

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Depoliticisation as a securitising move: the case of the United Nations Environment Programme

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Abstract

Created in 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has a normative mandate to promote the protection of the environment at the international level. However, since 1999, the organisation has been conducting field assessments in postconflict situations and addressing the role of natural resources in conflict, framing the environment as a security issue. To do so, the programme insists on its neutrality as a technical and ‘apolitical’ actor within the UN system. Considering depoliticisation as a political act, this article unpacks the concrete practices by which international organisations (IOs) enact depoliticisation. It further argues that IOs can perform securitising moves through practices and techniques presented as outside of the political realm. It draws upon the recent work on depoliticisation at the international level and reinforces studies considering the links between (de)politicisation and securitisation.

Keywords: Depoliticisation; Environment; International Organisations; Securitisation; UNEP

Introduction

In 1999, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)¹ with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/Habitat) sent a team of experts to Kosovo to assess the state of the environment after NATO air strikes.² Since this first field intervention, UNEP has conducted a considerable number of postconflict environmental assessments and since 2010 the organisation has dedicated a full programme to ‘Disasters and Conflicts’. Mostly managed by its Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB), UNEP’s activities in the field of security and conflict consist of assessments, policy reports, guidelines, and training material. In 2009, the Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding unit (ECP) of PCDMB published its first policy report entitled *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*. Drawing on multiple case studies, it addresses the role of the environment in conflict arguing that ‘research and field observation indicate that natural resources and the environment contribute to the outbreak of conflict’.³ Through this type of assertion, UNEP frames the environment as a security issue. In other words, it performs a securitising move directed to its audience: representatives from member states, personnel from other UN bodies, experts in environmental and security-related fields, and a concerned public opinion.⁴

¹At the end of 2016, the organisation changed its name to ‘UN Environment’. However, it is still mostly known under the acronym of UNEP.

²UNEP, UNCHS, *The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment & Human Settlements* (Geneva: UNEP, UNCHS, 1999).

³UNEP, *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment* (Geneva: UNEP, 2009), p. 8.

⁴The organisation relies on multiple communication tools to promote its publications to the medias.

To do so, the organisation affirms its neutrality as an ‘impartial’ actor.⁵ Created in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly,⁶ UNEP’s mission is ‘to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.’⁷ It is a small programme within the UN system with a budget of US \$334 million in 2014 for 851 employees and 129 projects.⁸ Relying on its normative mandate, it insists on its expertise and technical skills⁹ disregarding the political implications of its work and recommendations. However, far from being purely technical, UNEP’s field evaluations address issues of natural resources governance or socioeconomic dimensions of insecurities. It is precisely in presenting its work as apolitical that the organisation attempts to securitise the environment.

On the one hand, the existing literature on international organisations (IOs) has already shed light on the tensions around the political nature of these institutions.¹⁰ Likewise, there is a growing interest in the concept of depoliticisation ‘as a set of governing “tactics and tools”,’¹¹ and more precisely on the depoliticisation of environmental issues.¹² On the other hand, the theories of securitisation have inspired much work on the construction of the environment as a security issue and have discussed the connection between securitisation and (de)politicisation.¹³ In the Copenhagen School’s original formulation, depoliticisation is seen as a consequence of a successful securitisation: an issue presented as existential and urgent ‘should not be exposed to the normal haggling of politics’.¹⁴ The case of UNEP should not be surprising then: an organisation navigating between politics and anti-politics,¹⁵ dealing with an issue prone to be depoliticised – the environment – and using depoliticising tactics to promote securitising moves.

Yet, besides little dialogue between these studies, the literature in International Relations also remains rather silent on the concrete practices by which these organisations enact depoliticisation. How do international organisations such as UNEP not only claim but also perform depoliticisation? What are the motives and unintended consequences of these depoliticising moves? And finally, how can depoliticisation support securitising moves? By unpacking these mundane and below exception practices, this article intends to provide a deeper understanding of

⁵Interview with a programme manager, Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (hereafter PCDMB), UNEP, Geneva, April 2012.

⁶UN General Assembly, A/RES/2997(XXVII) *Resolution of the General Assembly 27/2997*, 15 December 1972.

⁷UNEP website, ‘About UNEP’, available at: {<http://web.unep.org/about/who-we-are/overview>} accessed January 2017.

⁸Detailed information on the number of staff and projects is not available in the latest annual report. UNEP, *UNEP Programme Performance Report, 2014* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2015), p. 10.

⁹Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹⁰James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development’, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Franck Petiteville, ‘International organizations beyond depoliticized governance’, *Globalizations* (2017), available at: doi: 10.1080/14747731.2017.1370850; ‘The (De)Politicizations of International Organizations’, Special Issue (in French) ed. Franck Petiteville, *Critique internationale*, 76:3 (2017); Lucile Maertens and Rahaëlle Parizet, “On ne fait pas de politique!": Les pratiques de dépolitisation au PNUD et au PNUF”, *Critique internationale*, 76:3 (2017), pp. 41–60; Diane Stone, ‘Global governance depoliticized: Knowledge networks, scientization and anti-policy’, in Paul Fawcett, Matthew Flinders, Colin Hay, and Matthew Wood (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 91–111, 112–33.

¹¹Fawcett et al. (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*, p. 5.

¹²Erik Swyngedouw, ‘Depoliticized environments: the end of nature, climate change and the post-political condition’, *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 69 (2011), pp. 253–74.

¹³Ulrik Pram Gad and Karen Lund Petersen, ‘Concepts of politics in securitization studies’, *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 315–28; Philippe Bourbeau, ‘Moving forward together: Logics of the securitization process’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:1 (2014), pp. 187–206.

¹⁴Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 29.

¹⁵Expression used by James Ferguson and reinterpreted recently by Fawcett, Flinders, Hay, and Wood (eds), in *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*.

the way depoliticisation can constitute, not only the outcome of a successful securitisation, but a tactic to facilitate securitising moves. It thus contributes to the literature on the processes of securitisation at the international level by shedding light on overlooked securitising moves enacted through depoliticisation.

While providing an original empirical example on the role of IOs as key players in the study of securitisation processes,¹⁶ the article intends to go beyond the sectors and actors identified by the Copenhagen School.¹⁷ First, it distances itself from state-centered analysis, also considering the overlaps between the political and the scientific agendas; second, it addresses the environmental sector below global threats to human civilisation. More precisely, it examines the tensions between UNEP's supposedly 'apolitical position' and the political dimensions of its securitising moves. I analyse the role of UNEP in the securitisation of environmental issues using data from a three-month participant observation in its Disasters and Conflicts programme and a series of semi-structured interviews with its personnel. I also rely on an analysis of UNEP's publications.¹⁸

This article draws upon the recent work on depoliticisation at the international level¹⁹ and reinforces studies considering the links between (de)politicisation and securitisation. It considers depoliticisation as a political act, which can contribute to a process of securitisation. On the role of science in the securitisation process, Trine Villumsen Berling has already shown that the mobilisation of scientific facts by securitising actors could prove useful.²⁰ Similarly, Thierry Balzacq highlighted the use of complex techniques to bypass public debate and to depoliticise the exchange of personal data within the European Union despite the security implications of these practices.²¹ In line with these studies, this article shows how depoliticisation – understood, at present, as the exclusion from the sphere of public affairs – is enacted and how it could contribute to securitisation. Based on the case of the securitisation of the environment by UNEP, it argues that international organisations can perform securitising moves through assemblages of practices and techniques presented as apolitical. Beyond this specific case, this article sheds light on depoliticisation in International Relations and security studies and the specific role of international organisations in this process.

The article first discusses the concept of depoliticisation as a political act performed by international organisations and questions its relevance to highlight securitising moves. It then intends to capture UNEP's depoliticising practices, which attempt to contribute to the construction of the environment as a security issue. The article is structured around these techniques and tactics – technical interpretation, neutral dissemination, and 'apolitical' field interventions – and it concludes

¹⁶It intends to supplement the few studies focusing on IOs and securitisation: Jef Huysmans, 'The European Union and the securitization of migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38:5 (2000), pp. 751–77; Thierry Balzacq, 'The policy tools of securitization: Information exchange, EU foreign and interior policies', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46:1 (2008), pp. 75–100; Tine Hanrieder and Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, 'WHO decides on the exception? Securitization and the emergency governance in global health', *Security Dialogue*, 45:4 (2014), pp. 331–48.

