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What is This?

Rethinking Security after the Cold War*

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———————————— ABSTRACT ————————————

This paper examines aspects of the debate amongst traditionalist, widening and critical approaches to Security Studies. It looks at how the security agenda has expanded away from the narrow military focus generated by the Cold War, and argues against the traditionalist criticism that widening the concept of security necessarily makes it incoherent. To carry this argument, it proposes a constructivist method for security analysis that offers a way of confining the application of security, and some reintegrative potential, to all three schools. In this approach, security is understood not as the content of a particular sector (military), but as a particular type of politics defined by reference to existential threats and calls for emergency action in any sector. The paper concludes by examining some of the political issues raised by any attempt to widen the scope of security, setting the liberal case for narrowing security as much as possible against the pressures to widen the security agenda that ironically arise from the contemporary success of the liberal project.

Introduction

Since the winding down of the Cold War, the theoretical literature on Security Studies has become notably active. One feature of this revival has been a fragmentation of the debate into three schools: traditionalists, who want to retain a largely military focus; wideners, who want to extend the range of issues on the security agenda; and the recently launched Critical Security Studies, whose proponents want to cultivate a more questioning attitude to the whole framework in which security is conceptualized. There are some areas of overlap amongst these schools, but also major areas of disagreement. This article is mainly rooted in the widening school, and its prime purpose is to rebut the traditionalist criticism that widening makes the concept of security incoherent. It also examines the often unspoken political issues raised by any attempt to widen the scope of security. In doing this it proposes a

constructivist method for security analysis that speaks to all three schools and offers some reintegrative potential. Identifying security issues is easy for traditionalists who, broadly speaking, equate security with military issues and the use of force. But it is not so easy when security is moved out of the military sector. There are both intellectual and political dangers in simply tacking the word security onto an ever wider range of issues.

The Erosion of the Traditionalist Agenda and the Traditionalist Counterattack

In the early years of the Cold War, when the concept of national security first came into fashion, the security problem for the West was how to respond to a broad spectrum challenge from the Soviet Union. This challenge was not just military, but also ideological, social and economic. The Cold War was about a rivalry between two mutually exclusive systems of political economy over the future of industrial society. But this initially wide conceptualization of security quickly narrowed down to a largely military focus under the pressure of a nuclear arms race marked by rapid, sustained, and strategically important improvements in technology. Right through to the 1980s, this arms race, and the theories of deterrence interwoven with it, dominated the discourse on security. Only during the last decade of the Cold War did the wider agenda re-emerge, and by then its non-military aspects had acquired a quite different character.

By the 1980s, the decline of military–political security issues at the centre of security concerns was visible in the growing awareness that war was disappearing, or in some cases had disappeared, as an option in relations amongst a substantial group of states. The core group of this emergent security community was Western Europe, Japan and North America. The effectiveness of nuclear deterrence between East and West made it possible to think that the Soviet Union could also, in an odd way, be included in this sphere, an outlook that became much stronger once Gorbachev assumed power and embraced an explicit demilitarization of the Cold War. After the Vietnam War, there was also an increasing tendency in the West to question whether war was a cost-effective method for achieving a wide range of political and economic objectives. If war was fading away as a possibility amongst many of the leading powers in the system, then realist assumptions

about the primacy of military security became questionable. Adding to this shift was the increasing securitization of two issues that had traditionally been thought of as low politics: the international economy and the environment.

In the case of the environment, the securitization process can be traced back to the 1960s, when books such as Carsen's *Silent Spring* first began to make people seriously aware that the growing impact of humankind was transforming the natural environment from being a background constant into a foreground variable. Starting from a concern about pesticides, this grew steadily into a wide range of interconnected issues, including climate change, biodiversity, resource depletion, pollution, and the threat from meteorites. The underlying problem was a combination of rising human numbers and rising industrial activity within a finite planetary ecosystem. Concern was split between a potentially arcadian desire to securitize the environment itself, to preserve things as they had been before humans disturbed them, and a more pragmatic worry that if humans exceeded the carrying capacity of the ecosystem in too many ways, they would endanger the supporting conditions of their own prosperity, civilization, and possibly existence. There was also a growing awareness that nature itself could still deliver huge blows against humankind, whose density and urban concentration made it increasingly vulnerable to major disruptions of trade and production (Mathews, 1989; Homer-Dixon, 1991).

In the case of the economy, the securitization process arose in part from the relative economic decline of the United States, and in part from reactions to the increasing liberalization of the world economy. Relative American decline was an inevitable result of both the exaggerated position of global dominance that it held in 1945, and the imperial overstretch that set in with the Vietnam War. US dominance was challenged by both Europe and Japan recovering from the Second World War, and by some newly decolonized countries finding effective paths to modernization. By the 1970s some in the United States were already beginning to feel threatened by dependence on imported oil, by trade deficits, and by pressure on the dollar. Alongside US decline was the growing liberalization of the global economy, first in trade, and, from the 1970s, also in finance. This meant that national economies became progressively more exposed to competition from other producers in a global market, and to ever more powerful transnational corporations and financial markets.

