Aberystwyth University

Failed Securitization

Ruzicka, Jan

Failed securitization: Why it matters

Jan Ruzicka

Abstract:

The puzzle driving this article is the near unanimous focus in the literature on successful cases of securitization. The article examines this case selection bias and asks about its consequences for the study of security. Three arguments are offered. First, there is no reason to a priori give preference to successful cases and a full range of outcomes should be explored. Second, paying attention to failed cases of securitization might hold important insights for the processes of securitization as well as desecuritization. Third, taking failed cases seriously can put into broader perspective actors' ability to use claims about security to accrue power and advance their political agendas. In short, moving away from the fixation on successful cases of securitization will give us a fuller understanding of what security is and what it does.

Key words:

failed securitization; case selection bias; security; process; frequency illusion

Nothing succeeds like success. One could hardly choose a better saying to pithily summarize the direction that the study of securitization has taken over the past two decades. Researchers have delivered case upon a case of successful instances where actors have managed to securitize a specific issue within a particular context. Any overview of the fast growing literature must lead to an indisputable conclusion that the securitization scholarship has focused almost exclusively on those instances where securitization did

happen.[1] One hardly ever encounters a failed case of securitization. And even the few notable exceptions devoted to failed securitization are written with either a very specific notion of failure or are based on the premise that what makes them of interest is the lack of success rather than the failure per se.[2]

The empirical observation about the overwhelming one-sidedness of the studies using securitization theory provides for the initial puzzle underpinning this article. While it shows some of the sources of this direction in the original formulation of the theory, it is ultimately beyond the scope of this article to explain the undoubtedly numerous and varied motivations of many scholars. The article is therefore less concerned with the question why there has been the bias towards the successful cases, than with the question of how the bias has affected the study of securitization.

In response to this question, I put forward three interconnected arguments. First, the possible reasons to prefer the successful cases are not convincing and researchers should examine the entire spectrum of outcomes of securitizing moves. Second, the case selection bias dominating the securitization literature makes it difficult to understand why some, or perhaps even most (it is impossible to tell, because we have no systematic data) securitizing moves fail. Finally, paying attention to securitization failures provides a useful corrective to the impression, created by the emphasis on successful cases, that political actors can appropriate power more easily when invoking security. Each of these arguments has important implications not only for the study of securitization, its logics and processes, but also for the study of security as a key political value and concept.

Studying cases of failed securitization promises important heuristic gains. Failed cases can provide a firmer understanding of why some securitizing moves succeed while others do not. Speech acts are not created equal. Who expresses them and under what conditions, whom they are addressed to, the issues they concern, the forms that are used in their delivery, metaphors they incorporate, historical connotations on which they draw all matter and, crucially, differ from case to case and across time and space. The preference for successful cases has mutilated this fascinating variety of factors mostly to actors typically revolving around the state. That is hardly representative of instances where security is spoken. By orienting attention to a fuller range of factors, the actual processes of security construction, rather than

---

[1] For a comprehensive overview of the literature see Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Leonard and Jan Ruzicka, "Securitization Revisited: Theory and Cases," *International Relations* 30, no. 4 (2016): 494-531.
[2] See Kristian Atland and Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "When Security Speech Acts Misfire: Russia and the Elektron Incident," *Security Dialogue* 40, no. 3 (2009): 333-354; Matt McDonald, "The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2012): 579-592; Mark B. Salter, "When Securitization Fails: The Hard Case of Counter-Terrorism Programs" in *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve,* ed. Thierry Balzacq (London: Routledge, 2011), 116-131.

actors' pronouncements, will become more prominent. Because of this, new research questions can be asked. For instance, can a failure of a securitizing move pave way for its eventual successful securitization? What changed so that a different result ensued? What is processually and contextually different to explain the variation in outcomes? Why are some important issues persistently resistant to being treated as security issues? Answers to all of these questions will be better informed, if they draw on failed cases of securitization.

