



The Commodification of Security in the Risk Society

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Abstract:

Expanding on the works of Beck and others on the growing business of risk, this paper examines the role of private industry in the creation, management and perpetuation of the world risk society. It observes that the replacement of the concept of security with risk over the past decades has permitted private firms to identify a growing range of unknown and unknown-unknown dangers which cannot be eliminated and require continuous risk management. Using the discourse of risk and its strategies of commercialized, individualized and reactive risk management, the private risk industry has thus contributed to the rise of a world risk society in which the demand for security can never be satisfied and so guarantees continuous profits.

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Introduction

With the perceived rise of global dangers such as transnational terrorism, nuclear proliferation, organized crime networks and global warming, Ulrich Beck's notion of the world risk society has received increasing attention in International Relations.¹ Numerous studies have analysed how the changing nature of contemporary risks, the growing concern with the future and the shift from the elimination to the management of risks are changing the ways in which governments deal with security issues.² One area which has so far been underexamined is the role of private businesses in the emergence and management of the world risk society. This is the more surprising since Beck acknowledges that the risk society has reached a new level with the self-referential commercial exploitation of industrial risks. He argues: "Modernization risks from the winner's point of view are *big business*. They are the insatiable demands long sought by economists."³ Yet, focussed primarily on the known risks resulting from modern industrial production, such as nuclear radiation and environmental pollution, Beck neglects the big business of unknown and unknown-unknown risks and risk management in today's hyper-sensitised societies. Notably, the perception of the latter risks is more easily manipulated because they regard dangers that are in the future or beyond statistical estimation because they have never occurred before.

This article seeks to address this gap through an analysis of the growing market for private risk management services. It argues that the world risk society is not only the outcome of unintentional modernization dangers, but also a creation of private companies, which have profited from the commodification of risks in Europe and North America since the 1970s. Initially, businesses focussed on the provision of security as related to physical dangers such as robbery and burglary. In recent years, however, the search for new sales opportunities has

¹ Ulrich Beck (1992) *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage); Ulrich Beck (1999) *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity).

² See, for instance, Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster (2007) 'Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (un)Knowing the Future,' *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 89-115; Christopher Daase and Oliver Kessler (2007) 'Knowns and Unknowns in the 'War on Terror': Uncertainty and the Political Construction of Danger,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 411-434; Yee-Kuang Heng (2002) 'Unravelling the 'War' on Terrorism: A Risk-Management Exercise in War Clothing,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 227-242; Keith Spence (2005) 'World Risk Society and War against Terror,' *Political Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 6, pp. 284-302.

³ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 23.

encouraged firms across a widening range of economic sectors, from healthcare and food to consumer goods, to identify a wide variety of risks to the safety and wellbeing of peoples. This expansion of the private market in risks has contributed to the emergence of the world risk society through its discourse of unknown and unknown-unknown risks, and by offering to contain the uncontainable.

Whereas Beck believes that the global nature of dangers such as ecological crises, global financial crises and transnational terrorist networks will lead to increasing popular demand for cosmopolitan political solutions, this article suggests that the risk discourses and practices of private businesses offer an alternative future in which industrialized societies manage their risk through individual consumer choices.⁴ To support this argument, this article investigates the rationalities and mechanisms of the risk industry in an area which has figured prominently in the analysis of the world risk society: the terrorism-crime nexus. In this area, the perception of interconnected transnational dangers linking disparate issues such as state failure, terrorism, crime and immigration has replaced the seemingly clear distinctions between internal and external security, and military and non-military threats. Moreover, increasing concern about these issues has facilitated the rise of a huge private security sector in Europe and North America. In the UK alone, security firms had a turnover of over £4 billion in 2005 and some estimate that the global market for commercial security services will reach \$200 billion by 2010.⁵ Notably, private clients buy 70-90 percent of these services.⁶ Focusing on security guarding firms in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), the following sections explore how this industry contributes to the emergence, management and continuation of the world risk society through its own autonomous rationalities and risk management technologies.

Risk Society and the Market

Building on Beck's *Risk Society* and *World Risk Society* as well as Michel Foucault's governmentality framework, the roles and strategies of governments in generating, sustaining and managing risk perceptions and the risk society have received much attention in the analysis of risk in International Relations.⁷ On the one hand, such studies have included the investigation of the risk management mechanisms of governmental agencies and international

⁴ Ulrich Beck (2003) 'The Silence of Words: On Terror and War,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 255-267, p. 257.

⁵ Data from the British Security Industry Association, at: <http://www.bsia.co.uk>.

⁶ Private conversations with industry leaders.

⁷ Spence (2005) 'World Risk Society and War against Terror,' pp. 284-302.

organizations in the ‘war on terror’ and other political issues.⁸ Mike Raco, for instance, argues that “the concept of risk-environments based on the selective generation of fear has been a central part of government strategies to develop, promote and implement new agendas of economic development.”⁹ On the other hand, research on risk has examined the governmental use of risk discourses and practices to “discipline” populations.¹⁰ In this sense, Deborah Lupton contends that “risk may be understood as a governmental strategy of regulatory power by which populations and individuals are monitored and managed through the goals of neo-liberalism.”¹¹

The contribution of businesses to the emergence of risk discourses and the management of risk has so far been under-researched.¹² Although many authors acknowledge the participation of private firms in the management of risks, the specific rationalities and mechanisms of the risk industry have not yet been investigated in detail beyond the context of insurance and, recently, aviation security.¹³ This gap is particularly surprising since both Beck and Foucault suggest that the modern market economy not only plays a crucial role in the emergence of the risk society, but also operates according to its distinct objectives and autonomous logic.¹⁴

Beck himself fails to analyse the growing market in risk management in greater detail, despite his argument that the world risk society has its origins in the industrial development from classical to reflexive modernity. In fact, he devotes only two pages in his book *Risk*

⁸ Christopher Coker (2002) *Globalisation and Insecurity in the Twenty-first Century: NATO and the Management of Risk*, Adelphi Paper 345 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies); Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen (2006) *The Risk Society at War. Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁹ Mike Raco (2002) ‘Risk, Fear and Control: Deconstructing the Discourses of New Labour’s Economic Policy,’ *Space & Polity*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 25-47, p. 26.

¹⁰ Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate (2006) ‘Criminology and Terrorism: Which Thesis? Risk Society or Governmentality?’ *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 379-398; Aradau and van Munster (2007) ‘Governing Terrorism Through Risk’.

¹¹ Deborah Lupton (1999) *Risk* (London: Routledge), p. 29.

¹² Notable exceptions include Maria Łoś (2002) ‘Post-communist Fear of Crime and the Commercialization of Security,’ *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 165-188; and Louise Amoore and Marieke De Goede (2005) ‘Governance, Risk and Dataveillance in the War on Terror,’ *Crime, Law & Social Change*, Vol. 43, Nos. 2-3, pp. 149-173.

¹³ François Ewald (1991) ‘Insurance and Risk,’ in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 197-210; Mark B. Salter (2008) ‘Imagining Numbers: Risk, Quantification and Aviation Security,’ *Security Dialogue*, Special Issue on Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political, Vol. 39, No. 2-3, pp. 243-266. It is unclear, however, whether Salter sees the rationalities and technologies of private aviation security services as part of a larger ‘dispositif’ that subsumes state as well as commercial actors.

¹⁴ Colin Gordon (1991) ‘Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,’ in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 1-51, p. 11, p. 16.

Society to the question of how private firms are profiting from the identification, assessment and mitigation of risk.¹⁵ In this narrative, contemporary risks are real and they have changed:

The risks and hazards of today thus differ in an essential way from the superficially similar ones of the Middle Ages through the global nature of their threat (people, animals and plants) and through their *modern* causes. They are risks of *modernization*. They are a wholesale produce of industrialization, and are systematically intensified as it becomes global.¹⁶

Businesses have contributed to the creation of these dangers through unconstrained, reckless and globally expanding industrialization.¹⁷ In addition to being the result of globalizing industrial production, these new dangers are also more dangerous and less predictable than the dangers of the past.¹⁸ According to Beck, the potentially devastating nature of these dangers, their global reach and their incalculability require a new term: risks. Reflexive modernization, the defining feature of the risk society, is the result of the changing nature of these modernization hazards. Modernization becomes reflexive in the sense that it has to deal with the risks that industrial modernization has produced.¹⁹

Beck views industrialization risks primarily as unintended side effects, but his analysis contains the seeds for a broader understanding of the role of businesses in the risk society. In particular, he notes that industrial capitalism is becoming reflexive because “risks are no longer the dark side of opportunities, they are also market opportunities.”²⁰ Firms can make a profit from managing the risks that they or others have created. Moreover, businesses cannot only manufacture risks in a material sense, but also discursively. Thus, Beck writes: “Demands, and thus markets, of a completely new type can be *created* by varying the definition of risk, especially demand for the avoidance of risk – open to interpretation, causally designable and infinitely reproducible.”²¹ Finally, Beck notes that risk management can take two forms: the first seeks to eliminate the causes of risk in industrial modernization; the second turns the management of the consequences of risk into a new industry sector.²²

For the following analysis, these contentions suggest three core hypotheses. Firstly, the private risk industry operates according to its own distinct rationality which is concerned with the expansion of consumer demand and profit. Secondly, the concept of risk is

¹⁵ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁶ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 21.

