructure for the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq and between 2002 and 2003 had served as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) in charge of the European Union pillar of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In addition to recruiting from and working for states, international organisations and NGOs, PMSCs also align themselves with humanitarian actors on the basis of ideas and ideology.

Referring to its humanitarian relief efforts, the company CACI, for example, declares '[t]he work we provide goes beyond aiding nations in the Asia Pacific Region – it helps establish the true picture of America as a caring country, deeply involved in world affairs'. The assistance it offers constitutes 'an important component in helping our customers focus on how America presents itself to the rest of the world'.[151] While in our sample of companies CACI was an exception in terms of its openness as far as its ideological commitment is concerned, a survey conducted among US-based companies shows that many of the respective PMSCs conceive of themselves as acting in accordance with and in support of the foreign policy of their home country.[152] We found evidence of this argument in our sample too. The company PAE, for example, states on its homepage:

> Following the direction of U.S. foreign policy goals, PAE has expanded its capability offering in the areas of stability operations, peacekeeping and disaster recovery efforts. As threats to our global security have evolved, so has our relationship with national and international aid and development agencies, who have entrusted PAE with some of their most significant humanitarian and peacekeeping missions.[153]

Moreover, an article by the president of the ISOA, Doug Brooks, on the future of international private military services, entitled 'Messiahs or Mercenaries?',[154] suggests that leading figures, including the author, conceive of the industry as more than simply humanitarian service providers or war profiteers. Nevertheless, alliances with other humanitarian actors are generally more subtle.

Representatives of NGOs, for example, contribute articles to the journal of the ISOA, the *JIPO*. In the May–June edition of the *JIPO*, entitled 'Humanitarian Response', NGOs, PMSCs and the military are all referred to as humanitarian actors, and humanitarian responses include peacekeeping.[155] The ISOA declares that it 'is proud to have a multisectoral membership that represents the many various aspects of operations performed in conflict, post-conflict, disaster relief and reconstruction efforts'.[156] Among its members are not only PMSCs that carry out base support and logistics, communications and tracking,

151. CACI International Inc., 'Main', CACI International, http://www.caci.com/ (accessed 9 June 2010).
152. Deborah D. Avant, *The Market for Force* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
153. PAE, 'Foreign Assistance and Global Stability', PAE, http://www.paegroup.com/capabilities-operations-foreign-aid (accessed 2 June 2011).
154. Doug Brooks, 'Messiahs or Mercenaries? The Future of International Private Military Services', *International Peacekeeping* 7, no. 4 (2000): 129–44.
155. *Journal of International Peace Operations* 6, no. 6 (2011).
156. Ibid., 39.

consulting services, logistics, intelligence services and analysis, risk management, security, security sector reform, and training, but also not-for-profit humanitarian and development assistance organisations, such as International Relief and Development (member of ISOA as of June 2011) and Worldwide Shelters (member of IPOA as of June 2010). Finally, and as already alluded to above, individual companies choose names for their firms that are more typical of humanitarian NGOs, or even appropriate their symbols. The logistics company RA International, for example, uses a logo similar to that of the International Rescue Committee,[157] an NGO.[158] If these companies are then listed, as has been the case on the IPOA's Haiti Relief Effort homepage, next to for-profit development assistance organisations and PMSCs delivering armed security services, it becomes increasingly difficult for outsiders of the industry to decipher which of the various actors is a PMSC and which is not.

Conclusions

An analysis of the homepages of PMSCs and one of their associations – the ISOA – provides evidence that companies increasingly present themselves as 'new humanitarians'. They rely on a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they employ naming strategies, emphasising their commitment to humanitarian aims and ethics. Through these strategies PMSCs can influence how they are perceived by other security actors and policymakers. On the other hand, PMSCs align themselves with other humanitarian actors to establish their authority and legitimacy as humanitarians. In this respect, the recommendation of the managing director of GardaWorld's international operations for company clients is quite telling. To identify a 'good' PMSC, he suggests, one should 'look at who the company's other clients are, both past and present, and what services they provide for those clients'.[159]

The framing approach has proved useful as a heuristic tool to distil how PMSCs establish their humanitarian identity. Rather than relying on what are considered common strategies for frame transformation, that is, counter-framing or frame alignment, companies engaged instead in what we refer to as frame appropriation. They seized the humanitarian frame created and promoted originally by NGOs. Frame appropriation is possible, we argue, because (1) the humanitarian frame is far from coherent, composed of different elements and undergoing change, and (2) the original frame advocates constitute a heterogeneous group with different experiences. In combination, these two conditions allow PMSCs to pick out the elements which best fit with their companies' interests and push the frame in a certain direction, while at the same time ensuring that it remains aligned with overall accepted factors. Since such a strategy leaves the central elements of the humanitarian frame intact, discerning who belongs to the in-frame group and who to the out-of-frame group, or who is a humanitarian and who is not, is increasingly difficult.

