

Theories, methods and ‘practices of (de)securitization’: The Russia-Chechnya case

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How do securitising actors, in this case governments, go about de-securitising policy issues that have been securitised across multiple referent objects? Do such de-securitisations develop as a single or manifold process and with what political effect? These are pertinent questions that have been left under-examined in the (de)securitisation literature. In seeking to fill this gap, the aims of this article are two-fold. Firstly, it calls for a greater focus on what happens in such cases, whereby the de-securitization process encompasses the multiple referent objects initially securitized. Secondly, it considers the case of Russia’s policy of normalization towards Chechnya since 2000, as an exemplary case-study to illustrate the politics at play in the nature and practice of de-securitizations, especially if and how this plays out across multiple referent objects. This article argues for a more process-centered and longitudinal approach to the study of the security politics of (de)securitisations, especially as actors go beyond the singular-act of a securitizing move and towards the much broader consideration of managing and counteracting a particular security threat.

Keywords

Copenhagen School, securitization, de-securitization, Russia, critical security studies

1. Introduction

How do securitising actors, in this case governments, go about de-securitising policy issues that have been securitised across multiple referent objects? Do such de-securitisations develop as a single or manifold process and with what political effect? These are pertinent questions that have been left under-examined in the (de)securitisation literature. Most of the current literature that draws on the Copenhagen

school's model of de-securitization (Buzan et al, 1998; Buzan and Waever, 2003; CASE Collective, 2006; Waever, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2011) has focused primarily on the theoretical level, examining either the initial stages and instances of a securitization (Abrahamsen 2005; Buzan, 2006; Elbe, 2006 Morozov 2002). More recently, a literature has emerged considering the subsequent de-securitization (Aras and Polat 2008; Åtland, 2008; Oelsner, 2005; Coskun, 2008, Aradau, 2004, 2006; Behnke, 2006; Huysmans, 1998; Taureck 2006). However, within this research agenda, little empirical work has been done on cases in which the initial securitization occurred across multiple referent objects.

In seeking to fill this gap, the aims of this article are two-fold. Firstly, it calls for a greater focus on what happens in such cases, whereby the de-securitization process encompasses the multiple referent objects initially securitized. The Copenhagen School's model of securitization offers formulations of what constitutes a referent object for each of the five sectors of security: namely, the state in the military sector; national sovereignty or ideology in the political sector; the national economy in economic sector; collective and national identities in societal sector; and, species or habitats in environmental sector. In practice, however, in most of the recent empirical studies on de-securitization, the question of the referent object, its role and/or interconnection with processes of de-securitization has been left under-examined or not addressed at all (for example see Morozov 2004, Donnelly 2015, Palosaari and Möller 2004, Åtland 2008, McDonald, 2011).

In asking questions about the politics of the process of desecuritisation, this article seeks to engage with what Stritzel calls the 'second generation...contextual securitization scholars' that seek to combine the formal aspects of the securitization model with a greater emphasis on examining the inter-relationship between security politics and its context. With the aim to 'construct a more comprehensive understanding of underlying processes', by focusing on the 'socio-linguistic and/or socio-political micro-dynamics of generating threats' (Stritzel, 2012: 2, for other example of these types of studies see Balzacq, 2005, 2011; Guzzini, 2011; Salter, 2008; Stritzel, 2007, 2011; McDonald, 2008, 2011). In so doing, this article argues that it is vital to investigate not only the way in which (de)securitizations are enacted within a specific context at a particular time, but also to consider what happens to the different referent objects identified in the initial securitization once de-securitization processes are introduced.

Secondly, it considers the case of Russia's policy of normalization towards Chechnya since 2000, as an exemplary case-study to illustrate the politics at play in the nature and practice of de-securitizations, especially if and how this plays out across multiple referent objects. In the initial period of securitization, the Russian authorities securitized the threat emanating from Chechnya as posing an existential danger to three principle referent objects, namely Chechnya, the North Caucasus region and Russia. Once the Russian authorities moved towards a policy of normalization, however, three different strands of de-securitization discourses emerged related to these three securitized referent objects, following different trajectories from one another. Indeed, whilst the sum total of these discursive strands adds up to an overall de-securitization narrative, their exact nature and specifics were largely dependent on the referent object in question. This suggests that processes of de-securitization across multiple referent objects can

and do follow very different trajectories from each other, whilst continuing to retain a certain degree of inter-dependence and overlap. In practice, this can both support the parallel de-securitization processes vis-à-vis the other referent objects, and problematize the overall de-securitization strategy carried out by the main de-securitizing actor.

In addition, and in view of the recent discussions about the widening and deepening of methods and methodology in critical security studies (see Aradau and Huysmans, 2014, Salter and Mutlu 2013, Shepherd 2013, Aradau, Huysmans, Neal and Voelkner 2015, Hansen 2006, Jackson 2011), the papers also calls for greater use of longitudinal and process-orientated analysis in (de)securitization to allow researchers to better capture the evolutionary dynamics within security policies. Indeed, as set out below, a contradiction remains within the current (de)securitization literature between the second generation suggestion that (de)securitizations may develop not only as a result of one-off speech acts, but also incrementally across longer periods of time (Åtland 2008, McDonald 2008, 2011), and the methodological practice of most empirical studies that tend to focus on narrow time periods that provide only a snap shot of how (de)securitizations processes emerge and develop. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, a longitudinal methodological lens is particularly apt in enabling analysts to trace the multifaceted processes of de-securitization.