¹⁹ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 21.

²⁰ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 46.

²¹ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 56.

²² Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 175.

particularly suited to this aim because it permits the identification of unknown and unknown-unknown risks through interpretation and imagination. Thirdly, the risk industry can perpetuate the demand for its services by dealing with the consequences rather than the causes of global risks.

Despite these observations, Beck believes that the destructiveness, the global scope and the incalculability of the new risks hold the potential for mobilizing public demand for cosmopolitan political solutions rather than a growth of the private risk industry. While he accepts that the world risk society may become differentiated between those who profit from the production and management of risks and those who suffer the consequences, this appears to be merely an intermediary stage.²³ Beck seems confident that, eventually, societies across the globe will accept that “*objectively*” the new risks “display an equalizing effect within their scope and among those affected by them.”²⁴

As the literature has noted, there are several problems with and limitations to Beck’s argument.²⁵ These limitations also account for Beck’s failure to expand on the role of businesses in the risk society. The first problem is Beck’s usage of the term risk to denote a distinct set of man-made global modernization dangers. This definition prevents Beck from investigating the particular utility and increasing use of the concept of risk in public, academic and economic discourses.²⁶ As François Ewald points out, “Nothing is a risk in itself, there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything *can* be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event.”²⁷ Ewald’s argument, thus, opens up the questions of what is defined as risk, by whom and for what purpose.

Secondly, Beck’s argument concerning the origins and future of the world risk society appears to be shaped largely by recent German history. In particular, Beck’s contention that global modernization dangers will create public demand for cosmopolitan political solutions seems influenced by the German experience of the 1970s and 1980s when the *Waldsterben*, the dying of the German forests, led to large-scale ecological movements which supported the formation, rise and eventual election into governmental power of the German Green Party.²⁸ In the UK and the US, by contrast, societies seem to put a greater emphasis on non-political

²³ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 46.

²⁴ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 36.

²⁵ Scott Campbell and Greg Currie (2006) ‘Against Beck: In Defence of Risk Analysis,’ *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 149-172; Robert Dingwall (1999) “‘Risk Society’: The Cult Theory and the Millennium?” *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 474-491.

²⁶ Campbell and Currie (2006) ‘Against Beck,’ pp. 150-151.

²⁷ Ewald (1991) ‘Insurance and Risk,’ p. 199. Italics in the original.

²⁸ Dingwall (1999) “‘Risk Society,’” pp. 475-476.

mass responses to the new risks, such as voluntarism, private market solutions and changes in consumer behaviour. One example is the reaction to the increasing awareness of global warming that reached the UK and the US in the wake of Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006. Rather than mobilizing widespread political demands for government action, it resulted in a media and advertisement frenzy that told the readers of women's magazines "How to be an eco-slut" by buying recycled jewellery, had leading newspapers "off-set" the CO2 emissions of their travel section reporters by donating small sums to environmental charities and created regular newspaper columns such as "The Eco-Worrier", which educate readers about environmentally-friendly consumer choices. It is, thus, little surprising that other authors have put forward different understandings of the world risk society and its evolution.²⁹

Thirdly, Beck fails to examine in greater detail the mechanisms which contribute to the management of the world risk society. Concentrating on a meta-narrative of historical transformation and change, his research does not answer the question of how the risk society is sustained. If Beck's reasoning is correct and the global nature of contemporary dangers promotes radical political movements and cosmopolitan solutions, one would expect to see more of them given that he first developed his argument about two decades ago. As other authors have pointed out, so far, little progress has been made in this respect.³⁰ On the contrary, Western governments and a prospering risk industry are giving the impression that industrialized societies can manage global risks without fundamental changes to their lifestyles.

The following sections seek to expand upon Beck's insightful, but limited, hypotheses regarding the role of businesses in the creation, management and continuation of the world risk society. To do so, it examines the underlying rationalities, discursive strategies and risk management mechanisms of the private security industry with regard to terrorism and crime. Admittedly, these rationalities are likely to be distinct from those of other economic sectors such as insurance or the environmental industry. However, they hopefully contribute to expanding our understanding of the growing business of private risk management.

²⁹ Jim McGuigan (2006) 'Culture and Risk', in: Sandra Waltlake and Gabe Mythen (eds.) *Beyond the Risk Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press), p. 222; Anthony Giddens (1998) 'Risk Society: The Context of British Politics,' in: Jane Franklin (ed.) *The Politics of the Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 23-34, p.

²⁴ Italics added.

³⁰ Claudia Aradau, Luis Lobo-Guerro and Rens van Munster (2008) 'Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political: Guest Editors' Introduction,' *Security Dialogue*, Special Issue on Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political, Vol. 39, No. 2-3, pp. 147-154, pp. 148-9, p. 151.

The Concept of Risk

Especially in his later work, Beck accepts that risks are not merely defined by our physical environment, but also by social construction. Responding to his critics, Beck writes: “*it is cultural perception and definition that constitute risk.*”³¹ However, Beck is sceptical of a purely constructivist framework because within it “no one is able to define or declare what really ‘is’ or ‘is not’.”³² His analysis of risk and the world risk society rely ultimately on the contention that material dangers have objectively taken on a new form.³³ While this author shares Beck’s critical realist epistemology, this section seeks to illustrate that Beck’s focus on the material transformations of global dangers has led him to neglect the question of how the discourse and practices of risk are changing the public perception of these and other dangers. As Mitchell Dean argues, “the significance of risk does not lie with risk itself but with what risk gets attached to.”³⁴ Moreover, the following illustrates that the concept of risk and its particular logic shape how contemporary dangers are addressed.

The investigation of risk as a discursive concept also suggests a modification to our understanding of the risk society. If it is not (only) the nature of the danger which has changed, but (also) their analysis through the concept of risk, the relationship between emergence of global modernization risks and the risk society changes. Instead of being (exclusively) the result of the material transformation of ‘real’ dangers, the defining feature of the risk society becomes its obsession with risk.³⁵ In this interpretation, the risk society is characterized “by a cultural desire to tame chance and effect security, and by institutions increasingly organized around risk management.”³⁶

Known, Unknown and Unknown-Unknown Risks

According to Raco, risk is “a multidimensional concept whose definition and articulation are critically dependent upon the objectives and rationales of those using it to promote their own agendas.”³⁷ This raises the question of who benefits from the emergence of risk as a central

³¹ Beck (1999) *World Risk Society*, p. 135.

³² Beck (1999) *World Risk Society*, p. 135.

³³ Ulrich Beck (2002) ‘The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited,’ *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 39-55, p. 40.

³⁴ Dean (1999) ‘Risk, Calculable and Incalculable,’ p. 131. See also Lupton (1999) *Risk*, p. 33. Although Beck keeps returning to ‘real’ threats, he seems to accept this argument when he writes: “It is not clear whether it is the risks that have intensified, or our *view* of them.” Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 55.

³⁵ Anthony Giddens (1998) ‘Risk Society: The Context of British Politics,’ in: Jane Franklin (ed.) *The Politics of the Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 23-34, p. 26.

³⁶ Richard V. Ericson and Aaron Doyle (2004) ‘Catastrophe Risk, Insurance and Terrorism,’ *Economy and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 135-173, p. 141.

³⁷ Raco (2002) ‘Risk, Fear and Control,’ p. 27.

concept in the discourse on security. In order to understand the particular characteristics and utility of the concept of risk, it is first necessary to note its definition. Against Beck, predominant political, economic and academic parlance defines risk not as distinct types of modernization dangers, but as a measure of the level of insecurity in terms of “the probability of an adverse future event multiplied by its magnitude.”³⁸ Since past experience provides the best basis for the inference of both the potential impact and the probability of a danger, the more infrequent a danger, the more difficult it becomes to assess the associated risk. For the purposes of this article, it is useful to distinguish between three levels of risk on a continuum of frequency, calculability and familiarity with certain dangers: known, unknown, and unknown-unknown risks.³⁹

Known risks denote dangers affecting peoples’ lives on a permanent or regular basis. They are ‘known’ if a significant number of people has personally observed or experienced these dangers or if there is a large amount of public and verifiable information about them. Before the rise of the concept of risk in the jargon of security experts and the general public, known risks used to be referred to as ‘threats’. According to Mikkel V. Rasmussen, “A threat is a specific danger which can be precisely identified and measured on the basis of the capabilities an enemy has to realise a hostile intent.”⁴⁰ Threats exist in the present rather than the future.⁴¹ A known set of triggers will lead to instantaneous harm. During the Cold War, for instance, the nuclear weapons of each superpower were conceived of as a threat. Each side had verifiable information about the number, direction and lethality of the other’s nuclear weapons and declared policies of mutual destruction or first use confirmed their deployment under specified circumstances. In sum, the notion of ‘known’ risk or threat emphasizes simultaneously the certainty of a danger and its imminence.⁴²

In the second category are ‘unknown’ risks. These risks are related to dangers which can be calculated in terms of their probability and impact on the basis of past records. However, it is unknown where exactly and with what consequences they will occur next. Unknown risks are within the individual experienced of some people, but not entire populations, and are exemplified by dangers such as terrorism, robbery or traffic accidents.

