6 Military interventions and the concept of the political
Bringing the political back into the interactions between external forces and local societies

Christian Olsson

The ‘global war against terrorism’ is the overarching rationale, if not the main motivation, of two major, international, but US-led, military interventions in Afghanistan since 2001, and in Iraq since 2003. These anti-terrorist interventions, although they both have been justified discursively or legally by ‘exceptional circumstances’, have in many ways challenged and changed our common understanding of the place of interventionist behaviour in international politics. But what is less frequently underscored, is that these interventions have seen major developments in military practices on the ground. The shift from ‘wars between states’ to ‘wars within states’ has highlighted the importance of the relation between intervening forces and local populations: the relational dimension of the political seems to prevail over the purely strategic relation of interstate war. One could have asked whether we are talking about wars at all (in the historical sense of the term), if it were not for the justification of these interventions by a ‘global war’, the long-term implications of which are still difficult to assess. Therefore any political analysis of these interventions would have to start with the concept of war. There are two ways of grasping the relation between the political and war.

The first consists of analysing the political through the specific field of practices called politics.¹ In this case, the central problem is to identify which one of the two fields of practices, politics or war, can be inferred from the other. Several classical insights can be mentioned here. In the Clausewitzian perspective, war as a practical reality – as opposed to war as a theoretical category – ought to be considered as ‘the continuation of politics by other means’. According to this insight, the political dimension of war is to be found in the political ends of which war is a means. In other words, the political refers to the ends, other than the military ends themselves of course that are pursued by war.² Hence, in interstate wars, which are the ones that interest Clausewitz, the political refers to the state, or rather to the will and the practices of the professionals of politics, who
speak and act in the name of the state. Michel Foucault has formulated a more provocative perspective in his analyses of the political theory of Hobbes. He simply reverses the first adage.3 Thus, Mike Dillon and Julian Reid in their analyses of the contemporary liberal form of biopolitics claim:

[W]e draw attention, as Foucault consistently does, to the ways in which global biopolitics operates as a strategic game in which the principles of war are assimilated into the weft and warp of the socio-economic and cultural networks of biopolitical relations. Here Foucault reverses the old Clausewitzian adage concerning the relations between politics and war. Biopolitics is the pursuit of war by other means.4

Of course, should they be used as analytical tools, these insights have to be analysed distinctly and thoroughly, not least because Foucault refers to war as a metaphor and not to a specific historical repertoire of action. This is not, however, what the present paper will seek to do. My aim is not to determine whether ‘war’ is ontologically prior to ‘politics’ or if the reverse is true.

Nevertheless, these insights could here be used as metaphors for two analytically distinct, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, positions regarding the current ‘war against terrorism’. The first, Clausewitzian, position consists of analysing the measures related to this ‘war’ in their relation to the political objectives that they are presumed to serve, in order to assess their efficiency or counter-productivity. What is central to this perspective is the equation of means and ends.5 The second, Foucauldian, position consists of showing how the very dynamics of biopolitics, based upon the idea of the promotion of life, manages to hide the violence and excesses that it inevitably fosters or reinforces: restrictions on civil rights, partial suspension of the principle of Habeas Corpus, arbitrary detentions, for example in Guantanamo Bay, etc. One might mention here the critical discourses on the ‘security measures’ that have been reinforced after 11 September 2001, and on their consequences. It is here the equation of means and consequences that is highlighted.6 These insights, where the focus is on politics as the practices of an institutionalized form of the political (mainly the state), inform this chapter. However, this chapter will be much more focused on the concept of the political in the analysis of politics.

Actually, in a second different way of analysing the political and its underlying processes of politicization and of depoliticization, it is the concept of the political itself that is central and thus the analytical relation between the two notions (the political and politics) is reversed: politics is analysed through the concept of the political and not the reverse. Of course, such a change in scope in the analyses of the post-September 11th
military practices will necessitate questioning and redefining the very concept of the political. Once one has dismissed the simplistic point of view according to which the political is the state and the state is the political, one has to ask a certain number of questions about the political. Is it an essence, a substance, a subjective mode of representation of social reality or a specific kind of relation?

According to a first definition, which I would call the essentialist one, the political refers to an essence that is inherent either in the human nature as a *zoon politicon* that, because of this precise nature, could never exist outside of history or outside of a collectivity (following Aristotle), or in the human condition of a collective life in which our ability to take action and to speak in the public sphere makes us truly human (following Hannah Arendt).7 In these definitions, the political is inherent in humanity as such and is present, regardless of time and space, in specific forms of social organization. But the latter are here only seen as the material manifestation of a superior essence. Although the political refers to a particular sphere, to a particular aspect of humanity among many other (economic, private, legal, aesthetic, etc. – depending on the perspective one has on the political), in this definition it is often considered as the one that makes us human. Therefore, when social actors deny the political, or try to escape from it, they contradict a reality that continues to be structured by it. This might eventually have destructive consequences. This is precisely the criticism Arendt addresses to totalitarianism.8 One might say that in this perspective the political exists regardless of the consciousness one has of its existence. Its imperatives transcend the empirically observable reality as well as, in some cases, the concrete ways in which we think we experience the political. Although very interesting and useful, these definitions – when they are not accompanied by further specifications – are therefore difficult to integrate as intellectual tools into the sociological analysis of the complexity of the social world.

According to what one might call the substantialist definition, the metaphysical search for an essentialist definition of the political is not a central preoccupation. It focuses foremost on the empirically identifiable criterion that allows us to distinguish political relations or units from other configurations. Carl Schmitt can be considered as one of the most famous defenders of this perspective, making the polarization between friend and foe the distinguishing criterion of the political, while saying to refuse developing an explicitly metaphysical theory of the political.9 In a more recent period, and writing from a political perspective that Schmitt would castigate as ‘pluralist’, Susan Strange can be considered as a modern representative of this approach. She considers the authoritative allocation of values in the social space to be the main criterion.10 Focusing on the importance of an empirical criterion, these definitions have the merit of being easily usable in sociological inquiry. Moreover, they identify the political as a particular kind of social relation and not as an a-sociological essence (at least in the
case of Strange), even if they insist on the specific objective structure of this
relation. However, by focusing solely on the objective structure of social
relations, they fall into the trap of all positivist sociology: a relation can be
considered as political regardless of the perceptions that the actors
involved have thereof. In other words, a relation can be political even
though all the actors involved in the relation consider it apolitical. This is
especially the case in the approach of Strange. In the same way, a relation
can be apolitical even when the individuals involved are convinced that
they are engaging in political activities. This is especially so in the theo-
retical framework advanced by Schmitt. Moreover, both of these
approaches fall short of a general and explicitly metaphysical theory of the
political, while undeniably presupposing such a theory when proposing an
empirical criterion.

According to the last perspective, which I would call the relational
approach, the political refers to a specific kind of social relation in which
the concept of the political confers a specific salience to the relation itself,
as the actors themselves subjectively represent it. I will here suggest some
of the implications of such an approach. Following it, the political refers to
a social reality that is not purely objective, in that it is dependent on the
representations of the actors involved. However, it is not purely subjective
either, since it refers to a relation in which the actors’ subjectivities inter-
act. In other words, the political refers to an inter-subjective relation in
which the actors confer a particular salience to the issue that structures
this relation. The process through which this particular salience is con-
ferred to the topic is the process of politicization defined as ‘the process of
transformation of a societal problem into a political problem’.11 Discourse
plays a central role in this process. The political can be said to be a speech-
act through which a particular salience is conferred to a societal problem.
This is the definition of the political implicitly underlying analyses in terms
of politicization.12 It would also be the conception of the political indi-
rectly adopted by many authors inspired by Bourdieu when they claim that
any attempt to formulate a definitive definition of the political is itself a
highly political enterprise.13 For example, when the political or politics is
said to refer to the state, this very claim contributes to the legitimization of
those who have a vested interest in this specific definition, i.e. the profes-
sionals of politics. This means that any attempt to define the political is
politically motivated. It is impossible to define the political from an exter-
nal point of view, while remaining outside of the sphere of the political. In
other words, the political is an auto-referential concept: it defines itself.14

As such, the political has many parallels with security as defined and
analysed by Ole Wæver.15 Security is indeed a political process.16 More-
over, just as Wæver analyses the processes of securitization and de-
securitization, one would have to analyse the processes of politicization
and depoliticization when approaching the concept of the political.17 Secu-
ritization, i.e. the process of transformation of a societal problem into a
security problem (through discourse Wæver would add), may be defined as a specific kind of politicization. Both the politicization and the securitization of an issue confer a particular salience to it. The specificity of securitization lies however, according to Wæver, in the fact that it calls for emergency measures by invoking an existential threat to a particular community. Therefore, security may be defined as the ‘Schmittian realm of the political’. I will not here develop this parallel, nor focus on the theoretical implications of this specific perspective on the political. If suffices here to highlight that politicization, as opposed to securitization, does not necessarily imply the recourse to exceptional means (‘all means necessary’) or the polarization between friend and foe. The specific feature of politicization is rather to confer a particular salience to a societal problem thus thought of as essentially linked to the fundamental condition of collective life. This also implies that actors other than the state can enter into a political relation and that there is virtually no limit to the societal topics that can be politicized. The advantage of this last perspective is that it allows for the sociological analysis of the processes related to the political. This is not to say that other perspectives have to be dismissed, but rather that the latter perspective encompasses the others in the sense that it offers a general perspective on the specific definitions of the political. Its inevitable weakness is, however, that it does not provide a definitive definition of the political. But this weakness is precisely what frees this perspective from any suspicion of having a political agenda itself. Thus, it is this latter perspective that will guide this analysis.

