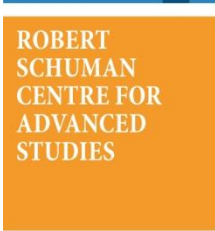




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Security Governance: making the concept fit for the
analysis of a multipolar, global and regionalized world

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multipolar, global and regionalized world**

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Abstract

Recently introduced in the academic and political debate, the concept of “security governance” still needs to be clarified. In particular, to make the concept more useful for an assessment of current security dynamics, four main shortcomings need to be overcome: in the first place, attention has been devoted more to “governance” than to “security”, while greater attention should be paid to how security is understood and perceived by the actors involved in the governance system. Second, the literature is divided in two main branches, one looking at security governance predominantly by/through governmental organizations and one dealing with non-state actors: attempts should be made to give sense of coordination efforts (or lack thereof) among different actors and layers of governance, even when focussing attention predominantly on one type of actor (e.g. regional state powers). Third, the literature (with notable exceptions though) has predominantly focused on Europe and the transatlantic area: an effort should be made to look at extra-European dynamics, also with an aim to evaluate the relationship between political/security culture and security governance, as well as between political/economic development and security governance. Finally, the literature on security governance has been too often detached from reflections over regionalism, while it would be useful to explore further the relationship between cognitive definitions of regional and security dynamics. This is all the more important when considering the progressive emergence of non-European regional powers, possibly interpreting security challenges in different terms and displaying different likelihoods and modalities to arrange coordination patterns and solve security problems.

Keywords

Security governance; security; regionalism; coordination.

Introduction*

Broadly speaking, the concept of “security governance” refers to an ‘intentional system of rule that involves the coordination, management and regulation of issues by multiple and separate authorities, interventions by both public and private actors, formal and informal arrangements and purposefully directed towards particular policy outcomes’ (Kirchner 2007: 3).

The literature, however, ranges quite a lot as far as the type of “authorities” (states, private actors, international organizations), type of coordination (formal or informal arrangements) and the policy areas to which it is applied (traditional security issues or a wider understanding of what security is). In other words, the concept is flexible enough to grasp most of the new features characterizing the governance of specific issues and regarding both the actors and the levels of cooperation at play. James Sperling sees it as ‘a heuristic device for recasting the problem of security management in order to accommodate the coexistence of alternative forms of conflict regulation, the rising number of non-state actors considered relevant to national definitions of security, and the expansion of the security agenda’ (Sperling 2011: 33).

This flexibility, however, risks coming close to vagueness. The academic literature on (or employing) the concept is frequently conceptually vague and all together results scattered as far as empirical applications are concerned. On the contrary, the need is pressing to consider what security governance adds to concepts conventionally used to register cooperation attempts in the security field and to evaluate the utility of this concept in a world that is getting all the more multipolar, regionalized and complex with respect to the role of state and non-state actors.

In particular a reflection should be made on how order is provided in different regional contexts: given the nature of the challenges at play and the increasing relevance of emerging powers, regional security governance may turn to be a relevant field for theoretical investigation and empirical analysis. In order to evaluate the usefulness of the concept of security governance to understand the current dynamics of multipolarism and regionalism, this work unpacks the concept of security governance and emphasises some of the shortcomings the literature has exhibited throughout years. Hence a first consideration to the peculiarities characterizing the literature on security governance is provided in section one. Section two goes deeper into the weaknesses characterizing both the theoretical and the empirical research. A concluding section summarizes the main argument and proposes a way forward for research.

1. “Security governance”

Generally speaking, security governance has been largely derived from insights gleaned from existing theoretical work on security and on governance – separately.

