REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?

## SUMMARY

• The Monopoly on the use of force is a concept that is strongly interlinked with the idea of a state providing security. Therefore it is crucial to consider the different meanings and implications of »security« when reflecting on the future of the monopoly on the use of force.

• We suggest that two broad avenues for thinking about security may be distinguished from each other. The first perspective displays a preference for the question what security is. By contrast, the second perspective emphasizes what security does.

• »What is security?«: Many critiques of traditional security studies do not contest the ontology of security itself, but instead denote variations of an »essentialist« understanding of the security paradigm.

• »What does security do?«: Security can also be understood as an inter-subjective social practice. The securitization literature argues that security is what people say. It is a self-referential practice that does not refer to something »more real« and attains visibility only in deliberate social conduct.

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# Security

# What Is It? What Does It Do?

*Marc von Boemcken and Conrad Schetter*

In a world of perceived uncertainty and danger, the desire for security becomes a central concern of political thought and action. Against the threatening forces of unpredictability, rapid transformation and complexity, it appears to channel a diffuse longing for greater reliability, stability and tangibility. Ironically, however, the term »security« does not itself possess any stable or consensual meaning. Rather, it marks the perimeters of a highly contested terrain. For how is security to be achieved? Who is to be secured, against which dangers? And, moreover: what actually *happens* when we »speak security«? To reflect upon any in/security problematic would require us to, first of all, locate our own position and argument vis-à-vis a careful consideration of some basic questions pertaining to the concept and nature of security itself.

For this purpose, we suggest that two broad avenues for thinking about security may be distinguished. The first perspective displays a preference for the question as to what security *is* (»What is security?«). By contrast, the second perspective emphasizes what security *does* (»What does security do?«). In the following, both questions will be addressed, arguing that they differ considerably in terms of their ontological, epistemological and normative assumptions. It is, however, not the purpose of this paper to identify the »best« way security can or should be encountered as an object of analysis. Its modest objective is, quite simply, to encourage explicit reflection of the term in question, thereby hopefully diminishing the chances of it being applied in an ambiguous or somewhat vague manner.

## WHAT IS SECURITY?

If one sets out to think about security, an obvious starting point might be to ask: what *is* security anyway? Posing such a question is anything but a trivial exercise, for it already makes an implicit assumption about the very nature of security itself: namely, that such a thing as »security« actually exists. Security, in other words, would refer to an actual condition of existence that is independent of its enunciation in day-to-day discourse. This ontological condition of security has been imagined in quite different ways. For example, in the great debate between Realism and Idealism in International Relations theory it was either thought of as a relative condition in the present or as an absolute condition of the future. In both cases, however, references to

security sought to signify certain objectivity. This way of thinking has had at least two implications for the way we ought to go about studying it. First, security is conceived as something that can be objectively known and thus needs to be diligently measured, monitored and improved upon by means of reason and scientific inquiry. Second, security attains a normative quality: it appears as a »good thing« we ought to actively aspire to.

From such a perspective, the general definition of security is usually thought to be encountered in the absence – or at least unlikeliness – of threats to a certain object. For example, David Baldwin has defined security astutely as »a low probability of damage to acquired values« (1997, 13). Similarly, for Lawrence Krause and Joseph Nye it was »… the absence of acute threats to the minimal acceptable levels of the basic values that a people consider essential to its survival« (1975, 330). Such definitions of security seek to somehow capture the underlying *essence* of the term. However, it may yet be conceptualized in quite different ways. In order to move from the essence to the concept of security in the context of a particular academic and/ or political project, the most important question to be addressed is: security for whom? In most cases, the answer would either refer to some or all individuals or to some or all states. It needs to be remembered, however, that security may be equally applied to such diverse objects as, for example, animal life, the biosphere or physical infrastructure.

To further specify the object of security, it may be necessary not simply to point to the actual entity in need of security, but to also identify the endangered *values* that this particular entity contains or represents. For instance, a human being can be associated with several values, all of which may be worth securing. In such a case, a concept of security needs to be clear on whether it refers to corporeal integrity, economic welfare, autonomy or psychological well-being. In the end, different objects and values yield rather different conceptualizations of security, the most prominent of which are of course »human life« and »state

sovereignty«.

Taken by itself, the idea of »environmental security« is therefore not an accurately specified security concept, for it remains very much open who or what is to be secured. Are we talking about the territorial integrity of a South Pacific island state threatened by climate change and rising sea levels? Or do we seek to address the decline of individual human well-being and prosperity due to desertification processes? Maybe our object of security is neither the state nor the individual but the environment itself. But which part of the environment? A certain endangered species or the entire biosphere? Naturally, many of the different security concepts gathered under the umbrella of »environmental security« are closely related. However, they may also oppose, even conflict with each other. This is aptly illustrated by the brown bear that rampaged through the forests of Bavaria in the summer of 2007. Identified as a problem (»Problembär«), for threatening livestock, the bear was eventually killed. This security measure clearly overrode an alternative conceptualization of security that would have taken the physical integrity of the animal itself as its principal object. To the extent that different concepts of security may contradict each other, it is thus of utmost importance that we specify whose security we are actually talking about when partaking in a discussion on security issues.

