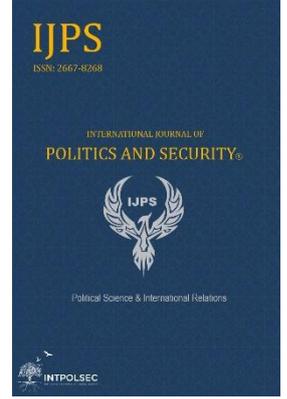


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Rethinking the Concept of Threat: Threat Studies and the Limits of Security

Mehmet Recai Uygur¹
Fatma Sever²

Abstract

This paper lays out Threat Studies as an emerging sub-discipline of International Relations and Security Studies. It breaks from the conventional, reactive, state-centric approaches that dominate Security Studies by proposing an interdisciplinary model that, instead, analyzes how threats are constructed, perceived, and mobilized politically, economically, technologically, and environmentally. Drawing upon critical perspectives, discourse and political psychology, systems theory, and integration theory, the study argues that threats do not simply exist; they are crafted socially and politically, usually as mechanisms of domination, exclusion, and securitization. By analyzing the ontological and epistemological questions regarding threats, the paper provides a bounded classification distinguishing between material versus perceived threats and direct versus indirect threats. The paper defends Threat Studies as an intellectually and strategically pertinent innovation that shifts security from militaristic reaction to ethical and preventive engagement with the causes of instability in a hyperconnected world.

Keywords: *Threat Studies, Securitization, Interdisciplinary Security, Integrated Threat*

Introduction: The Need for a Paradigm Shift

The ability of states and institutions to respond to threats in international politics has been significantly weakened by inherited epistemologies. “Security” has traditionally been seen as a focal point in the disciplines of International Relations and Political Science, but it is now losing its importance as a conceptual critical yardstick among complex, multifaceted, and intertwined global problems. These contemporary problems—climate change, cyberwar, economic collapse, population displacement crises, and disinformation campaigns—cannot be understood within traditional paradigms that perceive threats as purely military, external, and state-centric. In this article, I propose an interdisciplinary approach called Threat Studies to challenge the epistemologically and practically deficient mainstream discourses on “security.” In contrast to the reactive and often ideologically distorted logic of Security Studies, Threat Studies, as proposed here, is an interdisciplinary analytical framework that prioritizes the identification, construction, perception, and political utility of threats over reactive responses to crises.

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This research aims not only to question the assumptions in Security Studies, but also to shift the lens of inquiry to the creation, classification and instrumental use of threats. The study's central hypothesis suggests that "threat" is not a condition of the system, or even a non-interventionist and neutral condition, but rather a socio-political construct that is strategically used, often under the guise of protective governance. Therefore, the ontological and epistemological work of understanding threat production is much deeper than what Security Studies has traditionally offered. As developed in this article, Threat Studies focuses on the political, psychological, discursive, technological and environmental factors through which servitude manages and magnifies insecurities. It proposes a methodological framework that combines empirical inquiry with constructivist, psychological, and critical theories to reveal that threats are not only recognized but actively created, propagated, and sustained.

Research Topic and Relevance: This article addresses one of the most neglected issues in international relations today: the epistemic and political foundations of threat construction. The way "threat" is framed and operationalized has become, especially within the context of national security rhetoric, which rationalizes mass surveillance, climate inaction, border militarization, and detention without end, a fascination with surveillance in "an academic issue" but an ethical matter. Scholarship policymaking remains mired in state-centric frameworks dominated by realism or neorealism, which, while increasingly out of touch, still inform policy and scholarship for transcending institutional, cross-border, cross-military global challenges. This research argues for an alternative: proposing the creation of a new sub-discipline proposed as Threat Studies, which seeks to identify, classify, and evaluate threats as emergent, multi-dimensional, and politically mediated phenomena.

This article pertains to specialists in International Relations, Political Psychology, Environmental Studies, Critical Security Studies, and Technology and Society, to name a few. It fills important theoretical and practical gaps by examining how threats can be conceptualized as systemic—embedded within governance frameworks, economic concerns, social anxieties, and technological competencies. Given the proliferation of crises, real or fabricated, that define international security frameworks, this analysis is also timely. From the Terrorist Wars to migration's securitization, and climate risk's financialization, the discourse on threats is ubiquitous. It is a paradox, however, that such questions are rarely subjected to rigorous interdisciplinary scrutiny. This paper aims to address this gap by formulating a systematic approach with a fresh vocabulary, methodology, and theoretical framework for the study of 'threat'.



Problem Statement and Hypothesis: As Security Studies are understood today, it begins only after a threat has been identified. This focus encourages reactive approaches as opposed to preventive strategies and looks at the “threat” as something given rather than something that is contingent, contested, and constructed. The mainstream paradigms of realism and liberal institutionalism assume that the threats are external problems that need to be counterbalanced or managed through some allocation of state power, interstate cooperation, or deterrence mechanisms. Even constructivist and critical approaches have not fully integrated to consider the interdisciplinary complexity of how threats emerge, evolve, and are legitimized.

Thus, the main problem is conceptual and epistemological: the suspicion is that the discipline lacks a pre-securitization framework that instead attempts to examine the conditions under which threats are produced, embraced, and rendered habitual. The hypothesis that accompanies this paper is that, unlike security, threats are not fixed, but fluid assemblages produced through force, discourse, emotion, perception, and in a relational context. In this case, any attempt to understand or address the problem of insecurity must start from the premise of threat rather than the premise of security. This requires radical reconstruction of foundational International Relations and security policymaking principles.

Methodology: This research adopts interdisciplinary and critical approaches informed by political theory, discourse analysis, critical security studies, political psychology, and other relevant fields to explain how concepts of ‘threat’ are constructed, justified, and enacted in geopolitical and domestic security narratives. The analysis starts with the assumption that threats do not exist as ‘objective’ phenomena; rather, they are the product of situated histories, institutional narratives, and social imaginaries. It analyzes how the discourse of threat functions as an instrument of power, permitting the securitization of some issues while silencing others.

The methodology relies on discourse theory, particularly the works of Foucault, Derrida, and Wæver, to capture how threats are symbolically and linguistically constructed in a way that claims need urgency, justifies extraordinary responses, and reshapes political apportionment of power. This perspective is complemented by a political-philosophical approach that combines classical and modern wicked thinking from Hobbes and Rousseau to Hegel and Montesquieu, emphasizing the politics of fear and deeply rooted disorder.

This research draws on the insights of integrated threat theory as well as the cognitive and motivational processes that lead to fear, particularly in the context of authoritarian reactions, group dynamics, and political psychology. The historical case studies of counterterrorism, migration politics, and environmental securitization are employed to analyze



how and why threat perception is cultivated and wielded over time. The paper aims to construct Threat Studies, not merely as an unbounded theoretical invention, but as a systematic approach that exposes the forces at work that geopolitically and socially mold vulnerabilities into categories of politically charged definitions. Such a methodology allows for a multi-layered investigation into the nature of threats, their ontological essence, their epistemic framing, and their strategic use in an increasingly fractured world.