¹⁷Jocelyn Vaughn, 'The unlikely securitizer: Humanitarian organizations and the securitization of indistinctiveness', *Security Dialogue*, 40:3 (2009), pp. 263–85.

¹⁸The empirical study does not include the most recent evolutions driven by UNEP's new executive director. However, these new institutional arrangements do not alter the present analysis focused on the interrelation between depoliticisation and securitisation.

¹⁹J. F. Humphrey and Ingerid S. Straume, *Depoliticization: The Political Imaginary of Global Capitalism* (Malmö: NSU Press, 2010); Matt Wood and Matthew Flinders, 'Rethinking depoliticisation: Beyond the governmental', *Policy & Politics*, 42:2 (2014), pp. 151–70; Japhy Wilson and Erik Swyngedouw, *The Post-Political and its Discontent: Spaces of Depoliticisation and Spectres of Radical Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); 'Depoliticisation, Governance and the State', Special Issue, ed. Matthew Flinders and Matt Wood, *Policy & Politics*, 42:2 (2014); Fawcett et al. (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*; Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized'.

²⁰Trine Villumsen Berling, 'Science and securitization: Objectivation, the authority of the speaker and mobilization of scientific facts', *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), p. 385.

²¹Balzacq, 'The policy tools of securitization', p. 93.

with discussion on the logics of depoliticisation and securitisation they carry – bypassing politics, monopolising the field, and maintaining the status quo.

Depoliticisation as a securitising move: Delimiting the political realm

Like security, depoliticisation remains an ‘essentially contested concept’.²² Although attention to depoliticisation is not recent, new developments have emerged since the end of the 2000s with a growing interest in the international level.²³ Colin Hay determines three phases of depoliticisation: (i) the governmental depoliticisation or the process of delegation; (ii) the public depoliticisation which appears in the privatisation of public sectors; and (iii) the private depoliticisation, or the denial of the problem.²⁴ Supplementing this work, Matt Wood and Matthew Flinders assert that ‘depoliticisation occurs when the debate surrounding an issue becomes technocratic, managerial, or disciplined towards a single goal, and hence changed in content’.²⁵ They define three faces of depoliticisation as follows: (i) the governmental depoliticisation, or ‘the withdrawal of politicians from the direct control of a vast range of functions, and the rise of technocratic forms of governance’;²⁶ (ii) the societal depoliticisation, or the end of public debates; and (iii) the discursive depoliticisation where a single discourse with a single interpretation of the problem remains.²⁷ At the international level, these phases and faces can overlap and this article combines them while relying on a more generic definition of the process. Based on Hay’s original work, the authors from the ‘first wave’ and ‘second wave’ of writing on depoliticisation²⁸ propose the following definition: ‘depoliticisation can be defined as the set of processes (included varied tactics, strategies, and tools) that remove or displace the potential for choice, collective agency, and deliberation around a particular political issue.’²⁹ This article deals with the set of processes by which an actor can enact depoliticisation. While contributing to the development of ‘further conceptual work’ on the processes through which depoliticisation takes place, it also intends to capture how ‘depoliticisation works in practice’.³⁰

To do so, the article questions the links between depoliticisation and technicisation. Drawing on Schmitt’s concepts of politics and of the state of exception, Flinders and Wood associate depoliticisation and technicisation, stating that ‘the great promise of technicity, however, was that unlike theological, metaphysical, moral and even economic questions – that are forever debatable – purely technical problems have something refreshingly factual and neutral about them’.³¹ In a similar vein, Yannis Papadopoulos focuses on technocratic ruling in the case of depoliticisation in multilevel governance. Insisting on the domination by technocrats, including experts and bureaucrats, he asserts that ‘depoliticisation can be considered at its peak when technocrats dominate the process, when its pluralism is limited, when it is shielded from the “shadow of hierarchy”, and when there are no “fire alarms” to alert and trigger open debates.’³² In her article entitled ‘How to Technicize is to Do Politics Without Saying It’, H el ene Dufournet also shows how technicisation is based on ‘an activity of articulation of technical and

²²Fawcett et al. (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*, p. 5.

²³Matthew Flinders and Matt Wood, ‘Depoliticisation, governance and the state’, *Policy & Politics*, 42:2 (2014), p. 159.

²⁴Colin Hay, *Why We Hate Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

²⁵Wood and Flinders, ‘Depoliticisation, governance and the state’, p. 161.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 158–63.

²⁸Colin Hay, ‘Depoliticisation as process, governance as practice: What did the “first wave” get wrong and do we need a “second wave” to put it right?’, *Policy & Politics*, 42:2 (2014), p. 293.

²⁹Fawcett et al. (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance*, p. 5.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 24, 293.

³¹Flinders and Wood, ‘Depoliticisation, governance and the state’, p. 142.

³²Yannis Papadopoulos, ‘Multilevel governance and depoliticisation’, in Fawcett et al. (eds), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance* p. 141.

political registers ... and a tool for political legitimisation'.³³ According to her, the 'technical management of an issue' is a form of depoliticisation as it fixes it in a context of administrative regulation to avoid 'putting it into politics'.³⁴ Even if she uses the term 'a-politicisation' rather than depoliticisation, I argue, in line with Jürgen Habermas's work on technology and the depoliticisation of the public sphere,³⁵ that the concept of depoliticisation is relevant to qualify the political enterprise of technicisation performed by international organisations. In other words, while 'apolitical' indicates the quality of an element as being outside of the political realm, 'depoliticised' qualifies an element deliberately labelled and/or designed as being 'apolitical'. Part of this dual process of depoliticisation and technicisation relies on scientific knowledge, alleged objectivity, and technocratic neutrality. In her work on global governance depoliticised, Diane Stone refers to the process of 'scientization' as a tactic of depoliticisation.³⁶ She shows how "science" or "causal knowledge" is deployed to reduce conditions of "uncertainty", allowing experts to enter policy deliberations with 'their tactical input to governance [being] legitimized by their professional accreditations, high-level educational qualifications, or scientific recognition'.³⁷ While she focuses on knowledge networks, experts, and their professional agency, this article includes the tactic of 'scientization' within the larger process of technicisation that feeds depoliticisation. It explores this process of depoliticisation with a focus on international organisations and the environment, contributing to two additional sets of literature.

First, it reinforces a growing body of work on depoliticisation and IOs. Technicisation is essential to the functionalist project, which precisely applies to the case of IOs. According to Mitrany, functionalism rests on the idea that a 'technical' approach to international political problems could promote peace by neutralising the politicisation of issues and by organising interdependence.³⁸ Technicisation is therefore not a new practice in multilateralism and figures among the potential vectors of depoliticisation used by IOs.³⁹ With a focus on global governance, Stone also argues that depoliticisation arises 'from technocratic distancing tactics' that are 'practised by international civil servants, government officials, and various experts'.⁴⁰ Insisting on their apparent neutrality and presenting themselves as 'depoliticized and impartial',⁴¹ IOs build and emphasise the technical and 'apolitical' dimension of their activities. Depoliticisation may then conceal the ideological dimensions of their practices. This argument echoes the work that has shown that IOs are 'anti-politics machines', that can reduce issues such as poverty to a technical problem.⁴² They can remove the political meaning of international development or humanitarian activities undertaken by the international donors or the national actors with whom they are working.⁴³ Far from being depoliticised by nature, practices performed by IOs are confined to the field of expertise in order to avoid cleavages and oppositions.⁴⁴ In line with the work

³³Hélène Dufournet, 'Quand techniciser c'est faire de la politique "sans le dire": Récit d'une "technicisation réussie" au ministère de la Défense', *Gouvernement & action publique*, 1 (2014), p. 43, title and text translated from French by author.

³⁴Ibid., p. 32.

³⁵Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

³⁶Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized', p. 95.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 101–02.

³⁸Cited in Guillaume Devin, 'Traditions et mystères de l'interdépendance internationale', in Pascal Morvan (ed.), *Droit, politique et littérature: Mélanges en l'honneur du Professeur Yves Guchet* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2008), p. 253.

³⁹Petiteville, 'International organizations beyond depoliticized governance'; Annabelle Litzot-Monnet (ed.), *The Politics of Expertise in International Organizations: How International Bureaucracies Produce and Mobilize Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁰Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized', p. 92.

