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Twittering for talent: Private military and security companies between business and military branding

Jutta Joachim[a], Marlen Martin[b], Henriette Lange[b], Andrea Schneiker[c] and Magnus Dau[c]

[a]Nijmegen School of Management, Department of Political Science, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands; [b]Institute of Political Science, Leibniz University Hannover, Hannover, Germany; [c]Social Sciences, University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany

ABSTRACT

Private military and security companies (PMSCs) play an increasingly important role in the provision of security-related services. In their attempts to win new clients and find suitable personnel, they take on different identities by presenting themselves as conventional businesses, military actors, and humanitarians. In this article, we examine how PMSCs deploy these identities when they recruit new personnel through social media. Our computer-assisted content analysis of Twitter messages posted by two major United States-based companies—CACI and DynCorp International—shows that while both PMSCs amplify their business and military identities to attract the most talented personnel, they construct and communicate these identities in different ways with CACI branding itself as a sophisticated, modern, and patriotic business and DynCorp as a home-grown, traditional military provider. In addition, our analysis lends force to scholars suggesting that state militaries and the private security sector compete increasingly for prospective employees using similar strategies.

Private military and security companies (PMSCs) have an established presence in the security field today. However, in the international relations (IR) literature, their existence has given rise to a debate about what type of actor these companies are. Some regard PMSCs as corporations that provide services to a broad range of clients including states, international (non-)governmental organizations, companies, and individuals (e.g., Singer, 2001–2002). Others suggest that their character is less clearly defined and that they, in fact, have multiple identities—depending on the context or addressee, PMSCs can appear as businesses, military actors and, more recently, as

humanitarians (Berndtsson, 2012; Carmola, 2010; Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, 2014). In this article, we engage with this second and more recent line of argument. Yet unlike existing research in IR into how relevant these identities are for PMSCs more generally, which is often done on the basis of companies' websites (e.g., Berndtsson, 2012; Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, 2014), we are interested in the extent to which companies exhibit these identities in specific instances when they communicate with particular audiences, such as when recruiting personnel via social media.

Studying the recruitment efforts of PMSCs is particularly useful in this respect. Defined as "those practices and activities carried on by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees" (Barber, 1998, p. 5), recruitment is not only crucial for the survival of a company, it also forces companies to reveal their corporate identity to prospective employees (Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010). By conveying who they are through an "employer brand" specifically developed for this purpose, companies try to find the right match for the position they seek to fill, while at the same time attempting to distinguish themselves from their competitors in the "war for talent" (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), which include other PMSCs and state militaries.

Social media have become highly popular channels in recent years, and Twitter, in particular, is regarded as "an unsurpassed medium to attract and engage the existing and potential employees" (Kaur, Sharma, Kaur, & Sharma, 2015, p. 7). For this reason, we conducted a qualitative computer-based content analysis of recruitment-related Twitter messages ("tweets") posted by CACI International and DynCorp International, two major United States-based PMSCs. Our findings not only reveal interesting similarities and differences with respect to how the companies use social media to attract prospective employees, they also show how the two PMSCs deploy their identities through their tweets. We found evidence of the hybrid and chameleon-like character of PMSCs that has frequently been noted in the literature.

The companies in our study appear to recruit on the basis of their military traits and their business orientation in search for what Strand and Berndtsson (2015) refer to as the "enterprising soldier," by promising personal benefits to likely applicants as well as by trying to attract them with references to institutional values. In contrast, PMSCs' humanitarian identity played a negligible role. However, despite these commonalities, our findings also suggest that both companies engage in employer branding to "stand out from the crowd" of their competitors (Doherty, 2010, p. 11). More specifically, CACI and DynCorp exhibit differences in how they construct and communicate the two identities, with CACI conveying the impression of a sophisticated, modern, and patriotic business and DynCorp presenting itself as a home-grown, traditional military provider firm. The observed differences may be the result from a number of sources each of which deserves more serious

attention in the context of future research. These may include growing competition and related attempts of companies to set themselves apart. The variation between the two PMSCs might, however, also be reflective of the different role social media and in particular, Twitter plays for both companies or even within the security sector in the case of recruitment and vis-à-vis other channels, but also have to do with companies' versatility with social media.

