Meaning of Security and Theory of Securitization

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On the concept of security

Since its inception the security studies represent the core of the International Relations, predominantly dealing with the issues of war and peace. In the years following the Second World War security studies have become a synonym for Strategic Studies with a distinct focus on the military sector. However, with the growing complexity of the international relations` agenda, namely with the rise of economic and environmental challenges count, emergence of the new security challenges, risks and threats, emergence of the new international relations` actors, the traditional view of the sole concept of security, that is, its essence, has become too narrow.

Before a more detailed insight into the root of the problem, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "the concept of security". The question on the essential characteristics of this concept also presents a logical priority, having in mind that without clear and precise definition of its content and scope, it is impossible to initiate empirical observations and the security phenomena analysis. Buzan's definition is clear and saying that "security is pursuit of freedom from threats" (Buzan, 1991: 18), however the content itself of this concept remains obscure. Huysmans suggests that by defining the meaning of a category (security in this particular case) we are condensing it into one sentence (Huysmans, 1998: 229). The main function of the definition is the identification of the subject of the research, or to put it more precisely, the removal of any doubt reader could have concerning the following content of the text. Conceptual analysis is similar to the definition in extent that it also condenses the meaning of security for the establishment of a singular scientific goal's sake of all future research projects, but condensing its meaning is being performed in a much more complex way than with just one sentence. The starting assumption of the conceptual analysis is that the meaning of the notion that is being examined is more or less familiar, but also that it usually isn't expressed in the explicit manner. Making it explicit by eliminating its ambiguities and inconsistencies in the different uses is the sole purpose of the conceptual analysis. "Conceptual analysis does not result with the new definition. It is not comparative analysis of definitions with the purpose of formulating an all-embracing definition. Rather, it formulates a common denominator which expresses "common conceptual distinctions underlying various conceptions of security" (Baldwin A. David (1997) "The concept of security", in Huysman, 1998: 231).

The question is whether there is a generally accepted definition of the meaning of concept of security in theory and whether it should be regarded as an "essentially contested concept"[i] (Baldwin, 1997: 5) or it is more suitable to say that the concept itself is insufficiently explained and blurry. Anyways, the security concept can be "dangerously ambiguous" (Wolfers 1952) should it be used without additional specifications. Baldwin, for example,

formulate the entire series of questions – security for whom, security for which values, how much security, from what threats, by what means, at what cost, in what time period (Baldwin, 1997: 12-18) – that should make appropriate analytical framework for future security studies.

Therefore, the definition of the term itself is not enough; a particular textual organization is also required.

The "traditionalists" vs. "wideners" - debate about security studies

Should we, for the sake of the clearer view, neglect all the shortcomings of Manichean logic (excessive simplification in the first place), from plethora of articles that have dealt with this problem, two confronting approaches can be outlined.

Traditionalists, adherents of the realist school of thought, define security as a freedom from any objective military threat to the state survival in an anarchic international system. Definition of security studies by Stephen Walt perhaps in the most explicit way expresses the traditional understanding of the problem. He defines security studies as "the studies of the threat, use, and control of military force" (Walt (1991), in Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 3). This approach is essentially based on a clear ontological point of view that the social truth is predominantly result of material factors` influence, in other words, "the social relations as well as security threats are result of material factors and that they exist "objectively"" (Ejdus 2007). Second fundamental assumption of these theories is an epistemological assumption, i.e. method that they apply when responding to the question on how to acquire the knowledge on certain social truths. Basic method of these theories is positivist method. The starting point of positivist approach is that social facts should be regarded as things – like in natural sciences. The causal relations and laws of social phenomena ought to be discovered by description and arrangement of perceptible facts. Observing and analyzing subject and object of their analysis are separate in this case.

The other school of thought, so-called "wideners" with Barry Buzan in front, has challenged this conception of security by widening and deepening security studies agenda, both horizontally and vertically. Having in mind the horizontal dimension, the wideners think that in reality the security concept has expended from exclusively military onto political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. Vertically, the altered security concept should also be open to referent objects [ii] other than the state (individuals, social groups, humanity as a whole). Ontological standpoint of traditional understanding of security critics is that "social relations and security threats are actually the result of an inter-subjective ideational social construction and that they do not exist objectively, independently" (Ejdus 2007). This is, in essence, anti-essentialist ontological standpoint. Responding to the question on whether the truth about social reality has one, unique, unchanging, essential meaning, or there are more versions of its interpretation, proponents of this school of thought undoubtedly opt for the latter solution. Complete and perfect knowledge does not exist. The truth about reality is a socially constructed interpretation. Therefore, it is clear that the method used in their analysis can't be positivist method, but a kind of "empathic interpretation" (Ejdus 2007) of the facts. Methodological interpretive (post-positivism) assumption is that there is an unbreakable unity between subject and object of cognition, therefore the facts are relative and dependent upon the observer.[iii] Constructivist's majority opinion is that "the theory does not take place after the fact. Theories, instead, play a large part in constructing and defining what the facts are"

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(Enloe and Zalewski, 1995: 299). Having that kind of attitude in mind, relevance of distinction between "real" and "perceived" threats seizes to exist. Corollary of such epistemological approach is that the main goal of security studies is to understand social reality, not its explanation. To understand certain social phenomenon means to grasp and interpret its meaning given by the social actors.