Once the essence and the concept of security have been clearly delineated, it is, in a third step, possible to think about the pursuit of security. Here, Baldwin (1997) has suggested a couple of additional relevant questions. First and depending upon the particular object of concern, the actual *threats* to security need to be identified. Second we have to ask ourselves which *means* and *strategies* ought to be employed in order to minimise, or even eradicate these threats. Do we revert to coercive military means favouring strategies of surviving and/or deterring danger; or do we prefer civil, for example developmental, means directed against the root causes of threats and thereby associated with strategies of overcoming and transcending danger? Third, we ought to consider

| TABLE 1: WAYS OF APPROACHING »SECURITY« | |
|---|---|
| Essence of security | Objective condition described by the absence or low probability of threats to a certain object. |
| Concept of security | • Who is to be secured?<br>• Which values are to be secured? |
| Governance of security | • What are the threats to security?<br>• By which means and strategies is security to be achieved?<br>• How much resources should be devoted to security?<br>• Who is to do the securing? |

how much *resources* should be devoted to increasing security, and how the resources spent should be divided among different« means and strategies. Finally, Emma Rothschild (1995: 55) has put forward a further important question, namely: *Who* is going to do the securing? Is it always state institutions that are best suited to provide security, or is there also a role for the private and/or non-governmental sector to play?

If we decide to perceive security, including »environmental security«, as both a normative policy goal and a knowable and objective condition of existence, then the procedure outlined above might well serve as a useful guide to clearly specify our object of analysis, distinguish it from alternative conceptualizations of security, and conduct research in a coherent and policy-relevant manner. Indeed, we would suggest that the largest part of the debate concerned with the »redefinition« of security following the end of the Cold War can be traced along the lines of different approaches (see Table 1) to answer the above questions. Many critiques of traditional security studies therefore do not contest the ontology of security itself, but instead denote tactical variations within the overriding model of what might be thought of as an »essentialist« security paradigm.

## WHAT DOES SECURITY DO?

Although the by far most popular and mainstream approach to the study of security, the »essentialist« perspective is by no means the only way to analytically engage security issues. Instead of asking »what is security?« a very different and perhaps a more interesting question is: »what does security do?« To pose such a question represents a great deal more than to simply adopting a slightly different research angle. For in departing from the essentialist assumptions of security as an objective, knowable and good thing, it implies a profound departure in ontological, epistemological and normative terms. Security and insecurity would thus not be considered as aggregate conditions of existence that are objectively »out there« and present themselves to us as unquestionable facts of life. Instead, they are thought of as socially constructed by certain actors and for particular purposes. As Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1998: 31) have noted in their influential book *Security – A New Framework for Analysis*, security needs to be understood as an inter-subjective social practice, as something we do. It is, in other words, »… a specific social category that arises out of, and is constituted in, political practice« (ibid.: 40).

Such a »constructivist« perspective implies a certain

way of approaching and studying security. It would not begin with a laborious effort to identify and define the underlying, essential meaning of security, but restrict its analytical scope to the discursive and practical manifestation of the term in social and political life. Security *is*, quite simply, no more (or less) than what people say it is. It is a self-referential practice that does not refer to something »more real« and attains visibility only in deliberate social conduct. Or in the words of Wæver: »It is by labelling something a security issue that it becomes one – not that issues are security issues in themselves and then *afterwards* possibly talked about in terms of security« (Wæver 2000: 8; emphasis added). Notwithstanding the questions outlined in the previous section, we would therefore have to ask, more fundamentally: *What happens* when certain issues are treated as security issues?

The most well-known response to this question is the so-called »securitization« theory developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998). By *securitization* the authors mean a succession of authoritative claims or statements wherein a particular issue (be it military, political, economic, societal or environmental) is successfully presented as an existential threat to a referent object, in turn requiring emergency measures exceeding »… the normal bounds of political procedure« by legitimizing the breaking of established norms and rules (ibid.: 23–4, 25). As they go on to argue, securitization is but one, albeit the most extreme, form of rendering an issue a problem of governance. In this sense, it may be differentiated from »politicization« as the process by which a problem enters an open public debate, becomes part of a political bargaining process and eventually may (or may not) receive certain resource allocations (ibid.: 23). By contrast, if an issue is *securitized* it is presented as so urgent, existential and important »… that it should not be exposed to the normal haggling of politics« (ibid.: 29). It is lifted *beyond* politics and – by implication – beyond the mechanisms of democratic control and oversight.

