

Portraits in Practice: The Private Security Business and the Reconfiguration of International Politics

by

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Abstract:

Departing from the self-portrayal of the private security business as a normal, non-political sector at the service of states and other legitimate clients, this article argues that the rise of the private security business reinforces general trends towards techno-managerial, de-politicized, and militarized security practices. That is, even when firms behave by their own books, security privatization reconfigures international politics. Paradoxically this straightforward implication of privatization tends to be obscured both in mainstream international relations analysis and in the critical literature on security privatization. IR scholars tend to focus on the extent to which privatization undermines or alters states and the state regulatory systems at the expense of changes that leave these intact. The critical literature concentrates on denying the self-portrayal of private security firms showing the degree to which they are inefficient, politicized and corrupt neglecting the unspectacular, normal, situations where the portraits private security firms reflect their practices. As this article shows, the lack of attention to situations where the private security business does not undermine states or public regulation and acts as it preaches leads to a misunderstanding of some essential implications of security privatization.

Portraits in Practice: Private Security Business and the Reconfiguration of International Politics

Since the end of the Cold War private security has become a lucrative, fast growing business. At the outset, this passed largely unnoticed. This is no longer the case. The beheading of Blackwater employees in Fallujah, the participation of CACI and Titan in the Abu Ghraib interrogations and the close relations between vice president Dick Cheney and “the industry” are just some of the reasons it has made it into the media and hence into public debate. An impressive amount of journalistic work in the form of documentaries, articles and books is effectively sustaining this position in the ongoing policy debate particularly, but not exclusively, in the US context. In some respects, the private security industry is literally fashionable. Paris stores carry Blackwater branded clothes (West, 2006) and movie-star Leonardo di Capri plays a “soldier of fortune” in the film *Blood Diamonds*. As one would expect in this context, International Relations (IR) scholars have engaged in taking stock and debating the significance and implications of the rapidly growing commercialization and outsourcing of security. Scholars have critically assessed the efficiency of the industry, the shifting dividing-lines between the private and the public and their implications for governance and accountability.

This article builds on this literature but shifts the focus and the question asked. It asks if and how privatization and outsourcing changes security practices and it focuses on what happens when private security firms behave as they say they do. The substantive claim in the article is that the exponential growth of the security business contributes to the technocratization and de-politicization of security practices, including the practices of states. To make this argument, the article looks at three central aspects of the portrait the private security business paints of itself and explores the security practices that result when and if the business behaves as it says it does. Hence the article argues that the portrait of the business as “normal” is linked to techno-managerial security practices, that its image as “non-political” leads to de-politicized security practices, and that the subordination of the private security business to states engenders a militarization of security practices. Before making this argument, the reason and relevance of looking at portraits and practices to assess the private security business will be explained with reference to the existing (IR) literature.

Retrieving Portraits /Analyzing Practices in the IR Context

This section can neither summarize nor do justice to the voluminous and rich literature on the privatization of security in the International Relations/ Security context literature. What it can do, is to clarify how the argument in this article relates to that literature. The base line is that by focusing on portraits and practices, the analysis here brings attention to two aspects of the private security business that have been marginalized in much of the ongoing discussion. By taking the self-portrayal of the private security business seriously and using it as a point of departure for the analysis, it breaks with the tendency prevailing especially in the critical literature on private security to focus almost exclusively on de-mystifying industry. By emphasizing security practices, the article moves away from the IR inclination to assess security privatization mainly from the perspective of how it affects the state and state based regulation of the private security sector specifically or the use of force generally, that is how it alters the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

From Critical Assessments of the “Industry” to Retrieving Portraits

Critical assessments of the private security industry have played an essential role in drawing attention to the significance of security privatization in and IR context. They have established a critical awareness of the expansion of the private security business and they have nuanced the overwhelmingly positive view of privatization advocates. In so doing they have brought attention to the need to reflect on the industry. This article rests on and draws heavily on the insights of this literature. In fact, this article is conceivable only in the context of this discussion which has established the private security industry’s existence and critically nuanced our understanding of its activities. However, in their eagerness to debunk the industry, the critics have often neglected the significance of industry self-portraits.

For long, the central issue at stake was to establish, explain and affirm the quantitative expansion (and hence existence) of a private market for force. Awareness of the sea-change taking place was *the sine qua non* for any critical analysis of the security business. Scholars therefore mounted evidence to make the point that private military services were rapidly expanding and needed (more) critical attention. Authors struggled to support their contention that the industry existed and was expanding by collect information about individual firms, look at their role in different contexts, generate aggregate (and always shaky) sector figures, provide case studies and look at overall industry transformations (e.g. Kaldor, Albrecht and Schméder 1998; Musah and Fayemi 2000; Shearer 1998; Silverstein 2000; Singer 2001/2, 2003; Wulf 2005; Jäger and Kümmel 2007). These efforts met considerable resistance. Peter Singer, the author of one of the first academic books (a revised version of his PhD dissertation) on the topic was told by his supervisor (a senior International Relations scholars) that the sector was insignificant and that he better find himself “something serious” to work on (Singer 2006). Similarly, this author was told by an associate editor of [...] that the private security industry was “a mere academic fantasy”. To some extent, the privatized wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan (Isenberg 2004; Petlon 2006) have made this kind of critical assessment redundant. Few now need to be persuaded that a private security industry exists and plays a significant role even if many (especially in continental Europe¹) remain unaware that its significance extends beyond the US, the UK and weak developing states.