The findings support the argument found in studies on PMSCs that these companies shape how they are perceived (Berndtsson, 2012; Joachim & Schneiker, 2012; Leander & van Munster, 2007), but they also add to this body of literature in important ways. Our analysis brings together what until now were separate strands of research that regarded these companies either on the basis of their identities or in terms of their services. However, the way CACI and DynCorp communicate via Twitter makes apparent that although the different identities are important to companies and establish a norm to which companies aspire (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012), in certain situations, such as during recruitment, PMSCs present themselves more in line with their services. In addition, this study contributes to the IR literature, by providing important preliminary insights into the recruitment practices of security actors, about which we still know very little. They deserve, however, more attention considering that our results suggest that PMSCs no longer only perform services or are a "force multiplier" for state militaries, but that they also are competitors that address prospective personnel in fairly similar ways.

The article is structured as follows. We begin with a theoretical discussion of recruitment, employer branding, and corporate identities and then describe our research methods. In the next section, we present the results of our computer-assisted content analysis of Twitter messages. We show that although CACI and DynCorp both amplify their business and military character, they construct and communicate these identities differently. We conclude with some reflections on our findings and how they link functional and identity-based arguments regarding PMSCs, offer important insights about the social media use of security actors as well as the growing competition between state militaries and PMSCs.

Recruitment, corporate identities, and social media

Recruitment is essential for the success of companies both in terms of their productivity and in terms of their profits, which makes it imperative to fill vacancies with suitable personnel (Lepak & Snell, 1998, pp. 215–216). In the case of PMSCs, this can prove to be challenging, because they offer a broad range of services. According to the Montreux Document (2008), which has been signed by over 50 states, as well as by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, and the Organization

of Security and Co-operation in Europe, PMSCs are "private business entities that provide military and/or security services," which "include, in particular, armed guarding and the protection of persons and objects, such as convoys, buildings, and other places; maintenance and operation of weapons systems; prisoner detention; and advice to or training of local forces and security personnel." Based on this definition, and the more recent PMSC literature which suggests that these companies are both businesses and military actors (Berndtsson, 2012; Carmola, 2010; Joachim & Schneiker, 2012), we have identified what scholars consider to be relevant recruitment practices in these sectors.

With regard to businesses, various scholars have considered "employer branding" to be a central aspect of recruitment. Not only does it help a company to project a positive reputation to future employees (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1052), it also signals to them what the company stands for, what it values, and how it is distinct from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). A prospective employer's brand motivates those looking for a job to submit their application, because they can "see" more clearly what the company is about (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012, p. 1053; Cable & Turban, 2001, p. 116).

Corporate branding is based on and shaped by a company's "corporate identity" (Wæraas, 2008, p. 207). Although the terms are sometimes used or defined in similar ways (e.g., Fombrun & van Riel, 2004, pp. 165–166), a corporate identity precedes, but is also reproduced and occasionally even altered through, corporate branding (Waters & Jones, 2011, pp. 250–251). Corporate identity is "the underlying 'core' or basic character of the firm" (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006, p. 33; see also Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000, p. 63; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002), which specifies "who" a company is and which characteristics are central and enduring with respect to it (Albert & Whetten, 1985; as cited in Wæraas, 2008, p. 207). It is strategically communicated in different ways (e.g., visually, verbally), all of which, however, help "shape the perceptions of the organization and create a brand that helps cement the organization in the public's mind" (Waters & Jones, 2011, p. 251; referring to Allesandri, 2001; Diamond, 1988).

Because recruiting companies conduct this communication with recipients in mind (Rowland & Tatham, 2010; as cited in Jensen, 2011, p. 195), they must anticipate the needs of prospective employees (Gromark & Melin, 2013; as cited in Olsson, Deverell, Wagnsson, & Hellman, 2016) and emphasize how potential applicants would benefit if they were hired. In line with this argument, we, therefore, identify the motivational factors that PMSCs might highlight in line with their military and business identity as part of their recruitment efforts, and we do so based on recent literature on military recruitment that suggests that in light of "far-reaching military transformations" (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015, p. 238) and growing competition from

private security providers, "armed forces need to transform into 'consumer brands' to become employers in the eyes of young individuals" (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015; see also Woodward, 2003, p. 45).