1. The Crisis of Traditional Security Thinking

For hundreds of years, the idea of security has occupied a focal point in political theory and international relations. From the Thucydidean worry about the ever-existing volatility of human affairs³ to the Hobbesian need for an all-powerful sovereign to forestall chaos⁴, security has been framed as the preservation of order from both external and internal threats. Regardless, the traditional understanding of security, especially as it has evolved in modern international relations, has been reactive and politically selective. It is framed in a manner that threats are exceptional and external rather than intrinsic to systems of power and governance.

The realist orthodoxy, as cemented by Morgenthau (1948)⁵ and later refined by Waltz (1979),⁶ framed security logically as a function of military capability and balance of power politics. It operates on the assumption that states, interested actors, traverse an anarchic international system by safeguarding themselves from external hostilities. The consequences of such an assumption are the reduction of security to state survival, abandoned to further scrutiny of the socio-political realities that give rise to insecurity in the first instance. The resulting paradigm is characteristically reactive. It does not aim at averting the birth of threats but rather managing them when they emerge.

The reactive disposition is worsened by the vague abstract notion of a “security threat.” It is a remarkably common term used in politics and academia, yet its volatility makes it easy to misuse. Security threats are more often politically constructed rather than objectively evaluated risks.⁷ What is deemed a “threat” is not defined by empirical ground but rather ideological and economic geopolitical reasoning. The securitization of migration, for instance,

³ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948).

⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁷ Ole Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46–86.



transforms displaced people into threatening beings devoid of evidence that immigration counters national security.⁸ Equally, environmental exploitation has undeniably been treated as an existence issue, ignoring its profound ramifications, but has historically been framed as developmental or economic rather than a security concern.⁹ This form of self-selective securitization brings forth an underlying power structure: states and other dominant actors decide what and what does not count as a recognized threat. The differentiation between “security-relevant” and “non-security-relevant” issues tends to be more politically controlling rather than evaluative neutral. As Derrida (2001)¹⁰ asserts, defining a certain threat is, above all else, an exercise in power at the exclusion of alternative discourses and systematically excludes possibilities of other perspectives.

2. The Need for a New Framework: Introducing Threat Studies

If security is rather perceived in terms of prevention, as the avoidance of harm instead of the safeguarding against loss of power, then a threat analysis would come before a security analysis. Any existing attempt at international relations from a realism perspective, liberalism or even constructivism does not deeply reflect on the processes of threat construction, perception, or escalation. Even in its most critical form, security studies remain passive; they try to explain the absence of security as an isolated phenomenon to be addressed, managed, or mitigated, rather than a multifaceted reality shaped by underlying structural factors.¹¹

Threat Studies, by contrast, is focused on global challenges while employing an active and interdisciplinary framework. It does not treat the state as the main reference point; it analyzes how threats develop, change, and interact with other socio-political, economic, technological, and environmental factors. Instead of asking how states can insulate themselves to survive, it asks why these states are subjected to so many threats in the first place. This change of approach entails moving beyond traditional security studies. The analysis of any given threat needs to combine elements of political psychology, sociology, environmental studies, and even post-structuralist critique. It calls for moving away from the rigid dualistic representation of security threats towards a more fluid topology of interwoven threats and insecurities. This approach is not concerned with merely establishing what a threat is, but rather with who decides, how, and why it is constructed, along with what the consequences will be.

⁸ Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁹ Rita Floyd and Richard A. Matthew, eds., *Environmental Security: Approaches and Issues* (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹¹ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).



In order to formulate a coherent analytical framework for Threat Studies, the following primary questions need to be answered: “How does the vague nature of 'security threat' impact global security strategies? “In what ways do political figures fabricate 'security threats' to rationalize particular policies while ignoring others?” “What other disciplines beyond the boxes of traditional security frameworks are needed for analyzing threats?”

These inquiries prepare the way for a transformative shift, one that goes beyond the reactive, state-centric, and militaristic focus of traditional Security Studies to an interdisciplinary, multi-dimensional, and anticipation-driven approach of threat analysis centric to security. Recall that, as Hegel (1807/1977)¹² put it, “*truth is not an inert entity but a process of becoming.*” This applies to how our comprehension of global insecurities needs to progress. Moreover, the shift from Security Studies to Threat Studies is, at heart, not a shift in emphasis, philosophical scrutiny, or conceptual delicacy, but it is an urgent need in a period of burgeoning complexity, diffusion, and interconnection of threats.

2.1. The Problematic Nature of "Security Threat"

The phrase “security threat” arguably exists as one of the most politically controversial and inadequately analyzed phrases in contemporary global relations and international politics. Although discussed in academic literature and in policy debates, its lack of clearly definable boundaries makes it highly malleable, a construct that can be stretched or shrunk for political gain. This lack of boundaries is not simply a conceptual error; instead, it reveals a deep underlying epistemological and ontological problem. There is no neutral process of identifying and labeling a “security threat,” and that process determines international relations and security policies as well as domestic governance frameworks.

To grasp how security threats are constructed, one requires Michel Foucault’s work, on which discourse and power analysis provides an angle from which to study these phenomena. Knowledge, in Foucault’s view, is not disinterested or devoid of influence because it is always produced in the context of a specific power system that defines its truth at each moment.¹³ His theory of governmentality demonstrates that modern states do not only respond to an external danger; they actively create categories of risk and security that transform governing from an

¹² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; originally published 1807).

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).



exercise of sovereignty into an ongoing management of threats.¹⁴ In this light, security threats are not found; they are created and constructed.

The same logic applies to the securitization process as described by Ole Wæver¹⁵ and Didier Bigo¹⁶. Their work illustrates how threats do not objectively exist. Rather, they are normative constructs which emerge through political discourse. When an issue is labeled a security threat, it does not simply denote an external risk; rather, it elevates the matter to an issue of life-and-death urgency which demands extraordinary policy actions. This was particularly evident during the War on Terror. Prior to 2001, terrorism was largely regarded as a criminal concern, an issue to be dealt with by law enforcement, not military doctrine.¹⁷ But following the 9/11 attacks, there was a radical change in the discourse of threat. Terrorism was redefined as an existential security threat warranting indefinite detention, global surveillance, and preemptive military action. The very elastic nature of “security threat” enabled expansive, often arbitrary, inclusions for the securitization of entire Muslim communities, refugees, and even whistleblower activists.¹⁸ This is one example of how securitization is not a simple reflection of reality but a way of enforcing control over it. This was a dynamic reality which Derrida’s critique of linguistic determinism captures best; meaning is never fixed, always contingent upon those who have the power to define it.¹⁹

If threats are not objectively discovered but constructed, then their ontological status, what it means for something to be a security threat, becomes equally adaptable. This argues that threats are not only external factors that are imposed onto states, but rather, they are informed and constructed by cognitive, ideological, and historical frameworks. This type of volatility becomes clear in the cases of threat amplification, when issues are defined as security issues without any evidence to support such classification. The Chilly War concern over Soviet expansionism, for example, was the impetus for decades of nuclear brinkmanship, despite subsequent historical scrutiny and analyses suggesting that the Soviets were driven by far more

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁵ Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, 1995.

¹⁶ Didier Bigo, "Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease," *Alternatives* 27, no. 1_suppl (2002): 63–92.