Methodologically, this article draws on the longitudinal approach combined with the single ‘case plus study’ method championed by Hansen in her study of the Western actors’ security discourses/practices during the Bosnian war (2006). However, whereas Hanson applied her ‘single case study’ method to investigate the way in which security policies were presented and enacted across time, in this case the aim is to outline the utility of longitudinal methods of analysis through the single-case study method by examining the evolution of a single case, from being securitized to de-securitized: the (de)securitization of Chechnya in Russian official discourse across an extended period of time, 2000-2009. This is analyzed by a focus on the official discourses of the Russian federal authorities as the main (de)securitizing actor that drove both the securitization and the de-securitization of Chechnya, as the actor with both the authority and the facilitating capacity to put forward these particular discourses and processes (Koltsova 2006, Ortmann 2008, p.366).

This article, firstly, charts the current debate on the nature of de-securitization processes, highlighting the current shortage of studies examining (de)securitization discourses across multiple referent objects. It then sets out its empirical case of Russia’s policy of normalization towards Chechnya. In so doing, it lays out a brief context of the Russian authorities’ initial securitization of Chechnya in 1999-2000. Using longitudinal process-tracing analysis, it then considers, chronologically, this case of desecuritisation according to two periods - Putin’s first (2000-4) and second (2004-8) terms in power. This temporal division broadly corresponds to Oelsner’s (2005) suggestion that de-securitizations often proceed in two-steps, namely peace stabilization and peace consolidation. The article concludes by outlining its key implications for (de)securitization studies.

2. The state of the (De)securitization debate

a) The study of (de)securitizations

According to the foundational text of the theory of securitization - *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998) -, an issue can either be non-politicized (the state does not deal with it, and it is not an issue in the public debate), politicized (an issue that is part of public debate and policy) or securitized (an issue that is presented as an existential threat, and can be dealt with using measures outside normal politics), and that 'any issue can end up on any part of the spectrum' (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998: 24). It is argued that to shift an issue from either of the other realms into that of security simply requires an actor to name that issue as a security threat to a particular referent object, and for this 'securitizing move' to be accepted by the relevant audience of this referent object. Within this framework, securitization theory conceptualizes normal politics and security as discreetly distinct from one another 'by suggesting that while the former permits debate, the latter means the end of contestation and debate' (Acharya, 2006: 250). In turn, de-securitizations are processes 'in which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for exceptional measures to deal with the threat' (Buzan and Waever, cited in Coskun, 2008: 405).

The implication of this model of security is that rather than taking for granted that certain issues or relationships are intrinsically and universally a security issue, the question of what a security issue is becomes the subject of investigation (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998: 5). Thus, the key aim of (de)securitization theory is to identify what, when, where and how an issue is moved from being part of the normal environment of politics to become a threat to security and beyond normal politics – and the other way around.

Despite its almost instant popularity, the securitization model has in recent years undergone a series of critiques and modifications, which have stemmed from both its staunch supporters, as well as its critics. As noted by Cuita, this critique of securitization centers on three main strands: conceptual (structural issues particularly related to speech act theory and other necessary components of the model); epistemological (how securitization views contexts); and normative (related to the shift from securitization speech acts to practices of the political and the liberal) (Cuita, 2009: 302). Alongside this animated, and at times heated, theoretical debate, the securitization model has also been applied to the empirical study of diverse security issues, including the War-on-Terror (Buzan, 2006), immigration, trafficking and minority rights (Huysmans, 1998, 2000; Aradau, 2004; Sasse, 2005; Jutila, 2006); societal insecurity, human rights (Morozov, 2002), environmental politics, HIV/AIDS (Elbe, 2006) and EU security (Huysmans, 2000; Balzacq, 2008; Neal, 2009).

Whilst most of the initial discussion centered on establishing, negotiating and fixing the exact characteristics and principles of securitization and its relationship with political and security contexts,

the process in reverse - de-securitization - did not receive much attention (Coskun, 2008: 393). Recently, however, scholars have begun to delve more deeply into what it means to desecuritize an issue or ask what a desecuritized issue would look like (see Åtland, 2008; Aradau, 2004; Aras and Polat 2008; Behnke, 2006; Cui and Li, 2011; Hansen, 2012; Kundsens, 2001; Roe, 2004; Waever, 1995, Oelsner, 2005; Coskun, 2008, Salter, 2008, Klinke and Perombelon 2015). As Hansen has suggested, however, the focus was on the philosophical, drawing on a wide range of figures such as Schmitt, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, and Arendt, in order to shed light on what constitutes the nature of politics and security within the (de)securitization model (Hansen, 2012: 527). While Åtland (2008) notes that most work has been exclusively on the political and societal sectors, largely ignoring the effect across all five sectors of security.