The *concept of security*, traditionally restricted to military threats by (and directed to) states, has been progressively expanded to cover a much more variegated set of phenomena and actors. The challenge to traditional security studies has regarded: the objectivity and the source of threat and the actors involved. Contributing to this renovated focus on security has been the proliferation of reflectivist approaches, underlining the importance of the subjective dimension of security and the importance to study the social construction of security through discourse and practice. This is particularly the case of the Copenhagen and the Paris Schools of security studies, as well as of Critical

* A previous version of this working paper was presented in the Workshop Regional Security Governance and Regional Powers in a Multipolar World: Burden Sharing or Free Riding? held at the European University Institute, Florence 30 September- 1 October 2013.

security studies at large.¹ Gradually, phenomena such as migration, human rights and the environment, among others, have been securitized, that is, due to the increasing role of inter-subjective understanding of phenomena, security has been identified less and less with military threats and more with challenges and risks arising from different issue areas. This widened security milieu involves both traditional state-actors and non-traditional ones, such as international and transnational groups, individuals, national agencies, NGOs, etc.

Turning now to *governance*, the concept has become a useful device to depict the diffusion of authority in international politics and the emerging regulatory policies that bypass state sovereignty (Higgott 2005: 578). Applied to global governance, the term focuses on multiple actors – institutions, states, international and non-governmental organizations – required to coordinate their efforts to regulate phenomena of global concern. Governance sheds a light on the fact that not only there is no central government and that states need to develop cooperation strategies to respond to collective problems (this assessment holds true also for more traditional approaches that do not speak about governance), but also that: i) states are no longer the only relevant actors in world politics as other actors, playing at different levels, have emerged; ii) the system is not only globalized but also highly fragmented, with a lot of issues requiring joint efforts and having an impact overcoming the borders of the states; and iii) hence, that the response to challenges is necessarily the result of a complex interaction between traditional and non-traditional actors, with a global, regional or sub-regional scope. By extension, governance also applies to challenges identified as ‘security’ challenges. Thus, if governance refers to the ‘modality’, security specifies the scenario where coordination is attempted.

Beyond the fact that *security governance* refers to a complex set of challenges and coordination efforts at the global, regional and local levels, there is no agreement on a specific definition and the areas of application of the concept range widely. All in all, regrouping two already complex concepts, “Security governance” has a lower clarity and theoretical intake than other concepts used in the traditional literature to refer to security cooperation (security regimes, security communities, concerts of powers etc.). Moreover, the predominant attention to the ‘governance’ side of the label (with respect to the ‘security’ one), has further contributed to create a sort of Babel literature where different authors look at completely different aspects of governance in the field of security. Should we have to list the most relevant weaknesses of the current literature, we would point to the following:

First, a certain ontological heterogeneity. Different authors have focused on the different processes of decision-making and implementation of security policies, which are characterized by fragmented power and authority within and outside the state (Krahmann 2003: 6). Eventually we can say that the literature on Security governance is divided in two main branches: one dealing with governmental actors (states and International organizations) and one dealing with no-state actors, with little interaction among the two. Therefore, if a branch of literature looks at the interaction among governmental actors at the regional and global level (e.g. Van Langenhove, Lucarelli, Wouters 2012), another wide branch of literature looks at the role of private actors such as security agencies and private military firms (Bigo 2006; Leander 2006; Watson 2009). This understanding of security governance looks particularly at actors and levels and little to what these actors share.

Second, an epistemological heterogeneity. Part of the literature has a factual approach and looks exclusively at the net of relations among different actors; another branch pays attention to the inter-subjective processes subsumed in coordination attempts. For instance, Kirchner underlines how ideas and values can be as important as power as their study allows not only to assess security governance’s effectiveness, but also to investigate and weight the importance of relative power and material interests, inter-subjective understandings and norms or institutional rules characterizing the governance process (Kirchner 2007: 24). The importance of norms as distinctive traits of security

¹ See for example C.A.S.E. 2006; Both 2005; Krause and Williams 1997; Bincat, Lima and Nunes 2012.

arrangement are underlined by James Sperling. According to Sperling, the role that norms play in defining ‘state interests and acceptable behavior’ is a stepping stone of regulation dynamics (2009: 9).