As the existence and significance of a private security business is increasingly accepted, the critical discussion has become geared to draw attention to the downsides of its growth. The reason is probably that the supporters of security privatization often depict it as virtually flawless – something the discussion below amply illustrates. Privatization is purportedly the magic key to the desired combination of reduced expenditures, efficient soldiering/war-making in the service of the national interest or even more ambitiously of international peace. Characteristically, the industry lobby organization focused on promoting international security services calls itself the “International Peace Operations Association” (IPOA) and refers to the private security industry as the “peace and stability industry”. One of the national US lobby organization focusing on outsourcing of defense tasks generally calls itself “Business Executives for National Security” (BENS). The temptation to scratch the surface of this gloss is hard to resist and has resulted in a critical discussion that de-bunks any simplistic and general statements about the industry. Claims about cost effectiveness have proven as untenable, as generalization about the professionalism of the industry and its work in the service of state. The often staggering costs of an industry managed by administrations that seem to have forgotten the “101 of economics” (Singer 2005) have been criticized in both academic and policy-making circles (Markusen 2003; Rasor and Bauman 2007;

¹ Most specialists (political and academic) working with security matters in continental Europe assume that privatization concerns the developing world, the former Eastern bloc and the Anglo-Saxon countries (UK/US). In academia Janne Haaland-Matlary??, Elke Krahnann (e.g.2005c; 2005b; 2006) and Anna Leander (2006) are notable exceptions.

GAO 2005). Its professionalism and capacity to support war making operations have been uneven at best. Contractors have also failed to carry out tasks, have carried them out unsatisfactorily and to have been generally unsuited for the tasks at hand (Singer 2001/2; Rasor and Bauman 2007). In the process they have created considerable difficulties for states but also for the public armed forces and for civilian populations (Francis 1999; Musah 2002; ICIJ 2002).

This critical assessment of the industry has left us with a complex and nuanced image of the industry. It has indicated a number of very serious economic, political, military, administrative and legal challenges that need to be addressed. The focus on fraud, corruption, human rights violations, employee abuse, impunity and incompetence (Scahill 2007) has left little space for the analysis of the situations where there is nothing spectacular and/or illegal about the activities of the firms in the industry. There is good reason to believe that some firms at least part of the time behave as their advocates and managers say that they do. Moreover, as regulation improves firms will be under growing pressure to behave by their own books. This makes it significant to critically assess not only what is happening when firms misbehave, but also what happens when they behave as they say they do. This task is too important to be left to lobbyists and business advocates. Hence the focus on business self-portrait in this article and the reason this focus constitutes something of a value added in relation to much of the established literature.

From Shifts in States, and State Governance to Shifts in Practices

This article also contributes to the discussion in a second way: it moves attention from the question of whether the development of the private security business alters states and/or the international (state) system to the question of how the private rise of the private security business alters security practices. As this section shows, just as portraits, practices have occupied a place at the margins of both the academic and popular discussion, but (as portraits) they deserve careful consideration. The academic International Relations / International Security analysts as well as policy oriented analysts have tended to analyse security privatization primarily from the perspective of its effects on states. There are good reasons for this.

The academic field of international relations is inherently state centric. Its political imagination and vocabulary is profoundly tied to the inside/outside boundary. Its primary theoretical and empirical interest is therefore the analysis of states and the international state system. Standard text book definitions of International Relations emphasize that it is the study of relations among states in conditions of anarchy (e.g. Jackson and Sørensen 2003). Partly as a consequence, discussions about whether or not something is significant tend to be framed in terms of whether or not it alters the role of an nature of states (in general) or whether it alters the role and nature of specific states. The way “globalization” and/or sovereignty have been discussed in academic international relations are good illustrations of this general trend IR. Expectedly, the analysis of security privatization follows this general trend. The bulk of academic effort has gone into assessing the extent to which the private security alters something fundamental with respect to the relations among states under anarchy. A central question has been whether or not the emergence (or re-privatization) of security alters state control over the use of force – or perhaps even more significantly the state monopoly over the legitimate use of force – on which these relations rest (Avant 2005; Leander 2006; Thomson 1994). This effort has included developing an understanding of the differentiation among states (for example developed and developing) (Abrahamsen and Williams 2007; Krahmman 2005a; Leander 2005).

The academically driven interest in how privatization affects states has been reinforced by the fact that the issue is pivotal also for the practical and normative concerns of most observers (academic or not) of the industry. States and their policies are essential for understanding the development and nature of the industry. But even more so, writing about the industry has often been

driven by the concrete question of “what to do about it” or how to improve governance (Chesterman and Lehnardt 2007: 2; Bryden 2006). Ultimately, that question revolves around states. Not only are the flawed governance systems in question public (state based). Any initiative to reform them (or create new ones) also would most likely be taken by states within the state system. Hence, analysts have looked at how privatization affects, can be dealt with and/or calls for reform in specific parts of the (public) governance system. For example it has been argued that the international norm against private use of force internationally has impeded the development of strong regulation of the sector or perhaps made it redundant (Percy 2007; Kinsey 2005; Zarate 1998). Ways in which contractors can be held responsible to international humanitarian law have been suggested (Doswald-Beck 2007; de Wolf 2007). National governance systems have been analyzed and sometimes compared to clarify the different challenges entailed by the increasing reliance on contractors (Krahmann 2005a; Whyte 2003). Focus has been placed on the economic governance (or the lack thereof) of the sector (Akeh 2007; Dupont 2003). It been suggested that a clearer regulation of the role of contractors in shaping politics is needed (Leander 2007; also Nossal 2001). And the governance of the relations between contractors and armed forces have been analyzed and necessary reforms suggested (Guillory 2001; Zamparelli 1999).