Against this background, Coskun rightly points out that part of the problem with the original formulation of the de-securitization model is that ‘the Copenhagen School does not suggest an explicit framework for its analysis as it has done for securitization, different scholars have interpreted and implied de-securitization differently (Coskun, 2008: 395). Furthermore, there is no consensus on the idea that desecuritization can be considered as governed by the process of securitization posited by the Copenhagen School model, only in reverse. Åtland argues that, as opposed to securitization, ‘de-securitization does not necessarily happen as the result of a ‘speech act’. Rather there are many other ways that an issue or issue-area can be moved out of the sphere of security politics and into the sphere of regular politics’ (Åtland 2008, p.292). From this perspective, de-securitizing moves, whereby an attempt to shift a particular security policy issue from security into normal politics, have come to be seen by some scholars as part of a wider management process, rather than single speech acts or debates (more on this debate see Huysmans 2005, Roe 2004, 2006, Jutila 2006). This article views Russia’s policy of normalization towards Chechnya as an empirical example for this wider process perspective. Taking this into account, debates have taken place about whether or not the securitization model has an ontological preference for de-securitization over securitization politics (Waever, 1995; Roe, 2004; Huysmans, 1998; Aradau, 2004; Floyd, 2007; Abrahamsen, 2008); whether or not ‘de-securitization is desirable’ or even a logical impossibility when it comes to minority rights (Roe, 2004: 284); the wider normative biases of the (de)securitization model (McDonald, 2008); and the debate regarding the sheer possibility of ever truly achieving de-securitization in politics (Behnke, 2006, Aradau 2004, Donnelly 2015).

This paper does not aim to re-open these earlier discussions. Instead, it positions itself within the burgeoning literature seeking to investigate the nature and evolution of de-securitization discourses and processes from an empirical perspective. In surveying this alternative set of literature, Hansen (2012) outlines four main readings of what constitutes a de-securitization from a more empirical standpoint. Firstly, de-securitization seen as primarily a form of ‘détente’, whereby it ‘implies a rather slow move out of an explicit security discourse, which in turn facilitates a less militaristic, less violent and hence more genuinely political form of engagement’ (see Waever, 2000). Secondly, de-securitization as a

'replacement', with 'the combination of one issue moving out of security while another is simultaneously securitized' (see Bilgin, 2007; Roe, 2004; Aras and Polat, 2008). Thirdly, de-securitization as 're-articulation', which 'refer to de-securitization that remove an issue from the securitized by actively offering a political solution to the threats, dangers, and grievances in question' (Atland, 2008). And finally, de-securitization as a process of silencing, 'that is when an issue disappears or fails to register in security discourse' (MacKenzie, 2009). These divergent ideas on what constitutes a process of de-securitization suggests that Coskun's claim about scholar's different interpretations of de-securitization is an astute one. However, rather than seeing these as distinct and separate conclusions about the nature of de-securitization processes, this article suggests that some or all maybe evident in a particular case, and thus should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Indeed, it will be argued that each of the dimensions noted above were present in Russia's federal authorities policy of normalization towards Chechnya. In accounting for these divergent strands to this de-securitization, this article points to how the initial securitization of Chechnya took place across a series of different referent objects, and, as a result, various dimensions to the de-securitization took rather different trajectories from each other, encompassing *détente*, *replacement*, *re-articulation*, *silencing*.

b) Multiple referent objects and processes of de-securitization

What continues to be under-explored in this growing de-securitization literature are instances when a particular threat was initially securitized simultaneously across a number of different referent objects, and what impact this has on the subsequent process of de-securitization processes. Whilst there has been a substantial discussion as to whether or not de-securitization of certain objects/issue areas is ever possible (for more on this see Roe and Jutila debate on the societal sector in Security Dialogue 2004-2006), a few studies have focused on the formulation of the referent object itself and the ways in which this relates to (de)securitization. Thus for example, Wilkinson has criticized the model for its Western-centric assumptions, namely that the notion of the referent object presupposes a much more coherent and stable set of identities than is usually found in practice (Wilkinson 2007 p.10-11). Hoogensen has suggested that securitization theory is overly concerned with the state as the main referent object (Hoogensen 2005), whilst more recently Rumelili has questioned the relationship between the Self/Other in processes of (de)securitization, suggesting a difference between ontological and physical security with different dynamics and objects operating in each (Rumelili 2015). In turn, Christou and Adamides (2013) have sought to problematize the nature of the referent object when it comes to energy, noting that this particular referent object cuts across all five sectors of security identified in the original model, namely the military, political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. They thus suggest the need to treat some issues such as 'energy in a cross-sectoral manner as part of the widened security agenda, rather than as an independent referent object' (Christou and Adamides 2013, p.518).