Third, a predominantly empirical approach. Most of the existing literature on security governance has been characterized by empirical case studies. One relevant exception is the conceptually dense work of Kirchner and Sperling on security governance in Europe (2007), which provides a framework for assessing the instruments used to accomplish defined governance functions given the ongoing system of security threats (see Kirchner in this Working Paper). Seemingly, the attempt by Sperling et al (2003; 2009) at providing a typology of security governance systems has enlarged the theoretical breadth of the concept rendering it available to the investigation of extremely variegated sets of security coordination efforts.

Fourth a predominantly narrow European focus of early studies. Empirical case studies for long time have been mainly Euro-centric. In particular, either the literature has focused on the contribution of the EU to the global governance of security or it has referred to the EU as typifying a security governance system.² This is not surprising given the affinity of the EU’s intricate institutional system and the net of relations and actors the concept of governance reminds of. It is also not surprising given the rising scholarship on EU’s contribution to holistic security (from fight of hunger to peacekeeping). However the predominant attention to EU dynamics might have biased theorizations and analyses of global security governance or to systems of security governance as developed and implemented in other regional contexts. In fact, an important antidote to such a Eurocentric perspective has been offered by a rising number of studies on regional security governance; here the focus is on attempts at security management in different geographical contexts³. Promising in this context is the contribution provided by Adler and Greve (2009), hypothesizing the co-existence of parallel and yet different systems of security governance exhibiting different practices (such as balance of power and security communities) as attempts at creating order. Drawing from the literature on regional security complexes (Buzan and Wæver 2003) the studies on ‘regionalism’ underline how security can or could be better achieved through frameworks of regional cooperation. In this case attention is on states or regional security organizations as the main and sole actors in security governance (while scarce attention is devoted to non-state actors).

2. Where to go from now? Shortcomings to overcome

As we have seen, the literature on Security governance is now broad and growing but with some gaps and shortcoming. In particular, we believe that four main shortcomings need to be overcome:

First, greater attention should be paid to the subjective and intersubjective dimension of security, investigating how security is understood and perceived by the actors involved in the governance system.

Second, attempts should be made to give sense of the coordination efforts (or the lack thereof) among different actors and layers of governance, even when focussing attention predominantly on one type of actor (e.g. regional state powers).

Third, an effort should be made to look at extra-European dynamics, also with an aim to evaluate the relationship between political/security culture and security governance, as well as between political/ economic development and security governance.

² The literature on EU’s security governance is now rather large; to the already cited works we recall here Lavenex 2004; Lucarelli, Van Langhehove and Wouters 2012; Dannreuther 2008; Hallenberg *et al.* 2009; Webber 2007; Kaurert and Léonard 2013; Daase and Friesendorf 2010.

³ For a selected list of contributions see below.

Finally, it would be useful to explore much more in depth than it has been done thus far the relationship between cognitive definitions of a region and security dynamics. Let us explore each of them at the time.

2.1 Bring security and its inter-subjective dimension back in.

As we have argued elsewhere (Christou et al. 2010; Ceccorulli and Lucarelli 2012), in the existent literature, attention has been devoted more to ‘governance’ than to ‘security’, while greater attention should be paid to how security is understood and perceived by the actors involved in the governance system. This is all the more important in that how security is perceived is likely to influence the instruments, the practices and the management of the same. Ultimately, this type of analysis is fundamental if one takes into account the emergence of rising powers in different regional contexts as it suggests that security governance may assume peculiar traits.