In addition to qualifications more intrinsic to the military—or "institutional" qualifications, as Moskos (1977) calls them—state militaries have come to emphasize "occupational" benefits otherwise more commonly found in the business world (Moskos, 1977, pp. 42–43; see also Eighmey, 2006, p. 310). These changes in hiring practices are echoed by Strand and Berndtsson (2015), a study of the Swedish and British armed forces which found that today's militaries try to find an "enterprising soldier," one who is interested not only in the "mental and physical challenge, opportunities to travel," "the excitement," "taking risks," and "wanting to make a difference" or "doing something good" (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015, p. 243), but also in pursuing a career, "grow[ing] professionally and personally," and "assuming responsibility" (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015, p. 239).

Based on a survey of young people who were considering military service, Eighmey (2006, p. 323) arrived at similar conclusions, finding that "the intrinsic benefits derived from the distinguished core values of the organization" and the "more tangible and immediate concerns of job benefits in contrast to the role of institutional themes involving intangible values and norms" (p. 310) were important reasons for candidates to apply for a vacant position (p. 309). Motives related to institutional aspects are based on considerations regarding the "adventure" or "risk" a job may involve and the opportunities to contribute to one's nation that it might provide ("fidelity," as Eighmey calls it), whereas occupational motives relate to the personal "benefits" a job provides and to how challenging or dignifying prospective employees consider it to be (Eighmey, 2006, p. 323).

In their dual roles as actors that compete for job applicants and as suppliers of personnel to armed forces, PMSCs face similar challenges as state militaries when it comes to recruitment. This is why we would expect them to brand themselves in a similar fashion by amplifying both their military and business identities and to attract applicants by emphasizing their corporate values and the benefits to be enjoyed, as state militaries do, which use "market communication in relation to recruiting personnel and keeping these on board by 'selling' the image of the Armed Forces as an employer" (Deverell, Olsson, Wagnsson, Hellman, & Johnsson, 2014, p. 390).

Data and methods

To determine how PMSCs brand themselves when seeking to attract prospective employees, we conducted a computer-assisted content analysis of recruitment-related tweets from CACI International and DynCorp International, two of the most prominent United States-based PMSCs. These two companies

offer a broad range of services including in the case of DynCorp aviation, intelligence, logistics, support during operations as well as training (DynCorp, 2017a) and in the case of CACI communication and enterprise information technology, cyber security, intelligence service, surveillance, and reconnaissance (CACI, 2017a). Moreover, they are contractors of the U.S. federal government (CACI, 2017b; DynCorp, 2017b). Given their military and non-military service portfolios, we would expect CACI and DynCorp to use Twitter in similar ways for recruitment purposes and to emphasize both their business and their military identities, as well as the occupational benefits and institutional values associated with these identities.

We chose Twitter as our data source for three reasons. First, save for a few exceptions, social media have received little attention in security studies, despite the fact that they have increasingly been used by a variety of actors, including diplomats, terrorist networks, the military, and PMSCs. Second, as noted above, social media have come to play an ever more important role in recruitment efforts (Doherty, 2010, p. 11; Madia, 2011, p. 20). Because of their wide reach, they are a highly cost-effective, extremely fast, and regular means for employers to target prospective employees (Doherty, 2010, p. 11). Third, Twitter is regarded as particularly useful for this purpose, and it also lends itself to our analysis because it forces companies to "be extra prudent and strategic in the design and execution of their content to motivate and sway their followers" and a "tweet is a make-or-break text in terms of portraying a message from a firm" (Swani, Milne, Cromer, & Brown, 2013, p. 49), not least because of the platform's character limit. When being used as a recruitment tool, Twitter, therefore, asks of companies to be forthright about who they are, what they stand for, and what they have to offer.

Both DynCorp and CACI employ Twitter for recruitment purposes. Although it is hard to tell how important Twitter is in comparison to other channels (e.g., the presence at job fairs or word-to-mouth advertisement common in the security sector (Hawks, 2014, p. 82)), we observed a steady output of tweets related specifically to recruitment and between May 2010 and December 2015. Our sample consists of 3,137 messages from CACI and DynCorp. The earliest tweets we collected were from May 18, 2010 (CACI), to August 15, 2011 (DynCorp); and the last tweets were posted on December 7, 2015, and November 18, 2015, respectively.

