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Abstract

The terrorist attacks of September 11 brought to a head change that had been underway since the end of the Cold War in how we think about security: (1) there is no longer consensus about who or what constitutes the “enemy”; (2) Realism as the dominating paradigm for studying international relations is collapsing; (3) domestic factors are gaining importance for devising security policies; and (4) with increasing globalization these domestic factors attain impact beyond national borders. In this article, I examine the nature of these developments and illustrate that the concept of security is often misapplied for political gain and/or to justify extraordinary measures for countering impending or perceived threats. Comparing various conceptions of security, I analyze the dangers resulting from oversecuritization, which is the propensity to treat traditional policy issues as existential threats to security, and demonstrate the need to more clearly define the distinction between nonexistential and existential threats that justify extraordinary measures. Expanding on classical security complex theory, I propose a conceptual model that links security sectors and can be applied to develop measurable criteria for distinguishing between those issues that should be securitized and those that can be addressed through existing policy channels.

Keywords: *21st century, globalization, September 11 terrorist attacks, securitizing threats*

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THE EMPEROR NEEDS NEW CLOTHES: SECURITIZING THREATS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Volker Franke

Abstract

The terrorist attacks of September 11 brought to a head change that had been underway since the end of the Cold War in how we think about security: (1) there is no longer consensus about who or what constitutes the “enemy”; (2) Realism as the dominating paradigm for studying international relations is collapsing; (3) domestic factors are gaining importance for devising security policies; and (4) with increasing globalization these domestic factors attain impact beyond national borders. In this article, I examine the nature of these developments and illustrate that the concept of security is often misapplied for political gain and/or to justify extraordinary measures for countering impending or perceived threats. Comparing various conceptions of security, I analyze the dangers resulting from oversecritization, which is the propensity to treat traditional policy issues as existential threats to security, and demonstrate the need to more clearly define the distinction betw-een nonexistential and existential threats that justify extraordinary measures. Expanding on classical security complex theory, I propose a conceptual model that links security sectors and can be applied to develop measurable criteria for distinguishing between those issues that should be securitized and those that can be addressed through existing policy channels.

On that tragic morning of September 11, 2001 when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, the world had changed forever. Or at least, so we learned from politicians and pundits, security experts and pollsters. In his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, President George W. Bush described this change:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars—but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war—but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks—but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day—and night

fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.¹

While that September morning brought the most vicious attack on U.S. homeland in history, the world had already begun to change more than a decade earlier. Speaking about the implications of the end of the Cold War, then President George H. W. Bush celebrated “a very real prospect of a new world order” in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1990. The United Nations, freed from the cold war stalemate, was finally in a position to fulfill “the historic vision of its founders” (quoted in Gregg 1993, p. 135) and “unite [its] strength to maintain international peace and security” (Preamble of the UN Charter).

Although the threat of global thermonuclear war has virtually vanished, the world has not yet become a safer place. Since George Bush’s UN speech, we have been witnessing growing ethnic strife and violent quests for self-determination, incidents of genocide, mass migration and floods of refugees, and repeated acts of terrorism. September 11 brought to a tragic head change that had already been underway for more than a decade. Since the Cold War ended: (1) there has been no clear consensus about who or what constitutes the “enemy”; (2) Realism has been losing its stronghold as the dominating paradigm for studying international relations; (3) domestic factors are gaining importance for devising security policies; and (4) with increasing globalization these domestic factors attain impact beyond national borders.

In this article, I examine more closely the nature of these developments and illustrate that the concept of security is often misapplied for political gain and/or to justify extraordinary measures for countering impending or perceived threats. Comparing various conceptions of security, I analyze the dangers resulting from oversecritization, which is the propensity to treat traditional policy issues as existential threats to security, and demonstrate the need to more clearly define the distinction between nonexistential and existential threats that justify extraordinary measures. Expanding on classical security complex theory, I propose a conceptual model that links security sectors and can be applied to develop measurable criteria for distinguishing between those issues that should be securitized and those that can be addressed through existing policy channels.