The aim of this chapter is to explore and analyse the relation between the political and some of the military practices of the ‘war against terrorism’ in Afghanistan and Iraq. This will imply a focus on the relation between security and the political, between securitization and politicization. However, my intent is neither to present new facts, nor to make a detailed analysis of the facts already available on these military operations. Rather, the idea is to raise some important questions related to the military dimension of the so-called ‘war against terrorism’. These questions concern the general dynamics of the ‘wars’ being waged, but also some of the more specific military and non-military means used. They also concern the potential impact of military interventions on local social systems, as well as the intellectual tools that can be used to analyse these new security practices in terms of international political sociology. The elements of political theory presented here serve the objective of laying the foundation for a more empirically informed sociological analysis of the political interactions between external military forces and local social systems.

This chapter is structured in two parts. The first part tries to explain why the analysis of the political interactions between external forces and local social systems is so important. It seeks to argue that the issue of the political and of political relations lies at the core of the raison d’être of contemporary interventions. It also highlights the complexity of the issue.
Indeed, the multiplicity of actors involved along with the military (and often in close coordination with it) in these interventions, and the networks that they form, make the political analysis of these interactions complex. The second part tries, therefore, to propose sociological tools for the analysis of the political relations and processes involving external forces and local societies, while applying these tools to approach the social processes induced by the different networked actors (private military companies, humanitarian organizations, etc.) involved in contemporary military interventions.

From the securitization of domestic political orders to the new military interventionism

The aim of this first part is to identify some of the elements that are at stake in the recent USA-led military interventions, which claim to have the political at their core, while often depoliticizing the representation of the enemy. These interventions see the military engaging in missions that reach far beyond their primary role ‘to wage and win the nation’s war’, while private actors are simultaneously mobilized in the war effort. Consequently, as it will be shown, the analysis of the political interactions between the intervening forces and the local societies becomes somewhat complex.

The securitization of political orders and the logic of military interventionism

In order to understand the dynamics underlying the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is necessary to situate them in a broader historical context of external interventions in domestic political orders. As a matter of fact, they share common features with the counter-insurgency operations and the ‘small wars’ of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America and in South-East Asia, as well as with the interventions in the so-called low-intensity conflicts (LIC) of the 1980s. In these interventions, it is the relation between the civilian population and a specific historical construction of the political – generally the state – that lies at the centre of the securitization process. These interventions have been one of the expressions of a reading of international relations, in which the very nature of the political and constitutional order of other states is considered a security issue. The securitization of the relation between a foreign ‘civil society’ and a foreign state can be traced back to the discourses on counter-insurgency and/or LICs, in which the possibility of political upheavals or internal instability was considered a threat to international security by mainly Western states. It is the weakness of the state, as compared to the social forces it is supposed to contain and control, that is thought of as the main security concern. This view, which differs from more traditional security
concerns (interstate wars), has led to an interest in ‘unconventional warfare’. It has been the driving factor behind the development of new ‘unconventional’ military practices and concepts during the cold war, such as the US concept of foreign internal defence that very explicitly illustrates the security concerns that have motivated these interventions.23

The construction of the nature of political orders as a security issue

Central to these new security discourses is the concept of ‘failed states’ that since the late-1950s has been the main source of legitimization of external interventions and has put a special emphasis on the need for political reconstruction.24 The CIA and other US security agencies frequently financed research around this topic, thus fuelling the securitization of the issue of the nature and internal structure of foreign states.25 Of course, the very concept of the failed state is questionable. Its main political function is to legitimize interferences in foreign social systems. But, collaterally, it also puts the focus on the restoration of its diametric counterpart, the ‘successful state’.26 During the cold war, this meant that support was given to anti-communist, but often authoritarian, regimes either by keeping them in place in the case of insurgency or guerrilla warfare,27 or by restoring them in case of revolution or coup d’état.28 In some cases, it has even led the US-military to engage in pro-insurgency, as in Nicaragua after the Sandinistas came to power. This was one of the tasks of the US military, and particularly of the Special Operation Forces, during the cold war era.

These discourses on failed states have prevailed after the end of the cold war and remain a powerful factor in the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the Bush administration it is stated that ‘America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones’.29 But the difference with the counter-insurgency and LIC interventions of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is that, in the liberal version of the failed state, it is the absence of democratic decision-making structures, as well as the absence of ‘good governance’ and liberal management that is a justification for interventionism. In this new version of failed states, the explicitely stated objectives of the interventions are not only to build democratic and accountable institutions, but also to build a ‘civil society’. In other words, it is the paradigm of the liberal state that supplies the discursive guidelines of these kinds of interventions. The ‘successful state’ is now an idealized version of the Western state and, since political bodies are no longer considered as preformed, as in the Schmittian or Clausewitzian reading, military interventions are to actively participate in the ‘shaping’ and the transformation of them.

The importance of the political, and the way it is thought to be perceived by the potential enemy, is characteristic of the discourses on these
interventions. It is the interaction between the political representations of the ‘locals’ and the structure of the foreign state that lies at the centre of the intervention and even more so of the post-conflict phase of the operation. The aim is to install a particular kind of polity and not only to defeat a government. Two reasons are given for this. Either it is considered that the characteristics of the domestic political order will determine the foreign policy of the state (Iraq for example);30 or, the argument goes, if the state fails, terrorist groups might find a safe haven in these countries and destabilize the region or the world (Afghanistan and Iraq).31 But in both cases, the relation between the individual other and the political is placed at the centre of the securitization process.

Thus, these kinds of interventions are interesting in the sense that the stake is not to impose a political will on another preformed political will, which is the Clausewitzian perspective, but to transform the political representations of the potential enemy. This is especially the case in the so-called post-conflict phase. In other words, the stake is no longer to ‘win the war’ but to ‘win the peace’. The securitization of the political (as perceived by the potential enemy) implies a radical change in scope as compared to classical interstate wars. The concept of ‘political wars’ might sound tautological from a Clausewitzian perspective, but it makes sense when considering the discourses on these interventions because they place the relation of the enemy to the political at the heart of the operations.32

As a matter of fact, these interventions follow the same logic as psychological operations (PSYOPS) in counter-insurgency: the aim oscillates between the influence on the perception and political will of the ‘actual enemy’ on the field, and the influence on the domestic public opinion, as represented by the Congress for example in the case of the USA, considered as a ‘potential enemy’ of the intervention.

The political dimension of these interventions is particularly salient for two reasons. First, the aim is to transform the foreign polity by diffusing liberal norms and politics: the aim of the political and military strategy is to impose a liberal model based upon the principles of ‘good governance’, ‘democracy’, ‘privatization’ and ‘transparency’. Second, and this is the specifically biopolitical dimension, the methods officially used not only imply to govern through the threat of death, but also to impose a specific political model through the management of populations, of their specific properties and dynamics, and finally of life itself.33

However, there is a wide discrepancy between these discourses on the political and some of the military practices on the ground. The latter oscillate between a political approach to the local military resistance, on the one hand, and practices of eradication, in which the enemy is considered as apolitical or at least as outside of the realm of the political, on the other hand.34 One of the reasons for this discrepancy is to be found in the reticence of the US military, as well as of an important part of the current US Administration, to engage the troops in ‘peace-keeping’, ‘peace-building’
or, even worse, ‘nation-building’. Another reason has to do with the designation and the representation of the enemy as an essentially apolitical entity. But in either case, the result is that the interest in a political approach to crisis-management is said to prevail (once the ‘terrorists’ are eradicated), while the means actually mobilized for this enterprise are limited. It is to the latter element that I now turn.