However, aside from these valid criticisms, what remains under-explored is the interconnection between multiple referent objects and de-securitization processes. This is in part because most of the

recent research on de-securitization has focused primarily on instances in which only a single referent object has been at play in the processes under study (for example see Morozov 2004, Donnelly 2015). And, yet not all cases of securitization can be said to be neatly confined to a single referent object. In this article's case study, the initial securitizing move by the Russian authorities identified at least three main referent objects that were being threatened by the insecurity emanating from the Chechen republic, namely Chechnya itself, the North Caucasus region and the Russian Federation as a whole. In this regard, and as laid out in detail below, Russia's overall de-securitisation discourse broadly followed Oelsner's suggestion that de-securitization processes develop in two stages – firstly, centered on peace stabilization, and then moving towards peace consolidation (Oelsner, 2005). In the case of Russia's policy towards Chechnya – this would correspond to 2000-2004 as peace stabilization, and 2004-2008 as peace consolidation. As Oelsner goes on to argue in her work on regional peace, 'the first phase describes regional peace stabilization and the first few steps towards domestic de-securitization, whilst the second phase involves peace consolidation, expansion of mutual de-securitization, and growth of mutual trust' (Oelsner, 2005). In the Russia-Chechnya case, all of the different strands of this overarching discourse were indeed tied to the wider goal of tackling and ultimately normalizing the situation in the republic. As set out below, when it came to peace stabilization – most of the transformative dynamics, as articulated by the Russian authorities, seemed to be focused on the relationship between the federal authorities and the local Chechen administration under the control of President Kadyrov, rather than on societal, people-to-people peace consolidation. Nonetheless, by the late 2000s, the Chechen issue had been de-securitized within the official narrative.

However, a more nuanced reading of these discourses of de-securitization suggests that we need to move away from the assumption that only single referent objects are present or function within (de)securitization speech acts/processes. Likewise, that these diverse sets of de-securitization function synchronously to each other. Indeed, the different discourses and strategies presented by the Russian authorities varied greatly depending on which referent object we look at (see Table 1).

| REFERENT OBJECT | PEACE STABILIZATION 2000-2004 | PEACE CONSOLIDATION 2004-2008 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| CHECHNYA | Re-articulation (with elements of ongoing securitization) | Détente |
| NORTH CAUCASUS | Ongoing securitization and increased displacement | Replacement |
| RUSSIA | Silencing | Re-articulation - re-branding |

The different discourses and strategies presented by the Russian authorities ranged from, on the local level, de-securitisation as a form of replacement through a mixture of development and COIN operations, to a form of détente and devolution of security from the federal to the local level by 2008. Through a process of displacement and subsequent replacement on the regional level, with the North Caucasus coming to play the role of the source of insecurity previously occupied by Chechnya. To the silencing of the issue on the national level and subsequently the rebranding of Chechnya as a success story by 2008/9. In addition, as discussed in more detail below, during most of this period, terrorism/insurgency groups continued to be securitized. Yet, at the end of this period, even these groups and the proclaimed threat emanating from them had been downgraded from outright existential threat to a security risk. As this illustrates, the trajectory and specifics of the wider de-securitization process varied greatly between 2000 and 2008/9, and did so across the three referent objects initially identified as threatened by the instability and situation in Chechnya.

Taking this into account, this article argues that rather than seeing de-securitisation discourses and processes – in particular in relation to those that have been securitised across multiple referent objects - as self-contained policy issues, it is more appropriate to view them as a series of inter-connected strands within a wider policy-cluster. The Russian authorities' stated aim for its 'normalization policy' was, in keeping with the original desecuritization model, to return Chechnya from the order of security politics back into normal politics. However, in practice this desecuritisation discourse differed across the local, regional and national levels due to the functioning of this policy-issue across three different referent objects. Whilst all three policies continued to be positioned within an over-arching de-securitization discourse, developments in one area could and did undermine the Russian authorities' efforts elsewhere, especially during periods following major terrorist incidents, or in the form of the replacement of Chechnya with the wider North Caucasus as the epicentre of insecurity within the Russian Federation's domestic security narrative. By tracing longitudinally the evolution of the distinct strands of the Russian normalisation discourse according to three different referent objects – Chechnya, North Caucasus, Russia -, this article aims to bring to the fore the multifaceted security politics at play in a desecuritisation process.

This article now turns to investigate the evolution of Russia's official discourse towards Chechnya 1999-2009 from being securitized to de-securitized, according to the three referent objects against which the initial threat was securitized, namely: Chechnya, the North Caucasus region and Russia as a whole.

3. Russia and Chechnya - the initial securitization 1999-2000

The issue of Chechnya has been very significant in Russia's contemporary security policy-making, particularly during the first (1994-1996) and second Chechen wars (1999-2009) (Kipp in Herspring, 2003: 177). Indeed, the initial securitization processes launched at the outset of the Second Chechen campaign in 1999-2000 followed a text-book model of securitization. As the principle securitizing

actors, the Russian authorities argued that the primary root cause of insecurity and instability emanating from Chechnya stemmed from it having become a failed entity, a 'quasi-state' (Putin 2001d), that had by the late-1990s succumbed to the forces of domestic and foreign terrorist groups (Putin, 2001). In turn, this threat was said to be existential threat to three key referent objects: firstly, on the local level, to the continued survival of Chechnya; secondly, on the sub-federal/regional level, to its North Caucasus neighbors; and thirdly, on the national level, to the country as a whole (Snetkov 2015). In this regard, the initial securitization discourse suggested that these rather diverse referent objects and the security threats said to be existentially threatening them were all subsumed under a single over-arching securitizing narrative.