³⁸ John Adams (1995) *Risk* (London: Routledge), p. 69.

³⁹ This definition departs somewhat from Daase and Kessler (2007) ‘Knowns and Unknowns in the ‘War on Terror’, but is not incompatible with it.

⁴⁰ Rasmussen (2006) *The Risk Society at War*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Janne Flyghed (2005) ‘Crime-Control in the Post-Wall Era: The Menace of Security,’ *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 165-182.

⁴² Aradau et al. (2008) ‘Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political: Guest Editors’ Introduction,’ pp. 148-9; Mythen and Walklate (2006) ‘Criminology and Terrorism,’ p. 381.

Unknown risks refer to the principal definition of risks as calculable, but unknown future dangers. While threats *will* lead to harm under certain conditions, unknown risks *can* lead to harm at any time.

The third category is ‘unknown-unknown’ risks. They concern dangers with a very low probability or where the probability is unknown because there are no previous experiences of such hazards. Unknown-unknown risks are incalculable future dangers. Unknown-unknown risks are also outside the individual or collective experience of anybody. Instead, unknown-unknown risks are identified through speculation. They are “not so much the theoretical exploration of the unknown, as an exercise of the imagination.”⁴³ Despite a low probability, unknown-unknown risks can be high on public and political agendas because of their, albeit equally speculative, devastating consequences. These imagined consequences gain credibility through “worst-case narratives and disaster rehearsals.”⁴⁴ Examples of unknown-unknown risks include the danger of new chemical or biological weapons or the development of new strategies of destruction by transnational terrorists.⁴⁵

Due to these characteristics, the transition from the concept of security to risk in contemporary discourses and practices has several important consequences. Firstly, the emergence of risk as a central concept has made possible the shift from the known threats of the Cold War era to today’s concern with unknown and unknown-unknown risks with serious implications for the provision of security. While the realist concept of security implies that dangers can be eliminated, the probabilistic concept of risk suggests that insecurity can only be managed. A notion of security building on risk means that security can never be attained. Zero risk does not exist. Therefore, the concept of risk guarantees constant demand. Risks require permanent surveillance, analysis, assessment and mitigation.⁴⁶

Secondly, the concept of risk makes possible the discourse of unknown-unknown risk. It allows demand for security management to expand from personally known threats and calculable unknown risks to risks that exist only in our imagination. The potential range of imaginable risks is infinite. Whereas threats can be personally observed and experienced, and unknown risks can be statistically assessed, unknown-unknown risks are beyond knowledge

⁴³ Frank Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited* (London: Continuum), p. xi.

⁴⁴ Marieke De Goede (2008) ‘Beyond Risk: Premediation and the Post-9/11 Security Imagination,’ *Security Dialogue*, Special Issue on Security, Technologies of Risk, and the Political, Vol. 39, No. 2-3, pp. 155-176, p. 156.

⁴⁵ Adam Burgess (2004) *Cellular Phones, Public Fears and a Culture of Precaution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁴⁶ Heng (2002) ‘Unravelling the ‘War’ on Terrorism,’ p. 237.

and evaluation. The concept of risk, thus, allows and even legitimizes the inflation of risk perception beyond the apparent to the inconceivable in the name of precaution.

Thirdly, since unknown and unknown-unknown risks are outside personal experience, the concept of risk leads to a growing dependence on experts for the identification, analysis and assessment of risks. According to Lupton, “it is rarely lay people who play a major role in the construction of risk objects at the level of public debates.”⁴⁷ The world risk society needs experts to tell it what it should fear. Moreover, there is no way of challenging the risk assessment of experts who inform the public of unknown and unknown-unknown risks. Due to the futurity of unknown and the incalculability of unknown-unknown risks, it is impossible to prove experts wrong. In a reversal of Beck it can be argued that expert prognoses of risk and insecurity cannot be refuted even by the *absence* of actual accidents because the risk discourse is based on a set of speculative assumptions and moves exclusively within a framework of probability statements.⁴⁸

Finally, the latter makes it difficult to evaluate the utility of professional risk management. Since risks happen in the future, their non-occurrence can be due equally to faulty risk assessment or successful risk mitigation. Effective risk management is, by definition, a non-event. As Yee-Kuang Heng observes, “The key benchmark of successful risk management is simply avoiding harm. Success will be low-key, unpublicized, sometimes even unknown”.⁴⁹ The concept of risk, therefore, permits the inflation of demand by focussing on the input of risk management and not on its results. In the logic of risk, the more unknown and unknown-unknown risks are identified, analysed and mitigated against, the less likely they are to happen.

Returning to the question who benefits from the discourse of risk, a multitude of studies have illustrated that governments have used the notion of risk to control and gain the support of their populations.⁵⁰ However, it has been little noted that for democratic governments the concept and discourse of risk can be a double-edged sword. While it can increase executive control over policies and populations, the discourse of risk and fear can also undermine electoral trust in governments if the risks prove unfounded or if governments fail to appear to restore order and security. Governments who use the concept of risk to

⁴⁷ Lupton (1999) *Risk*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Heng (2002) ‘Unravelling the ‘War’ on Terrorism,’ p. 236.

⁵⁰ Mythen and Walklate (2006) ‘Criminology and Terrorism,’ p. 385; Jane Franklin (2006) ‘Politics and Risk,’ in: Sandra Walklate and Gabe Mythen (eds.) *Beyond the Risk Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press), p. 160; David L. Altheide (2004) ‘Consuming Terrorism,’ *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 289-308, p. 292.

justify their policies walk a fine line. Although they can exploit public fear for political purposes, these governments have to convince their populations that the risks are ‘real’ and addressed effectively if they want to be re-elected. Moreover, governments have limited resources. Increased risk perception leads to demands for improved public security measures such as additional police patrols, but tax increases to fund such measures are often unpopular.

The intervention in Iraq illustrates this dilemma. Tony Blair’s popularity suffered permanently from public scepticism regarding the level of risk posed by Iraq and the subsequent failure of the allied forces to find evidence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).⁵¹ In the US, George W. Bush’s assertion of the risk of global terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan helped him to remain in power after the 2004 presidential elections. However, Bush’s subsequent inability to establish peace in Iraq and the rising cost of the occupation contributed to undermining popular support for his party resulting in the election of a Democrat majority in both Houses of Congress in 2006.

The private risk industry has no such problems. For businesses, the fact that risks can never fully be eliminated promises insatiable demand. Maria Łoś observes with regard to the privatization of security in Eastern Europe, that by “simultaneously contributing to social insecurity, defining risks and supplying expensive means to address them, this sector has worked to shape a new risk mentality that generates mushrooming demand for its own products and services.”⁵² The fact that risks cannot be eradicated is not a problem because public expectations regarding the capabilities of businesses and states differ markedly. While the public hires firms to micromanage their personal risks, it expects their governments to address and eliminate risk at a macro-level. The ‘consumer’ accepts that private business solutions to risk are only temporary and individual, while the ‘citizen’ demands that the government develops permanent and collective responses to the new risks. Consumers would also never expect that private firms provide for their security unless they pay them. Conversely, many citizens seem to believe that tax cuts and increased national and international security measures are compatible. While citizens are likely to vote a government which fails to address perceived risks out of office, consumers who have become targets of terrorist attacks or burglaries are advised to upgrade their private security by buying more

⁵¹ Alan Travis and Ian Black (2003) ‘Blair’s Popularity Plummets,’ *The Guardian*, 18 February; Kevin Sullivan (2007) ‘Brown Acts to Distance Himself from Blair, Iraq,’ *Washington Post*, 25 September; NN (2005) ‘It Has Led to a Massive Loss of Trust,’ *The Guardian*, 30 April.

⁵² Łoś (2002) ‘Post-communist Fear of Crime and the Commercialization of Security,’ p. 178.

advanced technologies and more extensive services.⁵³ Most importantly, businesses sell security, while governments have to pay for it. Firms do not have to balance manufactured increases in risk perception against existing or potentially available budgets. On the contrary, rising private risk perception increases business profits.

