

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO SECURITY STUDIES: CONSTRUCTING (IN)SECURITY THROUGH PERFORMATIVE POWER

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Abstract:

Security has generally posed a challenge to those who have attempted to reach an ideal, comprehensive and encompassing definition of the concept. Orthodox perspectives have mainly focused on the state as a "harbinger" of security that defends its territory and citizens against external enemies through the acquisition of military grade weapons. Neorealist theorist, Stephen Walt defines security as "the study of threat, use, and control of military force" (1991, 212). Since security is a seemingly self-explanatory concept, it has also been rather underdeveloped to the point that International Relations theorist Barry Buzan argues that before the '80s, "conceptual literature on security" was rather neglected if not, a sorely absent field of inquiry (1983, 3-4). Buzan himself, along with Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, proposed a new research agenda for security as evidenced in the book: "Security: A New Framework for Analysis" (1997). These authors are regarded as the main representatives of what today we refer to as the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. The present article provides an analysis of the Copenhagen School's "good practices" on security and securitization as speech acts (Mutimer 2016, 93) and intersubjective processes (de Graaf 2011, 11), in order to address the performative power behind the contemporaneous security architecture and the security practices of threat construction.

Rezumat:

Securitatea a reprezentat în general o provocare pentru cei care au încercat să ajungă la o definiție ideală, comprehensivă și acoperitoare a conceptului. Perspectivele ortodoxe s-au axat în principal asupra statului ca simbol al securității, care își apără teritoriul și cetățenii împotriva dușmanilor externi prin achiziția de arme militare. În viziunea neorealistului Stephen Walt, studiul securității reprezintă „studiul amenințării, utilizării și controlului forței militare” (1991, 212). În contextul în care securitatea reprezintă un concept care aparent se explică de la sine, aceasta a suferit de pe urma unei subdezvoltări teoretice astfel încât teoreticianul de relații internaționale Barry Buzan a considerat că înainte de anii ‘80, dezvoltarea „unei literaturi conceptuale asupra securității” a constituit o temă de cercetare neglijată, chiar absentă (1983, 3-4). Buzan însuși, alături de Ole Wæver și Jaap de Wilde, a propus o nouă agendă de cercetare în domeniul studiilor de securitate, dezvoltată în lucrarea de referință: “Security: A New Framework for Analysis” (1997). Acești autori sunt reprezentanții Școlii de la Copenhaga în domeniul studiilor de securitate. Articolul de față analizează „bunele practici” ale Școlii de la Copenhaga în privința securității și a securitizării ca „acte de vorbire” (Mutimer 2016, 93) precum și a proceselor intersubiective (de Graff 2011, 11), în vederea analizării arhitecturii de securitate contemporane din perspectiva puterii performative a modului de reprezentare a amenințărilor.

Keywords: the Copenhagen School, critical security studies, securitization, performativity, threat assessment, asymmetric warfare

Introduction

With the outbreak of the reflectivist wave in International Relations (IR), traditional concepts – such as security and sovereignty, or war and peace – have been subjected to an interpretivist process which sought to critically reevaluate their standing in the discipline of IR as well as within the family of IR’s subdisciplines. Analyzing the framework of security under the new methodological auspices of the “contested concepts” framework, led to the multiplication of security referents (from the state as a classical actor to the individual) and sectors. In turn, as Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung point out, due to this “conceptual widening”, the barriers between strategic studies and peace research started to break down: “To some extent, the two fields have merged to become security studies, which

covers a range from more traditional approaches (Walt 1991) to so-called 'critical security studies' (Krause and Williams 1997)"¹.

In the midst of this theoretical cacophony during the first half of the 90s, the Copenhagen School brings its contribution to the security debate by providing a research framework that better encompasses the concepts of security and that of security threats. The name of this approach originates with its proponents – members of the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (formerly the Centre for Peace and Conflict Research). At its core, the Copenhagen School considers that security is constructed as a result of human and not state agency.

This article reviews the overarching ethos of the Copenhagen School by addressing the School's research framework on security and the theory of securitization. We follow this with a critique of the Copenhagen tenets proposed by fellow reflectivist / postpositivist researchers of Security Studies. Finally, we address the issue of threat construction by exemplifying what Matt McDonald refers to as the "performative role of security"², explored in the context of preemption, imminence and asymmetric threats.

The Copenhagen School's Theoretical Underpinnings

In the field of Security Studies, security approaches such as those of the Copenhagen School as well as those of Critical Security Studies³, were a by-product of the debate on security from the mid-80s onwards, between proponents of peace studies and those of strategic studies. The commonalities shared by the Copenhagen School with the Critical Security Studies, range from:

¹ Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung, "Copenhagen Peace Research", in *Contemporary Security Analysis and Copenhagen Peace Research*, ed. Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

² Matt McDonald, *Security, the Environment and Emancipation. Contestation over Environmental Change* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

³ Critical Security Studies trace back to a conference organized at the York University in Toronto, in 1994, centered on "Strategies of Conflict. Critical Approaches to Security Studies" – the result was book published three years later, in 1997, entitled *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (edited by Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams). Critical Security Studies put an emphasis on individual security and emancipation (David Mutimer, "Critical Security Studies: A Schismatic History", in *Contemporary Security Studies (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 89; Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13).