The ‘new enemy’, ‘new wars’ and the twilight of the political

Many of the military practices on the fields of Iraq and Afghanistan are radically different from what the discourse on the political dimension of these interventions would imply. The designation of the armed opponent as ‘terrorist’, and the subsequent denial of the political nature of the ‘actual enemy’ (as opposed to the potential enemy, i.e. local populations), often lead these interventions to include practices of eradication against the enemy with whom any form of recognition, and thus of negotiation, must be absent. Indeed, ‘one cannot negotiate with terrorists’: the discrepancy between the position in the first years of Operation Enduring Freedom of the US command in Afghanistan – ‘the Taliban has to be eradicated’ – and of the Afghan government – ‘the Taliban can and must be co-opted into the system or at least negotiated with’ – is in this regard revealing. The paradox originates in the fact that the enemy is denied the status of enemy in the Clausewitzian sense. It has become a mere criminal or a terrorist, and as such is named but not identified. The paradox of these kinds of interventions, in which the political dimension is both affirmed and denied, can be read through the distinction made between the abstract categories of the potential enemy, on the one hand, and the actual enemy, on the other. Of course, these categories should not be considered here as descriptive of an objective reality but as constitutive of the representations of the military forces involved in these fields.

The potential enemy in these new wars is constituted by the civilian population that does not pose any resistance to the military forces, but that is always suspected of being capable of entering into resistance in case of disagreement with the political options of the external forces. This category is theoretically to be dealt with on the political level by acting pre-emptively upon its political beliefs and representations: PSYOPS, local consensus building, co-optation, etc. This category is absolutely encompassing. The whole of the local populations, as well one might add the domestic public opinion, are treated as potential or virtual enemies in a pre-emptive way.

The actual enemy is thought of as a loose category, considered as constituted of criminals and terrorists. Often the latter are not even distinguished. This category is of course distinct from the first in the sense that what is focused upon is no longer what an individual might become (friend or enemy) but what he is and what he will stay (terrorist or criminal). The
only treatments are: delegitimization, when the individuals representing
this category are not identified; and eradication, when they are. In other
words, military pressure is no longer perceived as a way of defeating the
enemies’ strategies in order to impose one’s own political will, but rather
as a means of eliminating an otherwise irreducible evil.

However, the problem lies precisely in the identification of the enemy
that is named. By his very nature as a terrorist, he is considered as furtive
and stealthy, always hiding in the local population but carrying no distincti-
tive signs, avoiding revealing himself, but always ready to strike. As
George W. Bush put it in a speech about the new enemies after the cold
war: ‘today we’re not so sure who “they” are, but we know they’re there’.37 Once defined in these confusing terms, the enemy cannot be
fought against without identifying him with a specific population group:
Talibans, Baathists, Islamists, foreign Arabs, etc. The abstract categories of
the potential and the actual enemy are thus to a certain extent conflated in
practice. Since military casualties must be avoided at any cost in the US
view, suspicion becomes a virtue. In other words, the politics of military
confrontation becomes generalized to groups of populations (as opposed
to individuals), however restricted they are.

What is really at stake is thus the question of the identification of the
enemy. A war without identifiable enemies is an interminable war and,
 hence, even the ‘peace’ following these interventions becomes a con-
tinuation of war by other means.38 The war simply changes from a military
operation to a vast police operation.39 The police dimension of these inter-
ventions is indeed so pervasive that one might call them ‘international
police operations’.40 As opposed to many of the counter-insurgency opera-
tions of the 1960s and 1970s, many of which were, however, much more
lethal than the current interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, these mili-
tary interventions do not officially deal with the actual enemy on the polit-
cal level. The question is not how to make the enemy adhere to a certain
representation of the political good but how to identify, target and elimi-
nate him. When observing certain practices, it seems that these wars are
not even political in the Clausewitzian sense because the aim of the war
itself is the elimination of the enemy, and not the achievement of a more
advantageous position in the subsequent negotiation of the practical solu-
tion to the opposition of political wills.41

The actual military policy on the ground often consists of denying the
enemy the privilege of having political motives in order to reduce his
action to mere ideological, religious or criminal motivations.42 Thus, the
enemy is not perceived of as a political enemy, the hostis in Schmittian
terms, which would confer a certain degree of reciprocity and relationality
to the conflict, but as an evil to eradicate. The enemy ceases to be a polit-
ical actor to become a mere political issue. In other words, the terrorist
relation in a situation of armed conflict is an apolitical relation in the
sense that the political nature of the clandestine groups involved is not
recognized. They are not thought of as acting primarily following a particular representation of the ideal form of collective life. This also implies that the means of approaching the ‘security problem’ they create is perceived as apolitical. It is mainly a matter of technologies of surveillance, control and elimination.

However, this tension between the political objectives of the intervention, i.e. the [re]construction of a legitimate Iraqi and Afghani state, and the apolitical and even technological approach to the ‘enemy’, has been resolved through a close coordination between a myriad of civilian actors and the military forces. The delegation of non-military activities to civilian actors allows the military to refrain from engaging in activities (humanitarian, rehabilitation, reconstruction) that are seen as a threat to military identity, but that are necessary when considering the humanitarian and political justifications of the interventions. The civil–military objectives pursued by the new interventions have thus reinforced the already prevailing tendency of the networking of warfare analysed by Dillon and Reid.43 This is all the more true as the US army is generally very hostile to non-military functions stigmatized as ‘nation-building activities’ and wants to withdraw as fast as possible in order to avoid ‘mission creep’,44 while passing the ‘civilian’ functions to civilian organizations. Two types of actors, involved in this multifaceted and multidimensional war by proxy and through delegation, will be focused on here: humanitarian organizations and private military companies (PMCs). Both are closely associated to the military operations and both have an apolitical conception of their respective role, in the sense that the political representations of the local populations – and the underlying processes of (de)politicization – are not considered as pertinent to their activities.

Network-centric wars and the twilight of the military

As seen previously, there is a decentralization of the execution of the political–military plan by delegation to a very diverse set of actors (professional soldiers with civilian status, i.e. PMCs; civilians with military status, i.e. civil affairs personnel).45 We are witnessing a transformation of the methods of military control and surveillance that can be observed through the diversification of the means used. The decentralization of the battlefield has emphasized the network-centric dimension of the liberal way of war.46 Amongst other factors, it has been brought about by a change in definition of the enemy. Indeed, by blurring the distinction between friend and foe, these interventions mark the end of war as a limited social field of practice and, thus, of the military as a specific profession linked to a specific identity with fixed frontiers. As a consequence, we are paradoxically seeing in Afghanistan and Iraq military operations that are considered as ‘peace operations’, ‘security and stability operations’, or even as ‘military operations other than war’, banning any reference to war. Yet, these operations
are simultaneously presented as being part of a ‘global war against terrorism’, thus reinforcing the paradox.

*Civil–military cooperation and the co-optation of the humanitarians*

One type of actor involved in these networks of war is represented by the many civilians that intervene on the fields of Afghanistan and Iraq: NGO’s, quasi-NGOs such as the International Red Cross, international organizations with humanitarian preoccupations such as the UN, governmental development agencies, etc. They are very different in nature but often converge in their humanitarian rhetoric. Their activities are often closely coordinated with the military operations through what is called civil-military cooperation. Thus, Colin Powell, when Secretary of State, has described NGOs as ‘force multipliers’ and as members of the ‘combat team’ in the war against terrorism.47 Of course, the private voluntary organizations cannot be analysed as a homogeneous group. They are more or less keen to cooperate with the military on the external operational fields.48 Some of them, especially those working closely with the governmental development agencies such as the American USAID, are however closely coordinating their operations with the military through civil-military cooperation. Hence, many authors and NGOs have firmly criticized the militarization of the humanitarian activities.49 Civil–military cooperation could be defined as the operational function aiming at the coordination between the military command and the multiple civilian actors on the operational field: NGOs, local administrations, governmental agencies, UN agencies, etc.50 However, this function often leads the military to engage directly in activities related to humanitarian action and reconstruction. Among these activities are the restoration of infrastructures and public services, the participation in the restoration of the rule of law and the promotion of economic, administrative and social activity. Civil–military cooperation is then the expression of the broadening of the military mandate in external interventions. This function creates networks between the civilian world and the military world through reservists being part of both, and thus capable of straddling the frontier between them. We might both speak of a militarization of humanitarian missions and a very relative civilianization of the military.51 The units in charge of this coordination, civil affairs units in the case of the US military, are generally composed of civilians with military status (reservists). These activities are, however, generally undertaken in close coordination with civilian actors, as is for example the case within the framework of the Provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan (PRTs).

Yet, in spite of what the political discourses claim, the underlying logic of these practices is often not one of political reconstruction. On the contrary, civil–military cooperation is frequently part of a strategy aiming at
the building of a local consensus around the presence of a foreign military, the so-called ‘hearts and minds approach’, in order to avoid local military resistance (doctrine of ‘force protection’). In a context in which the focus of the military still is on the idea that its mission is to ‘fight and win the nation’s war’, the prevailing representation is that the coordination with civilian actors must serve the specific military mission. Hence, the focus is rather on so-called ‘quick impact projects’, for example, the building of schools, roads or wells, than on political reconstruction. This is often the case for the PRTs in Afghanistan, that were however, said to be created to support the ‘Bonn process’ and to extend the authority of the ‘central’ government beyond Kabul.