⁴¹Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*, p. 63.

⁴²Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

⁴³Mark Duffield, 'Carry on Killing: Global Governance, Humanitarianism and Terror', Working Paper No. 23 (Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2004); David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005); Raphaëlle Parizet, *Les paradoxes du développement: Sociologie politique des dispositifs de normalisation des populations indiennes au Mexique* (Paris: Dalloz, 2015).

⁴⁴Maertens and Parizet, "On ne fait pas de politique!", p. 55.

on the influence of technocrats' ideas and the role of expertise in the construction of the multilateral system,⁴⁵ this article investigates the technical functions of IOs and the logics of depoliticisation, which they underpin.

Second, the article focuses on the case of the environment, providing novel empirical data on the process of depoliticisation of environmental issues. According to Erik Swyngedouw, environmental politics 'is a politics reduced to the administration and management of processes whose parameters are defined by consensual socio-scientific knowledges',⁴⁶ adding that the 'reduction of the political to the 'mode of governing' is particularly prevalent in environmental practices'.⁴⁷ The case of UNEP supplements this assertion, based on its personnel's assumption that environmental issues locate at the level of low politics. Paradoxically, the environment is also seen and framed as a security issue.

Depoliticising to securitise

This article not only questions depoliticisation in the case of environmental issues dealt by international organisations, but also its contribution to the process of securitisation. Developed by the Copenhagen School in a context of broadening of security studies in the 1980s, the concept of securitisation considers the social construction behind the notion of 'security'. For Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, 'the exact definition and criteria of securitization is constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects'.⁴⁸ In other words, the process would be based on the political elite labelling a threat to survival – through a speech act – and making it recognised as such. A successful securitisation process would allow the issue to be treated with urgent and exceptional measures that characterise the field of security according to these authors.⁴⁹ This would eventually lead to its depoliticisation, since 'upon acceptance by the audience, the issue is said to have moved out of the sphere of normal politics and into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal rules and regulations of policymaking'.⁵⁰

The Copenhagen School's model, centred on a discursive analysis, has been widely criticised and expanded since its first formulation. Three specific pieces of work are useful to highlight the case developed in this article and justify the deployment of securitisation theory to capture attempts to frame the environment as a security issue. First, Balzacq proposes a sociological approach to securitisation including non-discursive practices.⁵¹ He also insists on the intersubjective dimension of securitisation, which is not 'a self-referential practice'.⁵² As a short definition, consolidated later in his chapter, he defines securitisation as 'a set of interrelated practices, and the processes of their production, diffusion, and reception/translation that bring threats into being'.⁵³ This article deals with this set of practices, with a specific focus on their production and diffusion. It directs the analysis on securitising moves, instead of on the

⁴⁵Johan Schot and Vincent Lagendijk, 'Technocratic internationalism in the interwar years: Building Europe on motorways and electricity networks', *Journal of Modern European History*, 6:2 (2008), pp. 196–217; Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Streck, and Jakob Vogel (eds), *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

⁴⁶Erik Swyngedouw, 'The antinomies of the postpolitical city: In search of a democratic politics of environmental production', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33:3 (2009), p. 602.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 605.

⁴⁸Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 25.

⁴⁹Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization', in Ron Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–86.

⁵⁰Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment: Securitisation Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁵¹Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁵²Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory*, p. 3.

⁵³Ibid.

securitisation process as a whole. In line with the work of Rita Floyd on the securitisation of the environment by the US administration, the article also considers securitising moves beyond their potential success or failure.⁵⁴ For that reason, the article is less concerned by the reception and the audience of these moves, despite acknowledging the intersubjective character of the process. Finally, it also draws on the work focusing on security in a logic of routine instead of a logic of exception. Notably referring to Didier Bigo's work,⁵⁵ Philippe Bourbeau explains: 'the logic of routine sees securitisation as a process of establishing and inscribing meaning through governmentality and practices. It sees the securitisation process as consisting of a series of routinized and patterned practices, carried out by bureaucrats and security professionals, in which technology holds a prominent place.'⁵⁶ By focusing on UNEP's personnel and their daily activities, the article precisely questions routinised practices. In the case of the environment, this approach considering security in mundane decisions is all the more relevant.

The theories of securitisation have inspired much work on the construction of the environment as a security issue.⁵⁷ Matt McDonald⁵⁸ and Felix Ciută⁵⁹ highlight the challenges faced when securitising environmental issues and suggest going beyond 'the strict boundaries of the concept and practice of security'.⁶⁰ In addition, the work of Maria Julia Trombetta insists on the transformative action of environmental issues on the security sector. She analyses the securitisation of climate change⁶¹ contributing to a growing literature, that shows how the securitisation of the environment can drive security practices towards risk management instead of exceptional measures.⁶² For instance, besides their focus on the different levels of referent objects – territorial, individual, planetary – the work of Franziskus von Lucke, Zehra Wellmann, and Thomas Diez on the securitisation of climate change also identifies two logics of securitisation: one based on the concept of security and the other one on the concept of risk.⁶³

The article intends to reinforce these studies by capturing an overlooked aspect in the process of securitisation of the environment. First, it addresses the role of UNEP, barely considered in this literature.⁶⁴ Second, it discusses the tensions between securitisation and depoliticisation for the specific case of the environment. It draws on a sociological definition of the process of securitisation focusing on routinised practices and concentrates on the production of securitising moves. It argues that the depoliticisation of the environment can be deliberately promoted in order to contribute to its securitisation. By facilitating the production and the dissemination of the discourse on environmental threats, depoliticisation can be a securitising move. In that

⁵⁴Floyd, *Security and the Environment*.

⁵⁵Didier Bigo, 'Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease', *Alternatives*, 27 (2002), pp. 63–92.

⁵⁶Bourbeau, 'Moving forward together', p. 190.

⁵⁷Rita Floyd and Richard Matthew (eds), *Environmental Security: Approaches and Issues* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁸Matt McDonald, *Security, the Environment and Emancipation: Contestation over Environmental Change* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁹Felix Ciută, 'Conceptual notes on energy security: Total or banal security?', *Security Dialogue*, 41:2 (2010), pp. 123–44.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶¹Maria Julia Trombetta, 'Environmental security and climate change: Analysing the discourse', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 21:4 (2008), pp. 585–602.

⁶²Nicole Detraz and Michelle Betsill, 'Climate change and environmental security: For whom the discourse shifts', *International Studies Perspectives*, 10 (2009), pp. 303–20; Angela Oels, 'From "securitization" of climate change to "climatization" of the security field: Comparing three theoretical perspectives', in Jürgen Scheffran et al. (eds), *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict* (Berlin: Springer, 2012), pp. 185–205; Chris Methmann and Delf Rothe, 'Politics for the day after tomorrow: the logic of apocalypse in global climate politics', *Security Dialogue*, 43:4 (2012), pp. 323–44; Franziskus von Lucke, Zehra Wellmann, and Thomas Diez, 'What's at stake in securitising climate change? Towards a differentiated approach', *Geopolitics*, 19:4 (2014), pp. 857–84.

⁶³von Lucke, Wellmann, and Diez, 'What's at stake in securitising climate change?', pp. 857–84.

⁶⁴Though it does not discuss the securitisation process, Ken Conca provides a general overview of UN activities in the field of environmental security, including UNEP's action. Ken Conca, *An Unfinished Foundation: The United Nations and Global Environmental Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

regard, the article again distances itself from the Copenhagen School. While for them, depoliticisation results from a successful securitisation process by refusing to expose the securitised issue ‘to the normal haggling of politics’,⁶⁵ here depoliticisation is not to be understood as a form of de-democratisation, or a denial of classical democratic procedures via the implementation of exceptional emergency policies as perceived by these authors. Depoliticisation as enacted by UNEP consists of the delegation of control to technical experts. Drawing on Bourdieu, Villumsen Berling questions the interface between science and securitisation and underpins three distinct mechanisms. She shows how ‘science objectifies its object of study’ influencing securitising options, how ‘science co-determines the status of a securitizing actor and thus influences the authority of the speaker in specific fields’ and how ‘scientific facts can be *mobilized* in securitization claims by both experts and other political actors in attempts to seek back-up in the objective, disinterested aura of the scientific vocation.’⁶⁶ In line with her conclusions, this article argues that depoliticisation as a securitising move proceeds from tactics of technicisation and ‘scientization’⁶⁷ where scientific knowledge, apparent objectivity, technocratic ruling, and authority legitimised through expertise are deployed to contribute to the securitisation process. The three main tactics identified in the case of UNEP consist of providing a technical interpretation, relying on neutral dissemination and presenting field interventions as ‘apolitical’. The article intends to unpack these depoliticising techniques, which facilitate or contribute to securitising moves.