¹⁷ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 2001.



defensive motives than offensive ones.²⁰ A parallel dynamic occurred before the Iraq War as well, where the erroneous perception of Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons program was more than enough reason to justify a full-scale invasion.²¹ Likewise, the framing of migration as a security concern has been persistent in political discourse, despite overwhelming proof that migrants do not disproportionately endanger national stability or crime rates.²²

Underestimating or overestimating threats from a cognitive perspective often stems from deeply ingrained social processes. Within Stephan and Stephan's²³ Integrated Threat Theory, it's highlighted how individuals and societies perceive threats due to intergroup relations rather than objective risk factors. This is indicative of why, in contrast to traffic accidents and workplace injuries which are far more fatal, terrorism is perceived as an ever-present security concern in Western societies.²⁴ Likewise, economic migrants are securitized despite empirical evidence showing their greater contribution to national economies than their "cost".²⁵ The same logic applies to the classification of digital surveillance as a necessity for national security; it is ubiquitous in security policy as warrantless mass data collection is one of the enduring features of security policy²⁶, despite never providing irrefutable evidence for the reduction of crime or terrorism.

To appreciate the self-fulfilling dimension of security threats better, we need to also consider Hegel's dialectical reasoning.²⁷ Although Hegel did not elaborate on threat perception in his works, his dialectical process offers a model from which to craft relations: the metamorphosis from thesis and antithesis to synthesis. When State A perceives State B to be a security threat and takes defensive postures, State B responds in a way that is indeed offensive. The cycle then follows through a plethora of self-fulfilling prophecies. This resembles the logic of the security dilemma, which encapsulates the efforts invested to enhance security tending to

²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

²¹ Robin Butler, *The Butler Report: Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London: The Stationery Office, 2004).

²² Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*, 2006.

²³ Walter G. Stephan and Cookie W. Stephan, "An Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice," in *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination*, ed. Stuart Oskamp (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 23–45.

²⁴ John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Fetzer, Joel S. *Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States, France, and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

²⁶ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).

²⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807.



produce the very threats intended to be averted.²⁸ For instance, counterterrorism policies can yield the opposite of their goal by radicalizing already marginalized communities and increasing terrorism instead of decreasing it.²⁹ So too, the fear of cyberattacks gives rise to policies of mass surveillance along with the vulnerability they create as states become more dependent on digital control mechanisms.³⁰ Each of these cases suggests that the act of securitization does not resolve Insecurity, rather reinforces the trajectory of political and strategic relations by the sheer absence of resolution, connoting the failure of preexisting conditions termed threats to security.

In the 21st century, the mid War on Terror shifted the narrative to permit private security contractors to capitalize on ceaseless military conflicts³¹ while the digitally analyzed cyber threat industry benefits from the ongoing production of cyber threats.³² The migration debate has also created billion dollar security industries, even though statistical research disproves the link between migration and crime.³³ Neoliberal approaches to economics broaden the definition of security threats in order to rationalize spending: funding corporate bailouts and implementing stringent financial policies on constituents.³⁴ From this perspective, security threat is not merely a concept, but it is a product that manufactured, distributed and sold in the context of the global political economy.

The deceitful, unclear, and politically motivated portrayal of security threats emphasizes the need to develop a new alternative approach, that shifts away from state boundaries to an empirically based understanding of multidisciplinary threats. Threat Studies attempts to fill in this gap by adopting a deconstructed and integrated theoretical stance. Instead of responding to perceived security crises, Threat Studies explores how threats are produced, perceived, and structured within politics, economics, and psychology. This shift from security to threat transforms the discourse surrounding international security, transforming it into a more critical and inclusive understanding of global insecurity.

²⁸ John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157–180.

²⁹ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

³⁰ Ronald Deibert, *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2019).

³¹ P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

³² Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).

³³ Peter Andreas, *Redrawing the Line: Borders and Security in the Twenty-First Century*, *International Security* 28, no. 2 (2003): 78–111.

³⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).



2.2. The Conceptual Foundations of Threat Studies

The gap in threat and security is not only a matter of vocabulary choice but also indicates a profound epistemological and methodological shift. One of the branches of security studies, particularly within its realist and neorealist traditions, is almost exclusively fixated on the maintenance of power, control over territory, and military equilibrium. It encompasses a form of governance centered on the state, within which security is understood as a resource that must be defended rather than a state that can be analyzed.³⁵ This approach responds to perceived dangers instead of examining the historical, structural, and socio-political contexts that give rise to the threats. “How do we secure ourselves?” captures the essence of the prevailing discourse on security, but “Why do threats arise?” remains mostly overlooked.

Unlike other fields of study, Threat Studies focuses on the mapping and analytics involved with monitoring the onset and subsistence of global threats. Unlike other fields, it does not consider security a goal. Rather, it focuses on diagnosis, classification, and the prevention of threats. Buzan et al. mention, unlike security studies which compartmentalize issues such as migration, terrorism, or nuclear proliferation, threat studies analyze these issues as multidimensional phenomena that dynamically, and ecologically, interact with each other.³⁶ A good example is a pandemic or an outbreak of widespread disease. It is not purely a health problem. The pandemic causes an exacerbation of political rigidity as well as fuel for economic instability. In addition, it alters the structure of global security frameworks.³⁷ Climate change, for instance, is an environmental problem that also exacerbates resource conflicts and causes mass human displacement, as well as increased geopolitical tensions.³⁸

Threat studies critique security studies for having a fixed understanding of threats and emphasize the context in which socio-political variables and technological frameworks situate threats. By changing the analytical focus from security to threat, Threat Studies adopts a more interdisciplinary, empirically grounded, and proactive approach to global risks. This new way of thinking calls for a shift of perspective from sociopolitical studies onto political science, sociology, psychology, environmental studies, and critical security studies. Aspects of these fields help derive a socially constructed perception of how threats are manipulated for political

³⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

³⁶ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

³⁷ David P. Fidler, *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁸ Simon Dalby, *Security and Environmental Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).



reasons. This enables threat studies to devise an ethically sound explanation and develop rigorously defensible argumentation for global risks.

2.3. Moving Beyond Traditional Theories: The Distinctiveness of Threat Studies

Threat Studies affirms the Critical Security Studies (CSS) commitment to interrogating the unarticulated presuppositions of realist and liberal paradigms, yet it departs from CSS along one decisive axis: whereas CSS situates the category of “threat” within the broader circulations of securitization or the political economy of security provision, Threat Studies rearticulates the threat as the principal empirical and conceptual focal point. Threat is thus studied not as the political outcome of security justification but as the contingent starting point that galvanizes securitizing measures. This shift permits the identification and analysis of dangers that elude formal security registers, disclosing generative processes that otherwise escape scrutiny. By tracing the conditions that produce threats—whether they are materially grounded, symbolically laden, or discursively invoked—Threat Studies refines explanatory purchase on the emergence and durability of insecurity even within domains that official security apparatuses have yet to designate as “security issues.”