From the point of view of the humanitarian actors, the political dimension of the process of (re)construction is also often considered as secondary. Their doctrine of neutrality/impartiality is frequently based on a ‘needs theory’, inspired by authors such as John Burton, in which the aim is to satisfy basic human needs regardless of political considerations. These actors consider themselves as exterior to the political struggles of local societies since their main role is to satisfy universal biological needs. As such, their approach of security is apolitical; their focus is on the individual as a biological being and not on the fundamental condition of collective life. In other words, their conception of intervention is founded on the instrumental equation of means and ends. The ends themselves are thought of as being outside of the struggles for political legitimacy since they are universal and founded on a tangible reality, i.e. the body and the psyche. This seemed to be the conception of the UN in Iraq in the first phase, in which it was not yet involved in issues of political (re)construction. In some cases, this conception justifies cooperation between civilian actors and the military as long as it serves the purpose of the former to satisfy biologically founded needs. This is not to say that there has been no resistance to the potential instrumentalization of humanitarian actors by the military. However, this resistance was often resting upon the argument that cooperation could be counter-productive to the humanitarian ends, or that it could represent a threat to the neutrality of these actors. Only rarely was it relying on a general disagreement with the political options of the military.

The network-centric ways of warfare that question the very distinction between the civilian and the military, the private and the public, thus transform and make more complex the field of war. However, the diverse actors involved often widely neglect the (de)politicization processes that characterize the local societies concerned and, hence, contradict the prevailing discourse on the centrality of the political. From this point of view, the case of private military companies (PMCs) seems not to be an exception.
The network of PMCs and the privatization of security

The second type of actor that will be focused upon to illustrate the diversification of the means used, as well as the strategies of delegation in these wars, is the private military company. One of the important specificities of the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan is the importance given to private operators in security-related or even traditional military missions. Just as some of the humanitarian missions are considered as relevant to the military, some of the military or security-related missions are outsourced to private operators in order to reduce military casualties, diminish costs and increase the availability of the public professional soldiers. This evolution further confirms the blurring of the traditional boundaries between the civilian and the military, and increases the role of formal and informal networks in the waging of these ‘new’ wars.

PMCs might be considered as having penetrated the contemporary way of war, thereby giving a certain credit to the idea of a progressive and partial privatization of warfare. According to a study realized in 2003, PMCs represent the second biggest contingent in Iraq with 20,000 private military contractors, after the US contingent but before the British one. According to published figures, 10 per cent of the military personnel in Iraq would be private. The biggest contributors are US (e.g. DynCorps, Vinnel), British (e.g. Global Risk International) and South African (e.g. Meteoric Tactical Solutions, Erinys International) ones. Following another study, there would be 1,500 South African private soldiers, nationals of a country that officially refused Operation Freedom in Iraq, as compared for example to the 1,100 Dutch troops, nationals of a country that officially participates in the operation. This development offers a powerful insight into the reason for the massive involvement of PMCs in a war that from the beginning was, to say the least, internationally contested. Private agency seems in some cases to be more important than officially state-sponsored initiatives, even in the field of military and foreign policy. The international allocation of coercive resources seems progressively to lean towards the private sector, which from the point of view of historical sociology is both a very recent and astonishing trend. Of the 87 billion dollars allowed in 2003 by the Congress for the broader ‘war against terrorism’ in Iraq and Central Asia, one third would be spent on contracts with these companies. Needless to say, they have become an essential component of the US, and British, way of warfare and even more so of the ‘post-war’ operations. These companies carry out many sophisticated missions as security consultants or advisors. For example, they have guarded the headquarters of Paul Bremer and the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, as well as pipelines, ministries and official buildings in Iraq, trained the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi police, protected President Hamid Kharzaï and assessed the security situation for the occupation forces in Iraq.
This engagement of PMCs raises many questions relative to the accountability of these firms, their political control by governments and their long-term effects on military planning and decision-making. Thus, a debate on PMCs has arisen. PMCs are frequently analysed normatively from two perspectives. According to the first, the supposed efficiency of the market, as compared to the state, in the field of security would justify considering them as an alternative to the classical means of military intervention in the case of international crises. According to the second perspective, the pre-eminence of the state, perceived as the only responsible and accountable actor in the field of security, would cast a shadow of illegitimacy on PMCs, and any intrusion of private actors in the field of security policies would be a crime against sovereignty. Consequently, the very structure of the current debate on PMCs turns every criticism against them into an apology of the state. Moreover, this way of framing the debate makes the case for PMCs particularly easy to make: they are not a threat to the international state system because they are hired by states to defend states: the only criticism addressed to them is therefore invalid.

But to put the question in such binary terms inevitably leads to one of the two pitfalls that must be avoided when trying to conceptualize the phenomenon of PMCs. The first consists of considering them as an expression of the end of the capacity of governments to control the means of violence. This is only true if one reifies the state to the point of considering it as a unitary actor the frontiers of which, with society, the market and the private sector, are linear and intangible. If this view is correct, everything that is not inside of the frontiers of the state must be outside of it. But this view does not take sufficient account of the porosity of the boundaries between the public and the private, of the transversal fields of security practices that invalidate the distinction between public and private, as well as of the strategies of reciprocal instrumentalization between actors positioning themselves in the private or in the public sector. As a consequence, rather than adopting the narrative of the irresistible decline of the state, it is necessary to analyse sociologically the personnel of these firms in order to highlight their relations to the traditional professionals of security: military, police, intelligence services, etc. The practices of PMCs and the international policies of governmental bureaucracies are difficult to distinguish. Rather than private, these firms are ‘para-private’ in the sense that they are part of networks that are transversal to the simple opposition between private and public.

This notion of the ‘para-private’ sector also allows the second pitfall to be avoided. Indeed, some conclude from the close ties between PMCs and governmental bureaucracies that the former are mere instruments of states and their strategies. But such a neo-realist approach of the phenomenon also falls under the criticism of identifying the state as a unitary and rational actor. It forgets the relative autonomy of the networks of security professionals (both public and private) in relation to the government. The
government is not a hierarchical pyramid, but rather a set of interconnected but often distinct networks: networks of power, networks of accumulation, etc. In other words, PMCs proceed neither from the pure market, nor from a reified conception of the state. Hence, the normative debate on them is, as has already been pointed out, biased.

However, rather than developing on all the consequences of this bias, the phenomenon of the privatization of the military operations and the subsequent institutionalization of a security-market will here be analysed through what has been said about the political and its underlying processes of (de)politicization. This will allow us to show that alternative criticisms can be addressed to PMCs. Indeed by showing how PMCs are both officially outside of the realm of the institutionalized form of the political that the state often is considered to be, and linked to the policies of governmental security bureaucracies through transversal fields of security, as well as through individuals straddling the frontier between the private and the public, this part inevitably raises the question of how their action and their functions relate to the political. If, as we have posited, security is a political process, and the state claims to have a legitimate monopoly on the political, what will the effects be when private firms claim to offer security to the highest bidder while, by virtue of their non-governmental character, they refute any argument that would tend to assign political intentions or consequences to their action? Does the privatization of security equate to its depoliticization in spite of the close connections between the world of PMCs and that of governments? Does the privatization of security on the contrary imply a delegation of political authority to non-state actors?

In other words, when trying to analyse the political implications of complex military interventions, involving both public and private actors, claiming both to take account of the local representations of the political while denying political status to any form of resistance, it is necessary to have sociological tools dealing with the political processes of (de)politicization, and at the same time showing in what way these processes structure social relations. Such tools could help us to conceptualize the political interactions between external forces and local population, while allowing for the analysis of the concrete military practices that characterize these interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Conceptualizing interactions between ‘external’ forces and ‘local societies’: bringing the political back in**

One way of bringing the political back in to military practices that are self-perceived as apolitical, is to stop focusing on the external forces themselves in order to analyse something less easy to grasp: their relation to the societies with which they inevitably interact once they have ‘won’ the war against a state and are forced to engage in a more difficult ‘war’, i.e. the ‘war’ against local forms of resistance to the political options of the
C. Olsson

external powers, and the ‘war’ against the adverse political effects that the very presence of external forces inevitably induces. There are several ways of conceptualizing social interactions between external actors and local social systems. Following the point of departure of this text, I shall analyse them through the lenses of the processes of (de)politicization. In doing so, I shall focus on the two actors that I have already described here – PMCs and humanitarian organizations. A third kind of actor directly involved along with the military and the humanitarian ones in these operations would be the political actors, not in the broad or analytical sense of the term, but in the sense of actors labelled and self-represented as such. These actors will not be analysed here.