The Dilemma

Traditionally, studying security has meant focusing on issues such as national defense, military power, and the use of force. Stephen Walt (1991), for instance, defined security studies as “the study of the threat, use, and control of military force” (p. 212). This fairly narrow definition worked well

¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>, last visited January 8, 2002.

for scholars working under the shadow of the nuclear threat. Attention focused primarily on analyzing military hardware and nuclear deterrence and on doctrines about their use (see Kriesberg 2002). However, over the past decade the field of security studies has been forced to accommodate new realities. The relatively peaceful protests and mass anti-government demonstrations in Prague, Budapest, and East Berlin in the fall of 1989 showed the ability of non-state actors to shape international relations. The early 1990s also demonstrated that security can no longer be expressed solely in military terms, as the world has become more interdependent economically, politically, socially, and culturally. At the same time, a series of global problems has brought the international community closer together. Widespread violations of human rights, threats to biodiversity, global warming, the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and, recently, the looming threat of terrorism, have severely reduced the ability of states to solve problems on a purely national basis (Dierks 2001; Lechner & Boli 2000; Rosenau 1992; Scholte 2000).

Defining Security

Students of international relations have traditionally focused their inquiries on the study of war and peace. For Realists, threats to the security of a state manifested themselves in the form of wars. Hobbes' state of nature, and by extension, the anarchical structure of the international system, is characterized by inherent competition over scarce resources and, ultimately, by states' inherent quest for power. By nature, human beings (and by extension states), Realists argue, unconstrained by government and law, exhibit motives and behaviors that will inevitably lead to war, thereby threatening the security of all. Consequently, imposing one's will on the enemy (before he can subject others to his will) becomes the "natural" means for gaining and maintaining power and, subsequently, for ensuring safety. Of course, military might—along with the threat to use it—still proves in many instances an effective tool of conventional power politics. However, Realists have conceded that power can also stem from economic capabilities (Keohane 1984; Keohane & Nye 1977; Waltz 1979). Dependency theorists went even further and argued that economic inequality itself may be a root cause for security threats since for as long as "hunger rules peace cannot prevail. He who wants to ban war must also ban mass poverty" (see Independent Commission on International Development Issues 1980, p. 6; see also Galtung 1971; Gunder Frank 1984).

Security Sectors

In his classical security complex theory, Buzan (1991) recognized five distinct yet overlapping security sectors, each characterized by unique types of interactions. The military sector revolves around relationships of forceful coercion; the political sector around authority, governing, and recognition; the economic sector around relations of trade, production, and finance; the societal sector around relationships of collective identity; and the environmental sector around issues related to the planetary biosphere (see also Buzan et al. 1998).

More specifically, military security describes the interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states and states' perceptions of each other's intentions. Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of government, and the ideologies that give them legitimacy. Stability of governance is seen, for instance, in the democratic ideals of free and equal opportunity for all citizens to participate, open and fair procedures for gaining power, and stable structures for the peaceful transfer of power.

Economic security depicts the access to resources and technology, and the finances and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power. Economic security may be threatened by a widening gap between rich and poor (states, individuals, classes), modified dependencies (from the dependency on single or limited commodity trade to service dependencies ranging from tourism to sex (see Enloe 1990; Steans 1998) and a growing new divide between the technologically connected and disconnected (see Rifkin 2000).

Societal security concerns the ability of societies to reproduce their traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom. The main security objective lies in establishing peaceful relations among diverse collective identities, i.e., in answering the questions how can various ethnic, religious, national, or other groups sharing a common identity live together peacefully (see Rawls 1993)?

Finally, environmental security relates to the maintenance of the local and planetary biosphere as the essential support system for human existence. Threats to the environment include global warming, pollution, depletion of resources, energy and food shortages, extinction of species, and uncontrolled population growth. More generally, Barnett (2001) explained that environmental degradation and insecurity are a "product of meta-processes of development in the industrialized North at the expense of underdevelopment in the industrializing South" (p. 13, see also Galtung 1971; Gunder Frank 1984). Consequently, environmental insecurity stems from people's vulnerability to the effects of environmental degradation, including how that degradation affects human welfare.

In the mid 1990s the United Nations attempted to broaden the idea of security to encompass virtually all threats to human existence. Human security means, "first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs or in

communities” (United Nations Development Programme 1994, p. 23). The 1994 UN Development Report specified the following security areas (see also Paris 2001):

- economic security (e.g., freedom from poverty);
- food security (e.g., access to food);
- health security (e.g., access to health care and protection from diseases);
- environmental security (e.g., protection from such dangers as environmental pollution and resource depletion);
- personal security (e.g., physical safety from such things as torture, war, criminal attacks, domestic violence, drug use, suicide, and even traffic accidents);
- community security (e.g., survival of traditional cultures and ethnic groups, and the physical security of these groups);
- political security (e.g., enjoyment of civil and political rights, and freedom from political oppression).

