

# Transnational Threats and Reformulating Security in the UN

*Dagmar Rychnovská*

Over the past two decades, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has increasingly dealt with new thematic issues and, particularly, with so-called “transnational security challenges.” What implications does this trend have? Focusing on conceptual dimensions, this article analyses whether, and how, the inclusion of transnational threats on the UNSC’s agenda affects its understanding of security. This work approaches the dynamics of threat politics in the UNSC from the perspective of securitisation theory and argues that security is reformulated in the process of securitisation. Deploying the examples of the securitisation of terrorism and AIDS, this work assesses the dynamics of the (attempted) reinterpretation of security, highlights its effects, and discusses what further consequences and challenges this trend may produce.

*Keywords: UN, UNSC, security, transnational threats, securitisation, terrorism, AIDS*

## Introduction

The UN was established towards the end of WWII as an international organisation whose mission was to prevent another destructive war—a goal that its predecessor, the League of Nations had not fulfilled. Given the changing nature of international politics and the UN’s expanding membership, the organisation’s priorities, tasks and competences have been transformed. However its core agenda – maintaining international peace and security – remains intact. Still, the very understanding of what constitutes international peace and security, what may threaten these lofty goals and how threats to them should be prevented has undergone significant evolution. Over the past two



*Scan this article onto your mobile device*

decades, two particular and not unrelated trends may be identified in this regard: the UN's attention shift from interstate to intrastate conflicts, and the new thematic issues that have been brought to the UNSC as a body responsible for UN security politics. These issues, which have been addressed according to the logic of security, include terrorism, piracy, organised crime, infectious diseases, environmental degradation and the security of marginalised groups.<sup>1</sup>

Dagmar  
Rychnovská

Though more recent and less settled, the move to broaden the UNSC's agenda is thought to be significant since it affects both the UN's internal functioning and its cooperation with member states and other actors. By emphasising new threats that are often understood as transnational – i.e. as phenomena 'driven by non-state actors (e.g. terrorists), activities (e.g. global economic behaviour), or forces (e.g. microbial mutations, earthquakes)<sup>2</sup> – the UNSC may better mobilise the international community and call for coordinated action. At the same time, since many new threats have a non-military character, this trend underscores the UNSC's changing perception of peace.<sup>3</sup> Here, peace is understood as not only the absence of armed conflict (negative peace), but also the achievement of broader structural conditions enabling friendly relations among states and a conflict-free society (positive peace).<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the logic behind the UNSC actions is transformed from reactionary to more proactive, and it ceases to operate merely in emergency mode. By propounding long-term policies and prescribing new measures to be implemented by member states in national law, the UNSC also begins to act as a UN legislative power (rather than only in its traditional executive role) and, thus, to diminish the role of the General Assembly.<sup>5</sup> Since the UNSC is a *status quo* body, the move to reformulate security marks a dramatic shift from prior practice.

This work contends that the internal dynamics of these developments call for attention. Looking at issues through the lens of constructivist security studies, it asks whether, and how, the inclusion of transnational threats on the UNSC's agenda has challenged and transformed its understanding of security. Drawing on the securitisation theory developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies<sup>6</sup> and its recent advances,<sup>7</sup> I argue that "security" does not have any universal fixed meaning but rather is a concept which is constantly being reinterpreted as it is used in social interactions. The most significant changes to understandings of security may be observed in the process

of securitisation whereby a particular problem is brought within the security agenda and formulated as a threat. Securitisation is, then, a specific political action in which a securitising actor identifies that an issue or condition is a threat to a valued referent object and calls for the use of extraordinary means in order to tackle that threat. If this securitising move is accepted by the relevant audience, the issue shifts from normal politics to the realm of exceptional politics, enabling the use of extraordinary measures. As a consequence, successful securitisation not only changes the power and competences of securitising actors, but also reconstitutes the meaning of the issue—that is, the way it is conceptualised, linked to other issues and embedded in dominant security narratives.<sup>8</sup>

All this suggests that if we want to uncover whether and how the meaning of security is evolving in the UNSC, it will be useful to analyse how the UNSC interprets international peace and security and threats to these goals in practice. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the introduction of new issues onto the UNSC agenda. A number of pressing questions arise: Are these new threats seen as compatible with the UNSC's understanding of threats to international peace and security? Why or why not? Does the UNSC explicitly discuss what "international peace and security" means? Is the new interpretation of security disputed within the UNSC?<sup>9</sup>

This research focuses empirically on two new transnational threats which were included on the UNSC's agenda: the issue of terrorism in 2001 (leading to UNSC Resolution 1373) and that of HIV/AIDS in 2000 (prompting UNSC Resolution 1308). These cases have been selected for analysis for several reasons. First, the era of the early 2000s was marked by the UNSC's increasing emphasis on transnational threats, resulting in the adoption of several non-traditional resolutions dealing with new thematic issues.<sup>10</sup> Second, both cases concluded with the adopting of a UNSC resolution that formulated a new understanding of the securitised issue; both might, thus, challenge the broader interpretation of international peace and security. Third, both securitisations were initiated and promoted by the same actor—the United States, which had the control and power of a securitising actor. Despite these similarities, however, the reinterpretation of security caused by each issue's inclusion on the UNSC agenda was very different. While the case of terrorism prompted a highly successful, unchallenged securitisation, the attempt to securitise AIDS was more problematic and dis-

puted. This work's comparative design, thus, allows us to study the different dynamics at work in the UNSC's reinterpretation of security through its deliberations on new security issues and their relevance to international peace and security.