The Development of Threat Studies is diverse in its focus, engaging with International Relations, Political Psychology, Social Theory, and Critical Security Studies. It also emphasizes the interrelation of all spheres of human activity. Opposed to Realism which mainly focuses on military threats and power relations, Threat Studies uses a wider lens, taking socio-economic and even environmental issues into consideration. While constructivism focuses on the security threats’ discursive imaginary, Threat Studies builds on this clue to constructivism by adding more grounded empirical investigations about the material contexts of perceived and actual threats.

In its neorealist versions, realists scholars reduce security to the possession of military tools and the distribution of power.³⁹ Attention is still paid to the survival of the state, which is assumed to be in constant competition of strategic initiatives due to the existence of international anarchy.⁴⁰ This ignores an array of non-conventional threats, such as a climate crisis, digital monitoring, or economic disintegration. There is a growing recognition in Threat Studies that these approaches are inadequate because states are not the only referent objects of

³⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁴⁰ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy*, 2001.



security. Instead, the analysis needs to consider multiple layers from individual psychological reactions to shifts in global systems.

Constructivism with Wendt⁴¹ considers the role of discourse as a powerful tool in forming security issues. The process of securitization, which Waever⁴² and the Copenhagen School developed, illustrates that threats are not an objective reality but rather socially and politically constructed. Although this consideration is important, Constructivism focuses exclusively on rhetoric and discourse without addressing material conditions.⁴³ Threat Studies combines constructivist approaches to securitization with empiricist frameworks that examine the role of economics, demography, and technology in the construction of certain threats to fill that gap.

Critical Security Studies, especially by Booth⁴⁴ and Bigo,⁴⁵ has provided significant alternative views to the conventional security paradigm by focusing on human security, asymmetries of power, and surveillance as an essential element of contemporary governance. A bulk of Critical Security Studies tends to remain normatively post-structuralist, critiquing security policies without providing systematic approaches for analyzing and assessing security threats.⁴⁶ This is where Critical Security Studies becomes possible, going beyond constructive deconstruction, providing systematic frameworks for identifying, measuring, and mitigating global threats.

3. Defining a Threat Framework: Classification and Interconnections

A comprehensive framework for Threat Studies is built upon an intricate hybrid model that integrates classification typologies, which attempt to differentiate interrelated threats. A classic distinction in Threat Studies is made in regard to the nature of the threats: material threats and perceived threats.

Material threats are those risks with identifiable, quantifiable repercussions which include pandemics, financial crises, or even ecological disasters.⁴⁷ These threats form empirical realities that are subjected to the analyses of statistical modeling, risk assessments, and

⁴¹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴² Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization, 1999.

⁴³ Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Didier Bigo, "Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease," *Alternatives* 27, no. 1_suppl (2002): 63–92.

⁴⁶ Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster, "Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 89–115.

⁴⁷ David P. Fidler, *SARS, Governance and the Globalization of Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).



historical comparisons. Contrarily, perceived threats are constructed in the social and political realm and are influenced by media, ideologies, and cognitive shortcuts.⁴⁸ Take, for example, the case of economic migration which is often portrayed as a national security threat. Empirical research does, however, consistently demonstrate that migrants contribute more to host economies than they "cost".⁴⁹ While the gap between material and perceived threats is highlighting the need to conduct research within Threat Studies that combines empirical research and discourse analysis.

A difference of notes is made between direct and indirect threats. Direct threats, including terrorist attacks, cyberattacks, or military aggression, are immediate and require face value consideration, frequently evoking rapid policy shifts.⁵⁰ Indirect threats, like climate change and political polarization, act more gradually but are catastrophically detrimental in the long term.⁵¹ More direct threats generate political urgency, causing immediate responses, while ignoring deeper structural issues that leave societies vulnerable to enduring crisis. This imbalance is changed with the help of Threat Studies, which has focused on the accumulation of indirect threats over time, along with interaction with other risk constituents.

Interconnectedness of these threats is one of the most important findings of Threat Studies. Threats exist in a unique system, and rarely independently, since they tend to aggravate and strengthen each other. The relationship between climate change and resources illustrates this notion; climate change does not only pose environmental threats; it heightens resource conflicts as well as aggression, migration, alienation, and economic destabilization.⁵² In the same manner, social and economic inequality provokes social unrest, which fuels political extremism and vice-versa self-radicalization.⁵³ These necessitate a completely new method of analyzing threats based on systems, as they interact in complex and unpredictable manners. Thus, the transition from Security Studies to Threat Studies marks a pivotal change in the approach to examining and defining global risk. Threat Studies focuses on threats rather than

⁴⁸ Stephan and Stephan, *An Integrated Threat*, 2000.

⁴⁹ Joel S. Fetzer, *Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in the United States, France, and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵¹ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.

⁵² Rita Floyd, *Security and the Environment: Securitization Theory and US Environmental Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵³ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).



security as a response, giving it a more comprehensive, dynamic, and empirically sound approach.

3.1. Ontological Basis: What Constitutes a Threat?

If Security Studies are the tip of an iceberg, Threat Studies can be the iceberg itself. Unlike the fixed bounds of security, threats, in contrast, tend to be more fluid in nature and adapt to the criteria of state survival or military might. The classical paradigms' preoccupations with territory and war have long focused on the commanding obsession with 'battlefield', while the inflected scope of modern threats is far beyond the notion of power. Hence, a threat is not a new singular event, but rather an explosive sequence of events waiting to be 'struck' upon. To grasp these forces, an individual is required to step outside the realm of the state and accept that insecurity is not simply an invasion at the border or an increased competitive arms race. Reality is no longer a singular attack from competing military integration, but a fracture unleashing division, an action widening inequality, a flood drowning livelihoods, and the keystroke breaching democracies.

3.2. Political Threats: The Erosion of Governance and Stability

Understanding the body politic as a living organism, one could argue that extremism, authoritarianism, and terrorism are akin to autoimmune disorders—dysfunctions that damage system principles and allow the system itself to attack its core foundational principles and institutions. Terrorism as a phenomenon is often considered the archetypal security threat in the contemporary world, but it is not a deviation from the norm; rather, it is a manifestation of underlying grievances that, too, are usually present in some form among marginalized communities and exacerbated by uneven economic development, sociocultural isolation, and ideological distortion.⁵⁴ These dangers do not represent rogue actors operating within an otherwise stable political system; rather, they arise from the systematic failures and breakdowns of institutions undergoing dissolution and providing avenues for radicalization and coercion.

Unlike clearly defined confrontations on the battlefield, political threats are of a more pernicious nature. Their advance does not involve charging through the gates; instead, it requires quietly overtaking the corridors of power and employing laws, rhetoric, and institutions to solidify their grip. They appear in the form of uncompetitive elections, legislatures that turn into needlessly functioning bodies, and public discourse that is reduced to propaganda. The disintegration of governance does not take place as an eventful and spectacular coup, rather, it

⁵⁴ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 2005.



takes the form of gradual decline, disintegration of norms that, upon further reflection, turns out so in hindsight appear almost designed to unfold this way.