For the computer-assisted qualitative content analysis, we relied on a coding scheme that we developed primarily deductively and on the basis of the above-cited recruitment literature, but that we then augmented inductively after our initial tweet analysis (see Kohlbacher, 2006). Several trained individuals coded the tweets independently of one another using the coding software MAXQDA to ensure a high degree of inter-coder reliability. Based on our theoretical distinction between institutional values and occupational

benefits (Moskos, 1977; Eighmey, 2006), we coded text elements as "military" if they contained references to institutional values such as fidelity, patriotism, courage, resolve, adventure, or risk, and as "business" if the job advertisement promised occupational benefits, including that the job would be challenging, dignifying, or rewarding. Although we treated these codes as distinct for analytical purposes, they intersect and overlap empirically given the ongoing changes in the two sectors, which at times made it difficult to code them as either one or the other. For example, child care or a family friendly employment situation is no longer offered by companies only, but also by modern militaries. In such cases, we coded references of this kind as reflective of business identity because of the occupational benefits they hold for prospective employees.

Although we were primarily interested in how PMSCs predominantly brand themselves in the context of recruitment, we were cognizant of likely interaction effects between the way this social media platform is used and the way PMSCs present themselves on it to their users. Not only does using social media "make … an organization's brand stand out from the crowd by showing that it is staying relevant and embracing change as technology and ways communicating evolve" (Doherty, 2010, p. 11). The choice of platform might even influence how a user communicates on Twitter, which encourages a more colloquial style and imposes limitations on the use of symbols and images. Various social media scholars have also stressed the relational character of social media, which allows users to interact much more directly and immediately than other forms of communication do (e.g., Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). We did not examine the effects of tweets from DynCorp or CACI on potential recruits since the primary aim of this study was to understand how the companies brand themselves when using Twitter as a social media platform.

Appealing to recruits as businesses and military actors: empirical analysis

Employer branding is intended to capture the attention of prospective employees, which not only makes it an important means for a company to communicate what is unique and different about it, but it is also indicative of a company's corporate identity. However, our tweet analysis provided surprisingly similar results for the identities of DynCorp and CACI. Business identity plays a major role in the tweets of the two PMSCs (54% and 56%, respectively). Military identity is the second most important characteristic (46% and 44%). These results may not reveal any significant differences between the two companies' general identities, but our findings nevertheless suggest that DynCorp and CACI distinguish themselves in other ways—namely, in the way they construct these

identities and in the way they communicate them to potential recruits on Twitter. In the following, we will discuss each of these aspects and how they relate to a business or military identity.

Differences in the construction of business and military identity

Both companies present themselves as businesses to potential employees and emphasize above all the benefits that can be gained when working for them—about half the tweets in our sample contained such messages. Both CACI and DynCorp assert that they are sizable, market-leading, and expanding PMSCs, from which applicants can benefit. According to CACI, this means opportunities for jobs: "With all of our recent contract wins, we are hiring more than ever! Check out our current open positions." DynCorp states that it "hire[d] 12,300 during 2011" and reached a "Company Hiring Record in 2011." At the same time, "benefits," which are defined as "instrumental attributes" that "trigger interest among applicants because of their utility (i.e. maximizing benefits and minimizing costs)" (Lievens, 2007, p. 53), mean different things to CACI and DynCorp.

CACI stresses the many advantages the company has to offer to future employees, with benefits ranging from "tuition reimbursement, career development, and various saving plans" to "on-site child care," "paid vacation, adoption assistance," and even "pet insurance." The DynCorp sample, by contrast, contained only a small number of references to such "relevant economic factors in the enlistment process" (Eighmey, 2006, p. 308) that create "expected utility for potential employees" and, in turn, "employer attractiveness" (Wilden et al., 2010, p. 61). The two companies also differed in what they promised prospective employees as part of their diversity programs.