Risk Perception and the Culture of Fear

The industry's ability to profit from risk management provides it with a vested interest in the creation, expansion and continuation of the demand for its services. Fear is one of its strongest marketing tools.⁵⁴ The emergence of a "culture of fear" in risk societies directly benefits the private risk industry.⁵⁵ This culture of fear is created through the "pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment, or the physical and symbolic environment as people define and experience everyday life."⁵⁶ In his examination of the emergence of a culture of fear in the UK and the US, Frank Furedi notes that "terms like 'risk' or 'at risk' are used in association with just about any routine event" reflecting "our unprecedented preoccupation with risk."⁵⁷ Due to the lack of personal experience of unknown and unknown-unknown risk, mass mediated and expert interpretations of potential dangers play a critical role in the manufacture of private risk perception.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the old adage 'bad news is good news' applies to the mass media as well as the risk industry.⁵⁹ The practices of the media and the risk industry, thus, support each other in creating a spiral of perceived risk escalation. Industry experts lend credibility to bad news in the media, and bad news in the media generates rising private demand for commercial risk management.

The impact of media and industry advertisements on fear is well researched.⁶⁰ Although individual risk perception varies considerably depending on age, gender, class, living area or culture, extensive press coverage of specific dangers or risks increases fear independently of other factors. A study of crime reporting and fear of violence in Finland

⁵³ See, for instance, Westguard Security Ltd., at: <http://www.westguardsecurity.co.uk> and Hart Security Ltd., at: <http://www.hartsecurity.com>.

⁵⁴ Anne-Marie Vincent and Alan J. Dubinsky (2004) 'Impact of Fear Appeals in a Cross-Cultural Context,' *Journal of Euromarketing*, Vol. 14, No.1/2, pp. 145-167.

⁵⁵ Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited*.

⁵⁶ David L. Altheide and R. Sam Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News: A Discourse of Control,' *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 475-503.

Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' p. 476.

⁵⁷ Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited*, p. xvii.

⁵⁸ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' p. 479.

⁵⁹ Łoś (2002) 'Post-communist Fear of Crime and the Commercialization of Security,' p. 166.

⁶⁰ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' pp. 475-503;

observed that already the indirect exposure to crime news in the form of ever present tabloid front pages and billboard advertisements in urban landscapes contributes to growing fear among citizens.⁶¹ Personal risk perception increases in direct proportion to the exposure to media reporting of crime, and the reading of front page news in tabloid papers is directly related to attempts to avoid risks. In fact, empirical research has demonstrated that all forms of threat reporting, including about traffic accidents or environmental degradation, contribute to people's perception of "life as 'scary', dangerous and fearful."⁶²

It is little surprising that in most industrialized nations the media and marketing discourse on risks, public anxiety and private security industry turnover have increased simultaneously since the 1970s. The statistic risks of terrorist and criminal attacks have decreased for much of the past three decades, but Western societies are more fearful than ever. In the US, key newspapers' association of fear with violence and crime increased six-fold between 1984 and 1999, that is, *before* 9/11.⁶³ As David Altheide and Sam Michalowski observe, the discourse of fear "resonates through public information and is becoming a part of what a mass society holds in common: We increasingly share understandings about what to fear and how to avoid it."⁶⁴ Similarly, Furedi finds that the use of the term 'at risk' in UK newspapers increased nine-fold between 1994 and 2000.⁶⁵

Risks appear all pervasive. A content analysis of the websites of British security guarding firms, which have seen the highest increases in turnover over the past decades (see Graph 1), reveals a range of discursive strategies supporting this impression.⁶⁶ Foremost are statements highlighting the multiplicity of unknown and unknown-unknown risks everybody faces today. As one company puts it ominously, "Your business operation faces a *growing number* of risks from an *array* of sources."⁶⁷ Terrorism, crime and other unnamed dangers merge into a seamless web of a complex and interconnected security risks. Thus, another private security firm suggests, "the risk of terrorism and organised crime sits alongside the exposure to internal breaches of security,"⁶⁸ while a third observes "the *ever-present* risks of

⁶¹ Mirka Smolej and Janne Kivivuori (2006) 'The Relation between Crime News and Fear of Violence,' *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 211-227, p. 215.

⁶² Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' p. 479; Smolej and Kivivuori (2006) 'The Relation between Crime News and Fear of Violence,' p. 221.

⁶³ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' p. 490.

⁶⁴ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' p. 476.

⁶⁵ Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited*, p. xvii.

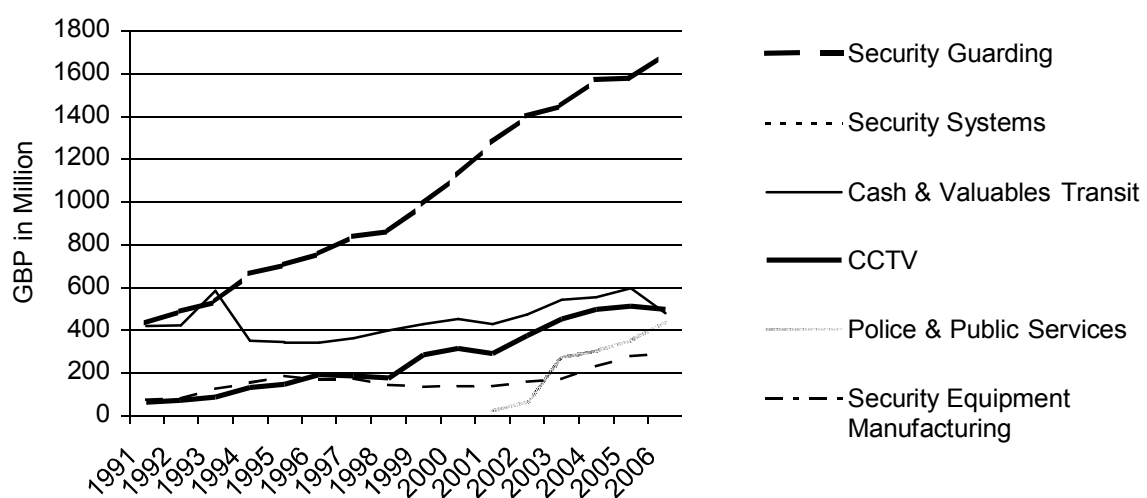
⁶⁶ The firms are listed as members of the British Security Industry Association, at: <http://www.bsia.co.uk>.

⁶⁷ Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>. Italics added.

⁶⁸ Hart Security Ltd., at: <http://www.hartsecurity.com>.

fire, flood, theft, vandalism, terrorism and occasionally, industrial espionage.”⁶⁹ A second marketing strategy highlights the actuality and changing nature of these security risks. References to “recent world events”, “the current climate” and “the modern world” suggest that contemporary dangers are new, pressing and requiring immediate action.⁷⁰ Finally, against statistical evidence, many private security firms assert the “increasing number of crime related incidents”⁷¹ and a growing terrorist threat “which may involve introducing measures that have never been considered before.”⁷²

Graph 1. British Security Industry Turnover



The combination of media and industry claims regarding the heightened risk of terrorism and crime has amplified public fear and demand for private security services. An Ipsos MORI poll conducted in 1999 found that 25 percent of Britons worried permanently about a potential burglary, and 15 percent had acquired professional home security advice.⁷³ A survey in 2006 showed that Britons were more concerned about crime and violence than citizens in the US and other major European countries. In the UK, 43 percent mentioned crime and violence as the most pressing concern of their country, compared to 40 percent in France and Italy, 31 percent in Spain, 27 percent in the US, and 21 percent in Germany. Britons were also the least confident in their government’s ability to deal with these problems

⁶⁹ Elite Security Group Ltd., at: <http://www.elitesecuritygroup.co.uk>. Italics added.

⁷⁰ Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>; Advance Security Ltd., at: <http://www.advancesecurity.co.uk>.

⁷¹ Crown Security Services, at: <http://www.crownsecurity.uk.com>.

⁷² Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>.

⁷³ Ipsos MORI (1999) ‘One in Four Britons Lives in Fear of Burglary,’ 23 August.

with 29 percent, compared to 57 percent in Germany, 48 percent in Italy, 44 percent in France and the US, and 35 percent in Spain.⁷⁴

The same time period that has seen the rise in public fear and risk perception has witnessed a massive expansion of the private security industry. Between 1991 and 2005, the turnover of private security companies in the UK rose by no less than 330 percent, i.e. an average of 23 percent annually. In the US, the average growth of the private security industry lay by 8-10 percent per year.⁷⁵ By comparison, the UK manufacturing sector only expanded on average by 0.5 percent and even the IT sector grew only by 6-8 percent annually during the same period.