A framework for the analysis of political processes in external interventions

Once the (de)politicization processes are conceived of as embedded in social relations, the question that arises is in what way the representations of the actors involved in this relation interact. Do they agree on the politicization of a particular societal problem or not? Do they all consider this issue to be a political issue, or an apolitical one? The answer to this question is not self-evident. The relational definition of the political also implies that social actors can foster politicization processes without having knowledge thereof. In other words, political processes are not necessarily the outcome of intentional strategies but rather of relations in which no actor can lay a claim on the final outcome. Thus, following a Foucauldian methodology, when analysing politicization processes the focus has rather to be put on the effects of power than on its underlying intentions. The objective mechanism producing the outcomes of inter-subjective relations is to a certain extent independent from the intentions of the actors involved in these relations.

Hence, there might be a discrepancy between the representation of some actors as compared to that of others, whereas they are all part of the same political relation. This is not to say that the political relation is an objective structure in which some actors could be mistaken about the relation of which they are part; but rather that the interaction does not necessarily tend towards a convergence of representations. Two ideal-typical configurations will be analysed here. First, the one in which there is a general convergence and agreement around the politicization of an issue or of an actor (symmetric relations); second, the configuration in which the (de)politicization processes of specific issues or actors give rise to radically different interpretations (asymmetric relations).

In order to introduce the first ideal-type, I shall try to analyse what defines a political actor. A political actor is not only an actor that is part of a political relation structured around a political issue. He could be defined by two factors. First, the actor has to perceive himself as political...
in the sense of perceiving his role and his actions to be essentially linked to
the fundamental condition of collective life. Second, this actor and his
practices have to be politicized by the other actors involved with him in
social relations. In this case, as with the classical and idealized representa-
tion of the sovereign nation-state, there is a convergence of the social
representations of the different actors involved in the political relation.
This relation can be said to be symmetric. This social construction of the
political, provided it is institutionalized and legitimized by the field of poli-
tics, might structure very strong power relations between the actors, but it
also introduces a principle of negotiation into the relation. On the one
hand, symmetric relations confer political authority to the actor that is
politcized. By definition, authority, as defined for example by Arendt,75
only exists provided it is recognized by the ones on which it is exercised.
On the other hand, since the political refers to the notion of collectivity
and of collective life, and since the political status has to be bargained col-
lectively, it involves a certain degree of reciprocity. Of course, such
reciprocity does not necessarily imply democracy as we understand it. If
this were the case, this analysis would inevitably fall into the trap of ethno-
centrism. It is therefore important to recognize that there exist other forms
of political reciprocity than the one formalized in constitutional Western-
style democracy.

Nevertheless, a general consensus on the political nature of a specific
actor does not necessarily imply that this actor is considered as legitimate.
Here, the distinction between the political, on the one hand, and politics as
a specific field of practice, on the other, must again be insisted upon. The
practices of an actor can be politicized without him being considered as a
legitimate player in the field of politics. In this case, one might speak of a
negative politicization. The actor is considered as exterior to the legitimate
game of ordinary politics, and action will be taken to undermine his legiti-
macy to enter this field.76 But by doing this, this actor is inevitably politi-
cized, not only in the sense that his actions and practices are considered a
political issue, but also in the sense that his actions are thought of as pri-
marily motivated by his conception of collective life and not by his indi-
vidual interests, which would be the case of the criminal for example.77
The actor might even be politicized as a political enemy. In this case,
intense struggles for political legitimation, accompanied by attempts to
delegitimate the other, might arise. This leads us directly to the second
ideal-type.

The second ideal-type is the situation in which there is a social uncer-
tainty about what is political, about what issues and/or actors are to be
(de) politicized, and in which the political narratives are embattled. In these
situations, actors perceiving themselves as being outside of the realm of the
political, and hence considering their practices as merely technical for
example, might be considered by other actors as having a political reach
or even political motivations. The reverse is also true: actors perceiving
themselves as political might be denied any political status. The political relations can in this case be said to be asymmetric. This is notably the case when police operations, in which the enemy is defined by the mere technical fact that he does not abide by the law, hit political dissidents. Often violent struggles for political legitimacy, as well as for the political delegitimization of the other, become inevitable. But this does not mean that any form of political relation is interrupted, at least if one defines political relations as social relations that are structured by the actors’ postures towards the political. The central question is what are the mechanisms of interaction in situations of uncertainty: do they tend towards convergence, or is there a tendency towards polarization of political representations?

There probably is no general answer to this question but certainly both outcomes are possible, depending on a set of social factors that cannot be developed here. Suffice it to say that one of these factors is the existence or not of an institutionalized field of politics that manages to homogenize social representations and thus to establish symmetric relations. If this mechanism does not operate, political uncertainty might foster dynamics of polarization of political representations. Therefore, it should be noted that these questions related to asymmetric political relations, and to embattled narratives on the political, become particularly salient in situations of ‘exception’ in which ordinary politics has been suspended. They arise when the institutionalized field of politics is no longer the point of convergence of the greater part of the (de)politicization processes of societal issues and actors. It goes without saying that this is precisely the situation prevailing in external military intervention: the violent upheaval caused by the suspension of the ‘ordinary’ political order by foreign soldiers irrupting into the political space causes politics to become an essentially contested field, thus reinforcing struggles for political (de)legitimization as well as for (de)politicization. The asymmetries that might ensue in the subjective representations of the actors involved in political relations might give rise to a set of seemingly irreducible misunderstandings and conflicts, rather than introducing a principle of negotiation.

It must here be added that, of course, these two situations are merely ideal-typical. In actual situations there is rather a continuum. The few analytical tools seen in this section will, however, be used to analyse the political processes underlying the massive recourse to PMCs and to civil-military cooperation in the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These processes will also be analysed through their relation to the processes of securitization.

**Politicization/depoliticization processes through the example of civil–military cooperation and PMCs**

Drawing on what has been said in the first part about the paradoxical relation between contemporary military interventions and the concept of the...
political, I shall try to analyse the implications of private military firms and civil–military cooperation for the interactions between intervening forces and local societies. As I shall seek to show, the recourse to PMCs both reveals and accentuates the depoliticization of the intervening forces’ perception of the local populations. The recourse to PMCs in the phase of ‘stabilization’ rests upon a false assumption (‘the resistance is not motivated by political representations and, therefore, the attempts to crack down on it will not be perceived as political in nature either’) that might produce adverse effects. The military and security practices on these fields are often inherently political to the local populations. Second, and this will be the second part of this section, civil–military cooperation leads paradoxically to a politicization by the local populations of activities that are self-perceived as being external to the realm of the political. This could be a powerful factor, as I shall try to argue, in the growing and sometimes even lethal misunderstandings between humanitarian actors and local populations in conflict-ridden societies.

**PMCs, the depoliticization of conflict-resolution and its possible adverse effects**

The recourse to PMCs often rests on a false assumption as far as the political is concerned. Thus, contrary to what is generally assumed, PMCs do not represent the ideal solution to the so-called new international conflicts. It is therefore important to show why the analysis of the supporters of the ‘outsourcing of war’, like David Shearer, is biased. The favourable stance of the latter towards PMCs rests on the general assumption that the latter ‘have to be considered as an arms system’. This purely instrumental and technical approach to PMCs supposes that the recourse to coercion produces the same effects regardless of the identity of the coercive actors involved: ‘PMCs are an arms system just like any other arms system’. It is based upon the idea that power, for instance military power, is a quantifiable capacity. Consequently, when confronted with particular situations of conflict, it suffices to identify the actor that holds the necessary amount of capacity. However, as shown by Foucault, power is a relational process and not a pure capacity. Hence, it does not produce the same effects when the actors involved vary. A social relation will not be same if the identity of the actors entering into this relation varies.

A technical conception of the recourse to PMCs, as opposed to a political conception, can thus be defined by the assumption that it is possible to make a distinction between the recourse to violence (and its consequences) and the perception that the local populations have of this recourse and of the actors involved in it. This assumption is false. Conflict resolution is not a mere technical matter in which military capacities are modulated in order to produce a situation of peace, but a political process in which dynamics of political (de)legitimization, and of (de)politicization, play a
crucial role. It would be naive to think one can achieve civil peace solely through superior fire-power. Thus, as has been shown by John Crowley, any positivist sociology excluding the dimension of ethics and of political legitimacy from conflict-resolution is also incapable of thinking of a sustainable peace. It is therefore necessary to focus on the social identity (and the way it is perceived) of the actors who claim to keep, enforce or build peace.84 Relying on PMCs to establish security is to postulate that security is a technical problem and that, for this very reason, it can be regulated by market forces. It is precisely because protean forms of violence in the ‘South’ are too often considered as a mere technical problem, or at least as an apolitical problem,85 that the idea of hiring PMCs to solve these problems has been able to emerge. These firms often think of themselves as specialized in ‘low-intensity conflicts’ characterized by ‘deregulated’, ‘irrational’, ‘chaotic’ or merely ‘incomprehensible’ forms of violence. Yet, these conflicts have to be situated within the context of processes of political (de)legitimization.86 Therefore, the mere technical (military) competence in matters of ‘conflict-management’ could not be considered as sufficient. By relying on PMCs, the problem of political legitimacy is overlooked and sacrificed to the sole problem of efficiency.