Unpacking depoliticising practices

As developed earlier, this article considers depoliticisation as a political act of technicisation. It does not examine if the issue is actually depoliticised, but questions the process of depoliticisation – its techniques, objectives, and outputs. It does not address the effects in terms of ‘post-politics’, but intends to understand how ‘political contradictions are reduced to policy problems to be managed by experts and legitimated through participatory processes in which the scope of possible outcomes is narrowly defined in advance.’⁶⁸ Depoliticisation is at work in the deliberate exclusion of a problem from the political sphere and the denial of contingency through practices purposely presented as outside of politics.

Concretely, IOs depoliticise with assemblages of multiple tactics and techniques. Mainly associated with the work of Deleuze and Guattari and DeLanda, the concept of assemblage is increasingly used in social sciences.⁶⁹ Referring to a mode of association, which allows the preservation of a form of heterogeneity,⁷⁰ it indicates ‘the possibility that heterogeneous elements can hold together *without* actually forming a coherent whole’.⁷¹ The concept of assemblage allows us to study all the fundamentally different techniques, which participate in the same process of depoliticisation undertaken by UNEP to contribute to the securitisation of the environment.

The article will thus unpack the concrete enactment of depoliticisation by an IO such as UNEP. Through the lenses of depoliticising practices, it also intends to capture the making and doing of securitising moves. Here the focus is put on the organisation as a whole through its official discourse – publications and field activities. When possible, I will acknowledge the

⁶⁵Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, p. 29.

⁶⁶Villumsen Berling, ‘Science and securitization’, pp. 385–6, emphasis in original.

⁶⁷Stone, ‘Global governance depoliticized’.

⁶⁸Wilson and Swyngedouw, *The Post-Political and its Discontent*, p. 6.

⁶⁹Ben Anderson and Colin McFarlane, ‘Assemblage and geography’, *Area*, 43:2 (2011), pp. 124–7.

⁷⁰Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal, and Nadine Voelkner (eds), *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 7; George Marcus and Erkan Saka, ‘Assemblage’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:2–3 (2006), p. 106.

⁷¹John Allen, ‘Powerful assemblages’, *Area*, 43:2 (2011), p. 154, emphasis in original.

significant role of a few key individuals, even though I will mainly refer to UNEP as a single actor (also to preserve anonymity). As mentioned earlier, PCDMB performs most of UNEP's securitising moves, but the main secretariat of the organisation has to validate its projects. The member states also have the possibility to restrict UNEP's actions and I will in time refer to their official endorsement or disapproval. However, the specificity of the international level is also to blur the lines between actors, audience, and context. An organisation such as the United Nations can be the actor performing securitising moves, the context in which other actors attempt to securitise and the audience of these moves. As a result, the strict application of these categories does not inform our case as much as a focus on specific tactics and practices.

Depoliticising tactics and techniques of securitisation

Based on the data generated through participant observation, interviews, and analysis of UNEP's publications, I identified three main tactics implemented by the organisation to depoliticise its activities while attempting to frame the environment as a security issue. They illustrate the way scientific knowledge, alleged objectivity, technocratic ruling, and legitimised expertise are deployed to securitise. First, UNEP provides a technical interpretation to explain the link between the environment and security. Second, to disseminate its framing of the issue, the UN programme relies on specific media formats often used by IOs due to their apparent neutrality. IOs exploit distinct modes of communication to neutralise the political dimensions of the discourse they circulate.⁷² Third, through its field activities – environmental assessments and field-based projects – UNEP presents itself as 'apolitical' despite providing very political recommendations. This part of the article now focuses on the depoliticisation process enacted by UNEP while providing some comments on their functions in regards to the organisation's securitising moves.

Technical interpretation

First, UNEP provides a technical interpretation to assess the connection between security and the environment by claiming its position as an expert. The organisation particularly demonstrates its willingness and ability to use its normative mandate by highlighting its technical functions. During its first field intervention in 1999 in the Balkans, UNEP relied on its expertise and scientific competences combined with its political and diplomatic skills with the Russian and US ambassadors to get the mission accepted.⁷³ Even though the results of the mission did not necessarily meet the states' expectations, they respected the work because, according to a former member of the team, the results were 'scientifically sound and politically well-balanced'.⁷⁴ Still today, UNEP presents itself as an 'impartial actor', a 'potential mediator' between parties in conflict.⁷⁵ To strengthen the legitimacy of its projects, the director of the Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding unit of PCDMB established a panel of experts on peacebuilding and the environment with the International Institute for Sustainable Development.⁷⁶ UNEP also worked closely with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the University ETH Zurich, positioning the organisation as an expert in the field on the same level as a research centre or a university. Key individuals within UNEP are positioned at the intersection between practitioners, policy-oriented research participants, and academics: they are experts in bridging different professional fields and navigating between different institutional languages and dynamics. Their academic background (at least MA level), their extensive UN experience, their well-connected network (inside and outside the

⁷²Maertens and Parizet, "On ne fait pas de politique!", pp. 8–9.

⁷³Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Interview with the programme manager, Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, April 2012.

⁷⁶Ibid.

organisation), and their own individual attributes – charisma among the most common – provide useful skills to strengthen their positions as experts.⁷⁷ They need to constantly reaffirm their epistemic power as part of the ‘scientization’ tactic of depoliticisation,⁷⁸ increasing their authority to securitise.⁷⁹ Conversely, the organisation also tries to keep its distance with politically sensitive situations and highly political actors. For instance, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the environmental recovery programme relocated its office to Port-Salut in the south of the country, a few hours from the capital, Port-au-Prince. It allowed UNEP to establish a distance from other UN agencies in the capital where the lack of coordination was highly criticised. Moreover, this new location also helped the team to dissociate itself from the peacekeeping mission responsible for the cholera outbreak.⁸⁰ It preserved its status of apolitical expert.

UNEP also proposed a technical interpretation by quantifying and mapping the causal relation between the environment and conflicts. Its first report on peacebuilding and natural resources is based on different statistics to attest the role of natural resources in triggering and financing conflicts. For instance, it states that: ‘preliminary findings from a retrospective analysis of intrastate conflicts over the past sixty years indicate that conflicts associated with natural resources are twice as likely to relapse into conflict in the first five years.’⁸¹ A member of UNEP expressed satisfaction that data cited in this document are mentioned in subsequent reports and in other external publications.⁸² However, UNEP received the credit for these largely repeated figures but did not actually conduct the study. Thanks to its partnership mentioned earlier, the organisation obtained permission from PRIO to quote the results before their own publication. Similarly, during my investigation, it was found that research assistants were asked to rephrase specific statements or take into account broader criteria in order to overstate the figures.⁸³ The mobilisation of these numbers as scientific ‘facts’, which provide a stronger link between the environment and conflict, constitutes a securitising move. On the one hand, UNEP seeks to quantify security issues with ‘compelling’ data, and on the other hand, it expects to receive credit for this work of numerical qualification. In some cases, a mapping exercise supports the numerical interpretation, erasing all the political choices required for the production of maps. For instance, in a desk study dedicated to climate change, migration, and conflict in the Sahel region, UNEP produced maps to identify the areas most affected by changes in climate (precipitation, temperature, drought, and flood). Cumulating all types of changes and adding population trends and data on conflicts, one map reveals ‘hotspots’.⁸⁴ Behind the apparent scientificness of the exercise, it offers an extremely simplified analysis while concealing the role of political actors and governance structures. By providing a technical interpretation of the issue, UNEP also proposes technical solutions and suggests that the programme itself may prove to be the most appropriate organisation to carry out this work. As shown by Yannick Barthe, a technical interpretation does not necessarily suggest that the problem is only technical, but it implies that technical answers can solve the issue.⁸⁵ Thus the technical interpretation of the links between environment and security legitimates the role of UNEP as an expert with technical skills and solutions, like environmental assessments or technical training on natural resources management.

⁷⁷Participant observation within UNEP: PCDMB, Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding unit, Geneva, May to August 2011.

