

# **Greening Security Strategies: Weaknesses and Contradictions**

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CS – Copenhagen School of Security Studies

Keywords: environmental security, climate change, threat, risk management, urgency, European Union

## **Abstract**

Since the 1970s, threats like climate change have gradually become a part of the security agenda and cannot be anymore excluded from a security mainstream. The 1990s failure to produce a crucial military event and, yet paradoxically, diminishing great power debate after the Cold War, underlined the significance of non-traditional security sectors such as the environmental one. However, some security authors claim that the environmental threats are characterized by a lower urgency and belong into the sphere of a risk management. This paper analyzes such contradictions through the Copenhagen School theory and the case study of the European Union (EU). Despite the European environmental global actorness, the EU decided not to originally securitize environment in her Security Strategy in 2003. In the light of scientific underpinnings, the EU has continuously taken an active role in environmental negotiations like in Montreal or Kyoto Protocol. Eventually, climate change and environmental degradation has been included as a key threat endangering the European security by the 2008 Report on the Implementation of the

European Security Strategy. The EU's securitizing move is a prime example highlighting the controversy around the environmental security. It characterizes climate change as a threat multiplier, which, however, employs only preventive measures and diplomatic means.

### **Introduction**

What academic and political actors accept as 'international security' changes over time. Political and other diverse issues, which were never before labelled as security threats, are currently discussed at international security conferences and as a part of national security strategies. The best example is environmental security, which has undergone a long-term process since the 1970s in order to be included among security fields. Despite opposing views and reactions of environmental and international security scholars towards an association between the environment and security, environmental security was included among main security threats.

The paper argues that environmental security has a significant place in international and national security planning and cannot be excluded from the security discussions. In order to support this claim, it analyzes two weaknesses of environmental security. Detailed investigations of specific features of this concept can be useful for environmental security scholars as well as for the critics of the existence of the environmental security. Two analyzed weaknesses are:

- 1) The distinctive nature of an environmental threat is not directly related to security. Environmental issues are often characterized by a lower urgency endangering, for instance, a population or the entire biosphere. For this reason, they are better characterized as risks rather than threats.
- 2) Environmental issues are better addressed via risk management tools. Because they do not follow the confrontational logic of securitization, they often employ preventive measures. As a result, securitization in the environmental sector is almost never successful because it is carried out at the international level and usually results only in politicization (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.71).

Based on the Copenhagen School's theory, two weaknesses are exemplified on the case study of the EU. Despite the EU's global actorness in the environmental field, the decision to securitize environment threats such as climate change was delayed. The author acknowledges that it would

be possible to analyze securitizations in every EU member state. However, the length of the paper restricts us to consider only the EU as a political entity.

### **Environmental Threats**

In the environmental sector, one can recognize three types of threats: threats to human civilization from natural environment not caused by human activity, existential threats to planetary biosphere caused by human activity, and threats from human activity not posing existential threats to civilization (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.79-80). Certainly, the second category representing existential threats to the environment originating in human activity is the most common motivation to politicize or securitize the environment, as seen at the latest conference Rio+20.

In environmental security, the environment as such (or its specific part, i.e. surviving of individual species) is typically threatened (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.23-75). This reflects maintenance of the planetary climate and biosphere suitable for human population. The second most common and concurrently interrelated endangered object (also called a referent object) is a preservation of existing levels of civilization, the loss of the civilization status and a return to already achieved form of human development, to some kind of social barbarism (Buzan, 1991, p.132; Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.75).

In fact, environmental security can refer to different environmental issues such as conflicts caused by environmental degradations or by a control over natural resources, management of hazardous waste imposing health risks or the climate change threat. In comparison to other environmental issues, the threat of climate change refers to an environmental problem causing climatological changes, which influence temperature increase, sea level rise, and increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters (Brauch, 2009, p.71). Climate change is probably the most discussed and at the same time the most controversial environmental threat. It can best illustrate a doubtful security nature of the environmental threat, which is triggered by a relative invisibility of the effects of climate change for instance, accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (Caldwell & Williams, 2012, p.1). Even though this threat does not directly threaten current population, global warming might presently cause extreme natural events such as

earthquakes or floods. These natural catastrophes are explicitly securitized or politicized as consequences of climate change, which require an instant action (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.81). However, securitization of climate change's future effects is complex and repeatedly lacking attention of political elites as well as of the general public. Therefore, this concept has been chosen for analysis in this paper.