Given the plethora of security concerns circumscribed by the umbrella term “human security,” Paris (2001), understandably frustrated, concluded that while “as a political campaign, the human security coalition has...been successful in a number of specific goals, such as the negotiation of the landmines convention,” as a new conceptualization of security or as a framework for understanding the sources of conflict, human security “is so vague that it verges on meaninglessness—and consequently offers little practical guidance...to policymakers whose responsibility it is to prioritize among competing policy goals” (p. 16).

Despite frustration regarding a comprehensive conception of security, a growing number of observers recognize the need for rethinking what security means (Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 1991; Kriesberg 2002; Paris 2001), while others still attempt to hold on to traditional conceptions of security (Mearsheimer 2001, 1990). Cold War security strategies—shaped by predictable fears of Communism and Soviet nuclear prowess and an American determination to control both—promoted deterrence, containment, military strength, and interventionism. Ironically, America’s “victory” in the Cold War has removed many of the cornerstones that had imposed structure and a sense of order in world politics (see Gaddis 1999; Mearsheimer 1990). Consequently, some authors have bemoaned the collapse of the Cold War order that had provided somewhat calculable levels of certainty and predictability. Three texts stand out in this context, all of which share rather pessimistic predictions for our future.

Three Marker Texts

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama jubilantly proclaimed the “end of history” (1992, 1989). He argued that the West’s victory in the Cold War had once and for all settled ideological differences. According to Fukuyama, the grand ideological debate was over and there was nothing more to be discussed. “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (1989, p. 4). Fukuyama was convinced that the expanding number of democratic states would help overcome the conflictual nature of international anarchy (an assessment widely shared among Democratic Peace theorists. See Doyle 1986; Müller forthcoming).

Given standard Realist Cold War argumentation, one should have expected unqualified excitement about the predicted global spread of Western values and capitalistic market principles. Instead, Fukuyama concluded his article by lamenting that the end of history was a very sad time that left him longing for “the time when history existed.” Fukuyama explained:

The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. (1989, p. 18)

Half a decade later, Robert Kaplan (2000, first published 1994) published his notes collected from travels through Eastern Europe and Africa, suggesting that West Africa was a window for things to come worldwide. His “coming anarchy” contained “disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels” (p. 7). From these observations, Kaplan concluded that “[w]e are entering a bifurcated world,” some parts “inhabited by Hegel’s and Fukuyama’s Last Man, healthy, well-fed, and pampered by technology.” The other, “larger part is inhabited by Hobbes’s First Man, condemned to a life that is ‘poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Although both parts will be threatened by environmental stress, the Last Man will be able to master it; the First Man will not (p. 24).” Although Kaplan acknowledged and vividly illustrated the severity and global reach of emerging security threats in the environmental, societal, and political sectors, he bemoaned a loss of Western control and argued that “in places where the Western Enlightenment has not penetrated and where there has always been mass poverty, people find liberation in violence” (p. 45). The Hobbesian

nature of the international system is inescapable and aggression and self-interest will continue to dominate relations between “us” and “them.”

Extending Fukuyama’s conclusion that with the end of the Cold War the ideological bases for conflict had lost meaning, Samuel Huntington (1993) argued in his famous *Clash of Civilizations* that “the great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations” (p. 22). Huntington predicted that the clash of civilizations would dominate global politics after the Cold War and that conflict between civilizations would be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world. Huntington defined civilization as the highest cultural grouping of people and broadest cultural identity short of what distinguishes humans from other species. In the post Cold War world, he argued, people would define their identity in ethnic and religious terms. The ideological divide that had characterized the Cold War was giving way to “us” vs. “them” relations between people and members of different cultures, ultimately pitting the West against the Rest.

What To Do...

The “end of history” and the “coming anarchy” signify not only the emergence of new security threats, but also manifest a profound assault on those theoretical premises that have served Realists well for explaining international relations for more than 2,000 years. Understandably, Realists attempt to develop solutions for emerging problems based on their time-tested assumptions. Huntington, for instance, provides a number of recommendations for what the West should do to address civilizational security threats (notice, all of them presume the conflictual nature of human relations and promote the “us” versus “them” dichotomy that has traditionally informed Realist scholarship). His recommendations include: (1) maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; (2) exploit differences among other civilizations; (3) support civilization groups sympathetic to Western values and interests; (4) strengthen international institutions that reflect Western values and interests; and (5) promote involvement of non-Western states in those institutions.