This work proceeds as follows: first, the theoretical aspects of the UNSC's construction of security are discussed. Second, two case studies are set out, dealing respectively with the construction of terrorism and of HIV/AIDS as threats in the UNSC setting. Third, the findings are discussed and put in the broader context of UN security politics. Finally, I offer some concluding observations.

*Reformulating Security in the UN*

### Constructing Security in the UN Security Council

According to the UN Charter, the UNSC's responsibilities are to identify 'the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression' and 'make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken,' even extending to the collective use of military force.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of international law, these concepts are very open-ended and their interpretation, thus, depends on the UNSC itself. There are no specific definitions of these terms in the UN Charter, and turning to other sources of law, very little International Court of Justice jurisprudence addresses these issues.<sup>12</sup> In fact, since the end of the Cold War – and especially since the UN engaged in the war on terror – the key concept "threat to peace" has been significantly reformulated. The UNSC's emphasis has shifted from international (interstate) to internal (intrastate) affairs, and more attention has been paid to threats that go beyond the topic of political violence.<sup>13</sup>

Rejecting the idea that the UNSC agenda is predetermined by a particular notion of what international peace and security mean – or should be – and, thus, which threats the UNSC should deal with, I would suggest that we look at how the security concept is reinterpreted through securitisation in empirical contexts. The Copenhagen School argues that any issue can become a security issue if it is presented as such by a securitising actor and accepted by a relevant audience.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it may be contended that securitisation not only constructs the meaning of a concrete threat, but also profoundly affects the social context in which it is embedded. Successful securitisation can empower securitising actors – and possibly others as well – and improve their ability to influence how meaning is constructed in the

given socio-political setting. Alternatively, securitisation changes the socio-linguistic context, i.e. the system of meaning (i.e. security narratives, frameworks etc.) in which specific conceptions of threat and security are entrenched.<sup>15</sup> The concept of security may be thought of as one which is constantly being reconstituted as it evolves over time and reaches new actors and discursive contexts. Thus, it makes no sense to search for an ultimate or even universal logic of security in either specific empirical contexts or theoretical terms since the meaning of security is always contextual and changing, and as such, it must be understood in a process-oriented and empirically informed way.<sup>16</sup>

To analyse this process, we can focus on speaker-listener interactions in a specific empirical area and study them with the help of the securitisation framework; according to the latter, a securitising actor proposes a new concept of a threat and the relevant audience accepts or rejects this move.<sup>17</sup> In the context of the UNSC, the interactions between the securitising actor and the audience are institutionalised through official Council deliberations initiated by UNSC members or other relevant UN actors.

The outcome of these debates takes the form of resolutions (or other official documents) which indicate whether, and how, the audience has accepted the securitising move and the resulting reinterpretation of threats and security. Once accepted by the UNSC, the new understanding of threats and security presumably affects further SC actions both in terms of the powers and competences gained by actors during the securitisation and the images of security issues constituted in these debates.<sup>18</sup>

This study analyses these dynamics in practice and looks at how the meaning of security is constituted and reconstituted through the securitisation of transnational threats in the UNSC. Concretely, the analysis focuses on the following concerns:

*Securitisation context:* What is the broader socio-political and socio-linguistic context of the securitisation? Which actors are involved in the securitisation, and how do they take part?

*Securitisation process:* How does the securitising actor present whatever constitutes the threat as well as the referent object? How does it depict what must be done about the threat, who must take action and the urgency and seriousness of the threat? How does the audience accept these moves?

*Securitisation effects:* What are the immediate as well as the more long-term effects of the securitisation in terms of policy change (i.e. security practices)? What are these effects in terms of discursive change (i.e. the concept of security)?