⁷⁸Stone, ‘Global governance depoliticized’, p. 95.

⁷⁹Villumsen Berling, ‘Science and securitization’.

⁸⁰Anonymous interview.

⁸¹UNEP, *From Conflict to Peacebuilding*, p. 5.

⁸²Anonymous interview.

⁸³Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

⁸⁴UNEP, *Livelihood Security: Climate Change, Migration and Conflict in the Sahel* (Geneva: UNEP, 2011), pp. 50–1.

⁸⁵Yannick Barthe, ‘Le recours au politique ou la problématisation politique “par défaut”’, in Jacques Lagroye (ed.), *La politisation* (Paris: Belin, 2003), p. 479.

Finally, activities related to postconflict assessments and to the management of natural disasters are assembled in the same branch within UNEP. Yet this association contributes to a technical interpretation of environmental and security issues. While UNEP's former executive director praised the technical expertise of PCDMB, he chose, during the reform of the organisation, to associate the work on postconflict with activities on natural disaster management and disaster risk reduction.⁸⁶ According to the coordinator of UNEP's 'Disasters and Conflicts' programme, this pairing was logical for the executive director: the technical tools used for the assessments in both types of situation were similar.⁸⁷ Unlike the trend to categorise any crisis situation as a potential security issue, the logic here is to disguise the political character of postconflict situations by considering them only from a technical point of view. By associating conflict situations with natural disasters in the same branch, the director assimilates them, meaning that postconflict or natural disaster responses are equivalent. In doing so, the reform depoliticises UNEP's activities in this field, supporting the organisation's attempts to securitise the environment.

Neutral dissemination

Dissemination practices also tend to depoliticise UNEP's activities while still contributing to its securitising moves. Here, it is less the content of the discourse produced in these artefacts than their formats that is compelling: a platform considered neutral because of its scientific nature. Like knowledge networks 'give their products – policy plans, publications, analysis – a patina of scientific objectivity and technocratic neutrality',⁸⁸ UNEP uses technical tools – guidelines and training – to produce and disseminate a supposedly neutral message about the security threats posed by the environment.

First of all, in cooperation with multiple external actors, UNEP produces fact sheets linking the environment to conflict and peacebuilding. Through its partnership with the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), the University of Tokyo, and McGill University, UNEP has published a series of edited volumes on natural resources and peacebuilding. With the same partners, it launched a knowledge platform entitled 'Environmental Peacebuilding' where it promotes the various publications resulting from the partnership – books and policy briefs.⁸⁹ The platform also includes a library of 'country assessments', 'toolkits and guidance', and 'briefs and development'. Aiming to create a community of researchers and practitioners, the platform is a new way to position UNEP as an expert in this field. With its online technical publications, UNEP's expertise and knowledge are then available to everyone. The UN-EU partnership on natural resources and conflict prevention produced similar outputs, according to its coordinator and UNEP's staff member who initiated the project.⁹⁰ The partnership published six fact sheets, also called 'toolkit and guidance for preventing and managing land and natural resources conflict'. Presented as 'practical guidance notes',⁹¹ they address the following issues: land and conflict;⁹² extractive industries and conflict;⁹³

⁸⁶Interview with the executive director, UNEP, Nairobi, August 2012.

⁸⁷Interview with the deputy coordinator, 'Disasters and Conflicts' programme, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, April 2012.

⁸⁸Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized', p. 104.

⁸⁹See {<http://environmentalpeacebuilding.org/>} accessed January 2017.

⁹⁰Interview with the programme manager, Environmental Cooperation and Peacebuilding, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, April 2012; interview with the programme manager, UN-EU partnership on natural resources and conflict prevention, New York, February 2013.

⁹¹EU-UN Partnership on Land, Natural Resources, and Conflict Prevention website, available at: {<http://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/index.shtml>} accessed January 2017.

⁹²United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action (hereafter UNIFTPA), *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict* (hereafter: *TGPMNRC: Land and Conflict* (New York, 2012).

⁹³UNIFTPA, *TGPMNRC: Extractive Industries and Conflict* (New York, 2012).

renewable resources and conflict;⁹⁴ strengthening capacity for conflict-sensitive natural resource management;⁹⁵ conflict prevention in resource rich economies;⁹⁶ and capacity inventory.⁹⁷ An additional note summarises their conclusions and proposes 'practical guidance to assist in thinking through how natural resource management principles and practices can feed into transitional analysis and planning frameworks'⁹⁸ of UN interventions. It even suggests 'diagnostic tools to assist those on the ground in deciding where and when such issues need to be addressed, how this can be done, what types of roles the UN can take on, and how the UN can support other actors.' The Joint UNEP/OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Environment Unit also provides such documents on a database called the Environmental Emergencies Centre.⁹⁹ With tools and guidelines, technical expertise, training and assessments, the unit provides 'independent, impartial advice and practical solutions'¹⁰⁰ for environmental emergencies. The tone is undeniably technical. Most of these activities result from collaborations set up by UNEP where key individuals play a significant role. Indeed, like in the creation of partnerships with research centres and well-known academics in the field of environmental peacebuilding, personal relationships between UN workers from the different programs and agencies are central in facilitating collaborations. In return, joint-publications reach a larger audience while capitalising on the legitimacy and perceived expertise of each organisation.

Second, training programmes provided by UNEP facilitate the neutral dissemination of its discourse on environment and security. Once again, the organisation is positioned as an expert able to train different actors on these issues. UNEP presents three types of training: online training that is open to all but often targeting UN actors; direct and field training with UN practitioners; and training offered to government officials and local actors. In terms of online training, the UN System Staff College¹⁰¹ hosts four modules on natural resources and conflicts that were developed in the framework of the UN-EU partnership. These modules focus on measures to implement as part of a development programme to resolve conflicts over natural resources.¹⁰² The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)¹⁰³ also offered an online training course created with UNEP based on its report *Greening the Blue Helmets: Environment, Natural Resources and UN Peacekeeping Operations*.¹⁰⁴ The module provided an introduction to the environmental footprint of peacekeeping missions. It also discussed the links between the environment and conflict and the role of peacekeepers on that matter. Although the training was public and open to all, the main target audience was the Blue Helmets and UN peacekeeping personnel.¹⁰⁵ More recently, UNEP with its academic partners¹⁰⁶ launched a

⁹⁴UNIFTPA, *TGPMLNRC: Renewable Resources and Conflict* (New York, 2012).

⁹⁵UNIFTPA, *TGPMLNRC: Strengthening Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Natural Resource Management* (New York, 2012).

⁹⁶UNIFTPA, *TGPMLNRC: Conflict Prevention in Resource Rich Economies* (New York, 2012).

⁹⁷UNIFTPA, *TGPMLNRC: Capacity Inventory* (New York, 2010).

⁹⁸UNDG-ECHA Guidance Note Natural Resource Management in Transition Settings, available at: {<http://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/offer/undp-echa.shtml>} accessed January 2017.

⁹⁹Environmental Emergencies Centre, available at: {<http://www.eecentre.org/>} accessed January 2017.

¹⁰⁰Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, 'Environmental Emergencies Section', Fact sheet, n.d.

¹⁰¹The UNSSC is a UN programme that was set up in 1996 as part of a joint operation between the United Nations and the International Labor Organization (ILO), which became independent in 2002 after the approval of the General Assembly. Its mission is 'to contribute to a more effective, results-oriented and agile United Nations through learning, training and knowledge dissemination'. See UNSSC website, 'About UNSSC', available at: {<http://www.unssc.org/about-unssc/>} accessed January 2017.

¹⁰²EU-UN Partnership on Land, Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention, available at: {<http://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/index.shtml>} accessed January 2017.

¹⁰³Established in 1963, UNITAR is 'a training arm of the United Nations System'. See UNITAR website, 'About Us', available at: {<http://unitar.org/the-institute>} accessed January 2017.

¹⁰⁴UNEP, *Greening the Blue Helmets: Environment, Natural Resources and UN Peacekeeping Operations* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2012).

¹⁰⁵Participant observation within DPKO and DFS: Policy, Evaluation, and Training division, Policy Planning unit, New York, October 2012 to February 2013.