Within the discipline of Threat Studies, the interrelated phenomena of war, conflict, and peace are parsed not as discrete, enduring categories but as shifting phases that populate a dynamic threat spectrum. War is apprehended as a crystallization of underlying threats that accelerates into widespread violence; conflict is regarded as a sustained, mid-tier threat arena that retains the potential to tip toward war or to stabilize at lower intensity; peace is recognized as a temporary balance wherein threats are managed, postponed, or rendered temporarily opaque. This graduated conceptualization departs from classical realist thought, which posits war as a foregone conclusion of international anarchy, and from liberalism, which treats peace as the endpoint of successful institution- or norm-building. By situating each phenomenon along a graduated threat curve, Threat Studies facilitates a granular examination of the strategies that state and non-state actors deploy while oscillating between escalation and de-escalation.

3.3. *Social Threats: The Fracturing of Cohesion and Identity*

As political threats may cause damage to the governance system of a region, social threats may damage society as a whole. Societal discrimination, radicalization, and polarization operate like tectonic shifts that reshape landscapes over an extended period, without any immediate eruptions, while simultaneously preparing for a disaster. Just as a fault line may remain dormant for decades before an earthquake, societal divisions often lie beneath the surface until external shocks bring them into full force.⁵⁵

It would not be correct to state that the only cause of polarization is the difference of opinions, as there are many other factors involved, like the splitting of reality into different perceptions. The social body which was bound by an epistemic foundation starts dividing into different competing groups, each fighting to prove their existence.⁵⁶ Indiscriminate social alienation, systemic discriminatory policies, and external influences form an extremist individual, but not overnight. To attain these stances, individuals need to go through a series of processes, like social isolation, crossing various dividing lines of political policies, and external influence.⁵⁷ Essentially, social threats do not focus on disagreement but rather on the gradual

⁵⁵ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24.

⁵⁶ Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁵⁷ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalkenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).



and deliberate removal of commonality. A society is in dysfunction when even the idea of truth having some validity becomes unassailable, and along with governance, civil trust collapses, and the ideal of futuristic collective action becomes a remnant.

3.4. Economic Threats: The Unseen Trenches of Inequality

While military conflict produces loud explosive noises, the economically motivated conflict manifests through the eroding of available opportunities and the quiet deepening of the gap separating the privileged from the dispossessed. The neglected concentration of wealth, resource depletion, and financial crises are bound to invoke unease and unrest. Global inequality, for instance, is not simply a problem of having unequal incomes; it is a stratified fact of existence that shapes the reality of who gets to wield power, enjoy stability, and even survive. Notable examples include the economic downturn of 2008, which brought about changes to the existing political order and the balance of power between states, in addition to devastating governments economically, leading to the rampant and less sophisticated but politically charged populism that is an unmistakable trait of modern international politics.⁵⁸ Debt crises, along with others, especially in the global south, have chained states into a cycle of dirty dependency, which strips a country of its independence without any invasion or foreign military presence.⁵⁹

Economic threats are frequently misclassified as secondary concerns as crises for economists rather than specialists in security. Yet, history continuously demonstrates that reaching critical levels of economic instability transforms into socio-political unrest. The French Revolution, the Arab Spring, and the collapse of Venezuela's economy all started with insufficient staple goods, rampant unemployment, and poor financial practices instead of elaborate ideological conflicts. If traditional security approaches concentrate on the safeguarding of borders and institutions, Threat Studies understands that true instability often begins when a given population can neither afford to live within those borders nor have faith in those institutions.

3.5. Environmental Threats: The Great Disruptor

While economic challenges can be considered silent tempests, threats of climate change, pandemics, and ecological degradation loom dangerously as storms on the horizon, working synergistically within a singular framework to unravel stability on a global scale.⁶⁰ Unlike other conventional conformity security risks that pose a threat as a result of purposeful action, the

⁵⁸ Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (New York: Viking Press, 2018).

⁵⁹ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).

⁶⁰ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.



environment is at risk for different reasons, particularly human activities. Changes in climate do not only exist as an abstract concept but instead act as a force multiplier by accentuating violence over resources, migration, and food scarcities.⁶¹ The concept of pandemics further exemplifies the failure of modern governance, providing evidence that claims the ability of a single virus to dismantle economies, restructure international relations, and incite chaos globally in less time than any hostile nation.⁶²

As threats to the environment arise, they do not follow any political timelines. Rather, such threats occur within geologic and biologic periods, advancing slowly yet having an impact that cannot be undone. Unlike armed conflicts, which can be negotiated through discussion, diplomacy will not be of any use when dealing with climate destruction and pandemics. Hence, the greater problem is not only the need to manage their effects but also transforming security paradigms to address far-reaching and ambitious frameworks that focus on lasting value instead of dealing with crises as they emerge.

3.6. Cyber Threats: The Unseen Battlefield

The nation state, once the unquestioned fulcrum of security policy, now finds its sovereignty splintered by cyberspace – a domain of diffused power that has enabled unprecedented authority for individuals, corporations, and even non-state actors. In modern societies, protecting borders is as much about controlling the narrative as it is about territory, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence, digital warfare, and misinformation campaigns.⁶³ With no physical battlefield in existence, all focus is on advancing technology, which calls for a restructuring in the realm of security studies. Rather than solely monitoring borders, it is crucial to understand the methods employed in shaping, distorting, and contesting reality that takes place within digital realms.

4. Epistemological Basis: How Do We Study Threats?

Whereas classical security studies perceived threats as concrete and quantifiable, Threat Studies recognize, arguably more aptly, their often chimeric quality – a troubling blend of real peril and fear of danger, where perception is as important as reality when it comes to policy formulation. The concern, therefore, is how one studies something that is at once material and imagined, systemic and situational, universal and contextually relative? The tools of positivist

⁶¹ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

⁶² Fidler, *SARS, Governance*, 2003.

⁶³ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).



analysis, with their emphasis on hard data, statistical models, and predictive algorithms, are inadequate when the very existence of a threat relies on discourse, ideology, and historical experience. At the same time, purely constructivist approaches that dismiss everything as a mere social construction face the problem of ignoring the empirical evidence attached to the patterns of their emergence, escalation, and impact. Threat Studies must therefore balance measurement and meaning between discourse and reality, blending scientific objectivity with philosophical inquiry.

4.1. Moving Beyond Positivism and Realism: A Hybrid Approach

Security studies have been oriented around positivism for a large chunk of their history, attempting to account for threats using causal relations, their calculable probabilities, and various game-theoretical frameworks.⁶⁴ In order to comprehend fully the nature of threats, one needs to move away from the linear logic of the ‘Newtonian’ security studies framework, which considers threats as forces that can be quantified, and instead embrace an enemy paradigm that is much more capable of quantum mechanics, where threats exist in states of probabilities and only materialize when observed or acted upon. Take, for example, the War on Terror. It was not simply an abstract response to a set of empirical threats, but rather a self-perpetuating loop in which perceiving terrorism enacted policies that created new security crises.⁶⁵

Just like that, climate change underwent relegation from scientific discourse to the scope of security. Despite proposing existential propositions, only when framed as a security issue did the phenomenon begin to influence military or geopolitical strategy.⁶⁶ Threat Studies, therefore, integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches with forecasting techniques and predictive statistical analyses to evaluate risk in addition to scrutinizing the narratives, discourses, securitization processes, and even politics that transform risks into dangerously perceived threats.⁶⁷ A threat is an event that has occurred, as well as an evaluation of that event, and any epistemology that fails to address both dimensions will perpetually remain inadequate.