While the discussion proceeds according to this scheme, the main emphasis is on the third part— i.e. the issue of how UNSC members, as the securitisation audience, accept the concept of a threat and its relevance and appropriateness to the UNSC agenda. This securitisation process is, thus, traced over two case studies: the securitisation of transnational terrorism in 2001 and that of HIV/AIDS in 2000.<sup>19</sup>

Dagmar  
Rychnovská

## The Case of Transnational Terrorism: A Successful Extension of Security

### *Securitisation Context*

The issue of terrorism has a long history in the UN: during the Cold War it was dealt with by the UNGA and seen as a specific crime whose roots and motives varied. In the 1990s, the UNSC increased its activities in this field and reinforced the perception of terrorism as a state-sponsored and state-based criminal activity. However, the failure to suppress terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, which had become less dependent on state support, motivated the UNSC to adopt a more comprehensive approach to terrorism.<sup>20</sup>

The result of this change was Resolution 1269, which represented a substantial shift in the understanding of terrorism: it depicted terrorism as a general concern, condemned all terrorist acts regardless of their motivation and manifestation and highlighted the importance of the issue by recognising that some terrorist acts ‘could threaten international peace and security.’<sup>21</sup> After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, American and other diplomats urged their governments to call for a resolute response.<sup>22</sup> Terrorist attacks and terrorism in general were discussed at the UNSC meeting on 12 September when the UNSC adopted Resolution 1368. The counterterrorism strategy was further specified in the comprehensive Resolution 1373, which was developed by the US, co-sponsored by the UK and adopted at a meeting on 28 September that year.

### *Securitisation Process*

CEJISS  
2/2015

The securitising move was made in a very broad and abstract manner. In initiating the securitisation, the US representative did not elaborate on the nature of the referent object, but instead stressed that the terrorist attacks also affected other states. In his words, the attack 'was an assault not just on the United States, but on all of us who support peace and democracy and the values for which the United Nations stands.'<sup>23</sup>

The audience condemned the terrorist attacks and expressed their support for further actions by the Security Council. The attacks of 9/11 were said to target humanity, democracy, freedom and the values shared by the UN members, but some also presented them as a threat to the domestic order. When it came to interpreting the nature of the threat, most speakers depicted terrorism in a very general way and linked it discursively to other security issues. Terrorism was presented as an unjustifiable phenomenon; Ireland, for instance, suggested that 9/11 was an 'attack of barbarism and evil against innocent people.'<sup>24</sup> Even more importantly, 9/11 attacks were interpreted as an example of a new type of terrorism which was global in scale and could take any form. For instance, the Ukrainian representative noted that 'new definitions, terms and strategies have to be developed for the new realities'<sup>25</sup> while Russia described terror as a 'plague of the twenty-first century.'<sup>26</sup>

The US speaker did not present the suggested security measures in detail, but only demonstrated the clear determination of his country to 'win the war against terrorism,' while making 'no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour them'<sup>27</sup> and calling on members to bring the perpetrators to justice. These suggestions were repeatedly approved though only briefly discussed by the audience. That audience expressed its solidarity with the US, and all speakers vocalised the support of their countries for any further UNSC action in this respect even if such support took a rather abstract form. Further, Russia and China raised the issue of existing international conventions against terrorism and argued for their full implementation. They also pointed out that these conventions should lead to not just the suppression, but also the prevention of terrorism. For Russia, the Council's action represented a 'resolve of Council members to do all they can to leave not one terrorist act unpunished and to increase efforts to prevent and end terrorism.'<sup>28</sup> China was more

circumspect in its wording about what should be done and instead proclaimed its support for 'the United Nations in strengthening its work in preventing and combating terrorism [... and in the] practical implementation of the relevant international conventions against terrorism.'<sup>29</sup>

As regards the perceived seriousness and urgency of the situation, the audience broadly accepted the view that the threat from terrorist attacks was exceptional. The French ambassador, for instance, described the situation as a 'time of trial'<sup>30</sup> while the Jamaican representative even noted that the attacks had 'plunged our entire world into an unprecedented period of peril, fear and uncertainty.'<sup>31</sup> Some speakers indicated that they saw terrorist attacks as comparable to acts of military aggression in the traditional sense: for instance, the Russian ambassador proclaimed them 'an unprecedented act of aggression of international terrorism,'<sup>32</sup> and the representative from Mauritius stressed that they had taken 'the lives of thousands of innocent victims, including women and children.'<sup>33</sup> Therefore, despite the many unknowns around the threat – or rather, the *potential* threat since the UNSC sought to address terrorism as a more general issue – the way that it was discussed by decision-makers showed that they were convinced of its relevance and the urgent need to formulate and implement collective countermeasures.

In general, this securitisation was very effective, appealing persuasively to all UNSC members. That audience accepted the extended conception of terrorism as a threat to the whole international community. They agreed that this complex threat must be responded to collectively through the prevention and suppression of terrorism. They also shared a sense of the urgency and seriousness of the threat.

### *Securitisation Effects*

Adopted unanimously, without any abstentions, the two resolutions on terrorism generated a new understanding of terrorism as a threat to international peace and security. As such, they triggered an international counterterrorism regime. Interestingly, there was no formal discussion in the Council before the passing of the landmark Resolution 1373, and allegedly no significant background negotiations were held about the content of this resolution.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the language it used, the conceptual changes it made and the policies it designed, Res-

olution 1373 clearly deviated from the UNSC's prior security discourse. The resolution cited terrorism in general as a threat to international peace and security; it approved the use of self-defence against terrorist attacks and authorised several exceptional measures including the obligation of member states to incorporate a variety of new and extraordinary policies (e.g. the criminalisation of terrorism and its funding, targeting of suspected terrorists with economic sanctions and travel bans, obligatory extradition of terrorists, etc.) into their domestic law. It also established the Counter-Terrorism Committee, with a mandate to monitor and support the implementation of these measures at the level of the states. How long the measures should be in force and how they could be reviewed were not discussed in the resolution. Given both its quasi-legislative form and its unusual content, it was, thus, unprecedented and a landmark in the politics of the UNSC and the UN in general.

