Talking Threats
The Social Construction of National Security in Russia and the United States

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Abstract

Why are some issues seen as threats? This dissertation attempts to explain the dynamics of threat construction by national decision-makers. The theoretical ambition is twofold: first, the dissertation aims at improving the research on threat construction by suggesting a broad approach that analyzes this process in a structured manner. Second, the dissertation also contributes to the more mainstream International Relations security research agenda, which often under-problematizes this issue. The point of departure is that the link between a condition (e.g. structure) and threat framing (e.g. agency) is not to be taken for granted, and that threat construction is subjective and varies among actors. This assertion is supported by the findings of the dissertation’s component parts. Essay I finds that US security doctrines such as the Truman and Bush doctrines are not routine responses to external threats but rather the natural continuation of a political and societal discourse in which certain norms and identities interact. Essay II finds that a condition that could lay the foundation for a threat construction does not necessarily evoke such a reaction, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Russia. Essay III demonstrates the opposite situation; that a securitization can take place although the contextual conditions do not necessarily point toward such a move, such as US President Clinton’s declaration that AIDS is a threat to the national security of the United States. Essay IV proposes a framework that incorporates explanatory factors from the international, the domestic, and the individual levels of analysis. Such a framework allows for a more refined analysis which better captures the contingent relationships between factors. Taken together, the findings of this dissertation indicate that the correlations between conditions and threat constructions are intricate, and that the explanation of a securitization lies in the interaction of certain social and cognitive processes.

Keywords: threat images, security, securitization, norms, ideas, HIV/AIDS

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To my parents
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List of Essays


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Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................... 9

Introduction to the Dissertation ........................................................................................................... 11

   Actor-Based and Non-Actor Based Threat Images – an Overview ................................................. 14
     Actor-Based Issues .......................................................................................................................... 15
     Non-Actor Based Issues .................................................................................................................. 17
     Unexplored Avenues in Previous Research .................................................................................. 19

   The Analytical Framework: Concepts, Theory, and Method ........................................................... 21
     Central Concepts and Theoretical Assumptions ....................................................................... 21
     Ontology, Epistemology and Method ......................................................................................... 27

Presenting the Four Essays .................................................................................................................. 32

   Essay II: Exploring the Construction of Threats. The Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Russia ................................................................. 34
   Essay IV: Ideas, Identity and Internalization. Explaining the Threat Images of Actors ................................................................. 37

Concluding Remarks ............................................................................................................................. 39

   Findings and Contributions ............................................................................................................. 39
   Implications for Future Research ................................................................................................... 42

References .............................................................................................................................................. 44

Essay I .................................................................................................................................................... 49

Essay II ................................................................................................................................................ 73

Essay III .............................................................................................................................................. 99

Essay IV .............................................................................................................................................. 121
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Introduction to the Dissertation

Why are some issues seen as threats? Why do decision-makers place a particular issue on the national security agenda at a particular point in time? The component parts of this dissertation are linked by the common theme of explaining threat construction and exploring which factors influence national decision-makers to frame an issue as a threat. The theoretical ambition is twofold: first, the dissertation aims at improving the research on threat construction by suggesting a broad approach that analyzes this process in a structured manner. Second, through this theoretical development of threat construction research, the dissertation also contributes to the more mainstream International Relations (IR) security research agenda, which often under-problematizes this issue.

Threat construction is dynamic. An issue that has been ignored or only viewed as one of many on the political agenda can suddenly receive highest priority. The opposite is just as true – issues that have been central to national security decision-making can suddenly be downplayed. A third possibility is that an issue never receives attention. The empirical record demonstrates all of these three possible sets of threat frames. An example of the first type is the post-9/11 accentuation of terrorism, even in places not directly affected by the attacks. That case also illustrates how a threat image can diffuse among actors.1 An example of the second kind, i.e. the downgrading of an issue that used to be in focus security-wise, is the change of perception regarding the military power of Russia. Although predominant in the Western political and societal discourse for several decades, for most states the Russian threat image has now been surpassed by things like terrorism, unemployment, environmental issues, and international crime. That case indicates that threat construction can alter over time. Finally, one example of when a decision-making elite has chosen not to view a possibly harmful condition as a threat to national security is the South African leadership’s perception of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. That case illustrates the assumption that underpins this dissertation: that although certain conditions – be they structural or

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1 The notions of threat image and threat construction are used interchangeably and indicate the same phenomenon.
contextual – may constitute a threat, the actual threat construction, or threat framing process is subjective and varies among actors.

The point of departure of this dissertation, as illustrated by the preceding three sets of threat framing, is that the link between a condition (e.g. structure) and threat framing (e.g. agency) is not to be taken for granted. This assertion is supported by the findings of the dissertation’s component parts—that is, a securitization, or threat framing, is not an automatic response to a condition that could be perceived as threatening.\(^2\) Essay I finds that US security doctrines such as the Truman and Bush doctrines are not routine responses to external threats but rather the natural continuation of a political and societal discourse in which certain norms and identities interact. Essay II finds that a condition that could lay the foundation for a threat construction does not necessarily evoke such a reaction, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Russia. Essay III demonstrates the opposite situation; that a securitization can take place although the contextual conditions do not necessarily point toward such a move, such as US President Clinton’s declaration that AIDS is a threat to the national security of the United States. These three empirical investigations thus all indicate that the correlations between conditions and threat constructions are intricate and far from self evident. Instead, as developed in Essay IV, the central questions to ask are how, why and when a securitization occurs. The four articles demonstrate in different ways that the answer to this question lies in the interaction of certain social and cognitive processes. In order to examine these processes and to explain the construction of threat images I argue that a broad conceptual and analytical framework is needed. This dissertation thus proposes a framework that incorporates different explanatory factors and includes the international, the domestic, and the individual levels of analysis.\(^3\) Such a framework contributes to the research on security and threat construction by allowing for a more refined analysis which better captures the contingent relationships between factors.\(^4\) A methodological contribution of this dissertation is that the various theoretically driven concepts have been applied to empirical settings in a systematic manner, employing a combination of a structured form of discourse analysis and process tracing.

The *explanandum*, or that I want to explain, is the actions taken by the national decision-making elite. These actions are particularly important because they can result in changes of policy, redistributions of resources designated to handle security matters, and great media and public

\(^2\) Securitization is a concept first popularized by the so-called Copenhagen School and constitutes one of the foremost criticisms of viewing threats as objective.

\(^3\) Figure I of essay IV illustrates this framework.

\(^4\) Most previous works on threat construction have traditionally tended to take the form of single factor, single level analysis.
attention. Due to so-called ‘agenda crowding’, the prioritization of one issue often occurs at the expense of other issues which could also be of relevance to national security. Hence, the threat framing of decision-makers has significant implications for the overall national, and sometimes even international, security context. Analyzing national security also allows for a comparison of different types of threat images. Previous studies have often distinguished between military threats from antagonistic states and non-military issues, for example climate change, by not including the latter into the sphere of national security. In contrast, this dissertation argues that incorporating all conditions that could endanger some aspect of the state – its territorial basis, its institutions, or its conceptual idea – into the sphere of national security allows for the investigation and comparison of a broader range of issues without compromising the field of security studies (cf. Buzan, 1991).

In line with this reasoning this dissertation examines, as mentioned above, both traditional actor-based conditions, such as terrorism and antagonistic states, as well as non-actor based conditions, such as HIV/AIDS in relation to national security decision-making. While the former easily fall into the realm of security studies, the inclusion of the latter is not unproblematic. It is often argued that an epidemic like AIDS belongs to the sphere of public health rather than security. Proponents of such a perspective argue that many of the linkages between AIDS and social, political, and military disorder are at best exaggerated, if not outright wrong:

the argument that HIV/AIDS may prove politically destabilizing is /…/ speculative and arguably an example of worst-case thinking. /…/ Indeed, evidence for many of the claims as to why HIV/AIDS might prove destabilizing appears to be lacking (McInnes, 2006: 317-18).

This point of view posits that AIDS does not constitute a condition that should be examined within the realm of security studies. On the other hand, proponents of an AIDS – security nexus stress that

[t]he issue whether HIV/AIDS constitutes a threat to state capacity and security is not a question whether the threat exists – it does. Instead, the focus is centered on how serious the threat is to the stability of states (Ostergard, 2007: 65).

The stance taken in this dissertation differs from both of the above in the sense that although I argue that AIDS can be analyzed within the sphere of national security, the linkage between the contextual condition that AIDS constitutes and the problem formulation by actors is not self evident. Instead, the focus here lies on analyzing the presence or absence of a threat construction process with regard to a certain issue (such as
antagonistic states, terrorism, or AIDS). Such a focus relates to the fairly limited research field on the process of threat construction. This field, in which constructivist approaches dominate, stands in opposition to the more mainstream neo-realist dominated field of security studies, as the latter rarely (if ever) problematizes threat construction. As noted initially, although the main objective of this study is to develop theoretical and empirical knowledge on threat construction within a constructivist perspective, the theoretical advancement and empirical findings of this dissertation contribute to the broader field of security studies as well.