### **Theoretical and Historical Background**

In a new world order created after Cold War, the realist security discussion evoking state relations and confrontational logics was no longer at the forefront. Yet, the ideological struggle of the Cold War was replaced by the struggle for economical efficiency or environmental sustainability (Ornäs & Krokfors, 1992, p.1). New security schools emerged in Europe, namely the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CS)<sup>1</sup>, critical security studies, traditionalists/realists, radical post-modernists, feminists, Bourdieu-inspired approaches and sociological works by Didier Bigo. A security approach broadening the security sphere by non-military sectors was initially developed by the CS. Therefore, the CS's argumentation serves as a theoretical basis for the paper. While the first part is mainly descriptive, the theory is broadly applied in the second and third part of the work.

For Buzan, Wæver and Wilde (1998) from the CS, environmental security is about, "the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend" (p.76). In their view, the focus is on a relationship between human actions and environmental degradation. On one hand, the CS recognizes that humankind is living beyond the carrying capacity of the earth and therefore, it is a global responsibility to

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<sup>1</sup> The Copenhagen School is one of the most influential security schools, which originated as the Conflict and Peace Research Institute in 1985. Ole Wæver, the father of the Copenhagen theory of securitization, participated in this project from the beginning, while Barry Buzan became a project director in 1988. The School is famous for developing a security approach broadening the security sphere by non-military sectors and for securitization theory, which was founded by Wæver's article *Securitization and Desecuritization* in 1995. The idea and the definition of securitization theory and specific security fields were later fully expanded in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. In the line with the CS's theoretical framework, military and non-military fields are categorized as security sectors. Accordingly, securitization has formed the mainstream in security studies because of its innovative ideas based on social constructivism. The theory emphasizes the speech act and particular requirements, which enable the process of securitization to be successful. Security is treated here as a practice, a socially constructive process with determined conditions. For an issue to be successfully securitized, "...the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure." (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.24) In addition, the acceptance of an existential threat by the audience is required.

handle this issue (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.81). On the other hand, the CS academics do not take a strong stance on the presence of the environmental security sector.

The CS scholars believe that the appearance of this sector was caused only by a steady drip of new information and a rising public consciousness that invoked inclusion of environment into security policy debates and international security literature (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p.55). In fact, the concept of environmental security was initially related only to a normative notion of sustainable development. Sustainable development and environmental preservation for the biosphere were firstly discussed by the Report of the Brundtland Commission in 1987. Subsequently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established in 1988 (Brauch, 2009, p.69- 82). In 1992, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was approved in Rio de Janeiro and as a consequence, climate change as a security issue was firstly addressed by the UN Security Council in 2007 (Brauch, 2009, p.89).

Similarly to the development of international environmental politics, it took more than ten years from 1973 for an environmental policy to be recognized by the EU. The Single European Act amended the Treaty of Rome in 1987 and the environmental policy became for the first time an official provision of the European Community (Wunderlich & Bailey, 2011, p.136). Later, the EU Treaty in 1993 formally added the precautionary principle together with the 'sustainable growth respecting the environment' to the European Community's tasks (Europa, n.d.). Slowly, but steadily, the EU has become the major driving force of the discussions about the ozone depletion in the Montreal Protocol in 1987 and of the Basel Convention on hazardous waste in 1989. (Wunderlich & Bailey, 2011, p.132).

From a security perspective, issues like environmental degradation or climate change were not considered as threatening for the Union for a long period of time. In 2003, the EU agreed on 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', the first and until now the only security strategy, which deals with security issues. The European Security Strategy (ESS) briefly mentioned global warming and the interconnection with the conflict over natural resources. However, no environmental danger was categorized as a threat.