Although both companies refer to themselves as equal-opportunity employers on their websites, only CACI posted tweets that emphasize the company's "commitment to hiring a diverse workforce" and that promise a positive entrepreneurial climate and a "great place to work." Such tweets accounted for only 3% of the tweets in this sample, but they are directed to a broad range of disadvantaged communities. In addition to "encourag[ing] female job seekers" to "Join CACI @ the Women in Technology Job Fair tomorrow, 3/7, in Tysons Corner" or people of color to "Come meet us during the career fair!," CACI promises disabled veterans "great new careers in technology" and prides itself on providing more "exciting opportunities for experienced professionals, college graduates, and vets."

In contrast, DynCorp posted only a few such tweets, despite the fact that trying to attract minority applicants is characteristic of modern companies (McKay & Avery, 2005, p. 331). The only exception are tweets directed to veterans, but even these are of a more general nature than those posted by CACI. This is illustrated by a tweet in which DynCorp states that it is "The

Perfect Fit for Returning Veterans … ,” or one, in which it claimed that the company made it to the “Top Vet-Friendly Companies and Supplier Diversity Programs lists.” Aside from using messages of this type to signal that future employees can work for an accredited company, DynCorp says little about any concrete personal occupational benefits prospective employees can expect. Similar patterns emerged as those related to how the two PMSCs convey their business identities with respect to their military identities.

Both companies present themselves as military service providers to potential recruits. They advertise positions that are typical of the military and suggest risk and adventure. For example, DynCorp is “seeking French/ Creole-speaking law enforcement officers for a UN mission in Haiti,” “hiring for a [ ]K9Handler in [A]fghanistan … [who m]ust have secret … clearance,” offering a “New Job Opportunity: [as] Intelligence Operations and Collections Officer,” and looking for recruits to join their “NTM-A [NATO Training Mission Afghanistan; A/N]” or their “ISAF Joint Command-Senior Corps … [in] Kabul, Afghanistan.” CACI posted similar kinds of tweets, stating, for example, that it “is seeking cleared professionals to support the Army’s PEO Soldier contract,” “hiring Background Investigators who will ensure the safety and security of the nation,” and “seeking to hire 200+ cleared geolocation operators.” However, CACI and DynCorp show significant differences in how they convey their military identity to attract skilled employees.

CACI’s tweets contain references to activities traditionally associated with state armies, including war, that are more explicit than those of DynCorp. Borrowing the U.S. government’s recruitment slogan “Uncle Sam Wants You,” made famous during World War I, CACI looks for future employees, who do not shy away from danger and risk and will “[j]oin CACI to help fight cybercrime,” “Help CACI support the U.S. Army’s Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk,” or work on “solutions for the Nextgen Warfighter.” In return, the company promises adventure and the opportunity to travel and “see … foreign lands” (Padilla & Riege Laner, 2002, p. 115), because “CACI has job openings in offices around the world” and is “hiring cleared linguists for an intelligence contract.” CACI also uses explicit references to military values to win prospective employees. Another prominent feature of CACI’s tweets is the mention of patriotism, which Burk and Faris (1982) and Moskos (1977) regard as a strong motivational force in military recruitment (see also Faris, 1995).

CACI brands itself as an active defender of the nation’s safety with patriotic dedication and as an official government contractor (Singer, 2004; Stanger & Williams, 2006), stressing its “patriotic loyalty towards [its] home-country” and that it serves “the government … [for its] most critical missions, from supporting warfighters to protecting our borders.” In addition, not only does CACI present itself as “one of the other agents on which the state can

rely" (Macías, 2012, p. 234), but by using slogans such as "Nation first, people always … ," it also implies that working for the company means doing something for one's country and it urges future recruits to "[start contributing [to] our nation's security."

Whereas patriotism is an integral and explicit part of CACI's corporate philosophy and recruitment strategy, we found no comparable tweets from DynCorp; instead, this company brands itself as a member of the military industry without any references to military values. For example, as with those of DynCorp's tweets that relate to diversity and its business identity, CACI just refers to its external accreditation, priding itself on its " … Sixth Year as Top Military-Friendly Employer" or on the fact that "LLP awarded G.I. Jobs '13 Top 100 Military Friendly Employer.'"

Overall both companies make use of their military and business identities but relate them in different ways to potential recruits. Opposed to DynCorp's tweets which are much more minimalist as far as their content is concerned, CACI brands itself as an equal-opportunity employer, promises a range of benefits and opportunities to serve the nation. The differences between the two companies are also reflected in the language in which they address prospective applicants.