How these central claims relate to the previous research on threats and security is discussed in the following section, in which I provide a brief overview of the field and point out four central aspects which are lacking in this research. I thereafter present my conceptual framework, as well as the main ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of this dissertation. The four essays are then presented; in the final section I discuss the main empirical and theoretical findings, contributions and avenues for future research.

**Actor-Based and Non-Actor Based Threat Images – an Overview**

This dissertation focuses on the construction of threat images and builds on the fairly limited literature that attempts to problematize why and how a specific condition is framed as a threat. As this literature is discussed in greater detail in Essay IV, it is not further developed here. The main problem with this literature can nevertheless be summarized as a lack of attempts to analyze threat construction in a structured, systematic manner. Furthermore, many previous studies on threat construction employ mono-causal and single-level forms of explanation, and generally link a threat-image to a particular sender (for example an antagonistic state). As argued in this dissertation, a structured but broad analytical framework can be applied to investigate different kinds of threat images and thus facilitate an analysis that better accounts for and explains the complexities of a threat construction process.

Although this study mainly builds on and relates to the research on threat construction, it is nevertheless important to situate this focus within the broader IR/national security field of research (which does not always make a distinction between underlying conditions and threat images). An overview of the broader field also indicates a number of unexplored avenues to which this dissertation can contribute.

Turning now to the broader field of threat analysis within security studies, a useful way to organize this research is to separate it into two
clusters: *actor-based threat images and non-actor based threat images*. Instead of the customary separation of issues into ‘old’ and ‘new’ or ‘military’ and ‘non-military’ issues (Matthew & Shambaugh, 1998), which in many ways overlap and create conceptual confusion, this dissertation separates between studies that focus on security issues that are linked to a sender, i.e. antagonistic actors, and those threat images that are not associated with a sender. I argue that this distinction better recounts for the different types of threats analyzed in previous research. Iran’s nuclear development and Al Qaida’s proclamations against western civilization are threat images that belong to the sender category. Climate change and epidemics are threat images that lack a particular sender.5

**Actor-Based Issues**

The predominance of realism is evident in the studies on actor-based threat images.6 Ever since Thucydides’ analysis of the Peloponnesian wars, a history of realist theorizing can be traced in the works of a number of significant thinkers, such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Clausewitz. Since the mid-1900s’ various realist assumptions have set the research agenda for security studies, from classical realism, with its focus on human nature’s inherent quest for power (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1959) to structural realism/neorealism, which stresses the roles of states in the anarchic system (Mearsheimer, 2001, 1990; Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). The Cold War era became the heyday of neorealism, as the structure of the international system and the security priorities by the two superpowers called for work on issues like power balancing, security dilemmas, deterrence and alliances. Although the international structure and the issues that are deemed important have changed since the beginning of the 1990s, realist works still are quite dominant in IR (see, for example, Schweller, 2004; Paul, 2005; 2006; Posen, 2006; for recent review essays on current realist research, see Layne, 2009; Nexon, 2009). This means that the traditional and well-established definition of national security – set almost twenty years ago by Walt in his seminal article – still prevails. According to this definition, national security concerns the phenomenon of war, and security studies should thus focus on “the study of the threat, use, and control of military force” (Walt, 1991: 212).

5 One problem with the actor-based/non actor-based distinction becomes evident in the tricky cases, for example biological warfare (when an actor intentionally puts bacteria in drinking water or systematically uses rape as a means to spread AIDS). Most of the previous research, however, focuses on either antagonistic others or issues like epidemics and climate change.

6 The dominant theory in International Relations, realism, and neorealism in particular, argues that states in the international system “seek, at minimum, self-preservation in a self-help anarchic environment” (Telhami, 2002: 159). The distribution of power and capabilities are the main determinants of state behavior.
In this line of argumentation, the inclusion of issues beyond the purely military dimension “runs the risk of expanding ‘security studies’ excessively /…/ [and would] destroy its intellectual coherence” (Walt, 1991: 213). In other words, issues like environmental hazards, migration, or epidemics are not viewed as legitimate problem areas to explore within a realist framework of national security. Instead, the realist focus is on threats linked to antagonistic actors and on strategies to manage these threats. This view is mirrored by contemporary neorealist research as well, with studies employing realist theoretical assumptions mainly investigate phenomena like the balance of power and/or balance of threats (Wivel, 2008; Yetiv, 2006; Ross, 2006; Posen, 2006), the security dilemma (Holslag, 2009), and power asymmetry (Paul, 2006). As a natural result of these foci, the units of analysis are great powers and regional powers – such as the United States, China, India, Pakistan and the EU – and the dyadic relationships between them or with other, smaller states. Even in more recently developed forms of realism, such as neoclassical realism which incorporates domestic variables into the analysis of foreign policy behavior (Schweller, 2004), the threats investigated are linked to antagonistic actors.

It is not only realist works, however, that view this linkage between threat images and external actors as more or less given. Studies employing other theoretical points of departure, such as various constructivist approaches, also often focus on empirical cases where the perceived threat stems from an ‘other’. This ‘other’ can be another state (Rousseau, 2006), or terrorist groups (Meyer, 2009; Hulsse & Spencer, 2008). The latter, in particular, has become the issue to investigate in security studies in the decade after 9/11. This is true for all theoretical disciplines and there has been an upsurge of studies analyzing various aspects of the terrorist phenomenon in relation to national security. Many recent studies have investigated the psychological effects of terrorism on a state’s perceived sense of security and how the terrorist threat image influences foreign policy (Gadarian, 2010; Aly & Green, 2010; Shambaugh, Matthew, Silver, et al., 2010; Fettweis, 2010; Meyer 2009; Huddy, Feldman & Weber, 2007). Others have focused on counterterrorism strategies (Adler, 2010; Hoffman, 2009), some have investigated whether these strategies are exaggerated (Wolfendale, 2007), and some have even whether terrorism is a national security threat at all (Mueller, 2006). It can thus be argued that terrorism, if not replacing the traditional state-origination of threat images, has at least positioned itself

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7 Even though the EU is not a state in the traditional sense, its common Defense and Security Policy allows for the treatment of the EU as a unitary actor, and the EU’s role as a power actor in the international arena can thus be investigated.

8 It has been argued, however, that realism has problems with analyzing terrorism in terms of national security due to its state centrisn (Brenner, 2006).
at the forefront of the actor-based category. Although it has been argued that there are some differences between threat images coming from states and terrorists in a number of regards, such as, counter-strategies (Adler, 2010), they share enough resemblances to be justifiably placed in the same category (see Essay I).

Non-Actor Based Issues

Turning to non-actor based threat images, realist works are basically absent since realists tend to examine military issues and do not consider issues like epidemics to be national security concerns. However, non-actor based threat images are analyzed by works from several other theoretical disciplines which view them as being of equal importance to actor-based threats. This category is, however, fairly new, and issues like epidemics, environmental hazards, and migration were more or less ignored in security studies until the early 1990s. One notable exception to this were seminal works by Buzan and Ullman that attempted to broaden the security concept as early as 1983 (Buzan, 1983; Ullman, 1983). Although security in the midst of the Cold War was very much linked to counter-balancing activities by the two superpowers, Buzan nevertheless argued that the concept of national security should not be limited to the military sphere, but could also be economic or ecologic in nature. A threat image can also affect different levels of analysis, not only the state level (Buzan, 1983). Ullman emphasized the importance for security theorists and practitioners alike to recognize non-military threats images since a sole focus on the military “conveys a profoundly false image of reality” (Ullman, 1983: 129). This suggests that issues like climate change and epidemics, which can threaten several different sectors and societal levels, should belong to the sphere of national security.

It is generally understood that the non-actor based threat images are distinguished from actor-based issues in that they, for instance, “cross state borders but generally cannot be linked directly to the foreign policies or behavior of other states” (Matthew and Shambaugh, 1998: 163). Nonetheless, like actor-based conditions, they threaten “the core values of national security: territorial integrity and political independence; preservation of the well-being, freedom, and property of citizens; and national culture” (Matthew and Shambaugh, 1998: 163). It is sometimes even claimed that they have superseded traditional military issues in importance since “few of today’s dangers have the character of direct military aggression emanating from a clearly defined sovereign source” (Brower and Chalk, 2003: 3; also Heinecken, 2003; Price-Smith, 2002; Prins, 2004). Non-actor based threat images can actually be viewed as more threatening than actor based conditions since there is no sender, or
identifiable actor, behind them: “There is nothing as dangerous or terrifying as the unknown” (Johnson, 1994: 12).