While Beck believes that the inherent incalculability of global modernization risks allows people to challenge the risk assessments of experts, he also sees the danger that an inability to agree on the 'real' risks "throws the door open to a feudalization of scientific knowledge through economic and political interests and 'new dogmas'."⁷⁶ People might be able to resist the discourse of fear by pointing out the unverified and complex assumptions of expert calculations regarding unknown and unknown-unknown risks; but to do so is in itself a risk which people might not want to take. A precautionary response becomes even more likely if, as the media and business advertisements do, risks are not related to peoples themselves, but to those for whom they care or are responsible.⁷⁷ People might be willing to take risks for themselves, but they are disinclined to accept risks for those they love or are accountable for. References to one's children, family or employees permeate the discourse on risk. The next section investigates how the specific rationalities and mechanisms of private security management build on the concept of risk and the culture of fear to further expand the demand for its services.

Commercial Risk Management

Private businesses not only contribute to the emergence of the world risk society through discursive strategies, they also offer to manage the risks that they identify. However, as the concept of risk employed by the private security industry magnifies and sustains demand, so

⁷⁴ Ipsos MORI (2006) 'Britons Most Worried about Crime – and Government Is Least Trusted to Deal with It,' 6 November.

⁷⁵ British Security Industry Association, at: <http://www.bsia.co.uk>; NN (2007) 'Ride the Wave,' *Security Executive*, April/May, pp. 11-15, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 156-157. Beck makes this argument with regard to the tendency of governments and experts to 'downplay' modernization risks such as nuclear power and genetic modification, but of course it can also be viewed in the reverse.

⁷⁷ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) 'Fear in the News,' pp. 491-492.

does commercial risk management. The demand inflating rationalities and mechanisms of private risk management can be observed in three areas: risk identification, risk assessment and risk mitigation.⁷⁸ Risk identification concerns the detection of potential dangers and their targets. Risk assessment calculates the relative probability and impact of different types of dangers and seeks to establish priorities for risk mitigation. Finally, risk mitigation aims to prevent or limit the damage of a hazard. The following sections examine each in turn.

Risk Identification

Beck believes in the collectivising capacity of global risks such as transnational terrorism and environmental degradation. According to him, fear creates solidarity and will lead to the formation of new cosmopolitan political communities to collectively address common dangers.⁷⁹ Yet, in the UK and the US, a frequent response to the rise in risk perception and the emergence of a culture of fear appears to have been the alienation of individuals from their social environments. Rather than finding a new sense of solidarity, many people seem to shut themselves off, both physically and psychologically, from suspect or simply unknown ‘others’ within gated communities, purportedly safe housing districts, private schools and locked cars.⁸⁰ Beyond the general individualization of modern society, one of the origins of this behaviour appears to be the differences in personal risk and individual responsibility emphasized in private industry discourses and practices.⁸¹ In these, the “urgency and existence of risks fluctuate with the variety of values and interests” espoused by different individuals.⁸² Moreover, the private industry portrays risks as personal characteristics and pro-active risk management as the responsibility of everybody.⁸³

The individualizing rationality of commercial risk identification plays a crucial part in increasing private consumption of security services by attributing risks to persons rather than collectives. Although probabilistic risk statistics are “meaningful only on a population level and not for an individual... this information is conveyed as exact, certain and tailored to the individual.”⁸⁴ The media and industry abound with statistics, tests and services offering

⁷⁸ Beat Habegger (2008) ‘Risk Analysis and Management in a Dynamic Risk Landscape’ in: *ibid.* (ed.) *International Handbook on Risk Analysis and Management* (Zurich: Center for Security Studies), pp. 13-32, pp. 21-27.

⁷⁹ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ Lupton (1999) *Risk*, p. 47.

⁸¹ Anthony Giddens (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

⁸² Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 31.

⁸³ Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited*, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Press et al. (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,’ p. 242.

personal risk profiles depending on age, sex, occupation and other factors. These risk profiles generate the impression that everybody's risks are distinct and that, therefore, they require individualized solutions. Private security and other risk management firms present even inherently collective dangers as personal and selective. Their risk identification strategies transform Beck's "de-bounded" modernization risks, such as nuclear waste, genetic modification and terrorism, into bounded personal risks, depending on whether a person lives near a nuclear waste disposal site, eats genetically modified food or flies with American airlines.⁸⁵

The advertisements of private security firms in the UK illustrate the individualizing rationality of commercial risk identification. As one company proclaims, "no two businesses security needs are identical."⁸⁶ Implying that governments and the public police cannot take these differences into account, private security companies promise to analyse each individual clients' particular risks and provide "bespoke" services, which can be "tailored to clients' requirements and can be delivered whenever and wherever they are needed."⁸⁷ In fact, the assertion that the security risks of every customer are distinct is one of the most widely-found statements on security firms' websites in the UK.⁸⁸ The American Security Industry Association agrees that the ability of private security firms to cater to the divergent needs of individual consumers is one of the key reasons for the expansion of the private security sector.⁸⁹

Conjoined with the individualization of risk is the logic of individual responsibility for containing them. Where risks are ascribed to persons rather than societies and states, the individual is seen not only as able to manage, but also as responsible for managing, their risks.⁹⁰ The rise of neo-liberalism since the 1980s has facilitated this responsabilization of citizens at the same time as it has favoured private market over public service solutions to social needs and risks such as healthcare, transport and energy. Individualized responsibility detracts attention from collective and political responses to risk and focuses on how people can improve their personal risk profiles through consumer choices. As Raco notes,

⁸⁵ Beck (2002) 'The Terrorist Threat,' p. 41.

⁸⁶ BritSec International Ltd., at: <http://www.britsec.co.uk>.

⁸⁷ ArmorGroup International Plc., at: <http://www.armorgroup.com>.

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>; Allander Security Ltd., at: <http://www.allandersecurity.com>; Britsafe, at: <http://www.britsafe.com>; Crown Security Services, at: <http://www.crownsecurity.uk.com>; Danhouse Security Ltd., at: <http://www.danhouse.co.uk>; Duval Security Ltd., at: <http://www.duvalsecurity.co.uk>; Elite Security Group Ltd., at: <http://www.elitesecuritygroup.co.uk>.

⁸⁹ SIA, *Security Industry Overview*, available from:

http://www.siaonline.org/response.asp?c=industry_overview&r=1024.

⁹⁰ Press at al. (2000) 'Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,' p. 241.

“insecurity becomes associated with individual deficiencies, rather than broader structures.”⁹¹ Health risks such as cancer become the responsibility of individuals who are encouraged to lower their body weight, eat food rich in anti-oxidants, take vitamin supplements and exercise instead of the concern of governments which could be encouraged to investigate and regulate the radiation emitted by mobile phone masts, pesticides in drinking water and hormone additives in meat.⁹²

Also with regard to terrorism and crime, government discourses suggest the responsibility of potential victims to protect themselves and, thus, promote commercial security solutions.⁹³ The British police, for instance, seek to contain the risk of crime by advising people to lock their doors, sling handbags across their bodies and not to walk home alone at night.⁹⁴ Even the globalizing danger of transnational terrorism becomes a personal responsibility. Thus, Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate observe that UK government recommendations regarding a WMD attack by terrorists have been “skewed towards the individual – ‘what can you do to protect yourself and your community against risk’”.⁹⁵ In the same manner, Metropolitan police told local businesses after the London attacks to take action to step up the safeguards to their premises.⁹⁶ Some years earlier, the US government’s recommendation “that windows might be rendered airtight against biological agents through the application of plumbing tape and plastic sheeting led, in a self-supporting cultural circuit of media hype and public panic, to reports of unprecedented demand, stockpiling and shortages.”⁹⁷

In addition to personal risk profiling, individual responsibility for risk management arises from a number of factors in private security industry risk identification discourses. Foremost is the alleged failure of governmental agencies to provide efficient, effective and accountable risk management. As Intacept Security Ltd. writes, “we know Police resources are being stretched daily and their attendance at a premises [sic] depends greatly on operational commitments.”⁹⁸ Moreover, private security companies assert that individual responsibility to protect against risks is an issue of corporate governance and duty of care,

⁹¹ Raco (2002) ‘Risk, Fear and Control,’ p. 29.

⁹² Press at al. (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,’ p. 245.

⁹³ Pat O’Malley (2006) ‘Criminology and Risk,’ in: Sandra Walklate and Gabe Mythen (eds.) *Beyond the Risk Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press), pp. 43-59, p. 49.

⁹⁴ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) ‘Fear in the News,’ p. 481. Unsolicited personal advice received from a police officer in an area that had seen repeated theft in Bristol.

⁹⁵ Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate (2006) ‘Communicating the Terrorist Risk: Harnessing a Culture of Fear?’ *Crime, Media, Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 123-142, p. 134.

⁹⁶ *Financial Times* (2005) ‘London Businesses Told to Upgrade Security,’ 14 July.

⁹⁷ Spence (2005) ‘World Risk Society and War against Terror,’ p. 294.

