

Security Governance and Asymmetrical Threats: A Critical Approach

حوكمة الأمن والتهديدات غير المتكافئة: مقارنة نقدية

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Abstract: This research paper aims to emphasize the theoretical limitations of security governance in relation to asymmetrical security threats. This is due to the fact that security governance is still a strategic approach rather than a fully developed theory. However, this does not prevent researchers from attempting to establish a theoretical and relational foundation for security governance, considering that it can be generalized to non-European experiences.

Keywords: Governance; Security; Pre-Theory; Strategy; Security Threat.

ملخص: تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى التأكيد على المحدودية النظرية للحوكمة الامنية في علاقتها بالتهديدات الامنية غير المتكافئة. وذلك راجع الى ان الحوكمة الامنية لازالت استراتيجية مواجهة ولم تصبح نظرية بعد، لكن هذا لا يمنع الباحثين من محاولة التأسيس النظري والعائقي للحوكمة الامنية، باعتبار انها قابلة للتعميم على تجارب غير اوروبية.

كلمات مفتاحية: حوكمة؛ أمن؛ ما قبل النظرية؛ استراتيجية؛ تهديد أمني.

1. Introduction

The period following the Cold War saw significant shifts in global diplomatic dynamics. The architecture of the modern international order has grown intricate, marked by a fluctuating security landscape. This volatility is a consequence of heightened mutual dependencies among nations coupled with the lack of a dominant global authority, compelling nations to confront a series of novel security challenges that necessitate unified action. The concept of security governance has emerged as a crucial strategy to tackle these asymmetrical security threats.

This article aims to provide an answer to the following research question: **How can security governance be understood in the theoretical context of asymmetrical security threats?**

The research paper posits that the importance of a state's ability to confront asymmetrical security threats is linked to the extent of security governance in mutual dependence with other countries.

Our analysis seeks to unpack this primary thesis through a framework structured around four principal dimensions; The initial dimension focuses on the process of defining "security governance," aiming to elucidate its role within the theoretical landscape of security studies and to acknowledge the historical backdrop that influenced its development. In the second dimension, we strive to clarify this term by exploring its intersections with related concepts to foster a unified scientific understanding in academic discourse. The third dimension explores the foundational hypothetical constructs that underpin the nexus between security governance and asymmetrical threats, with the objective of theorizing this relationship.

In the concluding dimension, we explore the boundaries of formulating a distinct theory of security governance, in spite of the theoretical possibilities that are beginning to take shape.

2. Conceptualizing Security Governance

To grasp the concept of security governance, it is essential to first dissect the etymological roots of the terms involved: 'governance' and 'security'. Since the 1980s, the definition of 'security' has been a subject of extensive debate among scholars, prompting efforts to broaden its scope from merely state-centric concerns to encompassing communities and individuals, and from solely military concerns to include non-military aspects. This broader interpretation of security has notably shaped modern approaches to security policy-making (Krahmann, 2003, pp. 9-10).

'Governance', meanwhile, refers to a government's capacity to establish rules, enforce laws, and provide services, irrespective of whether it operates under democratic or authoritarian principles. Governance extends across various domains such as education, health, and public safety, all of which are critical for governments to manage efficiently and judiciously (Fukuyama, January 2013, pp. 3-4). Understanding security governance becomes more tangible when connected to its operational framework, necessitating an examination of the pivotal factors that have propelled it into the spotlight within the theoretical sphere of security studies.

Since 1989, the concept of security governance has increasingly captured scholarly interest, catalyzed by the challenges introduced by the 'new' security agenda. Scholars such as Robert O. Keohane and Robert Jervis have explored the necessities of security governance within the modern global framework. Jervis discussed how the Western model of security governance has fostered a security community, influenced by specific dynamics concerning war perceptions and their associated costs, which compel national leaders to generally eschew warfare as a governance strategy, particularly among themselves, due to its significant material repercussions.

This requires embracing political and economic liberalism, where decision-makers pursue national prosperity through peaceful economic interaction to eliminate the justifications for war and economic isolationism. Additionally, local democratic governance is necessary for negotiation, settlement, and the rule of law to be the hallmark of inter-state relations. Additionally, nations must be content with the prevailing regional dynamics, a factor that lessens the security dilemma (Sperling, september 2004, pp. 10-11). Although the international milieu initially influenced the emergence of the security governance concept, leading to various interpretations, scholars have since converged on a unified and comprehensive conceptual framework that is broadly accepted.

According to Mark Webber and colleagues, the accepted definition within the literature on security governance is "the orchestrated coordination and regulation of issues by diverse and autonomous entities, encompassing both public and private sectors, ... incorporating both structured and organic processes, shaped by ongoing discourse and standards, intentionally aimed at achieving specific policy objectives."