Apart from offering a broadening of the security concept, the non-actor-based threat images also differ from actor based approaches by investigating other levels of analysis than the national. Human security, for instance, focuses on issues that demand international collective action, and calls for a broadening and deepening of the security concept through paying attention to the everyday security concerns of individuals rather than the traditional security threats of high politics (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Although still popular in policy circles, human security has been criticized by academics for being too vast, lacking a proper definition, and having an unclear unit of analysis. These problems lessen its analytical value (Buzan, 2004; Paris, 2004, 2001). Similarly, global security (Prins, 1995), which investigates transnational, non-actor based threat images at the international level of analysis also faces problems with clarifying the unit of analysis. 9

A number of works have focused on different non-actor based threat images such as the environment (Herman & Treverton, 2009; Borgerson, 2008; Klare, 2007; Campbell, 2008) and migration (Huysmans, 2000; 2006). Of particular interest to this dissertation is the previous research on epidemics as issues of national security. Infectious disease, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, is claimed to be one of the most central security issues in the post Cold-war security era; although, as argued by Price-Smith, it is by no means a new threat image, rather, it is “one of humanity’s oldest and direst enemies” (Price-Smith, 2002: 3). In other words, the distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ is neither useful nor accurate. Instead, infectious disease, like global warming, is a non-actor based threat image since it is not the individuals that carry an infection that constitute the threat image, but rather the virus itself (Elbe, 2006). Unlike climate change, however, the direct effects of infectious disease on mortality are much more evident. Together with the long-term effects they can have on the social, political, economic and military spheres, epidemics are perhaps the most alarming of the non-actor based security conditions. Epidemics are thus a central concern not only at the individual level, but to national security:

9 Proponents of a global security concept argue that the so-called ‘new’ global security challenges cannot be handled by or analyzed through traditional security approaches which focus on “antagonistic cultural power blocs” (Prins, 1995: 826). Instead global security studies pursue a form of “practical idealism”; an attempt to integrate the study and solution of global problems into the workday lives of human beings and the work of governments (Ibid.: 828).
Since infectious disease results in far greater population mortality than typically results from war, the resurgence of older miasmas and the emergence of novel and lethal pathogens constitutes a very real threat to the security of the population of the modern state (Price-Smith, 2002: 118).

The infectious disease that is most commonly recognized as possible threat is HIV/AIDS. However, viewing HIV/AIDS or other epidemics as threat images can be controversial; not only from a realist point of departure, but also by those who believe that moving this issue into the security sphere is actually counter-productive for managing the epidemic in a proper and efficient manner. Nevertheless, many argue that AIDS can affect a greater number of different security sectors than any other non-actor based issue and therefore is a self-evident matter for national security. First, it can affect the economic sector, due to decreased productivity and strains in the work force population (McInnes and Lee, 2006). Second, it can affect the social sector, due to particular demographic effects (AIDS often eliminates the middle-aged hump of a population). Third, it can be linked to political insecurity as “infectious disease prevalence levels show a significant negative empirical association with measures of state capacity” (Price-Smith, 2002: 172). Finally, there is a particular link between AIDS and the military, as “the average infection rates of soldiers are significantly higher than equivalent age groups in the regular civilian population” (Singer, 2002: 147). In turn, this means that “the state’s ability to stabilize, defend, or protect their citizens weakens.../.../ [which] provides fertile ground for conflict and war, or exploitation by dissident groups” (Heinecken, 2003: 282).

Unexplored Avenues in Previous Research

As discussed above, the research field on threats and security within IR is far from being uniform – both with regard to theoretical assumptions and the issues examined. Some unexplored avenues indicate that there are issues warranting further examination. The first such issue concerns the general negligence in problematizing the construction of threats. This is particularly true in realist works, but can be evidenced in other studies as well. In previous research a contextual condition like international terrorism is inextricably intertwined with the threat perception of this issue, with the result that the analytical focus mainly concerns the state policies countering that threat image. Few studies attempt to address and explain why a certain issue is believed to be threatening when other conditions are not. Some previous research has criticized this state of affairs and has suggested other ways of problematizing the concept of threat. The so-called Copenhagen School, for instance, employing the idea of securitization, has reconceptualized threats to be speech acts.
This means that threats only exist when someone declares an issue to be a threat and that this process is separated from any contextual conditions. This dissertation builds on the literature which criticizes the static view of threats, but also argues that threat construction studies must be more systematic and employ a broader point of departure.

Related to this is the issue of theoretical and methodological holism when attempting to address national security and foreign policy behavior. Traditionally within IR, realist works have mainly employed dyadic power relations between actors as the key factor in explaining different forms of security behavior. Constructivists have focused on identities and ideas. Foreign policy analysis has traditionally focused on either the rational behavior of actors or the cognitive perceptions of these actors in order to explain decision-making. Although there have been calls for more holistic approaches (e.g. Hudson, 2005; Carlsnaes, 2002), such attempts are rare both when it comes to the particular field of threat constructions, as well as within the larger area of IR security policy research. The analytical framework suggested here thus attempts to contribute to the threat construction literature and in turn to the broader field of IR security studies by offering a more holistic form of analysis.

A third issue concerns the tendency to link national security studies to actor-based threats. This is particularly true for realist works but holds true for other theoretical approaches as well, as the extreme focus on terrorism in the past decade indicates. Although actor-based threat images naturally constitute an essential part of contemporary international affairs, they are by no means the only part; by ignoring non-actor based threat images one fails to give an accurate representation of the international security context. Although this issue was addressed by Ullman and Buzan 27 years ago, further contributions certainly can be made in order to analyze and compare different threat images within the realm of national security. This dissertation addresses this issue both empirically and theoretically. The three empirical studies investigate both actor-based and non-actor based issues and the analytical framework suggested in Essay IV can be employed to investigate the threat construction processes of different types of conditions.

The fourth and final issue concerns the lack of theoretical contributions by the studies on non-actor based threats. Many of the works on epidemics or climate change are either descriptive or policy-oriented in nature, without any explicit aim of theory building. The claim that non-actor based threat images are ‘human security’ issues also leads to a disadvantageous distinction between these issues and the so-called ‘traditional’, or actor-based, national security issues. This impedes comparative analyses of different threat images, both in terms of how they are constructed and the counter-strategies directed to handle them. This is counter-effective to the theoretical development of threat
construction. This dissertation attempts to explain the construction of both actor-based threat images (antagonistic states and terrorism) and a non-actor based issue (HIV/AIDS) and thereby to further our knowledge on threat construction as a whole. Methodologically, most previous studies on non-actor based threats are descriptive in nature (Price-Smith, who employs a highly sophisticated method to examine the effects of epidemics on state capacity, is a notable exception). Nor do studies employing a more post-modernist epistemology always provide transparent accounts of how data was collected and analyzed. This dissertation argues that just as more theoretical rigor is required, a more systematic and structured methodological approach is needed in order to forward our knowledge on threat construction.

The Analytical Framework: Concepts, Theory, and Method

This composite dissertation investigates the phenomenon of threat construction in four separate essays. The essays are united by some general conceptual, ontological, and epistemological assumptions which I explicate in this section. I also discuss central methodological designs and techniques.

Central Concepts and Theoretical Assumptions

The concepts of threat and national security are often referred to as two sides of the same coin. They constitute the most fundamental notions to this dissertation, and all four essays attempt to contribute to the field of security studies by furthering knowledge on threat construction. However, the research field on national security is broad and offers diametrically opposing conceptualizations of what national security really is and how it should be defined.

In this study I employ a broad notion of national security in terms of sectors – including both actor-based (e.g. antagonistic states or groups) and non-actor based (e.g. epidemics or climate change) issues into the realm of national security. Although we should refrain from allowing the national security concept to become too broad, the inclusion of issues such as epidemics does not imply that every type of danger should be regarded as a national security concern. Instead, national security is defined as the acknowledgment and management of conditions that could violate the three pillars of the state, i.e. the state’s physical base in terms of territory and population; its institutions; and the shared idea of the state among its citizens (Buzan, 1983/1991). Thus, only conditions
that can threaten these pillars are included in the national security concept. War is doubtlessly central to security studies. However, non-actor based phenomena can also threaten the pillars of the state. For instance, if high numbers of people are killed in an epidemic, the state faces a declining population, making it difficult to uphold institutions like the police force, the school system, etc. Problems with maintaining the essential functions of a state can lead to its weakening which can affect the idea of the state. It is important to note, however, that while this conceptualization of national security employs objective criteria, whether or not a given issue is constructed into a threat image and becomes securitized by decision-makers is a different matter.