“the stress on the political power and symbolism of the word ‘security’; the [...] implications of taking issues outside ‘ordinary politics’ and onto the security agenda’; the understanding of security as an intersubjective concept; a commitment to the desirability of trying to avoid the militarizing of issues by challenging the ‘mind-set of security’ that sees issues in zero-sum terms; the search to resolve security issues without violence”⁴.

In general terms, the Critical Security Studies approach aims to go one step further than the Copenhagen School, and to politicize security – that is to “bring the political back into⁵ security studies”⁶, as evidenced by the research published in the book *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (1997): “Contesting an Essential Concept: Reading the Dilemmas in Contemporary Security Discourse” (Simon Dalby); “From Strategy to Security: Foundations of Critical Security Studies” (Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams; “The Subject of Security” (Robert B.J. Walker).

The Copenhagen School originated with the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute – founded in 1985⁷ – and the seminal work of this approach was *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, co-authored by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (published in 1998). Other representative texts of the Copenhagen School are: *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (Ole Wæver et al., 1993), or *The European Security Order Recast. Scenarios for the Post-Cold War Era* (Barry Buzan et al., 1990). While the School has undergone an evolutive process over the course of several decades, the research has maintained a level of continuity even when more recent analyses focused on a critical revision of the School’s

⁴ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164.

⁵ The author paraphrases the title of a classical book on the poststructuralist theory in International Relations, authored by Jenny Edkins: *Poststructuralism and International Relations. Bringing the Politics Back In* (Boulder, CO.: Rienner Publisher, 1999).

⁶ João Reis Nunes, “Politics, Security, Critical Theory: A Contribution to Current Debates on Security” (Aberystwyth: University of Wales), 3, accessed on October 10, 2016, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.408.6414&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁷ Currently known as the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI).

research fundamentals⁸. Meanwhile, the name itself originates with Bill McSweeney's critical article of these works, published in 1996⁹.

The Copenhagen School frames its theoretical enterprise in a juxtaposition of somewhat disjunctive research venues, interlocking – according to Ken Booth – neorealist, liberal and poststructuralist assumptions¹⁰. Where neorealism is concerned, the School remains tributary to the traditional debate on security, in that as Michael C. Williams points out, the Copenhagen School rethinks security by reaffirming realist ideas regarding conflict, war, survival and zero-sum thinking¹¹. The poststructuralist influence is reflected in the preferred object of analysis, namely that of discourse and discursive structures. Moreover, the Copenhagen School shares a series of common views with social constructivism, since both emphasize “[t]he utility of the model of language as action or as a resource for action in the field of security”¹².

We can go so far as to say that the Copenhagen School proposes a radical view of social constructivism¹³, subsumed to the notion that security belongs to actors, not to observers. In other words, threats are established in an intersubjective manner through the interplay of actors and audience, while the researcher sits on the outside, providing an input on the security dynamics¹⁴. Consequently, one can identify whether a problem is non-politicized, politicized or securitized and furthermore one can trace the ways

⁸ See for example Lene Hansen, “The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School”, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (June 2000): 285-306

⁹ Bill McSweeney, “Identity and Security: Buzan and the Copenhagen School”, *Review of International Studies* 22, no. 1 (January 1996): 81-93.

¹⁰ Booth, *Theory of World Security*, 161.

¹¹ Williams (2003) quoted in Ingrid Boas, *Climate Migration and Security. Securitisation as a Strategy in Climate Change Politics* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015), 23. See also: Michael C. Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics”, *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (December 2003): 511-31 and Ole Wæver, “Securitization and Desecuritisation”, in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46-86.

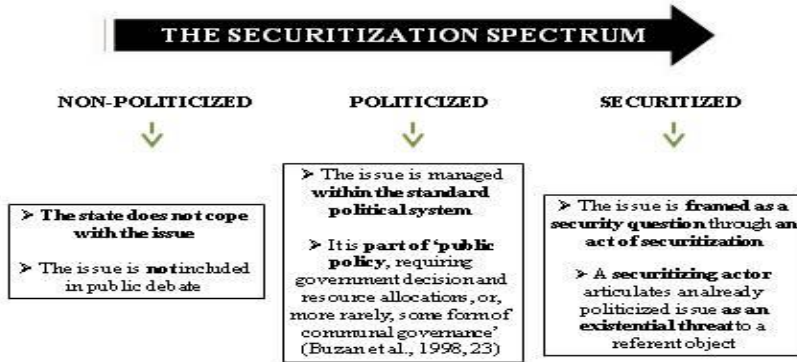
¹² Monica Gariup, *European Security Culture. Language, Theory, Policy* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 66.

¹³ Here, we apply Holger Stritzel’s view of constructivism, representing approaches characterized by: “1) the social constructedness of reality, 2) the ideational embeddedness of agency and 3) the focus on constitutive research” (Holger Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond”, *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 3 (September 2007): 378).

¹⁴ Paul Roe, *Ethnic Violence and the Societal Security Dilemma* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005), 54.

in which a non-politicized issue warrants politicization and when the situation arises, goes so far as to require securitization – which involves the need for emergency measures (see Fig. 1)¹⁵.