¹⁰⁶Duke University, University of California Irvine, Columbia University, and ELI.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in Environmental Security and Sustaining Peace.¹⁰⁷ In terms of direct training with practitioners, ELI with strong support from PCDMB, organised a learning event at the Rio+20 Earth Summit on sustainable natural resources management and peacebuilding. Likewise, UNEP led an awareness-raising event at the UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan (UNAMID – Darfur). The training showed how the mission and other humanitarian actors, by asking the local population for bricks to build the camp, actually contributed to deforestation of the area, exacerbating the risk of desertification and thus the depletion of arable land. It was also designed to apprise peacekeepers in a relatively informal setting about the links between the environment and the conflict in the region, mainly over arable land between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers.¹⁰⁸ Finally, UNEP offers training to local actors in other countries where there are UN missions, for example, Afghanistan. As part of its technical assistance, the country team train local actors in environmental management with the aim of developing professional and technical skills.¹⁰⁹ With these different guidelines and training programmes, the organisation, supported by its partners, who also bring scientific authority, manages to diminish the political dimensions of its discourse linking the environment to conflict and security.

‘Apolitical’ field interventions

Field activities presented as ‘apolitical’ also constitute a tactic for securitising moves. Indeed, UNEP designates its environmental assessments as ‘neutral’.¹¹⁰ To conduct these evaluations, UNEP sends a team of experts to assess the state of the environment and to identify the risks and opportunities arising from the situation. After the publication of the results, the assessment may lead to the implementation of a long-term recovery programme. These ‘neutral’ assessments apply to two types of situations. UNEP is primarily involved in postconflict situations to assess the environmental damage of a conflict. UNEP conducted such assessments in regions and countries including the Balkans, Afghanistan, Sudan, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNEP also provides evaluations of the state of the environment in the aftermath of a natural disaster. PCDMB and the Joint Unit on environmental emergencies – ecological disasters of natural and human origin – offer this type of assessment. These field studies evaluate the degradation of the environment following the disaster and identify the potential risks for human beings while suggesting the steps needed for rehabilitation. Within UNEP, all postcrisis environmental assessments are conducted by the same branch, PCDMB, but usually by different teams.¹¹¹ In both cases, the organisation claims to provide technical expertise while also advising on very political issues such as peace treaties or natural resource governance reform. For instance, in its 2003 postconflict environmental assessment in Afghanistan, UNEP presented cross-cutting environmental management recommendations that stated in the introduction: ‘For the government of Afghanistan to address effectively the great environmental challenges faced by the country, strong and well-equipped environmental authorities are needed to guide and design new environmental management tools and policies, as well as monitor the implementation of protection and restoration projects.’¹¹² Far from being purely technical, the first recommendation is to ‘recognize environmental rights in the national constitution’. Likewise, in its report on Sudan, UNEP’s first two general recommendations are: ‘Invest in environmental management to support lasting peace in Darfur, and to avoid local conflict over natural resources elsewhere in Sudan’ and ‘[b]uild capacity at all levels of government and improve

¹⁰⁷See {<https://courses.sdgacademy.org/learn/environmental-security-and-sustaining-peace-march-2018>} accessed March 2018.

¹⁰⁸Participant observation within DPKO and DFS (2012–13).

¹⁰⁹Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹¹⁰Interview with a programme manager, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, April 2012.

¹¹¹Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹¹²UNEP, *Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* (Geneva: UNEP, 2003), p. 105.

legislation to ensure that reconstruction and economic development do not intensify environmental pressures and threaten the livelihoods of present and future generations.¹¹³

In addition to environmental assessments, UNEP offers technical assistance to UN staff in the field and to local stakeholders. Many actors within the UN system provide this type of service, again designated as apolitical guidance tools. As part of the support given to local authorities and communities at the field level, UNEP's capacity to influence is highly significant since it offers assistance for a wide range of practices. For example, the UN-EU partnership on natural resources and conflict prevention, in which UNEP is participating, offers to provide technical assistance on the management of natural resources in postconflict situations and to help formulate programmes in this area. It designates its service as a bottom-up approach that receives regular requests from governments.¹¹⁴ UN actors participating in these activities are thus able to shape the local authorities' perception on the connection between natural resources and conflict and to directly impact the programmes implemented. Similarly, as part of its few ongoing field-based projects and environmental recovery programmes, UNEP also offers technical assistance. For example, in Afghanistan, UNEP provides day-to-day technical assistance, advice, and training on environmental management to the national environmental protection agency (NEPA), government officials, and UN personnel. It also delivers daily guidance and mentoring to the NEPA staff notably with professional skills and management training.¹¹⁵ UNEP can contribute to defining the key issues on NEPA's agenda and shape its practices in terms of environmental policies. Likewise, as part of its policy mainstreaming activities, it aims to treat the environment as both a sector and a crosscutting issue. With considerable access to government officials, UNEP could also bring environmental issues onto the Afghan government's security agenda, while still designating its activities as technical and apolitical. Far from being apolitical and 'neutral' as UNEP's personnel claims, the technical assistance is thus a tool for political intervention through assessments and advice presented as exclusively belonging to the technical sphere.

These different examples show how an organisation enacts depoliticisation through a variety of practices, tools, and tactics. In other words, it not only claims its neutrality, it performs it through a series of depoliticising moves. The case of UNEP's activities in the field of conflict and security is also compelling to question the link between these depoliticising moves and securitisation. Indeed, with a technical interpretation of the causal relation between the environment and conflict, the use of supposedly neutral media of dissemination and field assessments designed as 'apolitical', UNEP depoliticises its own action while trying to bring the fields of security and the environment closer together. Without assuming a successful outcome for these securitising moves, this case illustrates specific modalities performed by international organisations to pursue securitisation.

Logics of depoliticisation and securitisation

After identifying the assemblages of techniques performed by UNEP to enact depoliticisation as part of its securitising moves, the last part of the article questions the logics of depoliticisation and securitisation. In other words, it discusses the motives of enacting depoliticisation and how depoliticising practices affect securitising moves. It also considers unintended consequences, which are the result of practical considerations and external constraints. It sees depoliticisation as 'both an undirected trend and a deliberate tactic'.¹¹⁶ First, depoliticisation allows UNEP to bypass politics and to intervene in the field of international security. Second, the technicisation of issues related to the environment and security helps UNEP to justify its monopoly within the UN

¹¹³UNEP, *Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2007), p. 330.

¹¹⁴Interview with the programme manager, UN-EU Partnership on Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention, New York, February 2013.

¹¹⁵Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹¹⁶Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized', p. 96.

system over activities at the intersection between environmental and security practices. Third, by depoliticising the causes of conflicts and attributing a technical and environmental explanation, UNEP may actually maintain the status quo and contribute to minimising the responsibility of political actors.

Bypassing politics

First, in a functionalist perspective, UNEP justifies depoliticisation for pragmatic reasons. Indeed, according to its personnel, the choice of a technical approach to environmental and security issues would facilitate their access to the field. Interventions would be more accepted, especially by governmental actors, because of the technical and depoliticised nature of the organisation. This perspective is not unexpected for Ken Conca and Jennifer Wallace: 'UNEP's depoliticized, technically oriented approach is not surprising given the politicization surrounding all aspects of international intervention, no matter how benign and altruistic aid efforts may seem to some in the international community.'¹¹⁷ This position is also a result of the context in which the organisation operates. UNEP intervenes in postconflict situations where its neutrality is particularly appreciated. According to PCDMB's director, UNEP is thus 'more accepted' because it is 'less political'.¹¹⁸ As stated by the coordinator of UNEP's 'Disasters and Conflicts' programme, 'in the aftermath of a conflict, everything is politicised', therefore states expect 'a neutral and science-based environmental assessment to determine the damage and risks'.¹¹⁹ Neutrality is often an absolute precondition to obtain the necessary funding for the intervention. For instance, to enhance its neutrality, UNEP would rather use the concept of 'conservation' instead of environmental security in Afghanistan and Haiti.¹²⁰ The coordinator of the EnvSec initiative,¹²¹ set up by UNEP, also stressed that states did not want to talk about security in the former USSR. Therefore, they appreciated the prospect of a discussion on environmental issues instead of political issues in Central Asia and Afghanistan where, according to her, 'we had to' work on security matters at the end of the Cold War.¹²² Carlo Sandei described the EnvSec initiative as 'very pragmatic and action-oriented'.¹²³ For UNEP, the 'very technical, results-oriented' approach also follows a utilitarian logic: according to PCDMB's director, bringing technical skills is a means of being 'useful'.¹²⁴ The technical and depoliticised approach to security and environmental issues therefore enables UNEP to intervene at the field level. Moreover, according to its staff, by establishing itself as a neutral and technical entity, UNEP could be a central actor in mediating conflicts over natural resources.¹²⁵

UNEP's personnel also perceive technicisation as a means to downscale the stakes of political disputes as the organisation could encourage cooperation between multiple stakeholders. Following the work of Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko on 'environmental peacemaking',¹²⁶ Achim Maas, Alexander Carius, and Anja Wittich argue that the environment can provide a platform of

¹¹⁷Ken Conca and Jennifer Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies: Lessons from the UN Environment Programme's experience with postconflict assessment', *Global Governance*, 15 (2009), p. 500.