Analyzing security at the national level is, however, not uncontroversial. Recent research in the field of security studies has argued that current security concerns are transboundary and span both internal and external security domains (Eriksson & Rhinard, 2009). Moreover, non-actor based threat images such as epidemics are in many ways global, international and transnational phenomena. Epidemics are not delimited to borders, and neither are the actors involved in the handling of these types of threat images. Neo-liberalist views of complex interdependence suggest that the state and the national level of analysis have outplayed their importance and that the bulk of exchange and interaction occurs between groups, organizations, and individuals at the inter-society level (Keohane & Nye, 2000). Although this might be true, I nevertheless argue that the state is still the institution holding the power and capabilities necessary to handle issues like epidemics or climate change. For example, although several international and transnational actors emphasized the dangers of, and worked against, the AIDS epidemic in Russia, it was not until President Putin decided to securitize the issue – thereby dedicating attention and finances – that AIDS in Russia began to be handled in an organized manner. In other words, in terms of exploring threat images and analyzing the security policies concerning these images, the state is still a central actor.10

The conceptualization of national security and national security threat images in this dissertation contributes to the different unexplored issues from previous research that were highlighted earlier. Because different kinds of conditions are analyzed in a similar manner, this study contributes to the field of threat construction and advances theoretical assumptions.

Other central concepts are the non-material factors employed as explanans (independent variables) in the four essays. They are defined and conceptualized in each essay, particularly in Essay IV which brings

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10 As previously mentioned, a supra-state entity like the EU can also have the power and capabilities to handle security threats.
together the theoretical assumptions and finding of the previous essays, so I will here only briefly mention the key theoretical assumptions. All of the concepts, securitization, ideas, and identity are derived from previous constructivist research on security and, in particular, international relations. They are non-material or ideational factors in the sense that they are constructed in collective and intersubjective discursive processes. This means that an ideational factor differs from a material one in the sense that it is not tangible or observable (compare a norm to a rock, for instance). Instead, there is only “indirect evidence” of ideational concepts (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998: 892). Identity, for example, can mainly be traced through communication between actors – when we use personal pronouns identifying a collective, or in some other way express identity boundary markers or signifiers.

Following the assumptions of constructivism – which will be further developed in the section on ontology – non-materialist concepts are believed to matter in shaping the interest and behavior of actors, either in interplay with material factors or on their own.

The first such central concept is securitization. Popularized by the so-called Copenhagen School, securitization constitutes a new way of problematizing security by viewing it as a speech act, that is, the framing of an issue as an existential threat to a referent object (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998). Security threats are thus subjective constructs. The concept of securitization plays a significant role in all four essays, although the employment of this concept varies. While securitization is viewed as one of the discursive entities making a security doctrine possible in Essay I, it is the explanandum of Essays II, III and IV. This is partly due to the findings of the first essay: although all three discursive components investigated there – norms, identity, securitization – interacted in the discourse that made the creation of a doctrine possible, it was also found that both norms and identities play important roles for the securitization of a particular phenomenon. In other words, the degree of securitization appeared to be dependent on dominant identity constructions and on settled norms. Since I found this dynamic interesting and under-investigated in previous research, the focus of subsequent works thus shifted to analyzing the processes leading up to securitization.

The conceptualization of a securitization process here follows the general assumptions of previous securitization research although some conceptual modifications are suggested in order to increase the empirical applicability. For instance, unlike most other studies on securitization, my explanandum concerns the notion of a securitizing move. A securitizing move is the public declaration by an actor that a certain issue is a threat to national security. According to the Copenhagen school this is only the first step in a securitization process; in order to determine
whether an issue is properly securitized one must also investigate whether and how the securitizing move is accepted by the so-called audience. Thus, for the Copenhagen school the analytical focus concerns the interaction between the securitizer and the audience. This dissertation is concerned instead with the process leading up to the securitizing move and attempts to explain what causes someone to make a threat declaration in the first place. Thus, the audience is not analyzed or problematized here. Moreover, the definition of a securitizing move follows the Copenhagen school to the extent that a move is seen as a public declaration of threat. I have, however, added to this definition that such a declaration must be accompanied by a strategy to act. In other words, to only say that something is a threat does not constitute a securitizing move; one must also suggest how this threat should be handled, for instance, through an action strategy combined with designated resources.

Ideas constitute another key concept as they play an important explanatory role in all four essays. While I initially referred to norms in Essays I and II, the concept of ideas was found to be more suitable since the norm concept is often associated with issues of right and wrong. Because all four essays concern norms in the broad sense—policy norms or standards of behavior without any moral connotation—the employment of the term ideas rather than norms creates less conceptual confusion. Still, in many constructivist works, ideas and norms are used interchangeably, so I argue that notions from previous research on norms, such as diffusion and internalization, are applicable to the concept of ideas as well. Ideas are defined as intersubjective understandings that to differing extents constrain behavior, but more importantly, they “provide agents/states with understanding of interests (“constitute them”)…” (Checkel, 1999: 84). In terms of threat, ideas can specify what is a threat, for instance that HIV/AIDS is a threat to national security, or in and of themselves constitute a value that can be threatened, for example liberty, which was believed to be threatened by Communists during the Cold War. In both cases ideas generate interest from actors—the interest to act against the AIDS threat and the interest to protect liberty.

Identity is the third key non-material factor and is defined as a socially constructed collective separated from other socially constructed collectives by some form of ideational border (cultural, historical, ideological, etc.). Identity can thus be distinguished into Self and Other, ingroup and outgroup and exists both at the international and domestic levels of analysis. The concept of identity has an important explanatory function in Essays I, II, and IV, although the approach to understanding the linkage between identity and threat varies somewhat across the essays. The first approach, used in Essay I, is in line with common
conceptualizations of identity in international relations, that is, identity constitutes an underlying condition for a threat construction in terms of being an antagonistic Other. In other words, the main threat image of an ingroup is the constitution and actions of a particular outgroup.\footnote{Another way of explaining the threat images linked to outgroup is suggested by Social Identity Theory (Noreen & Sjöstedt, 2004; Tajfel, 1974). Here, the conception of threat is not caused by the behavior of the outgroup but rather the constitution of the ingroup. Hence, if an ingroup is an identity under development it tends to view all external identities as much more threatening than if the ingroup is a settled identity.} For example, the main threat to the US decision-making elite in 1946 was the Soviet Union since this identity was predicated to be evil as well as powerful, and whose behavior was deemed aggressive.

The second approach to linking identity to threat construction, as is done in Essay II, is to analyze how identity works as a catalyst or gatekeeper in accepting idea diffusion concerning threat conditions. If the dyadic relationship between ingroup and outgroup is colored by antagonism, ingroup is probably more likely to resist any idea diffusion attempts from outgroup than if the role identity is colored by cooperation. For example, Russia initially hesitated to accept the idea of an AIDS-security nexus, and, in particular, the gravity of the Russian AIDS epidemic because this idea came from organizations believed to be linked to the US or ‘the West’. Identity can thus prevent the acceptance or realization of a threat image.

Departing from much of the previous constructivist work in international relations, which mostly focuses on the salience and implications of structural factors, this dissertation attempts to bring agency into the analysis by explicitly problematizing the role of actors. Although not emphasized in all of the essays, agency is a central concept and conceptualized as having two dimensions. First, agency is important in relation to ideas. As particularly emphasized in Essays III and IV, the role of policy entrepreneurs and their characteristics, power positions, etc., are essential features in explaining the diffusion of ideas. To describe, understand, and explain processes of international norm diffusion, for instance, an explicit focus on the entrepreneurs who attempt to spread an idea or norm is required (Checkel, 2001). Who are these entrepreneurs, what are their essential traits, what tools do they employ to spread a particular message (for instance the idea that AIDS is a security threat) to states? Highlighting these micro-aspects of agency allows for a more refined analysis of the overall diffusion processes, as well as for comparison between different processes.

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, in order to fully comprehend diffusion processes, the receivers of these processes must also be problematized. To only study the existence of a particular international idea and the correlation with the subsequent behavior of
states black-boxes the process concerning how this idea was accepted and established. Instead, the internalization process of the central decision-making unit of a state, that is, the people who ultimately turn ideas into policies (i.e. – initiate securitizing moves) should be explicitly traced and analyzed. What, then, is the central decision-making unit and how can it be operationalized? In most states a distinction between different layers of decision-making can be made: the outer layer is constituted by the broader political elite (for example, members of parliament), the inner layer consists of more central decision-makers (for example, cabinet members). The core is the unit holding the ultimate decision-making power. In many cases this consists of one individual (for example a president) but in other empirical contexts this unit may consist of a leader and his/her closest advisors. Who constitutes this decision-making unit is thus an empirical question.

In political psychology, the decision-making unit is central in explaining policy making due to its “actor and action indispensability” (Greenstein, 1967: 633-636; also Houghton, 2001). Actor indispensability basically means that beliefs and internalization processes differ between decision-makers, while action indispensability means that had not this particular unit been in power, the policy outcome might have been different. In other words, in contrast to the claims of structuralists, decision-makers can never be reduced to their surrounding contexts. Although it is important to also explore how a particular idea is accepted in the outer and inner layers of the political sphere, it is especially crucial to examine the perceptions and internalization of the core.

