

A Whole-Process Exploration of the Evolution of Security Issues

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Abstract: From the whole-process perspective, this paper elaborates and analyzes the ideal model of the evolution process of security issues. The ideal model for the evolution of security issues is presented as: securitization, de-securitization, and re-securitization. Analyzing the evolution of security issues from a whole-process perspective helps to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of “security” and also helps to gain insight into the dynamic development processes of security issues.

1. Introduction

How a specific issue enters the security agenda, that is, a non-security issue becomes a security issue, is a common issue in the security practice. The solution to this problem often relies on the policy tool of securitization. Against the backdrop of the prominence of non-traditional security, the theory of securitization emerged at the end of the 1990s when it was proposed by the Copenhagen School. The Copenhagen School’s securitization theory provides a theoretical explanation of the evolution process of security issues, mainly discussing the processes and related elements of security issues. However, securitization does not fully describe the evolution processes of security issues, and security may not be the endpoint of the evolution of security issues. Afterwards, there may be processes of de-securitization and re-securitization.

2. The Evolution Path of a Security Issue

Firstly, the transformation of an issue from a non-security issue to a security issue is the result of the subjective construction of the securitizing actor, but the securitizing acts during the securitization process usually encounter counter-moves, which is known as counter-securitization. In the contestation process of securitization and counter-securitization, securitization may achieve success or partial success, but it may also fail. If securitization is successful, an issue will enter the security agenda and be dealt with in an unconventional way. But usually, an issue may not always be dealt with in a security manner, so it will be de-securitized and returned to the track of conventional politics. Although, according to Ole Wæver (1995), the goal of de-securitizing a problem is to be pursued, in some cases, an issue needs to return to the security agenda for emergency response after de-securitization, that is, re-securitization. Of course, in practice, a

problem may not necessarily follow this process and may not necessarily involve all the elements. But for the purpose of theoretical exploration, the author will elaborate and demonstrate the evolution of security issues and the relationships between the various elements from a whole-process perspective as shown in Figure 1:

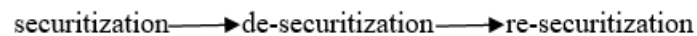


Figure 1: The Evolution Path of Security Issues

2.1. Securitization

Securitization is the theoretical core of the Copenhagen School and a policy tool widely used in practice to address specific issues. In the 1990s, the Copenhagen School represented by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, De Wilde and others put forward the securitization theory, which opened up a new path for security research and pointed out a new direction, expanding security research from the traditional military field to the fields of politics, economy, society, health, environment and culture. The Copenhagen School defines securitization as a successful speech act, through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed in the political community, something is regarded as an existential threat to valuable referents, and calls for urgent and special measures to deal with this threat [1]. The Copenhagen School's securitization theory draws on the "speech Act Theory" in linguistics, and believes that security is a speech act, and security is not an objective state, but the result of the subjective construction of the securitizing actor. Securitizing actors are those who have the right to frame a problem as an "existential threat" to the target. Their authority and social power usually stem from their status, which means that although no one is excluded from becoming a participant in securitization in principle, the security field leans towards political elites and "security professionals" [2]. The success of securitization must depend on the acceptance of this threat construction by the audience. The Copenhagen School pointed out that presenting something as a discourse that threatens the existence of the referent will not lead to securitization itself, it is just a securitizing act, and only when the audience accepts it can the issue be securitized. [3] To sum up, securitization can be understood as a process in which specific actors frame a specific issue as an existential threat, and then submit it to the target audience for recognition, so that special means and measures can be taken to deal with the problem.[4]

The Copenhagen School's securitization theory provides a theoretical explanation of the securitization process, offering theoretical guidance for securitization practice and laying the foundation for security research. However, the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School has also been criticized from many aspects, including a lack of analysis of rival views (i.e. attention to rival voices and counter-securitizations), overemphasis of speech acts and under-analysis of non-discursive practices, an elitist framework, a decisionist approach that assumes that securitization occurs at the moment when the audience accepts the securitizing actor's proposal, the framework's Eurocentric perception, under analysis of audience and contextual factors, and overemphasis on macro-level discourses while ignoring micro-level practices. [5] In the criticism of the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School, there have been new developments in securitization theory, with the Paris School having the greatest impact. The securitization theory of the Paris School has a different perspective on the securitization process from the Copenhagen School. Different from the Copenhagen School's excessive attention to discourse or speech act, the Paris School emphasizes the role of social practice, power, background, habitus and other factors, and emphasizes the mutual construction relationship between securitizing actors and audiences. [6] The securitization process is composed of a series of routine and standardized practical behaviors executed by bureaucrats and security professionals. [7] Overall, the Paris School emphasizes the construction of daily security

practices and objectively describes and explains the development process of security practices. In the case of the Paris School, a process of securitization is for the most part carried out through the daily routines of politics and by security professionals, and a securitizing speech act is nothing else than a 'louder' manifestation of this process. [8]

Based on the securitization theories of the Copenhagen School and the Paris School, as well as relevant research achievements in the academic community, this paper believes that securitization is a process of dual construction of discourse and practice. On the one hand, successful securitization is that the securitization discourse or speech act is accepted by the audience, so that the securitizing actors have the right to deal with problems through special means, break normal political rules, and sacrifice other values in the pursuit of security; On the other hand, successful securitization depends on whether the securitizing actors can translate security discourse into security practice, whether they have truly taken effective actions to eliminate so-called threats, and whether they have truly produced substantive effects or policy changes.