Differences in the communication of business and military identities

Recruitment messages can help companies find suitable personnel. The institutional and occupational aspects they emphasize in such messages are not necessarily all that different from those they convey through other channels that PMSCs use to recruit (e.g., websites, advertising in magazines). However, this may be different for how the content is communicated in those other channels. Our analysis suggests that social media offers companies an additional means not only to address prospective employees, but also to distinguish themselves from their competitors, as Doherty (2010, p. 11) suggested. CACI and DynCorp both brand themselves in particular ways by how they communicate their business and military identities.

DynCorp uses minimalist language to convey its business identity and gets straight to the point by simply tweeting "NEW JOB LISTING: Electrical/ Environmental Technician—Thumrait, Oman … ." Nor does the company show much variation in its tweets: As many as 75% of its Twitter postings are of the kind cited here or are repeated postings. DynCorp invites applicants over and over again to "visit the DynCorp International careers page for the most current job opportunities," which supports the argument that social media make it possible for "a job [to] be tweeted out right away, and retweeted as often as a recruiter deems necessary" (Madia, 2011, p. 20).

Whereas repeated tweets that contain basic information are characteristic of DynCorp, we found a much smaller percentage of such tweets among those

that CACI posted. Instead, this company tries to attract prospective employees by using hip, slangy tweets that relate to potential applicants' everyday life. For example, job advertisements often use lyrics of old pop songs to "style [oneself] well to attract the attention and commitment" (Kaur et al., 2015, p. 7). Tweets such as "Baby, it's cold outside … but CACI's Hot Jobs are hotter than ever!" or "Beat the heat with CACI! Check out our August Hot Jobs today … " are typical examples that confirm the observation of business scholars who regard attempting to appear casual and relaxed as a characteristic approach of modern businesses, particularly in the IT sector (Hooper, 2001, p. 184). At the same time, this image is reinforced by the modern technologies and networks that CACI uses for recruitment.

Social networks such as LinkedIn have become important tools for recruitment (Bonsón & Bednárová, 2013, p. 969) and give companies an edge in the race for the most talented by "foster[ing] connection sharing, social capital generation, and effective communication" (Caers & Castelyns, 2011, p. 438), as well as relationship growth (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009, p. 102). CACI brands itself by using "extra tools for recruiting applicants" (Caers & Castelyns, 2011, p. 438), such as LinkedIn: "Did you know we have a LinkedIn page? Join our group for discussions and … job postings, and expand your network!" In contrast, DynCorp's tweets contained a much smaller percentage of references to such networks.

CACI also uses a broad range of tools, including cell phones ("Do you own a smartphone and want to find a new job? Check out CACI's mobile job site today!"); podcasts ("Job seekers: you're getting warmer! Listen to our latest Jobcast to find out what CACI jobs are ablaze in May"); virtual job fairs ("OPM-Credentialed Background Investigators—we want to talk to today until 9/4 @ 12-2 during our Virtual Job Fairs!"); and video interviews ("job search tips for 2014—be ready for lots of change including video interviewing and social media integration!"). Given that no comparable tweets were among those DynCorp sent, the use of modern technology reinforces the impression that CACI seeks to brand itself as an innovative and progressive enterprise and in doing so to distinguish itself, as the following tweet suggests, in which CACI prides itself on being "a finalist nominee for @ERE_net awards, Recruiting Department of the Year & Strategic Use of Technology!"

CACI supports potential employees during the application process by asking such questions as "What is the single most important … interview question to prepare for? Check out what one recruiter guru has to say … " or "Do you have what it takes become a CACI Background Investigator? Watch the video to find out." DynCorp's communication style, by contrast, might be regarded as basic. This company simply refers those looking for further information to its website; invites candidates " … [t]o view open listings and apply, please visit our careers site at … Thank you!"; or at most offers the following kind of advice to those who want to know how to apply:

"Attention job seekers! DynCorp International has tips for applying, using our careers site and more! View more at … ." Similarly, DynCorp only mentions that it "will be participating in several job fairs in September, info here: … ." CACI, by comparison, is much more specific. This company provides precise information about locations, times, and entrance fees ("Explore CACI job openings at the ISACA Academic and Career Night in Arlington, VA. 10/ 19, 5:30–8:30. Free!") and maintains a talent pool for individuals who are "[n]ot ready to enter the job market, but want to keep updated on opportunities as they arise? Join CACI's Talent Community!" and who "By signing up for CACI's Talent Community, … receive breaking job alerts and important company information."