Securitization theory – a step forward in security studies

Radical transformation of security ambient, complete reconfiguration of the system of global relations of power and force at the end of the Cold War and emergence of entirely new security challenges, risks and threats, only added to intensification of the debate on redefinition of the concept of security. The central point of the debate was a question on whether and how to broaden and deepen the security concept without bringing its logical coherence into the dispute, how to widen the focus of the research onto the other, non-military sectors, and keep the sole concept meaningful and to analysts a useful tool.

Enormous contribution to the contemporary security studies was made by the so-called Copenhagen School of Security Studies[iv], which offered a quite innovative, original perspective on a broad spectrum of security issues, perceiving clearly that security dynamics could no longer be reduced only to the military-political relations of the two super powers, however important they might be. In that sense, proponents of the Copenhagen School stand firmly on the wideners` side. However, as shown in the text, the moment one leaves the idea to tie the concept of security only to certain referent objects (such as the state) and to certain kind of security threats (such as military), a question "what quality makes something a security issue" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 21) arrives at the very centre of controversy. Without distinctive criteria which separate a security issue from non-security issue, the concept of security is trivial and leaves only confusion behind.

In an effort to give an answer to this particular question, Barry Buzan, one of the representatives of the Copenhagen School, starts with an assertion that undoubtedly presents a traditional view's heritage: security is about survival; it is when an issue, presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object, justifies the use of extraordinary measures to handle them (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 21). However, radical severance from traditional security studies commences with the multisectoral [v] approach to the research on security. Statement of existence of other security sectors, apart from military, allows the possibility of other referent objects different from state and, in accordance with that, existence of much wider scope of security threats, being that their nature is variable in relation with the characteristics of particular referent object.

On the other hand, the materialist assumption of traditional security studies on the objectivity of security threats, in which they exist independently and outside the discourse, did not remain out of reach of criticism. The Copenhagen School of Security Studies conceptualizes security as a process of social construction of threats which includes securitizing actor[vi] (mostly political elite), who declares certain matter as urgent and a posing threat for the survival of the referent object, that, once accepted with the audience[vii], legitimizes the use of extraordinary measures for neutralization of the threat. Thus, the issue is securitized and removed outside the normal bounds of democratic political procedure and put on the "panic politics" agenda (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 34).

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"Security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 23). The move mentioned in the previous sentence the theorists of the Copenhagen School call the securitizing move.

In the foundation of such an understanding of security lays social constructivist assumption that security threats do not exist independently from the discourse which marks them as such. Ideas and language as their expression form the reality; therefore the language exists prior to security. Moreover, security is conceptualized as a speech act in the securitization theory. "In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. By saying the word, something is done" (Weaver, 1995: 55) [viii]. Therefore, security is not a subjective perception which refers to something more real, externally given, independently existing from this perception; speech act refers only to itself. By verbal labeling an issue a security threat, it becomes one. In that sense, the speech act is, by itself, self-referential structure, the structure that refers to itself. This way the dichotomy between the subjective and objective definition of security has been put in the brackets.

Treating something a security issue is always a matter of choice – political choice (Weaver, 2000: 251). This choice is being actualized through securitizing discursive practice of labeling something a security threat. However, the power of constructing the security issue through speech act shouldn't be put in the single person's hands. Should that be the case, there would be no difference between the speech act and the subjective perception and interpretation of the security threat, and the framework of the dichotomy of the subjective/objective definition of security would remain largely intact. Securitization is "essentially inter-subjective process" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 30). It is the course of the ongoing negotiations between securitizing actor, who puts the issue on the agenda, and the audience, who has a choice of either accepting or declining given agenda. Securitization can not be imposed. Only the audience's consent justifies the application of extraordinary measures, which include breaching of regular political procedures, all in order to neutralize the threat. "Thus, security (as well all politics) ultimately rests neither with objects nor with subjects but among the subjects" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 31).