2.2. De-securitization

De-securitization is the reverse process of securitization, which refers to the routine negotiation process of "removing issues from emergency mode and entering the political field" [9]. That is, to shift an issue from a security agenda to a non-security agenda, to shift a problem from a security issue to a non-security issue, to shift the problem from a "threat-defense" sequence into the general public domain, and to change from the past unconventional emergency response methods to conventional non-emergency response methods. Compared to the depoliticization characteristics of securitization, de-securitization usually implies some form of re-politicization. [10] In contrast to securitization, in order to successfully achieve de-securitization, actors must convince the audience that the target has not been threatened by the existential threat, so they need to break away from the critical mode and reenter the normal political field. Generally speaking, the issue having been securitized will be on the security agenda for a long time before being de-securitized or reintegrated into the "normal political" field. However, the so-called "existential threat" characteristic of an issue may alter with the changes of various factors. Therefore, in a specific time and context, the issue that has been securitized needs to be de-securitized.

The mechanism of de-securitization is similar to the mechanism of securitization. The first step is the dimension of discourse, that is, the process of de-securitization is the process of "limiting the use of security speech act" [11] or the use of non-security discourse. Similar to securitization, in order for de-securitization to succeed, actors should use such discursive manipulation to convince the audience that the target is no longer threatened by existential threat, that relevant emergency measures beyond the normal political model are inappropriate, and that the results of security need to be eliminated and reversed. Wæver pointed out that there are many options to achieve de-securitization: not talking about security issues, dealing with security issues in a form that will not cause security dilemma or other vicious circles, and reintegrating security issues into "normal politics". [12] It can be seen that the Copenhagen School mainly limits the essence of de-securitization to discourse, which, like their definition of securitization, also lacks attention to practical behavior after discourse, that is, what specific actions to take after security issues are reintegrated into "normal politics". Therefore, the mechanism of de-securitization also involves practical dimension in addition to linguistic dimension. Cavelty and Balzacq (2016) argue that de-securitization involves taking counter-measures against non-linguistic expressions of the threatened issues and removing them from the threat-defense nexus in the public domain. This viewpoint points out that de-securitization is not only about transferring an issue from the security agenda to a non-security or political agenda through discourse, but also requires practical measures to eliminate

the impact of securitization, specifically changing or canceling the relevant policies caused by securitization, stopping the implementation of some related security measures, etc. De-securitization may be achieved through the adoption of relevant security policies by securitizing or de-securitizing actors, but it can also be independent of the behavior of securitizing or de-securitizing actors: initial security issues may be resolved, institutions can adapt to new situations through new regenerative structures, and discourse may change (such as loss of interest or audience), or the initial reference object no longer exists. [13] However, based on the subjective construction of threats in securitization, in most cases, de-securitization is still a behavior subjectively implemented by the relevant actors.

2.3. Re-securitization

After de-securitization, a specific issue enters the “conventional political” agenda, but de-securitization may not be the endpoint of the issue’s development, and changes in relevant scenarios may quickly lead to re-securitization of the issue. For example, the government of Türkiye de-securitized the issue of the Alevis minority during and after the Gezi protest in 2013, but the government then re-securitized the issue of the Alevis, putting them in the rhetoric of national security and social engineering by directly denigrating them. [14] For another example, after taking office in 2009, the newly elected left-wing government in El Salvador initially planned to adopt a more comprehensive approach to security issues, implementing a certain degree of de-securitization in dealing with gang issues compared to the previous government’s tough and positive policies, attempting to place this issue in a normal political process. However, within a short year, due to the slow formulation and ineffective implementation of relevant policies, gang crime in El Salvador has become more serious. Under various pressures, the government has made gang issues safer to cope with the worsening crime problem. [15]

Re-securitization is the process of re-securitizing a problem that has already been de-securitized, which means that the issue is re-brought from the political or non-security agenda into the field of security or extraordinary measures, once again placing the issue above politics, so that it can be re-addressed in an urgent and unconventional manner. It can be seen that the implementation steps and operational mechanism of re-securitization are essentially consistent with securitization, and re-securitization is also a dual construction process of discourse and practice.

3. Conclusions

This paper summarizes the ideal types of the evolution of security issues from a whole-process perspective, namely, from securitization, to de-securitization, and finally to re-securitization. This entire process of evolution of security issues is also relatively commonplace in political practice. For example, in recent years, the United States’ climate change security policy has basically followed this development model: from the Clinton Administration’s securitization of climate change, to the Bush Administration’s de-securitization of climate change, and then to the Obama Administration’s re-securitization of climate change. Admittedly, not all security issues evolve in accordance with this whole-process pattern, but in security practice, these types of security issues are very common. Displaying and sorting out the ideal types of the evolution patterns of security issues from a whole-process perspective helps to understand the concepts related to security issues and the process of security practice, and to some extent, it helps to differentiate and analyze the concepts related to security.

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