In contrast to DynCorp, which posts a smaller percentage of such tweets, CACI appears much more assertive in spreading "information necessary [for potential employees] to make an informed decision" (Wilden et al., 2010, p. 60). Tweets in which this company prides itself on having "1,500 current job openings. Will you be our next hire? … " or on "growing and seeking execs in business development, HR, and finance" are characteristic of this assertiveness. In addition, CACI is more outspoken than DynCorp about the opportunities provided by the advertised jobs, with typical tweets including the following one, in which the company encourages future employees to "[t]ake the next step in your career. View CACI's October Hot Jobs featuring our most critical, in demand openings … ."

As we have seen, the communication styles of CACI and, to a lesser extent, of DynCorp primarily reflect the two companies' business identity. However, we also find distinctive language that reflects their military identity, such as when the companies address prospective employees, and in particular veterans, in a much more personal manner, stating that they rely on the "informal networks established in the armed forces and nurtured in civilian life" (Higate, 2013, p. 112).

For example, CACI gives company staff who used to be members of the military a chance to have a say. Tweets such as "voted among Best Recruiters of 2011 by security-cleared job seekers," "Gunny used his … military 'soft' skills & network to land a civilian … job," or "Hear from Larry Clifton, SVP of Recruiting & Workforce Planning at CACI, on the importance of hiring veterans" not only convey appreciation for and "stress the benefits of the military culture inherited from those they hire" (Carmola, 2010, p. 31). Messages of this kind also serve a psychological function in recruitment; they instill trust in those looking for a job (Oladipo, Iyamabo, & Otubanjo, 2013), because employees might be able to more credibly communicate what the company is about or speak from a position to which those looking for a job can relate.

While DynCorp also "recognize[s] the experience and dedication that veterans contribute to our business," CACI distinguishes itself by paying

tribute to the special needs of former military personnel and encouraging them to "[v]isit CACI's Military Transition Center to make CACI your next mission & get help with basic training" and by offering veterans support in transitioning into civil jobs with its "Military Transition Center online," which "help[s] [applicants to] navigate the job search process." The ways in which CACI establishes a connection to veterans based on their former experiences, personal bonds, and camaraderie is regarded as characteristic of military values, but this company also uses references to company values in its communication, which shows how the two identities overlap.

According to the employer branding literature, references to corporate values play an important role in attracting new recruits, in that they allow those looking for employment to identify with the advertised job, which heightens employees' commitment (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). CACI appears to be well aware of this. This company regards "[i]ntegrity & honesty" as being at the "top [of] CACI's list of business values" and encourages prospective employees to go and "see what it's like to work for a company whose values match yours." CACI asks even more directly, "Do your values match those of your employer?" and even offers potential applicants the answer to this question: "If you value integrity above all else, CACI could be the place for you." In addition, CACI achieves identification by personally addressing particular employment groups, as in the following tweet: "College students —are you looking for an internship? Check out our job search page and enter 'intern,'" or by encouraging potential employees to self-identify: "Which are you? Inactive … job seeker, Active … job seeker or keeping your ears open for a better … opportunity?"

If we compare tweets such as these with tweets sent by DynCorp, it becomes apparent that identification may also be about branding. Rather than looking for active and ambitious employees, as CACI does, DynCorp simply asks, "Are you a heavy equipment mechanic? DynCorp International is hosting a career event in El Paso w/info on open positions." Hence, recruitment involves not only promises or references to values, but entails as well communicating with prospective applicants in particular ways.

In addition to the variation we observed between CACI and DynCorp with respect to the content of their respective tweets, companies build a brand through the language they use. While CACI uses hip language paired with military jargon and seeks to identify with recruits, DynCorp conveys information in a forthright manner.