Understanding how these processes come together to form a risk requires a multidisciplinary approach, where each discipline constructs its own defined boundaries, presents its own methods, and offers its unique perspectives explaining threat emergence and development. For example, the act of perceiving a threat is much more than a phenomenon that

⁶⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Writing the War*, 2005.

⁶⁶ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

⁶⁷ Waever, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, 1995.



is simply appreciated at an abstract level. It's physiological and psychological, as people are predetermined by their emotions, cognitive preferences, and instincts shaped through evolution. People survive because their biology enables them to overvalue imminent and tangible risks and undervalue enduring ones.⁶⁸ This illustrates why people view terrorism as a far greater existential danger than factors such as climate change and financial crises, despite the far lower statistical impact terrorism has.⁶⁹ The study of threats, therefore, needs to integrate cognitive psychology to uncover how fear, heuristics, and authoritarian predispositions shape public and policy responses toward security issues.⁷⁰

The Integrated Threat Theory offers an account of how individuals and groups construct in-group and out-group threats, which results in radicalization, xenophobia, and the securitization of marginalized populations, as documented by Stephan and Stephan.⁷¹ To explain why some states overreact to particular threats but downplay others, one must navigate through a human's past trauma, cultural narratives, and ideas that are pre-conditioned to perceive danger. Moreover, every threat is a product of social realities, which include group dynamics, identity politics, and the social cohesion, or lack thereof, within societies. Along with the absence of war, security also encompasses stability, and society, whether through ethnic fragmentation, economic disparity, or ideological extremism, becomes the source of multiplied threats, not because external enemies exist, but because society is in the process of disintegrating.⁷²

Radicalization, for example, cannot solely be understood in the context of counterterrorism policies; rather, is terrorism studied in the sociological framework of alienation, marginalization, and civic decay.⁷³ In the same way, misinformation and conspiracy theories pose social dangers by undermining governance, democracy, and inciting political violence.⁷⁴ In order to map the epidemiology of threats, it is necessary to understand that

⁶⁸ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974): 1124–1131.

⁶⁹ John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷⁰ John Duckitt, "A Dual-Process Cognitive-Motivational Theory of Ideology and Prejudice," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 33 (2001): 41–113.

⁷¹ Stephan and Stephan, *An Integrated Threat*, 2000.

⁷² Tajfel & Turner, *The Social Identity*, 1986.

⁷³ McCauley & Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization*, 2017.

⁷⁴ Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).



insecurity spreads not only through weapons and war, but also through the narratives a society tells itself, the myths it believes, and the fractures it cultivates.

While constructed through social realities, threats are also politically constructed. The state, which holds the primary responsibility in traditional security frameworks, has the prerogative to identify, legitimize, and set priorities for threats, often in accordance to interests rather than objective assessments of danger. This explains why some dangers are elevated to crisis status while others receive only passing attention and are relegated to footnotes in policy documentation.⁷⁵ This calls for interdisciplinary approaches to governance in Debate in ‘Threat Studies’ needs to move away from considering governance as a reactive entity, and instead focus on a narrative of security, with the question of how institutions fabricate risk, public fear, and use the prospect of crisis to extend control over society.⁷⁶

Migration securitization, for instance, does not emanate from an empirical threat by migrants; it is grounded on a political argument portraying migration as a crisis.⁷⁷ Likewise, the increase of electronic monitoring for the purposes of cybersecurity is more about control than the protection of the people, which raises fundamental issues regarding the overarching intent of security policies.⁷⁸ The study of threats, then, adds a political dimension, considering that governmentality, insecurity is frequently produced as much as it is socially constructed.

While political considerations set in during a crisis, threats to the environment evolve in a slow and almost imperceptible manner, like a violent erosion of cliffs that changes the global order not suddenly, but slowly and irreversibly.⁷⁹ One of the most important issues in analyzing environmental threats is the lack of visibility; these threats do not appear as enemies or singular occurrences, instead they come as multi-faceted processes that develop over decades.⁸⁰

Change in climate, biodiversity decrease, and pandemics encourage the combination of ecological science and political science, giving birth to a different epistemology. Unlike conventional security problems, which can be solved through diplomacy or deterrence, putting the environment in danger poses an existential rethinking on how an attempt to provide security challenges the very notion of security, which needs to move from state-centered defense of

⁷⁵ Waever, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, 1995.

⁷⁶ Bigo, *Security and Immigration*, 2002.

⁷⁷ Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁸ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 2019.

⁷⁹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁸⁰ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.



territory to the more holistic nurturing of benevolent sustainability and resilience.⁸¹ Thus, threats are not stand-alone, separated issues, but rather results of intricate systems that require a security-insecurity epistemology which fuses dualistic tendencies. Threat Studies does just that by defining crises through the lens of perception, asking not how society predicts threat, but how society defines risk and responds to risk.

4.2. Methodological Approaches

Unlike conventional security studies, which often seek definitive answers through rigid theoretical frameworks, Threat Studies is complex, as threats are multi-dimensional, multi-temporal, and intricately embedded into social, political, and technological contexts. In order to grasp these shifts, Threat Studies seeks to combine the empirical methodologies that capture the patterns of periphery threats and the subtleties of perception, amplification, and manipulation.

As an example, an analysis of threats through a comparative historical approach can enable scholars to carve out rhythms of identification, escalation, and resolution, identifying the many crises that seem different but share a common structure. Evolving threats throughout history have seldom manifested as unique, untethered events; rather, they have surfaced as repetitions of past conflicts and crises. The dread of external antagonistic invasion, fundamental for centuries to European statecraft, became prominent again during the Cold War obsession with ideological subversion, only to resurface in contemporary society, obsessed with the notion of cyberattacks and digital warfare.⁸² The collapse of economic structures in Germany during the Weimar period, which intensified the exacerbated colonial nationalist politics in the decade of the 1930s, has modern echoes in the volatile economic state that sparked populism subsequent to the 2008 recession.⁸³ Cross-case comparison methods facilitate the extraction of these patterns and assist scholars in foreseeing contemporary dangers. Researchers are able to differentiate between recurring crises, which are bound to happen empirically, and new threats, which need fresh understanding, by advancing time and stepping within historical contexts. This approach helps guarantee that Threat Studies not only respond to existing risks by acting in a way that tries to avoid them, but also learns from the previous risks in order to predict latent instabilities in the future.

⁸¹ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

⁸² Gaddis, *We Now Know*. 1997.

⁸³ Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (New York: Viking Press, 2018).



Surveys can also provide an effective means with which to measure the perception of a given threat, providing insight into the most significant dangers threatening public consciousness and how these dangers change with time.⁸⁴ As an example, terrorism was considered one of the most important security issues in the early 2000s; now surveys show that the public is more concerned about climate change and economic downturns, illustrating the evolution of threats both in reality and in the perception of those experiencing them.⁸⁵ Also, experimental methods go deeper, as they analyze how someone might interpret and respond to a threat. These methods, which are often borrowed from cognitive psychology and behavioral economics, focus on the impact of framing, emotional triggers, and bias on risk perception.⁸⁶ Through experiments, researchers can explore whether the contrary opinion effect increases fear, whether predisposed authoritarian personalities relate to greater sensitivity to threats, or whether certain demographic groups give importance to certain insecurities over others.