The clash of civilizations presents Huntington’s attempt to save Western identity for which Realism has traditionally provided the normative framework. Now that the Cold War is over and the enemy has vanished, Huntington wonders who the next enemy might be. After all, since human relations are, by their very nature, conflictual, we need a new enemy to continue our competition over scarce resources. Therefore, constructing “threats” becomes part of constructing the “other.” Effective “othering” oftentimes involves the use of stereotypes, which are often thrust upon those (the “other” or the enemy) whom we wish to silence, dehumanize, or

securitize (see Allport 1971; Abrams & Hogg 1999; Prins 1998; Tajfel 1978). While a more detailed examination of the dynamic between securitization, stereotyping and enemy imaging is beyond the scope of this article, future research should explore conflict strategies based on securitization of the “other” and examine the extent to which politicized (instead of securitized) response mechanisms could deescalate conflict.

What Else To Do...

As this brief excursion demonstrates, the most prominent policy recommendations derived over the past decade have left intact the very assumptions that informed the prevalent theoretical explanations and policy options of the Cold War. Yet, global security in the aftermath of thermonuclear threat is about more than just advanced weapons technology and military competition. But we can no longer simply add new security sectors and still make our explanations stick. Rather, it is essential to profoundly revise the premises and the scope, and to overcome the stereotypes that have informed our thinking about security. Security threats are not universal nor do they apply objectively to actors worldwide.

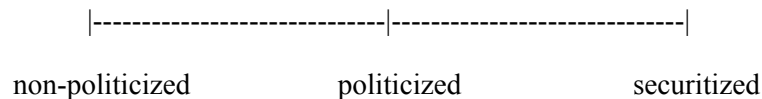
Security today encompasses a wide array of sectors and actors. Buzan and colleagues (1998) argued that security is about survival, meaning the level at which an issue poses “an existential threat to a designated referent object (traditionally, but not necessarily, the state, incorporating government, territory, and society). The special nature of security threats justifies the use of extraordinary measures to handle them” (p. 21). Traditionally, the referent object of security has been the state, threatened primarily militarily by some peer competitor (see Schwarz & Layne 2002; Mearsheimer 2001; Keohane & Nye 1977). Politically, existential threats may be viewed as challenges to constituting principles, especially sovereignty and perhaps even state ideology. The state may also be a referent object in the other sectors, but is much less likely to be threatened in its very existence. Economically, for instance, firms are the most common referent objects—threatened by bankruptcy. Crises to a national economy absent a war are only rare occasions. In fact, the largest bankruptcies in American history (Enron, Worldcom) have not threatened the survival of the American economy.

The primary referent object in the societal sector are collectivities formed around a shared identity independent of the state. The recent events in the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia illustrate this. Under the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, Kosovo became an autonomous province within Serbia. From the late 1980s Kosovo faced growing Serb nationalist sentiments. Slobodan Milosevic, who had gained power in Serbia in 1987, revoked Kosovar autonomy in 1990, dissolved the Kosovo Provincial Assembly and Government, removed Kosovo Albanians from important state posts, and declared a state of emergency. Growing Albanian resistance to rule from Belgrade led to attacks against Serbian security forces by the Kosovo

Liberation Army (KLA) in the mid-1990s. Belgrade responded with military repression of the Kosovar population as a whole. By mid September 1998 an estimated 250,000 Kosovo Albanians had been driven from their homes and some 50,000 were still in the open as the winter approached. It was clear many might die. Despite the extent of the human tragedy, the international community waited until the spring of 1999 before it recognized the potential security implications for the European Community (legitimized as a traditional state actor referent object) and responded with air strikes which eventually lead to the capitulation of the Milosovic regime.²

These examples illustrate that security takes “politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics” (Buzan et al. 1998, p. 23). Any issue, so the upshot of this argument, can be securitized, i.e., presented as an existential threat that requires immediate attention, oftentimes in form of emergency measures. According to classical complex security theory (see Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 1991), any public issue can be located along a spectrum (see Figure 1) ranging from non-politicized (i.e., the state does not deal with the issue and is not made part of the public discourse on the issue) through politicized (i.e., the issue is part of public policy and thus requires government decision and resource allocations or, in some cases, some form of communal governance) to securitized (i.e., the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside normal political procedure).