The whole idea of economic security in a capitalist system is fraught with contradictions and complications, not the least being that actors in a market are *supposed* to feel insecure: if they don't the market doesn't produce its efficiencies (Buzan, 1991, ch. 6; Cable, 1995; Luciani, 1989). Nevertheless, concern did focus on a range of specific issues: (1) the ability of states to maintain independent capability for military production in a global market; (2) the possibility of economic dependencies within the global market (particularly oil) being exploited for political ends; (3) fears that the global market would generate more losers than winners, and that it would heighten existing inequalities both within and between states (manifested at the top of the range by US fears of decline, and at the bottom by developing country fears of exploitation, debt crises and marginalization); and (4) fears that the international economy itself would fall into crisis from some combination of weakening political leadership, increasing pro-tectionist reactions, and structural instability in the global financial system.

It was often difficult to separate the attempts to securitize economic issues from the more general contest between liberal and mercantilist approaches to economics. During the Cold War the superpower rivalry muted protectionist voices because of the overriding common military and political security concern that all of the capitalist powers shared against the Soviet Union. So long as the Soviet threat existed, the capitalist states worried more about it than about the commercial rivalry among themselves.

When the Cold War finally unravelled at the end of the 1980s, these underlying developments were suddenly thrown into prominence by the rapid collapse of virtually the whole military–political security agenda that had dominated the world for over forty years. As the Soviet Union first withdrew its military and ideological challenge, and then imploded, the political–military rationale of the Cold War security system evaporated. With the ideological confrontation consigned to history, nuclear forces suddenly had little to deter, and conventional forces little to contain. But offsetting this positive development was the loss of the common interest that had kept the capitalist economies together despite their rivalry. The image of a 'new world disorder' began to dominate perceptions of the future, bringing with it a new security agenda.

The debate between wideners and traditionalists grew out of dissatisfaction with the intense narrowing of the field imposed by the

military and nuclear obsessions of the Cold War. It was stimulated first by the rise of the economic and environmental agendas in international relations during the 1970s and 1980s, and by the rise of concerns with identity issues, and transnational crime during the 1990s. This issue-driven widening eventually triggered its own reaction, creating a plea for confinement of Security Studies to issues centred around the threat or use of force. A key argument here was that progressive widening endangered the intellectual coherence of security, putting so much into it that its essential meaning became void. This perhaps masked a generally unspoken political concern that allowing non-military issues to achieve security status would have undesirable and/or counter-productive effects on the whole fabric of social and international relations.

Those arguing explicitly for widening include Ullman (1983), Jahn et al. (1987), Nye and Lynn-Jones (1988), Mathews (1989), Brown (1989), Nye (1989), Crawford (1991), Haftendorn (1991), Tickner (1992), Wæver et al. (1993), most of them taking off from the urgency of new, often non-military, sources of threat. There has also been a strong thread in international political economy linking patterns in the economic and military sectors (Gilpin, 1981; Crawford, 1993, 1995; Gowa, 1994; Mansfield, 1994). I (Buzan, 1991, 1983) am a widener, but have been sceptical about the prospects for coherent conceptualization of security in the economic (see also Luciani, 1989) and environmental (see also Deudney, 1990) sectors. I have argued for retaining a distinctively military sub-field of strategic studies within a wider Security Studies (Buzan, 1987; Buzan et al., 1993, ch. 10). Ullman (1983), and I (Buzan, 1991, ch. 3), have specifically widened the definition of threat away from a purely military to a more general formulation.

The defence of the traditionalist position got underway as the Cold War unravelled. Until quite late one could still find arguments for restricting the field to 'anything that concerns the prevention of superpower nuclear war' (Lebow, 1988: 508). But as the main task of the strategic community — analysis of East–West military confrontation — evaporated, there was a period of disorientation. The function, and therefore the status and the funding, of the whole edifice of strategic studies built up during the Cold War seemed to be at risk, and consequently the military focus of strategic analysis seemed extremely vulnerable to pressure from the wideners. Indicative of this period was the 1989 issue of *Survival* (31: 6) devoted entirely to 'non-military aspects of strategy'.

Traditionalists fought back by reasserting conventional arguments about the enduring primacy of military security (Gray, 1994b). In varying degrees they accepted the need to look more widely at non-military cases of conflict in the international system, and there was little explicit attempt to defend the centrality of the state in security analysis at a time when so many non-state actors were playing vigorously in the military game. Most traditionalists insist on *military* conflict as the defining key to security, while being prepared to loosen their state centrism. But some, Jahn et al. (1987) and Ayoob (1995), hold the *political* sector as primary, and Ayoob the *state* as focal point, while they ease the link to military conflict. Some traditionalists (Chipman, 1992; Gray, 1992) argued that there was simply a return to the natural terrain of the subject after the artificial nuclear narrowing of the Cold War. But the key strategy was to allow widening only inasmuch as this could be linked to concerns about the threat or use of force between political actors. As Chipman (1992: 129) put it:

> The structuring elements of strategic analysis must be the possible use of force. ... Non-military aspects of security may occupy more of the strate-gist's time, but the need for peoples, nations, states or alliances to procure, deploy engage or withdraw military forces must remain a primary purpose of the strategic analyst's inquiries.