Finally, contrary to normative viewpoint of most of security theoreticians – traditional and alternative-criticizing – who assume that security is something both positive and desirable; the Copenhagen School proponents suggest that security shouldn't be idealized. Securitization of a certain issue leads to the downfall of the regular political process and liberal democratic procedures and therefore securitization should be perceived negatively and as a necessary evil. As an optimum long-term option they suggest the opposite process – desecuritization, *ergo* returning certain issues from the domain of urgency, extraordinary, securitized to the domain of regular, public sphere. In that sense, they do not regard their own theory a politically neutral analytical tool. Moreover, whenever possible, they strive to aid desecuritization processes by deconstructing the ongoing securitization discourses.

Criticism of the concept of security in securitization theory

The securitization framework has been a useful tool to analysts who want to challenge the notion of the objectivity of security threats. The framework is elegant and has generated much academic interest and sparked the number of critiques and debates, aiming to broaden

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and further specify the framework in order to increase its logical coherence and explanatory power.

However important and innovative contribution to our understanding of security may it be, the securitization framework is problematically narrow. First, the form of act constructing security is defined narrowly, with the main focus on the speech of dominant actors, usually political leaders, which encourages an interpretation that securitization is only happening when there are discursive interventions of those who are institutionally legitimate to speak on behalf of a particular political community (usually a state). This also excludes a focus on other forms of representations, such as images or material practices. (McDonald, 2008: 564). Thus, the focus is on the speech and its per formative power to construct security. At the same time, the conceptual framework of securitization puts a special emphasis on the acceptance of the audience which is claimed to be essential in the successful securitization process. Contextual factors, which the Copenhagen school terms facilitating conditions, help explain why some securitizing moves are more likely to be accepted by the audience than the other. These facilitating conditions are taken as givens that either help or hinder securitization but are not conceptualized as constitutive of the speech acts, which is at odds with the claim that security is a social construction. There is tension between understanding securitization as a productive process by focusing on the per formative power of the speech act, and as a constructed process by claiming that security is inter-subjectively constituted. This tension gave rise to critique by the so-called Second Generation of securitization analysts who argue that securitization can not be properly understood outside historical and cultural context in which security discourse takes place. Thus, the very meaning of security is contextual. Finally, the framework of securitization is narrow in the sense that the nature of the act is defined solely in terms of the designation of threats to security (McDonald, 2008: 564). This claim is based on a commitment to the idea that security is constituted in oppositional terms: by designating that which it is not or that from which it needs preservation or protection (Weaver, 1995: 56). Sometimes it is more effective if security is conceptualized in terms of normative goals that should be achieved or expression of the core values that are in need of being protected, than if it is articulated only in terms of "from what and from whom it needs protection". Thus, seeing security as something negative *per se* does not represent a logical imperative anymore.

Conclusion

The work of the Copenhagen School, concerning the existing problem of redefinition of security, is one of the most interesting developments in the contemporary security studies. The most extensive and systematic interpretations of the implications of widening the security concept are part of their work. Although it is true that their reformulation of security is not flawless, some innovative work is going on here without a question.

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[i] In 1956 W. B. Gallie published an extremely influential article saying that in social theory there are certain terms which he dubbed essentially contested concepts. The idea wasn't to say that there were great disagreements regarding the definitions of these concepts, but that there are concepts whose meaning is inherently a matter of dispute because no neutral definition is possible ("Essentially Contested Concepts", Gallie (1956), according to Steve Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security", in Ken Booth ed. "*Critical Security Studies and World Politics*", 2005: 27).

[ii] "Referent objects: things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 36)

[iii] "Positivism is for interpretive what photography is for a painting. In the case of photography the subject literally shows us the object of observation and stays separate from

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him. With the painting, subject (that is the painter) and object are inseparable being that the pained tells us of a deeper meaning viewed object holds for him" (Ejdus, 2007).

[iv] Three most important contributions of the Copenhagen School to security studies are securitization theory, security sector approach, and regional security complex theory.

[v] "Sectors are views on international system through lances that shed light on particular aspect of relations and interactions between all its constitutive units" (Buzan, Jones and Little (1993), in Buzan 1998: 27); Based upon these particular types of interactions, Buzan identifies five sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. Sectors proved to be very useful tool in security issues analysis, because by reducing the number of variables they largely facilitate the analysis.

[vi] "Securitizing actor: actors who securitize issues by declaring something – a referent object – existentially threatened" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 36).

[vii] "Audience – those securitizing act attempts to convince to accept exceptional procedures because of the specific nature of some issue" (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 1998: 41).

[viii] It is beyond any doubt that as the main inspiration for assuming this kind of attitude concerning security Weaver took John L.Austin`s theory of speech acts. Main idea of this theory is that certain statements do not describe things, tangible reality. Instead, with these statements particular actions are being performed (like betting, making a promise), and as such, they can not be assessed true or false. Meaning of these statements lies in their usage, and not in something we define according to what would be best.

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