FIGURE 1: Spectrum of Securitization



For example, religion is politicized in some states (e.g., Iran, Saudi-Arabia) but not in others (e.g., Germany, France); some states securitize culture (Iran, the former Soviet Union) while others don't (the United Kingdom or the Netherlands). Similarly, the writers of our three marker texts have clearly securitized culture or civilization. Using speech act theory (see Austin 1975; Bourdieu 1991), Buzan et al. (1998) argued that a discourse that presents something as an existential threat to the referent object does not by itself create securitization, but is only a *securitizing move*. The issue is securitized if and when the audience accepts it as such. Buzan et al. identified two dangers: (1) opportunities for power holders to exploit threats for domestic purposes (e.g., Reagan's invasion of Grenada following the 1983 suicide

² A detailed account of the events can be found at <http://www.kosovo.mod.uk/account/intro.htm>.

truck bomb that killed 241 U.S. Marines in Beirut bombing or, concomitant the Lewinski scandal, Clinton's bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan in response to terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998); and (2) attempts to securitize not because an immediate existential threat exists, but merely to gain "tactical attention," e.g., for environmental problems. The danger lies in the fact that issues may be securitized whenever there is a failure to address them (at least with the desired outcome) through normal politics.

The Danger of Oversecuritization

Securitizing everything from nuclear missiles to miniskirts and pop music (as is the case in the former Soviet Union, Iran, or the Taliban's Afghanistan) suffocates civil society, jeopardizes democracy, and creates coercive states whose only legitimacy stems from countering ever increasing security threats (see Buzan et al. 1998). Therefore, avoiding excessive securitization becomes as important as widening our understanding of what security means. The tendency to oversecritize issues of public policy is quite common as a few examples from the American context illustrate. These examples show the intricate overlap between security sectors and suggest that the perceived need to securitize an issue in one sector may produce a threat in another sector.

SEMATECH. Capitalism strives on the fact that the main actors—firms and workers/ employees—feel insecure. After all, insecurity in terms of market shares and employment produces market efficiencies. But what happens when the forces present in a global free market produce outcomes that threaten the security of the state? By the mid-1980s, the U.S. electronics industry had lost its global market dominance partially due to government supported research and development activities by overseas competitors. Concerned about the growing dependence on foreign supplied semiconductors and components for advanced weaponry, the Reagan Administration supported industrial policy efforts to reinvigorate the U.S. semiconductor industry, recapture the market, and assure that the American military could rely on domestic chip manufacturers. The government promoted the establishment of a non-profit consortium of U.S. semiconductor manufacturers, known as SEMATECH (SEMiconductor MANufacturing TECHnology), which, in conjunction with government agencies and universities were to sponsor and conduct research aimed at assuring U.S. leadership in semiconductor manufacturing technology (see O'Keefe & Franke 2002). While the most prominent manufacturers joined the consortium, some 200 smaller chip-makers stayed out, steered off by the financial requirements or because they feared the larger companies would dominate the research agenda. In addition, some critics argued, by helping one set of companies, SEMATECH effectively shut out those manufacturers whose products and research ideas it opted not to support.

TRP. Convinced that SEMATECH had been a success, the Clinton administration modeled its 1993 Technology Reinvestment Project (TRP) initiative for developing dual-use defense technology largely after that experience (see O’Keefe & Franke 2002). The perceived earlier success of merging private and public resources into the SEMATECH consortium to produce internationally competitive semiconductors encouraged the Clinton administration in its efforts to pursue the development of dual-use technology through partnering arrangements between the public and private sectors. Quickly TRP renewed the controversy over the economic priorities of government policies, raising questions of whether the government should directly interfere in domestic market competition by sponsoring specific R&D efforts to help promote the competitiveness of the U.S. defense industry in the global marketplace. While one can easily point to increased levels of military security by reducing dependencies on imported technologies, government interference in the market presents a direct threat to firms or entire industrial sectors that do not benefit from government contracting.