In 2008, the attitude of the EU promptly changed towards one of the environmental areas, climate change. The security construction of the climate change threat has been discussed in the Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council 'Climate Change and International Security' (CCIS) from 2008. For the first time, this document referred to climate change as a direct threat for the EU. A few months later, the 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy - Providing Security in a Changing World' re-evaluated the relevance of the European security goals set up by the ESS in 2003. In order to secure climate change as a key issue, the EU labelled it as a threat to the international community in 2008 (European Commission. 2008). As a result of the late development, the environmental sector is assigned more controversy and less importance than other security sectors in international security settings.

### **A Lower Urgency of Environmental Security**

In comparison to threats such as a military intervention or a nuclear catastrophe, issues like climate change do not in all circumstances endanger present civilization and the biosphere. Consequently, they are of a lower urgency. Not surprisingly, security scholar Stritzel claims that security practices deal mainly with environmental issues below the level of exceptionality and within risk management practices (Stritzel, 2007, p.367). In most of the cases, they do not require an immediate action from international or national security actors.

According to the CS reasoning, an existential issue should impose an absolute priority among other security challenges. It should be a question of survival for a referent object. Even though Buzan, Wæver & Wilde (1998) recognize the existential nature of threats arising from environmental threats for survival of human civilization, according to them, these issues are still only politicized – not addressed by security agendas (p.23). Therefore, environmental security threats are assigned less importance than threats occurring in other security sectors.

However, such logic does not fully explain why a distant issue such as climate change has been labelled as a direct international threat for the EU by the Report on the Implementation of the ESS. While the EU largely contributes to the emissions production, she is obviously not the most vulnerable region affected by climate change in the world. In fact, only the low-lying coastal

areas including the Netherlands and East Anglia are subject to inundations according to IPCC estimates (Bretherton & Vogler, 1999, p.84). As a matter of fact, the world's rich regions including the EU are not fully protected from the effects of climate change. In particular, they are not immune from causes of worsening local and national environmental conditions threatening national traditions and cultures within the EU, but also in the neighbourhood. As Harris (2007) concludes, these impacts would oblige the EU to spend vast sums of money on stabilizing migration or civil unrest, increasing food security or providing development aid to secure her international interests, which could be otherwise directed for different priorities (p.4-5). Therefore, the EU is concerned about developments in the climate change sector and plays a crucial role in international environmental talks.

Apart from the international actorness of the EU, the scientific agenda was another reason why the EU decided to proceed in security talks. Even though issues like natural causes and disasters and climate change should be addressed as quickly as possible, they mostly demand calculation of probability and seriousness of the issue and the right planning. Therefore, one of the main differences of environmental security is a scientific proof required for a threat creation in a security field. According to the CS, the environmental security sector differs from other sectors by being composed of two agendas, the political and the scientific agenda. The causal link among these two agendas is blurry, while they interactively influence each other.

In the political agenda, political actors discuss and include a threat into the political sphere. They focus on a solution of an issue within the security system. In the aftermath of scientific underpinnings, it is always a political choice to put an issue to a security agenda and securitize it. These choices are usually made by elites from the political agenda (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.72).

In the environmental field, the scientific agenda created by the epistemic community<sup>2</sup>, is an inevitable part of the process. It stands outside the core of politics and is embedded in mostly natural sciences (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.71-72). The scientific data and predictions are communicated by professionals to the press or to political elites and for this reason, politicians as well as the general public can do no more than trust or mistrust the scientific results on an

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<sup>2</sup> According to Haas, epistemic communities are formed by professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge. (Haas, 1992. p.3)

intuitive basis (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.72-p.77). What is more, scientific data, models or predictions are exploited in a political struggle by securitizing actors or political elites. The desire for knowledge surrounding environmental threats often justifies further actions (i.e. further research, political agenda or precautionary actions).