Turning to the long-term evolution of understandings of terrorism, Resolutions 1368 and 1373 attached a specific meaning to the concept – as a global, uncontrollable and increasingly dangerous phenomenon – which, in fact, fits well with the progressivist narrative about terrorism's changing nature and the international order that the UN represents.<sup>35</sup> The repeated classification of terrorists as extremists or fanatics who exploit the advantages of the modern world was also consistent with suggestions to “fight” the conditions which presumably enable the planning and organising of terrorist activities rather than considering other potential countermeasures, such as negotiations, deterrent acts or addressing the root causes of terrorism.<sup>36</sup> This approach contrasts with the earlier stance which dealt with terrorism on an ad hoc basis, focusing only on some of its aspects and mostly targeting its state sponsors.<sup>37</sup>

Seen more broadly, the UNSC's involvement in emerging international counterterrorism allowed it to gain new powers – particularly at the expense of the General Assembly – through the establishment, for example, of several expert bodies that maintained terrorist blacklists and decided on new counterterrorism measures. Terrorism, thus, became a very powerful buzzword in the UN, and many other issues (e.g. proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organised crime and drug trafficking) have since been securitised in the UNSC based on their links to terrorism.

## The Case of AIDS: An Unsuccessful Reformulation of Security

### *Securitisation Context*

*Dagmar  
Rychnovská*

In 2000, the UNSC, for the first time, addressed an issue that had previously been linked instead to the politics of development and health: the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In contrast with the securitising of terrorism in 2001, this was the first appearance of the AIDS topic on the UNSC's agenda. The issue had already been politicised in the UN and dealt with by several of its agencies in 1990s, but without much success. At the end of that decade, Peter Piot, then head of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), took over the agenda, seeking to gain political attention for the pandemic by connecting it with a new narrative in US policy circles about 'global emerging infectious diseases' as a national security threat.<sup>38</sup> The characterisation of AIDS as a threat to social and economic stability was accepted within the wider network of relevant UN agencies<sup>39</sup> though the representatives of states with the highest AIDS prevalence rates were more sceptical about this securitisation.<sup>40</sup>

The securitisation in the UNSC was initiated primarily by Richard Holbrooke, a US diplomat. He was later joined by Al Gore, the then US vice-president and presidential candidate as well as Kofi Annan, the then UN secretary-general, Peter Piot and other AIDS experts.<sup>41</sup> The UNSC debate on HIV/AIDS took place in January 2000 and was followed by a meeting in June 2000. It was at that meeting that the UNSC passed Resolution 1308 specifically addressing the topic.

### *Securitisation Process*

The securitisation was promoted by a variety of securitising actors, who, in fact, offered two different takes on the issue. On the one hand, Holbrooke, then the US ambassador, sought to present HIV/AIDS as a threat to 'world security' under a 'new and extensive definition' of security.<sup>42</sup> In his view, "security" denoted not only security from 'loss of life and the ravages of war,' but also from 'constant fear and degradation, and from a loss of the quality of life and liberty of spirit that should belong to all.'<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, other securitising actors

linked the threat of HIV/AIDS to security's traditional referent object—the state—through the supposedly negative effects of the pandemic on economic and social stability. This was in turn, assumed to endanger the political stability of African states, where the pandemic was most severe. In this vein, Al Gore argued that

[f]or the nations of sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is not just a humanitarian crisis. It is a security crisis, because it threatens not only individual citizens but the institutions that define and defend the character of a society.<sup>44</sup>

The representatives of some African countries also stressed this negative effect of HIV/AIDS on the social and economic stability of their states and highlighted the danger that the pandemic would hamper the progress that had been made so far. However, these arguments about the far-reaching consequences of the AIDS epidemic could not sway this audience. Most UNSC members did not support the re-conception of security suggested by Holbrooke, and some even questioned the empirical grounds for his argument.