The International Space Station. As the Clinton administration took power in 1993, national security officials became aware that Russia was about to transfer rocket technology to India. It appeared that the U.S. might well have to impose severe trade sanctions to head off or punish Russia for missile proliferation. However, instead, the Clinton administration decided to bring Russia aboard international efforts to build a space station, thereby linking business relations with the requirement that Russia would abide by the Missile Technology Control Regime.³ With the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic downturn accompanied by continuous deficit spending, space policy was declining both in national prominence and in its importance for national security (as a symbol of global technological dominance). What would justify multi-billion dollar expenditures absent superpower rivalry? Would exploration for science’s sake be enough? The decision for space cooperation securitized the space station by linking it directly with U.S. foreign policy objectives and, at the same time aided NASA in gaining funding to keep the program alive (see Lambright 2001).

The State of the Union. Most recently the Bush administration has attempted to link domestic policy objectives with efforts to curb terrorism. Unquestionably the Bush administration is preoccupied with waging war on terrorism, thereby running the risk of oversecuring policy issues that present neither an existential threat nor require extraordinary measures. In his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, President Bush focused

³ This meant specifically that Russia could provide India with rocket engines (the product), but not with the know-how of how to make them (the process). See Lambright 2001.

primarily on his administration's efforts to "win the war on terror."⁴ Conveniently, since public support for his foreign policy performance is at an unprecedented high, the president linked his domestic policy agenda directly to his war efforts, stating that "...we will win this war, we will protect our homeland, and we will revive our economy." From his discussion of military and homeland security, Bush moved directly to promoting his economic security plan, which he "summed up in one word: jobs. Good jobs begin with good schools, and here we've made a fine start..."

Bush continued his address with a call for a new culture of responsibility, culminating in the unveiling of the USA Freedom Corps, designed to focus on "three areas of need: responding in case of crisis at home, rebuilding our communities, and extending American compassion throughout the world." As discussed above, societal security concerns the ability of societies to reproduce their traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom. The main security objective lies in establishing peaceful relations among diverse collective identities. Instead of promoting cultural diversity, securitizing values threatens the legitimacy of non-Western normative and cultural societal frames, directly translating the "us" versus "them" mentality that inspired our three marker texts into political praxis. President Bush suggested that "America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere." He continued, and this demonstrates the reach of oversecritization, "we have no intention of imposing our culture, but America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance." Again, by securitizing everything security loses its substantive meaning.

The War on Drugs. During the 2002 Super Bowl, the president's Office of National Drug Control Policy aired a commercial linking illegal narcotics trade to terrorism. While previous anti-drug messages focused on how users harm themselves, the Super Bowl commercial claimed that money to purchase drugs is likely to end up in the hands of terrorists and narco-criminals. Focus groups conducted before the add aired revealed a "strong decline in intension to use" among teenagers and showed considerable support among parents who found the commercials a "powerful way to initiate conversations' with their children" (Ahrens 2002, p. A3).

Farm Subsidies. Speaking to a convention of ranchers in February 2002, President Bush declared crop and cattle production to be a national security issue, providing a fresh rationale for continuing farm subsidies. "This nation has got to eat," Bush told the crowd. "It's in our national security interests that we be able to feed ourselves. Thank goodness, we don't have to rely on somebody else's meat to make sure our people are healthy and well-fed"

⁴ For the text of the State of the Union Address see *Washington Post*, January 30, 2002, p. A-16.

(Allen 2002, p. A4). Bush's attempt to securitize cattle farming lead even staunch conservative commentators like George F. Will (2002) to remark that "President Bush tiptoed to the edge of parody" (p. A33).

The Budget. The Bush Administration's tendency to oversecure government policy objectives can be seen in its FY 2003 budget that shows significant increases in proposed expenditures for homeland security efforts. While this is to be expected in the aftermath of September 11, some budget experts caution that "spending could get out of hand as agency heads rush to seek more money by cloaking their mission in the mantle of homeland security" (Pianin & Miller 2002, p. A7). As Robert Bixby of the budget watchdog group Concord Coalition explained, "It will be very tempting for agencies to redefine their missions under homeland security and for almost any member of Congress to explain an add-on or earmark as a matter of homeland security" (quoted in Pianin & Miller 2002, p. A7).

What This Means...