Although clearly trying to keep the lid on the subject, Chipman's statement is interesting because it explicitly moves away from strict state-centrism by acknowledging that peoples and nations, as well as states and alliances, can be strategic users of force in the international system.

Stephen Walt gives probably the strongest statement of the tradi-tionalist position. He argues that Security Studies is about the phenomenon of war, and that it can be defined as 'the study of the threat, use, and control of military force'. Against those who want to widen the agenda outside this strictly military domain, he argues that this:

> runs the risk of expanding 'Security Studies' excessively; by this logic, issues such as pollution, disease, child abuse, or economic recessions could all be viewed as threats to 'security'. Defining the field in this way would destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions to any of these important problems. (Walt, 1991: 212–13)

Walt (1991: 227; see also Dorff, 1994; Gray, 1994a) does allow

'economics and security' into his picture, but only as they relate to military issues, and not as economic security per se.

The traditionalists' criticism of the wideners that they risk intellectual incoherence can be a powerful point. The wider agenda certainly does extend the range of knowledge and understanding necessary to pursue Security Studies. More worryingly, it also does two other things. First, given the political function of the word security, it extends the call for state mobilization to a wide range of issues. As Deudney (1990) has pointed out, this may be undesirable and counterproductive in the environmental sector, and this argument could easily be extended into other sectors. Second, the wider agenda tends, often unthinkingly, to elevate 'security' into a kind of universal good thing — the desired condition towards which all relations should be moved. But, as Wæver (1995b) has argued, this is a dangerously blinkered view. At best, security is a kind of stabilization of conflictual or threatening relations, often through emergency mobilization of the state. While security in relations may generally be better than insecurity (threats against which no adequate countermeasures are available), a securitized relationship is still one in which serious conflicts continue to exist, albeit those against which some effective countermeasures have been taken. Even this degree of relative desirability can be questioned: liberals, for example, argue that too much economic security is destructive to the workings of a market economy. Security should not too easily be thought of as always a good thing. Better, as Wæver argues, is to aim for desecuritization: the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere.

In the space available it is impossible to attempt an exhaustive tour d'horizon of the new security agenda. What can be clearly observed is that the state is less important in the new security agenda than in the old one. It still remains central, but no longer dominates either as the exclusive referent object or as the principle embodiment of threat in the way it did previously. A range of new referent objects for security and sources of threat is being set up above, below and alongside the state. Above the state one finds being elevated to the status of referent objects of security such things as the set of rules, regimes and institutions that constitute the liberal international economic order (LIEO); the global climate system; and the various regimes that attempt to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (the non-proliferation treaty [NPT], the chemical weapons convention

[CWC], and the missile technology control regime [MTCR]). Alongside the state, nations and religions have emerged as distinct referent objects (Wæver et al., 1993). Below it, the rising focus on human rights supports claims to give individuals more standing as the ultimate referent object for security (Shaw, 1993; McSweeney, 1996). At the same time, the sources of threat are also diversifying away from the state. Many of the new threats seem to stem from complex systems both natural (the ecosystem) and the human-made (the global economy), and the operation of these systems is often poorly understood.

What the security priorities are will also depend on how a number of intrinsically unpredictable things work out. For example, some scientists argue, on the basis of drill cores from the Greenland ice cap, that serious climate change in the past sometimes occurred with great swiftness, major changes in temperature (and therefore in glaciation and sea level) occurring within a few years. If they are correct, then current observations such as the breakup of some Antarctic ice sheets could put environmental security at the top of the global agenda very soon. If they are wrong, environmental issues could remain on the margin, consisting of particular countries or regions with particular problems: sea flooding in a few very low lying countries; water sharing in the Middle East; nuclear accidents in Europe and such like. The same could be said about the international economy: if it spins into a major crisis then it will be a central security issue, but if ways are found to overcome or contain crises, and keep the system tolerably stable, then most economic issues will remain off, or marginal to, the security agenda. Many of the new security issues could become major, but they could just as well remain marginal, or of high concern only to a few actors.

Unless events take a turn which pushes some issue to the centre of global security concerns, there is a good case for thinking that the new security agenda will be considerably less monolithic and global, and considerably more diverse, regional and local in character than the old one, despite the global quality of many of the new threats and referent objects. Although there will be some shared issues, in the post-Cold War world the security agenda will vary markedly from actor to actor in terms of both the issues and priorities.