Conclusion

In this article, we examined how PMSCs convey the identities they commonly display when recruiting employees through social media. Our computer-assisted content analysis of Twitter messages of the United States-based

companies CACI and DynCorp showed that the two companies try to win potential recruits by simultaneously branding themselves both as businesses and as military actors. However, although these identities are equally important to both PMSCs, the two companies construct and communicate them in different ways. CACI and DynCorp brand themselves in unique ways and seek to distinguish themselves from their competitors by emphasizing the occupational benefits prospective employees will enjoy and by referring to institutional values, including the opportunities to serve one's nation that are associated with the job. Unlike DynCorp, which projects an image of itself as a more traditional, home-based enterprise that offers careers close to state military, CACI presents itself as a modern, innovative company and as a patriotic servant of its country.

There might be several reasons for the variation we observed as to how CACI and DynCorp deploy their identities. The difference may be reflective of a growing competition in the industry and the perceived need of companies to set themselves apart or of varying corporate cultures. Moreover, the branding that both companies engage in could also have to do with the role social media plays within their companies, in general, and during recruitment, in particular. The reasons for the variation may even be due to a more or less social media affine public relations staff or be reflective of the private security industry as such. Future research will have to tell, which of these or of other possible reasons indeed apply.

Although approaches from organizational or management studies may appear as being particularly suited to provide explanations, the tool box of IR seems equally promising. For example, constructivist as well as institutional approaches would lend themselves to examine whether companies respond to external pressures with niche building or whether their social media behavior mirrors what goes on insight PMSCs. Furthermore, comparisons with other PMSCs or other security actors, such as state militaries, can be fruitful to determine whether the variation in social media behavior related to recruitment applies to only select companies, the security industry more generally, or is indicative of a broader trend. While these are questions to be explored in the framework of prospective research projects, the findings contribute to existing literature on PMSCs, in particular, and IR, more generally.

The findings support the often-stated hypothesis that PMSCs shape how they are perceived (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 2). However, our analysis suggests that rather than presenting themselves in similar ways independent of the services they provide, as they have frequently been said to do in previous research (e.g., Carmola, 2010; Joachim & Schneiker, 2014), these companies show their "true" face in critical situations, such as when recruiting employees. In addition, this study improves our knowledge of the role of social media. Our analysis of PMSCs and their recruitment practices shows that platforms such as Twitter are not just information or mobilization

tools, but in the case of these companies, they ensure their institutional survival by allowing them to attract potential recruits and create a brand of themselves. Given that PMSCs have been faced with negative press and been likened to modern mercenaries owing to scandals involving their staff, social media offer an immediate and unfiltered way for companies to improve their image. Moreover, our findings also lend some preliminary support to the still largely theoretical hypothesis that state militaries are faced with increasing competition from the private sector.

Just as the "enterprising soldier" that Strand and Berndtsson (2015) found to be the ideal recruit in their study of the British and Swedish armed forces, so the PMSCs in our analysis appear to look for employees who strive to advance their careers through personal growth while at the same time showing devotion and willingness to die for their country. This alignment in recruitment practices may not be all that surprising considering the services PMSCs perform for state militaries, but it is a development that deserves attention. Given the increased competition between the private and public sectors, we must learn more, not only about how state militaries and companies try to attract new recruits or the problems they face in doing so but, more importantly, how state militaries ensure their monopoly on violence if PMSCs vie for the same personnel.

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Notes on contributors

Jutta Joachim is professor of international relations at Radboud University, The Netherlands. She is author of *Agenda setting, the UN, and NGOs: Gender violence and*

reproductive rights (Georgetown University Press) and co-editor of *International organizations and implementation: Enforcers, managers, authorities*, and *Transnational activism in the UN and the EU: A comparative study* (both Routledge Press). Articles of her have appeared in among others *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Security Dialogue*, *Millennium*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *Comparative European Politics*, the *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Critical Military Studies*, and the *German Journal for International Relations*.

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Andrea Schneiker is professor of political science at the University of Siegen, Germany. She is the author of *Humanitarian NGOs, (in)security and identity: Epistemic communities and security governance* (Routledge, 2015) and co-editor of *Researching non-state actors in international security: Theory and practice* (Routledge, 2017, with Andreas Kruck). Her research on state and non-state actors in international security and humanitarian affairs has been published in numerous refereed international journals such as *International Studies Review*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Disasters*, *Millennium*, *Security Dialogue*, *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, and *Comparative European Politics*.

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