The Gulf War and the Kosovo conflict, the nuclear muscle-flexing by India, Pakistan, and North Korea, Argentina's economic collapse and continuing European integration, global warming and ozone depletion, drug trafficking and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and, most recently, America's war on terrorism illustrate that threats to security in the 21st century will take on various forms and will require interdependent responses that both link security sectors and bring together the range of actors shaping international politics. In these pages, I have argued that in a world that admittedly is becoming more dangerous in many areas, the concept of security is often misapplied for political gain and/or to justify extraordinary measures for countering impending or perceived threats. The examples above illustrate the dangers of oversecuritization and demonstrate the need to more clearly define the distinction between nonexistential and existential threats that justify extraordinary measures. In the following section I attempt to develop a framework for determining the existentiality of threats and for deciding on appropriate responses (either through existing policy response mechanisms or extraordinary measures).

A New Framework for Determining Threats

Measuring the respective impact of various issues threatening sustainability, Dovers (1995) developed a framework for assessing the magnitude of security threats that can be adapted to examining the severity or existentiality of possible challenges across security sectors and to determining the most appropriate types of responses. According to Dovers' model, three parameters—time, space, and impact—help determine the magnitude of security threats. More specifically, Dovers identified six problem-framing attributes that are useful for developing criteria for

distinguishing between issues that should be securitized and those that could be handled through existing political response mechanisms. The more highly problems rate across parameters, the more severely they are thought to impact upon security:

1. *Spatial scale of cause and effect*, describing the “spread” of the issue across political boundaries, assuming that the more diffuse causes and/or effects are, the more difficult it will be to rely on clearly defined political response mechanisms. For instance, climate change is a much more diffuse policy issue (and potential security threat) than solid waste management or weapons proliferation.
2. *Magnitude of possible impacts*, referring to “the degree of ‘damage’ in a worst-case scenario relative to the whole of the entity impacted upon” (Dovers 1995, p. 96). For instance, smaller changes in economic productivity (due to seasonal variations) are less serious than larger changes (due to recession or a stock market crash).
3. *Temporal scale of possible impacts*, distinguishing on the one hand between immediate, near-term impacts and very far-off impacts and, on the other hand, between discrete, short-term effects and long-term, lasting impacts (of, for instance, storage of nuclear waste or preemptively striking Iraq).
4. *Reversibility* and the assumption that irreversible or very costly impacts (e.g., the loss of a particular species or the effects of nuclear war) are more severe than more easily reversible and less costly impacts (e.g., development of alternative energy sources or adjustment of consumer behavior).
5. *Mensurability*, describing the degree to which we actually comprehend and can measure relevant impacts and processes pertinent to the problem. Dovers distinguishes between “well-known” cause-effect associations; “risk” where we can at least assign trustworthy probabilities to possible outcomes; “uncertainty” where only the general nature and direction of outcomes are understood; and “ignorance” where outcomes are “unknown, unguessable, or can only be speculated upon” (p. 97).
6. *Degree of complexity and connectivity*, establishing a continuum ranging from discrete issues to highly complex issues featuring multiple feedbacks and possible threshold effects. Issues scoring highly on this attribute include, for instance, climate change, population-environment linkages, or globalization and the democratization-development dynamic.

In addition to these problem-framing attributes, Dovers provides a further filter for identifying the magnitude of problems and prioritizing policy responses. He distinguishes problems at three levels:

1. *Micro-problems* are “spatially and temporally discrete; not overly complex or fraught with uncertainty; not requiring large resource commitment or the development of new mechanisms or policy

processes for redress; and, if particularly topical, then only on a local or sectoral scale or are so despite lack of substantive evidence” (p. 100). Problems on the micro-level can typically be resolved on a case-by-case basis within existing institutional arrangements and policy processes (e.g., settling of labor disputes, trade negotiations, crime prevention).

2. *Meso-problems* are significant and may be prominent on the public agenda, but “do not pose systemic threats to the present pattern of production and consumption, or overwhelming challenges to existing policy processes” (p. 100). Major issues fully addressable within one country may fall into this category (e.g., national air pollution emission standards, social security provisions).
3. *Macro-problems* present threats that are “multifaceted, complex, fraught with uncertainties and ignorances, spatially and temporally diffuse, highly connected to other issues (or security sectors, VF) and threaten major possible disruption of human or natural systems” (p. 100). Again, climate change, resource scarcity, the spread of infectious diseases, the widening gap between rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, technologically connected and the disconnected, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and wars of all kinds (in an increasingly interdependent world) present macro-problems of varying magnitude.