The scarce attention devoted to security and its shared (or not) understanding among different actors is widely acknowledged in recent academic contributions, which instead put security, its understandings and implications at the center of their reflections (Croft and Floyd 2011; Buzan and Hansen 2009; Williams 2013). The literature on Security governance would benefit from dialoguing with this literature, for instance paying more attention to ‘securitization’ dynamics, which affect both the very definition of a problem as a security challenge and the modes of security regulation. One path in this direction would be investigating issue-areas increasingly perceived as embodying or igniting security challenges broader intended. For example, human rights violations has advanced the formulation of ‘human security’, a concept not only discontinuing states’ exclusive actorhood but also questioning one of the underpinnings of the international system as we know it, the non-interference principle.⁴ These approaches look at the ‘constitutive’ dimension of security, explaining how the framing of an issue into a security modality impinges on the way the same is understood and then addressed. Variants of these approaches insist more on discourses or practices as relevant determinants of securitization processes (Wæver 2004; Bigo 2000, 2002). In such a way, it is possible to discover how both traditional but particularly new issues arise as security concerns requiring cooperation, providing a benefit to security governance compared to other traditional concepts.

In other words, the research agenda would take advantage from a deeper reconsideration of what security is today: of the actors (see below), referents (suffice to recall the concepts of societal or human security), issues (energy, migration, climate change, food, organized crime, cyber activities) and practices of collective attempts (multilevel, formal/informal, ad hoc/institutionalised) aimed at tackling ongoing challenges. Also, benefit would derive from a consideration of the extent to which security understandings are shared among different actors and what this determines in terms of collective security efforts (Ceccorulli and Lucarelli 2012).

2.2 Bring state and non-state actors in

That the security landscape is characterized by a growing range of different actors is widely recognized. Indeed, governance as a term has been especially referred not only to the variegated levels of coordination: regional (among others see Lake and Morgan 1997; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Lake 2009; Fawn 2009; Paasi 2009; Vieira 2006; Korkmaz 2008; Breslin and Croft 2012; Crocker et al. 2011; Paul 2012), inter-regional (Fioramonti 2012, 2012b; Rignér, Söderbaum 2010; Dannreuther 2008; Lucarelli, Pinfari and Santini 2014) and global (Gowan 2008; Britz, Ojanen 2009; Kirchner and Sperling 2007b; Graham and Felicio 2006). Increasingly growing is also the literature acknowledging the role of non-state actors in security dynamics either as agent of security threats (for example

⁴ Exceptions include: Caparini and Marenin 2006; Kaunert and Léonard 2013; Daase and Friesendorf 2010; Aydinli 2010; Biermann, Pattberg and Zelli 2012; Olonisakin and Okech 2011.

terrorists and nets of organized crime), referents (society, human beings) or as parts of the process of security management: thus, for example, security agencies and private actors have been under the spotlight of many security analyses (Bigo 2006; Leander 2006; Watson 2009; Bryden and Caparini 2006). NGO's have been particularly studied as far as their implementation in security coordination was concerned (Westermeyer 2013; Ryerson 2012; Richmond and Carey 2005; Carey 2012). Also, NGOs have been investigated as far as their role in watching over the consequences of policies undertaken to face 'security' challenges were considered (Harris 2009; see also the works of Migreurop, Médecins sans Frontières, Statewatch on matters regarding migration and refugees).

And yet, one has to recognize that, for obvious and valid reasons, works on International Organizations engaged in security at various levels are still predominant in the security governance literature (see among others Webber 2007; Holmberg 2011; Hopmann 2003; Kirchner and Dominguez 2011; Tavares 2010; Alexandroff 2010, Acharya 2009; Kirchner 2012). This fact should not surprise given that not only the number of IOs has skyrocketed in recent years but also the nature of existing one has sometimes changed, such as the former Organization for African Union (now African Union). More to that, the regional level seems to mostly characterise the new IOs' playing field - suffice here to mention the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Union of South American Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization . In the same vein, there is no need to question the renovated interest in states, their security culture, their power, their geographical location and their perspective role: blooming is the literature on emerging powers (see among others Clementi 2011; Thomas 2012; Bisley 2012; Alexandroff 2010; Cooper 2008; Renard and Biscop 2013; Prys 2012; Herd 2010; Ikenberry et al. 2011).

But is it possible to take into account the role of all these actors in the analysis of security governance? There are several research strategies that could help in this direction, but one promising (and less explored) strategy of enquiry is to focus on the states that are emerging as crucial actors in security governance, exploring their relationship with other actors such as IOs (regional and global), other states and non state actors.