Understandable and important as this work on how the privatization shifts states and state based governance system is, a side effect has been that relatively little attention has been paid to what security privatization may mean for other things than states and state systems. Most analysts would (if asked) probably not think that security privatization *only* matters if it affects states. Yet, they have spent little time worrying about if and how privatization matters when it does *not* alter states or state governance systems. The contention in this article is that this is a mistake. It amounts to assuming that changes taking place without altering states or their governance systems are not worth studying. It also implies a neglect of the extent to which security privatization may alter the overall context within which changes in state security is evolving, i.e. the broader conceptions of politics and security. Yet, asking questions about what happens legally and within the existing state system seems of rather fundamental significance in a context where the bulk of the privatization is not only allowed but designed and encouraged by states. Similarly, asking questions about the overarching context is both logically prior to asking questions about how privatization affects the relative strength of institutions, states and firms. It is also an important task in its own right. It is a way of not losing sight of what is happening to the forest (security practices whether public or private) for all the focus on the trees (states and firms). The shift from states and the state system to a focus on practices in this article is an attempt to grapple with this issue. Just as the shift to portraits, the move to practices draws attention to an aspect of the security privatization which receives scant attention.

The general point of undertaking the dual shift in focus (from unmasking to portraits and from states to practices) is neither to disprove any specific finding in the existing literature nor to argue that it is generally useless. Rather, the shift in focus adds to the existing literature by drawing attention to portraits and practices that have had a place at the margins of the ongoing discussion. However, the shift in focus amounts to more than simply adding further dimensions allowing us to see new things. This article claims that the reason for doing this is that the prevailing neglect of portraits and practices obscures and marginalizes important analytical questions, perhaps some of the most important ones, if the analysis in subsequent sections is correct. This analysis will proceed by discussing three central aspects of the business portrait and the kinds of (normal and legal) security practices tied to them. The first of these is the portrait of the business of the sector as “normal” and the techno-managerial security practices tied to that image.

Portrait/Practice 1: The Normal Business of Techno-Managerial Security Practices

The private security business is like any other private businesses at least if we are to believe managers of the sector or assorted lobby groups such as BENS, IPOA, the British Security Industry Association (BSIA) or the British Association of Private Security Companies (BASCP).² Security firms they insist compete with each other for contracts by trying to offer the best product/service at the most attractive price. To do this, they need to attract competent staff. Moreover, as in any other business, firms specialize in specific market segments and bolster their operations by vertical (into corporate hierarchies) and horizontal (between markets) market integration strategies. Third, as in any other market, firms engage in marketing, branding and advertising as well as in lobbying aimed at reshaping the regulatory environment. Finally, as in other economic sectors, the state and state sponsored regulation plays a central role. This does not imply that there is no market. Moreover, as in other markets some firms and individuals break the norms and laws of regulation which obviously does not mean that laws/norms are absent. The private security business on its own account is, to be clear, a private business sector. The sector has its own admitted idiosyncrasies but logically and morally it does not fundamentally differ from many other private business sectors. This portrayal of the sector will not be contested here (although it could be). Instead, the question that will be raised is what this “normal” business behavior entails for security practices.

Marketing professional security services

The “normality” of the private security business makes it focus on the technical and the managerial aspects of security. Normal market oriented private security firms sell professional solutions to security problems. This logically pushes them to stress the centrality of professionalism and technical capacities. The way they do this obviously varies greatly. Some may work from a very specific competence (for example operating a specific Information Technology system) for others it may be far more general (for example providing guard services for investors in conflict contexts). Many firms stress their possibility to draw on a specialized staff for specific contracts to argue that this places them at the top of technical requirements in any specific field. Characteristically Dyncorp (one of the bigger US firms) explains on its website that “maintaining security is a global problem, but individual security needs are unique. Our flexible, integrated approach provides extensive technology and personal security solutions to protect people, facilities, and information.” Similarly, Ed Soyster speaking about his firm Military Professional Resources (MPRI) underscores its competence by claiming that it has “more generals than the Pentagon” on its staff lists (quoted in Mandel, 2002: 112). Firms in the sector tend to emphasize professionalism and technical competence and many add their flexibility to tailor their service to specific tasks.

When firms compete for contracts, the emphasis on technical expertise and professional competence is logically paired with an emphasis on cost effectiveness. Potential clients care about results but to also about costs. It is hence unsurprising that we find the cost effectiveness of the industry figuring prominently in the business’ self-promotion. In the US for example, BENS has produced a “Tail-to-Tooth” report suggesting that Pentagon’s defense budget could be halved if only the possibilities of outsourcing and privatizing in the sector were fully grasped.³ But also the firms themselves emphasize the cost-effectiveness of the services they offer. Cost effectiveness and technical professionalism usually figure side by side as well illustrated by the following statement by Chris Taylor (of Blackwater, another large US firm):

² The organizations have websites all explicitly stating this view. For a specific example see the statement by the IPOA president (Brooks, 2005).

³ The full report is available on the net at www.BENS.org as are a variety of interpretations and policy statements related to it.

Send 10.000 UN troops to Darfur? A colossal waste of money. You do not create security and peace by throwing more mediocre, uncommitted people into the fray. 1000-2000 professional contractors could perform those same stability operations, safely turning over the operation to the UN and other NGOs to perform post-conflict operations. That is what they do best (Taylor 2005).

