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Securitization

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Chapter Contents

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Reader's Guide

The chapter introduces, assesses, and applies the Copenhagen School and its securitization model. The School widens the definition of security by encompassing five different sectors—military, political, societal, economic and environmental security. It examines how a specific matter becomes securitized, that is, its removal from the political process to the security agenda. The chapter analyses the act of securitization by identifying the role of the securitizing actor and the importance of the 'speech act' in convincing a specific audience of the existential nature of a threat. It argues that the Copenhagen School allows for non-military matters to be included in security studies while still offering a coherent understanding of the concept of security. Yet the chapter also stresses the dangers and the negative connotations of securitizing an issue as well as some shortcomings of the model. While the chapter is conceptually driven, it relies on a series of illustrations to apply the securitization model. These include the securitization of undocumented migration under the John Howard government in Australia, the securitization of the illicit trafficking and abuse of drugs in the United States and Thailand as well as the failure by US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to persuade world opinion of the existential threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq.

KEY POINTS

- A narrow interpretation of security concentrates on the state and its defence from external military attacks. In response to this narrow definition of security, other approaches to security studies have called for a widening and deepening of security to include non-military threats.
- The Copenhagen School stresses that security is about survival. A security concern must be articulated as an existential threat. The School maintains the security-survival logic found in a traditional understanding of security.
- Yet the Copenhagen School broadens the conception of security. It identifies five general categories

of security: military, environmental, economic, societal and political security. The School thus broadens the concept of security beyond the state by including new referent objects like societies and the environment.

- The dynamics of each security category are determined by securitizing actors and referent objects.
- It is important, however, to preserve the conceptual precision of the term security. This is where the Copenhagen School contributes to the security studies literature. It provides a framework to define security and determine how a specific matter becomes securitized or desecuritized.

Securitization model

Two-stage process of securitization

The Copenhagen School provides a spectrum along which issues can be plotted. It claims that any specific matter can be non-politicized, politicized or securitized. An issue is non-politicized when it is not a matter for state action and is not included in public debate. An issue becomes politicized when it is managed within the standard political system. A politicized issue is 'part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 23). Finally, an issue is plotted at the securitized end of the spectrum when it requires emergency actions beyond the state's standard political procedures.

The Copenhagen School argues that a concern can be securitized—framed as a security issue and moved from the politicized to the securitized end of the spectrum—through an act of securitization. A securitizing actor (e.g. government, political elite, military, civil society) articulates an already politicized issue as

an existential threat to a referent object (e.g. state, groups, national sovereignty, ideology, and economy). In response to the existential nature of the threat, the securitizing actor asserts that it has to adopt extraordinary means that go beyond the ordinary norms of the political domain. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde argue therefore that securitization 'is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 23). The Copenhagen School notes that desecuritization refers to the reverse process. It involves the 'shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 4). For example, the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa represents an illustration of the desecuritization of the race question in South African society and of its re-introduction into the political domain.

An act of securitization refers to the accepted classification of certain and not other phenomena,

Introduction

The Copenhagen School emerged at the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI) of Copenhagen and is represented by the writings of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, and others (Wæver 1995; Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998; Buzan, Wæver 2003). The Copenhagen School has developed a substantial body of concepts to rethink security, most notably through its notions of securitization and desecuritization. The School has played an important role in broadening the conception of security and in providing a framework to analyse how an issue becomes securitized or desecuritized. It is part of a broader attempt to re-conceptualize the notion of security and to redefine the agenda of security studies in light of the end of the Cold War.

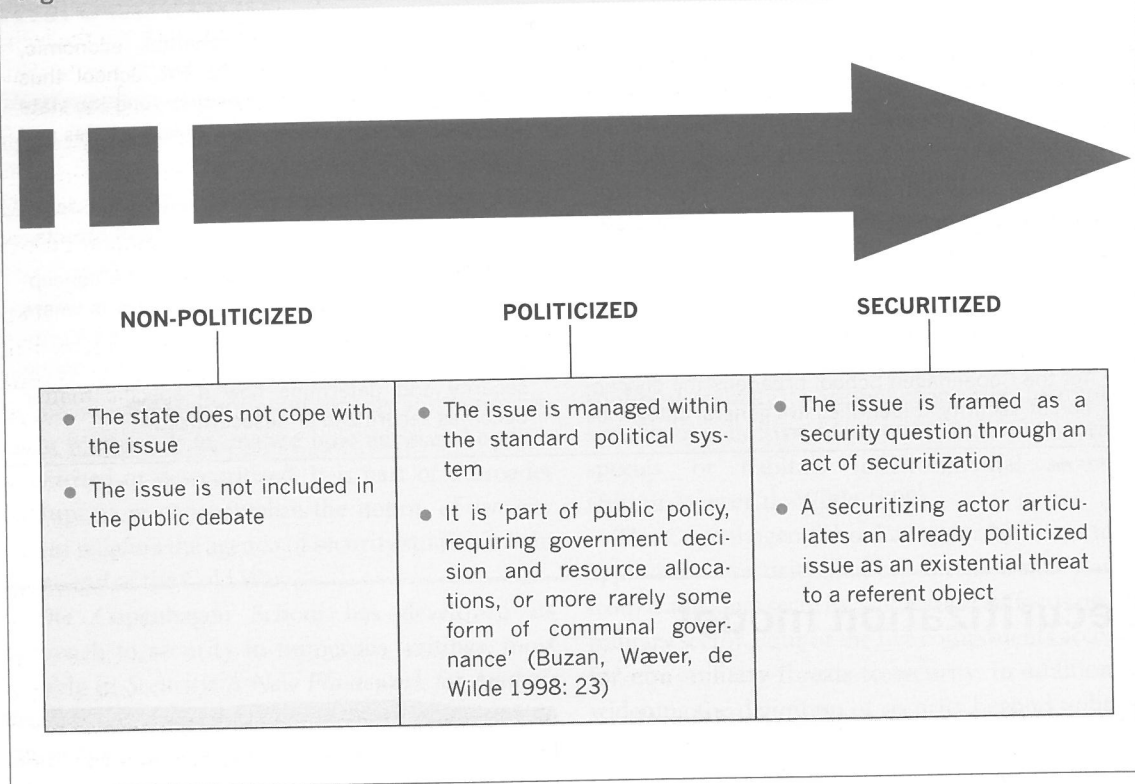
The Copenhagen School has developed its approach to security in numerous writings, most notably in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). In this volume, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde start by defining international security in a traditional military context. 'Security', according to them, 'is about survival. It is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society)' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 21). With this point in mind, the Copenhagen School identifies five general categories of security: military security as well as environmental, economic, societal and political security. The security-survival logic is therefore maintained as well as extended beyond military security to four other categories.