Fig. 1: Securitization spectrum



Source: Ralf Emmers, "Securitization", in *Contemporary Security Studies (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 170

Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams ascertain that the Copenhagen School represents the merger of two innovative research endeavors conducted by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. The former publishes in 1983, the book *People, States and Fear*, in which the author advances the concept of "sectors of security" through the prism of the system structure, while the latter develops the concept of "securitization"¹⁶. Buzan combines neorealism and constructivism, adopting the realist view on anarchy while at the same time, regarding the struggle for power as anachronistic. What Buzan proposes is a 'reconstructed' neorealism, expanding on Kenneth Waltz's three levels of analyzing state behavior (1. anarchy / self-help system, 2. functional differentiation of units and 3. the changing distribution of capabilities / issues of polarity) by adding two more: interaction capacity and process variables¹⁷. Wæver, on the other hand, adopts a more poststructural approach, regarding himself as a poststructuralist realist, by noting that: "[...] poststructuralists have emerged on the academic scene with

¹⁵ Ralf Emmers, "Securitization", in *Contemporary Security Studies (Fourth Edition)*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 170. See also: Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 23.

¹⁶ Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies. An Introduction* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2010), 76.

¹⁷ Knud Erik Jørgensen, *International Relations Theory. A New Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 94-95.

the political program of tearing down 'givens', of opening up, making possible, freeing"¹⁸. Lene Hansen argues that for Wæver, security is regarded as a speech act, framing the practice of security by connecting its discursive side to the political one:

"In this usage security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real, the utterance *itself* is an act. [...] By uttering "security", a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it"¹⁹.

Consequently, from this eclectic convergence of theoretical predispositions, three main themes emerge:

1. expanding security beyond the conventional understanding of the concept²⁰ (sectors of security);
2. the state-based process of identifying "security threats" tends to vary and be socially constructed (regional security complexes);
3. securitization – further investigated in the following section.

Security and Securitization: Speech Acts, Intersubjective Negotiation and the Performative Effects of Speech

In the IR sub-field of Security Studies, the theory of securitization refers to a diverse and comprehensive body of literature, representing in Jef Huysmans' view, "possibly the most thorough and continuous exploration of the significance and implications of a widening security agenda for security studies"²¹. This proliferation has led to the expansion of securitization theory beyond the first generation – represented by the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver et al.) – and was reflected in the subsequent dissemination,

¹⁸ Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization", in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 86.

¹⁹ Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization", 55, quoted in Lene Hansen, "A Case for Seduction? Evaluating the Poststructuralist Conceptualization of Security", *Cooperation and Conflict* 32, no. 4 (December 1997): 376.

²⁰ This claim is disputed by G. John Ikenberry and Andrew Moravcsik, "Liberal Theory and the Politics of Security in Northeast Asia" (paper presented at the Ford Foundation Project on Non-Traditional Security, Seoul, South Korea, January 30, 2004), Princeton University, accessed October 12, 2016, <https://www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/seoul.doc>.

²¹ Jef Huysmans, "Revisiting Copenhagen: Or About the Creative Development of a Security Studies Agenda in Europe", *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 4 (December 1998): 186, quoted in Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies", 511.

exploration and critical transformation of securitization (see the works of: Thierry Balzacq, Juha A. Vuori, Holger Stritzel, Rita Floyd (Taureck)). Furthermore, securitization has been applied and theorized from the perspective of: 1. idea / theory (the role of identity / identification); 2. bureaucratic routines; 3. ethics; 4. agency and discourse; 5. non-articulation / silence; 6. illocution versus perlocution; 7. audience; 8. securitizations in non-democratic environments; 9. images and visual language²², etc.

In the early stages of the Copenhagen School, researchers participated in the debate on security studies between the narrow and wide sense of security, and applied a broadened understanding of the concept of security. Unlike the traditional approach which is based in material considerations and utilized a positivist framework of research, by favoring explanatory models, the Copenhagen School added and operated with “non-military” security issues, alongside more traditional security issues, divided across five sectors: 1. military; 2. political; 3. economic; 4. societal; 5. environmental; based on their “specific types of interaction”:

1. “relationships of forceful coercion”;
2. “relationships of authority, governing status, and recognition”;
3. “relationships of trade, production, and finance”;
4. “relationships of collective identity”;
5. “relationships between human activity and the planetary biosphere”²³.

Notable for this period, was the fact that both sides of the debate considered the security context to be pre-existent – a fact which would later be reconsidered by the very same researchers of the Copenhagen School²⁴. For example, while in *People, States and Fear*, Buzan advances three levels of analysis (individual, state and international system), the focus remains exclusively on the state and national security, exposing his neorealist inclinations, as mentioned above. In this acceptance, security in its national character is dependent on the international environment of security.

²² Holger Stritzel, *Security in Translation. Securitization Theory and the Localization of Threat* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

²³ Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 7-8, quoted in Booth, *Theory of World Security*, 161-162.

²⁴ For the early period, Wæver et al., *Identity, Migration and the New Security Order in Europe* (1993); while for the revised analyses, see: Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998), or Wæver, ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’, (1995).

Meanwhile, critics of the neorealist tradition of security, argue that the object of security should expand beyond the containment imposed by the superposition of the state as a referent subject. Instead, security should encompass social groups or individuals. By overcoming the “narrow-wide” analytical framework for understanding security, one no longer regards it purely as a pre-existing object waiting to be examined by external parties, instead when one refers to the concept by its name, one, in effect, assists at “the discursive formation of the object itself”²⁵.