In the ensuing debate, the securitising actors therefore narrowed down the referent object and adjusted descriptions of the threat so as to link the problem of HIV/AIDS more directly to the traditional concept of security.<sup>45</sup> Here, they pointed to the peacekeeping operations whose efficiency would diminish if soldiers began to suffer from the disease. The success of the new argument was, however, doubtful since most speakers continued to address the more complex consequences of the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and not only its ties to peacekeeping. For instance, several representatives (from France, Jamaica, Namibia and Ukraine) highlighted the danger that the pandemic posed to the economic and social security of states, and some (from Bangladesh, Netherlands, Tunisia, UK and Zimbabwe) extended this argument to the allegedly negative consequences for the political stability of African states and their ability to resist violence. Canada reiterated its long-term support for a widening security agenda and a more human-centric understanding of security but also recognised the situation's destabilising effect on the stability and functioning of African societies. Argentina was more direct in its support for the draft resolution; it accepted that the spread of HIV/AIDS had a negative effect on African security by reducing the effectiveness of peacekeepers, and thus, their ability to stabilise conflict and post-conflict areas. At the same time, speakers from other states (Netherlands, Uganda and

Ukraine) challenged this argument, stressing that the roots of the AIDS pandemic were more complex and linking them to issues such as poverty, gender discrimination and modernisation.

As regards suggested measures, the speakers' opinions differed little. At the first UNSC meeting on HIV/AIDS, the securitising actors gave only a very vague picture of what should be done about the security issue. They emphasised the need to tackle AIDS domestically through education and awareness-raising among the population and illustrated the success of that approach with the example of some African states.<sup>46</sup> Later, as the focus shifted to the danger of AIDS for peacekeepers, their testing, education and training were the main policy initiatives suggested to solve the security problem. Faced with the concerns of some member states about the intervention in domestic affairs, Holbrooke had to reject a proposal for a compulsory database about peacekeepers;<sup>47</sup> he stressed that preventive measures should not infringe on the sovereignty of states.<sup>48</sup> There was relatively wide acceptance of the main argument about the need for a preventive training programme for peacekeepers to be coordinated by international bodies and other member states. Representatives from Canada, Jamaica and Ukraine also claimed that the UNSC might help suppress the spread of AIDS by preventing and stabilising violent conflicts—that is, in line with its traditional security politics and without expanding its competences. Many representatives (from Bangladesh, France, Mali, Namibia, Tunisia, Ukraine and Zimbabwe) also underscored the importance of better access to medical treatment and anti-AIDS drugs. Though these insights were not reflected in the final resolution, they showed this audience's interest in discussing and politicising the problem of AIDS more generally—and not only in relation to peacekeeping and security.

We can see, thus, that the audience was not really convinced that HIV/AIDS was a security problem. The securitising actors—and Holbrooke and Gore in particular—tried to liken the problem's relevance to that of traditional security issues by constituting the problem as a 'global challenge' and a threat to 'global security' and the 'world community' and calling for a 'war against AIDS.'<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, this militarised language did not resonate with the audience and most speakers were quite cautious when describing the negative effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The importance of the issue was demonstrated with many statistics about infection rates among the African population. However, while the audience expressed its concern about these neg-

ative trends, it did not accept arguments about the problem's urgency and global relevance or the need to apply any possible measures, including monitoring infection rates among international peacekeeping personnel.

CEJISS  
2/2015

### *Securitisation Effects*

After several months of intensive diplomatic negotiations and the mobilising of other international and UN agencies, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1308, which recognised that 'the HIV/AIDS pandemic, if unchecked, may pose a risk to stability and security.'<sup>50</sup> The spread of the disease was described as a potential 'risk to stability and security' with 'a uniquely devastating impact on all sectors and levels of society' and a 'potential damaging impact [...] on the health of international peacekeeping personnel, including support personnel.'<sup>51</sup> Since the UNSC had agreed to support domestic policy measures to tackle the AIDS problem, the resolution encouraged member states to prevent the spread of the disease to military personnel by reducing the risk behaviour of peacekeepers (through education, training, voluntary testing, counselling and treatment) and incorporating similar measures in the preventive training of UN peacekeepers. Although Russia and China refused to take part in the discussion, the resolution was finally adopted unanimously without any abstentions.

The securitisation of AIDS had additional implications notwithstanding research findings that subsequent UN debates on AIDS were not dominated by the language of security but rather by that of development.<sup>52</sup> For one thing, tackling AIDS became an important policy area in the UN (see, e.g., the Millennium Development Goals), bringing more attention and resources to UNAIDS. Kofi Annan included the UNSC narrative on AIDS in several official reports. In the *In Larger Freedom* report, for instance, he asserted that AIDS was not only a public health problem, but also a cause of social and economic instability since it endangers economic development and 'weakens governance and security structures, posing a further threat'; as such, he argued, it 'demands an exceptional response.'<sup>53</sup> It must be reiterated, however, that the credibility of this narrative has since been challenged, and the UNSC's perception of AIDS as a security issue has changed.<sup>54</sup>

## Characteristics of the New Threats and the Reformulation of Security

While scholars and analysts broadly share a view of the changing conception of security in the UNSC, how is this evolution perceived by insiders? Do UNSC members—the entities who make concrete decisions about issues of international peace and security—see these decisions as contributing to the changing understanding of peace and security? Do they explicitly discuss whether and why changes are made? And do they reflect on those changes?