The dynamics of each category of security are determined by securitizing actors and referent objects. The former are defined as 'actors who securitize issues by declaring something, a referent object, existentially threatened' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 36) and can be expected to be 'political

leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 40). Referent objects are 'things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 36). Evidently, the referent objects and the kind of existential threats that they face vary across security sectors. Referent objects can be the state (military security); national sovereignty, or an ideology (political security); national economies (economic security); collective identities (societal security); species, or habitats (environmental security) (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998).

The Copenhagen School adopts a multi-sectoral approach to security that represents a move away from traditional security studies and its focus on the military sector. Four of the five components account for non-military threats to security. In addition to widening the definition of security beyond military issues, the Copenhagen School deepens security studies by including non-state actors. A crucial question though is whether the concept of security can be broadened to such an extent without losing its coherence. There is a risk of over-stretching the definition of security with the result that everything, and therefore nothing in particular, ends up being a security problem. A loose and broad conceptualization of security can lead to vagueness and a lack of conceptual and analytical coherence. In other words, the redefinition and broadening of the concept of security need to be matched by the development of new conceptual tools. This is where the Copenhagen School with its securitization and desecuritization model has sought to contribute to the debates by developing an analytical framework to study security. The Copenhagen School raises the possibility for a systematic, comparative, and coherent analysis of security.

Figure 7.1 Securitization spectrum



persons or entities as existential threats requiring emergency measures. The Copenhagen School relies on a two-stage process of securitization to explain how and when an issue is to be perceived and acted upon as an existential threat to security. The first stage concerns the portrayal of certain issues, persons, or entities as existential threats to referent objects. The initial move of securitization can be initiated by states but also by non-state actors like trade unions or popular movements for instance. Non-state actors are thus regarded as important players in the securitization model. Yet securitization tends to be a process dominated by powerful actors that benefit from privileged positions. Indeed, **the move of securitization depends on and reveals the power and influence of the securitizing actor, which as a result often happens to be the state and its elites** (Collins 2005).

The usage of a language of security does not mean, however, that the issue is automatically transformed

into a security question. Instead, the consensual establishment of threat needs to be of sufficient salience as to produce substantial political effects. The second and crucial stage of securitization is only completed successfully once the securitizing actor succeeds in **convincing a relevant audience** (public opinion, politicians, military officers, or other elites) that a referent object is existentially threatened. Only then can **extraordinary measures be imposed**. Due to the urgency of the accepted existential threat to security, constituencies tolerate the use of counteractions outside of the normal bounds of political procedures.

Central to the two-stage process of securitization is the importance of the 'speech act'. The latter is defined as the discursive representation of a certain issue as an existential threat to security. **The Copenhagen School considers the speech act to be the starting point of the process of securitization.**

An issue can become a security question through the speech act alone irrespective of whether the concern represents an existential threat in material terms. **A securitizing actor uses language to articulate a problem in security terms and to persuade a relevant audience of its immediate danger.** The articulation in security terms conditions the audience and provides securitizing actors with the right to mobilize state power and move beyond traditional rules. As discussed above, the security concern must be articulated as an existential threat (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998). This significant criterion enables the Copenhagen School to link a broadly defined security concept to the question of survival and thus to the reasoning found within a traditional approach to security studies. This avoids a broad and loose conceptualization of security that could too easily become meaningless.

KEY POINTS

- The referent objects can be individuals and groups (refugees, victims of human rights abuses, etc.) as well as issue areas (national sovereignty, environment, economy, etc.) that possess a legitimate claim to survival and whose existence is ostensibly threatened.
- The securitizing actors can be the government, political elite, military, and civil society. They securitize an issue by articulating the existence of threat(s) to the survival of specific referent objects.
- The desecuritizing actors reconstitute an issue as no longer an existential threat, thereby moving it from the securitized realm into the ordinary public arena.
- Securitizing actors use the language of security (speech act) to convince a specific audience of the existential nature of the threat.