As Munster explains, it is at this point that authors like Buzan – accustomed to a more neorealist view of security – transition “to study the processes through which specific issues become illocutionary²⁶ constructed as security issues”²⁷ – where illocutionary constitutes “an act in saying something”²⁸. Anne Hinz observes the “qualitative jump” in the Copenhagen School’s view on security. The transition from “security” as perception of an external referent object, to “security” as speech act, is seen in the conceptual revision – attributed in particular to Wæver’s influence – proposed in Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). Here, the adopted view departs from Buzan’s *Identity, Migration and the New Agenda for Security* (1993) – which covers the societal

²⁵ Rens van Munster, “Logics of Security. The Copenhagen School, Risk Management and the War on Terror”, *Political Science Publications* 10 (2005): 1, University of Southern Denmark, accessed on October 12, 2016, http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles/Files/Om_SDU/Institutur/Statskundskab/Skriftserie/05RVM10.pdf.

²⁶ Vanderveken defines “illocutionary acts (e.g. assertions, orders, questions, promises)” as speech acts performed by speakers, “[i]n uttering sentences within a conversation or dialogue” (Daniel Vanderveken, “What Is an Illocutionary Force”, in *Dialogue. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Marcelo Dascal (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985), 181). For Wæver, relating security to illocutionary speech acts means “to define the particular case as one belonging to a specific category (‘security’) where the state tends to use all available means to combat it” (Ole Wæver, “Security, ‘The Speech Act: Analysing the Politics of a Word’” (paper presented at Research Training Seminar, Sostrup Manor, 1989), 42, quoted in Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment. Securitisation Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 53).

²⁷ van Munster then cites from Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 24, 26: “‘Security’ is thus a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat...The process of security is what in language theory is called a speech act” (van Munster, “Logics of Security”, 3).

²⁸ Juha A. Vuori, *Critical Security and Chinese Politics. The Anti-Falungong Campaign* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 29.

dimension of security, in the earlier context of the *narrow* (traditionalist, neorealist) – *broad* debate on security²⁹.

In order to showcase the hypothesis of security as a speech act and of security threats developed as discursive constructions, the Copenhagen School coins the concept of “securitization” (see Fig. 2). Wæver proposes that:

“there are no natural things out there that are security threats and others that aren’t. It’s more that we as communities, politically, choose sometimes to deal with things in a particular way. We named certain things “security problems” and when we do that something happens to that issue and to our interaction around it. [...] It is outside the normal bounds of political rules. [...] Securitization is a situation where a referent object depicts an existential threat and justifies to the relevant audience the use of extraordinary measures”³⁰.

In other words, “securitization” refers to, at the same time, a notion, an instrument for security analysis and a theory. For Wæver and Buzan, securitization constitutes a speech act: “through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat”³¹. In plain terms, securitization turns a noun into a verb, by moving from the struggle to find an ever elusive definition of security, to pursuing the means by which objects become securitized, so that they pose an “existential” threat. In this case, the threat can only be mitigated through a state of exception³². The process of applying a security label on something, constitutes “a speech

²⁹ Anne Hinz, “Security and the Costs and Benefits of Manipulating Analytical Boundaries: Constructivist Debates within European Critical Security Studies”, *S&F Sicherheit und Frieden (Security and Peace)* 25, no. 4 (2007): 205.

³⁰ Ole Wæver, “Securitisation Theory - International Relations (#3)”, YouTube video, 0:47-3:12, posted by the Open University, October 3, 2014, accessed on October 12, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQ07tWOzE_c.

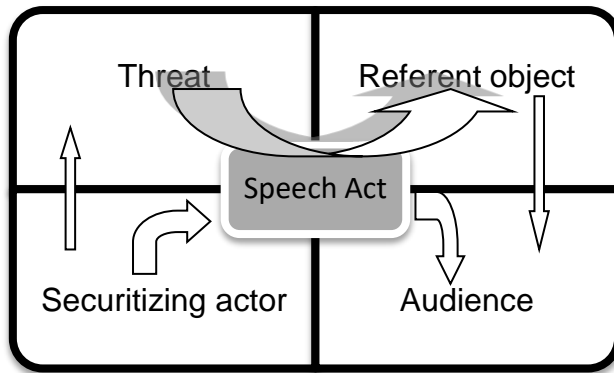
³¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 491, quoted in Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization”, 358.

³² Andreas Behnke, *NATO’s Security Discourse after the Cold War. Representing the West*, (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 55.

act"³³. Furthermore, once something is labeled a "security" issue, this will have an effect on policy and policy-making³⁴.

According to Nyman, the Copenhagen School advances the idea that: "security issues are not objective and external but 'determined by actors' and 'intersubjective and socially constructed'"³⁵. Consequently, security is imbued with a constructed meaning, as a result of intersubjective interaction, negotiation and contestation. In McDonald's view, this framework regards security as "a site of competing visions about a group's core values; threats to those values; and the means of protecting or advancing them"³⁶.