The Copenhagen School Framework

The Copenhagen school[1] framework comes down on the side of the wideners in terms of keeping the security agenda open to many different types of threat. It argues against the view that the core of Security Studies is war and force, and that other issues are relevant only if they relate to that. Instead, it constructs a more radical view of Security Studies by exploring threats to referent objects, and the securitization of these threats, that are non-military as well as military. It takes seriously the traditionalists' complaint about intellectual incoherence, but disagrees that the retreat into a military core is the only, or the best, way to deal with it. It seeks coherence *not* by confining security to the military sector, but by exploring the logic of security itself, to find out what differentiates security, and the process of securitization, from that which is merely political. This offers the possibility of breaking free from the existing dispute between the two approaches. The need is to construct a conceptualization of security that means something much more specific than just any threat or problem.

What quality is it that makes something a security issue in international relations?[2] It is important to add the qualification 'in international relations', because the character of security in that context is not identical to the use of the term in everyday language. Although it shares some qualities with 'social security', or security as applied to various civilian guard or police functions, international security has its own distinctive and more extreme meaning. Unlike 'social security', which has strong links to matters of entitlement and social justice, international security is more firmly rooted in the traditions of power politics. We are not following a rigid domestic/international distinction, because many of our cases are not state-defined. But we are claiming that 'international security' has a distinctive agenda. The answer to what makes something an international security issue can be found in the traditional military–political understanding of security. In this context, security is about survival. Threats and vulnerabilities can arise in many different areas, military and non-military, but in order to count as security issues they have to meet strictly defined criteria that distinguish them from the normal run of the merely political. They have to be staged as existential threats to a referent object by a securitizing actor who thereby generates endorsement for emergency measures beyond rules that would otherwise bind. In other words, issues become securitized when leaders (whether political, societal, or

intellectual) begin to talk about them — and to gain the ear of the public and the state — in terms of existential threats against some valued referent object. The securitizing formula is that such threats require exceptional measures and/or emergency action to deal with them. Securitization classically legitimates the use of force, but more broadly it raises the issue above normal politics and into the realm of 'panic politics' where departures from the rules of normal politics justify secrecy, additional executive powers, and activities that would otherwise be illegal (Wæver, 1995a).

Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization. It is the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects. In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from non-politicized (meaning that the state doesn't deal with it, and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision); through politicized (meaning that the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or more rarely some other form of communal governance); to securitized (meaning that the issue is presented as an existential threat requiring emergency measures, and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure). In principle, the placement of issues on this spectrum is open: depending on circumstances, any issue can end up on any part of the spectrum.

The distinguishing feature of securitization is a specific rhetorical structure ('survival', priority of action 'because if not handled now it will be too late, and we will not exist to remedy our failure'). In security discourse an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority, and thus by labelling it 'security' an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means. For the analyst to grasp this, the task is not to assess some objective threats that 'really' endanger some object that is to be defended/secured. Rather it is to understand the process of constructing a shared understanding of what is to be considered, and collectively responded to, as a threat. The process of securitization is what in language theory is called a speech-act. It is not interesting as a sign referring to something more real, it is the utterance itself that is the act: by saying it something is done (like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship) (Wæver, 1988; Austin, 1975, 98 ff.).

What we can study is this practice: who can 'do' or 'speak' security successfully, on what issues, under what conditions, and with what

effects? It is important to note 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. There will be instances where the word security appears without this logic, and other cases that operate according to it with only a metaphorical security reference. There are cases where securitization has become institutionalized. There does not have to be the constant drama because it is implicitly assumed that when we talk of *this* (typically, but not necessarily, defence issues) we are by definition in the area of urgency: by saying 'defence' or in the case of the Netherlands 'dikes' one has implicitly also said security and priority. We use this logic as a definition of 'security' because it has a consistency and precision which the word as such does not have. There is a concept of international security with this specific meaning, which is implied in most usage of the word.

Our claim is that it is possible to dig into the practice connected with this distinctive concept of security in international relations and to find a characteristic pattern with an inner logic. If we place the survival of collective units and/or principles — the politics of existential threat — as the defining core of Security Studies, then we have the basis for applying security analysis to a variety of sectors without losing the essential quality of the concept. This is the answer to those who hold that Security Studies cannot expand its agenda beyond the traditional military–political one without debasing the concept of security itself. Sectors are views of the international system through a lens that highlights one particular aspect of the relationship and interaction among all of its constituent units (Buzan et al., 1993: 31). Given that the analytical purpose of sectors is to differentiate types of interaction (military, political, economic, societal, environmental), it seems reasonable to expect (a) that one will find units and/or values that are characteristic of, and rooted in, particular sectors (though they may, like the state, also appear in other sectors), and (b) that the nature of survival and threat will differ across different sectors and types of unit. In other words, security is a generic term which has a distinct meaning, but varies in form.