In the case of the EU's securitization of climate change, the objectivity of human-made causes is supported by scientific evidence of the rising number of greenhouse-gas emissions in the atmosphere or sea-level rises (Berling, 2011, p.393). As the EU case study shows, the prior scientific agenda has strengthened efforts to securitize climate change. Even though the Report on the Implementation of the ESS does not necessarily refer to a previous research, the earlier CCIS report highlights the role of science. The CCIS can be perceived as a fore-runner of the decision to mark climate change as a key threat for the EU.

The CCIS continuously refers to the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In fact, the IPCC was established by the World Meteorological Organization and the UN Environmental Program in 1988 as a source of scientific information about climate change (Harris, 2007, p.10). The latest *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change* (2007) defines as the main problems for Europe extreme hot and dry summers and mild winters, short-duration environmental risks like windstorms, and long-term climate change consequences including sea-level rise affecting coastal areas. Among the economic impacts on the EU arising from climate change, the IPCC (2007) refers to a decline in coastline industries, decreasing water availability in southern and south-eastern Europe, and an increase in timber harvest in northern Europe with a simultaneous increase in the risk of forest fire in southern European countries. The IPCC's statements incorporated into the CCIS indisputably show the importance of the scientific agenda for environmental security. In this case, the CCIS's climate change securitizing move is supported and developed from the previous IPCC research, which later lead to bringing climate change to the security agenda. The CCIS emphasizes that:

*The science of climate change is now better understood. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change demonstrate that even if by 2050 emissions would be reduced to below half of 1990 levels, a temperature rise of up to 2°C above pre-industrial levels will be difficult to avoid. Such a temperature increase will pose serious*

*security risks* that would increase if warming continues.” (European Commission, 2008, p.1)

As this Report shows, the scientific findings fortify the security essence of environmental threats. The scientific data play a crucial role in deciding of a security nature of environmental dangers.

### **Preventive Measures**

From a security perspective, most of the environmental issues are neither existential nor urgent. Therefore, they are addressed differently in comparison to direct and immediate solutions such as defence planning, intervention, etc. Environmental security requires long-term solutions focused on a prevention of potential dangers. Risk management referring to precautionary actions is characteristic for the environmental sector, in which risks rather than threats arise. According to security scholars Aradau, Lobo-Guerrero and Van Munster (2008), the difference between a risk and a threat lies in the systematic solutions addressed by risks (p.148-149). Risks shift security logic often used in military settings away from war and violence. They concentrate on structured and pre-emptive planning. In general, a risk refers to the future uncertainty requiring the monitoring of actions in order to minimize its potentially harmful effects (Aradau, Lobo-Guerrero & Van Munster, 2008, p.149).

Regardless of whether defining an environmental issue as a threat or as a risk, it is still a challenge solved by precautionary measures and a risk management. In this view, an environmental and energy researcher Trombetta (2011) suggests that environmental issues are dominantly characterized by security measures reflecting mutual cooperation, economic sanctions and incentives based on the interplay of the scientific and the political agenda (p.145). According to her, the environmental sector distinguishes itself from other security sectors by its chain of reactions including promotion of an action, focus on the problem and adoption of a solution (Trombetta, 2011, p.139).

The predominant use of preventive measures, which do not require any immediate emergency action as in the case of military or political security, is reflected also in securitization of environmental challenges. These are hardly securitized – transferred from political agenda to the security agenda in order to take an immediate action. In the theory, securitization is an extreme

version of politicization. It is the outcome of an action, which shifts the issue beyond the established rules of politics and frames the issue as above politics (Wæver, 2004, p.8). This represents a fragile borderline separating politicization from securitization. For a threat to be securitized, it needs to fulfil the criteria for securitization and take an issue above normal game of politics by assigning it extreme urgency. The urgency of most of the environmental issues, as mentioned earlier, is missing. In order to better identify the transformation of an issue, there is an imaginable spectrum

- ranging from nonpoliticization (an issue is not a part of public debate, state does not deal with it)
- through politicization (the issue becomes a part of a public policy requiring government decision and resource allocations)
- to securitization (construction of the issue as an existential threat, emergency measures and actions outside the normal politics deployed) (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.23-24).

