

Oleg Gaidaeu,
“The Theory of Securitization: Origins, Evolution, Current State”

A dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Sciences
at St. Petersburg State University

Review by Professor Lassi Heininen

This dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Sciences is an interesting exercise to describe and understand the theory of ‘securitization’, originated by the Copenhagen School, and discourses around that. It is an analytical piece of text with a thorough search, and a holistic and informative description on relevant discourses on the securitization theory and modern security studies in general. The theme is scientifically fascinating and challenging, politically it is relevant and sensitive. Several authors, many of them members of different schools of thought are reviewed and quoted by the doctoral candidate, indeed there are reviews and citations on a large number of publications (books, articles), ie. references from relevant literature on the ‘securitization’ theory and international security studies. This rich description on large literature on security is also discussed and analyzed thoroughly, and well-thought discussion in each chapter is the best part of the dissertation.

The dissertation fulfills what the title promises, as it describes the origins, evolution and current state of the theory of ‘securitization’ (by the Copenhagen School), as well as discusses competing trends of thought and relevant issues in the theory (by the Paris School, post-Copenhagen School). The study’s object, subject (substance), purpose and chronological framework are clear. Six objectives and list of stated arguments about the scientific novelty of the study, though with high numbers, make sense. The methodological basis on the ‘post-Kuhnian sociology of science (by Buzan and Hansen), with an essence to explore the ‘securitization’ theory as a dynamically changing field of academic knowledge, is well argued and implemented.

The dissertation’s structure is logical, though each chapter is independent, which is understandable as they contain material previously published in peer-reviewed articles. Chapter I, as a core of the dissertation describes with details the origins, emergence and evolution of the theory of ‘securitization’ by the Copenhagen School, and its premises. The description is analytical and reveals well the emergence and evolution of the theory. As the focus of security study, either the main role of language, or that of social, historical, cultural, political contexts is largely discussed. It is easy to agree that “security is more than just a word” (p. 28), though a speech act as a discourse practice matters, when interpreted as an action, as it has its failures. Discussion about ‘security’ vis-a-vis ‘insecurity’, threats vis-a-vis challenges, “less security, more politics” is the core of security studies in general, as well as it explains the “three basic principles on which the securitization process is founded” (p. 41): survival, urgency, intersubjectivity.

Followed from this, the dissertation reveals that the founders of the Copenhagen School define security “as a discourse practice [...] in which elites [...] legitimize the right to emergency and decisive action” (p. 34), and keep the state as a central element of the theory (p. 40). Unlike, ‘societal security (dilemma)’ and ecological issues are briefly noted. The doctoral candidate concludes that the securitization theory “does not significantly change the overall picture in comparison to traditional approaches”, though its use has “certain advantages”, such as a more-depth study of cases, and puts emphasis on intra-state political dynamics influencing security decision-making (p. 53-54). Finally, it is easy to agree that the securitization theory has an

“enormous impact on the whole discipline of international security studies” (p. 55), even too much so.

Chapter II broadens the scope by bringing the research approaches and members (though not necessary consider themselves as members) of the so-called Paris School on security and its distinguishing features, in particular how this School contributes to the securitization theory. Interestingly, Bigo criticizes the theory too traditional, and that classical concepts (sovereignty, security, etc.) require a radical revision, when the “transnationalization of security issues” is a major trend (p. 59). The Paris School’s second distinguishing feature challenges the interpretation of security as a speech act by bringing in a “set of extra-linguistic devices and practices broadly concerned with controlling and regulating the fluid character of life” (p. 64). Bigo and Huysmans contribute the theory by focusing on the domains of insecurity, an array of securitizing techniques, intensifying insecurity, and by very relevant enemy construction – which have had little attention previously. The conclusion of Chapter II, including Figure 5, is analytical summary of the intellectual tradition, established by Bigo and Huysmans, as a “critique of contemporary neoliberal society as a whole that generates and reproduces such security technologies and practices” (p. 95) for EU migration / anti-terrorism policies.