Reframing security practices

So does it matter for security practices that the private security business competes by this combination of technical expertise and cost effectiveness? It is argued here that it does. Competition in the industry is ultimately about convincing clients that a firm is more efficient than its competitors. But perhaps even more importantly, it is about convincing these potential clients that technically competent cost-effective security services is what they need in the first place. If that is not the case, it becomes irrelevant to know whether or not a firm is efficient and technically competent. If a potential client sees a problem above all as a socio-economic issue or as one best solved by negotiation, it makes little sense to promote technical and cost effective security services: the kinds of solutions considered will involve diplomacy or aid; not security provision. Similarly if the key concern is limiting civilian casualties or establishing long term ties with a rebel group, technical competence and cost effectiveness may be less important than diplomatic skills, public authority or long term relations. It therefore becomes essential for the private security business that problems are defined as security problems and that the technical competence and cost effectiveness are important considerations when solutions are considered. We should therefore expect the industry self-promotion as well as the simple presence and growth of private contracting to refashion security practices in a direction where this is the case. This is occurring for two reasons.

The first is that firms push their understanding of security practices onto their potential clients through direct lobbying. As other “normal” business, security firms lobby both to reshape the regulatory environment and to promote specific contracts. Because of the centrality of states as regulators and as clients, lobbying is possibly even more central in the security sector than elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising to find constant reference to the close ties between firms and states, a tendency epitomized by the links between the US firm Halliburton and the country’s vice president Cheney on which there is a flood of books and intense media coverage (Didion 2006). The significance of lobbying for this argument is not that it is more common and intense than in other sectors (I am not sure it is). Nor is it that lobbying is costly and/or potentially illegal. Rather, lobbying by the private security business is significant here because it influences the framing problems. By lobbying private security firms frame problems as security problems solvable with the help of affordable technical competent measures. They alter the balance of arguments surrounding the questions on which they lobby. This is true even when the lobbying does not result in a contract. Through the lobbying process itself, private security firms alter the agenda, the arguments and the understandings involved in judging security matters. To the extent that the security understandings are reshaped, so are security practices.

Second, private security business are pulled into reshaping security practices: they are hired to do so. Private security firms are hired for training and consultancy. This may stand for something extremely narrow and technical as when a firm is hired to explain the general functioning of an armament system which it will itself operate for the armed forces or when it is training those who will operate the system. It may also be slightly broader as for example when firms develop military training programs and strategy. For example, Cubic trains the Georgian armed forces (Paton Walsh 2004). DynCorp offers consultancy to the Columbian armed forces (Bigwood 2001). MPRI “develops and conducts instruction for the Army Force Management School and related courses”

(www.mpri.com). A priori, these activities provide and communicate “technical” competencies in a narrow sense: how to use an arms system or how to develop an efficient military organization. However, these narrowly defined, technical training/consultancies play a significant role in shaping security practices. They involve the development of schemes of analysis and understanding as well as of routine forms of action that effectively give shape to security practices. Even narrowly defined security training works to make participants see problems as security problems and react to them accordingly.

More than this, the private security business is hired to shape security practices more broadly. Part of what the private security business does is to provide intelligence as Digital Globe and Space Imaging have in Afghanistan or Titan and CACI in Abu Ghraib. But even more broadly, private security firms are often hired to shape views on general political issues. The MPRI runs the African Centre for Strategic Studies. DynCorp holds contracts on the national, provincial and municipal levels in Iraq to assess threats, train Iraqi police and military personnel and to advise on the reorganization of the Iraqi justice system (Isenberg 2004). This type of activity is designed to shape the general understandings of political, economic and social problems. Security concerns and efficiency are bound to figure prominently in their analysis. After all, the private security business is staffed by security professionals who are no less likely to be shaped by their professionalism than are professionals in other fields. They are rather more likely than others. The traditionally strict corporate rules of the profession make it a standard example of a “total institutions” where (Goffman, 1961: 17).

Mobilizing pro-market bias

None of this signals an unequivocal monolithic view of security where technical competence and cost-effectiveness reign uncontested. Competing views exist and will most certainly continue to do so. However, the current political context amplifies the private security business’ impact on security practices. First, the rapid expansion and heightened competition in the business pressure firms to shape security practices more innovatively and more effectively. As an observer of the defense industry argues: “the leading defense company of the future will be primarily a manipulator of opinions, in a diversity of markets, rather than the familiar engineering enterprise of the past. Some companies are already becoming this” (Lovering 2000: 174). Second, since the early 1980s, an overall pro-private-business-and-market-solutions-mood has been the backdrop of politics everywhere (Shipman, 1998; Gill, 1995). This means that when the private security business makes inroads into security practices, it does so echoing privatization and outsourcing debates in other areas. It also benefits from the advance of privatization elsewhere. On balance therefore, private security providers are pushing in open doors. For these two reasons, private providers have had a stronger impact on security practices than one might otherwise have expected.

This is born out by the changes in security practices. The self-representation of the private security business as a business of technical experts selling cost-effective and essential services is widely accepted. The private security sector is considered “strategically effective”, flexible, and a depositor of privileged “local” and situational knowledge not only among observers but also in policy-making circles (e.g. Whelan 2003). As persuasively shown by Markusen (2003), this translates as a positive bias for private security providers when these are compared with public ones. Evidence of inefficiency and incompetence in the private business is dismissed as exceptions to the rule and basic information gathering procedures are simply ignored. The consequence is that private sector security expertise is increasingly relied on by the entire range of actors working in zones where security is a substantial issue, ranging from conservationist NGOs in national parks to states training their armed forces (Avant, 2005: chap. 5 and Howe, 2001 respectively). But even more significant is the extent to which the sector is employed for a range of activities with a tenuous

and distant link to security narrowly defined. The business hence finds itself involved in tasks for which it has no particular competence. For example it is or has been involved in reforming the justice system in Iraq (Isenberg, 2004), in negotiating peace accords in Sudan (Chatterjee, 2004) and explaining democracy in Croatia (Silverstein, 2000).