Successful act of securitization

Governments and political elites have a certain advantage over other actors in seeking to influence

audiences and calling for the implementation of extraordinary measures (Collins 2005). In a democratic system, a government benefits from the legitimacy of having been elected by the electorate. This gives it a significant advantage when seeking to convince an audience of the need for emergency actions in response to an existential threat. In democratic societies, the audience still has the right, however, to reject the speech act, namely the representation of a certain issue as an existential threat.

An important question to examine is whether an act of securitization is more likely to succeed in authoritarian states where the military plays a central role in national politics (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). The formulation of threat perceptions and the decision-making process are often dominated in undemocratic societies by the military as well as by bureaucratic and political elites. The influence of social pressure and aspirations on the securitization or desecuritization of political matters remains limited. Yet this is not to say that an audience is not part of the securitization move or that it is not expected to authorize the adoption of emergency measures. But rather that the audience excludes the wider population and consists solely of political elites and some state institutions such as the military. In such a context, political elites can abuse extreme forms of politicization to achieve specific political objectives and consolidate their grip on power. While the wider population may reject the speech act and consider the emergency measures adopted as a result to be illegitimate, the securitization act is nevertheless successful having convinced a more restrictive audience on the existential nature of the threat (Collins 2005).

It should be clear by now that **the Copenhagen School regards security as a socially constructed concept. In that sense, the School is primarily constructivist in its approach. What constitutes an existential threat is regarded as a subjective matter. It very much depends on a shared understanding of what constitutes a danger to security.** A person in authority first needs to speak the language of security and demand the adoption of emergency

measures. The discourse of the securitizing actor has to be articulated in a fashion that convinces an audience. In other words, a collective has to accept a specific issue as an existential threat to a referent object. Consequently, every act of securitization involves a political decision and results from a political and social act (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). Only in a successful case will standard political procedures no longer be viewed as adequate to counter the threat.

In contrast to a realist approach to security studies that focuses on the material nature of the threat, the Copenhagen School predicts that an act of securitization can either succeed or fail depending on whether a separate audience accepts the discourse. As a result, it naturally asks why some acts tend to fail while others succeed. **The Copenhagen School also examines why some questions are securitized in the first place while others are not. It argues that this will not just depend on material factors.**

KEY POINTS

- The act of securitization is only successful once the relevant audience is convinced of the existential threat to the referent object.
- Governments and elites have an advantage over other actors when seeking to influence an audience.
- What constitutes security is a subjective matter.
- Every process of securitization involves a political and security act.
- An act of securitization can either fail or succeed depending on the persuasiveness of the discourse.

Extraordinary measures and motives for securitization

The Copenhagen School asserts that a successful act of securitization provides securitizing actors with the special right to use exceptional means. It indicates, however, that the success of the process

does not depend on the adoption of such actions. It is natural to ask what is meant by 'extraordinary measures'. The latter go beyond rules ordinarily abided by and are therefore located outside the usual bounds of political procedures and practices. Extraordinary measures are expected to respond to a specific issue that is posing an existential threat to a referent object. The adoption and implementation of extraordinary measures involve the identification and classification of some issue as an enemy that needs to be tackled urgently. The types of measures to be adopted in response will obviously depend on the circumstances and the context of the threat. An existential threat to the environment, a sector of the economy, or a state ideology will demand different emergency responses (Collins 2005).

Some shortcomings of the Copenhagen School's interpretation of extraordinary measures should be mentioned. One can rather easily anticipate the types of emergency measures to be introduced by a state. Yet it is less clear what would form an extraordinary measure for a non-state actor after it has successfully convinced an audience of the existential nature of a threat. In other words, what would for instance constitute an extraordinary measure that goes beyond standard political procedures for non-governmental organizations like Greenpeace and Christian Aid? Moreover, one may question the significance of a securitization process when it does not go hand in hand with actions and policies to address the ostensible threat. **According to the securitization model, transforming an issue into a security question only requires the audience's acknowledgment that it is indeed a threat. The adoption of extraordinary means is not a requirement.** Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde specifically indicate that 'We do not push the demand so high as to say that an emergency measure has to be adopted' (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998: 25). This means that a securitizing actor can make successful speech acts while still deciding to address the existential threat through standard political procedures rather than extraordinary measures (Collins 2005). Yet it can be argued that a complete act of

securitization really consists of and demands both discursive (speech act and shared understanding) and non-discursive (policy implementation) dimensions (Emmers 2004; Collins 2005). In this case, **a security act would therefore depend on successful speech acts (discursive dimension) that persuade a relevant audience of the existential nature of the threat as well as the adoption by the securitizing actor of emergency powers (non-discursive dimension) to address the so-defined threat.**

A series of motives and intentions can help us explain a securitizing act and the subsequent implementation of extraordinary measures (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). Securitizing injects urgency into an issue and leads to a sustained mobilization of political support and deployment of resources. It also creates the kind of political momentum necessary for the adoption of additional and emergency measures. The securitization of an issue can thus provide some tangible benefits including a more efficient handling of complex problems, a mobilizing of popular support for policies in specific areas by calling them security-relevant, the allocation of more resources, and so forth. These achievements might not be obtained if the same problems were only regarded as political matters.