¹¹⁸Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹¹⁹Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹²⁰Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹²¹The EnvSec (Environmental Security) initiative was established in 2003 by UNEP and focuses on environmental security in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and the Balkans.

¹²²Interview with the programme manager, EnvSec Initiative, Geneva, April 2012.

¹²³Carlo Sandei, 'The environment and security initiative in South Eastern Europe: Transforming risk into cooperation', in Massimiliano Montini and Slavko Bogdanovic (eds), *Environmental Security in South-Eastern Europe: International Agreements and Their Implementation* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. 24.

¹²⁴Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹²⁵Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹²⁶Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko, *Environmental Peacemaking* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002).

dialogue between parties in conflict. According to them, technical cooperation over environmental issues that are low on the political agenda can 'create a social space in which representatives of conflict parties can meet, discuss issues and cooperate with a view to developing (or creating) common solutions'.¹²⁷ In concrete terms, for the deputy director of UNEP's Division of Environmental Policy Implementation,¹²⁸ the focus should be on the interaction of technical actors such as managers and engineers rather than political representatives. Then, they can create personal ties among themselves, thus bypassing political obstacles to cooperation. For instance, UNEP's work on soil and water in the occupied Palestinian territories fostered dialogue among the technical actors in charge of these issues from both sides.¹²⁹

UNEP therefore adopts a technical approach in the field of security and the environment to bypass politics. It facilitates its interventions on the ground while fostering cooperation. In terms of securitisation, depoliticising moves facilitate the integration of environmental actors in the field of security. However, technicisation can also allow the organisation to monopolise the field of action. Depoliticisation is therefore a strategy to expand UNEP's mandate and activities.

Monopolising the field

The tactics identified earlier allow UNEP to monopolise activities on security and the environment. In that case, depoliticisation follows a logic of expansion: most international organisations attempt to expand their mandate and field of activities.¹³⁰ In that perspective, technicisation empowers IOs to give legitimacy to their objectives.¹³¹ Leadership is key in this process. In a situation where there is significant competition between actors in the multilateral system, the acquisition of technical knowledge makes it possible to distinguish between one organisation and another. Indeed, as Stone shows, 'most fields of governance have become highly complex, requiring regular input and monitoring by highly trained professionals and scientific advisors', which in return 'institutes "knowledge" organizations and their networks as governance institutions'.¹³² From the beginning, UNEP relied on its technical skills to expand its original mission to the detriment to other UN bodies.

When the team was selected to conduct the first UN postconflict environmental assessment in the Balkans, UNEP stood out due to its technical expertise and competences. According to PCDMB's director, a member of that first team, UNEP, as a more technical organisation, managed to receive the mandate at the expense of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹³³ WHO and the IAEA were both much more bureaucratic and had longer procedures to follow. In other instances, UNEP has relied on the singularity of its mandate and field of expertise to fill a gap. According to a former UNEP intern, the organisation attempted to position itself as the most relevant and skilled actor in environmental postconflict assessments. For him, the programme had to capitalise on an opportunity in a changing international context where there was a vacuum in terms of mandate and official responsibility.¹³⁴ For instance, UNEP intervened in Afghanistan where the environment was not seen as a priority. While very few actors showed interest in environmental issues, UNEP managed to demonstrate the added value of its activities.¹³⁵

¹²⁷Achim Maas, Alexander Carius, and Anja Wittich, 'From conflict to cooperation? Environmental cooperation as a tool for peacebuilding', in Floyd and Matthew (eds), *Environmental Security*, p. 104.

¹²⁸Interview with the deputy director, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation, UNEP, Nairobi, August 2012.

¹²⁹Participant observation within UNEP (2011).

¹³⁰Marieke Louis and Lucile Maertens, 'Des stratégies de changement dans les organisations internationales: une analyse comparée du HCR et de l'OIT', *Etudes internationales*, 45:2 (2014), pp. 183–206.

¹³¹Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*, p. 21.

¹³²Stone, 'Global governance depoliticized', p. 95.

¹³³Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹³⁴Interview with a former intern, UNEP, New York, February 2013.

Therefore, the technical nature of the organisation first helped it to obtain the mandate by filling a gap and second, it facilitated an institutionalisation and monopolisation of the field. While UNEP's former executive director stressed the need to be 'useful' in UN efforts on global security,¹³⁶ in Kosovo, his predecessor did not want to go through the classical diplomacy: he wanted quick action away from the usual bureaucracy.¹³⁷ After this first intervention in 1999, he decided to keep the team that had been assigned other projects in the Balkans. The work in Kosovo was continued by an assessment of the use of depleted uranium. UNEP highlighted the technical aspect of this highly sensitive issue and was able to quickly commit to the project, something that WHO or the IAEA would not have been able to do.¹³⁸ The findings of the assessment were published in 2001 and UNEP then became the leader on depleted uranium. The programme conducted investigation in Serbia and Montenegro,¹³⁹ in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁴⁰ and later in Iraq.¹⁴¹ It also carried out postconflict environmental assessments, like the one conducted in Kosovo, in the former Yugoslav Republics of Albania,¹⁴² Macedonia,¹⁴³ and in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁴ As requests to provide assessments multiplied,¹⁴⁵ the team was converted into a permanent unit in December 2001. In other words, the work of UNEP in postconflict settings became an institutionalised routine. Since then, UNEP has received the approval of its member states and has the monopoly on UN postconflict environmental assessments. In 2004, 'post-conflict assessment' appears on the 'Indicative List of Main Areas of Technology Support and Capacity-Building Activities' in the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building. States also requested the executive director 'to further strengthen the ability of the United Nations Environment Programme to assess environmental impacts in post-conflict situations' and 'to make the necessary arrangements in order to enable the United Nations Environment Programme to conduct post-conflict environmental assessment at the request of the concerned State or States to be assessed as well as to report to the relevant United Nations bodies and commissions for further follow-up.'¹⁴⁶ According to its former executive director, UNEP has a unique technical expertise within the UN system¹⁴⁷ recognised by the member states and UNEP's personnel who gave PCDMB a Baobab Staff Award in recognition of its postconflict assessments.¹⁴⁸ States supported the extension of its mandate, ignoring UNEP's depoliticisation strategy or actually aware of and tacitly approving its moves aiming to reduce intergovernmental discords. Based on its technical skills, the organisation managed to obtain a monopoly on postconflict environmental assessments and increased its activities in the field of security. After this first institutionalisation, UNEP extended its work with its unit on environmental cooperation for peacebuilding. Yet, the title of 'Environment, Conflict and Peacebuilding' – suggested by PCDMB for this new team¹⁴⁹ – was opposed by states, demonstrating that depoliticisation has

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Interview with the executive director, UNEP, Nairobi, August 2012.

¹³⁷UNEP, *UNEP the First 40 Years: A Narrative by Stanley Johnson* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2012), p. 198.

¹³⁸Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹³⁹UNEP, *Depleted Uranium in Serbia and Montenegro: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Geneva: UNEP, 2002).

¹⁴⁰UNEP, *Depleted Uranium in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment* (Geneva: UNEP, 2013b).

¹⁴¹UNEP, *Technical Report on Capacity-Building for the Assessment of Depleted Uranium in Iraq* (Geneva: UNEP, 2007).

¹⁴²UNEP, *Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment – FYR of Albania* (Geneva: UNEP, 2000).

¹⁴³UNEP, *Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment – FYR of Macedonia* (Geneva: UNEP, 2000).

¹⁴⁴UNEP, *Afghanistan*.

¹⁴⁵Interview with the director, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, March 2012.