To sum up, when the private security business remains true to the portrait it paints to itself as an efficient provider of cost effective professional security services, it reshapes security practices. Through its direct lobbying, technical training and its provision of general advice on security policies, the private security business brings NGOs, publics at large and security professionals to think about security increasingly in terms of costs and technicalities. This in turn produces a shift towards and expansion of techno-managerial security practices. The resonance of this framing is amplified by the strongly positive pro-market mobilized by the private security business. It is also accentuated by the fact that private business strives to keep aloof of political debates.

Portrait/Practice 2: The Non-political Business of De-politicizing Security

A second important aspect of the private security business' self-portrait is that the business does not strive to shape politics. This section shows that when firms put this portrait into the practice the consequence is a de-politicization of security. When firms stay aloof of politics (as they insist they do) the consequence is a displacement of security practices. These come to be located outside public political debate; they are de-politicized. This dislocation reinforces the technical and managerial nature of security practices by effectively restricting the space for contesting both that understanding of security and for advancing alternative (non security oriented) understandings and remedies to problems.

A Business Outside politics

If there is one thing the private security business insists heavily on (besides its professionalism and efficiency) it is certainly that it is following the agendas of clients, it is answering a demand. The private business creates and shapes neither demand nor agenda. The industry clearly finds it important to be informed about what happens in politics and to keep policy-makers informed about their potential contribution. Hence, when the IPOA informs an audience interested in the "Peace and Stability Industry" why firms should join the association the emphasis is on informing:

"IPOA also works extensively with the media to ensure the private sector is accurately and fairly represented in regard to peace and stability operations, and with key legislators and regulators on issues impacting the industry. As information is of great importance in the peace and stability industry, IPOA works hard to keep its members informed of industry developments, including breaking news, legislative and regulatory proceedings, and potential contracts" (www.ipoaonline.org/php visited 7 July 2007).

The emphasis is clear: the association informs in both directions. It does not want to shape priorities. Along similar lines, most firms in the sector would argue that they take on contracts for clients (and lobby for these). But they would shun the idea that they try to shape or set the aim of these contracts. They do not want to engage in debates about political priorities.

Of course, no firm would deny that it may influence political outcomes. It is often part of their role to do so. Blackwater for example has an advertisement featuring "Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Iraq" as header under which the firm proceeds to tell its potential clients "...those of us who enjoy freedom and democracy are now bound to help share it with the world. Through selfless commitment and compassion for all people, Blackwater works to make a

difference...” (Advertisement in *IPOA*, 2005: 4). The “selflessness and compassion” is exercised for a legitimate cause and this legitimate cause is defined by politics, not by Blackwater itself. Most firms are keen to work for good causes. They are also willing to varying degrees to come out in public to underline their capacity to contribute to a given good cause including spreading democracy in Iraq, keeping peace in Afghanistan or capturing Charles Taylor (Rosenfeld, 2005; Opiel and Hart, 2004; Catán and Peel, 2003). However, firms (as they keep repeating) are not willing to engage in the public debate about which causes are good. Just as the military or the police see themselves as acting in a Clausewitzian continuation of politics, so does the private security business.

There are crucial differences between private and public security providers, however, with important implications for what their respective resistance to engage in politics means for security practices. The key difference is that most countries have political procedures – admittedly imperfect and ineffective to varying degrees – designed to control both how the (public) military and security forces engage in politics and to check way the executive uses force (Fisher, 2005; DCAF, 2002). The exact nature of these political procedures varies with the context. But they tend to involve procedures subjecting executive and security professionals to wider political scrutiny. Illustrations of this include procedures requiring uses of force to be reported to parliament or perhaps even approved by it, restrictions on the amounts and kinds of military assistance can be exported without legislative approval, legislative committees to which the armed forces report and through which they can be heard and so on. This type of political check on the use of force exists to ensure a (potential) continuous political, non-security establishment involvement with the use of force. These processes in other words operate to trigger public discussion when force is used about whether or not a use of military/policing is the best solution or whether there are other more appropriate alternatives. In this debate the military/security establishment is but one voice of many.

For the private military business the logic is different. The safeguards that exist for public military involvement are mostly either inapplicable or ineffective (Leander, 2007). Political controls of the use of force focus on the use of force by public security professionals. This makes historical sense. The outlawing of mercenarism means that private business has played a limited role in the use of force internationally and when it has played a role it has been under the auspices of public armed forces. Logically, therefore the political checks on private security that do exist typically cover the areas where private firms have a traditional open and legitimate involvement (arms exports, logistics) but leave out other areas and anything resembling military operations as it is assumed that this is a public monopoly. This may makes historical sense but it is nonetheless inadequate in the face of the current expansion of private security. The Rubicon separating public troops engaging in combat from private contractors that do not has long since been crossed (Guillory, 2001). Moreover, since using private business is a conventional way of circumventing political control, there is reason to believe that a weak control over the private security business is both widespread and intentional (Bigo 2004). The weakness of political control over the private security business has the consequence that the political debate ensured (at least potentially) by political controls when the public military is involved is correspondingly weakened or absent when it comes to the private security business.

In such a context, the security business’ unwillingness to engage in politics comes to mean something very different from the public military’s unwillingness to engage in political debate. It may be presented – and thought of – as expressing a wish to leave politics to sort out political priorities. The implication, however, is that the discussion about political priorities and politics as such tends to be displaced and to disappear from sight. Since the political safe-guards are inoperable, the discussions and decisions about why, when and how to use force are located within the security establishment. Those directly involved in security operations discuss among themselves

whether or not given contracts and engagements are acceptable and legal or not. Decisions are displaced from a public political process to a narrow technocratic one. From a discussion involving the entire spectrum of stake holders, ranging from the legislative branch (also opposition politicians), the media, interest group organizations, a broader public we move to a far narrower one. In effect, the debate over which issues are security issues and who is to deal with them becomes one involving mainly security professionals from the armed forces/police, ministries of defense and possibly the executive branch. The implication is that the voice of those who would like to define a problem as something else than a security problem, and to look for non military/policing technical solutions to it, is marginalized if heard at all. When alternative views are not heard, they are unlikely to be adopted. In this context staying aloof of politics by not engaging in public political debate is a matter of marginalizing debate outside the security establishment, of moving the problem definition out of politics, i.e. of effectively de-politicizing security.