Fig. 2: The Process of Securitization



As a notion, securitization introduces the concept of "security" as a consequence of performative power politics, underlining the ways in which objects are securitized. In other words, the ways in which they become issues of security after being subjected to "intersubjective socio-political processes"³⁷. As a research tool, securitization enables one to follow the instances by which an object enters the domain of security threats and by extension, moves from "the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal

³³ Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization", 55.

³⁴ Jonna Nyman, "Securitization Theory", in *Critical Approaches to Security. An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, ed. Laura J. Shepherd (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 52.

³⁵ Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 31, quoted in Nyman, "Securitization Theory", 52.

³⁶ McDonald, *Security, the Environment and Emancipation*, 11,

³⁷ Juha A. Vuori, "Constructivism and Securitization Studies", in *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies (Second Edition)*, ed. Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Thierry Balzacq (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 64.

(democratic) rules and regulations of policy-making”³⁸. In order to avoid a surplus of artificial security issues, three steps are required to conduct a securitization analysis:

1. “identification of existential rules;
2. emergency action;
3. effects of inter-unit relations by breaking free of rules”³⁹.

In terms of performativity, the Copenhagen School proposes a view of security that becomes performative through the act of securitization in the sense that an issue becomes securitized only when “a suitably powerful securitizing actor” identifies it and declares it a security threat⁴⁰. Since securitization theory is rooted in the speech act theory⁴¹, the act of securitization is dependent on the capacity of the securitizing actor to establish what Williams characterizes as “socially effective claims about threats, by the form in which these claims can be made in order to be recognized and accepted as convincing by the relevant audience”⁴². Regarding the security speech act, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde argue that:

“[...] the security speech act is not defined by uttering the word *security*. What is essential is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience”⁴³.

³⁸ Rita Taureck (Floyd), “Securitization Theory and Securitization Studies”, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 9, no. 1 (March 2006): 54-5.

³⁹ Taureck, “Securitization Theory”, 55.

⁴⁰ Rita Floyd, “Analyst, Theory and Security. A New Framework for Understanding Environmental Security Studies”, in *Environmental Security. Approaches and Issues*, ed. Rita Floyd and Richard A. Matthew (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2013), 23. See also: Sven Opitz, “Government Unlimited: The Security Dispositif of Illiberal Governmentality”, in *Governmentality. Current Issues and Future Challenges*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Sussane Krasmann and Thomas Lemke (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 102.

⁴¹ According to Vuori: “The basic idea presented by John Langsham Austin (1975) was that people indeed do things with language beyond asserting statements with truth-values in regard to an external reality; people can make bets, name ships, and adjourn meetings through the use of speech acts. Such acts have three types or aspects: locutionary (an act of saying something), illocutionary (an act *in* saying something), and perlocutionary (an act *by* saying something)” (Vuori, *Critical Security*, 29).

⁴² Williams, “Words, Images, Enemies”, 514.

⁴³ Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 27, quoted in Fred Vultee, “Securitization as a Media Frame. What Happens When the Media ‘Speak Security’”, in *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, ed. Thierry Balzacq (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 77.

The Copenhagen School and Its Critics

Many criticisms directed at the Copenhagen School's view on security and securitization, stem from the fact that a central idea of the School, is rooted in a neorealist mindset, which states that "the social production of security is sufficiently stable to be treated objectively"⁴⁴. This view is disputed by Huysmans who argues that "speaking and writing about security is never innocent"⁴⁵.

At a conceptual level, Matt McDonald argues that the securitization approach is narrow on three levels: *form* (focus on the dominant actors), *context* (focus on the moment of the securitizing intervention) and *nature* (focus on the designation of threats)⁴⁶. Though generally the Copenhagen Schools tends to be grouped alongside other critical approaches to the study of security, due to its heterogeneous theoretical make-up – that meshes together a neorealist *weltanschauung*, with a social constructivist *raison d'être*, and tops it with a poststructuralist tension – the School has been criticized by proponents of the Critical Security Studies approach. In Ken Booth's view – for example – "the Copenhagen School does not move far enough in the direction of 'real people in real places', that it mistakenly ties together security and survival, and that it is state-centric, elite-centric, discourse-dominated, conservative, politically passive, and neither progressive nor radical"⁴⁷. Meanwhile, Lene Hansen in the article "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School", reflects on the "silent security dilemma", highlighting how entire segments of silenced voices (subaltern or marginalized) "are precluded from participating in the production of security"⁴⁸. Hansen's critique is aimed at two main issues: 1. "security as silence"; and 2. "'subsuming security' problems":

⁴⁴ Mutimer, "Critical Security Studies", 94.

⁴⁵ Jef Huysmans, "Defining Social Constructivism in Security Studies: The Normative Dilemma of Writing Security", *Alternatives* 27 (2002): 41-62, quoted in Catherine Charrett, *A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security* (Barcelona: Institut Català Internacional per la Pau, 2009), 16.

⁴⁶ Matt McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security", *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (December 2008): 563.

⁴⁷ Buzan and Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, 215. See also Ken Booth, "Beyond Critical Security Studies", in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. Ken Booth (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 259-278.

⁴⁸ Alexandria J. Innes, *Migration, Citizenship and the Challenge for Security. An Ethnographic Approach* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 31.

'Security as silence' occurs when insecurity cannot be voiced, when raising something as a security problem is impossible or might even aggravate the threat being faced. 'Subsuming security' arises because gendered security problems often involve an intimate inter-linkage between the subject's gendered identity and other aspects of the subject's identity, for example national and religious"⁴⁹.