The internalization aspect is developed in Essay II and, in particular, Essay IV. Internalization is viewed as a causal mechanism linking the structural factors of ideas and identity to the outcome, the securitizing move. Resembling the concept of learning, internalization concerns how an individual may change his or her opinion on a certain issue and how this leads to a change in preferences.

Agency is thus a twofold concept and includes both the sender and the receiver, i.e. the entrepreneurs and the policy-makers involved in an idea diffusion process. Together with the above-discussed structural factors it constitutes a broad conceptual and analytical framework that plays an essential role in this dissertation’s theoretical argument. Because this framework allows for a more refined analysis of a threat construction process than would a single factor, single level analysis, this approach is an attempt to respond to the weakness in previous research that concerns the lack of multi-factor, multi-level analyses. It can also be applied to analyze different kinds of threat images – both actor-based and non-actor based – which allows for a comparison between the construction processes of different kinds of threats. In turn, this can
contribute to the theoretical development of non-actor based threats in particular since this type has been underdeveloped in previous research.

It should be emphasized that a broad conceptual and analytical framework constitutes a point of departure for a threat construction analysis. The factors and mechanisms discussed here – ideas, identity, internalization – should not be viewed as factors that have equal explanatory value, every time, in every context. As will be discussed in the following section, this dissertation does not strive towards generating covering laws. Rather, the context dependence of the entities of the conceptual framework is emphasized. However, this dissertation argues that a broad conceptual and analytical framework is a necessary starting point since it can discover relations (or ‘synergy effects’) for which a mono-causal analysis would fail to account. To use the concept of identity as an example: Essay II finds that identity was an important factor in the securitization of AIDS in Russia since it can explain the initial Russian reluctance to discuss AIDS in relation to national security. However, changes over time regarding which domestic identities were affected by AIDS eventually weakened this reluctance. Nevertheless, since identity is a malleable concept, it is not certain that identity would be of equal importance in another contextual setting. Employing a broad framework, the explanatory powers – or lack thereof – of each factor can be identified, and more importantly, the interaction of the factors can be examined.

Ontology, Epistemology and Method

As described above, non-material, or ideational, concepts are central to this dissertation. This approach follows mainstream constructivism’s emphasis of an ontology constituted by “intersubjective understandings, subjective knowledge and material objects” (Adler, 2002: 100). In other words, social processes are central to the explanation and understanding of the behavior of actors. Material factors are of significance as well, although their degree of importance for the behavior of actors is dependent on intersubjective understandings and subjective knowledge (Wendt, 1999). For example, an actor’s possession of nuclear warheads can be an important determinant for the security behavior of other actors, as these warheads may constitute a threat image. Nevertheless, what really affects the threat perception – and thereby subsequent behavior – is the identity of the actor in possession of the WMDs:

500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons because the British are friends of the United States and the North Koreans are not, and amity or enmity is a function of shared understandings (Wendt 1995, 73).
This means that material factors by themselves provide limited explanation, rather, “their effects presuppose structures of shared knowledge, which vary and which are not reducible to capabilities” (Ibid.).

Still, unlike the more radical views of post-modernism, stressing “ideas all the way down” (Fearon & Wendt, 2002: 58), the ‘via-media’ form of constructivism employed here acknowledges that the material context indeed exists and needs to be taken into consideration. Power, for instance, military or economic power, is embedded in the concept of identity (although it is by no means the only determinant to identity) and can be one factor as to how identity is framed and understood (cf. Adler, 1997). Just as identity provides meaning for material factors, materialism can help to constitute identity. For example, had not the Soviet Union been viewed as such a great military power in 1946, it probably would not have been securitized as a severe international threat by the United States. In other words, if there are no material conditions to back it, the likelihood of securitizing moves decreases. Although threat images are not inextricably intertwined with conditions in a static realist sense, but are instead subjectively constructed images, these images are still not detached from the surrounding context as speech act theory argues (cf. Balzacq, 2005). Instead, what is interesting to examine – and which can be linked to the concern in previous research regarding the lack of problematizations of threat construction – is why only some contextual (or material) conditions are perceived as threats. For example, in today’s current international context there are several great economic and military powers, but some are predicated as allies and some as adversaries. Materialism alone cannot explain this divergence; we need ideational factors – ‘social kinds’ – to do so.

As regards epistemology, it is sometimes argued that studies with an ideational ontology inevitably are concerned with constitutive rather than causational explanations (see Doty, 1993). Constitutive – or ‘how possible’ – analysis is not concerned with establishing causal relationships between independently existing factors, instead it attempts to account for “how the properties of a system are constituted” (Wendt, 1998: 105). In essence, this means that in order to explain how a particular ideational phenomenon (for instance, the Cold War) is made possible, one tries to identify the factors that make up (constitute) this ideational phenomenon. The constitutive factor is not separated from the constitutive effect by “independent existence or temporal

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12 Naturally, there are empirical examples of when securitizing moves are initiated, and successfully accepted by audiences, without the existence of any underlying material conditions (the securitization of Jews in Nazi Germany is one such example).
asymmetry” (Wendt, 1998: 106); instead, the two are conceptually intertwined and exist simultaneously.

This type of research enterprise is viewed skeptically by the rationalist camp. At best, it is labeled as a descriptive form of inquiry, and is by no means seen as explanatory (see King, Kehoane, and Verba, 1994). This dissertation objects to both of the above claims and agrees with the arguments made by Wendt: first, a focus on the ideational rather than the material does not necessarily imply constitutive rather than causal theorizing; and second, both constitutive and causal types of inquiries are concerned with explanation, that is, both ‘how possible’ and ‘why’ questions instigate explanatory answers. Moreover, ideational phenomena contain both causal and constitutive effects:

Ideas have constitutive effects insofar as they make social kinds possible; masters and slaves do not exist apart from the shared understandings that constitute their identities as such. Both those shared understandings also have causal effects on masters and slaves, functioning as independently existing and temporally prior mechanisms motivating and generating their behavior (Wendt, 1998: 107).

As this dissertation contains ideational factors it could be argued, in line with the above quote, that it contains constitutive elements. The explanatory focus is nevertheless causal since all of the essays are concerned to some extent with tracing the causes (ideas and identities) of a particular effect (a securitizing move; or in Essay I, a security doctrine). In all of the essays there is also a conscious attempt to temporally separate the explanans (the explanatory factors) from the explanandum (the phenomenon which is to be explained), i.e. the former precedes the latter in time. In Essays II and III, I have attempted to establish causality by “teasing out tentative explanations from thickly described narratives” (Adler, 2002: 101; also Ruggie, 1998), or in other words, using discourse analysis and process tracing to demonstrate how changes over time and interplay between different structural factors can lead up to a change of behavior in actors. In all of the essays there is a multi-factor and/or multi-level analytical framework structuring the empirical investigation. Applying such a broad framework while attempting to trace causal processes in a case can be problematic since doing so can lead to over-determination, that is, the number of explanatory factors exceeds the number of cases, making it impossible to determine which factor actually matters in explaining an outcome (cf. King, Kehoane & Verba, 1994; Checkel, 2007). Although over-deterministic conclusions should be avoided, it does not mean that broad frameworks should be shunned; it means they should be used with care. As discussed in Essay II, where a multi-factor framework is applied to a single case, the broad analysis
demonstrated that the explanatory factors were of varying importance for the outcome in that particular case, thus, they did not matter equally throughout the process leading up to the securitizing move. In addition, it was argued that if applied to a different contextual setting, the roles and the importance of the factors could very well change, implying a different-looking process or pattern.

This reasoning is in line with George & Bennett’s discussion on equifinality, meaning that “different causal patterns can lead to similar outcomes” (George & Bennett, 2005: 161). A broad framework allows for the analysis of whether the processes leading up to securitizing moves are similar in different contexts or whether they vary over time and space. Indeed, the framework suggested in Essay IV, which is derived from the theoretical assumptions and findings from the previous three essays, could very well be applied to a comparative setting. Comparing threat construction processes in several cases could help to demonstrate possible differences and similarities with regard to the factors of the broad framework. As argued by Checkel, constructivist studies in particular should also include empirical studies of cases “when the dog doesn’t bark” (Checkel, 1998: 339). This dissertation agrees that analyzing cases lacking securitizing moves (while containing certain conditions that constitute a prerequisite for such a construction) could add another dimension to the understanding of this phenomenon. At the outset of the dissertation research, Russia was a very silent dog indeed with regard to HIV/AIDS. During the research process, however, President Putin suddenly performed a securitizing move. This example illustrates the dynamics of threat construction and the difficulties in identifying these types of ‘non-cases’, as idea diffusion and acceptance is by no means a static phenomenon (i.e. just because an idea has not been internalized at a particular point in time, it does not mean that it never will be). The Russian example, however, also demonstrates that within-case analysis over time is one way to handle this possible problem. In other words, using cases containing a securitizing move as a starting point, one can also analyze the context prior to that move, that is, when the dog had yet not barked.