Securitization theory is a good example of the analytic shift from »what security is« to »what security does«. Importantly, it highlights the profound change in the normative orientation of analysis. Since threats are not self-evident but always subject to practices of political representation, whether certain issues should be framed and treated as security issues (whether they should be securitized) is a conscious and deliberate decision. For Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde this decision should not be taken lightly. Indeed, they argue that it is usually better to opt for »de-securitization«, that is: to switch out of emergency mode and back into the open deliberations of »normal« politics.

Obviously, the word »security« may well be uttered in political discourse without necessarily securitizing a particular issue in the sense outlined above. Especially on the domestic level, in the day-to-day proceedings of internal security governance, security may not securitize as much as it may order social relations in many other ways. Whereas these more mundane »doings« of security remain largely unexplored, securitization theory represents a useful, though limited, tool for analysing the function of security in the international and global realm. A case in point is, of course, the US-led »War on Terror«, securitizing the issue of terrorism to the extent that it justifies measures that violate human rights and international law. However, securitization strategies may also be encountered in far less obvious places, employed in relation to threats other than military ones and adopted by actors other than states. For example, it could be argued that Greenpeace goes some way towards securitizing environmental issues as existential threats, thereby legitimizing actions outside the normal bounds of political behaviour and in many cases even conflicting with the law.

More generally, when thinking about the relation between the environment and security, it is important to keep in mind the question »what security *does*«. Here, the strong military connotation which the term »security« encompasses in political discourse is of relevance for analysis. In consequence, treating environmental problems as security problems could lead either to a possible militarization of environmental policy or, vice versa, to a demilitarization of the term security itself (cf. Brock 1992). The discursive effect of conflating environmental and security issues would need to be empirically established from case to case. Finally, it is worth noting that to present an issue as a security problem *always* serves the purpose of instilling that issue with a particular sense of urgency. For this reason, it might well be the case that the discourse of »environmental security« can be understood, first and foremost, as a deliberate strategy on the part of certain actors to advance environmental issues up the political agenda.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested two very different ways to approach, to think about and to analyse security. One approach is not necessarily »better« than the other and the choice depends very much on the specific research question that one sets out to answer. In any case, we hope to have demonstrated that – regardless of the perspective one eventually adopts – there is a clear need to begin a security analysis with some reflection on the meaning and approaching of security itself. Such reflections will either serve the purpose of

specifying the concept of security that one intends to deploy when assessing an objective security condition; alternatively, it may also, however, sensitize analysis toward the inter-subjective function of security in political discourse.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Marc von Boemcken** is a Senior Resarcher and Project Leader at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), teaches security policy and peace and conflict research at the Bonn University and is the co-editor of the annual German Peace Report (Friedensgutachen). Among other things, he developed the Global Militarization Index (GMI). He holds a PhD, studied Politics, International Relations, Sociology and International Law and was trained as a reserve officer in the German Armed Forces.

**Conrad Schetter** is director for research at the Bonn International Center for Conversion, a Professor for Peace and Conflict Studies at Bonn University and Associated Member of the Center for Development Research (ZEF) Directorate. Recently, he undertook extensive research on civil-military interactions, ungoverned spaces and the nexus between conflict and migration. Conrad gave advice to German ministries as well as to GOs and NGOs such as GIZ, Concern and Welthungerhilfe.

## REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE

The Reflection Group »Monopoly on the use of force 2.0?« is a global dialogue initiative to raise awareness and discuss policy options for the concept of the monopoly for the use of force. Far from being a merely academic concern, this concept, at least theoretically and legally remains at the heart of the current international security order. However it is faced with a variety of grave challenges and hardly seems to reflect realities on the ground in various regions around the globe anymore. For more information about the work of the reflection group and its members please visit: http://www.fes.de/GPol/en/security_policy.htm

## THINK PIECES OF THE »REFLECTION GROUP MONOPOLY ON THE USE OF FORCE 2.0?«

The Think Pieces serve a dual purpose: On the one hand they provide points of reference for the deliberations of the reflection group and feed into the final report of the group in 2016. On the other hand they are made available publicly to provide interested scholars, politicians and practitioners with an insight into the different positions and debates of the group and provide food for thought for related discussions and initiatives worldwide. In this sense, they reflect how the group and selected additional experts »think« about the topic and hopefully stimulate further engagement with it.

The Think Pieces are not required to fulfill strict academic requirements and are not thematically peer-reviewed by FES. To the contrary they shall provide an unfiltered insight into the respective author's arguments and thoughts. Accordingly, the authors are free to further develop their arguments and publish academic articles based on these arguments or containing elements of them in academic journals, edited volumes or other formats.

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