This definition highlights two crucial aspects of governance: first, governance involves multiple and independent actors. Second, governance is an intentional coordination process activated by actors to achieve specific results.

Most researchers agree on these two pillars, although there is less consensus on the structural characteristics of international management frameworks (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2014, p. 41). The academic understanding of security governance is evident in its role in managing and administrating international crises.

In scholarly discourse, the core elements of governance typically involve decentralization, interaction, collaboration, the engagement of various stakeholders, reciprocal dialogue, and negotiation. Furthermore, governance is characterized as a paradigm shift from traditional government to a more inclusive governance framework. Essentially, security governance represents the integration of governance theories within the realm of security studies. To fully appreciate the historical development and analytical value of security governance, an examination of the historical evolution of both 'security' and 'governance' is necessary (Liao, 2013, pp. 17-18). The genesis of the governance concept is linked to global standards established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, alongside the adoption of good governance practices and their implications for sustainable development.

So far, research on global and security governance has largely taken a descriptive-analytical approach to understand the increasing fragmentation of policymaking among states, international organizations, and private actors as part of the shift from centralized, state-centric "government" to fragmented, multilateral "governance." This discussion pertains to the role of security governance in delineating the theoretical evolution in the realm of security and its broader implications (Krahmann, April 2005, p. 22). Within this framework, various concepts linked to security governance have started to crystallize.

3. Security Governance and Adjacent Concepts

3.1. *Security Communities*

The notion of a security community is centered around ensuring collective security among its participants. Originally introduced by Richard Van Wagenen in the early 1950s, the concept did not gain significant theoretical and empirical recognition until it was extensively explored by Karl Deutsch and his team in 1957. Deutsch articulated a security community as "the integration of a group of states to a degree that ensures a dependable assurance against mutual conflicts, opting instead to resolve disagreements through alternative methods." He posited that these states, within a security community, not only forge a stable system but essentially establish enduring peace (Ulusoy, 2024).

Through security governance, what is known as stable peace can be achieved by considering the fundamentals of effective management of the

collective security environment, such as respecting dialogue among parties, accommodating different political systems, achieving consensus among them, and focusing on the social structure and common cultural denominators of states.

3.2. Security Regimes

Jervis characterizes a security regime as "a set of principles, rules, and norms that encourage nations to moderate their actions with the expectation that others will reciprocate." Jervis identifies several conditions that are conducive to the establishment and maintenance of a security regime, including the desire of major powers to create such a regime, a preference for a more structured international environment over a scenario in which nations operate independently, and a collective contentment with the existing global order (Jervis, Spring 1982, p. P.357 and p.360). Security governance requires an orderly security environment to allow the security regime to control and regulate states' external behavior according to collective interests.

3.4. Securitization

Securitization refers to the process described by Ole Weaver, where certain issues are treated as matters of security. The opposite term, desecuritization, also comes from Weaver, who proposed mechanisms that lead to securitization, describing it as a process applied to specific issues like identity. This involves questioning when and how a particular issue is addressed by society from a security perspective. In other words, it means securing identity from surrounding threats by legitimizing all exceptional measures taken to prevent any potential problems that might arise from considering identity a non-security issue within the social structure (Waever, 2007, p. 83). Thus, security governance intersects with securitization in the necessity of reaching policy outcomes formulated around a specific issue. However, the difference lies in that securitization relies on a justificatory apparatus for exceptional practices to legitimize a particular matter, whereas security governance addresses crises based on principles and standards of effective and rational management.

4. Security Governance and Asymmetric Security Threats

Asymmetric security threats are defined as a wide range of challenges, including terrorism, cyber-attacks, organized crime, and illegal immigration. This situation compels countries in a specific region to adopt a precise, advanced, and comprehensive approach to security governance to confront and manage these risks. Understanding how to manage these diverse threats is crucial because they directly affect the stability of countries in a

particular region (ZEGGAGH, 2024, p. 87). Conversely, some countries face the difficult challenge of their security policies not considering the principle of inclusiveness, which reduces their effectiveness in managing threats.

In this framework, the constructivist perspective proposes that governance strategies should be tailored to the specific identities and interests of the respective countries and regions. For instance, the national and regional identities in Mediterranean countries are marked by their complexity and fluidity, attributes that stem from the region's extensive history, diverse cultures, and complex political landscapes. This intricate backdrop poses challenges in crafting an all-encompassing security governance framework for the area (ZEGGAGH, 2024, p. 93). Therefore, considering the specificity of decision-makers is of great importance in formulating comprehensive security policies that align with the changing regional and international security environment.