Network analysis is particularly important in understanding cybersecurity, organized crime, terrorism, and disinformation campaigns, where the source of threat does not arise from a singular entity but from a system of interdependent actors. From mapping the digital routes of cyberattacks to the financial tracing of extremist organizations and the analysis of social media misinformation, network analysis shows the architecture of contemporary threats in all their multiplicity, revealing their weaknesses and potential intervention points. This methodology is especially relevant in cybersecurity, where threats appear not as tangible violence, but as algorithmic breaches, data intrusions, and cascades of misinformation.⁸⁷

While historical case studies look backward and network analysis maps the present, scenario planning could be defined as planning for unwritten futures. In a world filled with uncertainty, ever-changing threats influenced by black swan events, scenario planning, and risk assessment become essential. Unlike other theorists, scenario planners, along with scholars and policymakers gauge and craft plausible predictive models of future risks, trying to uncover pathways to crises and devising response strategies prior to their actual unfolding.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Stephan and Stephan, *An Integrated Threat*, 2000.

⁸⁵ John Mueller and Mark G. Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts: The Policing of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸⁶ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974): 1124–1131.

⁸⁷ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 2019.

⁸⁸ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).



Floyd⁸⁹ argues that these methods become particularly useful for addressing slow-moving deep-seated, complex issues like climate change, artificial intelligence risks, and geopolitical shifts. These theorists blend tangible data with educated guesswork to shape hypothetical scenarios, allowing extensive testing. Hence, such complex matters involving AI and robotics are tackled by politicians paired with qualitative foresight and quantitative modeling, shaping proactive strategies instead of waiting for threats to occur.⁹⁰ Threat studies become a sub-field not merely analyzing the past and present, but envisioning a world where strategic preparedness enables future resilience against threats.

4.3. Avoiding the Pitfalls of Securitization: When Threats Become Political Weapons

Identifying threats is never an objective exercise; it is politically charged, whereby the entity classifying the threat, the parties to gain from acknowledgment, and the level of action deemed acceptable shape its nature.⁹¹ While the process of securitization tends to be requisite in mitigating genuine perils, it also carries the risk of exaggeration, distortion, and overreaction. For Bigo, any state that feels under unrelenting siege by internal opposition, migration, or technological changes turns into a society in an abstract emergency: extraordinary responses become the norm while democratic scrutiny recedes.⁹²

Sustaining authoritarianism has historically been supported by threat inflation. The post-World War II surveillance state provides a vivid example: The Red Scare imagined subversion so profoundly it became empirically self-justifying, enabling the restriction of ideology along with pervasive state scrutiny and political purges.⁹³ Subsequently, the post-9/11 era witnessed the securitization of terrorism, which rationalized policies of indefinite detention, enhanced interrogation, and surveillance to the point of data hoarding, irrespective of real risk reduction.⁹⁴ More recently, claims of digital threats and disinformation have applied blanket labels to impose severe restrictions on free expression and justify invasive monitoring, setting the stage for control disguised as preventative security.⁹⁵

The threats ought to be studied in their material reality along with the danger of state power that seeks control. Any risk should not result in violation of fundamental human rights,

⁸⁹ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

⁹⁰ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.

⁹¹ Waever, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, 1995.

⁹² Bigo, *Security and Immigration*, 2002.

⁹³ Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

⁹⁴ Jackson, *Writing the War*, 2005.

⁹⁵ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 2019.



mass discrimination, or perpetual state of heightened alert administration. Overall, studies related to risk should act as a balance to securitization.

4.4. Threat Equity: Ensuring a Just and Balanced Approach to Risk

One of the primary moral shortcomings of traditional security discourse is its selective nature, giving preference to threats that sit within political and economic interests surrounding the core of power.⁹⁶ For instance, terrorism is by far one of the most heavily prioritized issues on global security agendas. Yet, economically precarious conditions, public health crises, or even climate disasters outnumber terrorist attacks in the death toll.⁹⁷ Even so, policy action regarding climate threats remains reactive and incremental while anti-terrorism initiatives receive focused funding and disproportionate attention.⁹⁸ Economic injustices ranging from structural unemployment to the concentration of wealth are seldom recognized as security threats, despite the reality that desperate economic conditions tend to inspire enduring instability, radicalization, and civil unrest.⁹⁹

Threat equity insists that all threats be examined not through the lens of political opportunism, but rather in their true context of human security and systemic stability. Security policies should not serve merely the powerful interests but instead deal with their vulnerabilities by mitigating risks at the root level, which include economic, environmental, and social considerations that cannot afford to be tangential. Recognizing that the most marginalized people, those suffering from food insecurity, displacement, disenfranchisement, face some of the gravest threats today, which are not abstract humanitarian dilemmas, but core foundational security issues, comes to the fore.¹⁰⁰

Such a transformation cannot be reactive; rather, global governance needs to shift out of this short-term, crisis-centric mode of operation and into proactive, strategic planning that tackles deep-rooted structural risks before they escalate into emergencies. Rather than investing heavily into climate-resilient infrastructure as a reaction to terrorism or expanding resource allocation into defensive measures at the borders while neglecting the reasons behind migration, policymakers need to change their perception of threats as solitary entities. Addressing these phenomena requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that is equitable in nature.

⁹⁶ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

⁹⁷ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.

⁹⁸ Mueller & Stewart, *Chasing Ghosts*, 2016.

⁹⁹ Tooze, *Crashed*, 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).



4.5. Resilience and Inclusiveness: Beyond Protection, Toward Sustainable Security

Traditionally, security has been viewed as a fortress structure, a means of defending against outside dangers. Yet, true resilience cannot come from building taller walls or extending one's surveillance system; it comes from building societies that can adapt to and withstand crises as long as they do not succumb to authoritarianism, division, or panic.¹⁰¹ The most sustainable approach to responding to threats is not simply risk avoidance, but rather the nurturing of conditions in which risks do not explode into life-threatening crises. Civic inclusiveness is critical within this framework. A society that excludes marginalized groups, that treats certain segments of the population as standing perpetual security risks, or that encourages social polarization and fragmentation, is one that fuels the very instability it purports to control.¹⁰² The resilience parameters portray the need to ensure that fragmentation or apocalyptic threats do not shatter the social security net.

A holistic perspective of threat studies accepts that security cannot simply be forced from above, but rather must be generated alongside communities, civil society, and local governance structures.¹⁰³ When certain threats are perceived solely through the scope of the state's interest, the outcome is a security mechanism unaligned with the realities and requirements of those it intends to safeguard. Instead, policy formulation needs to be participatory so that those who are most impacted by insecurity are able to effectively influence policy outcomes. Thus, as opposed to regarding security as a tool of state power, Threat Studies must focus on redefining it as an aspect of social order, human rights, and international collaboration. To ensure that security is not an illusion maintained by fear, but rather a reality based on trust, justice, and collective welfare, it is necessary to manage the ethical and political facets of governance.

