

Non-Traditional Security in Asia: Issues, Challenges and Framework for Action

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Virtually anything that constitutes a threat to a person can be indexed as a human security issue. This makes it sometimes difficult to determine what should be included and what, if anything at all, should be excluded from the definition. Within human security, however, we can easily distinguish two groups of threats: state-sponsored military and non-military. Anything that is technically non-military is commonly regarded as a *non-traditional security* (NTS) issue, be it local or transnational in nature. Some examples are the spread of infectious diseases, natural disasters, resource scarcity, transborder pollution and environmental degradation, irregular migration, transnational crime, but also threats such as state sponsored violence on domestic populations and the emergence of non-state armed actors.

The worldwide discourse on non-traditional security gravitates around three major schools, as the editors point out in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1) of this book: the 1994 UNDP Report school; the Japanese school; and the Canadian-Norwegian school. As the scope of the book is not the analysis of such schools but the description of some case-studies, the general approach of all three is simplified as being the management of “non-military threats to the safety of societies, groups and individuals” (p. 5). One thing is, however, made very clear: since many of such security challenges are transnational, securitizing actors tend to draw closer, turning to regional and multi-level frameworks that have profound implications for regional security cooperation among states, particularly in Asia.

The editors then go on to introduce the five pillars of the securitization analysis, as defined by scholars at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies: issue area (the nature of the threat); securitizing actors; security concept (the securitized target); process (the speech act); and intervening variables (interplay of different concepts, issue linkage, role of stakeholders, and domestic political systems). Once these questions are addressed, the ultimate goal is the evaluation and analysis of policies and governance, or “the process of decision-making and the process through which decisions are (or are not) implemented” (p. 8). This inevitably results in an increased interaction between state and non-state securitizing actors, a process that gives rise to multifaceted governance structures with competing or joint mandates, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, United Nations bodies, the Bali Democracy Forum, and so forth.

Analyzing, evaluating, and eventually fine-tuning these governance structures are the sine qua non of success. Eight indicators are identified to measure governance performance: participation; the rule of law; transparency; responsiveness; consensus-oriented decisions; equity and inclusiveness; effectiveness and efficiency; and accountability. These are the perspectives through

which this book undertakes an investigation into nine key non-traditional security threats in Asia.

Health is the first NTS threat to be addressed (Chapter 2). Infectious and parasitic diseases linked to poor nutrition and an unsafe environment are the major causes of death in developing countries, and Southeast Asia in particular has a worryingly high incidence. The chapter not only provides a comprehensive overview of frameworks and characteristics of health systems in the region; it also analyzes the health discourse in Asia by delineating its transnational features (epidemics often go beyond borders). Of particular relevance is the explanation of pandemic preparedness and regional cooperative schemes developed after the outbreak of the human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Given the impossibility of effectively tackling epidemics after their appearance, the authors argue that health policies should focus on multi-level, multi-sectoral preparedness in order to enhance the surge capacity of all health systems.¹⁾ Under the supervision of the World Health Organization, ASEAN, and other regional bodies, many nations have mounted extensive efforts, currently concentrating on emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases (ERIDs). Although comparative results show steady progress, the authors argue that a very low threshold means the results are far from satisfactory; hence they conclude with a series of practical recommendations in order to plug local and national responses into regional frameworks, such as through the improvement of surveillance and laboratory capacity, the management of vaccines, and a more transparent cross-border collaboration and information sharing.

Chapter 3 deals with the emergence of arguably the NTS threat of the future: food. Particular attention is paid to soaring food prices, as Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's poor for whom food takes up 30 to 50 percent of the household budget (p. 43). Hence, a rise in food prices threatens to reverse the gains in poverty reduction in the region and thereby undermines the global fight against poverty and the achievements of both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, given that in a state of emergency nations will implement any policy that will improve their own food security, this would most likely exacerbate regional tensions. The authors describe and analyze current and projected consequences of an uncontrolled rise of food prices at the individual, household, and national levels. They build their arguments on a thorough analysis of the 2008 global food crisis, identifying its drivers, its social, economic, and political impact, and eventually drawing some conclusions on the policy response that helped the Asia-Pacific region out of the emergency.

Chapter 4 touches upon an NTS issue so sensitive that many influential thinkers have publicly stated that future wars will most likely be fought over it: water. Much is related to this element, from obvious survival needs to renewable energy exploitation. Moreover, there is perhaps nothing

1) Surge capacity is the elasticity of a health system that enables it to expand quickly and to cope with a surge in demand of services beyond usual levels (p. 27).

more transboundary in nature than water. The authors build their short chapter around the case study of the Hindu-Kush Himalaya region, which they describe briefly but in a balanced way. Although the explanation is at times not sufficiently detailed, their comparative analysis provides an introductory understanding of transboundary water management, particularly when they expose the nexus between water scarcity, uneven distribution and access, climate change projections, and water insecurity. The chapter could have been a lot more inspiring, had the authors elaborated more on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and its guiding principles, as the discourse on water has arguably the highest potential for both trans-national conflict and cooperation.