⁹⁸ Intacept Security Ltd., at: <http://www.intaceptsecurity.com>.

increasingly acknowledged as “legal and moral obligations”.⁹⁹ Lastly, there is the private risk industry itself which, in the guise of insurance companies, requires specific security measures or offers lower premiums in return for precautionary action.¹⁰⁰

The demand expansion underlying the individualization and responsabilization rationalities of the private security industry also characterises the mechanisms or technologies used for risk identification such as profiling and risk surveys. Typically employed at the first stage of a risk management consultation and offered by some companies as a free service, profiling and risk surveys promise to pinpoint the particular risks faced by individual customers and encourage them to take precautionary action.¹⁰¹ Both mechanisms, thereby, increase the influence of industry experts on risk identification. At the centre of their analyses stands the “expertise” and “specialised knowledge” of risk professionals regarding “realistic” unknown and unknown-unknown risks rather than the customer’s personal experience of known dangers.¹⁰² In fact, the explicit aim of risk surveys is to inform clients about potential and future risks they have been unaware of.¹⁰³

Private security firms also perpetuate the demand for commercial risk identification by emphasizing the constantly shifting nature of risks: “continuous evaluation enables us to anticipate and respond to the rapid changes to security risks that characterise clients’ operating environments.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, they highlight the changing needs of the customer. As Group 4 Securitor (G4S), the largest private security company in the world, asserts, “As your business changes, so does your security risk profile.”¹⁰⁵ It follows that risk identification is a “cyclical and ongoing process rather than a linear progression toward definite end goals. Such a process is never complete, as new risks are always emerging or old risks are reconstituted.”¹⁰⁶ The websites of private security firms stress the need for a regular review of a client’s risks. “The assessment of risk is not a one-off event; it is an ongoing process of evaluation and review, and Pilgrims will work with you as your operations develop.”¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ Octaga Security Services Ltd., at: <http://www.octaga.co.uk>; Pilgrims Group Ltd., at:

<http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>; G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>.

¹⁰⁰ Sawley Security Ltd., at: <http://www.sawleysecurity.co.uk>; Unit Group Ltd., at: <http://www.unitgroup.co.uk>; Intacept Security Ltd., at: <http://www.intaceptsecurity.com>.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Polyguard Security Services Ltd., at: <http://www.polyguardsecurities.com>; Guardforce Security Services Ltd., at: <http://www.guardforce-security.com>.

¹⁰² Octaga Security Services Ltd., at: <http://www.octaga.co.uk>.

¹⁰³ Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>; G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>.

¹⁰⁴ Hart Security Ltd., at: <http://www.hartsecurity.com>.

¹⁰⁵ G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>.

¹⁰⁶ Heng (2002) ‘Unravelling the ‘War’ on Terrorism,’ p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>; Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>; G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>.

Many firms recommend security ‘health checks’ on an annual basis.¹⁰⁸ Ironically, research has shown that risk analyses tend to increase fear rather than reduce it and lead to increased demand for assurance through regular check-ups.¹⁰⁹

Risk Assessment

Risk identification frequently merges with the subsequent assessment of risks in terms of their relative probability and impact in order to establish priorities for intervention. Nevertheless, this stage of commercial risk management has a number of distinct rationalities and strategies. While governmental risk assessment has been linked to “zero risk, worst case scenario, shifting burden of proof and serious and irreversible damage”, the primary risk assessment rationalities of the private security industry revolve around the concepts of vulnerability and risk minimization.¹¹⁰ Security surveys and penetration testing serve to implement these rationalities, while a discourse of risk management as an ‘investment’ justifies the additional expenses.

The rationality of vulnerability deserves particular attention because it expands private demand for security services by reinforcing the individualization and responsabilization of commercial risk identification. The concept of vulnerability does so by shifting the central focus of risk assessment from the danger to the potential target. Conventionally risks are calculated and compared in terms of the statistical frequency and magnitude of a particular danger for a given collective and time period. The US State Department, for instance, measures the national and global risk of terrorism as the number of attacks and casualties per country each year.¹¹¹ These statistics show that the risk of becoming a casualty in a terrorist attack is extremely low in most North American and European countries.

The focus on vulnerability changes this calculation. Instead of the statistical analysis of the danger, it focuses on the characteristics of the potential target to estimate the likelihood and probable impact of a risk. Specifically, it measures the level of risk in terms of the exposure and weaknesses of the client defined by his or her behaviour and ability to repel or survive an attack. In the case of terrorism, the rationality of vulnerability suggests that,

¹⁰⁸ Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>.

¹⁰⁹ Altheide and Michalowski (1999) ‘Fear in the News,’ p. 496; Press at al. (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,’ p. 238.

¹¹⁰ Aradau and van Munster (2007) ‘Governing Terrorism through Risk,’ p. 103.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of State (2003) *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003/c12153.htm>.

although the collective risk of terrorism is negligible, the industry can still present it as a high personal risk because of the lifestyle and lack of protection of the individual.

In some cases, the logic of vulnerability even suggests that the probability and magnitude of a risk increases *because* of the weaknesses of the potential target. According to this argument, a client who is seen to be vulnerable encourages a perpetrator to attack. Individuals who do not reduce their vulnerabilities are responsible for their own harm. In the literature on crime and policing, this transfer of responsibility for crime victimization to the individual has characterized the concept of situational crime prevention. The situational crime prevention approach contends that individuals can reduce their vulnerability to crime by increasing the cost and decreasing the rewards for the potential perpetrator.¹¹² The political and industry discourses on crime prevention, therefore, emphasize the responsibility of the victim for collective crime levels.¹¹³ As a result, some, like the former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, “[blame] a large proportion of crime on the victims’ carelessness.”¹¹⁴ Situational crime prevention implies that it is not external factors such as poverty or the childhood experiences of the perpetrator which lead to crime, but the failure of the individual victim to take precautionary measures. In effect, the target is portrayed as causing crime by its vulnerability.

A second rationality of commercial risk assessment is the concern with minimizing risk. This rationality explicitly recognizes that zero risk does not exist. Nevertheless, it increases demand for private security equipment and services by directing the evaluation of risk away from the questions of the probability and impact of known dangers toward the aim of minimizing even unknown and unknown-unknown risks. Although the objective of risk assessment is to establish priorities for risk mitigation and the risk industry does indeed make such recommendations, the rationality of risk minimization encourages the elimination of *any* possible exposure or weaknesses. Intacept Security Ltd., for instance, offers to carry out an analysis of “any vulnerable points”.¹¹⁵

The preoccupation of commercial risk assessment with vulnerability and risk minimization features widely in the advertisements of private security companies in the UK. One company website brings both together: “Our focus is on assessing your premises; reviewing current security provision and identifying the *weak* areas criminals are likely to target. By *minimising* pre-existing security risks we can develop an appropriate method of

¹¹² Pat O’Malley (2004) *Risk, Uncertainty and Government* (London: The Glass House Press), p. 138.

¹¹³ O’Malley (2006) ‘Criminology and Risk,’ p. 49.

¹¹⁴ *The Age*, 28 September 1990, cited in: O’Malley (2004) *Risk, Uncertainty and Government*, p. 139.

¹¹⁵ Intacept Security Ltd., at: <http://www.intaceptsecurity.com>.

dealing with criminal activity...”¹¹⁶ These advertisements also highlight the utility of commercial security surveys or audits and penetration testing as means for the assessment of vulnerabilities. The Pilgrims Group claims that through a “thorough survey or audit we will present a realistic and holistic analysis of your current security strengths and weaknesses.”¹¹⁷

Interestingly, the private security industry justifies its rationalities of vulnerability and risk minimization through a discourse of risk management as an “investment” rather than an expense.¹¹⁸ It suggests that the more a customer spends on risk management, the more he or she is likely to save. According to the websites of numerous private security firms, such an investment can “pay for itself” either in through lower insurance premiums, avoided losses and harm, or greater efficiency because clients are freed from “the time-consuming and costly day-to-day responsibility” of their own risk management.¹¹⁹

Risk Mitigation

The third stage of private risk management is risk mitigation, i.e. efforts to prevent or reduce damage caused by risks. In the practices of the private security industry, it is shaped by three rationalities. The first is the management of consequences rather than causes. The second rationality is risk mitigation as assurance. The third is risk mitigation as a continuous process. All three rationalities use the language of unknown and unknown-unknown risks to perpetuate the demand for commercial risk mitigation by asserting that risks can never be fully eliminated, because their causes are beyond comprehension and intervention. Instead, these rationalities promote perpetual risk mitigation which offers reassurance by claiming to minimize their clients’ alleged weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Moreover, these rationalities are implemented through demand-expanding technologies which present and provide security as an individualized, excludable service rather than a collective good.

The concern with consequences rather than causes is, according to Beck, one of the key features of commercial risk management. Thus, Beck observes that the private industry only

‘copes’ with the *symptoms and symbols* of risks. As they are dealt with in this way, the risks must *grow*, they must not actually be eliminated as causes or sources.

¹¹⁶ Allander Security Ltd., at: <http://www.allandersecurity.com>. See also G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>. Italics added.

¹¹⁷ Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>.