Chapter III focuses on one of the main methodological approaches of the securitization theory, a role of language vis-a-vis that of social, historical, cultural, political contexts. Here ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’ are the competing trends of thought. The doctoral candidate introduces, with details and several figures, a few researchers, whom are said to play a “decisive role in shaping the foundations of the externalist trend of thought in ST” like for example, Balzacq by defining securitization as a strategic practice (p. 98-99). This is a rich review of large literature which however makes the field of security studies even more fragmented. Here Eriksson’s criticism that by dividing security into sectors does not fit with the research perspective of the theory is logical. The end of Chapter III consists of an analytical discussion by the candidate, again another readable part of the dissertation. Yes, it is not possible to answer “unambiguously” to the question, which one - internalism or externalism - is “more promising in both theoretical and practical terms” (p 137). Indeed, security consisted of psychological aspects, such as fear, senses, interpretations, which are not possible to measure – as Westing (1989) puts it “security is a legitimate search for almost everything”.

Chapter IV on the normative and ethical issues in the securitization theory consists of the respondent’s own thinking. This is based on the review on securitization literature already known in other chapters of the dissertation, and illustrated by several figures also compiled by the doctoral candidate. The substantial discussion is interactive recognizing the ideas and arguments of various scholars who have contributed the securitization theory and security studies in general. When reading this chapter the discussion on social and political role(s) of the experts in securitization theory, including three generations of research and two groups of scholars, much occupies the attention, as it can be applied generally in security studies.

Finally, there are five main conclusions illustrated by Figure 29, which are according to the review and discussion. As the fifth conclusion sums “securitization in fact [...] can be as much for the benefit as for the harm of the referent object of security” (p. 190). It is all about whose point of view it is looked from, and security for whom.

The study has only a few weaknesses: The first one is that there is neither a research question per se, though it includes many questions, in particular in the end of Chapter IV, and even in Conclusion. Nor it has a hypothesis. The both are usually required in a doctoral dissertation. Secondly, when being descriptive, without a research question and based on articles, a dissertation

is easily with a lack of a holistic analysis by the candidate. This could be seen as a weakness of this dissertation, too. There is, however, a short analysis in the end of each chapter, which are with well-thought discussion, as mentioned earlier. Instead / in addition of this, it would be a benefit for the dissertation to have an analytical discussion in a special chapter, where to apply, not any more to review, the large number of research and discussions.

Thirdly, though the dissertation covers many years from 1983 to the present, it is influenced by a lack of a sense of history. As Chapter I notices, there was a debate around the concept of security before 1983, and in addition to 'energy security'. There were also several discourses on security trying to search for an alternative definition to unilateral, competitive and military-based national security. Among them the concepts of 'common security' and 'comprehensive security' by independent UN reports on the 1980s, those of 'environmental security' and 'civil / civic security', and finally 'human security' launched by UN report in 1994. For example, the comprehensive security concept is relevant from both empirical and theoretical perspectives, as well as interesting from historiographical point of view. Thus, when listing Western literature on the 'securitization' theory and its discourses it would make sense briefly to mention and refer some of them.

Fourthly, as minor comment concerning "critical risk studies", the theory of 'risk society' (by Beck) would earn a brief mention. It would help to differentiate a 'risk' from a 'threat', both relevant terms in security studies and from point of view of 'securitization'. The conclusion by the doctoral candidate that it is not possible to answer "unambiguously" to the question which of the trends is more promising. Behind is the nature of security consisted of psychological aspects, such as fear and threat, which are not possible to measure, unlike a risk is.

More interestingly, the dissertation earns a few substantial comments based on (critical) security studies as contributions to future discussion on the 'securitization' theory and international security studies in general:

First, about an 'agency' / actors of security. The questions of "who are the key actors?", "how do different actors represent security?" (p. 158), "security for whom?" are the most relevant questions in security studies. As agency or ownership determines, and reveals, whose security / security from whose perspective is taken into consideration, ie. aimed to be secured. It is well argued that according to the theory of 'securitization' (by Buzan and Waever / the Copenhagen School) the state is the most important actor and central element. Though a "three-tiered security: individual, national and international" (p. 29) is mentioned, security is defined by the founders of the securitization theory as a "discursive practise [...] in which elites [...] legitimize the right to emergency and decisive action" (p. 34), and the state is kept as a central element of the theory (p. 40). Thus the theory, in addition of having an enormous impact on the discipline, has an "elitist approach and state-centrism" (p. 56), which is also criticized by Bigo and that classical concepts, such as sovereignty, security, require a radical revision.