Yet it is crucial to highlight the danger of securitization. **The process can be abused to legitimize and empower the role of the military or special security forces in civilian activities.** This is particularly relevant in emerging democracies or countries where the division between the military and civilian authority is blurred. With the growing articulation of issues as threats in a post-9/11 context, an act of securitization can lead to the further legitimization of the armed forces in politics as well as to the curbing of civil liberties in the name of security in well-established democratic societies. **Elites can use a securitizing act to curtail civil liberties, impose martial law, detain political opponents or suspected terrorists without trail, restrict the influence of certain domestic political institutions, or increase military budgets** (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). Few checks and balances are normally imposed on

implemented emergency measures opening the door for possible abuse. In undemocratic societies, the greater public is not invited to speak out and thus unable to prevent the dangers associated with an act of securitization. To highlight the potential danger linked to an act of securitization, Kyle Grayson uses a Frankenstein's Monster analogy (Grayson 2003). This metaphor for securitization helps us understand how powerful the securitizing actor can become as a result of the process as well as the loss of control that arises from a strategy that opens the door to extraordinary security actions.

Keeping Grayson's monster metaphor in mind, it is not surprising that **the Copenhagen School does not regard an act of securitization as a positive value or as a required development to tackle specific issues** (Williams 2003). It argues instead that societies should, as much as possible, operate within the realm of normal politics where issues can be debated and addressed within the standard boundaries of politicization. Consequently, a process of desecuritization is described by Buzan and Wæver as particularly important to re-introduce a matter into a standard politicized level. Risks to society and abuse of authority can be prevented by desecuritizing an issue and re-including it into the normal political domain.

KEY POINTS

- A successful act of securitization provides securitizing actors with the right to use exceptional means.
- What constitutes an extraordinary measure is not always well defined.
- A series of motives and intentions can explain an act of securitization.
- An act of securitization can lead to excesses and abuse of power. It can easily be abused by authoritarian regimes and/or in the name of the defence of civil liberties.
- Desecuritization can be beneficial as it re-introduces an issue into a politicized sphere.

Limitations of the securitization model

The Copenhagen School provides a framework to determine how, as well as by whom, a specific matter becomes securitized or desecuritized. Yet despite the School's prominence in the security studies literature, the dynamics of securitization and desecuritization remain insufficiently understood empirically (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). The Copenhagen School has so far primarily concentrated on framing a theoretical approach to security studies while paying **insufficient attention to empirical research**. Questions that need to be explored empirically include why some moves of securitization succeed in convincing an audience while others fail to do so. It is also necessary to analyse why some issues are articulated and treated as existential security threats while others are not. In other words, empirical studies on the path that leads to the securitization of public issues might lead to a better understanding of the transition from the politicized to the securitized end of the spectrum and vice versa. Finally, the Copenhagen School has not given much attention to assessing the policy effectiveness of extraordinary measures nor to the unintended consequences that they might provoke (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). It is, however, important to determine empirically whether acts of securitization contribute to an effective handling of specific issues. Securitizing an issue may in fact not contribute to a solution as desecuritization might instead be a more fruitful approach.

The Copenhagen School is also criticized for being Euro-centric (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). This Euro-centricism is less obvious though in the case of *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, which seeks to provide a broad theoretical approach to security studies. Still, the notion of societal security, for example, which is at the core of the Copenhagen School and emphasizes society rather than the state as the primary referent object (Tow 2001), very much derives from a European experience. It refers to borderless societies that are said to

exist in Europe as a result of political and economic integration. Societal security, which is examined in Chapter 10, is linked to the construction of a collective European identity and should be dissociated from state security, which relates to the preservation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The existence of a similar sense of community in many other regions or parts of the world is disputable.

Furthermore, it is open to debate whether the securitization model contributes to the study of international security in parts of the world that can easily be analysed through a realist mode. Northeast Asia is still very much defined, for example, by a strategic structure determined by realist characteristics. Concerns of a traditional mould continue to trouble the Northeast Asian region, including the protracted Korean peninsula problem and the risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cross-straits tensions between China and Taiwan, and ongoing diplomatic furores between Japan on the one hand and China and South Korea on the other over the historical legacy of the Pacific War and disputed islets. The fragility of bilateral ties between China and Japan is a key concern for peace and stability in the entire region. From a US and Japanese perspective, China and its rising power also continue to present the most powerful long-term challenge to the East Asian regional order. In such a context, security is still regarded as being essentially about geo-politics, deterrence, power balancing, and military strategy. The state and its defence from external military attacks remain the primary focus of security policies. Hence, although the securitization model can indicate the various 'speech acts' as well as responses from specific audiences and the possible implementation of extraordinary measures, it may in such strategic environments not be able to reveal much more than rational theories, such as Realism.