¹¹⁸ G4S Security Services (UK) Ltd., at: <http://www.g4s.com/uk-security/>.

¹¹⁹ Intacept Security Ltd., at: <http://www.intaceptsecurity.com>; Danhouse Security Ltd., at: <http://www.danhouse.co.uk>. See also Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>; Unit Group Ltd., at: <http://www.unitgroup.co.uk>; Vigil Security Management Ltd., at: <http://www.vigilsecurity.co.uk>; Westguard Security Ltd., at: <http://www.westguardsecurity.co.uk>.

Everything must take place in the context of a *cosmetics* of risk, packaging, reducing the symptoms of pollutants, installing filters while retaining the source of the filth. Hence, we have not a *preventive* but a symbolic industry and policy of eliminating the increase in risks.¹²⁰

The concern with consequences highlights that risk mitigation is not always or necessarily preventative.¹²¹ While many businesses claim to prevent risks, their assertions are usually misleading. One example is the alleged ‘prevention’ of breast cancer through commercial genetic testing.¹²² As Press et al. point out, this promise is disingenuous because “science has not ‘cured’ or ‘prevented’ breast cancer.”¹²³ What firms really offer is the detection of purportedly ‘risky’ genes and the pre-emption of their potential consequences through mastectomies. Not only are the claims of private businesses deceptive, they also shift the focus from addressing the collective causes that can trigger those genes to develop into breast cancer such as the spread of pesticides and hormone additives in food and water to the individual susceptibility to and management of these risks.¹²⁴

To clarify such misunderstandings, it is necessary to distinguish between precaution and prevention. Due to the concern about the future inherent in the concept of risk, all risk mitigation can be said to be precautionary by definition. They all involve “measures taken in advance to avert a possible evil”.¹²⁵ However, precaution is not synonymous with prevention. According to both Beck and Press et al., the term prevention implies an action that eliminates the causes of a risk and, thus, the risk itself. In this sense, most commercial risk mitigation might be precautionary, but it is rarely preventative because it attempts merely to minimize the potential consequences of a danger for an individual client.

In the discourse of the private security industry, the preoccupation with consequences rather than causes is justified by the complexity of contemporary security risks, such as global warming and the development of chemical and biological weapons. While the origins of threats are clearly identifiable, those of unknown and unknown-unknown risks are either obscured by multiple and complex causalities or the lack of data and experience. In the absence of any definitive understanding of the root causes of contemporary risks, the industry can only offer to mitigate their potential impact. Another factor, however, is the public goods

¹²⁰ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 57.

¹²¹ O'Malley (2006) ‘Criminology and Risk,’ p. 44.

¹²² Nancy Press, Jennifer R. Fishman and Barbara A Koenig (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk: The Social and Cultural Context for the Genetic Testing for Breast Cancer,’ *Nursing Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 237-249.

¹²³ Press et al. (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,’ p. 241.

¹²⁴ Press et al. (2000) ‘Collective Fear, Individualized Risk,’ p. 245.

¹²⁵ Precaution at: <http://www.dictionary.com>.

nature of preventative risk mitigation.¹²⁶ Firms find it difficult to make potential customers pay for such services because of a free-rider problem. The problem is that the elimination of risks such as terrorism or global warming is non-excludable, i.e. it is not possible to exclude people from its benefits. Since people can ‘free-ride’ on such services, they have no interest in paying for them and firms will fail to cover even their own cost. The mitigation of consequences on the other hand is excludable since it regards the reduction of the vulnerabilities of potential targets. It can be made to benefit only paying customers and, thus, can be sold for profit.

Since the private risk management firms do not eliminate risks, the second rationality underlying commercial risk mitigation is assurance. The risks remain, but the discourse and services of the industry assure clients that they have done all that is possible to protect themselves. As Furedi observes, many measures against crime aim to reduce fear rather than crime itself.¹²⁷ This includes technologies such as panic buttons, burglar alarms and CCTV cameras. The phrase “peace of mind” is the single most frequent statement on private security industry websites after references to the ‘bespoke’, i.e. individualized, nature of commercial risk management.¹²⁸ Few of these risk mitigation mechanisms have a measurable effect on crime rates.¹²⁹ CCTV cameras, for instance, have lost their utility as a deterrence mechanism in many areas because the poor quality of the videos, the complexity of the visual data which so far resists computerized analysis and the huge amount of the material prevent their effective use in the prosecution of terrorists and criminals.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the turnover of the British CCTV monitoring industry increased nearly tenfold from £59 million in 1991 to £509 million in 2005. Ironically, measures designed to reassure people can amplify their fear. Extensive security arrangements such as pervasive monitoring and increased patrols can create the image of a dangerous environment making people feel unsafe in the first place.¹³¹ The demand for assurance, thus, becomes self-perpetuating.

¹²⁶ Elke Krahmann (2008) ‘Security: Collective Good or Commodity?’ *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 379-404.

¹²⁷ Furedi (2006) *Culture of Fear Revisited*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Advance Security, at: <http://www.advancesecurity.co.uk>; Allander Security Ltd., at: <http://www.allandersecurity.com>; Checkmate Guarding & Security, at: <http://www.checkmate-guarding.co.uk>; Contract Security Services, at: <http://www.contractsecurity.co.uk>; Crown Security Services, at: <http://www.crownsecurity.uk.com>; Danhouse Security Ltd., at: <http://www.danhouse.co.uk>; Duval Security Ltd., at: <http://www.dualsecurity.co.uk>; Intacept Security Ltd., at: <http://www.intaceptsecurity.com>; Knight Security Ltd., at: <http://www.knightsecurityservices.co.uk>; Omni Security Services Ltd., at: <http://www.omnisecurity.co.uk>;

¹²⁹ Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington (eds.) (2007) *Preventing Crime: What Works for Children, Offenders, Victims and Places* (Dordrecht: Springer), p. 8.

¹³⁰ Owen Bowcott (2008) ‘CCTV Boom Has Failed to Slash Crime, Says Police,’ *The Guardian*, 6 May.

¹³¹ Lucia Zedner (2003), p. 165

The third rationality of risk mitigation follows directly from the logic of consequences and assurance: the logic of permanent precautionary action. Since risks always exist and it is impossible to predict when they strike, clients require continuous assurance and risk mitigation 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Redguard Security, for instance, writes, “With your peace of mind our focus ... our procedures provide you with a service that is continuous, monitored and recorded to ensure true 24 hour security...”¹³² In short, as another company promises, “We will be there, whenever and wherever you need us.”¹³³

The rationality of permanent precautionary action also derives from the argument that risk mitigation strategies and equipment need regular updating. Man-made risks such as terrorism and crime are presented as ‘moving targets’ which adapt to and actively seek to overcome established risk mitigation products and services. According to Hart Security “criminal activity is usually only one step behind” the latest technological advances,¹³⁴ and Allander Security warns that “As tagging and surveillance systems develop, so to do the methods used by criminals to outwit supposedly foolproof systems.”¹³⁵ This means that not only do security services have to be supplied on a continuous basis, but also that technological equipment such as burglar alarms and security barriers have to be replaced frequently with new models.

The technologies employed by the private industry directly reflect the above rationalities. Analytically, one can differentiate between at least six possible risk mitigation strategies: prevention, pre-emption, avoidance, deterrence, protection and resilience.¹³⁶ Due to the specific rationalities of the risk market, however, private security firms tend to prefer some over others. The most widely offered commercial risk mitigation mechanisms are deterrence and protection. Both are excludable, focus on consequences, provide assurance and require permanent services. Less frequent are avoidance and resilience. They meet the first three criteria, but do not usually lead to long-term dependencies on private risk mitigation. Finally, preventative and pre-emptive technologies are virtually absent from commercial risk mitigation. They match none of the above rationalities.

¹³² Redguard Security Ltd., at: www.reguardsecurity.co.uk.

¹³³ Pilgrims Group Ltd., at: <http://www.pilgrimgroup.com>.

¹³⁴ Hart Security Ltd., at: <http://www.hartsecurity.com>.

¹³⁵ Allander Security Ltd., at: <http://www.allandersecurity.com>.

¹³⁶ These can be variously found in Mark B. Salter (2008) ‘Imagining Numbers: Risk, Quantification and Aviation Security,’ *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, No. 2-3, pp. 243-266, p. 252, and other studies. Compensation might also be included into a general list of risk mitigation technologies. However, it is more typical of insurance rather than security firms.