The Preference for Success

One of the chief reasons for the rapid spread of securitization theory in the field of security studies has been its ability to shift scholars' focus. As an outgrowth of the wider dissatisfaction with the state of the field since the 1980s, which manifested itself in the debates about the meaning and scope of security, the theory offered an appealing new direction. Rather than concentrating on the question "What is security?" it encouraged researchers to look at the question "What security does?".[3]

This change of emphasis towards performative effects of security is in line with the two broader philosophical sources underpinning the theory – J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts and Carl Schmitt's concept of the political.[4] Securitization's originators prominently acknowledged the former –"the process of securitization is what in language theory is called a speech act."[5] It was up to others to note the undertones of the Schmittian legacy of existential threats – "security is not just any kind of speech act (...) it is casting of the issue as one of an existential threat."[6] From the start then, the theory has pointed towards the following direction: the doing of existential threats.

In practical terms, i.e. which processes ought to be examined, what this meant was clear. As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde wrote in their seminal book, "security analysis is interested mainly in successful instances of securitization."[7] Why? Because such cases "constitute the currently valid specific meaning of security."[8] In other words, if one wants to observe and analyse what happens when the word security is uttered (i.e. what security does), one must study the cases when it works and actually has some effects. The preference for successful cases was therefore built into the

---

[3] The key reference points are Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization" in *On Security,* ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46-86; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

[4] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[5] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 26.

[6] Michael C. Williams, "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2003): 511-531, at 514.

[7] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 39.

[8] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 39.

theory from the beginning. Without it, so the originators must have thought, the theory could not have lived up to their overarching objective.

That the preference for success is not an uncontentious choice is suggested by the way they ruled out unsuccessful cases. These they deemed of interest "for the insights they offer into the stability of social attitudes toward security legitimacy, the process by which those attitudes are maintained or changed, and the possible future direction of security politics."[9] In some ways, the proposition sounds plausible enough. Rejecting a securitizing move, which is one possible meaning of an unsuccessful case, may indeed reflect the prevailing social (and obviously political) attitudes toward security legitimacy in a given context.

However, it is not at all clear why the study of security should limit itself to such attitudes. If that were to happen, we would learn something about them and perhaps about legitimacy, but not about security. A good illustration of potential shortcomings such approach entails is Lene Hansen's critique of securitization theory.[10] Hansen demonstrated how the absence of gender in the theory means that it is entirely incapable of paying attention to those instances where threatened individuals simply cannot voice their security concerns out of fear that their precarious lives would have become even more endangered. Ken Booth put a similar point more concisely: "If security is always a speech act, insecurity is frequently a zipped lip."[11] While Hansen and Booth do not invoke the distinction between successful and unsuccessful cases of securitization, it is implied in their arguments. Had they worked with it explicitly, they would have had another line of attack against the securitization theory. They would have been able to show how Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde's pre-emptively offered argument against such normative criticisms, namely that their perspective "basically removes the objective ground from the dominant discourse,"[12] rests on the preference for successful cases of securitization.

In addition to the normative problems raised by the preference for success, the neglect of unsuccessful cases is exacerbated by the lack of any indication what such cases might look like. What exactly is it that securitization theory ought not to concentrate upon? Are unsuccessful cases the aforementioned instances when securitizing moves get rejected or do they entail a much greater variety of cases? These questions are apparent in articles highlighting the geographically or thematically narrow confines of securitization theory, such as those presented by Claire Wilkinson or Matt McDonald.[13] Are the weaknesses they point out (respectively, the

---

[9] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 39.
[10] Lene Hansen, "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 285-306.
[11] Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 168.
[12] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 40.
[13] Claire Wilkinson, "The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory Useable Outside Europe?," *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2007): 5-25; McDonald, "The Failed Securitization of Climate Change in Australia."

Westphalian straightjacket and mobilizing around climate change) features inherent to the theory or to the type of cases it prefers? These questions also arise in Kristian Atland and Kristin Ven Bruusgaard's article which aims to explicitly contribute to the understanding of failed cases of securitization.[14] Atland and Ven Bruusgaard delivered a fine analysis of a single incident involving Norway and Russia where the puzzle was the absence of successful securitization despite the articulation of securitizing moves. Careful to avoid claiming that the incident should have led to securitization, they proposed as the key reason for the outcome "the securitizing actors' *lack of social capital.*"[15] Plausible though such an explanation appears to be, it clearly cannot cover the whole range of failed cases of securitization.