Another shortcoming touches on the blurred distinction between the political and security

realms (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). The Copenhagen School needs to further define and clarify the **boundaries between politics and security**. The School defines securitization as an extreme version of politicization, which contributes to the possible confusion and overlap along the spectrum of de-politicized, politicized and securitized issues. As it stands, the model may not be able to sufficiently dissociate an act of securitization from a case of severe politicization. The distinction that may exist between these processes can be blurred depending on the political context and existing circumstances (Anthony, Emmers, Acharya 2006). For instance, the separation between the **political and security domains traditionally remains indistinct in undemocratic societies**. Moreover, matters that are articulated in security terms even by democratically elected governments may continue to be located within the political domain and addressed through standard political procedures. Despite the use of speech acts, solutions for the resolution of non-military challenges are frequently found in the realm of politics. Furthermore, and as will be discussed in the next section, more needs to be said about the political motives to securitize an issue. Politicians can use the language of security toward public matters in order to boost their popularity and enhance their chances of re-election. Taking a tough stance on sensitive questions such as undocumented migration or drug trafficking can help them win support among the electorate. Such examples of securitization could be regarded therefore as illustrations of politicization.

Finally, the securitization model raises some important questions about the role of academia. Are academics and analysts meant to be and act solely as observers or as advocates—securitizing or desecuritizing actors in their own right—when studying a securitizing move? The Copenhagen School expects analysts to distinguish themselves from a securitization act and the role of the securitizing actor. Yet the distinction may be obscured by a variety of factors. For example, ever since the terror attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, terrorist experts have been widely present in the media and sometimes even in contact with intelligence agencies. It can be argued therefore that such repeated interventions blur the separation between academic analysis and politics and transform the **analyst into a separate and influential securitizing actor that is part of the securitizing move**.

KEY POINTS

- The securitization model is still relatively new. More empirical research is required to better understand the dynamics of securitization.
- The Copenhagen School is often viewed as Euro-centric, reflecting European security concerns and questions.
- The boundaries between securitization and politicization are sometimes blurred.
- The securitization model raises questions about the role of scholars and analysts.

Cases of securitization

Securitization of undocumented migration

The securitization of undocumented migration has become a recurrent event. Migration is a complex social phenomenon that is influenced by economic,

political, socio-cultural, historical, and geographical factors. Economic determinants, especially poverty and economic disparities, are the prime motivation for migrants to leave their countries of origin. They are in pursuit of better opportunities to earn an income and improve their quality of life.

KEY QUOTES 7.1

Migration

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said 'whole (Middle East) villages are packing up' to come to Australia and the nation was facing 'a national emergency'. (Associated Press. 23 Feb 2002) http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp

Discussing strip searches of children, Australian PM Howard said: 'It sounds stark and authoritarian, but if you are dealing with situations where people are using children in an exploitive way—which sometimes occurs—then I think that kind of thing is justified,'

Howard told Melbourne radio station 3AW. (Associated Press. 6 April 2001). [http:// global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp](http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp)

'And we have lost control of our asylum and immigration system. At a time when Britain faces an unprecedented terrorist threat, we appear to have little idea who is coming into or leaving our country.' (Text of Conservative leader Michael Howard's speech on asylum and immigration on 22 September 2004) [http:// news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3679618.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3679618.stm)

Besides the phenomenon of economic migration, political circumstances also explain the movement of populations. Inter-state wars, domestic conflicts of ethno-nationalist origin, and authoritarian regimes with appalling human rights records create waves of political refugees leaving their countries of origin in the hope of escaping persecution and violence. Migrants face restrictive immigration policies and reduced legal immigration opportunities. This leads to a growing reliance on illegal methods to either enter or remain in a specific country, including overstaying the expiry of a valid tourist visa or work permit. Over the last ten years, the issue of undocumented migration has also been increasingly linked to organized criminal groups that now largely control the smuggling and trafficking of people. It is estimated by the United States State Department that as many as 900,000 people might be trafficked annually across international borders.

Undocumented migration can be articulated by politicians and perceived by specific audiences as representing a threat to the political, societal, economic as well as cultural security of a state and its society (Graham 2000). Undocumented migration is said to undermine the security of national borders and thus to be a threat to the national sovereignty of a state (political security). It can also have a negative effect on the fabric of a society and its

economic welfare by affecting social order and increasing unrest and crime rates (societal security). Moreover, migrants are often portrayed as a threat to the lifestyle and culture of the receiving country. In addition to being blamed for contributing to a rise in crime and other social problems, undocumented migrants are sometimes described as economic migrants who are claiming asylum to take advantage of national social benefits or take away jobs from the local population (economic security). Hiring undocumented workers tends to be much cheaper for local employers, as the latter do not have to cover their welfare or medical costs. Viewed as cheap labour, undocumented migrants are regarded as threatening employment opportunities. In reality, they mostly end up doing low-skilled jobs that nationals refuse to do. Finally, the arrival of immigrants from a common ethnic or religious group can be perceived as causing a shift in the racial composition of a country and diluting its cultural identity.

The handling of the undocumented migration issue by the John Howard government in 2001 represents an interesting case of securitization (Emmers 2004). Undocumented migration had started to have a significant political impact in Australia since the late 1990s. Pauline Hanson and her political party, the One Nation Party, transformed the immigration

issue into a popular political rallying point. Hanson had proclaimed her extreme views on immigration, the Aborigines, and asylum seekers. She won a seat in the Australian federal parliament as an independent candidate in 1996 and created the One Nation Party in 1997. The John Howard government first adopted a hard line on undocumented migration in the summer of 2001 over the Tampa incident. The Tampa, a Norwegian freighter, had rescued 460 Afghans on their way to Australia to claim asylum. Approaching its territorial waters, the Australian government refused the right of entry to the Tampa and ordered the ship to turn away. After the ship had failed to obey, Howard ordered units of the Special Air Service (SAS) to take control of the ship and prevent it from reaching Christmas Island or mainland Australia. A military operation had thus been undertaken to avoid asylum seekers from coming to Australia.