Such a spectrum should simplify the placement of an issue. However, this is not always the case because case studies do not always follow the theory.

In CS terms, the securitization in the environmental security sector is questionable. The environmental lobby deals with causes in order to change society by coordinated efforts, therefore, these threats are often too distant for elites to be interested in the environmental securitization (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.82). The majority of environmental threats, especially the climate change danger, is a calculation related to an unstable future which does not threaten current civilization. Importantly, environmental threats are often placed on the agenda of international organizations with the purpose of capturing the urgency of these global threats. Buzan recognizes that these threats require international management because causes and effects of, for instance, climate change, have many times different roots (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.86).

According to the CS, 'collective response' actions, through which environmental issues are addressed, cannot be identified as securitization. Certain securitizing moves occurred, ranging from the Club of Rome reports to the work of the Brundtland Commission, which despite an

increased public concern only lead to politicization (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p.73-74). As Buzan, Wæver & Wilde (1998) conclude, “The environmental sector displays more clearly than any other the propensity for dramatic securitizing moves but with comparatively little successful securitization effects.” (p.73-74)

Despite the EU’s move to securitize climate change, the undertaken actions reflect neither the urgency nor the security value. The EU advocates a need to tackle the threat via a ‘collective response’ in a form of international cooperation, further research (as already mentioned in a relation to science), the EU financial capacities and internal solutions. The Report on the Implementation of the ESS (2008) defines a preventive action based upon international cooperation as a desired solution and states that, “We must step up our work with countries most at risk by strengthening their capacity to cope. International co-operation, with the UN and regional organisations, will be essential” (p.6).

In a similar manner, the CCIS describes required internal actions. Despite the fact that the CCIS stresses the necessity of a political dialogue with other donors and neighbourhood countries, it primarily focuses on the EU’s internal capacity to deal with the issue. Therefore, “The report considers how the full range of EU instruments, including Community and CFSP/ESDP action, can be used alongside mitigation and adaptation policies to address the security risks. It also considers the implications for the intensification of political dialogue with third countries” (European Commission, 2008, p.2). In order to fight climate change, the EU should focus on “an improvement in the prevention of, and preparedness for early responses to, disasters and conflicts. Financial implications for such responses should be identified and also be considered in the EU’s budget review” (European Commission, 2008, p.9). According to the CCIS (2008), priorities should be directed to “...climate change mitigation and adaptation, good governance, natural resource management, technology transfer, trans-boundary environmental cooperation (inter alia water and land), institutional strengthening and capacity building for crisis management” (p.2). Statements in the CSS report and the Report on the Implementation of the ESS confirm that the environmental sector is not securitized. The efforts made are rather characterized as preventive measures, which are within risk management practices.

## **Conclusion**

Environmental security is a well-known and historically accepted concept. However, it can hardly be compared to other security fields because of its uniqueness and the specific nature of environmental threats. This paper defines two weaknesses characteristic for this security area.

A first weakness is a distinctive nature of environmental threats, which does not have natural security implications. Mostly, it relates to science and environmentalism. This means that environmental issues are of lower urgency, which is also confirmed by the EU's actions. However, the EU's self-interest and a concern about the environmental developments in the neighborhood possibly affecting the Union are reasons for the threat to be considered by Brussels.

A second contradiction is related to a utilization of risk management tools in the environmental sector. The preventive tools and diplomacy are employed because these threats are not usually perceived as urgent. In fact, the environmental issues are not often securitized i.e. being fully transformed to a security agenda.

In conclusion, a characterization of environmental weaknesses should help us to better understand the slippery slope of environmental security as a concept in security terms. Despite its existence on a security agenda, it has to be considered with a different attitude than other security fields. The lower urgency and existential value for a population should not be undermined.

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