5. Future Directions: Advancing Threat Studies as a Research Agenda

For threat studies, the analysis of conflicts and crises is approached differently than the common international relations paths. Unlike other Eurocentric strains of security studies, threat studies seek to go beyond the narrow confines. The modern landscape of threats, whether it be in the form of cyber warfare, automation powered by artificial intelligence, environmental disintegration, or socio-political fracturing, is in desperate need of a fluid, encompassing

¹⁰¹ Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹⁰² Tajfel & Turner, *The Social Identity Theory*, 1986.

¹⁰³ McCauley & Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization*, 2017.



approach. It is well beyond an academic exercise; pondering over the future of threat studies should be an urgent intellectual necessity. It prompts us to fundamentally reconsider how we analyze, foresee, and attempt to contain potential dangers before they transform into crises.

State-centric approaches to threat analysis need to be expanded beyond the borders of traditional bounded rationality frameworks. There lies a need to integrate them into broader policies and governance structures, including advanced risk assessment strategies aimed at preemptively mitigating threats. The paradigms need to lean more towards practical prevention rather than reactionary measures. Accomplishing this would require more than theoretical inventiveness, which would call for integrating emerging disciplines and technologies and multi-national approaches to develop a streamlined strategy for dealing with global insecurity.

For a considerable duration of its development, the field of security studies has primarily been scoped within the context of the nation-state, viewing threats as external obstacles to be contained, deterred, or exterminated. However, the most formidable challenges of the current century, such as climate change, cyber warfare, economic inequality, and the spread of disinformation, are issues that do not observe territorial borders or geopolitical boundaries.¹⁰⁴ These challenges do not wait at the gates of a nation-state but rather invade its systems, infrastructure, and public opinion, rendering old defensive measures insufficient.

For this multidisciplinary realm, Threat Studies must develop into a policy-oriented discipline focusing beyond descriptive qualitative accounts of crises toward governance frameworks, risk assessment, and institutional resiliency. It is necessary that policymakers acknowledge that threats are not isolated issues; that there exists a connection between economic decline and political radicalism, between climate change and migration flows, and even between cyber vulnerabilities and election integrity.¹⁰⁵ If Threat Studies remains confined within academic discourse, it risks becoming a scholarly echo chamber devoid of confrontation with actual governance. This domain's future lies within collaborations between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in security so that there is integration of theoretical threat analysis and practical diagnosis as a basis for structured solution propositions.

6. Theoretical Innovations: Expanding the Boundaries of Threat Analysis

Both realism and liberalism as parts of international relations theory may offer some insight with regard to safeguarding policies related to state or national security. However, each

¹⁰⁴ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.



one contains a constraining factor that completely disregards the depth and complexity of modern-day threats. Constructivist theory using discourse and perception provides basic instruments to examine how threats are created and constructed, but these approaches require more of a focus on applied methods beyond the frame and concept. Addressing the discipline of Threat Studies requires vast attention and careful guidance from diverse branches, including:

i. Critical Security Studies - Focuses on the pervasive influence of power within security relations and the consequential impact that is inflicted on threat constructions and security action plans.¹⁰⁶

ii. Political Psychology - Concerned with the impact of cognitive distortions and social group affiliations as well as politically conditioned belief systems on the perception of threats and policy action.¹⁰⁷

iii. AI Ethics and Digital Governance - Addresses the consequences posed by algorithmic governance with reference to data privacy and autonomous threat-detection systems.¹⁰⁸

iv. Environmental Security Studies - Places climate change and biodiversity loss alongside resource depletion as not secondary issues, but primary factors of international chaos.¹⁰⁹

Integrating insights from various disciplines will enable Threat Studies to create new theories accommodating the contemporary multifaceted and integrated systems of insecurity. The aim is not just to supplement existing classifications with additional threats but to transform the entire approach of how threats are understood, evaluated, and addressed in times of unpredictability.

Security policy, as traditionally constructed, is always reactive and responds to issues only after they have occurred. This has created a global governance system that is always using a firefighting approach instead of proactively trying to create conditions that help reduce insecurity.¹¹⁰ As much as is required, Threat Studies needs to advocate for a radical change in crisis response governance policy. This shift fully requires the use of predictive modeling for emerging scenarios and adaptive planning towards policies that enable decision makers to mitigate the possibility of uncontrollable escalations from emerging threats.¹¹¹ For example,

¹⁰⁶ Bigo, Security and Immigration, 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Stephan and Stephan, *An Integrated Threat*, 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance*, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Dalby, *Security and Environmental*, 2009

¹¹⁰ Jackson, *Writing the War*, 2005.

¹¹¹ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).



cyber security should not be posting breach cleanup. There has to be active steps towards predictive risk modeling where vulnerable areas are identified before they are exploited. Disaster response climate-related policies should change focus to proactive infrastructure modification and sustainable development.¹¹² Moreover, cyber threats, financial instability, and climate disruption bring the need for global collaborative action, and so, unlike traditional state-driven security strategies, there is a need to adopt networked, cooperative models of threat governance.¹¹³

Conclusion: Beyond the Illusion of Security: A Call for New Thinking

Power's capacity to provide security has always been an illusion, marred by the assumption that 'power' alone equates to stability. Surveillance, militarization, borders, and to an extent, perceived infrastructure, have always been masqueraded as 'shields' against insecurity. History provides a sobering and untold truth; we cannot militarily contain threats and expect them to vanish. The collapse of democratic regimes due to authoritarian accumulation, collapsing empires, unchecked financial life, and societal cohesion cracking due to ideologically and disinformation-fueled public extremity, all support the notion that insecurity does not stem from an external opponent most of the time, but rather from a self-cultivated narrative.

In order to address this point, consider shifting strategies to controlling and preemptively stopping threats, allowing inclusiveness rather than exclusion. Restructuring global governance must prioritize risk. It is essential that base policies move beyond serving merely state interests and begin attending to the structures that catalyze and give rise to threats. Disinformation, cyber warfare, climate change, and rising inequality cannot be treated as add-on issues; they are central and the very seeds that destroy global stability and hence must be viewed through the lens of security.

The change requires an epistemic shift where threats do not get simplified into military calculations or national security policies but rather treated as changing and embedded within the social, political, and technological changes around us. As no one discipline can single-handedly, politically, psychologically, explore environmental studies or digital governance, resolve contemporary challenges, collaboration across disciplines is crucial.

¹¹² Floyd, *Security and the Environment*. 2010.

¹¹³ McCauley & Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization*, 2017.



Threat Studies does not present a conclusive way to deal with insecurity nor does it seek to eradicate threats entirely. What it does is call for revisiting the idea of risk perpetually, adopting an ethical approach to governance, and keeping a welcoming attitude towards new ways of framing issues that can be called a threat in the first place. Rather, security cannot be achieved; it has to be worked on. It must be a focus of endless adaptability, learning, structural changes, and continuous forward movement.

If the previous frameworks of security were walls set to keep a myriad of threats at bay, Threat Studies would be a map guiding societies toward resilience, justice, and readiness. I have to make it clear: this is not an academic reframing of security studies, but rather a comprehensive shift in the approach to mitigating harmful instability, doing everything possible to ensure we don't merely contain threats, but instead understand, reduce, and eliminate them from the very outset.

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