The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, used, together with the issue of terrorism in a post-9/11 environment, the migration theme in his re-election campaign in November 2001. The prime minister explained that he did not want undocumented migrants who had been smuggled into Australia to jump ahead of other people recognized as genuine asylum seekers by the Australian authorities. The smuggling of undocumented migrants into Australia was also described as a threat to the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. The government indicated that it could not give the impression that it was losing control over its borders, control that is so essential to national sovereignty. Finally, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the Australian authorities were concerned that terrorists might be among the migrants smuggled into Australia. The questions of terrorism and undocumented migration were therefore to some extent intertwined in public discussions.

The referent objects in this case of securitization were the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Australia (military and political security), the fabric of society (societal security), and economic welfare (economic security). The securitizing actor was the John Howard government. The audience

consisted of the Australian public opinion (Emmers 2004). Despite a lot of domestic debates and fierce criticism, the audience generally accepted the interpretation of events set forward by the securitizing actor and acknowledged the need to implement extraordinary measures to respond to the threat. Opinion polls suggested that a majority of Australians supported Howard's hard line on undocumented migration. While migration was certainly not the sole reason for success, his conservative coalition was re-elected for a third term in office in November 2001. In other words, the securitizing actor used a discourse of security that convinced an audience of the threat posed by the smuggling of undocumented migration into Australia.

Beyond the use of rhetoric, the Howard government adopted and implemented a series of extraordinary measures to reduce the number of asylum-seekers reaching Australia (Emmers 2004). Such measures included the automatic detention of asylum seekers in camps while waiting for their applications to be processed and the interception of ships carrying asylum seekers off the coast of Australia and their diversion to Pacific Islands for processing. The Australian government built immigration detention centres both on its territory and abroad. Asylum seekers were interned on the Australian territory of Christmas Island, a remote island in the Indian Ocean located at about 1,800 kilometres from Western Australia. Offshore refuge centres were also built on Mauru and on Manus Island, in Papua New Guinea, to detain asylum seekers until their applications were processed. Finally, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) increased their capabilities to ensure border and domestic security against people smuggling, terrorism, and other threats.

Securitization of drug trafficking

Besides undocumented migration, another issue that has recurrently been securitized is the illicit trafficking and abuse of drugs. Drug trafficking is a

KEY POINTS

- Undocumented migration is one phenomenon that is increasingly being securitized today.
- Undocumented migrants are often said to represent a threat to political, societal, economic, and environmental security.
- For example, the John Howard government securitized the smuggling of undocumented migrants into Australia in 2001.
- The use of the speech act was generally accepted by the wider Australian public (audience).
- The completed securitization act led to the implementation of extraordinary measures.

transnational criminal activity and most likely the largest international crime problem in the world. The global trade of illicit drugs is believed to be worth as much as US\$400 billion a year. Drug trafficking is connected to other categories of transnational crime. It is the prime generator of money laundering and is linked to arms smuggling (drug dealers often outgun police forces), organized crime, corruption, illegal migration, and in some cases terrorism. Drug trafficking is viewed as a threat to societal security by increasing drug consumption and addiction, raising the level of violent crime, affecting the health of the consumers, spreading HIV/AIDS due to intravenous drug use, and undermining family structures. In addition to its social consequences, drug trafficking has significant economic and political effects. It creates shadow economies, distorts financial institutions, undermines national economies, and fuels the problem of money laundering. It also erodes the rule of law, promotes corruption, and undermines border security. This is examined in detail in Chapter 19.

The so-called 'war on drugs' waged by Thailand in 2003 is an example of a securitizing act (Emmers 2004). The consumption of illicit drugs in the country is a dramatic problem that primarily involves

young adults. The most serious trend in Thailand has been the rapid increase in the use of synthetic drugs. Besides the health and social consequences of illicit drug consumption, many in Thailand view the drug trafficking activities coming from Burma as a significant national security issue. In response, the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, declared war on drugs in February 2003 vowing to the Thai population to eliminate the narcotics problem within three months. The prime minister stated at an anti-drugs event in late March 2003: 'The drugs problem is a threat to national security. Thus my government has declared war on drugs and placed drugs eradication as the nation's most urgent agenda' (BBC News 2003).

In this case of securitization, the referent objects were the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Thailand (military and political security), the integrity and stability of the political system (political security), the Thai population (societal security), and the economic development and prosperity of the country (economic security). The securitizing actor was the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his government. Finally, the audience consisted of the Thai public opinion (Emmers 2004).

Opinion polls indicated that the audience generally accepted the articulation of drug trafficking as a threat to Thailand's national security and its society and the need for it to be addressed through extraordinary measures. Repeated pollsters indicated strong public approval of the anti-drugs campaign. The audience therefore accepted the interpretation of events set forward by the securitizing actor and acknowledged the need for emergency action. According to the Copenhagen School, this indicates a successful act of securitization—the securitizing actor had used a discourse of security and an audience had been convinced by the existential threat posed by drug trafficking to the referent objects.