But what constitutes 'existential threat' and 'emergency measures' is not the same across different sectors. How in practice can the analyst draw the line between processes of politicization and processes of securitization on this basis? Existential threat can only be

understood in relation to the particular character of the sector and referent object in question. We are not dealing here with a universal standard based in some sense on what threatens individual human life. The essential quality of existence will vary greatly across different sectors and levels of analysis, and therefore so will the nature of existential threats.

In the military sector, the referent object is usually the state, though it may also be other kinds of political entity. It is also possible to imagine circumstances in which threats to the survival of the armed forces would elevate them to referent object status in their own right, perhaps serving to justify a coup against the existing government and its policy (whether of disarmament or of hopeless conflict). Traditional Security Studies tends to see all military affairs as security, but this may not be the case. For many of the advanced democracies, defence of the state is becoming only one, and perhaps not even the main de facto, function of the armed forces. Their militaries may be increasingly trained and called upon to support routine world order activities, such as peace-keeping or humanitarian intervention, that cannot be viewed as concerning existential threats to their states, or even as emergency action in the sense of suspending normal rules.

In the political sector, existential threats are traditionally defined in terms of the constituting principle — sovereignty, but sometimes also ideology — of the state. Sovereignty can be existentially threatened by things that question recognition, legitimacy, or governing authority. Amongst the ever more interdependent and institutionalized relations characteristic of the West (and increasingly of the international system as a whole), a variety of supranational referent objects is also becoming important. The EU can be existentially threatened by things that might undo its integration process. International regimes, and international society more broadly, can be existentially threatened by things that might undermine the rules, norms and institutions that constitute them.

In the economic sector, the referent objects and existential threats are harder to pin down. Firms are most commonly existentially threatened by bankruptcy, and sometimes also by changes to the law that make them illegal or unviable (as after communist revolutions). But in the market economy firms are, with a few exceptions, expected to come and go, and only seldom do they try to securitize their own survival. National economies have more claim to the right of survival, but only rarely will this type of threat (national bankruptcy, or an

inability to provide for the basic needs of the population) actually arise apart from wider security contexts such as war. Unless the survival of the population is in question, the huge range of doing better or doing worse in the national economy cannot be seen as existentially threatening to it, though as seen in relations between the US and Japan this will not prevent frequent attempts to securitize economic relations. As in the political sector, supranational referent objects from specific regimes to the global market itself can be existentially threatened by things that might undermine the rules, norms and institutions that constitute them.

In the societal sector, as we have defined it, the referent object is large-scale collective identities that can function independently of the state, such as nations and religions. Given the peculiar nature of this type of referent object it is extremely difficult to establish hard boundaries that differentiate existential from lesser threats. Collective identities naturally evolve and change in response to internal and external developments. Such changes may be seen as invasive or heretical, and their sources pointed to as existential threats, or they may be accepted as part of the evolution of identity. Given the conservative nature of 'identity', it is always possible to paint challenges and changes as threats to identity, because 'we will no longer be us', no longer the way we were, or the way we really ought to be to be true to our 'identity'. Thus, whether migrants or rival identities are securitized depends on whether the holders of the collective identity take a relatively closed-minded or a relatively open-minded view about how their identity is constituted and maintained. The ability to maintain and reproduce a language, a set of behavioural customs, or a conception of ethnic purity can all be cast in terms of survival.

In the environmental sector the range of possible referent objects is very large, ranging from relatively concrete things such as the survival of individual species (tigers, whales, humankind) or types of habitat (rain forest, lakes) to much fuzzier, larger-scale things such as the maintenance of the planetary climate and biosphere within the narrow band that human beings have come to consider normal during their few thousand years of civilization. Underlying many of these referent objects is a baseline concern about the relationship between the human species and the rest of the biosphere, and whether that relationship can be sustained without risking either or both of a collapse of the achieved levels of civilization, and a wholesale disruption of the planet's biological legacy. The interplay amongst all of these things is

immensely complicated. At either the macro or the micro extremes there are some pretty clear cases of existential threat (the survival of species, the survival of human civilization) that can be securitized. In between, to some extent as in the economic sector, lies a huge mass of problems that it is more difficult, though not impossible, to construct in existential terms.

Extracting the essential quality of international security takes one some way towards pinning down a general, but nonetheless still quite confined meaning for the concept that can operate both within and beyond the traditional military–political understanding of it. But it does not solve all the problems. Commentators on security going back at least as far as Wolfers (1962: 151) have noted that security can be approached both objectively (there is a real threat ...) and subjectively (there is a perceived threat ...), and that nothing ensures that these two line up. This distinction turns out to be crucial in formulating an international security concept for a multi-sectoral agenda. Our argument is that securitization, like politicization, has to be understood as an essentially intersubjective process. Even if one wanted to take a more objectivist approach, it is unclear how it could be done except in cases where the threat is unambiguous and immediate (hostile tanks crossing the border). It is not easy to judge securitization of an issue against some measure of whether this issue is 'really' a threat. Doing so would demand an objective measure for security that no security theory has so far provided. Even if one could solve the measurement problem, it is not clear that the objectivist approach would be all that helpful. Different states and nations have different thresholds for defining a threat: Finns are concerned about immigration at a level of 0.3% foreigners, where Switzerland functions with 14.7% (Romero, 1990).