Turning to the more specific methods employed in this dissertation, all of the three essays that study empirical puzzles, are forms of within-case historical analysis. Although Essay I is a comparative study between two cases of security doctrine and contains comparisons between the two, the focus is on the processes leading up to the formulation of the doctrines. Essays II and III are case studies analyzing the “sequential development over time” rather than a form of “before-after comparison” (George & Bennett, 2005: 231). This type of method is called process tracing and is employed
in order to infer and construct a causal chain account of how various conditions and variables interacted over time to produce the historical outcome (George & Bennett, 2005: 231).

According to George and Bennett, there are several varieties of process tracing. The kinds used here are a combination of a so-called “detailed narrative” and “analytic explanation”, meaning that a thick description of a process leading up to a particular event has been combined with a theory-driven focus on particular entities of this narrative. Together, the descriptive narration and the theoretical explanatory factors attempt to establish an analytical causal explanation rather than just describing what went on during a particular period of time (George & Bennett, 2005: 210-211).

This dissertation also includes a focus on the central discourses that dominate during a particular time frame. Following the common definition of discourse, it is defined as “a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action” (Wodak, 2001: 66). All of the central concepts employed here are discursive to the extent that they become pertinent through speech, text, and practices. To use the concept of identity as an example: a sense of ingroup and outgroup becomes established when we talk about who ‘we’ are, when a nation-state is founded through legislation, when a national anthem is written, etc. Text is thus a natural source to detect these types of identity markers. There are a number of different kinds of textual analyses, ranging from quantitative forms focusing on the number of times a specific word appears in a text, to purely inductive forms where previously unknown discourses are discovered and retrieved only through an open reading of texts. This dissertation follows a structured form of discourse analysis where the empirical investigations are organized according to the theory-driven concepts discussed above. I argue that pre-set questions or themes, derived from the theoretical concepts, should be applied to all texts in a similar manner in order to avoid arbitrary interpretation and questionable results. Although this form of structured discourse analysis is often questioned by those who favor a more inductive and interpretivist approach, the transparency of the investigation, and thereby the persuasiveness of the argument, improves when allowing a certain degree of pre-set structure (Noreen & Sjöstedt, 2004; Sjöstedt, 2010). This form of structured discourse analysis can be performed without compromising the main gains of investigating discourse; namely, the ability to detect non-materialist factors and the in-depth tracing of the relationship between such factors and behavior.

In sum, I argue that a combination of a process tracing of events during a particular period of time and an analysis of the dominant
societal and political discourses during that same period of time is a useful way to reconstruct a specific empirical context. By combining these two methods we are able to determine not only what was done in terms of decisions and other forms of action, but also how both the political and the societal spheres talked about the phenomenon under investigation. Such a reconstruction provides a richer basis for explanation.

Presenting the Four Essays

The four essays of this composite dissertation represent diverse aspects of the study of threats and security which examine various types of threat images in diverging empirical settings; or in the case of Essay IV, suggest a conceptual framework for the analysis of threats. They are bound together by the general puzzle of how and why a threat image is constructed and when this construction leads to a particular security behavior. They also share a common theoretical understanding of the significance of non-materialist factors, and the importance of employing broad conceptual frameworks that analyze factors at different levels of analysis. Moreover, all of the essays emphasize the role of speech and text in their analyses of threat perception and threat construction. As they appear in the order they were written, the essays are also demonstrations of an intellectual journey over time: beginning with a research interest in actor-based threat images, combined with a fascination for ‘how possible’ explanations; to an interest in the causal process tracing of the development of non-actor based threat images.

The first three essays are investigations of actor-based and non-actor based threat images in the empirical contexts of the United States and Russia. Essay I is a structured comparison between the US societal and political discourses of 1947 and 2001 regarding the Communist and terrorist threats respectively. The threat images investigated in this essay are thus actor-based and can be linked to specified antagonistic Others, the Soviet Union and Al Qaida. Essays II and III investigate the construction of a non-actor based threat – HIV/AIDS – in the empirical contexts of Russia and the United States. They each investigate processes over time, demonstrating how temporal structural changes correlate with altering views on AIDS. Theoretically, the first three essays embrace broad analytical frameworks but focus on somewhat different explanatory factors. Securitization, for instance, is viewed as a factor making a doctrine possible in the first essay, while it is seen as an explanandum in the others.

Another theoretical difference between the essays concerns the role of agency. While norms/ideas are central factors in all four works the
importance of entrepreneurs in diffusing these ideas is particularly highlighted in Essay III. The roles, power positions, persuasive abilities, etc. of these entrepreneurs are important in explaining why an idea is diffused to and accepted by states differently. The internalization processes by key decision-makers who place an issue on the security agenda are also important mechanisms to consider. This process is analyzed empirically in Essay II.

The different approaches and foci of the first three essays are brought together in Essay IV. There I attempt to develop the theoretical assumptions and findings of the previous three works in order to forward a more comprehensive conceptual and analytical framework for the study of threat construction. Here follows a brief summary of each essay.


This 2007 article was published in *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(3) and compares the development of two US presidential security doctrines: the Truman Doctrine and the Bush Doctrine. It claims that the upsurge of previous research on the Bush Doctrine in particular focuses mainly on one explanatory factor for the emergence of the doctrine: the existence of an external threat. This article argues that such a limited focus provides an insufficient understanding of the genesis of a security doctrine since it underproblematizes how a doctrine comes into existence and why it takes a particular form. Both the Truman and the Bush doctrines hold clear declarations of what is threatening the world (communism and terrorism, respectively), and how the United States intends to handle this threat. The doctrines also contain declarations of norms of good (liberty and democracy in both cases), and how the United States will strive to uphold these norms at a global level. Since the doctrines concern more than just the security aspect it is necessary to go beyond the simplistic explanation of viewing a doctrine as solely the response to a threat. Instead, it is a combination of discursive factors that make the formation of a doctrine possible: the securitization of a particular issue – i.e. declaring this issue to be a threat, the presence of particular hegemonic norms of good and bad, and the construction of certain international and domestic identities. What made communism and terrorism so threatening was that these two phenomena were each linked to an actor-identity (the Soviet Union and Al Qaida) respectively. These identities were predicated as being powerful, absolutely ruthless, completely against the prevalent norms of good (liberty and democracy), and instead wanting to settle norms of bad (totalitarianism). Since the
United States had been bestowed the powers and duty to uphold the norms of good it was deemed necessary to fight the evil identities and to continue the diffusion of good norms.

Because the focus of this article is to highlight the key concepts of a hegemonic discourse (norms, identity, and securitization); how they interplay; and how they make to formation of a security doctrine possible, the natural choice of method is discourse analysis. Contrary to many previous studies of discourse, however, this article argues that such an analysis should be systematic and transparent, and therefore criticizes the atheoretical approach of phenomenology and induction favored in many previous studies of discourse. A structured methodological approach that clearly postulates which theory-driven factors are to be investigated and how they are measured does not necessarily limit the powers of interpretation. Rather, it increases the persuasiveness of the argument that discourse and ideational factors influence the behavior of actors.

Essay II: Exploring the Construction of Threats. The Securitization of HIV/AIDS in Russia

This article was published in 2008 in *Security Dialogue* 39(1). It takes as a point of departure the empirical puzzle of why President Putin and the Russian security-making elite were so slow in viewing HIV/AIDS as a threat to Russian national security despite the country facing one of the fastest infection rates in the world. Indeed, both international and national experts had long stressed the need for immediate governmental action. When Putin finally initiated a securitizing move with regard to AIDS – that is, declared it a threat to Russia in 2006 – the Russian government had more or less ignored the issue for years. This situation is, however, not unique and there are many examples when decision-makers in different states overlook an issue or condition that could clearly constitute a danger to national security. Thus, this article attempts to contribute to the study of threats by investigating the question of which factors and mechanisms cause decision-makers to make a securitizing move and construct an issue as a threat. It is argued that a single-factor approach is not sufficient to answer this question; instead a broad analytical framework should be employed. This framework investigates the prevalent norms and identity constructions at the international and Russian domestic levels, as well as the internalization of the Russian key decision-makers during the process leading up to Putin’s declaration in 2006. The investigation of these factors at the different levels of analysis demonstrates that although there was a well-established norm in the international community viewing AIDS as a threat image,
there was a domestic resistance in Russia to accepting this norm. This can at least partly be explained by international identity constructions. Russia views itself as an international great power—“a provider, not a receiver”—which results in a reluctance to accept suggestions from “the West”. Over time, recognition of the implications of AIDS slowly became settled in the Russian societal discourse, with less polarization between the different domestic identities of those who are affected by the epidemic and those who are not. These processes appear to some extent to affect the internalization of the Russian leadership, who over time demonstrated an increased recognition of the AIDS problematique.

