

TOP LINE

Use of private security firms by businesses and local governments has drawn attention following the civil unrest of the past month. Businesses fearing property damage have increasingly sought licensed, armed guards to protect storefronts and act as a deterrent to looters. Local governments are hiring firms to supplement overstretched police forces and provide protection for officials facing death threats due to their position on protests or racial issues. Increased use of private security firms to supplement police services has raised concern about accountability given limited regulatory oversight in a number of U.S. states. However, use of reputable firms and coordination with local law enforcement has the potential to bolster the confidence of communities in which they operate.

Privatization of security goes beyond armed or unarmed guards at storefronts or accompanying at-risk individuals. Armed neighborhood watch groups have formed in minority neighborhoods at increased risk of violence and looting. The groups cited the absence of police and a resulting security vacuum in their communities as the primary reason for their emergence. Potential for conflict between or within groups remains; additionally, while armed individuals are licensed to carry weapons, they lack training on de-escalation or appropriate use of force in tense situations. In other areas, private police forces funded by wealthy individuals or through voluntary taxation provide a view into more formalized version of private law enforcement. The potential for overreach is significant however, and private police forces have been criticized for an ever expanding scope and presence. Neighborhood watch groups and private police forces alike raise questions about the potential for vigilante justice as such groups are not governed by the U.S. constitution or local law enforcement.

Business leaders concerned about the security of their property and workforces should seek to quell concerns about the accountability of private security guards by investing in reputable firms. Furthermore, focus on outreach and coordination between local businesses and larger firms has the potential to improve relationships with the communities in which they reside. Private security of some kind is likely to continue to grow amid low public confidence in public police forces. Business leaders are positioned to promote responsible use of security practices even as they seek to bolster their own security footprint.

Questions to Consider:

How does increased use of private security influence relationships between businesses and the communities in which they reside? What vetting processes should be undertaken to maximize accountability of private security officials?

COVID-19: THE HIGHLIGHTS

Covid-19 cases [rose](#) rapidly in the United States over the past week and infections repeatedly hit daily records. This reminder that the pandemic is far from over and that steps must be taken to address the climbing U.S. caseload. A growing number of U.S. states are pausing plans to reopen, or – in the case of Texas – [backtracking](#) and re-imposing restrictions they had previously lifted. Meanwhile, the European Union is continuing efforts to reopen more broadly to outside [travelers](#). Visitors from the U.S., Russia, and Brazil are currently excluded based on the countries' perceived poor handling of the virus; however, travelers from China are currently permitted. Questions remain as to the origins of the virus, with a new scientific [finding](#) claiming the virus was present in wastewater in Spain as early as March 2019. While the study has been questioned and has yet to face the rigorous scientific review process, it is a good reminder of how much remains unknown about the origins of the virus.

BEYOND THE NOISE

Private security: Private security firms received unprecedented [requests](#) for security assistance and licensed armed guards by businesses amid social unrest and looting across the United States. [Minneapolis](#) hired private security for members of the Minneapolis City Council following death threats. [Chicago](#) plans to spend up to \$1.2 million on private security firms to help protect local businesses from looting. The guards hired by Chicago are unarmed and lack police authority but are intended to act as a deterrent to illegal activity. Concerns about [accountability](#) for private security abound, particularly given lack of oversight over actions taken and limited investigations into past conduct.

- **Secure accountability:** Promote due diligence and accountability within private security sector. Utilize respectable firms which adhere to appropriate code of conduct to instill confidence.

Neighborhood watch: Following protests and looting in Minneapolis, [armed](#) neighborhood watch groups organically formed to protect and defend the communities in which they lived and worked. The groups criticized local police for leaving a security vacuum and disappearing from vulnerable areas and asserted the neighborhood watch was the only way to secure their livelihoods. In New Orleans, a millionaire businessman founded a [private police force](#) which was initially privately bankrolled, but now is financed via a voluntary occupancy tax paid by local hotels. The New Orleans force claims it is a neighborhood watch program; however, its existence raises questions about a rising number of private police forces existing in grey areas of the law.

- **Secure communities:** Consider options for supporting communities in which businesses reside in a sustainable manner. Establish consistent expectations and norms in communities which utilize neighborhood watch groups or private security forces to supplement traditional police services.

Global trade: Global [interconnectedness](#) has been taken for granted post-WWII, with a seemingly ever increasing number of travelers, money, and goods between countries and across continents. Rising economic nationalism was already slowing globalization's expansion prior to the pandemic; however, the nearly complete halt of travel has accelerated the shift.

- Secure trade: Evaluate how to leverage trusted partners to communicate in person in foreign environments to the extent possible. Consider ways to ensure robust communication – verbal and nonverbal – across continents and cultures to mitigate miscues that come from an inability to properly interpret body language or tone over video or voice calls.

TRUSTED RESOURCES: for numbers & guidance

[Johns Hopkins University](#) – Coronavirus Resource Center

[World Health Organization](#) – COVID-19 Pandemic

[Center for Disease Control](#) – Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Please contact Secure Source International at info@securesource.com to schedule a leadership roundtable with our intelligence and security experts to dive into these topics and discuss security and safety related best-practices..