Selecting Clients and Triggering Security Dilemmas

This de-politicization of security has three immediate implications for security practices. First, it tends to make money a (if not *the*) key criterion for whose security concerns are dealt with. Indeed, as political debate about the use of force is displaced, money moves in as pivotal for the decisions of which clients and causes deserve to have firms working for them. All established larger firms in the private security business make a point out of working exclusively for “legitimate clients”. The IPOA code of conduct for example states that: “Signatories pledge to work only for legitimate, recognized governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and lawful private companies”.

This said, it is important to realize two things. First, the legitimate clients for which the firms work (obviously) also have to be clients capable of paying for the services. This means that would-be-legitimate clients with no capacity to pay will not get services from private companies. While cash rich researchers, NGOs, international organizations, corporations, and governments will be able to buy security services, cash-starved political movements, ordinary citizens, refugees and children are not. It is from this perspective that observers of politics in Africa worry about the return of neo-colonial proxy wars where rich firms/individuals/rulers can fight out their disagreements with the help of private proxy armies (Musah 2002). Less drastically put, it certainly is the case that a Swiss cheese security coverage, where the wholes are made by financial weakness, is a correlate of making money rather than politics decisive in matters of security.

Second, de-politicization has altered security practices with regard to the tricky question of regulating who should be allowed to buy security services. Instead of having the issue settled by political considerations primarily, decision is left to the markets i.e. to firms who need contracts and customers. It is important to underline that what is a “legitimate” client is always a matter of interpretation and subject to intense contestation. Who is the legitimate ruler is a – if not *the* – key issue at stake in contemporary armed conflicts (Holsti 1996). Moreover, as economic considerations become significant, traditional evaluations of legitimacy may be reversed. For example, MPRI convinced the US to reconsider its policy towards Equatorial Guinea (allied with Cuba and North Korea). The firm successfully argued that it should be allowed to take on a contract with the country since otherwise a French firm would. By its own description MPRI is now assisting the country with the development of a National Security Enhancement Plan with “an integrated team of defense, security, and Coast Guard experts to provide a detailed set of recommendations to the government of Equatorial Guinea concerning its defense, littoral, and related environmental management requirements, as well as detailed implementation processes” (www.mpri.com). This engagement would have been unlikely if a political discussion had taken place. The extent to which the replacement of politics by money has affected security practices is expressed most starkly in the

virtual absence of effective limits on clients. Even clients almost everyone would concede are illegitimate will find it possible to persuade some firm to sell them military services. A drug cartel in Cali e.g. paid USD 10 million to obtain the material and expertise necessary to bomb their rival Pablo Escobar in the early 1990s (Kouri 2005).

Third and finally, depoliticization – via the growing uncertainty about clients – has resulted in security practices increasingly caught by a traditional security dilemma. The “security dilemma” refers to the dilemma of having to prepare for war (building up armed forces e.g.) even though doing so increases the insecurity of the opponent and hence the likelihood of war. The security dilemma is anchored in perceptions of what might happen rather than what really does. The imagined capacity of opponents of various kinds to buy security services on the private market is sufficient to justify further militarization and expenditure of defense which in turn deepens the traditional security dilemma. An episode from Ghana in 2004 exemplifies this dynamic (Addo 2004) : On 13 August 2004 *The Analyst* (a Liberian newspaper) carries a story about Ghanaian opposition leaders massively recruiting mercenaries in the Ivory Coast, Togo, Senegal and Guinea to attack Ghana. President Adullah Wade (of Senegal) and a former national security boss of Ghana, Kojo Tsikata, are said to be implicated. The story is carried in the Ghanaian papers *Statesman* (August 19) and *Insight* (August 27-29). The *Accra Daily Mail* claims to have received information about mercenaries planning to strike from Ivory Coast (August 23). Ministry of the Interior confirms that “some people with links to the opposition” are moving along the border regions Ivory Coast and Guinea. The president issues a call for security agencies to be vigilant (26 August). This is where the story ends. It turns out to be a hoax and *The Analyst* presents public excuses. However, the episode bolstered the Ghanaian security establishment and its demand for better resources. It showed what could have happened and might still happen. For this article, it illustrates the point that even if private security firms do not actually sell services to an opponent, the suspicion that they might is sufficient to deepen traditional security dilemmas.

The insistence of the private security business that it is not engaging in politics is hence a claim that should be treated seriously. The private security business prefers *not* to engage in public political debates about which issues are security issues and how political priorities should be structured. The implication is a de-politicization of security practices. Money becomes essential in deciding which problems are a security problem, how they should be dealt with and to whose advantage. The consequence is Swiss cheese security coverage and accentuated security dilemmas. This process of de-politicization further marginalizes the alternatives to techno-managerial security understandings that are already effectively out-competed by the technical efficiency of the private security business. To grasp the full significance of these changes security practices, it is useful to consider they relate to the public sector and the state more specifically.