In sum, the application of the broad analytical framework to the Russian case demonstrates that this type of approach allows for the examination of several factors in a threat construction process. It is, however, important to point out that the influence of these factors varied over time. For example, an international norm, establishing the AIDS-security nexus, was an important point of departure but did not have an immediate impact on the Russian view of AIDS. This was due to the fact that Russian identity at the international level worked as an initial gate-keeper against the diffusion of this norm to the Russian domestic context. Instead, it was domestic norms and identity processes that triggered an altered view of AIDS. A broad approach thus allows for the analysis of which factor that is of most importance in a particular case at a particular point of time, and the effects the factors have on one another.


This book chapter appears in *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, edited by Thierry Balzacq, published by Routledge in 2010. It shares some similarities with Essay II in the sense that it is driven by the empirical puzzle of what brings a decision-maker to declare an epidemic to be a threat to national security; in this case President Clinton’s 2000 declaration of HIV/AIDS to be a threat to the national security of the United States. Here, however, the situation is opposite to the Russian case of Essay II: Clinton made a securitizing move despite the fact that the US had a fairly low prevalence of HIV and faced a seemingly small risk that the disease would endanger the three pillars of the state. Why was AIDS seen as a national threat to the United States? This chapter attempts to explore this puzzle by tracing different political and societal processes leading up to Clinton’s securitizing move. It is argued that the actions of and framing by different policy entrepreneurs at the international, domestic societal, and domestic political levels of analysis helped to create a particular hegemonic discourse which
facilitated a general internalization of AIDS as national security. This opened a window of opportunity for the Clinton administration to declare AIDS to be a national threat.

The analytical focus here is thus on the policy entrepreneurs and the linguistic tools they employ in order to diffuse an idea, in this case the conception of AIDS as a security threat. The empirical analysis is a combination of a traditional within-case process tracing of events and actions over a delimited period – the early 1990s to 2000 – and a structured form of discourse analysis which traces the predominant societal and political discourses over that same time period. As mentioned above, the analysis is performed on three levels. Beginning with the international context we find three dominant actors striving to respond to the AIDS epidemic: the WHO, UNAIDS (which replaced the WHO’s Global Programme) in 1996, and the World Bank. Each of these three organizations was headed by an individual that put great effort into raising awareness about the implications of AIDS. Over time, changes in the framing of AIDS could be sensed, moving from a focus on health to the epidemic’s effects on other societal spheres. Nevertheless, these three international actors faced initial difficulties in their diffusion attempts, and were unsuccessful in convincing different national governments of the urgency of the threat. At the US domestic societal level there were different actors that contributed to the framing of HIV/AIDS, and when investigating the actions taken by these actors, along with how the epidemic is described and discussed, incremental changes over time can be discerned. Beginning with the media, which is one dominant actor in shaping domestic discourse, AIDS was mainly linked to two issues in the early 1990s: Haitian refugees and whether homosexuals could be soldiers in the US military. From the mid-1990s, the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa became the dominant frame, and the discourse became increasingly colored by the language of threat and security. Other societal actors, such as minority groups and church congregations also became increasingly involved in the AIDS issue. Taken together, the actions and changes in the domestic discourse helped to create a national sense that actions against the disease were urgently needed.

Finally, with respect to the political context, finally, clear temporal changes can be discerned regarding the actions taken by different political actors and the way AIDS is framed by these actors. From the mid-1990s, an increasing number of political actors close to the Clinton administration became involved in the issue and discussed it in terms of being a threat to international security. Different political measures were also taken, for instance the appointment of a special AIDS advisor in 1997. Although the developments of the political context can perhaps most clearly be linked to the subsequent securitizing move, this chapter argues that the political process was not exclusive. The other two
processes – the international and domestic societal – also shaped the Clinton administration’s view on AIDS, and helped to create a climate that facilitated the possibility of a securitizing move.

Essay IV: Ideas, Identity and Internalization. Explaining the Threat Images of Actors

This is article manuscript is currently under review. It focuses on the general theoretical puzzle of how, why, and when an issue is securitized, i.e. what influences decision-makers to place an issue on the security agenda. The article suggests a conceptual framework that can serve as a foundation for the analysis of threat construction. Although this essay is an independent contribution, facets of the conceptual framework are derived from the arguments and findings from the previous three essays.

This article argues that in analyzing threat construction, international ideas should be employed as a point of departure, putting particular emphasis on how an international idea is diffused to and handled within the domestic contexts of states. The domestic level is also important since the acceptance and settlement of ideas in this sphere often sets the path for whether these ideas are recognized by national decision-makers. The decision-making elite of a state is a member of this state’s domestic society as well and – at least in democratic states – is accountable to this society. This process of idea diffusion from the international to the individual level is best analyzed by highlighting the policy entrepreneurs, at both the international and domestic levels. In addition, the authority and power positions, the credibility and reputation of these entrepreneurs, along with the framing tools they employ determines the level of success of the diffusion process.

Along with ideas, identities at the international and domestic levels can be of great importance in understanding threat construction. The way an actor perceives him/herself and others in terms of, for instance, being major powers (“type identity”), combined with the dyadic relationship between two actors (“role identity”) can constitute the basis for either viewing Other as a threat or affect whether be a determinant as to why ideas coming from the other actor are accepted or not. The role of identity is thus twofold: first, in line with the more common way of conceptualizing identity and threats, identity can constitute an underlying condition for a threat construction in terms of being an antagonistic Other. The way Self and Other are perceived, as well as the dyadic relationship of the two, constitutes a particular threat image. The actual behavior of Other is not necessarily of any importance here.

This article, however, also suggests a second way of linking identity to threat construction, namely by analyzing how identity works as a catalyst
or gate-keeper in accepting international ideas of threat conditions. The role identities between a state and an international organization, for instance, can determine whether this state is willing to accept the ideas put forth by the organization. If the role identity is colored by antagonism, the state will be more likely to resist idea diffusion attempts than if the role identity is characterized by cooperation.

Role and type identities should be analyzed both at the international level, as described above, and domestically, as the dynamics of these two concepts apply to both levels. The wider society of a state can view a domestic group as a threat because this group has some specific identity traits. An idea can reach different levels of significance and acceptance depending on the identity of the domestic actor advocating this idea.

Collective ideas and identity thus affect the threat construction process in different ways. The final argument of this article is that in order to fully account for such a process, the individual unit behind the securitizing move should also be brought into the analysis. It makes a difference who is in power, and individual leaders should not be viewed only as products of their environment. Therefore, internalization by the key decision-making unit is seen as a mechanism linking structural factors (ideas and identities) to the outcome (a securitizing move). What determines the speed of the internalization – or whether the internalization occurs at all – are the belief systems of the individuals in power. A belief system is stored information in the brain, formed by a numerous factors such as childhood experiences, education and culture. The belief system helps the individual to select amongst and filter all the incoming information from the structural environment. Information that does not fit with established beliefs tends to be disregarded and, conversely, information that reinforces the belief system tends to be given disproportionate importance. Still, beliefs can change over time, but this change is slow and incremental.

In sum, the main argument of this article is that the employment of a broad conceptual framework to the analysis of threat construction can better explain how, why, and when a decision-maker declares an issue to be a threat to national security, than would a single-factor, single-level analysis. This is because a broad framework allows for a detailed process tracing of different explanatory factors: the tracing of idea diffusion and the impact of entrepreneurs involved in that process helps to demonstrate how an international issue is diffused into intra-state settings. Identity constructions explain why the success of diffusion varies among states, either acting as catalysts or gate-keepers. Finally, the internalization of the key decision-making unit can be of importance in explaining the timing of a threat declaration. The suggestion of a broad framework does not, however, imply that ideas, identity and internalization matter equally in all empirical contexts. Rather, the
employment of a broad framework as a point of departure makes possible a structured and focused analysis of each concept. This allows one to determine the level of impact of each factor on threat construction, as well as any reciprocal effects of the factors.

Concluding Remarks
In this final section of this chapter, the main findings and contributions of the four essays are discussed, both with regard to the distinct research question of each essay and to the overall question of what makes decision-makers to construct some issues as threats. Some avenues for future research are also suggested.