The reason is clear: states continue to retain a great amount of power in world politics, which is not only material but also ideational. From a material viewpoint they can support or not the work of IOs, decide resources allocation and take specific decisions. From an ideational viewpoint they have a subjective perception of security dynamics which interacts with that of the other actors of the system and contributes to shape the shared (or not shared) perception of a security threat and apt response. Not only, relevant states in the system (traditional or emerging) are engaged in a process of inter-subjective redefinition of the shape of the governance (who does what in terms of institutions and rules) and of the interpretation of existent norms. Therefore focusing attention on these actors, exploring their material and ideational preference, their interaction with other governmental and nongovernmental actors is a promising line of research that can contribute to understand the wider transformation of security governance.

Moreover, emerging powers assume a greater relevance because they seem to perfectly match with an ever growing tendency of today's governance, that is, the progressive regionalisation of world dynamics urging for 'regional governance'; in this sense, while no actor is supposed to play the global hegemon in the foreseeable future, regional powers may well play the pivot in their regional contexts and contribute (or fail to) to overall governance. Indeed, the peculiarities characterizing different regions represent another intriguing field of research.

2.3 De-Europeanize

The literature (with notable exceptions though) has predominantly focused on Europe and the transatlantic area: an effort should be made to look at extra-European dynamics, also with an aim to evaluate the relationship between political/security culture and security governance, as well as between political/ economic development and security governance.

As a matter of fact, the literature explicitly using the term *Security governance* is either referring to the EU as exemplifying a peculiar way of arranging relations in a context with post-Westphalian traits or either applied to make sense of coordination attempts within the EU (Kirchner and Sperling 2007; Bossong 2008; Lucarelli Van Langhehove and Wouters 2012; Pawlak 2012). However, the EU is not necessarily likely to assume ‘post-Westphalian’ moves in its external action, and, at the same time, more Westphalian entities can be pushed to greater coordination towards security governance by the challenges ahead: for instance, transborder risks significantly shrink the relevance of physical demarcations so that coordinated actions are most of the time the preferred choice. Indeed, what constitutes a challenge ahead and the compatibility between security perceptions is *the sine qua non* for coordinated actions. This is not to say that seemingly perceived collective problems are easily arranged; to the contrary, even a similar security perception may not be enough for coordination due, among others, to power considerations, different strategic cultures⁵.

It is for this reason that the contribution of Kirchner and Sperling (2007) and Sperling et al. (2009) to the exportability of the concept looks as promising: by classifying security governance policies according to instruments and functions, the typology offered by Kirchner and Sperling –and the one adopted by this Working Papers series- (policies of prevention, protection, assurance and compellence) can, with some caveats, be employed for the analysis of other contexts aside from the EU’s playground and for useful comparisons.

The empirical literature should thus more robustly focus on how security is perceived in different contexts, whether shared understandings exist and the shape that coordinated actions assumes. Particularly vibrant from this point of view is the literature on Asia (especially East-Asia). A specific attention to security in that region has especially grown in the last years (see for example Acharya 2012, 2009; Acharya and Buzan 2010), bringing authors to wonder, for example, the absence of a structure such as NATO in Asia (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002); or the existence, instead, of a peaceful community in East Asia (Gwi-Ok 2013) and peace-making efforts in the regional context (Svensson 2011); or, finally, considering the role of external actors, such as the US, on the security architecture of the region (Koga 2011). This latter case directly relates to some contributions to this Working Papers series who specifically considers the role of the US and of the EU in regional security governance (see for example Renard, Pawlak and Harnish).