*Dagmar  
Rychnovská*

In terms of the re-conception of security brought about by these two securitisations, our analysis shows that it was possible to expand the scope of threats on the UNSC's agenda so long as these threats were understood as credible and relevant for the UNSC. For instance, the effective securitisation of terrorism was justified based on the changing nature of transnational terrorism and the need to address this new type of threat in a more complex way. In contrast, AIDS was not perceived by this audience as a serious issue posing a direct and powerful threat to security.

At the same time, the UNSC continued to understand international peace and security, the ultimate referent object of security, in a predominantly negative way—as the absence of political violence. Attempts to explicitly reformulate the values that the UNSC should protect were rejected by the audience, as the AIDS example shows. The UNSC's deliberations demonstrate that AIDS was only taken seriously when securitising actors reformulated the issue pragmatically as a threat to the economic, social and consequently political security of states (rather than a threat to human security), thus accommodating the audience's understanding of security.

The securitisation of terrorism was different in the sense that the problem was understood in a very general and expansive way, allowing for speakers' different interpretations of the referent object. While some used highly militarised language, others linked the problem to other values that should be protected—domestic political and economic stability, freedom, democracy and so on. Arguably, while the reformulation of the referent object was rejected in the securitisation of AIDS, the broadening of this object became possible in the context of the threat of transnational terrorism.

The inclusion of the transnational security issue on the UNSC's agenda also represented a challenge to the type of politics which the UNSC typically engages in. Both the securitisation of terrorism and the less successful securitisation of AIDS led the UNSC to adopt certain long-term preventive policy measures which apply regardless of the seriousness ascribed to a particular threat. These policies give new powers and competences to transnational actors controlled by or collaborating with the UNSC. They, thus, transform the UNSC's traditional role in the UN as well as in international politics. Concretely, the AIDS case shows us that even where an issue is not identified as a threat to international peace and security, dealing with it within the UNSC under security logic can make a difference in several ways: on the one hand, it may empower new actors and make them more credible. On the other, it can highlight and legitimise a particular understanding of the issue, which may then be constâcted as a more serious security threat. This can lay the ground for a future – and perhaps more effective – securitisation. Nevertheless, from the AIDS example, we can also see that where an issue is ascribed limited seriousness, this may cause the unconvinced audience and other relevant actors (other UN agencies, including the General Assembly and African states in the case of AIDS) to express concerns about the UNSC's expansion of its powers, assumption of the competences of other bodies and intervention in the domestic affairs of member states.<sup>55</sup>

Generally, UNSC debates focused on the nature of each particular threat, and thus, the question of countermeasures was not addressed in any complex way by either the securitising actor or the audience. In fact, there was no official UNSC debate at all before the adoption of the ground-breaking Resolution 1373, which introduced many revolutionary security measures. This raises serious questions about not just the role of backstage politics and “hidden” participants in the UNSC's policy-making, but also the legitimacy of these new policies and the UNSC's ability to reflect on the significance of the changes that it makes.

### **Conclusion: Implications for the Construction of New Threats in the Security Council**

This study has highlighted the tensions between the established security logic of UNSC politics and attempts being made to address new problems in international politics effectively. The UNSC has been

granted extraordinary powers so that it can deal with extraordinary problems, but can it adjust to the logic of new threats and risks? The counter-terrorist policies adopted by the UNSC after 9/11 show that this body is, in fact, capable of reformulating the notion of security at least in order to accommodate potential threats to international peace and security; it is also able to reshape the portfolio of its countermeasures. In contrast, in the debate about AIDS, the audience explicitly expressed its desire to restrict the UNSC's focus to conflict management and not resort to any "standard measures" that could interfere with member states' domestic politics. Securitisation theory would explain these developments based on the principle that it is only when an audience accepts an issue as an existential threat that a securitising actor is allowed to resort to any necessary (let alone extraordinary) means. Since the UNSC has a mandate to act in times of emergency, it may be argued that its involvement in "normal" politics is in fact even more exceptional than its authorisation of the use of force. In other words, practices such as the use of force, which may be exceptional from the point of view of member states, need not constitute exceptional practices at an institutional level within the UN.

Can the UNSC, then, change its understanding of security so as to address issues that require prevention and control predominantly through standard measures rather than by responding with extraordinary measures? The case studies examined here show that while it is certainly possible to change the UNSC's conception of security through the securitisation of new issues, there are many barriers regarding what can be said in the UNSC context and how this may be achieved. Institutional language is one of these key obstacles. As has been suggested, the UNSC is vested with extraordinary powers in the realm of international politics and its scope of action is therefore restricted to issues of international peace and security. Its responsibility is to identify threats to international peace and security; in doing so, it may act under Chapter VII and resort to collective sanctions to tackle those threats. To include a new issue on the UNSC's agenda, a securitising actor must use institutional security language, or as some have termed it, 'the grammar of security' based on the UN Charter.<sup>56</sup>

Framing a topic as something other than a threat to international peace and security may raise serious doubts about its appropriateness for the agenda, and thus, about the legitimacy of the UNSC's politics. At the same time, this problem has a policy dimension. Since in the