In putting forward this over-arching securitizing discourse, the Russian authorities were largely successful in galvanizing the Russian public, to accept the threat posed by the situation in the Chechen Republic (Russell 2005). With audience acceptance secured, the resulting emergency measures in the form of security operations were articulated as an attempt to, one, localize and eliminate the existential terrorist threat from groups active in Chechnya, and to, two, address with the weaknesses of the republic that had seen it become a 'failed-republic', and thus mitigating its negative impact on its own populace, the North Caucasus region and Russia as a whole by re-establishing Russian control over the territory (Snetkov 2012).

Following the end of these initial military operations, a parallel 'normalization' policy was launched in 2000. The next sections seek to disentangle the complex web of securitizing and desecuritising discourses at play during the rest of the decade, culminating in the official declaration of normalization in 2009.

4. The evolution of Russia's desecuritisation of Chechnya: 2000-2009

To assess the evolution of the Russian desecuritisation policy across the period from the successful institution of emergency measures to the official declaration of their cessation in 2009, this article draws on the longitudinal approach combined with the single 'case plus study' method championed by Hansen in her study of the Western actors' security discourses/practices during the Bosnian war (2006). However, whereas Hansen applied her 'single case study' method to investigate the way in which security policies were presented and enacted across time, in this case the aim is to outline the utility of longitudinal methods of analysis through the single-case study method by examining the evolution of a single case, from being securitized to de-securitized: the (de)securitization of Chechnya in Russian official discourse across an extended period of time, 2000-2009. This is analyzed by a focus on the official discourses of the Russian federal authorities as the main (de)securitizing actor that drove both the securitization and the de-securitization of Chechnya, as the actor with both the authority and the facilitating conditions to put forward these particular discourses and processes (Koltsova 2006, Ortmann 2008, p.366).

In assessing the full-range of politics at play in this desecuritisation, the article considers each of three referent objects (Chechnya itself, the North Caucasus region and Russia as a whole) named in the initial securitization. To aid analytical interpretation of the evolution of these various strands of the desecuritisation across referent objects, the following empirical examination is divided, chronologically, into two time periods - Putin's first (2000-4) and second (2004-8) terms in power. This temporal division broadly corresponds to Oelsner's (2005) suggestion that de-securitizations often proceed in two-steps, namely peace stabilization and peace consolidation.

a) Chechnya in the Russian security agenda 2000-2004: Processes of securitization/de-securitization

ai) Processes of normalization: referent object - Chechnya

Once the main stage of the military operations had been completed, by the end of 2000, the Russian authorities began to re-articulate the threat from and situation in Chechnya. This signaled a shift away from the securitization processes of 1999/2000 towards a narrative about the 'rebuilding' and normalizing the situation in the republic. A two-fold approach, combining the restoration of political, economic and societal spheres to normalcy, including by alleviating poverty, with ongoing targeting of securitized groups (the insurgents) was outlined a strategy to finally pacify Chechnya, and return it back into its 'normal' state (Putin, 2004a).

As such, the Kremlin's strategy of normalization was said to center on 'the stabilization of the situation in the republic, reconstruction of its economy, return of refugees and the holding of a referendum on adoption of the republic's Constitution [in 2003].'¹ The restoration of a 'normal' political space in Chechnya, hence, became a central pivot to the desecuritization. The holding of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2003 and 2004 were therefore hailed as significant steps towards this goal (Putin, 2003 cited in Bacon and Renz, 2006: 61). With the Russian authorities presenting the de-securitization and/or normalization of the situation inside Chechnya across the economic, political and societal sectors as central to its policy vis-a-vis Chechnya.²

At the same time as the Russian authorities were increasingly suggesting that the situation in Chechnya was successfully being normalizing and the threat it posed to region and country was diminishing, it also continued to securitize the insurgency groups active in this space and seeking to counteract this threat with ongoing counter-terrorist special operations.³ However, these emergency measures also began to be subsumed within the wider discourse of normalization (Nizamutdinov, 2003), as Russian officials these actions by suggesting that the Ichkerian administration, foreign fighters and the insurgency groupings inside Chechnya presented an existential threat to these rebuilding efforts – the desecuritisation (Pilipchuk, 2003).

Thus, Russia's normalization policy towards Chechnya was composed of a multi-faceted discourse, focused not only on removing Chechnya from the realm of security, but also on 'rebuilding' and normalizing the situation on the ground. In this way, the Russian policy followed a wider trend in

international security and crisis management, whereby security policies and development programs are interlinked (Cui and Li, 2011, also see Duffield, 2001, cited in MacKenzie, 2009: 243). As well as closely resembling the counter-insurgency strategies deployed by the Western-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq (see Betz and Cormack, 2006; Dixon, 2009; Lopez, 2007; Metz, 2003). Whilst the success of such operations in restoring normal life on the ground in each case is debatable (Slim, 2004), the diversity of these cases - including that of Russia's policy towards Chechnya - suggests that this security/development nexus represents a wider trend in 'doing' security/peace-building/development.

iii) Processes of normalization: referent object – the North Caucasus region

Whilst by 2003-04, it was being suggested by the Russian authorities that the situation inside Chechnya was increasingly under control, there was a parallel continuation and expansion in spatial scope of a securitization discourse about insurgency and terrorist groups in Chechnya, and in particular the spread of such terrorist activity from Chechnya into neighbouring Republics in the North Caucasus. Thus, on the regional level, there was a continued and intensified securitization of insecurity vis-a-vis the referent object of the North Caucasus region. In this respect, the de-securitization of Chechnya and the securitization of North Caucasus were said to be intertwined. Indeed, the Russian authorities suggested that the movement of terrorist activity from Chechnya to the wider region of North Caucasus stemmed from terrorists being squeezed out of Chechnya, due to its 'rebuilding' into other places, namely the other Republics of the North Caucasus (Putin, 2005). Hence, terrorist activity in the North Caucasus increasingly displaced insecurity in Chechnya, within official discourse, as the key security concern for the region.