Approaching security from a speech-act perspective raises questions about the relationship between actors and analysts in defining and understanding the security agenda. The securitization approach serves to underline the responsibility of talking security, the responsibility of actors as well as analysts who choose to frame an issue as a security issue. They cannot hide behind the claim that anything is a security issue in itself. Dealing with and avoiding the dangers that irrational or unwise recourse to securitization poses will require development of a higher sensitivity to the difference between politicization and securitization in political life. There is a need to develop an awareness both on the costs of panic politics, as well as the allure of prioritization that

it offers, and of the benefits of desecuritization as the long-run political objective.

The relationship of analyst to actor is one of the places where our approach differs from that taken by many with whom we share some theoretical premises. At stake here is where to locate oneself analytically on a spectrum from constructivist to objectivist. Critical Security Studies (CSS) views the system very much in constructivist terms. It wants to challenge both traditionalists and wideners by applying post-positivist perspectives, such as critical theory and post-structuralism (Krause and Williams, 1996). Much of their work, like ours, deals with the social construction of security (cf. also Klein, 1994; Campbell, 1993), but CSS mostly has the purpose to show that change is possible because things are socially constituted. If states dominate the arena, this is a feat of power politics repressing other dimensions of reality that could potentially replace the states if an emancipatory praxis could — with the help of critical theory — empower other subjectivities than those who dominate at present. The social world does not exhibit any iron laws, all regularities can be broken, and it is the task of critical theory to show this, as well as expose how some logics came to be seen as necessary when in fact they are contingent. On the issue of security, however, CSS is often less constructivist than one should expect. As part of the argumentation against established discourses of security, CSS will often try to mobilize other security problems — environmental problems, poverty, unemployment — as more important, more threatening and thereby relativizing conventional wisdom. By this method they often end up reproducing the traditional and objectivist concept of security: security is about what *is* a threat and the analyst can tell whether something really is a security problem or not and for whom. Also this approach will often contribute to the general securitization of ever large spheres of social life (Wæver, 1995b).

The Copenhagen school, in contrast, believe that even the socially constituted often gets sedimented as structure and becomes so relatively stable as practice that one has to do analysis also on the basis that it continues, using one's understanding of the social construction of security not only to criticize this, but also to understand the dynamics of security and thereby manoeuvre them (Buzan and Wæver, 1997). This leads us to a stronger emphasis on collectivities and on understanding thresholds that trigger securitization in order to avoid them. With our securitization perspective we abstain from attempts to talk about what 'real security' would be for people, what are 'actual'

security problems larger than those propagated by elites, etc. To be able to talk about this, one has to make basically different ontological choices from ours, and define some emancipatory idea. Such an approach is therefore complementary to ours; it can do what we voluntarily abstain from, and we can do what it is unable to: understand the mechanisms of securitization while keeping a distance from security, i.e. not assuming that security is a good to be spread to still more sectors. There are other differences: a large part of CSS takes the individual as the true reference for security — human security — and thus differs in its individualism from our methodological collectivism and focus on collectivities. The analyst in CSS takes on a larger burden than in our approach; s/he can brush away existing security construction disclosed as arbitrary, and point to some other problems that are more important security problems. Our approach links itself more closely to existing actors; tries to understand their modus operandi and assumes that future management of security will have to include a handling of these actors, as for instance in strategies aimed at mitigating security dilemmas and fostering mutual awareness in security complexes. While our philosophical position is in some sense more radically constructivist in holding security to be always a political construction, not something the analyst can tell about how it 'really' is, we are in our purposes closer to Traditional Security Studies (TSS), which at its best attempted to grasp security constellations and thereby steer them into benign interactions. This is in contrast to the 'critical' purposes of CSS, which point towards more wholesale refutation of current power wielders.

TSS is usually objectivist regarding security in the sense that Security Studies is about telling what the real threats are, how best to deal with them, and as a second order question to study how actors manage or mismanage security policy due to intellectual or bureaucratic failures. Usually, TSS is also objectivist in general: it sees states as the given, eternal form of units, interests as something objective, and there are rules about the behaviour of states that take on something close to natural science status, such as balance of power, arms race theory, etc. TSS and our approach are only incompatible methodologically to the extent that traditionalists take an objectivist view of threat. Otherwise TSS can be seen as a subset within the Copenhagen school framework, preferring to operate within a narrower frame of reference. Indeed, we hope this framework will largely lay to rest the rather scholastic argument between traditionalists and wideners. Both

share a methodological collectivism that leads them to draw a boundary between international security and a wider political theory of security. Unlike some Peace Research, and parts of CSS, they reject reductionism (giving priority to the individual as the ultimate referent object of security) as an unsound approach to international security. This does not mean rejecting the validity of individual level security, but only seeing it as relatively marginal to the understanding of international security.