Thus, the new volatile and uncertain international security environment poses a serious challenge, exacerbated by the difficulty in managing this environment. No country in the world can stand alone against asymmetric security threats (organized crime, illegal immigration, terrorism, cyber threats...). Therefore, addressing these distinct challenges, which diverge from conventional threats, necessitates collaborative strategies, institutions, and shared responsibilities. In response to these needs, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), established by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1968,

inaugurated its Security Governance and Counter-Terrorism Laboratory. This initiative aims to implement and enhance broad cooperation and participation among various security actors, contributing credibly to developing a sustainable platform for sharing information and effective policies in security and counter-terrorism fields. The Security Governance Laboratory has adopted a flexible and multidisciplinary approach, applying the concept of governance in the security domain. Consequently, addressing security demands a diverse range of expertise and the engagement of multiple entities, given the strong interconnection between security and development at both national and international scales (The Security Governance Approach, 2024).

This need has surfaced due to a paradigm shift in the perception of security and the evolution towards an expanded security framework. Hence, the variety of security challenges requires the establishment of a technocratic entity dedicated to crafting effective security governance frameworks.

Nations no longer represent the primary origins of global security threats, and the changing nature of these threats tests the limits of state capabilities,

highlighting the deficiencies of policy frameworks that hinge on national sovereignty (Kavalski, 2008, p. 434). This supports the grand hypothesis of security governance, centered on how different actors (states and non-governmental actors) cooperate at various levels and use a range of formal and informal tools and practices to achieve security policy outcomes (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2014, p. 41). To clarify the dimensions of security governance and its implications for confronting asymmetric threats, we will discuss the pillars supporting the pluralistic direction of governance.

The second premise is that, due to the complexity of these threats and their domestic or cross-border nature, it is increasingly imperative for states to collaborate with various actors, including other states, international bodies, non-governmental organizations, and private enterprises, to adequately address their national security demands and those of their populations.

The complexity and variety of modern security threats not only exert additional pressure on state resources but also reveal that traditional sovereignty-focused policy-making mechanisms, developed over centuries, are inadequate for tackling issues that cross national boundaries. As a result, a growing number of international entities and private sector participants, including charitable organizations and private security firms, are stepping forward to manage issues related to humanitarian assistance, human rights oversight, refugee support, and military training and protection.

Ultimately, the third assumption posits that the current legitimacy of the state does not provide a reliable basis for maintaining a monopoly on the provision of national and international security, which appears to be weakening due to the previously mentioned factors. Instead, it increasingly depends on delivering security in a cost-effective manner. This assumption implies that substituting "government" with "governance" has profoundly altered the landscape of security policy-making. Several key principles arise from these fundamental assumptions about international security.

Initially, the transition towards governance facilitates the regional and functional specialization of security agencies, enabling both governmental and non-governmental entities to provide security more economically. As state security and defense capabilities become less suited for unilateral actions, this shift will diminish the threat perception among nations and reduce the likelihood of interstate conflicts. Secondly, with the dispersal of capabilities, states will find a greater need to collaborate on security matters. They will have the option to select from a variety of strategies (The End of the 'New World Order'? Security

Governance and US Imperialism after 9/11, 2006, pp. 8-9).

The ongoing role of security governance as a framework to tackle asymmetric threats compels states and other stakeholders to form alliances rather than pursue dominance, particularly among major nations and key international organizations.

5. Security Governance: The Limits of Theory

Building on Barry Buzan's idea that security threats stem from sectors other than the military, and Ole Weaver's idea of expanding security actors, the European context after the Cold War faced security threats such as terrorism, crime, civil war, ethnic conflict, human trafficking, climate change, and cybercrime. These threats necessitated that states become aware of transnational security risks. Consequently, the changing threat environment made it imperative to respond by considering the concept of "governance" at the level of actors and policies. However, it is important to highlight what the literature on security governance suggests, namely, the need to distinguish between considering this term as a concept and an analytical tool used for understanding, and as a specific political practice mechanism (Webber, 2014, pp. 2-3). This shift introduces both theoretical and practical challenges in the domain of security governance.

Over the last decade, the application of the governance concept to international security has led most contemporary research to adopt the term "security governance." This literature has become subject to critique. Researcher Christou and others observed that there are "three waves" representing significant developments in this literature. The first wave is dedicated to definitional issues, the second wave focuses on conceptual discussion, and the third wave centers on the applicability of the concept to European security policies. It can also be said that there is a fourth wave involving attempts to transfer the concept globally to areas outside Europe. Nonetheless, security governance as a method for analysis and understanding remains a central issue because the goal of the first wave—achieving definitional precision and conceptual clarity for "security governance"—has not been realized (Webber, 2014, pp. 3-4). This ambiguity hinders researchers from building a general theory around it.