This error, particularly salient in Shearer’s argumentation, induces adverse effects. First, by adopting the posture of apolitical technicians of conflict regulation, these firms are not very prone to take account of the transformations of political relations that their actions induce. Second, as lucrative organizations exogenous to the actual political conflict, they are not always considered by the local population as legitimately authorized to resolve it by force, and thus they are easily politicized negatively, as political enemies or at least as a political problem. In other words, the political relation between local populations and PMCs might become highly asymmetric. The idea of a ‘security market’ fails then to analyse the concept of security through its relation to the political by reducing it to its technical, tactic or strategic dimension. As demonstrated by authors like Ron Lipschutz, the concept of security is however constitutive of the political in the sense that every security discourse also contains implicitly a certain representation of the political community that must be defended, as well as of the enemies against which it must be defended.87 It defines the political community by drawing its symbolic frontiers.

Thus, even if the recourse to PMCs can reinforce a government militarily, it often weakens it in terms of political legitimacy. By analysing the PMCs as purely technical, apolitical tools, one necessarily fails to grasp their political and structural effects. This was demonstrated by the intervention of Executive Outcomes in Angola (1993–96) and Sierra Leone (1995–97). Even if the firm managed to reverse the power balance in both cases, the respective wars went on as the peace-negotiations failed. In Angola, the very recourse to Executive Outcomes simultaneously permitted and weakened the peace process: eventually Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA
abandoned the 1994 Lusaka agreement once the PMC was gone. In the case of Sierra Leone, the recourse to Executive Outcomes turned the military against the government that had engaged ‘mercenaries’ thus creating an alliance, led by Johnny Paul Koroma, between the military and the rebels. This would eventually lead to the 1997 coup against the democratically elected president Kabbah after the firm had left.88 While most of the analysts thought the South-African PMC was part of the solution, it rather seems it eventually became part of the problem as well. Only a political reading, i.e. a reading that considers the processes of (de)politicization and of political (de)legitimization, can account for this.

The same thing might be true as far as the current situation in Iraq is concerned. Indeed, the PMCs are not only engaged in the protection of foreign personalities and businessmen, but also in public security and even in ‘mission critical crisis management’, often with highly sophisticated military means including helicopters and advanced computer systems. This was, for example, shown when firms such as Blackwater became engaged in direct combat in the city of Najaf against the ‘Army of Mehdi’ of the Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr during its highly politically motivated clashes with the US army throughout the whole of southern Iraq in 2004. However, there are doubts as to the capacity of PMCs to lower the levels of violence and appease the political tensions in Iraq. The inhabitants of Iraq are not very likely to recognize any political authority to PMCs. A negative politicization of these private companies seems more likely, especially since some companies hiring so-called ‘debriefers’ have been found to be directly involved in the acts of torture committed in the prison of Abu Ghraib.89 Rather than analysing PMCs as an arms system, one has therefore to analyse them in context, which means analysing them politically, as a political issue having political consequences, even when these companies see themselves asymmetrically as entirely apolitical.

This potential criticism of PMCs is much more far-reaching than the one according to which PMCs only play a role on the short term, whereas conflict-resolution necessitates a long-term perspective. It not only questions the temporality of the intervention of PMCs but also the very social identity of the actors, who define conflict-regulation in technical and not in political terms. Moreover, it goes a little further than the traditional criticisms that only focus on the intentions of these firms, for it also accounts for the non-intentional, yet potentially harmful effects of PMCs.90 It is not necessary to believe that PMCs are inherently neo-colonial or war-profiteers to question their capacity to play a positive role in conflicts. Finally, it shows that the argument of efficiency, notably of military efficiency, simply misses the point.
Civil–military cooperation and the politicization of humanitarian actors

The analysis of political processes and of the way they structure political relations also allows us to interpret particular forms of political violence prevailing in Afghanistan and Iraq. Humanitarian actors seem increasingly to be perceived as political actors in spite of their official apolitical stance. As already mentioned, their self-perception posits that they are involved in conflicts to satisfy basic human needs regardless of political considerations. These human needs are considered universal and unquestionable. The logic of humanitarian actors is then self-perceived as purely technical. Security is counted among these needs. Hence, many humanitarian actors do not see themselves as politically engaged, even when in some cases they ask the military and international police forces to stabilize the situation and to establish more security. The pertinent metaphor would here be the one of a doctor treating his patients on the basis of his scientific knowledge, rather than the one of a negotiator conscientious of the political will of his partners. The problem is that this reading of humanitarian practice is not universally shared. The political nature of security seems to complicate the task of making the apolitical stance of humanitarian organizations credible to local populations when they call for more security. Moreover, in a situation in which the local political structures are questioned and transformed, the activities of humanitarian NGOs and governmental agencies might be perceived as participating actively to the political legitimization of the new power-structures.

This is all the more true as their cooperation with military forces on the fields of Afghanistan and Iraq, although presented as linked to purely functional needs, might associate them with the political options of the military. This is, rather, consistent with the tactics of the military since, as mentioned above, humanitarian actors are partially instrumentalized in order to build consensus around the presence of international military forces. The militarization of humanitarian actors, criticized by many authors and NGOs, could hence also be a powerful factor in the negative politicization of their practices by some individuals or local groups. But these dynamics are largely ignored by many NGOs sticking to their self-perception as apolitical actors engaged in the satisfaction of needs that, because of their unquestionable and individual character, could not be thought of as being essentially linked to the fundamental condition of collective life. By thinking of themselves in this way, they fail to perceive the processes they might induce in local societies. They fail to recognize that their practices inevitably lead to (de)legitimization processes at the core of the social fabric. These processes are, however, easy to politicize by local political actors in a context in which the political structures are being transformed.

These considerations certainly offer an insight into the cruel bombings that targeted the offices of the UN and the IRC in Baghdad in 2003.
same can be said about the many NGO workers who have been murdered in cold blood in Afghanistan or ruthlessly abducted in Iraq. These acts were probably largely misunderstood and misinterpreted because of the neutral and apolitical stance of the actors involved. Moreover, the terrorist label played an important role in the depoliticizing interpretations of these events. Indeed, they were merely considered as criminal acts or desperate attempts on the part of former Baathists, Talibans or ‘foreign Arabs’ to recover their social position regardless of their political beliefs and convictions. However, an analysis in terms of (de)politicization gives us alternative tools to interpret some of the motives underlying these attacks. Even if the humanitarian actors perceived themselves as apolitical, the local actors and clandestine groups probably did not. There was an asymmetric political relation between the humanitarian organizations and parts of the local population. The latter might have considered humanitarian aid a highly political issue because of the unintentional legitimizing effects of humanitarian action on the military interventions. Since many humanitarian NGOs and agencies deny the potential political interpretations of their actions, they failed to adapt their strategies to this possibility by developing forms of technical cooperation with the military. Of course, to say this is in no way to justify the action taken by some militant groups. It might on the contrary help to avoid some of the destructive consequences of asymmetric political relations.

To complete this political analysis of the social interactions characterizing military interventions, the specific politicization process of securitization has to be focused upon. Securitization is a politicization process in the sense that it both gives high priority to the social issue that is securitized and links this issue to the very condition of collective life. Once this process is mastered by lucrative private organizations that think of themselves in apolitical terms, it might have particularly undesirable effects on local societies. The example of PMCs training local security forces here serves to highlight the importance of looking at political processes in external interventions.

**From political processes to processes of (in)securitization: the role of PMCs in the training of local security forces**

As has already been insisted upon, relations founded upon a symmetric politicization of a societal problem, in which the perceptions of the actors converge, might structure very strong power-relations as is the case with the idealized version of the nation-state. This is also what happens when PMCs train foreign security forces; here too, adverse effects might be expected. In order to prove this point, it is however necessary to conceptualize security. This conceptualization will allow us to go beyond a frequent approach to the privatization of military training, that focuses on the impact of this phenomenon on the professional public soldiers of the
countries that send the private military trainers, and not on its impact on
the processes of (in)securitization that affect the political space of the
target societies.96

Security cannot be considered to be a good or a market service because
it does not refer to an objective situation that would exist as a security
situation prior to it being labelled as such. Wæver, inspired by Derrida’s
reading of the linguistic pragmatism of Austin, has shown that security
does not refer to an objective environment of threats that would exist inde-
pendently of the security enunciation.97 On the contrary, security is con-
structed through an act of discourse that does not refer to a pre-existing
object of security but, on the contrary, transforms certain issues (con-
sidered for example as mere risks: accidental death, diseases, pollution)
to threats to security. Consequently, it is necessary to de-essentialize
security and cease to consider it as a ‘thing’ or as a ‘state of affairs’ exist-
ing independently of enunciation. Of course, this is not to say that the
social issues that are securitized (clandestine groups using violence,
killings, disease, economic crises, etc.) do not exist prior to their enuncia-
tion. It only means that, in the analysis of these phenomena as a security
problem, language is a determining reality. Security is the product of dis-
courses – as well as of social practices one would have to add98 – that
confer a particular political salience to certain societal issues and legitimiz-
e the recourse to emergency measures. Rather than to speak of ‘security’, as
if the term referred to a fixed reality, one would thus have to speak of the
process of securitization. In this context, the commodification by private
firms of security, considered as a ‘good’ or as a ‘service’, constitutes on the
contrary the ultimate objectivation of the concept.

