

The Study and Practice of Security: Today and Tomorrow

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The celebration of the 20th year of *Security Journal* is an important step for security management, reflecting its maturation as a serious and skilled profession with its own established scholarly journal. In the post-9/11 environment, the world has woken up to the contribution that security risk specialists can make, but we are fortunate that such expertise has been developing over a long period. The global insecurities of the new millennium are facilitating new security opportunities at an unprecedented rate, and creating a buoyant market for the sector in these dark times. And researchers' interest in security management issues is finally extending beyond the sector's own journal and capturing the imagination of numerous academic disciplines concerned with the world's problems and how to respond to them.

The last 20 years of study and practice of "security", in terms of the Journal's own, implicit interpretation of the concept as a professional discipline, have included a number of analyses of the character and structure of commercial security produced largely for the benefit of those outside the sector. In Britain, texts by South (1988), Johnston (1992), Jones and Newburn (1998), George and Button (2000), Button (2002) and Wakefield (2003), among others, were of interest to criminologists keen to understand the scope of private contributions to the country's security – and particularly policing – needs, and recognizing that "policing" was no longer the exclusive domain of "the police". Of more direct interest to the sector itself has been the burgeoning literature on situational crime prevention theory and practice, associated work on understanding and dealing with specific security problems, the (still limited) literature on security management issues such as the procurement and organization of security services and the regulation of the commercial security sector, and research on emerging and diverse security niches from forensic accounting to crisis management.

As a researcher with a longstanding interest in the commercial security sector, and specifically in exploring the blurred boundaries of "public" and "private" security, for me the most important point of learning over the last 20 years' study of security has been mainstream scholars' recent realization that it is neither a marginal interest nor a pseudo profession. Overshadowing even the threats associated with global warming, "security" is now the world's number one concern, those with professional expertise in this area have never been more needed, and even those of us who are mere researchers of security issues will never again be short of business.

It is this blurring of boundaries, that is, in my view, the most pressing issue for security practice and research, and the one that will consolidate the position of security management as a true profession. There is now an acknowledged role for commercial security in actions

against global security threats, national security concerns, local community safety needs, as well as the requirements of the corporation and the individual. The sector holds a prominent position in international interventions against criminal states, terrorism and transnational crime, through the activities of the corporate and contract security sectors, including the burgeoning market in security risk consultancies and the shadier practices of the private military companies. While the latter have captured a disproportionate level of research attention in recent years, particularly from international relations scholars, the changing shape of the security market as it responds to global threats is a fascinating area of study, demonstrating the sector's dynamism and often superior expertise to the more constrained public sector. Many have spoken of the "revolving door" of security recruitment from the public to the private sector – surely soon the door will be revolving 360 degrees as the public sector is increasingly compelled to recruit private sector knowledge and experience? In Britain, the government's establishment of the Serious Organized Crime Agency may well be the first step towards this – in consolidating the knowledge and skills of the police, customs and immigration services within one organization, our government is acknowledging for the first time that a policing operative does not need to pound the beat for the requisite 2-year minimum in order to address the challenges of transnational crime.

In such exciting and fast-changing times, my research agenda for the next 10 years is clear-cut. Having previously gained an appreciation of how security is delivered at the grass-root level, through detailed research on the "private policing" of shopping malls and such-like (Wakefield, 2003, 2006), my focus is shifting towards analysing the security market as a whole, looking from the global down to the local, and the relationship between the security and the individual. There is an urgent need to see how the private intersects with the public at each of these analytic levels, to explore the directions of public and private security provision and their implications (e.g. for civil liberties and human rights), and to predict how things might look in the future. I am currently embarking on research to explore these issues through the eyes of senior figures in the security industry, listening to the views of corporate security managers, contract security directors and the entrepreneurs and consultants of the diverse security consultancy field. The hope is to piece together the jigsaw that makes up the contemporary security market, challenge unrealistic assumptions that public security is the exclusive domain of governments and state security provision, make sense of the complex public-private partnership arrangements that now exist in the security sphere, and look at which aspects of the market are most likely to grow fastest in the future.

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