Portrait/Practice 3: The Business of Serving States’ Militarized Security Practices

A final essential aspect of the private security business self-portrayal is of itself as a business that does not undermine states, or their authority, but which on the contrary tends to support it. The business constantly emphasizes its close links to states, the fact that it has grown under the auspices of states and continues to work for states and clients recognized as legitimate by these. From this perspective, it is generally and profoundly misleading to think of public and private actor in the security in zero-sum terms. Gains in state influence do not mirror losses in firm power or vice versa. On the contrary, states and the private security business may support and re-shape each other. As this section shows, when the security business serves states it tends to reshuffle power positions inside states and not to undermine them. The way it does this, tends to militarize security practices.

This section insists that although this militarizing effect is likely to vary depending on context, it is likely to be more widespread than usually recognized.

The Blurred Private Public Lines

The private security industry is closely intertwined with states. The business itself has been created by the willingness of states to diminish direct control over security affairs and to allow increased outsourcing and privatization. States continue to shape the market and often resist regulation attempts (Hulse, 2004). States continue to be among the key clients of security firms, even if one should not underrate the significance of private business, international organizations, NGOs and assorted individuals. States, finally, are directly involved in the business. Many firms originated and continue to operate as (para-) public firms, sometimes partially owned by the state. It is common also for entirely private firms to appoint high-ranking politicians and administrators to their boards and as directors (ICIJ, 2002). Finally, firms have close links to the armed forces. EO was linked to the South African Buffalo Battalion, MPRI is linked to the US armed forces, Sandline and its successors/ spin-offs are linked to the UK special services. But even firms that recruit from a variety of countries (e.g. Eriny's and Aegis) will have an overwhelming majority of their employees with origins in (various) national defense establishments. Everyone in the industry is an ex-something from the public armed forces.

The business is clear that working within this landscape where lines are blurred, the firms are subordinating their interests to those of states. Characteristically, the BAPSC⁴ makes it its first two priorities to:

- to build and promote open and transparent relations with UK Government departments and relevant International Organizations;
- to promote compliance with UK values and interests and with the laws of the countries in which its Members operate.

Moreover, point number 6 of the BAPSC charter states that membership entails the commitment "Decline to provide security services that might be contrary to UK values and interests." But the organization is also concerned with stating its attachment to the wider state based order. It is hence emphasized that members will respect applicable laws and values in countries where they operate as well as refrain from providing security services if this entails a risk of "adversely affecting the military and political balance in the country of delivery", "a likelihood of the provision involving criminal activity" and/or "a possibility that human rights will be infringed". Similar statements are issued by the other professional associations and firms.

As this indicates, it is not meaningful to assume a zero-sum relationship between states and the private security business. The relations between the two are more complex. Some parts of "states" (including their armed forces) encourage, work for and benefit from the development of the private security business and inversely the private security business is closely linked to (some parts of) the state. The relevant question in the context of this article is what implications this has for security practices. I will suggest here that the key to answering is to probe how the blurring boundaries shifts power positions inside states and through this, who weighs on and gives shape to state security practices.

Reshuffling Positions of State Power

Two different groups within states are empowered by the private security business. The first of these includes those who benefit directly or indirectly from private security business. Just as we talk about "dual use technology" moving between the civilian and military spheres, we can think of

⁴ The following references are all from www.bapsc.org.uk/key_documents-charter.asp (visited 7 July 2007).

individuals who do the same, dual sphere individuals. Staff and directors, board members and technicians of private security companies frequently also hold a position in the state institutions including the armed forces, the government or an administration. These persons include the generals on the lists of MPRI ready to take on a temporary contract with the firm. It also includes politicians who are closely tied to firms such as Frank Carlucci (defense secretary under Regan) who served as a board director at Vinell (ICIJ, 2002: 3), or those involved indirectly with the industry through more or less elaborate systems of economic kick-backs as has come out in the European “Augusta”, “Flick”, or Elf-Aquitaine scandals which all have in common that they unveiled complex systems of party finance involving large military contractors (Joly, 2003). The point here is that growth of the private security business bolsters the position of these dual sphere individuals. Their intermediation becomes more important both for the state and for the business and the rewards they can expect grow correspondingly. With the expansion of the private security business, dual sphere individuals gain not only economically but also in terms of status and centrality for policy-making. Since the private security business is “their” business in a very direct way, they can also be expected to work to promote it actively within the state. The term “business politician” describes a specific type of politician that was developing because of the growing closeness of business and politics in Italy (della Porta and Pizzorno, 1996). One sub-category of the business politician; the “security business politician” is becoming an increasingly common and increasingly prominent figure as a consequence of the expansion of the private military sector.

The second group empowered by the emergence of the private security business comprises those who share the private security business’ understanding of security and politics more widely without being linked to it. This group and the private security industry share a tendency to expand the number of issues that are thought of as security issues and to seek technical rather than political/diplomatic solutions to problems that arise. There is a long tradition for thinking that these views are particularly prevalent among security professionals whose professionalism makes them focus their attention on the technical aspects of security (Janowitz, 1971). There is an equally longstanding tradition for worrying about the “military adventurism” of politicians with exaggerated beliefs about what can be achieved through a technical competent and effective use of force (Desch, 1999). Both of these groups are susceptible of being strengthened by the rise of the private security industry. They share the private business understanding of security issues and, more tangibly, the industry makes it feasible to expand and extend strategies where the use of force plays a central role. One would, consequently, expect to see a reshuffling of the weight of different institutions within states expressed by intense competition and disagreement. In the US this expectation is currently born out as there is considerable disagreement between the Department of Defense and the State Department regarding how to deal with the private sector and how much to regulate it (GAO 2005).