That "securitization is primarily constituted by the daily routines of so-called 'security-professionals'" (p. 60), or as Bigo puts it applying Wendt that security is "what security professionals make of it" (p. 71). Further, a way seeking "to monopolize their right to define threats and exclude other actors from other social fields" (p. 70) is true in our modern societies and in different political systems. It is, however, not only about everyday security-professionals (policemen, custom authorities, diplomats, soldiers). As "the primary role is played by state elites who decide on the issues *ex nihilo*" (p. 85), it is more about a national security elite of each state consisted of a few politicians and civil servants due to their formal position (president, prime minister, foreign minister, heads of power ministries), a few CEOs of big companies & banks, leading generals, intelligence officers). It is interesting that though state elites and other security

professionals are mentioned, the Copenhagen School neither discuss 'national security elite' nor analysis on its role and importance.

=> This leads me to my first question to the candidate: What is / could be the reason for this, and is this relevant? What is your interpretation of a national security elite and its importance?

Second, as related to the previous comment. 'Societal (security) dilemma' is said to be a theoretical innovation of Copenhagen School, and also "the idea of multiple referents of security", or "the dialects of security", that security means different for each sector of a society (economic, social, military, etc.) (p. 44). This sectoral approach is problematic as it makes security - of an individual, a society, a nation, the world - divided and fragmented, and does not make easy to have a holistic approach of security. Nor it defines the environment as a focus, as Waever's response on sudden 'environmental awakening' and raise of ecological issues and "environmental securitization" (due to the fall of the Berlin wall!) (p. 43) is much opposite. Actually, many, if not most, of the aspects of societal security were discussed by the discourse of comprehensive security, and that of socio-economic / societal security. Furthermore, this discourse, as well as critical security studies in general, argues that state-centrism in security (studies) and traditional, national security are too narrow approaches. Global environmental challenges have brought up non-military risks and threats relevant to peoples' and societies' security, and they threaten even national security and state sovereignty.

=> This leads to another question: Why the securitization theory / the Copenhagen School was / is unable to recognize wicked environmental problems as relevant security issues and threats? And what is the relations between the securitization theory and comprehensive security, including the concepts of environmental and human security?

Third, about a 'school of thought'. Interestingly, Huysmans "does not consider himself a member of any of the schools" (p. 75), the Paris School is difficult to perceive "as a coherent intellectual tradition because the scholars developed their own conceptual apparatuses" (p. 188), and the term "post-Copenhagen School", as a "new zone of intellectual activity in the field of security studies" (p. 97), was reintroduced later by Stritzel. The study is, however, all about schools of thought, from the Copenhagen School to the Paris School and the post-Copenhagen School. Following from this, a reader is easily confused by these different schools, in particular as there are scholars whom are put into some school, even they state that they do not consider being member of any. This puts to think if these schools are like boxes, where all scholars should be fitting into, or like stamps, which each scholar carries on her / his forehead.

=> This leads to another question: Is this dissertation focusing on schools of thoughts, or founders of schools of thought, or theoretical findings as contributions by schools of thought? And do we need all these schools, and if, what for?

Fourth, the discussion on social and political role(s) of the experts in securitization theory, including three generations of research and two groups of scholars, in Chapter IV earns a comment.

Interestingly, this approach could be applied generally in security studies, and also when defining national security and security in global context on the one hand. On the other hand, it is a part of the discourse on the social relevance of science, implemented by the interplay between science and politics. It argues that "science cannot exist outside politics" (p. 179), and that science has its autonomy / independence. Here the most influential means to implement this relevance is an open dialogue, as an inclusive speech act, where the participants' approach is committed to a real dialogue which is no battlefield but with mutual respect focusing on an issue domain (Kornprobst 2009; Heininen 2015).

=> This leads to the last question to the doctoral candidate: What kind of role the social relevance of science, and that of independence of science, play in discourses of the securitization theory, and are they valued? Would a dialogue, as described here, fulfill the criteria of security as a speech act?

All in all, the dissertation “The Theory of Securitization: Origins, Evolution, Current State” by Oleg Gaidarov fulfills well the criteria of a scientific qualification for the degree of Candidate of Sciences at St. Petersburg State University. It contains a “solution to a scientific problem that is important for the development of the relevant branch of knowledge”, as well as new scientific results and recommendations. And, it is with a theoretical nature. In particular, the study’s essence to explore the ‘securitization’ theory “as a dynamically changing field of academic knowledge, inextricably linked to the transformation of international relations” (p. 12) is well done.

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