Findings and Contributions
Although being centered on the common theme of threat construction, the individual essays have different foci in terms of research puzzles and empirical settings. Each study contains theoretical and empirical contributions. In Essay I found that the Bush Doctrine is not a unique phenomenon in the history of American foreign policy – as often claimed – rather it shares a number of similarities to the Truman Doctrine. Despite a number of contextual differences, both of these two doctrines are declarations against an ‘evil’ enemy that is seen as constituting a threat to international security and liberty. The discursive settings making these doctrines possible are also remarkably similar. In both cases certain norms were settled in the discourse – liberty, democracy, etc – and a powerful external identity acted against these norms and was therefore securitized. With regard to the theorizing on security behavior, the essay finds that security policies are not necessarily solely the reaction to an external threat image. As indicated by the processes leading up to the declaration of a doctrine in the two cases investigated, a security policy can instead be the result of the interplay between norms and identities.

Essay II further elaborates on the interaction between different factors, and also investigates them at different levels of analysis. This investigation further demonstrates that a security declaration or policy – here the securitizing move – is not an automatic reaction to a threatening condition. Instead, it is found that norms and identities were important during different points of time in the process leading up to President Putin’s securitization of AIDS in 2006. Although international ideas constituted a necessary condition for threat construction, identities at both the international and the domestic levels played an important part in explaining the hesitance of the Russian decision-making elite to
securitize HIV/AIDS. The internalization processes of the key decision-makers were an important mechanism that operated as a link between the structural factors and the securitizing move. Essay III sets out to explain the opposite puzzle: why the Clinton administration decided to securitize AIDS despite a low domestic prevalence. The argument of this essay was that norm entrepreneurs of different contexts played an essential part in diffusing the idea that AIDS is security, thereby laying the foundation for a securitization process. Two main theoretical findings could be drawn from this study: First, in order to explain the process of idea diffusion it is necessary to explore the roles, power positions, linguistic techniques, etc., of the involved idea entrepreneurs. Second, it is important to include not only entrepreneurs of the political sphere into the analysis but also societal actors as they help to shape a “national mood” that influences decision-makers.

The findings of these three essays constitute the basis of the fourth essay. Here, a conceptual and analytical framework is suggested which takes the different functions of ideas and identities into consideration while stressing the importance of agency. Although the conceptual assumptions are linked to the ones presented in the previous three essays, some theoretical claims have been developed in Essay IV in order to better conceptualize the construction of threats. For instance, with regard to identity it is noted that identity has two functions in a threat construction process. Identity can either be the source of a threat image in terms of being an antagonistic Other or, perhaps more interestingly, identity can serve as a catalyst or gate keeper in the idea diffusion process. In other words, as often analyzed in studies on threat, a certain identity (for example, the United States) can frame another identity (for example, the Soviet Union) as a threat. The second way of linking identity to threat, as proposed here, is when the perceived identities of and relationship between two actors (for example, Russia and the United States) contribute to or prevent idea diffusion. For example, as Russia views itself as a great power, constantly in contest with the US, Russia does not easily accept ideas coming from the US.

Another theoretical development concerns the role of agency. This article argues that attention needs to be drawn to the so-called idea entrepreneurs and on how these entrepreneurs participate in idea diffusion. The internalization processes of the actors that are the receivers of this idea diffusion process also warrant attention. Looking solely for correlations between structure and the eventual policy action, as is done in much IR research, results in a black-boxing the actual threat construction process. Instead, highlighting the micro processes of idea diffusion and internalization provides a better understanding of how, why, and when securitizing moves are initiated.
Brought together, the findings of the three empirical studies and the framework suggested in the fourth essay contribute to the theorizing on threat construction and towards addressing several previously unexplored avenues in IR security studies. First, this dissertation problematizes threat construction and stresses that the link between structural conditions and the threat framing by actors is not self evident. In turn, threat framing cannot be reduced to mere responses to the actions of antagonistic Others. Rather, threat images are shaped by external structural factors, such as idea diffusion processes and collective identities, and the influence of these structural factors are filtered through the individual beliefs of decision-makers. This means that the assumption that certain structural conditions automatically trigger threat perception does not hold. Instead, the phenomenon of threat construction should be employed in a structured and systematic manner.

Second, since threat constructions are not automatic reactions to a particular condition but are caused by different factors, we need broad conceptual and analytical frameworks to capture these processes. The framework suggested and employed in this dissertation constitutes a contribution with regard to this issue. This type of framework allows for the inclusion and analysis of different factors, providing a more refined analysis. Mono-causal and single-level explanations have dominated IR security studies; the question is whether this predilection for parsimony has been at the expense of providing accurate accounts of reality. Although there can be a value in identifying the factor that appears to be the most significant in explaining a particular outcome, it is nevertheless argued that a broader analysis is better able to account for temporal and spatial changes in the explanatory powers and capture contingent relationships between factors.

The broad framework includes factors that are applicable to the construction of actor-based and non-actor based frameworks alike. This contributes towards the study of threat since previous research has focused largely on actor-based threat images. The approach suggested here instead includes both kinds of threat images within the national security concept as specified. This contributes theoretically to issue areas that have been previously under-theorized. For example, viewing AIDS as a human security issue or focusing on the normative aspects of the handling of the epidemic does not teach us much about how decision-makers interpret this issue and therefore cannot fully explain policy outcomes. Instead, investigating an issue like AIDS in the same manner as an issue like terrorism contributes to the knowledge of why or why not decision-makers have recognized the security implications of AIDS, and can thereby offer insights into subsequent policy action.
Implications for Future Research

Although this dissertation can be viewed as one step in problematizing threat construction, as well as suggesting a way to analyze this process, a number of interesting implications are still left unexplored. This opens several possible avenues for future research.

One such avenue is the application of the framework suggested in Essay IV to a comparative empirical setting in order to perform a structured and focused comparison between the threat construction processes in different cases (see George & Bennett, 2005). Such an investigation can highlight whether some of the factors suggested in the analytical framework are context dependent or whether threat construction is a spatially parallel phenomenon. There are several interesting possibilities of such an empirical application. One possibility is to apply the framework to empirical settings that have not been approached in this dissertation. One comparison could include cases where certain structural or contextual conditions are present, and in which a securitizing move has or has not been initiated. A ‘new’ case in this sense would either be a different empirical context or a different issue area. This change of setting, together with a structured comparison of the cases (that is, all cases are analyzed in exactly the same manner) could contribute to the theoretical knowledge on threat construction. In addition, with regard to method, the process tracing and sequential discourse analysis could be elaborated by also including a certain period of time after the securitizing move. Such a comparison could detect potential changes in the explanatory factors and if an act of agency (i.e. the securitizing move) has any particular reciprocal effects on structure. Another possibility with regard to the framework suggested in this dissertation is to further examine the empirical cases that have been investigated here. Employing the framework to the two empirical settings of Russia and the United States and to the three issue areas of antagonistic states, terrorism, and HIV/AIDS, would improve our understanding of these issues and contexts, facilitating a more structured and systematic comparison. Related to this is the issue of methodological development. Methodological triangulation, by adding for instance interviews to process tracing and discourse analysis components could create a richer account of threat construction processes. Although archival and other forms of textual material provide excellent information of both key events and major discursive formations within a contextual setting at a particular point in time, interviews with key actors would allow for the possibility of gathering information that was not publicly known.

Theoretical development is another avenue that could be further examined. The notion of internalization, in particular, could be
developed in terms of addressing the functions of belief systems and finding ways to further operationalize and empirically investigate these belief systems. How can we best pinpoint what goes on in the heads of decision-makers? Psychologists have long pursued this line of inquiry, but are there ways to address it without having direct access to the person in question? Studies that examine this issue would clearly contribute to the explanation of threat construction; the problem is how to develop appropriate methods and analytic tools to investigate cognition and beliefs. The field of political psychology has indeed made attempts, for instance through the developments of Alexander George’s operational code (OpCode) analysis. Still, the question remains of how to capture beliefs and cognitive processes that the rather blunt OpCode tool does not cover.

Although a good deal of work has been done on idea/norm diffusion, this topic can also be further developed analytically. To study diffusion processes at the micro level would constitute one way of highlighting this process. Further empirical investigations on this are also needed. Employing different kinds of methods and analytical techniques, including both interviews with policy entrepreneurs and textual analysis of policy documents, will help to shed light on why certain idea diffusion attempts are more successful than others. Investigations on the roles and functions of the idea entrepreneur, along with the process of idea acceptance, have certainly been done by socialization theorists. These studies, however, have mainly investigated the diffusion of, for instance, human rights norms, or the European Union’s role as a norm entrepreneur in its neighborhood sphere. More work can be done with regard to the diffusion of threat images. In particular, the issue of how a certain threat image, for instance epidemics or climate change, is socialized (both in terms of institutionalization and internalization) in the receiving context constitutes an interesting research area. A detailed analysis of that process could, for instance, reveal possible discrepancies between formal compliance and informal practices. For instance, how is the idea of climate change as a global threat image received by different states in the Soviet sphere? Although steps to institutionalize this idea might have been taken, how is it understood at other levels of society? Understanding these types of processes would benefit the theorizing on threat construction.
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