¹⁴⁶UNEP/GC.23/INF20, *Twenty-third Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum* (14 December 2004).

¹⁴⁷Interview with the executive director, UNEP, Nairobi, August 2012.

¹⁴⁸'The UNEP Baobab Staff Awards programme was established in 2007 to recognize and reward exceptional performance and dedication to achieving the goals of UNEP.' See UNEP Website, available at: {<http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=43&ArticleID=5770&l=en>} accessed January 2017.

limitations. However, while still providing non-apolitical recommendations in its postconflict assessments, UNEP also began, with this new team, to question the link between natural resources and conflict¹⁵⁰ and to address the issue of conflict mediation.¹⁵¹

Through technicisation and depoliticisation, UNEP managed to legitimise its intervention in the security sector. While its intervention does not attest of a definite successful securitisation process, it illustrates the organisation's securitising moves and ability to blur the lines between different separate fields of international interventions – environmental operations and peace-building missions.

Maintaining the status quo

Finally, the depoliticisation of the causal relationship between the environment and security also falls into a logic maintaining the status quo. First, by pretending to be apolitical to intervene, UNEP complies with the existing political situation, giving it tacit consent. For example, to obtain Israeli authorities' authorisation to conduct an environmental assessment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, UNEP had to be neutral. While the 2003 report states that 'many long-term environmental solutions cannot become reality without a peace process for the region',¹⁵² UNEP does not comment on the form that this peace process should take nor does it engage action to facilitate the process.

More recently, invited by the Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, UNEP sent a multidisciplinary team of experts to assess the environmental impacts of illegal extraction of minerals, deforestation, and mercury pollution. In the press release presenting the mission, the programme explains:

In the last decades, different rebel groups and criminal gangs ended up controlling large swaths of Colombian territory. These groups exploited natural resources or taxed extraction and trade as a way to generate revenue to finance their operations. This led to major environmental destruction from illegal extraction of minerals and other natural resources, illicit crops, deforestation and the unregulated use of hazardous chemicals such as mercury.¹⁵³

By attributing the causes of environmental destruction to rebel groups only, UNEP provides a convenient narrative for the Colombian government. It does not even consider (or at least mention) the possible role of the government and local authorities in degrading the environment or in facilitating the exploitation of natural resources. This statement challenges the neutral position that UNEP is supposed to hold between parties in conflict. Yet it also reveals the domination of some states over the organisation and the way UNEP maintains the status quo within the international system. Far from being apolitical, UNEP plays a key role in defining (and possibly shifting) responsibility in terms of environmental degradation.

Depoliticisation also helps to minimise political responsibilities. This criticism often targets the studies linking the environment and conflict or framing environmental issues as a unique cause of conflict. For some scholars, the securitisation of the environment could lead to its militarisation, increasing the power of military actors over nature.¹⁵⁴ For others, considering the

¹⁴⁹Interview with the programme manager, Environmental Cooperation for Peacebuilding, PCDMB, UNEP, Geneva, April 2012.

¹⁵⁰UNEP, *From Conflict to Peacebuilding*.

¹⁵¹DPA, UNEP, *Natural Resources and Conflict: A Guide for Mediation Practitioners* (Nairobi, New York: DPA/UNEP, 2015).

¹⁵²UNEP, *Desk Study on the Environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2003), p. 9.

¹⁵³UNEP, 'UN Environment will Support Environmental Recovery and Peacebuilding for Post-Conflict Development in Colombia' (23 March 2017), available at: {<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/un-environment-will-support-environmental-recovery-and-peacebuilding-post-conflict-development>} accessed June 2017.

¹⁵⁴Lorraine Elliott, *The Global Politics of the Environment* (2nd edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 231.

environment as a cause of conflict drives the attention away from the political responsibilities. Betsy Hartmann follows this argument to criticise UNEP's work in Darfur. According to her, in its postconflict environmental assessment, UNEP ignores the responsibility of the Sudanese government in the conflict in Darfur and by ignoring it, the organisation approves of the governmental actions in the region.¹⁵⁵ A Sudanese delegate also used climate change to explain the conflict in Darfur in an intervention at the Security Council in 2011: 'my country has suffered a conflict in Darfur that is coming to an end. I recall our previous statements to the Council to the effect that drought and desertification in that region are among the basic causes of that conflict, and that they are the results of climate change.'¹⁵⁶ The work of UNEP can support these assertions, which lower the responsibility of political actors.

However, as neutrality is often a precondition to intervene, the organisation's flexibility is rather limited. While the report on the Occupied Palestinian Territories still maintains the status quo in the region, UNEP's Executive Director Klaus Töpfer wrote in the foreword: 'the peaceful end of the occupation and cessation of all violence must be the ultimate objective'.¹⁵⁷

Framing the environment as a security issue can contribute to maintaining the status quo while attributing environmental causes to conflict instead of blaming political actors. It is thus a two-way connection: on the one hand, depoliticising moves facilitate the attempts to securitise the environment in very political contexts (mostly postconflict settings); on the other hand, framing the environment as a security issue promote a depoliticised understanding of conflict situations.

Conclusion

Based on the case of UNEP, this article unpacks the tactics and practices by which international organisations enact depoliticisation. Furthermore, it shows how depoliticisation acts as a securitising move. The process is carried out through various techniques and tactics including the creation of a technical interpretation of the causal link between the environment and conflict. In return, this interpretation shapes a series of technical solutions that UNEP is well positioned to offer. UNEP also uses allegedly neutral media formats to disseminate its interpretation. It circulates conclusions on 'environmental threats' through supposedly scientific platforms – fact sheets, guidelines, and training materials – that tend to minimise the political dimension of their content. Finally, it presents its field interventions as 'apolitical'. While defining its environmental assessments as neutral, it also provides technical assistance to local stakeholders, influencing the way they perceive environmental problems. These assembled practices often constitute an absolute precondition of UNEP's action. Yet, by depoliticising its own activities, the programme facilitates its attempt to securitise the environment.

On the one hand, as seen in multiple examples, UNEP frames the environment as a threat to security and as a cause of conflict in various publications. It also claims that the environment is a tool for peacebuilding and a platform for cooperation. In other words, the programme intends to both securitise and desecuritize the environment depending on the targeted audience. Yet in both cases, it relies on its supposed neutrality and situates its action outside of politics. On the other hand, by insisting on its 'apolitical' nature, the organisation manages to penetrate the security field. In this second perspective, the securitising moves manifest through the legitimization of environmental actors in conflict settings: once it appears legitimate that environmental actors intervene on matters of security, it helps to define the environment as a security issue.

¹⁵⁵Betsy Hartmann, 'Climate chains: Neo-Malthusianism, militarism and migration', in Chris Methmann, Delf Rothe, and Benjamin Stephan (eds), *Interpretative Approaches to Global Climate Governance: (De)constructing the Greenhouse* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 93.

¹⁵⁶UN Security Council, Proceedings S/PV.6587 (20 July 2011, Resumption 1).

¹⁵⁷UNEP, *Desk Study on the Environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, p. 5.

The contribution of this article is thus twofold. First, by focusing on the case of UNEP, it not only provides a novel empirical case study, it also identifies the multiple tactics and techniques by which an international organisation enacts depoliticisation. Second, it questions the tension between depoliticisation and securitisation at the international level. It shows how depoliticising practices enacted in different claims, practices, and tools are constitutive of securitising moves. Therefore, the article does not focus on the reception or actual accomplishment of these moves, especially in terms of exceptional measures, but it does inform on their formulation and production. It supplements the large body of work on securitisation by unpacking specific ways of advancing securitising moves.

Beyond this specific case, this article also suggests further research in three directions. First, it calls for additional empirical studies of the techniques performed by international organisations as main securitising actors. IOs perform securitising moves (successful or not) with specific practices that should not be overlooked. Second, within multilateral organisations, the political and technical spheres are intrinsically linked and perpetually negotiated. The literature in International Relations could then systematically address the role of IOs in depoliticisation to inform and understand international practices. Third, through this case study, this article reflects upon the complex entanglement between securitisation and depoliticisation. The 'apolitical' claims and depoliticising practices should thus be questioned and considered for their contribution to the securitisation process. In a context where constructed threats and security discourses are increasingly used in politics, understanding the multifaceted techniques of securitisation attempts is all the more critical.

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