The war on drugs led to the implementation of extreme measures as well as to a series of abuses (Emmers 2004). The interior ministry, the police,

KEY QUOTES 7.2

Thaksin and the War on Drugs

'I am serious about taking action against drug traffickers. Government officials, police in particular, must take action too as these traffickers destroy youths' lives, ruin the economy and damage the country.' (The Nation, 5 Oct 2004) http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp

'We must go after all traders and producers. They are not suitable to be part of our society. They deserve to be put in jail. Drug traders who fight back must be dealt with decisively.' (Bangkok Post, 23 March 2003) http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp

'Although we have destroyed most of the drug networks it does not mean that the drug problem is totally wiped out. They are like germs: they'll resurrect themselves when our body is weak.' (Agence France Presse, 2 Dec 2003) http://global.factiva.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/en/eSrch/ss_hl.asp

and local authorities published blacklists of suspected drug producers, traffickers, and dealers. The blacklists were widely criticized in the media and by non-governmental organizations due to their lack of accuracy. This led to concern that the police might accuse innocent people of being drug producers or traffickers. It was also reported that more than 2,500 people had been killed primarily between February and April 2003. The Thai government blamed inter-gang warfare for most of the killings. Thaksin announced: 'It is bandits killing bandits' (Cochrane 2003: 35). Most of the killings were not investigated, nor did they lead to arrests. Human rights groups argued that a 'shoot-to-kill policy' had been put in place. They suspected the police of taking matters in their own hands and executing traffickers as part of the war on drugs campaign. Despite domestic and international criticism of the extra-judicial killings, repeated polls indicated that Thai public opinion generally supported the implementation of extraordinary measures.

KEY POINTS

- The illicit trafficking and abuse of drugs has recurrently been securitized.
- Narcotics are viewed as a threat to political, societal, economic, and health security.
- Thailand declared war on drugs in 2003. The Thai population (audience) generally accepted the articulation of drug trafficking as a threat to Thailand and its society.
- The implementation of extraordinary measures led to abuses.

The war in Iraq and the failure of securitization

We have so far noted two cases of completed acts of securitization. This is not to say, however, that all moves of securitization succeed in convincing a specific audience on the existential nature of a threat. In fact, as mentioned above, the Copenhagen

abuse of power. The process of securitization therefore failed to move beyond its first stage.

KEY POINTS

- Moves of securitization can fail. This results from the audience rejecting the speech act articulated by the securitizing actor.
- US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair generally failed to convince the international community of the existential threat posed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.
- Members of the coalition sought to justify the military removal of Saddam Hussein linking the issues of international terrorism and the proliferation of WMD.
- The linkage was not accepted by most other members of the UN Security Council and by the wider international community.

The opposition to the war was not limited to a diplomatic level but was characterized instead by a broad popular movement. In the United Kingdom, although a key member of the US coalition, the wider population did not accept the government's speech act describing Saddam Hussein's regime as an existential threat to international peace (Collins 2005). This was indicated by opinion polls as well as by massive and repeated demonstrations against the war. Aware that they would not be able to get a UN mandate to attack Iraq, the United States and the United Kingdom launched Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March 2003. The opposition to the war remained particularly strong in most parts of the world. Even after the start of the hostilities, the US administration and the British government failed to convince the wider international community of the necessity and legitimacy of the conflict. The continuing demonstrations against the war reflect these elites' lack of legitimacy and perceived

Conclusion

The Copenhagen School, and its securitization model, is a framework for security studies that encapsulates both state security and non-traditional security concerns. It allows for non-military matters to be included in security studies while offering a coherent understanding of the concept of security. It provides a framework to determine how, why, and by whom a specific matter becomes securitized and thus succeeds in distinguishing security and non-security threats. The securitization and desecuritization model makes it possible to adopt a broader conceptualization of security without losing the central coherence of the term. In that respect, the Copenhagen School greatly contributes to the security studies literature.

The Copenhagen School structures its securitization model around a series of salient questions and steps. First, it asks **who the securitizing actors might**

be—those who initiate a move of securitization through the speech act. These can be policymakers, bureaucracies, but also transnational actors (international institutions, non-state actors, civil society), and even individuals. Second, **who or what is to be protected?** States and governments are no longer the sole referent objects of security as individuals, communities, economies, eco-systems, and others are all alternative referents for security. Third, **from what kinds of threats are the referent objects to be protected?** The security concern must be articulated as **an existential threat**—thus linking the concept of security to the question of survival. Fourth, **who decides on what is a security issue?** The act of securitization is only completed once a relevant audience (public opinion, politicians, military officers or other elites) is convinced that the so-called security issue represents an existential threat to the referent

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KEY QUOTES 7.3

Bush and the Iraq War

'Iraq is the latest battlefield in this war. Many terrorists who kill innocent men, women, and children on the streets of Baghdad are followers of the same murderous ideology that took the lives of our citizens in New York, in Washington, and Pennsylvania. There is only one course of action against them: to defeat them abroad before they attack us at home.'