Applying both problem-framing attributes and problem levels to the examples discussed above illustrate the threat distortion caused by oversecritization. Both SEMATECH and TRP adressed national-scale meso-level issues by employing problem-resolution mechanisms based on existing or easily adaptable industrial policy strategies. Overall, global market competition and the significant defense drawdown of the early 1990s presented moderate, near- to medium-term, and fairly easily reversible threats to the economic (and by extension military) security of the United States, and risks were fairly well-known in each case. Although the issues of dual-use technology and, more generally, industrial policy are fairly complex and can span across security sectors, these examples show that remedies were found through existing policy channels.

The Missile Technology Control Regime and the International Space Station provided bilateral/international policy responses to threats whose potential impact can be judged as moderate to severe and medium (in terms of timing) and medium to long-term (in terms of longevity), difficult and certainly expensive to reverse, with somewhat uncertain risks and a high degree of complexity and connectivity. Still, the U.S. and Russia were able to address the security threat (weapons technology proliferation) through establishing a new regime for dealing with this issue. Therefore, the ISS can be viewed as an instance of a fairly typical international policy resolution mechanism, but not as an extraordinary measure.

The war on drugs and farm subsidies differ in their spatial impact (regional versus national), but both policies respond to minor threats with short-term and fairly obvious impacts. Interestingly, attempts to reduce the influx of illegal drugs into the United States, Plan Colombia, the U.S. backed and partially funded Colombian government initiative is pushing indigenous peoples toward the brink. U.S. military aid has intensified militarization and provoked a surge in rural violence. At the same time, U.S. backed crop fumigation is destroying small-scale agriculture and highly biodiverse rainforest ecosystems (see Lloyd & Soltani 2001; Wilson 2001). Thus, policy measures designed to boost U.S. security pose immediate and severe threats to the economic, political and environmental security of the population in that region.

By contrast to the examples discussed above, climate change, sustainability, nuclear war, and terrorism present threats that are international to global in scale, with long-term, potentially catastrophic and irreversible impacts on both natural and human systems and high levels of mensurability and complexity. As the war on terrorism and the recent conference on sustainability in South Africa illustrate, no policy channels are currently in place to effectively counter these threats and, given the severity of these threats, extraordinary measures may be called for.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to sketch a preliminary model for distinguishing between existential and nonexistential threats and, consequently, to provide suggestions for how to decide which threats can be addressed using existing policy mechanisms and which may require extraordinary measures. While a more specific quantification of threat potentials is beyond the scope of this article, future research should develop more concrete measures for operationalizing threats. For instance, building further on Dovers (1995) sustainability framework, such research could weigh the various impacts and apply the emerging measures to very specific security threats. Such research could be of great benefit for scholars interested in tracking and predicting potential security threats and policy makers charged with appropriating finite resources to deterring, preventing or, when necessary, countering threats.

During the Cold War international relations were overshadowed by the threat of thermonuclear war. As existential as this threat was, it forced states to cooperate not only with regard to strategic arms limitations but also in political and economic sectors. The end of the Cold War has not ridded the world of existential threats. In fact, the threat of a nuclear holocaust merely masked other existential threats during the Cold War (every other threat received a lower ranking on the security continuum, see Figure 1). With the end of the Cold War we can now shift our focus to those neglected threats, reassess their importance, and decide whether to respond through existing or

develop new policy mechanisms or whether a threat requires extraordinary response measures. It should be in states' interest to cooperate on tackling those security problems that present existential threats to all of them. A non-exclusive list includes: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, stability of governance, the ever-widening gap between rich and poor (states, individuals, classes), the emerging divide between the technologically connected and the disconnected (see Rifkin 2000), global warming, pollution, depletion of resources, increasing energy demands, improving education and health, and population control and food security.

Security can no longer be defined in state-only terms. International relations are shaped by non-state actors and security concerns span across sectors and link various security communities. International actors (states, groups, firms, organizations, individuals) of various types may share the same existential concerns and may find that cooperating alongside others who share those concerns may benefit all of them. During the Cold War, everybody shared the fear of thermonuclear war. Today, in a world characterized by globalization and interdependence, actors may share common interests in preserving the biosphere, safeguarding the free market, preventing the further spread of infectious diseases, and, most visibly since September 11, combating terrorism.

The more it will be possible to promote communication and build cooperation among actors (state and non-state) and across sectors, the more regularized patterns of behavior and relationships will become and, consequently, the more actors may focus on shared interests. As a result, the more trust may be established and the closer we may come to attaining peace as a goal in international relations.

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