The Copenhagen school framework should also help dissolve the unhelpful boundary between Security Studies and International Political Economy (IPE). A good deal of the agenda that emerges from applying our framework lies in the realm of IPE, not least because of the propensity of liberal economics to spill security issues over into other sectors. If a wider view of security is to have any chance of success, it must draw on the expertise available in IPE. In return, it will allow IPE to confront the security aspects of its agenda, rather than pushing them into the sterile and unfriendly boundary zone between IPE's 'zone of peace' and Securities Studies' 'zone of conflict'.

The Politics of Security and the Problem of Widening

For all of the contending approaches, security is an empowering word, setting political priorities, and justifying the use of force, the intensification of executive powers, the claim to rights of secrecy, and other extreme measures. How it is understood and used profoundly affects the way that political life is conducted. As is well known, excessive securitization produces the international equivalents of autism and paranoia. Closed states such as the erstwhile Soviet Union, Iran and North Korea, that are trying to promote distinctive development projects, securitize everything from nuclear missiles and opposing armies to mini-skirts and pop music. Such wide-ranging securitization stifles civil society, creates an intrusive and coercive state, cripples (eventually) the economy, and maximizes the intensity of the security dilemma with neighbours who do not share the ideological project. Avoiding excessive and/or irrational securitization is thus a legitimate social, political and economic objective of considerable importance. The academic debate about how to constitute Security Studies cannot responsibly proceed in isolation from this real world political context.

The question is how best to limit the claims to security so that the costs and benefits of securitization are reasonably balanced? Progress on this question is closely linked to the much wider sense of progress attached to the development of Western international society as a whole. It perhaps begins with the construction of the Hobbesian state in the nineteenth century. The creation of leviathan was aimed at opening a sphere of public economic and political life, and this could not be done without pushing the use of force back into a contained space controlled by the state. Under leviathan, citizens could not draw swords over economic grievances or political disagreements, which were to be handled by the rule of law and the market. The logic of existential threat, and the right to use force over economic or political relationships, was reserved to the state, and, in so doing, largely desecuritized amongst the citizens (Williams, 1996).

This domestic development pointed the way to the wider sense of progress-as-desecuritization inherent in the liberals' project since the nineteenth century of attempting the intellectual and political separation of economics from politics. To the extent that this separation can be achieved, it desecuritizes the international economic realm in order to leave people, firms and states freer to pursue efficiency without the constraints of self-reliance and the need to consider calculations of relative gain. Paradoxically, this separation, and the interdependence that follows from it, is then supposed to allow desecuritization to spill over into military–political relations. The desecuritization of economics is central to the ideology of capitalism. This project has been taken furthest in the 'zone of peace' that now characterizes Western international society. With the demise of the communist counter-project, and the closed states and societies associated with it, the prospect exists for a more widespread dissolving of borders, desecuritizing most kinds of political, social and economic interaction. This development is most advanced within the EU, but is inherent in the shift from modern to postmodern states, and from more closed to more open political constructions that is going on in many parts of the world (Buzan, 1995; Buzan and Segal, 1996).

On the face of it, this project to limit the scope of securitization would seem to argue in favour of the traditionalists, with their narrow agenda, and against the wideners. It is indeed rather surprising that such a line of attack has not been used against the new Security Studies, except in a limited way by Deudney (1990) and in our own previous reflections (Buzan, 1995, Wæver, 1995b). The wider agenda

certainly seems to be more vulnerable to excesses of securitization than the traditional military one (which is vulnerable enough by itself if taken to extreme). Reserving security for the military sector has a pleasing 'last resort' ring about it, and fits comfortably with the broadly liberal ideology that is now enjoying its post-Cold War ascendance. In this perspective, widening the security agenda can be cast as a retrograde move. It threatens the hard won desecuritizing achievements of liberalism, and perhaps even of the Hobbesian leviathan, over the past three centuries, and is out of line with the imperatives towards more openness in the post-Cold War world.

We do not wish to question the general progress of Western international society, and we are on record here and elsewhere arguing in favour of desecuritization as the long-range political goal. But note that the liberal approach to desecuritization is primarily about detaching and freeing other sectors from the use of force, and so eventually reducing and marginalizing the military sector itself. Demilitarization by sector has been the characteristic liberal approach to desecuritization, and in that sense TSS is, surprisingly, one of its products (and not of conservatism, as one might first think). For what is TSS about if not the isolation of the military sector as embodying 'security' (and for some of its more liberal practitioners, hopefully then its eventual marginalization in international relations).