With these opening critical remarks in mind, the preference for successful cases becomes dubious. How to explain those instances where actors with abundance of social capital make securitizing moves, yet these do not lead to successful securitization? Take, as an example, the security concerns articulated in the United Kingdom as a decrepit Russian fleet sailed down the English Channel in October 2016. Despite extensive press coverage and debate, they ultimately amounted to very little. Think about cases where one might have expected swift securitization, such as when the United States hit the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during the 1999 air campaign against Serbia. Except it did not happen. What then? We don't know, because scholars have simply avoided looking into unsuccessful cases. Whatever the reasons for this outcome (we can only speculate whether it reflects scholars' fascination with power, blind following of role-models, lack of inventiveness, or something else), it has shaped profoundly the way in which securitization has been studied. By doing so, securitization research has also abdicated on a whole range of fascinating cases where securitizing moves might have appeared in the past, but no longer do (e.g. the Franco-German relationship). In the following sections the article shows that such a choice produces specific results and raises further questions about the theory and its general direction.

Case selection bias

The stated preference for successful cases raises methodological and epistemological questions. Methodologically, it boils down to a plain instance of case selection bias. To think that to learn about something (say security), it is sufficient, let alone desirable, to study the cases where that something occurred, not only unreasonably privileges particular cases, but also poses the risk that we might miss important dimensions of what we want to study. Simply put, case selection bias refers to a process of choosing cases based on their outcome or, in a particular methodological language, the dependent variable. There is no better way to sum it up than with the title of Barbara

---

[14] Atland and Ven Bruusgaard, "When Security Speech Acts Misfire."

[15] Atland and Ven Bruusgaard, "When Security Speech Acts Misfire," 348 (emphasis in the original).

Geddes' article: "How the cases you choose affect the answers you get."[16] When this happens, Geddes points out, proposed causal claims cannot be substantiated, because it is possible that the same causes did not lead to the same results in other cases.

Applying securitization theory only to successful cases produces similarly questionable results. Cases of securitization are typically not chosen, for example, based on the variety of securitizing moves or conditions under which they are articulated (both such options could be considered independent variables), but on the basis of the outcome, that is successful securitization (i.e. the dependent variable). This approach has produced tremendous wealth of single case studies and individual illustrations of securitization.[17] Not surprisingly, however, it has led to little in terms of cross-case comparison. In this regard, it is not without coincidence that the problem of case selection bias has been most closely examined in the field of comparative politics/sociology. The study of securitization would do well to heed the lessons learned by comparativists. It would open space not only for failed cases, but also for experiments, as well as counterfactuals, all of which, thus far, have been ruled out *a priori* by securitization theory.[18]

Epistemologically, there is no reason to accept the claim that to know something about "the currently valid specific meaning of security" we should only examine successful cases. When a securitizing move is rejected and therefore fails, we probably will learn something about the meaning of security at that particular point for at least two reasons. First, since securitization theory is conceived of as intersubjective (it presupposes interaction between the securitizing actor, other actors, and the relevant audience which is addressed by the securitizing actor) it must incorporate space for counter-claims. Those voicing opposition to the securitizing moves must have some grounds on which they resist. Their refusal to accept a securitizing move will likely, though not necessarily, entail some sort of the following statements: "What is proposed is not a security issue at all"; "The real security issue is so and so"; "Other security issues have to take precedence, because there are only limited resources for dealing with them".[19] Such statements could be seen as part of a competing process of securitization and hence constitute an alternative case of successful securitization, thus confirming the theory's preference. However, they may simply rearticulate what have long been established meanings of security. Finally, they may just as well amount to nothing as far as successful

---

[16] Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2, no. 1 (1990): 131-150. See also Barbara Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), especially chapter 3.

[17] Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicka, "Securitization Revisited."

[18] A step in this direction is Stephane J. Baele and Catarina P. Thomson, "An Experimental Agenda for Securitization Theory," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 4 (2017): 646-666. On the possible uses of counterfactuals see Richard Ned Lebow, F*orbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[19] There is, obviously, the possibility that they will argue *ad hominem*, saying nothing about security and simply dismiss their opponents as ignorant, idealistic, incompetent, etc.

securitization is concerned and serve merely as negative statements preventing the success of their competitors. Without studying unsuccessful cases, we are unlikely to find out.