Proponents of security governance theory argue that this theoretical deficiency is a natural consequence of the functional regional integration that occurred in Western Europe to manage shared security problems. This elite still does not realize that they have always lacked an explanatory theory, falling into a "pre-theory" stage. Security governance is merely a heuristic device used to describe and identify the characteristics and patterns of new governance, which

helps move away from traditional state security policies (Shahar Hameiri, 2018, p. P.463 and p.466). However, there is a favourable intellectual environment for attempting to build a general theory around the concept of security governance despite its conceptual ambiguity. The condition for theory building is its generalization. In this context, security governance has found wide application outside its original environment, with pioneering non-European experiences.

Security governance is no longer confined to the European domain where it originated but has spread to Asia and Africa. For example, studies on security governance in Africa acknowledge that countries like Rwanda have at times contributed to security governance and enhancing regional security (Shahar Hameiri, 2018, p. 467). Similarly, the Zwelethemba model of security governance in South Africa was notable for resolving community disputes through the establishment of community peace centers, which integrated the police's ability to respond to emergencies (Shearing, 2003 , pp. 342-343).

However, in the twenty-first century, some studies describe the state in Africa as failing due to security challenges hindering the application of security governance strategies, confining it to a key variable: "the difficulty of providing conditions suitable for human survival." (G.C Nwizu & Alozie, 2018, p. 46). This naturally relates to the prevailing variables in the African context that could undermine the concept of security governance. Experts observe that phenomena such as deprivation, poverty, widespread violence, genocide, terrorism, ethnic strife, and notably, poor governance, signal the variable indicating a decline in human survivability.

The empirical assessment of security governance is essential for appreciating the relevance of testing this concept and its operational limits in the present-day security conditions of different nations globally. This includes identifying the practical hurdles in universalizing this concept. This endeavor is complex and begins by evaluating "a spectrum of diverse indicators pertinent to the governance of the security sector, offering a summary of existing data on the quality of security provision and the management of the security sector across various nations.

This encompasses understanding the management of the security sector and discussing the applicability and constraints of both qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate the governance of the security sector." (Schroeder, 2010, p. 03) For instance, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators Project annually assesses political stability, voice and accountability, efficacy of government, quality of regulations, rule of law, and corruption control.

(Schroeder, 2010, p. 11)

A notable challenge with international peace and security metrics is their tendency to oversimplify, often narrowing them down to the mere absence of war and conflict between states. Yet, a more expansive definition also accounts for structural and cultural violence. (Schroeder, 2010, p. 16) Considering that the methodological requirement for any indicator, whether quantitative or qualitative, must be precise and reflective of the dimension it seeks to measure, security governance indicators can be delineated into three dimensions: "the overall condition of the democratic constitutional and legal framework that oversees security institutions (state and stability of democratic institutions), the democratic governance of civilian oversight over the security sector (civilian oversight and judicial and parliamentary accountability mechanisms), and the overall integrity of the 'rule of law' within the nation." (Schroeder, 2010, p. 25)

All these considerations point to a significant hypothesis that could potentially lay the groundwork for a general theory of security governance in the future: the caliber of security sector governance is intrinsically linked to the character of the political system (stable/unstable, authoritarian/democratic) in which security governance is implemented. The mechanisms and strategies of security governance are organized according to the framework through which the political system performs its essential functions.

6. Conclusion:

Security governance is a product of the structural transformation within the international and European systems. To this day, it remains at the threshold of analytical tools and has not yet reached the level of a full-fledged theory. It currently functions as an international strategy to address asymmetrical security threats resulting from changes in the security environment at the levels of actors, processes, and policies. However, if we examine the applications of security governance as being on the path to theoretical construction, we can describe this strategy as having a future theoretical legitimacy based on its potential for generalization, with non-European experiences serving as significant evidence.

Nevertheless, what undermines this epistemological hope for security governance as a theory is the infiltration of phenomena that hinder collective international action against asymmetrical threats. A prominent illustration of this is the occurrence of "state collapse and internal discord in circumstances where there is an absence of worldwide agreement (such as within the United Nations) and amidst asymmetric conflicts, concerning the methods of handling security threats according to the Westphalian sovereignty model." (Saxer, 2008, pp. 41-42)

Internal state security should not be compromised to enable it to address regional and international security concerns based on the global security governance strategy. This is fundamentally linked to finding a balance between state sovereignty and human rights, on one hand, and achieving consensus among major powers to avoid exploiting their own interests in the process of implementing security governance, on the other hand. By achieving this harmony in obtaining legitimacy both internally and externally, security governance can potentially become a theory that is largely generalizable.

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