Another strand of criticism has been associated with the ethical aspects pertaining to the researcher's very own responsibility when analyzing security. Rita Floyd identifies two main directions of the ethical critique: 1. one which explores the inherent lack of an emancipatory project or normative concept of the Copenhagen School; 2. and one that focuses on the School's externalized role in the research of security: "the alleged disregard for the political consequences of the School 'writing' and 'speaking' security themselves"⁵⁰, especially when it concerns societal security and its referent object, namely identity⁵¹.

Securitization and Threat Construction: The Curious Case of the Khorasan Terror Group

On Tuesday, September 23, 2014, the United States launched a three-pronged attack on Syrian territory, against the positions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and against the Khorasan Group. What interests us in the present analysis, is the case against the latter terror group⁵² and how it came to be securitized over the course of September 2014, prior and immediately after the American intervention.

As we have established earlier, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde consider securitization to be a where:

⁴⁹ Hansen, "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma", 287.

⁵⁰ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*, 44.

⁵¹ As Johan Eriksson (1999) argues in "Observers or Advocates? On the Political Role of Security Analysis": "the securitization of identity implies political risks and dangers" (quoted in Floyd, *Security and the Environment*, 44).

⁵² For a more comprehensive analysis, see: Luiza-Maria Filimon, "Is it Possible to Prevent Imminent Terror Attacks? The U.S. Intervention Case Against Khorasan Terror Group", *Proceedings International Conference Strategies XXI – The Complex and Dynamic Relationship of the Security Environment*, ed. Stan Anton (Bucharest: Carol I" National Defence University Publishing House, 2016), 30-41.

"a securitizing actor [...] uses a particular discourse, referred to as a 'speech act', to represent a particular issue to an audience as an existential threat to the security of a referent object", such as the state or its citizens. The acceptance of this speech act by the audience allows the securitizing actor to break the bounds of normal politics and take exceptional action to counter the security threat"⁵³.

Prior to the publication of an article in the *Associated Press* (AP) on September 13, 2014, the only available information related to Khorasan, referenced either a historical region, covering most of the territory of Turkmenistan, Iran and Afghanistan, or a province in Iran. The news report titled: "AP Enterprise: al-Qaida's Syrian Cell Alarms US" - warned that the group - "a cadre of veteran al-Qaida fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan" - "poses a more direct and imminent threat to the United States, working with Yemeni bomb-makers to target U.S. aviation"⁵⁴. Moreover, the group allegedly had ties and collaborated with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) - the al-Qaeda offshoot in Yemen, regarded as "the most dangerous terrorist threat to the U.S."⁵⁵.

The article further cites sources in the U.S. government who warn that the Khorasan fighters did not arrive in Syria with the purpose of fighting the government forces of President Bashar al Assad, "[i]nstead they were sent by al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to recruit Europeans and Americans whose passports allow them to board a U.S.-bound airliner with less scrutiny for security officials"⁵⁶. The group is framed as posing an existential threat to U.S. and European targets. Director of National Intelligence, James R. Clapper, declared on September 18, 2014, that "in terms of threat to the homeland, Khorasan may pose as much of a danger as

⁵³ Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 1, quoted in: Jessie Blackburn, "Conflicting Counter-Terrorisms: The United Kingdom's Response to Terrorism Since 9/11", in *Radicalization, Terrorism, and Conflict*, ed. Tali K. Walters, Rachel Monaghan, and J. Martín Ramírez (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 133.

⁵⁴ Filimon, "Is it Possible to Prevent", 35. See also: Ken Dilanian and Eileen Sullivan, "AP Enterprise: al-Qaida's Syrian Cell Alarms US", *Associated Press*, September 13, 2014, accessed on October 18, 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/ap-enterprise-al-qaidas-syrian-cell-alarms-us>.

⁵⁵ Filimon, "Is it Possible to Prevent", 36. See also: Dilanian and Sullivan, "AP Enterprise".

⁵⁶ Filimon, "Is it Possible to Prevent", 36. See also: Dilanian and Sullivan, "AP Enterprise".

the Islamic State”⁵⁷. In the days preceding the intervention, a series of articles crop in the press, warning of a more direct and bigger threat that ISIL:

- ***, “Al Qaeda’s quiet plan to outdo ISIS and hit U.S.”, *CBS News*, September, 18, 2014;
- Mark Mazzetti et al., “U.S. Suspects More Direct Threats Beyond ISIS”, *The New York Times*, September 20, 2014;
- Rose Troup Buchanan, “Khorasan: US Officials Warn Syrian Terror Group May Be Bigger Threat than IS”, *The Independent*, September 22, 2014.