Furthermore, many of the key discursive constructions and policies initially linked with Chechnya in the securitizing discourse were now re-orientated and utilized to explain the increasingly insecure situation in the rest of the North Caucasus. For example, the characterization of the local insurgency groups as an alliance between foreign fighters, bringing with them non-traditional, foreign forms of Islam, and deviant local groups to jointly engage in acts of global terrorism, which was first utilized in the case of Chechnya in the initial securitizing move, were now supplanted onto the securitization discourse concerning the situation in the North Caucasus. Indeed, the 'local' context and indigenous factors - particular to each of the Republics now securitized: Dagestan, Ingushetia or Kabardino-Balkaria - within which these insurgency groups developed and operated (O'Loughlin et al. 2011) were largely absent from the official representation of the widening insurgent threat. Rather, the same claims about the 'local' context and indigenous factors shaping terrorist groups in Chechnya were simply transplanted onto these other Republics.

The above suggests that the de-securitization of one particular referent object can often become inter-related and impacts upon (de)securitization discourses and practices vis-à-vis other referent objects. In this case, the displacement of the threat from Chechnya to the spread of insecurity across the North

Caucasus continued to position the Chechen republic in a negative and threatening relationship vis-à-vis the referent object of the North Caucasus.

aiii) Processes of de-securitization: referent object: Russia

On the national level - the threat posed by Chechnya to Russia as a nation-state, the main thrust of the de-securitization was one of silencing the issue within official and public discourses. The effect being that the discourse on Chechnya lost some of its 'exceptionalism' (read-symbolic power), as other issues, such as the economic rebuilding of the country and positive political developments in Russia, increasingly came to dominate the official political agenda.⁴ As part of this wider discourse, it was, therefore, suggested that the rebuilding processes in Chechnya now followed, rather than structured or triggered, developments in wider state and security policy, because Chechnya was now becoming a normal constituency in the federal Russian state.

However, what remained outside this wider process of de-securitizing, silencing and side-lining of the Chechen issue in the public was the ongoing securitization of information and media reporting from the republic. Tight state control of information about developments in Chechnya was already evident during the initial securitization period, but, against the backdrop of the normalization discourse, it became even more pronounced. In this way, the state sought to restrict the flow of information that stood in contrast to its claim of increasing normalization of the situation in Chechnya. Indeed, Putin continued to make connections between in/security in Chechnya and the role of the media, as demonstrated during his speech at the World Congress of News Agencies, in 2004, stating that 'the mass media cannot simply stand on the side-lines...the information community can and should design such a model of work that would make the media an effective tool in the struggle with terrorism'. (Putin 2004a). Additionally, journalists trying to report on events taking place in Chechnya were increasingly prevented from doing so via what Mendelson called a 'creeping securitization of information' (2002: 64).

It was only at times of large-scale terrorist actions, such as the theatre siege of Dubrovka in 2002, that this wider silencing process was temporarily broken, as the Russian authorities returned to their familiar discourses of existential danger and threat in relation to Chechnya, and were more permissive of media coverage of insecurity (Snetkov, 2007). Yet, whilst such terrorist incidents often resulted in the Russian authorities placing key strategic assets, and especially large cities, such as Moscow and St Petersburg on high security alert,⁵ they did not signal a change in the content of the official discourse on Chechnya, or a greater re-prioritization of Chechnya as an issue. Rather than becoming key turning points in Russia's official de-securitization or securitization narrative about Chechnya, these events became opportunities for the regime to argue that Russia was in the process of normalizing the situation in Chechnya. And, even, that it was on course to be rebuilt and normalized. As such, these high-profile terrorist spectacular did not result in the institution of the same level of threat as previously when the bombings of the Moscow apartment buildings in 1999 resulted in the Putin and Yeltsin regime launching the 2nd Chechen campaign.

b) Processes of de-securitization of Chechnya in the Russian security agenda – 2004- 2008/(9)

bi) Processes of de-securitization: referent object - Chechnya

The shift towards de-securitizing Chechnya that was begun in the early-mid 2000s was profoundly accelerated from 2004 to 2008, with the Russian authorities increasingly talking about a *détente* between themselves and both the instability of the local situation and the local political authorities in Chechnya. On the local level, having already taken the initial steps towards normalizing the situation in the republic in previous years, Russian officials generally argued that the on-going macro-processes of normalization and counter-terrorism had significantly reduced the levels of instability and insecurity locally and a form of *détente*. The image of Chechnya was repositioned from that of a failing entity to a rehabilitated Republic. This was a shift that also informed the introduction of large-scale state programs for Chechnya. One such program, entitled the ‘Socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic 2008-2011’, was allocated a budget of 120.6 billion rubles.⁶ These large-scale state programs were presented as indicative of a ‘new’ stage in Chechnya’s development. In this way, Vladimir Patrín, from the United Press Centre of the Operative Headquarters in the Chechen Republic in March 2008, stated that