(President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. 28 June 2005) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html>

'The threat comes from Iraq. It arises directly from the Iraqi regime's own actions—its history of aggression, and its drive toward an arsenal of terror. Eleven years ago, as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War, the Iraqi regime was required to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, to cease all development of such weapons, and to stop all support for terrorist groups. The Iraqi regime has violated all of those obligations. It possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people. The

entire world has witnessed Iraq's eleven-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith.'

(President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat Remarks by the President on Iraq Cincinnati Museum Center—Cincinnati Union Terminal. Cincinnati, Ohio. 7 October 2002). <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>

'While there are many dangers in the world, the threat from Iraq stands alone—because it gathers the most serious dangers of our age in one place. Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant who has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people. This same tyrant has tried to dominate the Middle East, has invaded and brutally occupied a small neighbor, has struck other nations without warning, and holds an unrelenting hostility toward the United States.'

(President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat Remarks by the President on Iraq Cincinnati Museum Center—Cincinnati Union Terminal. Cincinnati, Ohio. 7 October 2002). <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html>

School anticipates that some speech acts will fail to do so. A relevant example is the failure by US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to convince the international community on the existential threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq. In his State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, President Bush had already characterized Iraq together with North Korea and Iran as an 'axis of evil'. The US administration later sought to justify the removal of Saddam Hussein through military force by linking the issue of international terrorism to the threat of the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The language of security was therefore utilized to justify the need for the implementation of emergency and extraordinary measures (the immediate use of military force to dispose of a foreign regime). In the meantime, critics of the American position questioned Iraq's WMD capabilities and

the accuracy of its immediate threat to international peace and stability. The WMD capabilities of Iraq were also said to be less than those of Libya, North Korea, or Iran.

Opponents to the use of military force called for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis through efforts at the United Nations (UN). The UN Security Council adopted in November 2002 a new resolution that allowed UN inspectors to go back to Iraq and search for WMD after a four-year absence. In early 2003, Mr Hans Blix, head of the UN weapons inspectors, pointed out that Iraq had failed to cooperate proactively. Yet he also announced that in the two months of inspections in Iraq, his team had not found any WMDs, or in the parlance of the time, a 'smoking gun'. In the meantime, the military build-up continued in the Gulf, with the US and British military sending more and more troops and equipment.

object. Finally, what means are to be used to tackle the existential threat? Once the act of securitization is completed, extraordinary measures can be imposed that go beyond rules ordinarily abided by. The emergency measures are thus located outside the normal bounds of political procedures.

Nonetheless, the chapter has also stressed the dangers of securitization particularly in an undemocratic political system where the wider population is unable to reject an illegitimate speech act and the emergency measures adopted as a result. Even in democratic societies, there is the risk of an act of securitization leading to the curbing of well-established civil liberties in the name of security.

This is especially relevant in a post-9/11 context and the growing articulation of issues as existential threats. The pejorative and possibly negative connotations of securitizing an issue have been stressed through several illustrations as well as the preference for a desecuritizing approach. Finally, the chapter has highlighted some of the shortcomings of the Copenhagen School and its securitization model. These include the Euro-centric nature of the Copenhagen School, the sometimes blurred distinction between securitization and politicization as well as the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of securitization through more empirical research.



QUESTIONS

- Why are some issues considered as security questions while others are not?
- How is a process of securitization completed?
- Is an act of securitization generally dominated by powerful actors?
- Is securitization more likely to succeed in authoritarian states?
- What are the benefits of securitizing or desecuritizing an issue?
- Assess the dangers of securitization?
- What are some of the shortcomings of the securitization model?
- Should undocumented migration be regarded and treated as a security question?
- Is drug trafficking a national security problem?
- Did the process of securitization fail in the case of Iraq?



FURTHER READING

- Deudney, D. (1990), 'The Case Against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 19/3: 461–76. The article casts doubts upon the tendency to link environmental degradation and national security.
- Doty, R.L. (1999), 'Immigration and the Politics of Security', *Security Studies*, 8, 2/3: 71–93. The article offers 'lenses' for understanding security, arguing that a one-dimensional understanding of security is inadequate for both scholars and policy makers.
- Hansen, L. (2000), 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29/2: 285–306. The

article offers a critique of the Copenhagen School by raising gender issues and other blind spots of securitization.

■ Kenney, M. (2003), 'From Pablo to Osama: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from the War on Drugs', *Survival*, 45/3: 187–206. The article looks at lessons from the war on drugs and suggests the need for policymakers to address the 'demand side' of terrorism in the war on terror.

■ Matthews, J.T. (1989), 'Redefining Security', *Foreign Affairs*, LXVIII/2: 162–177. This essay argues for a redefinition of national security that incorporates resource, environmental and demographic issues.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/sites/copri.html> This website includes the Working Papers produced at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI). The Institute was established in 1985 and ceased to exist in January 2005 when it was merged into the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS).
- <http://www.idss-nts.org/> This website contains information about the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) Project on Non-Traditional Security in Asia, funded by the Ford Foundation. The website is an information hub for policymakers and academics working on Non-Traditional Security and offers analytical tools by analysing the dynamics of securitization and desecuritization.
- <http://www.midas.bham.ac.uk/theproject.htm> The Migration, Democracy and Security (MIDAS) is a research project undertaken at the University of Birmingham. It examines the securitization of the free movement of people following the terror attacks on 11 September 2001.



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