Table 1: The Securitization of the Khorasan Group

Speech act	Public officials’ statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - U.S. President address/ letter to the Congress - CENTCOM - Pentagon - Attorney Genera - F.B.I.
Referent object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Homeland” - “European countries”
Existential threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “execution stage of a plot” (A.G. Holder) - “nearing the final stages of an attack” (Lt. Gen. Mayville); - potentially an even <i>bigger threat</i> to the U.S. <i>than ISIS</i> - involving a bomb to pass undetected through airport security
Extraordinary measure	Military intervention: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - targets west of Aleppo - training camps - explosives and munitions production facility

⁵⁷ Clapper quoted in: Mark Mazzetti, Michael S. Schmidt, and Ben Hubbard, “U.S. Suspects More Direct Threats Beyond ISIS”, *The New York Times*, September 20, 2014, accessed October 20, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/world/middleeast/us-sees-other-more-direct-threats-beyond-isis-.html>. Also referred to in: Filimon, “Is it Possible to Prevent”, 36

	- communication, command and control facilities
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At a Pentagon press conference from September 23, 2014, the Press Secretary, Rear Adm. John Kirby, describes the military strikes against the Khorasan Group, as having disrupted the “imminent attack plotting against the United States and western targets”⁵⁸. Meanwhile, the Director of Operations, Lt. Gen. William Mayville cites intelligence reports that pointed towards the Khorasan Group as being “in the final stages of plans to execute major attacks against Western targets and potentially the U.S. homeland”⁵⁹. After the September 23 intervention, press articles refer to the group as having been in the final stages of planning an attack or as having posed an imminent threat⁶⁰:

- “Khorasan Planned Imminent Attacks Against U.S. or Europe: White House” (*Reuters*, September 23, 2014);
- “Shadowy al Qaeda Cell, Hit by U.S. in Syria, Seen as ‘Imminent’ Threat” (*Reuters*, September 23, 2014);
- “In Airstrikes, U.S. Targets Militant Cell Said to Plot an Attack Against the West” (*The New York Times*, September 23, 2014);
- “Targeted by U.S. Airstrikes: The Secretive al-Qaeda Cell Was Plotting an ‘Imminent Attack’” (*The Washington Post*, September 23, 2014)⁶¹.

In order to apply a securitization framework, we require the presence of four elements: 1. speech acts; 2. a referent objects; 3. an existential threat; and 4. the application of an extraordinary measure (see Table 1). In their

⁵⁸ Filimon, “Is it Possible to Prevent”, 37. See also: Rear Adm. John Kirby, Lt. Gen. William Mayville, “Department of Defense Press Briefing on Operations in Syria by Lt. Gen. Mayville in the Pentagon Briefing Room”, U.S. Department of Defense, September 23, 2014, accessed on October 18, 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript%20t-View/Article/606931>.

⁵⁹ As quoted in: Filimon, “Is it Possible to Prevent”, 37.

⁶⁰ The Pentagon spokesperson stated that: “We had very good information that this group, this dangerous group, an offshoot of al Qaeda, was in the final stages of planning an attack on Western targets” (Zachary Roth and Jane C. Timm, “Admin: Strikes on Khorasan Group Aimed to Avert Imminent Threat”, *MSNBC*, September 23, 2014, accessed on October 21, 2016, <http://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/us-arab-partners-airstrikes-syria-isis#54298>).

⁶¹ For a more detailed list see: Luiza-Maria Filimon, “International Relations Under the *Tropic of Time*. Analysing Imminence in the Age of Chronopolitics” (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Society for Cultural History, entitled “Time and Culture”, Bucharest, September 7-10, 2016).

application of speech act theory, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde distinguish between three actors involved in the securitization process: 1. referent objects; 2. securitizing actors; and 3. functional actors. In our case, the referent object (“things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival”⁶²) is the U.S. homeland or other European countries. The securitizing actors (“who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened”⁶³) that engage in speech acts are represented by the U.S. officials (the U.S. President, Pentagon spokespersons, F.B.I. director, Attorney General, etc.). Meanwhile, the role of the functional actors in our case (in other words, “actors who affect the dynamics of a sector”⁶⁴) is played by the media – which by disseminating the information on the Khorasan Group – assists the securitizing actor, in gaining the approval on the part of the audience. As Vladimir Dolinec explains:

“they influence the dynamics of the security sectors like functional actors do, and they promote the speech acts of the securitization actors and sometimes shift them to a higher level”⁶⁵.

The existential threat is represented by the alleged threat of imminent attacks posed by members of a group that have adopted a media blackout, instead of promoting their messages through various propaganda channels, in the vein of ISIL or al-Qaeda. Finally the extraordinary measure consists in the military intervention conducted strictly by U.S. forces, on the backdrop of a bigger military intervention by coalition forces, against ISIL in Northern and Eastern Syria, on the same day (see Fig. 3).

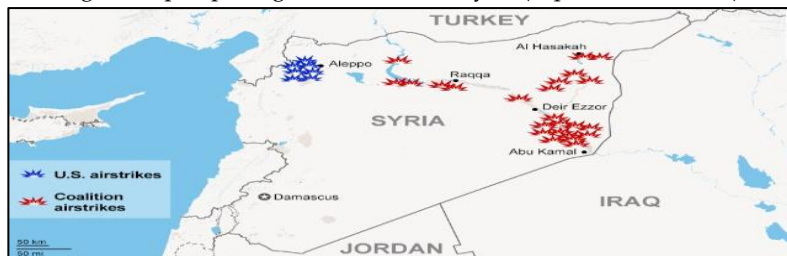
⁶² Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 36.

⁶³ Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 36.

⁶⁴ The functional actors do not constitute “a referent object or the actor calling for security on behalf of the referent object, this is an actor who significantly influences decisions in the field of security” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 36).