The humanitarian frame helps companies to distance themselves from the image of the social outcast. Contrary to the mercenary frame that dominates the media coverage about PMSCs, has negative connotations and is associated with profit-driven, lawless,

157. RA International, 'Main', RA International, http://www.rainternationalservices.com/ (accessed 7 July 2010).
158. IRC, 'Main', IRC, http://www.theirc.org/ (accessed 7 July 2010).
159. Pete Dordal, 'Choosing Security Wisely', *Journal of International Peace Operations* 6, no. 1 (2010): 11–12.

unscrupulous, trigger-happy individuals, humanitarianism, by contrast, brings to mind committed, responsible, selfless do-gooders. As such, the humanitarian frame constitutes an additional instrument, alongside performance, that PMSCs can use to enhance their acceptability and contributes to the normalisation of privatised security. When PMSCs are no longer associated with Rambos or mercenaries but instead are simply perceived as companies that 'help create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world'[160] and seek 'to make the world a better place',[161] it may become easier for their clients in the long run to justify why they privatise security.

By presenting themselves as humanitarian actors, however, PMSCs not only boost their own image but also transport a certain idea of what constitutes a humanitarian actor and a humanitarian activity. Respective companies do this by, for example, promoting a certain type of humanitarianism, one which strives to address the root causes of conflicts by delivering human rights, development and democracy in the context of peace-building, but is at odds with what is generally considered the traditional humanitarian assistance approach limited to 'a bed for the night'. Moreover, PMSCs do not carry out their humanitarian services according to traditional humanitarian principles. Instead, they integrate them into the military strategies of their home countries and/or those of their clients. The company Ronco, for example, declares that it delivers 'Humanitarian Mine Action in Counterinsurgency' in Iraq for the US Department of State.[162]

In addition to traditional humanitarian actors, PMSCs also differ in their approach from other commercial actors that increasingly provide humanitarian relief, such as Wal-Mart.[163] In contrast to these, PMSCs are engaged in the field in a more encompassing manner. They do not just carry out human services and/or work for human agencies, instead they also provide training, advice or intelligence services to state security forces, often at the same time and in the same geographical area. The company SOS International (SOSi), for example, declares on its website: 'By delivering international law enforcement and security training and advisory services … SOSi strengthens counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, institution-building and humanitarian assistance efforts around the globe'.[164] And MPRI states that '[w]hether for military or humanitarian missions, or for private business projects, our experts have the technical skills, education, language capabilities, and international experience to meet the complex needs of our customers worldwide'.[165]

As far as the transformation of the humanitarian frame itself is concerned, we can only speculate about the likely ways in which PMSCs will influence the debate about what constitutes a humanitarian activity and how it should be carried out. Their engagement in humanitarian work might, some observers suggest, not only 'legitimat[e] the privatization of security' but also 'contribut[e] to the militarization of humanitarian services'.[166] When PMSCs work for humanitarian NGOs on the ground or carry out humanitarian services

160. MPRI, 'Index'.
161. AECOM, 'Social Responsibility'.
162. Ronco, 'Humanitarian Mine Action in Counterinsurgency – Iraq', Ronco, http://www.roncoconsulting.com/projects/humanitarian-mine-action-counterinsurgency-iraq (accessed 25 August 2011).
163. Hopgood, 'Saying "No" to Wal-Mart?'.
164. SOSi, 'Services', SOSi, http://www.sosiltd.com/services/sog.htm (accessed 2 June 2011).
165. L3-MPRI, 'Sustainable Development'.
166. Hellinger, 'Humanitarian Action, NGOs, and the Privatization of the Military', 193.

themselves, so these observers fear, it becomes very difficult for local populations to distinguish between military and civilian activities and actors. 'Humanitarian and aid-type assistance risks becoming associated with an intervening force and PMSCs which may be perceived as biased.'[167] Consequently, aid workers may be less accepted, less secure and increasingly subject to attacks.[168] Such 'deep cause'[169] explanations for the increasing violence against aid workers are, however, challenged, because they often lack 'corresponding evidentiary support'.[170] Further research is therefore needed to determine with more certainty the impact of PMSCs, including empirical studies that assess how 'traditional' humanitarian actors react to the appropriation of the humanitarian frame by PMSCs.

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168. Bjork and Jones, 'Overcoming Dilemmas Created by the 21st Century Mercenaries', 786.
169. Larissa A. Fast, 'Mind the Gap: Documenting and Explaining Violence against Aid Workers', *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 3 (2010): 365–89.
170. Ibid., 367.