‘in the last few years the Chechen republic has achieved great successes. The process of rebuilding the economy destroyed by the war is smoothly transitioning into a new phase: of economic and resource development and growth. It appears that soon Chechnya will take its deserved place amidst other prosperous regions of the Southern Federal region and the rest of Russia.’⁷

At the same time, the insurgency groups were now characterized as a decreasing force, which no longer posed an existential threat either to Russia or Chechnya (Pchelov, 2008).⁸ Instead, they were articulated as a security risk that could be contained by the local Chechen forces.⁹ The final milestone in the de-securitization process was a decree from the Russian National Antiterrorist Committee (NAC) on 16 April 2009, which officially ended the counterterrorism operation in Chechnya, or in securitization parlance ‘extraordinary measures’.¹⁰ In conjunction with this, the final de-securitizing move came in the form of devolution of responsibility from security from the federal center to the local Chechen regime. Hence, the Kadyrov regime was increasingly presented as the main securitizing actor in Chechnya,¹¹ particularly when it came to identifying the necessary measures to counter-act terrorism and the conduct of local counter-terrorist operations.¹² This process led some commentators to characterize such developments as the ‘Ramzification’ of Chechnya (Ramzan being Kadyrov’s first name). In sum, it was argued that federal authorities had successfully completed a process of re-imposing the control of

the formal apparatus of the wider Russian political and economic state sphere in Chechnya, alongside the emergence of a loyal local regime with a strong power base that was built upon agreement with, and supported by, the federal authorities and their visions for Russia and Chechnya (Malashenko, 2007:2).

bii) Processes of de-securitization: referent object - North Caucasus region

Aside from the changing dynamics in Chechnya, when it came to the regional level the Russian authorities' main de-securitization discourse shifted from displacement of the threat in Chechnya onto the North Caucasus to threat replacement. The main threat in the region was now said to be coming from within the North Caucasus itself, rather than from Chechnya onto the North Caucasus, with Chechnya now articulated as the oasis of normality in this unstable region.

By the mid-2000s, the creeping securitization of the North Caucasus was becoming even more evident, alongside the discourse of de-securitization/securitization of Chechnya.¹³ The North Caucasus was now playing the role initially occupied by Chechnya, as the stated epicenter of terrorist and counter-terrorist activity in Russia – this was said to be symbolized, for example, by the Beslan school siege in September 2004 (Lynch, 2005:141-142). In addition, most of the emphasis, from both the official and insurgency side, came to be placed on the figure of Doku Umarov, who in 2007 announced the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate to replace the Caucasus Front. With the formation of the Caucasus Emirate, as its positioning as the main threat of domestic terrorism and source of instability in Russia, the shift of focus away from Chechnya and onto the North Caucasus became almost total.

Whilst Chechnya continued to be positioned as a Republic located within a difficult part of Russia's South, it was increasingly presented as a model example for how to deal with questions of security for the wider North Caucasus region.¹⁴ Such a development would have seemed inconceivable at the start of the decade. As suggested by Sukhov, 'paradoxically, Chechnya now served as a model of center-region relations' (2008). In turn, this re-articulation of the de-securitization narrative illustrates the fluidity and evolving nature of images, discourses and practices of (de)securitization. Hence, certain combinations or assumptions that appear as inconceivable in one temporal context of narrative constructions, can, after only a short time period, become reasonable, possible and 'normal' within a different political and security context.

biii) Processes of de-securitization: referent object - Russia

From the mid-2000s onwards, at a national level, the main thrust of Putin regime's de-securitization practice was no longer to silence the issue within the Russian public sphere. To the contrary, national official discourse sought to re-articulate the position of Chechnya in Russian public discourse. This re-articulation centered on representing Chechnya as successfully pacified and desecuritized, and formed part of the Russian authorities' wider attempts to publicize their national successes in rebuilding a strong Russia (Snetkov, 2011). Thus, not only was Chechnya no longer considered a 'forbidden' or 'unspoken' topic, it was now presented as a rehabilitated part of the Russian Federation that had successfully shed

its previously negative image. Improvements on the ground were frequently noted in official meetings between Russian officials and Chechen groups. A growing number of reports and eye-witness accounts highlighting the increasing pace of reconstruction and the return to normal life in the republic also began to appear in official sources and media. Therefore, by the late 2000s, Chechnya had even regained some of its symbolic power in national affairs, only this time as a rehabilitated policy area, rather than an existential threat. In this way, the Chechen issue underwent what Moore & Wills have characterized as a process of re-branding of the Republic (Moore and Wills, 2008: 260).

In 1999/2000, the Russian official securitizing discourse had gained audience acceptance. By 2008, according to Russian public opinion polls, the Russian public had also accepted the message that the situation in Chechnya was improving – for the first time since the securitizing move in 1999 more Russians agreed with the statement that peace was returning to Chechnya, than that war was continuing.¹ Whilst terrorism continued to feature as an issue of concern among the public, it was now mainly associated with developments in the North Caucasus, in line with official state narratives. Furthermore, whilst the situation in the North Caucasus was still characterized as tense², the situation was no longer presented as an existential threat, but rather as posing an ongoing security risk.