This commodification is likely to have very concrete structural con-
sequences. The construction of security as a commodity that can be con-
sumed and exchanged on a market allows the protection supply, provided
it simultaneously produces a security-related knowledge, to determine the
protection demand. As Anna Leander has highlighted, protection is a
‘service’ that through its underlying process of securitization creates its
own demand.99 The security enunciation produces, provided it manages to
impose itself as an authorized knowledge, a feeling of insecurity and thus a
demand to be met. It now becomes clear that security cannot be con-
considered as a regular commodity that could be exchanged on a market on
which an autonomous demand and supply would meet. Through the per-
formative properties of the speech-act that securitizes a phenomenon by
insecuritizing the public opinion, supply and demand of security are virtu-
ally inseparable. They both proceed from the same process of (in)securiti-
ization.100 Thus, if the actor who offers protection also is capable of
controlling the process of (in)securitization, he can also determine the
demand of protection.

To complete this analysis two issues have to be insisted upon. Contrary
to the approach of Wæver, the mere performative structure of specific
enunciations is not sufficient for an effective securitization. The security discourse also has to be accepted as legitimate and as an expression of an authorized knowledge. Hence, as has been shown by Bourdieu, performative discourses have to be analysed in context. This implies taking account of the social position of those who enounce in the social space. From this point of view, the personnel of PMCs in charge of the training and the counselling of foreign security services are ideally positioned to produce an authorized knowledge since they are hired as recognized specialists of security. As recognized security professionals, they are ‘naturally’ considered to benefit from a political authority. Therefore, they can deploy security discourses that produce the demand to which they are supposed to respond. Hence, it is easy for DynCorps training the new Iraqi police or Vinnel training the Iraqi defence forces to promote security readings that justify their lucrative training activity. They have the power to generate the necessary ‘demand ex post’, to use Gunnar Myrdal’s economic terminology. By determining against which threats one has to be able to defend oneself, they also determine what supply is able to respond to the existing demand.

It could here be argued that the social position of the PMCs’ personnel does not differ from the public military counsellors directly mandated by their respective departments of defence. However, since these companies are privately owned and acting, among other things, according to the logic of profit, they are more tempted than public officials to extend the environment of threats to security. This is all the more true as the PMCs in Iraq operate outside of the official and hierarchical military chain of command of the troops of the ‘multinational coalition’. Whereas the latter will probably promote their security readings to consolidate their social utility, PMCs have an existential and economic interest in selling the fears to which their expertise in matters of protection ‘responds’. The auto-referential character of the concept of security thus places these firms in a structural position of force on the ‘security market’ by allowing them, to a certain extent, to orient the demand (by distinguishing between real and false threats) and to determine its volume (by a process of extension of the threat environment). In other words, the road is open for many rackets. As highlighted by Charles Tilly: ‘The idea one will have of the word protection essentially depends on the conception one has of the exteriority of the threat. The one who produces both the danger and the lucrative defence against it, is a racketeer’.

In sum, security cannot be considered as a regular commodity that can be exchanged on a market because the supply and the demand proceed from a same political process of (in)securitization and not from autonomous dynamics. Security supply can create its own demand much more than in other sectors of activity. Hence, the use of PMCs in Iraq and in Afghanistan entails the risk of perpetuating the presence of these firms, as well as their social power and political authority. As mentioned above,
Routledge Research

C. Olsson

social relations structured around political processes – and securitization is a political process – also structure power relations. This is especially the case with symmetric political relations in which there is a convergence of the actors’ perceptions on the issues to be politicized.\(^{103}\) The relation between security providers and security demand is precisely an example of symmetric political relations since there is in principle a common perception of the threat on both sides (otherwise the training programme fails). This does not mean that PMCs consider themselves to be political actors. As security advisors or trainers, they merely politicize (securitize to be exact) social issues for those they advise or train.\(^{104}\) Thus, their approach remains purely technical and the principle of negotiation or reciprocity that characterizes many symmetric political relations is absent. What is important to highlight here is that the power-relations induced by private ‘security-providers’ might increase the potential for hegemony in external military interventions, and therefore also the different forms of political resistance to it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to analyse some of the military practices related to the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq through the concept of the political. This has implied an attempt to conceptualize the political as a speech-act embedded in social relations. One of the conclusions has been that the non-Clausewitzian character of these wars has paradoxically led to an interest in the political representations of the potential enemy, while simultaneously depoliticizing the relation to any form of military resistance. This paradox is all the more important to highlight as the importance of the relation between intervening forces and local populations has been emphasized by the shift from ‘wars between states’ to ‘wars inside states’. Thus, the second part of the chapter has been an attempt to highlight the importance of (de)politicization processes in interventions in which the confrontation between external forces and local societies has been made complex by the network-centric dimension of war. This has allowed accounting for the role of struggles for political (de)legitimization within the political process. In a context of institutional change and political violence, in which the field of ordinary politics has been suspended, these are indeed crucial questions. However, at its very best, this chapter has only tried to develop a framework for a political analysis of military interventions while leaving much of the empirical work to be done.

Notes

1 Bourdieu, *Propos sur le Champ Politique.*
2 Clausewitz, *On War.*
3 Foucault, *Society Must be Defended.*
Military interventions

5 Although she would most certainly not consider herself to be Clausewitzian, the perspective here described as Clausewitzian certainly inspires this article: Paddy, ‘The “war on terror”’.
6 For example: Bonditti, ‘From territorial space to networks’, 465.
7 Arendt, The Human Condition; Aristotle, Politics.
8 Arendt, The Human Condition.
9 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political.
10 Strange, The Retreat of the State. Actually, she borrows this criterion from David Easton.
11 Braud, Sociologie Politique, 581.
12 Lagroye (ed.) La Politisation.
14 All definitions of the political refer in a way or another to the fundamental anthropological condition of collective life. However, it is the specifics of a given definition that will give a concrete political content to the political by assimilating it, for example, to the state or to any other form of political communalization. Defining the political is in itself a political endeavour. Of course, I am here inspired by the developments made by the ‘Copenhagen School’ in international relations theory and security studies (Wæver, Buzan) on the concept of security. Actually, both security and the political can be said to be what the language of linguistic pragmatism calls ‘essentially contested concepts’.
16 The paradox being however that Wæver considers the process of securitization to lead to the suspension of ‘ordinary politics’. I shall not consider this to be a defining feature of security-related processes in this chapter.
17 The process of depoliticization is the transformation of a political issue into an apolitical one: social, private, economic, etc.
18 Williams, ‘Words, images, enemies’, 523.
19 The article establishing the relation between the political and the fundamental human condition of collective life in the clearest terms is: Leca, ‘Le politique comme fondation’, 27–36.
20 Which is also the implication of the theory of securitization (see Williams, ‘Words, images, enemies’).
21 Michael T. Klare has highlighted the continuity and the similarities between the counter-insurgency operations of the 1960s and the still prevailing doctrines of anti-terrorism and peacekeeping in the late 1980s. See Klare and Kornbluh (eds) Low Intensity Warfare, Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency and Antiterrorism in the Eighties. See also: Kitson, Low Intensity Operations.
22 This paradigm has been called the ‘huntingtonian formula’ since it has been influenced by Huntington’s ethnocentric approach. See: Huntington, Political Order and Changing Societies.
23 Foreign internal defence and counter-insurgency are two different terms describing the same practices.
25 Ibid.
27 El Salvador under the Duarte regime in the 1980s, for example.
28 This was attempted in Cuba in 1961, for example.
30 This view is, for example, defended by the so-called ‘democratic peace theory’, loose category that would encompass a highly diversified set of
authors reaching from Immanuel Kant to Bruce Russett. This view is usually assimilated on the political level with the so-called Washington Consensus.