The other reason why unsuccessful cases should be of interest when trying to understand the meaning of security has to do with the process of its construction. Whether the potential failure of a securitizing move has to do with what an actor proclaims and/or their social standing and capital, hinges upon the strength of alternative meanings of security, or comes as result of not managing the process of security construction appropriately to given conditions is, ultimately, an empirical question. The way in which newer articulations of securitization theory have stressed its processual dimension recognizes this issue more than the original statement by Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde.[20] The argument in favour of paying closer attention to processes is based on the premise that the meaning of security cannot be divorced from the process through which it has been produced.

Crucial to this argument is to understand securitization theory as a causal theory, i.e. as a theory, which identifies conditions and factors that lead to a certain result, namely the establishment of issues as security issues.[21] The knowledge how this happened in specific instances is gained by the tracing of processes when actors try to turn issues into security issues. This I take to mean the knowledge generated by asking questions such as: What has caused an issue X to become a security issue?, and/or How has an issue X become a security issue? Both questions ask about causes of a particular end result.

Securitization theory's initial causal proposition is the following: securitization happens when a securitizing move, which is an existential threat presented by an actor (typically with a privileged social standing) gains acceptance of a relevant audience for the breaking of otherwise binding rules.[22] Stefano Guzzini has re-articulated this pathway more fully and with greater precision as a causal mechanism:

> a process in which (de)securitization can only be understood against the background of existing foreign policy discourses, their embedded collective memory of past lessons, defining metaphors and the significant "circles of recognition" for the collective identities of a country; and whose success does obviously depend on, but cannot be reduced to, the distribution of authority and different forms of capital in the relevant field. Its effectiveness (just as with a law) is historically constituted and evolving.[23]

---

[20] See Thierry Balzacq, ed., *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (London: Routledge, 2011); Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicka, "Securitization Revisited," 496-8 and 517-521.

[21] See also Stefano Guzzini, "Securitization as A Causal Mechanism," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4-5 (2011): 329-341.

[22] Buzan et. al, *Security*, 23-26.

[23] Guzzini, "Securitization as A Causal Mechanism," 336.

For either the causal proposition or mechanism to be meaningful, there has to exist the possibility of failure. If they were to always lead to a successful outcome, the result would merely depend on the ability of actors to follow a given recipe. There would be no room for any other actors to influence the outcome. Nor would there be much of a role for the relevant audience to influence the process of security construction. On the one hand, the audience might not come into play at all and be simply ignored, because its role is important only in so far as the approval of an audience is demanded by the existing rules. On the other hand, there might be no rules to break, which applies especially to situations when political or social communities are undergoing a rapid and fundamental change or disintegration, and the process of securitization is aimed at creating a new set of binding rules.

Why some processes fail

The case selection bias has an additional processual dimension. Put very simply, to privilege successful cases (and hence outcomes in general) must lead to a rather impoverished understanding of failed processes of securitization. In the context of focusing on what security does, this would seem a banal point, a loss that might well be acceptable as the cost of doing business. There is a catch, however. Given the theory's clearly articulated normative preference for desecuritization, can it really afford to write off those cases that might hold cues to how desecuritization could come about?[24] Should we not want to know more about what a failure looks like and, more importantly, about the process that brings it about? So long as the normative preference for desecuritization holds, these should be important questions for those working with the theory.

Asking why a securitizing move did not succeed shifts the analytical emphasis from outcomes back to processes, specifically to the question how it came about that invoking security did not produce the desired/expected results. The inversion of criteria characterizing successful cases of securitization suggests several reasons why a securitizing move might fail. First, an actor presenting a securitizing move does not know how to speak security in a given context. In Salem, Massachusetts, accusations about the existential threat posed by witchcraft will produce radically different results today, than they did at the end of the seventeenth century. Second, the actors may not possess sufficient authority/social capital vis-à-vis the relevant audience, as Atland and Ven Bruusgaard conclude in their article about Norway and Russia.[25] Third, what is presented as a threatening object is not amenable to securitization. President Obama may have received Nobel Peace Prize for his call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, because of the existential threat they pose to the life on the planet, but he also oversaw a massive upgrade of the United States' nuclear arsenal as a necessary security policy. Fourth, the relevant audience may refuse to accept a

---

[24] See also Mark B. Salter, "When Securitization Fails."
[25] Atland and Ven Bruusgaard, "When Security Speech Acts Misfire."

securitizing move. In 2014, the Ebola virus epidemic in Liberia was aided by the fact that "many ordinary Liberians were so profoundly estranged from their government that they assumed it was lying to them and actively disbelieved the warnings."[26] A failure can come about as a result of any of these reasons alone or through their various combinations. Undoubtedly, there will be additional causes which studies of unsuccessful securitization can help to uncover.