UNSC's socio-linguistic context, the discourse of security also very directly signals the discourse of exceptional politics, recognising an issue as a threat to peace may cause the UNSC to gradually bring the proposed countermeasures into the realm of extraordinary measures and ultimately to authorise the use of force. While the language of "normal politics" may be seen as inappropriate in the UNSC context, using security language opens up the Pandora's Box of exceptional politics and may effectively escalate securitisation towards militarisation. This suggests that the UNSC is ill-equipped to act other than according to the logic of security on which it was founded and which is anchored in the UN Charter. The UNSC's expansion of its sphere of action through the securitisation of terrorism may, thus, be ascribed to its ability to bring together the established notion of an existential threat with new measures of a non-exceptional nature. The conditions for such radical conceptual changes do not emerge often, but this does not mean that they cannot occur at all.

This raises further questions about efficiency and legitimacy. By getting involved in the governing of new transnational threats, the UNSC is doing far more than authorising exceptional measures in international politics. It is also helping to establish a particular global security agenda, giving voice to new actors, legitimising new security practices and a new logic of security governance and significantly broadening the policy area for its interventions in the domestic politics of member states. Nevertheless, the UNSC continues to justify these steps by way of traditional security optics based on the established logic of threats and the language of security. Such narrow security-driven rhetoric may, however, be blocking a comprehensive discussion of effective solutions to new problems. By highlighting only their security dimension, the UNSC may reinforce a misleading highly simplistic approach to complex issues, which, in fact, require complex solutions. There is, thus, a need for more in-depth discussions about not only the understanding of new threats, but also their appropriate solutions and the UNSC's role in designing them. The second challenge refers to the legitimacy of the UNSC's political involvement in these issues. The UNSC's competences are traditionally in the sphere of conflict management, and this has expanded to internal conflicts. Given the UN principle of non-intervention, any broadening of UNSC competences is potentially controversial. Acting on issues which are not even considered to be threats to international peace and security and designing new policies

and new modes of involvement in member states' internal affairs may be illegitimate conduct in the eyes of some members in the long run. Therefore, unless the UNSC explicitly redefines the concept of international peace and security and its powers to maintain this sphere, it is unlikely to deal effectively with new issues that require new solutions.

Dagmar  
Rychnovská



DAGMAR RYCHNOVSKA is affiliated to the Institute of Political Studies, Charles University. She can be reached at [rychnovska@fsv.cuni.cz](mailto:rychnovska@fsv.cuni.cz).

The author would like to thank Holger Stritzel, Tomáš Karásek and Jan Daniel for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper. The study was supported by Charles University, Prague, project GA UK No 536312.

## Notes

- 1 Thomas G. Weiss (2010), *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press. See chapter 6 for a discussion of these issues.
- 2 Peter Bergen and Laurie Garrett (2005), 'Report of the Working Group on State Security and Transnational Threats,' Princeton Project on National Security Papers, p.3, available at: <<http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/conferences/reports/fall/ssTT.pdf>> (accessed 17 April 2014).
- 3 Erika De Wet (2004), *The Chapter VII Powers of the United Nations Security Council*, Portland: Hart Publishing, p. 139.
- 4 Johan Galtung (1969), 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 6: 3.
- 5 See, e.g., Stefan Talmon (2005), 'The Security Council as World Legislature,' *American Journal of International Law*, 99: 1; Paul C. Szasz (2002), 'The Security Council Starts Legislating,' *American Journal of International Law*, 96: 4; Eric Rosand (2004), 'The Security Council as "Global Legislator": *Ultra Vires* or Ultra Innovative,' *Fordham International Law Journal*, 28: 3.
- 6 Ole Wæver (2005), 'Securitization and Desecuritization,' in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*, New York: Columbia University Press; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1998), *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, Colo., London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- 7 Holger Stritzel (2007), 'Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 13: 3; Holger Stritzel (2011), 'Security, the Translation,' *Security Dialogue* 42: 4-5.
- 8 Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998).
- 9 This study approaches these topics at a micro-level: it analyses the inter-

nal dynamics of changes in the meaning of “security” rather than stressing the broader socio-political context for these changes. Arguably, the explanatory power of that context is limited. For instance, the favourable post-Cold War international environment certainly helped “unblock” the SC and enabled more constActive international cooperation among the great powers; this did not, however, necessarily mean the reformulation and expansion of the Council’s agenda. Though some contextualising of debates is needed, I would suggest that the broader international context is actually reflected in deliberations over the interpretation of security and transnational threats.