2.4 Bring regionalism ‘in’

The literature on security governance has only recently started to deal with regional security dynamics, either comparing different regional security organizations (Breslin and Croft 2012; Kirchner and Dominguez 2011; 2013) or exploring the specific security dynamics in one region (Acharya 2012; Sperling et al 2003). This attention to the regional dimension of security governance is all the more important given the rise of non-European regional powers, with their own interpretation of security challenges and dynamics. As a result of this and other trends we have assisted to a regionalization of security which is interestingly intertwined with the globalization of security governance. A good example might be the fight against terrorism which is the aim of both global and regional governance, achieved through different means in different regions. Despite this renewed attention to regional security dynamics, however, some improvement could take place also as far as scholarship in this field is concerned.

As we have said, in the first place, it would be particularly important to stress the subjective dimension of security by looking at *security perceptions* of different actors. This comes nicely with the idea that both security and regions are social constructions.⁶ Drawing from older IR theory on ‘pluralistic security communities’ (Deutsch et. al 1957) or ‘regional security complexes’ (Buzan and

⁵ On the role of national security cultures on global security governance, see Kirchner and Sperling 2010.

⁶ A good approach to this in Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002 and Adler 1997.

Wæver 2003) we could consider *regions themselves as a result of shared understandings of security*. The qualitative difference of a (pluralistic) security community is the absence among a group of actors of the security dilemma which instead is not excluded in the security complexes. In other words, in the case of a pluralistic security community, the community itself (and the regional area it covers) is defined by the shared understanding of security among the units (states) in the area, which, as a result of shared identities, values and diffuse reciprocity, stop feeling threatened one from the other. This has historically occurred beyond geographic regions (the transatlantic area). According to the Regional Security Complexes approach, instead, a region is a geographically determined framework where security concerns are widely shared among states because of security interdependences. The end result is that not only threats involve neighboring actors in a similar way, but policy provisions to cope with them spread out their effects on specific areas. Henceforth, an unavoidable necessity to coordinate actions among actors to solve security concerns. If the inter-subjective component of threat assessment reinforces the constructivist imprinting on security perceptions, the step towards or the probability of the creation of pluralistic communities is not contemplated in the Regional Security Complexes approach which suffers from geographic determinism in not acknowledging the probable existence of *'regions' which are not territorially defined*.⁷ A research on the role of state actors in regional security governance would also have to look at the states' interpretation of what is their region of reference as well as how their interpretation of security threats contributes to shape a cognitive region in the area that could be the basis of a regional system of security governance.

What can be drawn from the reasoning above is that both cognitive, power and geographic determinants are to be taken into account: all elements are part of the process explaining regional framings and none of them is *a priori* excluded by the usage of a term such as security governance.

3. Conclusion

Security governance is a useful concept to capture the complexity of the management of security in the current complex international and regional scenario. The same concept, however, risks being too loose to be a useful guide to research if scholars do not face some of the shortcomings encountered so far. In particular, to make the concept more useful for an assessment of current security dynamics, we have argued that four main shortcomings need to be overcome: in the first place, greater attention should be paid to how security is understood and perceived by the actors involved in the governance system. Second, the literature should overcome the current division in two main branches, one looking at security governance predominantly by/through governmental organizations and one dealing with non-state actors: attempts should be made to give sense of the coordination efforts (or the lack thereof) among different actors and layers of governance, even when focussing attention predominantly on one type of actor (e.g. regional state powers). Third, the empirical literature has predominantly focused on Europe and the transatlantic area (with a recent and predominant turn to Asia): an effort should be made to look more deeply at extra-European security dynamics. Finally, the literature on security governance has been only recently connected with reflections on regionalism, but it would be useful to deepen the reflection, particularly by exploring the relationship between cognitive definitions of regional and security dynamics. This is all the more important when considering the progressive emergence of non-European regional powers, possibly interpreting security challenges in different terms and displaying different likelihoods and modalities to arrange coordination patterns and solve security problems.

⁷ The fact that regional are not clearly geographically determined is confirmed by the simple observation that the plethora of international organizations (the World Bank, the OSCE, the UN) broadly working through regional approaches offer comparatively different labels of regional settings which most of the time do not overlap.

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