32. I do not consider the notion of war and the concept of intervention to be incompatible. For a slightly different view see: Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention*.
33. For a definition of biopolitics see: Foucault, *Society must be Defended*.
34. This explains probably partially the success of the representation according to which all the major attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been perpetrated by foreigners, terrorists or, even better, foreign terrorists.
35. The idea that troops should not be engaged in ‘nation-building’ operations was one of the important issues in the first election campaign of George W. Bush. The consciousness of the fact that this promise could not be held if the USA got engaged in Iraq was one of the important reasons for which important sectors of the US military were opposed to the intervention in Iraq. See: Hassner, ‘Etats-Unis: Civils belliqueux et militaires réticents’, 20–27. For a general perspective on the engagement of the US military in nation-building, see: Hippe, *Democracy by Force*.
36. C. Schmitt would say the ‘real enemy’.
39. The similarities between modern interventionalary practices and police operations have also been noted in Brodeur, ‘Maintien et imposition de la paix en Somalie (1992–1995)’, 175–229.
40. However, I am not here referring to the distinction made by Moskos between the military and the constabulary ethic when referring to police operations. See: Moskos, ‘UN peacemakers: The constabulary ethic and military professionalism’, 388–401. Rather, I am following the distinction between police operations and military operations made by L. Ferrajoli of the ‘Genoa School’ in legal theory. He insists on the fact that the symbolic asymmetry between actors confronting each other is characteristic of police operations as opposed to the non-hierarchical relation between enemies in classical wars: Ferrajoli, ‘Terrorismo e guerra: L’alternativo del diritto’, 15–21. See also: Balibar, *L’Amérique, la Guerre, l’Europe et la Médiation Européenne*, pp. 114–125.
41. It has to be noted that these conflicts are not Clausewitzian in any sense. The ‘ascension to the extremes’, the dualization of the conflict and the single temporality of the classical wars as described by Clausewitz are not recognizable features of the political violence that characterizes these operations.
42. This delegitimizing strategy has been analysed by Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.
43. Dillon and Reid, ‘Global liberal governance’.
44. For a very concrete illustration of this point: Priest, *The Mission, Waging War and Keeping Peace with America’s Military*.
46. For an analysis of ‘netwars’, see: Arquilla and Ronfeldt (eds) *Networks and Netwars*.
47. C. Powell, speech at Yale Law School, 26 October 2001.
50. For a general presentation of what is at stake in civil-military cooperation, see: Gordon, ‘Understanding the priorities of civil-military co-operation’.
Military interventions

51 Coker, Human Warfare; Coker, Waging War Without Warriors?

52 Although one has to remember that the different PRTs in Afghanistan are engaged in a highly diversified set of military practices.

53 Burton, Violence Explained.

54 For an overview of this debate: James, ‘Two steps back: Relearning the humanitarian–military lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq’; Torrente, The War on Terror’s Challenge to Humanitarian Action; Braem, Les Relations Armées-ONG; Gordon, ‘Understanding the priorities of civil–military co-operation’; Pugh, ‘Civil–military relations in Kosovo’, 238.

55 Traynor, ‘The privatisation of war’.

56 Singer, Corporate Warriors.

57 LoBaido, ‘White mercenaries in black Africa’.

58 This development is not at all foreseen by Janice E. Thomson in her excellent historical sociology analysis of the role of ‘non-state extra-territorial violence’ in the international allocation of coercive resources: Thompson, Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns, State-building and Extra-territorial Violence in Early Modern Europe. For an analysis of the state-centred bias in Thompson’s study: Rigaud, ‘Janice E. Thompson: Le mercenariat comme forme socio-historique de coercition privée’, 139–154.

59 Traynor, ‘The privatisation of war’.

60 e.g. Global Risk International.

61 e.g. Vinnel.

62 e.g. DynCorps, Erinys International.

63 e.g. DynCorps.

64 Olsson, ‘PMCs in Iraq, A force for good?’.

65 Coker, ‘Outsourcing war’, 95–113; Leander ‘African states and the market for force: The destabilizing consequences of private military companies’.

66 Thus, in war and counter-war, the self-proclaimed futurologists A. and H. Toffler write: ‘When nations have already lost the monopoly of violence, why not consider to let firms organize and create armies of voluntary mercenaries to wage wars on a contractual basis for the UN?’ (quoted by: de Saint-Quentin, ‘Mercenariat et mutations stratégiques’).

67 See the reports on the mercenaries of the special rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission of the UN, Mr Enrique Ballesteros.

68 Van Creveld, The Rise and Decline of the State.

69 For a similar stance, see: Hibou, ‘La privatisation de l’Etat’, 151–168. Writing from another perspective than B. Hibou, the analysis of B. Badie also insists on the necessity to put the focus on the redefinition of the relations between private and public actors, rather than dismissing the state altogether: Badie, La Fin des Territoires.

70 Bigo, ‘Les entreprises de coercition para-prives, de nouveaux mercenaires?’.

71 For a very interesting analysis drawing both from the insights of international relations theory and of political sociology, see: Pouligny, ‘Les missions polyvalentes de maintien de la paix de l’ONU dans leur interaction avec les autres acteurs locaux, sociologie comparative de différentes situations’.

72 For instance, the UN, when engaged in institution-building and electoral processes, local administrations or politicians.

73 Edelman, Constructing the Political Spectacle.

74 In this sense, one would have to make the distinction between a political actor (politicians, trade-union officials, militants, demonstrators, etc.) and politicizing actors (i.e. virtually everybody).

75 Arendt, La Crise de la Culture.

76 Bourdieu, Propos sur le Champ Politique.
Politics is hence only a particular expression of the political. In other words, it is important to distinguish political actors from the professional of politics since many political actors operate outside of the field of politics. Politicization and political legitimization must also be distinguished.

According to L. Ferrajoli, police operations are fundamentally asymmetric since they can claim to be the expression of a symbolically ‘superior order’, the legal and political order. If they pursue individuals that also claim to act in the name of a ‘superior order’ a clash between narratives occurs. See: Ferrajoli, ‘Terrorismo e guerra’.

Although non-Schmittian, this interpretation might offer an insight into the reason for which the Schmittian tradition defends the idea that situations of ‘exception’ require a radical transformation of political practice, and notably in its relation to the law: the ordinary political order has already been de facto suspended. However, by adding the suspension of the legal order to the suspension of the ordinary political order, such ‘exceptional’ practices are counter-productive in my view since they suppress any possibility for the social actors to refer to a commonly recognized ‘symbolic superior order’ to legitimize their action (other than the very loose notion of ‘national interest’ or ‘raison d’état’) and thus to appease political tensions.

In other words, the institutionalized field of politics tends to become the centre of attraction of (de)politicization processes, thereby homogenizing them through a process of diffusion into the ‘social body’. It thus establishes symmetric relations. This can be explained in Bourdieu-inspired terms by the social position of the professionals of politics who enounce in the social space. But this argument only accounts for part of the explanation since these professionals have not the monopoly on political discourses: there are political actors outside the realm of institutional politics (everybody agrees on the fact that militants are political actors and they see themselves as such). But here too, the institutional field of politics tends to remain a centre of attraction. The political processes that occur outside of the field of politics are usually integrated into the ‘official’ political agenda (negatively or positively) if they reach a critical mass, as is currently happening with the topics highlighted by the ‘anti-globalization movement’. This is often consistent with the strategy of the ‘non-official’ political actors: they want their point of view to be integrated into the institutional agenda (which is for example the aim of the demonstrations at the G8 summits). But of course, this is not necessarily the case; and when it is not, we are precisely in a dynamic of suspension of ‘normal politics’, where political readings do not tend towards homogenization anymore. Hence, asymmetric relations become more likely.

Shearer, ‘Private military forces and challenges for the future’, 92.

Ibid.

Foucault, *Dits et Écrits IV*.


In the sense that the motivations of the actors involved are thought of as having nothing to do with their conception of what is essentially linked to the condition of their collective life.


A similar argument is made by: Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, pp. 191–205.

This is notably the case for two firms: Titan and CACI6.

Military interventions

92 Makki, *Militarisation de l’Humanitaire*.
93 Just as securitization processes, politicization is dependent on contextual elements. Hence, some practices are easier to politicize than others.
94 More than 40 humanitarians had been killed in Afghanistan by February 2004.
95 Buzan *et al*. *Security*.
97 Wæver, ‘Securitization and desecuritization’.
98 Following Jef Huysmans and Didier Bigo.
99 Leander, ‘The commodification of violence, private military companies and African states’.
100 Bigo, ‘La mondialisation de l’(in)sécurité’, 53–100.
101 Bourdieu, *Ce que Parler Veut Dire*.
103 The politicization of an issue confers a specific salience to it. Thus, if an actor claims to be able to tackle this issue, he gives a specific salience to himself if this claim is made credible to the other actors in the relation (and this is the symmetric element).
104 The principle of bargain and of reciprocity that often defines the relations between political actors and the actors they represent is not present. PMCs do not consider themselves to be involved in the definition of the ‘collective life’ of political societies and thus they do not bargain for this definition.