The key conclusion is that especially the third and the fourth reason undermine the idea that the "currently valid specific meaning of security" can be established on the basis of studying successful cases alone. These two reasons point towards variation in the processes of security construction that securitization theory has mostly overlooked. On the contrary, the preference for successful cases goes hand in hand not only with privileging a specific type of process, but also some of its constitutive features, which, in turn, diminish the processual dimension of securitization. This characteristic is most apparent with regard to political decisions, the Schmittian undercurrent of the theory. Ole Wæver, clarifying elements of the theory on his own, expressed this quite unambiguously when he wrote that "even very important *conditions* for successful securitization can never replace the political act as such."[27] Well aware that this brings the theory perhaps too close to Schmitt's decisionist logic of the political, Wæver attempted to create some distance from it by invoking the intersubjective nature of securitization.[28]

Whether Wæver's move to shield the theory is persuasive or not goes beyond the scope of this article.[29] The argument here merely is that the need to distance the theory from Schmitt arises not necessarily from the theory's logic (which, indeed, is intersubjective), but actually from the misguided preference given to successful cases. It is the overwhelming focus on such cases that highlights decisions more than processes.

The shift from processes to decisions and outcomes is quite ironic, given that one of securitization theory's main ambitions was "not to assess some objective threats that 'really' endanger some object to be defended or secured; rather it is to understand the processes of constructing a shared

---

[26] Helen Epstein, "Ebola in Liberia: An Epidemic of Rumors," *The New York Review of Books* 61, (December 18, 2014): 91-95, at 91.

[27] Ole Wæver, "The EU as a Security Actor: Reflections from a Pessimistic Constructivist on Post-sovereign Security Orders," in *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community,* ed. Morten Kelstrup and Michael C. Williams (London: Routledge, 2000), 250-294, at 252. For an example of work that casts doubt on the primary importance of the political act in securitization see Thierry Balzacq, "The Policy Tools of Securitization: Information Exchange, EU Foreign and Interior Policies," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 1 (2008): 75-100.

[28] Wæver, "The EU as a Security Actor," 252 and footnote 5.

[29] However, its limits appear when one considers the following possibility. Suppose that a socially and politically powerful actor follows the grammar of security, but fails to succeed in securitizing a given issue. How else but by recourse to circumstances does one explain that outcome?

understanding of what is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat."[30] It should be clear from the above that such a goal is better served by analysing both successful and failed cases of securitization.

What does security actually do?

There can be little doubt that among the three main "schools" of critical security studies, which originated in the post-Cold War Europe (Aberystwyth, Copenhagen, Paris), securitization theory espoused by the Copenhagen School has produced the largest quantity of empirical research.[31] Unlike the other two alternatives, it is straightforward in its operationalization and because of the emphasis on discourses does not require painstaking institutional, archival, or field-based work.

Adding to the allure of securitization theory are two more factors. One derives from the way in which it taps into the pervasive sense that to get anything done politically actors are at an advantage when they invoke security. In securitization theory this manifests itself in the aforementioned prominence given to actors' political acts. The other factor is connected to the underlying suspicion, which sometimes borders on certainty, that security allows actors to mask actions of dubious nature, gain various difficult-to-attain advantages, and ultimately increase their own power. In the theory this is expressed by the element of breaking free of otherwise binding rules that co-defines a successful case of securitization. Thanks to these two factors securitization theory seems eminently plausible. Actors do make claims using the label of security often and in the most unexpected circumstances. They also fall back on security when trying to cover up problems and gain greater power. In short, pronouncements invoking security seem omnipresent.