⁶⁵ Vladimir Dolinec, “The Role of Mass Media in the Securitization Process of International Terrorism”, *Politické vedy* 2 (2010): 14.

Fig. 3: Map depicting the airstrikes in Syria (September 23, 2014)



Source: Chelsea J. Carter et al., “‘The Turk’ Is Dead: Al Qaeda-linked Terror Group Says Leader Died in Syria Airstrikes”, *CNN*, September 24, 2014, accessed October 24, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/23/world/meast/isis-airstrikes/>

The measure can be considered extraordinary since it involves attacks on the territory of a country with which the U.S. is not officially at war. Moreover the intervention is justified on the legal ground provided by the broadly and vaguely formulated Authorizations for Use of Military Force from 2001 (against al Qaeda forces) and from 2002 (against Iraq), thus bypassing both the U.S. Congress and the U.N. Security Council.

Furthermore, in the securitization process, the securitizing actor described the Khorasan Group as posing an imminent threat, thus putting it under the incidence of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter (which states “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member”)⁶⁶. Another notable aspect is that soon after the public is informed about the intervention and the alleged imminent threat posed by the group, the same officials who advanced the “imminent attack” as an existential threat, start to provide more nuanced observations, stating that:

- “It's hard to say whether that's tomorrow, three weeks from now or three months from now. But it's the kind of threat you have to operate under the assumption that it is tomorrow”. (F.B.I Director Jack Comey)⁶⁷;

⁶⁶ ***, “Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression”, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, accessed on October 21, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/>.

⁶⁷ Ken Dilanian, “U.S. Offers More Nuanced Take on Khorasan Threat”, *Military Times*, September 25, 2014, accessed on October 21, 2016, <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2014/09/25/us-offers-more-nuanced-take-on-khorasan-threat/16229049/>.

- "I don't know that we can pin that down to a day or month or week or six months. It doesn't matter. Far better to be 'left of a boom' than to the right of it⁶⁸" (Rear Adm. John Kirby)⁶⁹.

The Khorasan case provides a blueprint for intervention against threats located in states with which the U.S. is not at war with, and which have not asked for military assistance (like in the case of Iraq faced with the territorial gains of ISIL on Iraqi soil from the June – August 2014), by relying on pre-existent national Authorizations for Use of Military Force. Consequently, in this operational framework, the President was not required to seek a Congressional authorization for war on a case by case basis – especially as it relates to countries with which the U.S. is not presently at war with (Somalia, Yemen, Syria). On the other hand, at the international level, the U.N. Security Council which supposedly has the authority to authorize the use of force, was ignored altogether.

Conclusions

By applying the Copenhagen School's methodology, we can trace how in the act of securization, the securitizing actor has transformed a potentially latent threat (as seen in the subsequent declarations) into an imminent threat, thus requiring an immediate reaction. This has been made possible by the contemporaneous codification of imminence especially in the aftermath of September 11 terrorist attacks – an event that has created a context for the occurrence securitization *in perpetuum*. For example, in the case of the Obama Administration, a White Paper from the Department of Justice states that:

"The condition that an operational leader present an 'imminent' threat of violent attack against the United States *does not require* the United States to have clear evidence that a specific attack on U.S. persons and interests will take place in the immediate future"⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ Here the Pentagon spokesperson uses "a military expression referring to a left-to-right timeline associated with efforts to stop roadside bombs before they explode" (Dilanian, "U.S. Offers More Nuanced Take").

⁶⁹ Dilanian, "U.S. Offers More Nuanced Take".

⁷⁰ Emphasis added. See: ***, "Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed Against a U.S. Citizen Who Is a Senior Operational Leader of Al-Qa'ida or an Associate Force", Department of Justice White Paper (Draft), November 8, 2011, 7, accessed on October 22, 2016, <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/doj-lethal.pdf>. Also cited in Filimon, "Is it Possible to Prevent", 35.

In conclusion, the application of the Copenhagen's School's securitization theory to the Khorasan Group has shown who can securitize, what can be securitized and the way in which security threats are referred to. The Khorasan Group has undergone a process of securitization – which signifies the fact that the state was successful in designating them as posing an existential threat to the security of a state and the wellbeing of its citizens. Consequently, as a result of this intersubjective interplay, the state was now warranted to take extraordinary measures and even go so far as to naturalize and permanentize a state of exception.

This context allows for latent threats to become imminent since as Beatrice de Graaf observes, “securitization” as an intersubjective process, “does not concern an objective threat, but a subjective threat perception accepted by the majority of the population”⁷¹. Given the contemporary, extraordinary circumstances which require that “[w]e must deter and defend against the threat *before* it is unleashed”⁷², the framework of the Copenhagen School – in spite of its flaws – shows how a particular security issue that has undergone a prior stage of securitization, arrives to be regarded in the particular way advanced by the securitizing actor and in doing so, becomes a national security problem.

⁷¹ de Graaf, *Evaluating Counterterrorism*, 11.

⁷² President George W. Bush, “U.S. National Security Strategy: Prevent Our Enemies From Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction”, U.S. National Strategy, White House Releases, June 1, 2002, U.S. Department of State Archive, accessed on October 24, 2016, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ei/wh/15425.htm>.

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