This liberal approach has costs as well as benefits. It is one way of understanding desecuritization, but arguably not the best, and certainly not the most appropriate in current circumstances. Ironically, it is the very success of the liberal project that now gives rise to the demand for a wider security agenda, for a reinvention of security in terms other than military. Rather than being an atavistic assault on the three-century liberal project, we see the wider agenda as a constructive and necessary response to it.

Even during the Cold War, two costs of the liberal approach equating demilitarization with desecuritization were already evident. One was its ideological role in international power politics, and the second was its vulnerability to politico-military logics of over-securitization. Whether intentionally or not, liberal desecuritization legitimized the post-1945 American/Western imperium, which operated on the demand for access rather than in the traditional European style of direct control. The desecuritization of economic relations facilitated an imperium of access. It made economic penetration by the strong legitimate, and threw political obstacles in the way of the weak who saw

their security in much wider terms than just military relations. For many states and peoples in the periphery of the international system, the attempted liberal desecuritization of the political economy was itself a security issue. The self-serving qualities of liberal choices about defining the security agenda were seen as invidious, whatever their merits elsewhere. Liberal states were able to deligitimize the non-military security claims of other actors, in the process of subordinating them to the 'normal' politics of the market economy and pluralist politics. By itself this situation justified a wider perspective on society, but only the voices of the weak supported it, and it was largely drowned out by the titanic military confrontation of the superpowers.

This confrontation can be seen as evidence for the vulnerability of politico-military logics to over-securitization. By equating 'security' with 'military', the Western, and particularly the American, political establishment exposed itself to an objectivist, externally determined definition of security that was extraordinarily difficult to break. It drove the logic of nuclear parity with the Soviet Union, paved the way for the disaster in Vietnam, and legitimized the self-mutilation of McCarthyism. This objectivist, military understanding of security all but forecloses the option of fundamentally questioning any securitization. When locked into a military sector defined as 'security', and faced with a military threat, it is difficult to do more than argue about 'how dangerous' the threat is. In this mode of thinking, asking whether something military should be securitized or not is extremely difficult, since it requires not only making a case on the issue at hand, but also redefining the terms of the discourse. One advantage of the securitization approach advocated here is that it points to the responsibility involved in talking security (or desecuritization) for policy-makers, analysts, campaigners and lobbyists. It is a *choice* to phrase things in security (or desecurity) terms, not an objective feature of the issue or relationship itself. That choice has to be justified by the appropriateness and the consequences of successfully securitizing (or desecuritizing) the issue at hand.

With the end of the Cold War, the extension of the market economy into nearly all of the ex-communist world, and the intensification of global finance, investment and production, the case for a wider security agenda has become stronger. The demise of the Cold War has, at least for the time being, greatly reduced military rivalries amongst the great powers. Now security concerns are more about the consequences of how the open international system operates, a set of issues that af-

fects the strong actors as much as it does the weaker ones. This is most obvious in the case of the international economy. The rise of economic security is not just a throwback to classical mercantilism. It is a reaction against the various dangers of global liberalization: the risk of becoming a loser; the general hazard of system instability, especially financial; and the dark side of trade in the form of criminal activities in drugs, weapons and other banned products (e.g. CFCs). It is also about the crossover effects of the global economy on environmental issues, domestic political autonomy and stability, and military self-reliance. As we argued in our 1993 book (Wæver et al.), some of the postmodern liberal moves in the international system, most notably the integration of the EU, were also crucial to the generation of societal security problems.

In the post-Cold War world, therefore, it can be argued that a wider security agenda is a necessary response to the global success of the liberal project. Among other things, this can be seen in the rising number of system and subsystem level referent objects in the current security discourse. In some central ways, the liberal project does seem to have succeeded in marginalizing military security, and, along with it, the approach of Traditional Security Studies. But in so doing it has raised new security problems that can only be handled in a multi-sectoral framework. The danger of excessive securitization remains, and a core part of Security Studies must therefore be to provide means of identifying and criticizing counter-productive claims to securitization (including military ones). But to assume that the post-Cold War world has been successfully desecuritized, or that only military security issues remain, would risk misunderstandings equal to or greater than those associated with the wider agenda. It has the basic merit of conceptualizing security as a labelling for which actors can be held responsible, rather than an objective feature of threats. Thus, while its multi-sectoralism enables a proliferation of securitization, its constructivism delivers the means for questioning and politicizing each specific instance. This in contrast to TSS that has a limit, but has depoliticized, indeed naturalized it.

NOTES

* This Plenary address at the NISA Conference, Helsinki, August 1996, is largely abstracted from Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A*

Framework for Analysis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 1997). It is thus not single-authored by Barry Buzan but part of a collective work edited into this compressed form by him. In particular, much of the text in the middle section originates from Ole Wæver.

1. The name 'Copenhagen school' was coined by McSweeney (1996) to refer to the group of people who have been writing with Buzan and Wæver since 1988 under the auspices of the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI).
2. The rest of the text in this section mostly originates from Ole Wæver, and is drawn from ch. 2 of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (forthcoming 1997).

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