Preventative technologies may be understood as goods and services which target the underlying root causes of a risk. In the case of terrorism, this might include addressing the grievances of terrorist groups and their perceived exclusion from legitimate political processes. With regard to crime, it can involve the reduction of poverty or drug dependency. As has been argued above, private firms are unlikely to offer truly preventative technologies to private customers because the benefits of eliminating a risk are non-excludable and, therefore, impossible to sell for profit. The American Security Industry Association, thus, lists 26 market sectors, including burglar alarms, CCTV, computer security, mobile security, personal security devices and outdoor protection, but none refers to services which address the origins of dangers.¹³⁷ In most cases, preventative measures are left to governments which can fund them through general taxation.¹³⁸

Pre-emptive technologies can be defined as those which destroy the danger before it takes effect. This can be achieved either by eliminating the potential perpetrator or source, such as a terrorist or WMD, or by erasing the potential target, as in the case of pre-emptive mastectomies mentioned above. Since both measures assume a danger (and guilt) before it materializes and can be very destructive, neither states nor businesses like to turn to pre-emption. In fact, most societies prohibit private individuals and businesses from taking pre-emptive measures against security threats emanating from other human beings. Private security firms often emphasize that their services are purely defensive, i.e. that their personnel only shoot in self-defence or in defence of their clients.¹³⁹ Even less radical pre-emptive actions such as the identification of 'risky' employees or prohibitions against the carrying of weapons in shopping malls, are problematic because they infringe upon peoples' rights and freedoms.

While pre-emption primarily targets potential perpetrators, avoidance strategies encourage clients to modify their own behaviour in order to reduce their risks. Avoidance strategies follow logically from the rationalities of risk minimization and the management of consequences. They can be an important mechanism where deterrence and protection are likely to fail, such as regarding terrorists who are unlikely to respond to threats of imprisonment or death. Nevertheless, only a small number of private security firms promote

¹³⁷ SIA, available from: http://www.siaonline.org/_newmem.html.

¹³⁸ Sometimes governments choose to outsource these services to private firms. The British Security Industry Association, thus, added in 2001 a new sector to its database entitled 'police and public security'. Arguably, however, governments are also influenced by the discourse and practices of the private security industry when they become a customer. See Krahmann (2008) 'Security: Collective Good or Commodity?'.

¹³⁹ Armor Group, at: <http://www.armorgroup.com/mediacentre/faqs/>; Blackwater, at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14904069>.

avoidance as a suitable risk mitigation strategy and offer related services such as risk consulting and training. ArmorGroup, is one of the few firms to teach its clients “to recognise and avoid potential threats and equip them, if necessary, to respond to terrorist actions, kidnappings and violent crimes.”¹⁴⁰ Admittedly, clients frequently hire private security firms because they cannot avoid a risk.

The two primary commercial risk mitigation technologies are deterrence and protection. Incidentally, both show the greatest convergence with the rationalities of commercial risk mitigation outlined above. Deterrence technologies seek to increase the cost or decrease the benefit of carrying out an action that entails the risk of harm to their clients. Since deterrence relies on the perception of the potential perpetrator, it is only suitable for risks of human origin. In the case of terrorism and crime, private industry deterrence typically operates in conjunction with the judiciary. Specifically, private firms attempt to increase the likelihood that a perpetrator will be detected, apprehended and successfully prosecuted. There are a whole range of services and equipment aiming to deter potential attackers or criminals, including static guards, mobile patrols, CCTV surveillance, security checks at buildings and airports, intruder alarms, cash and property marking, access control technologies and IT security solutions. The largest increases in turnover since 1991, however, have been seen in two services: manned security guarding and remote CCTV monitoring (see Graph 1). As 4 Forces Security advertises, mobile patrols are a “high visibility security service that acts as a powerful deterrent”¹⁴¹ and Abal Security promises that contract security guards can “deter high risk situations, where you may be under threat of terrorist attack or armed robbery.”¹⁴² Notably, these two services are the most demanding in terms of 24/7 provision, yet do the least to address the root causes of security risks.

Some deterrence technologies such as security guards also have a protective function, i.e. they seek to minimize the potential harm done to clients or their property. Protection usually works by reducing vulnerabilities or increasing defensive capabilities of a customer. Since protection only applies to the specific client who is safeguarded, it is the most excludable technology of all. While deterrence strategies such as security patrols can have positive effects for those in its vicinity, protection can be restricted to single individuals such as in the use of bodyguards or body armour, to properties such as perimeter fencing and patrols for gated communities, shopping malls or business estates, or to virtual defences such

¹⁴⁰ ArmorGroup, at: <http://www.armorgroup.com/services/securitytraining/>;

¹⁴¹ 4 Forces Security Ltd., at: <http://www.4forcesecurity.co.uk>.

¹⁴² Abal Security Ltd., at: <http://www.abalsecurity.com/>.

as electronic ‘firewalls’ for computer systems. The popularity of protective technologies with private businesses appears to lie in its close match with the underlying rationalities of commercial risk management, including the individualization of risk and the responsabilization of potential targets, the concern with vulnerabilities and risk minimization, and the emphasis on assurance and the perpetual mitigation of consequences. The extent to which the UK and the US have become dependent upon commercial protection is staggering. The 2004 Report for Congress ‘Guarding America’ pointed out the increasing reliance of the US on private protection, observing that 87 percent of security guards employed to safeguard infrastructure against terrorist attacks worked in the private sector.¹⁴³

The last risk mitigation technology regards the resilience of potential targets. Resilience denotes the ability to carry on or recover after harm has been done. Since resilience limits rather than expands demand, private security firms typically promote resilience as an additional service in case deterrence or protection fails. To enhance resilience, private security firms suggest a number of strategies. One strategy relies on educating clients how to respond to attacks by setting up “incident management and crisis response” procedures and executing “security exercises and drills”.¹⁴⁴ Another expands clients’ backup or redundant networking capacities in order to enable them to continue communicating and quickly access alternative resources if their primary capabilities are compromised. As ECA Resilience and Security Consultancy argues: “Only diversity ensures the resilience essential to your communications”,¹⁴⁵ while Red Cell Security emphasizes improvements to “supply and distribution chains.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, firms offer to help their clients to recover from an attack with “psychological trauma support” and other services.¹⁴⁷

Together these risk mitigation technologies illustrate that commercial risk mitigation works through a distinctive set of rationalities and mechanisms which serve to expand the demand for private security services. It is thus not only the concept of risk and the emergence of a culture of fear which has contributed to the rise and perpetuation of the world risk society, but also the reflexive management of risk through a growing industry. In the area of terrorism and crime, this industry has involved the creation of a global private security sector which offers to minimize the risk to private clients who increasingly doubt the capabilities of governments to protect them against these national and transnational dangers. However, at

¹⁴³ Parfomak, 2004, Summary.

¹⁴⁴ Hart Security UK Ltd., at: <http://www.hartsecurity.com/>. See also Ian Johnson Associates Ltd., at: <http://www.ija.co.uk>.

¹⁴⁵ ECA Ltd., at: <http://www.ecalimited.co.uk>.

¹⁴⁶ Red Cell Security, Ltd., at: <http://redcellsecurity.co.uk>.

¹⁴⁷ Red Cell Security, Ltd., at: <http://redcellsecurity.co.uk>.

the same time as they assure their clients, the rationalities and technologies of private security management further undermine the belief in political responses as the discourses and practices of private security firms suggest that contemporary security risks are individual and diverse and can only be effectively contained by ‘bespoke’ commercial services.

Conclusion

The concept of the world risk society has gained increasing popularity in recent years. However, the features and origins of the world risk society remain the subject of controversial debate. While Beck envisages the rise of global political movements which will challenge the nation-state and promote the emergence of a cosmopolitan security community, his critics contend that the emergence of ‘new’ risks has led to the strengthening of the central authority and powers of the state. This article has sought to present another perspective. Building on the work of Beck and others, it has examined the role of private businesses in the creation, management and perpetuation of the world risk society. Focussing on the private management of security risk with regard to terrorism and crime in the UK and the US, it has observed that the replacement of the concept of security with risk has permitted private firms to identify a growing range of unknown and unknown-unknown dangers which cannot be eliminated, but require continuous risk management. Using the discourse of risk and its strategies of commercialized, individualized and reactive risk management, private security companies have thus contributed to the rise of a culture of fear in which the demand for security can never be satisfied and guarantees continuous profits. The analysis concludes by suggesting that the individualization and responsabilization of citizens combined with the impression that risks can be ‘managed’ challenge Beck’s contention that the world risk society will become increasingly politicized and develop cosmopolitan solutions to contemporary hazards. At least within the UK and the US, Beck’s utopian vision appears to be hampered by private industry solutions which offer personal rather than collective risk management. Framed within a neo-liberal discourse of the small state and the superiority of the market, the private management of risk promises to provide security not only more effectively, but also more cost-efficiently than political and cosmopolitan bargaining. To return to Beck’s observation made fifteen years ago: “there are fundamentally two options confronting each other in dealing with civilizational risks: removing the causes in primary industrialization, or the secondary industrialization of consequences and symptoms, which

tends to expand markets. To this point, the second route has been taken almost everywhere.”¹⁴⁸

Length: 10,285 words (without bibliography)

¹⁴⁸ Beck (1992) *Risk Society*, p. 175.

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