Indeed, it could even be suggested that some form of ‘peace consolidation, expansion of mutual de-securitization, and growth of mutual trust’ (Oelsner’s 2nd stage of de-securitization/peace consolidation) had been achieved, particularly in terms of the relationship between the federal and local authorities. The threat from terrorism continues to prevail in national discourse in Russia, but the level of the threat is now said to have diminished and most of the focus has shifted away from Chechnya towards the potential links between localized North Caucasus networks and developments in the MENA region, namely a concern about foreign fighters returning from fighting in Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, the Russian authorities have sought to publicize their successful pacification of the wider North Caucasus region through, for example, the hosting of the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014 and the close cooperation between the federal and Chechen authorities in relation to Russia’s security deployments in the Ukraine crisis and, more recently, over with regard to Syria and ISIS.

In sum, by the end of this period, the Chechen issue had finally been de-securitized within Russian official discourse, and was no longer said to pose an existential threat, either locally, regionally or nationally.

Conclusion

This article’s examination of Russia’s de-securitization of Chechnya has sought to lay out the utility for de-securitisation studies of investigating what happens to the original referent objects as the securitising actor moves towards de-securitization discourses and practices. This is particularly important in cases

¹ <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-51.pdf>

² <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-70.pdf>

in which multiple-referent objects were securitized simultaneously in the initial securitizing move. At present, there is a tendency to focus on single snap-shot and brief periods when studying (de)securitisations, with wider conclusions extrapolated about contemporary security policies. However, this article suggests that it is often more fruitful to adopt a more longitudinal and wider analytical lens for analyzing desecuritisation. As part of such an approach, it is necessary to move beyond the reification of one threat-one referent object model, and rather see security policies and processes as more multi-stranded, forming loosely bundled policy clusters.

Indeed, as the Russo-Chechen case demonstrates, if at times of crisis (and the initial securitisation), securitising actors have a tendency of conflating many different issues, threats and referent objects into a single image of the threat, these different discursive strands tend to unravel as actors move towards the next stage of policy: the management of these threats and processes of de-securitisation. All of the discursive strands invoked in the initial securitisation of Chechnya by the Russian federal authorities continue to fit within, and be structured through, the overarching Russian discourse of de-securitisation vis-à-vis the threat from Chechnya. This broadly follows Oelsner's (2005) two-step de-securitisation, namely peace stabilization and peace consolidation. However, the different referent objects were de-securitized at different times and in different ways. And, thus, with different political implications.

The entangled dynamics surrounding Russia's official de-securitisation of Chechnya also point to the complex nature of the security policies that animate a desecuritisation, whereby this process comes to be constituted as encompassing several, and varying, strands of policy within a particular policy-cluster, rather than the singular unified issue area upon which the securitising move was framed and directed. For example, in the early-mid 2000s, Russian official discourse proclaimed the success of its effort to re-articulate and normalise the situation in Chechnya. During the same period, they also acknowledged that this very process of normalisation was to blame for the rising insecurity in the North Caucasus. In turn, by positioning it as the source of and associated to the insecurity in the wider region, the image of Chechnya in official Russian discourse remained tainted with insecurity. In practice, then, distinct policy strands within a cluster can and do function in parallel, while also diverging from one another. Hence, while some may support, others may undermine an actors' efforts to de-securitize a certain issue areas vis-à-vis certain referent objects.

In the strategy to normalize Chechnya from early to late 2000s, the Russian authorities used not one, but all four forms of de-securitization identified by Hansen (2012), namely 're-articulation,' 'silencing,' 'détente,' and 'replacement' at different stages and in different strands of this desecuritisation process. Indeed, all of these strands were present either simultaneously or concurrently depending on which referent object and time period is considered. This suggests that different processes of de-securitization (and at times ongoing securitization) can be interlinked and function simultaneously, but not automatically synchronously, across different referent objects as part of a wider management strategy for dealing with a previously securitized issue area.

In view of the conclusions posited above, this article argues for a more process-centred and longitudinal approach to the study of the security politics of (de)securitisations, especially as actors go beyond the singular-act of a securitizing move and towards the much broader consideration of managing and counteracting a particular security threat. A snap shot of (de)securitisations at any one point in time, including that marking a transition from security to normal politics, will also provide a shallow account of how the process from normal to security and back to normal politics has occurred, neglected all of the politics and political implications in between. It is often the evolution of (de)securitisation discourse that is the most politically significant, as this determines how, in what sequence and in what way a securitisation policy is re-articulated and re-positioned so that it may be deemed no longer exceptional, including how it may have split into separate strands with different trajectories. If one considers only the start or the end of Russia's (de)securitisation of Chechnya, then it is not possible to shed any light on how the Chechen Republic came to no longer be seen as a threat, but rather as a model of desecuritisation for surrounding republics. Or, how the North Caucasus is now presented as a security risk. Taking this into account, (de)securitization theory should place more emphasis on examining not only the initial stages of securitization and/or military operations and the end of security politics, but also the processes in between and how actors attempt to transition from one set of policies – securitising - to the other – desecuritizing.

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