This bolstering of those who share the private business’ technical and managerial approach affects states’ security practices. It amounts to giving the persons and individuals most prone to have a techno-managerial understanding of security an increased say. Since this understanding is centered on technical solutions, emphasizing cost saving it limits the scope for contestation. The consequence is a militarization of security practices in a classical sense.⁵ Ultimately the worry is that one could end up in what Harold Laswell termed a “Garrison State” where “crisis accentuation of state power tends to subordinate all social values and institutions to considerations of military potential, and where as a result military and police specialists are placed in advantageous positions, within the decision process” (Laswell, 1997: 102).

⁵ Militarization is “the permeation of an entire society by the self-serving ideology of the officer and soldier” (Laswell, 1997: 107).

Militarization with Variation

The argument made here provides no foundation for claiming that any particular state has turned into a “garrison state” or that states in general have. The point here is that the development of the private security business logically drives state security practices in this direction even if the significance of this drive is far from uniform. The security business politician as well as of the reshuffling of security institutions is bound to vary considerably across contexts. This is so because national security cultures vary (Katzenstein, 1996) with the dual consequence that privatization has been uneven and that it has been dealt with in diverging ways. For example, in post-second world war German security thinking the defense forces are a school of the nation and fear that they could escape control is deeply rooted. As a consequence privatization and outsourcing in the security sector has remained relatively limited compared e.g. to the situation in the UK. But more than this, the post-second world war forces have made the primacy of policy and diplomatic alternatives as well as the individual soldier’s duty to resist unjust orders part and parcel of their training (Longhurst, 2004). In such a context, a development of security business politicians and extensive reshuffling of positions is unlikely. The development of the private security business is more limited and it is more difficult to turn into an advantage for those who would share and benefit from a technical-managerial understanding of security. Similarly, the strongly statist French armed forces are prone to be more suspicious of private business involvement than are the more liberal UK ones (Leander, 2004; Lanxade, 2001). Again this restricts the extent of privatization and outsourcing and more centrally limits its imprint on state security practices.

The emphasis on variability should not be exaggerated. It is far easier to underestimate the effects of the rise of the private security business on the security practices of states officially resisting privatization than to overestimate it. The restructuring of the security industry world wide and the intense competition for market shares that this has engendered, affects also those states least prone to privatize and outsource (Kaldor, 1998). An increasing number of standards and security priorities are established beyond the state either through markets or regulatory agencies where private firms have an increasing. For example, in the EU the security services offered by UK companies put pressure on German and French firms to compete and on governments to create the frames regulating but also allowing this competition. The UK industry association (The British Association of Private Security Companies: <http://www.bapsc.org.uk/>) has tried to promote regulatory standards which if adopted are bound to reshape also the policies in France, Germany and elsewhere. In addition to this, private companies have a part in virtually all multilateral operations. “You could fight without us but it would be difficult” is Paul Lombardi’s judgment (2003).⁶ This means that also states that do not encourage privatization and outsourcing have working relations with the business to the extent that they participate in these operations. Last but not least, political debates about security are not nationally bounded. They engage international media, international institutions, foreign governments and translational civil society groups. Isolating security practices in any one state from the effects of the rise of the private security industry is consequently an elusive quest.

There is no good reason to assume that the private security business is portraying itself deceptively when it claims that it works for states and does in no way want undermine them. But this thinking through what implications the close links to states have is not necessarily reassuring. This section has suggested that it logically entails that the private security business empowers specific groups within states, namely the groups that either benefit directly from its existence or the groups that share its overall world view and priorities for a variety reasons. These groups have

⁶ Lombardi is a former CEO of Dyncorp.

played a significant part in the industry's expansion by promoting it inside states. More generally, their empowerment and their presence in states reinforce the technocratization and de-politicization of security that is a consequence of the expansion of the industry. The blurred private/public boundary, the fact that the industry does not work against states but with, for and through them is not a sign of the insignificance of the private security business. It is constitutive of its success and of its impact on security understandings.

Conclusion:

This article has emphasized the performative nature of security business self-portraits. It has analyzed the transformations entailed when portraits are practice. It has looked at three portraits and traced the security practices tied to them. It has argued that these practices are reconfiguring security and more broadly international politics. The article has made the point that the normal business practices of private security firms lead to more technocratic and managerial security practices. It has shown that the non-political mode of operations of the sector de-politicizes security practices by reducing the role and scope for political contestation. Finally, the article has underlined that because the private security business works with, for and through states (rather than against them), it militarizes security practices by reshuffling power positions inside states. The point of the article is clear is that political practices are becoming increasingly techno-managerial, de-politicized and militarized. The argument is a blunt and simplified discussion of more complex processes. The private security itself is highly diversified and the portraits could have been correspondingly differentiated and refined. Similarly, the overall reconfigurations in security practices and international politics can obviously not be attributed to the exponential growth of the private security business alone. These take place in a context that is absolutely essential. The article has hinted at this diversity and the general complexity and certainly there is no intent or wish to deny it. Yet it has received little explicit attention. The reason is a wish to retain a strict focus on the reconfiguration of security practices that occur when the private security business is true to its own portrait.

The general motivation for writing this article is that these changes tend to disappear from view in the discussion of the emergence of private security companies. They disappear from IR mainstream discussions that tend to focus almost exclusively on (the important) issues related to the shifts in the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force, including questions of accountability, control, and security governance arrangements. But they also tend to disappear from the gamut of critical approaches and writings on private security companies aiming primarily at reversing the industry self-portrait by showing its (often indeed proven) non-competitive, corrupt and anti-state nature. The zeal to unveil the hidden and unlawful obscures the legal and unspectacular, but significant, reconfiguration of political practices pointed to in this article. It may encourage the belief that if we could just identify and punish the bad firms, privatization with good firms would have no consequences worth discussing. Yet, precisely because the private security business is increasingly established as both acceptable and permanent, it is essential to think through the implications of its presence when it is behaving according to the books; true to its image.

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