All this would suggest that to better understand what security does amounts to conducting critical analysis. Paradoxically, however, rather than helping the theory these factors undermine its critical potential, especially if it immerses itself exclusively in successful cases. If it is indeed true, and that is an empirical question requiring robust data collection and analysis, that numerous actors invoke security to have their preferred issues taken seriously, we should be wary of the power of security to do things. As a hunch, it does not seem very plausible that all of these actors will succeed with their security-laden agendas. While some of their failures can certainly be chalked up to actors' properties and/or their limited ability to use security to reach the goals they want to realize, it is unlikely that this could cover all the possible failed cases.

What the field of security studies may well be dealing with when it comes to securitization with its preference for successful cases is a phenomenon

---

[30] Buzan, et al, *Security*, 26.
[31] For an overview of these approaches see C.A.S.E. Collective, "Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4 (2006): 443-487.

known in cognitive psychology as frequency illusion.[32] This type of cognitive bias describes situations where either memorable or newly learned information is perceived as occurring more frequently than it objectively does. Richard Galbraith and Benton Underwood demonstrated this illusion using texts containing the same count of abstract and concrete words, yet where the former were perceived as more numerous. Examples of the frequency illusion in our daily lives are commonplace and require only modest introspection. For example, parents of a new-born child with Down's Syndrome will start noticing everywhere people with Down's Syndrome whom they hardly registered before.

Securitization theory's alertness to the powerful effects of the use of security, amplified by the preference for successful cases, could have produced findings that are driven precisely by frequency illusion. It is, of course, possible that they are not. The point is that at this stage and with the findings generated by the theory we cannot tell one way or the other. Without systematic treatment of securitizing moves irrespective of whether they produce successful or unsuccessful cases it is actually impossible to say with a solid degree of confidence what security does. There are too many important issues, climate change or nuclear weapons to use just two prominent examples, where securitizing moves have been failing for decades. Such failures need to be somehow accounted for and the preference for successful cases does not do that. Similarly, it may also be the case that because of frequency illusion studies using securitization theory have tended to overestimate the power of elites when doing security. This, of course, is at the heart of the frontal critique launched against the theory by Ken Booth and his approach to security as emancipation that need not, or perhaps even cannot, be driven by elites.[33]

All this uncertainty about findings generated by securitization theory skewed towards successful cases and their potential ambiguity should alert us to a bigger argument concerning the question of what security does. What does it do actually? While securitization theory deserves some credit for giving this question its prominence, it has not taken us very far in answering it. To use the label of security with the expectation that, thanks to its unique properties, it will produce a favourable outcome for an actor wielding it, there has got to be a pre-agreed understanding that this particular concept should carry a disproportionate causal weight. In other words, its power is not derived from any "currently valid meaning of security" that any given actor might be pushing at a specific point in time. Instead, it is the meaning of security that surpasses that given moment, a meaning which can in some contexts (but not in others since security has not always been a dominant political value) enable actors to invoke its

---

[32] Richard C. Galbraith and Benton J. Underwood, "Perceived Frequency of Concrete and Abstract Words," *Memory&Cognition* 1, no. 1 (1973): 56-60; Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Availability: A Heuristic for Judging Frequency and Probability," in *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases,* ed. Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 163-178.
[33] Booth, *Theory of World Security.*

powerful appeal. Quite what *that* meaning is transcends a single type of case and must involve both successful and unsuccessful instances of securitization.

The arguments presented in this article have questioned the desirability – theoretical, empirical, and normative – of the preference for successful cases of securitization. The case selection bias leaves us with both an impoverished understanding of security and of its effects in various political and social settings. Analysing a whole range of outcomes of securitizing moves (including instances where there might have been good reasons to think that such moves would appear, yet they did not) would produce a more nuanced grasp of what and under what circumstances invoking security can or cannot do. This invitation to conduct far more robust and systematic inquiries into what security does promises to yield better insights about its workings than simply following the convenient path leading to predictable results.

About the Author:

Jan Ruzicka is Lecturer in Security Studies in the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University. He also serves as Director of the David Davies Memorial Institute. His research on international security, nuclear weapons, and trust has appeared, among others, in the *Review of International Studies*, *International Affairs, International Relations*, and *Ethics & International Affairs*. He is currently completing (with Campbell Craig) the book *Unipolarity and the Politics of Nuclear Nonproliferation*, which is under contract with Cornell University Press. Email: jlr@aber.ac.uk