- 10 Peter Wallensteen and Patrik Johansson (2004), ‘Security Council Decisions in Perspective,’ in David M. Malone (ed.), *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, p. 29.
- 11 Charter of the United Nations, (adopted 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945), I UNTS XVI.
- 12 See, e.g., Nigel D. White (1997), *Keeping the Peace: The United Nations and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 33-52.
- 13 Malcolm N. Shaw (2008), *International Law*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 1237.
- 14 Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998).
- 15 Stritzel (2007).
- 16 Stritzel (2011).
- 17 Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998).
- 18 For an extended discussion of how to approach this process both conceptually and methodologically within constActivist security studies, see Dagmar Rychnovská, ‘Securitisation and the Power of Threat Framing,’ *Perspectives* (forthcoming).
- 19 The securitisation literature does not deal directly with the securitisation of terrorism in the UN. For more theoretical discussions of the issue, see, e.g., Barry Buzan (2006), ‘Will the “Global War on Terrorism” Be the New Cold War?’ *International Affairs*, 82: 6; Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2009), ‘Macrosecritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory,’ *Review of International Studies*, 35: 2. On the securitisation of AIDS in the UN, see, e.g., Roxanna Sjöstedt (2011), ‘Health Issues and Securitisation: The ConstAction of HIV/ AIDS as a US National Security Threat,’ in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, London and New York: Routledge; Colin McInnes and Simon Rushton (2013), ‘HIV/AIDS and Securitisation Theory,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:1; Colin McInnes and Simon Rushton (2010), ‘HIV, AIDS and Security: Where Are We Now?’, *International Affairs*, 86:1; Simon Rushton (2010), ‘AIDS and International Security in the United Nations System,’ *Health Policy and Planning*, 25: 6; Stefan Elbe, ‘Risking Lives: AIDS, Security and Three Concepts of Risk,’ *Security Dialogue*, 39: 2-3; Gwyn Prins (2004), ‘AIDS and Global Security,’ *International Affairs*, 80: 5; Marco A. Vieira (2007), ‘The Securitization of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic as a Norm: A Contribution to ConstActivist Scholarship on the Emer-

- gence and Diffusion of International Norms,' *Brazilian Political Science Review (Online)*, 1: 2, available at:<[http://socialsciences.scielo.org/pdf/s\\_bpsr/v2nse/a05v2nse.pdf](http://socialsciences.scielo.org/pdf/s_bpsr/v2nse/a05v2nse.pdf)> (accessed 21 March 2015); Roxanna Sjöstedt (2008), 'Exploring the ConstAction of Threats: The Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Russia,' *Security Dialogue*, 39: 1; Alan Ingram (2007), 'HIV/AIDS, Security and the Geopolitics of US–Nigerian Relations,' *Review of International Political Economy*, 14: 3.
- 20 Chantal De Jonge Oudraat (2003), 'Combating Terrorism,' *Washington Quarterly*, 26: 4, p. 167.
- 21 UNSC Res 1269 (1999). UN Doc S/RES/1269.
- 22 Kendall W. Stiles and Adam Thayne (2006), 'Compliance with International Law,' *Cooperation and Conflict*, 41: 2, p. 157.
- 23 UNSC Verbatim Record (2001), UN Doc S/PV/4370, p. 7.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.5.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.7.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p.6.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.5.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.3.
- 34 Ilias Bantekas (2006), 'The International Law of Terrorist Financing,' *American Journal of International Law*, 97: 2, p. 326.
- 35 Rostow, Nicholas (2001) 'Before and After: The Changed UN Response to Terrorism Since September 11th', *Cornell International Law Journal*, 35 (3): 475-490.
- 36 Cf. Jane Boulden (2008), 'The Security Council and Terrorism,' in Vaughan Love et al. (eds.), *The United Nations Security Council and War: The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 619.
- 37 Ilias Bantekas (2006); Chantal De Jonge Oudraat (2004), 'The Role of the Security Council,' in Jane Boulden and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Terrorism and the UN: Before and After September 11,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- 38 Nicholas B. King (2002), 'Security, Disease, Commerce: Ideologies of Post-colonial Global Health,' *Social Studies of Science*, 32: 5-6; Alan Ingram (2007), p. 515.
- 39 Roxanna Sjöstedt (2011), p. 156.
- 40 Harley Feldbaum (2008), 'The History of the HIV/AIDS–Security Nexus and Its Impact on Global Health,' (unpublished PhD thesis), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, pp. 153-54.
- 41 McInnes and Rushton (2010), p. 227.
- 42 UNSC (2000), UN Doc S/PV/4087, p. 2.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p.3.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p.6.

- 45 UN Doc S/PV/4172.
- 46 UN Doc S/PV/4087, p. 11.
- 47 Joseph Kahn (2000), 'U.S. Offers Africa \$1 Billion a Year for Fighting Aids,' *New York Times*, 19 July.
- 48 UN Doc S/PV/4172, p. 5.
- 49 UN Doc S/PV/4087, pp. 3, 7.
- 50 UNSC Res 1308 (2000), UN Doc S/RES/1308.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Rushton (2010).
- 53 UNGA, 'In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All: Report of the Secretary-General,' (21 March 2005), A/59/2005, pp. 15-16.
- 54 McInnes and Rushton (2013), pp. 130-31.
- 55 Feldbaum (2008), pp. 158-59.
- 56 Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), p. 33.