Asia (and particularly Southeast Asia) is possibly the region most affected by natural disasters in the world. Given the severe short and long-term consequences of such occurrences, the management of all phases of natural disasters (prevention, relief, and reconstruction) is an utmost NTS concern. Despite the timeliness and far-reaching implications of the issue, Chapter 5 fails to satisfactorily address it in a constructive way. The authors structured their chapter very well, but do not link the interesting data with some overarching findings. In particular, although they provide a systematic analysis of policy implementation in many Southeast Asian countries, most of the data are updated only to 2008 at the latest, thus limiting the study to the preparatory and planning stages of the process. A consideration worth mentioning here is the explanation of how the disaster management cycle (including preparedness, early warning, mitigation, relief, recovery, and rehabilitation) has gradually seen a shift in focus to disaster risk reduction, both through reactive adaptation (individual and local level) as well as through planned adaptation (state and institutionalized actors). An example of new models of cooperation in this field is the ASEAN Regional Forum's Voluntary Demonstration of Response (ARFVDR), the first, robust civilian-led, military supported exercise designed to demonstrate ARF's national capabilities in responding to an affected country's request for assistance, and to build regional assistance capacity for major, multi-actor relief operations.

One of the most insightful chapters in the book, Chapter 6, looks at internal conflict from a too-often ignored perspective: the importance of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in nowadays human security. From a statistical point of view, SALWs are a much greater threat than Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), in the sense that they are easy to procure, easy to use, and extremely lethal. This is particularly true for Southeast Asia, a region with on-going internal armed conflicts (demand), post-conflict states such as Cambodia and Viet Nam where SALWs can be easily obtained (offer), long maritime and continental frontiers (distribution channels), and poor storage facilities (smuggling). Since the threat posed by SALWs is still largely overlooked by both the international community and national legislations, this chapter is a valuable contribution to the NTS discourse.

Although strictly speaking the title of Chapter 7 should not be "Forced Migration," the authors

once again touch upon one of the most sensitive NTS issues in Southeast Asia: statelessness. As the definition of a stateless person greatly varies depending on its *de jure* or *de facto* terms, these people are greatly affected by political change and discrimination, trafficking, marriage discrimination, child registration problems, and nationality issues. And despite the fact that many of these problems are common to illegal migrants and refugees, the two definitions do not coincide, although they do overlap at times. In fact, the official status that stateless persons obtain considerably affects the treatment they receive under national and international law. After describing how the problem of statelessness is currently regulated, the authors explain how most conventions are still Eurocentric and can hardly be applied to the Southeast Asian reality. To support their arguments, the authors comprehensively introduce the cases of the Rohingyas, the hill tribes in Thailand, the oft-forgotten Malaysian case, to conclude their analysis with an evaluation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). Their conclusion reiterates the need to focus on gendered policy directions to effectively understand and deal with human development in Southeast Asia.

Energy is the pivotal pillar of the sustainable development nexus of energy-economy-environment. In Chapter 8, the authors constructively paraphrase that nexus into energy security-economic growth-environmental protection. The underlying question the authors address is whether Asia is experiencing a nuclear renaissance (referring to nuclear energy) or a renewable renaissance (referring to renewable energy resources). Although they seem to agree on the renewable renaissance trend, which they support with accurate data, the structure of the chapter is confusing and at times misleading. There are multiple sections within the chapter, either listing different energy sources, or gauging the discussion through a geographical framework. Unfortunately the distinction between the sections is blurred, often overlapping, and sometimes inaccurate, particularly when repeatedly listing Southeast Asian countries under the East Asian bloc. This distracts the reader from the core discussion and conclusions.

Alongside natural disasters, transnational crime is possibly the most tangible of all NTS issues. It is also one of the most controversial NTS issues, as international regulations on the matter are still too many. "Disrupting or deterring criminal organisations and traffickers does not solve the problem because the incentives and the drivers remain in place; and as long as they remain unaddressed, the problems will persist" (p. 235). Acknowledging the practical impossibility of covering all instances of transnational crimes in a single chapter, the authors focus their attention on those with a particular relevance to the region, namely illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, maritime piracy, financial crimes, and environmental crimes. The selling point of this chapter is its second half, where the analysis of responses to two of the abovementioned crimes, i.e. human and drug trafficking, is very clearly divided into regional, national, supply-side, and demand-side. Although the analysis itself is sometimes superficial, the message that the authors deliver is effectively in

line with the arguments set at the beginning of the chapter.

The last chapter of this book deals with cyber security. Until recently not considered to be a transnational crime, the threats it poses have convinced most practitioners to treat cyber security as a distinct NTS issue. One of the main reasons is that neither the securitizing actors nor the perpetrators of crime are easy to identify, while anybody else can be a direct target. Cyber security might be the only NTS issue where the balance of power does not relate to political and economic influence. Despite an increased professionalism of cyber crime in Southeast Asia, most responses to this kind of threat still put state and military interests at the center of the debate. The authors, notwithstanding the importance of the former, invite the reader to focus on the “human” factor of cyber security and the subtle threat it poses to human security in more general terms. Routine surveillance of the cyberspace is such a powerful tool that it can easily blur the demarcation line between authoritarian and democratic systems, particularly where the state is no longer the only securitizing actor and private companies are more and more involved in the business. The necessity of E-governance is surely undeniable, but the extent of it and the inevitable secrecy that its very mission implies could constitute a form of NTS. Given the early stage of the phenomenon, opinions on the future of cyber security widely differ, although fear of unknown consequences should not overshadow the potential for cyberspace multilateral cooperation, particularly as a pre-emptive measure.

Altogether, the book is a complete and well-arranged collection of the major non-traditional security concerns in the region. Due to space limitations, none of the chapters is able to analyze the issues with sufficient depth. But this is not the purpose of the book in the first place. Nevertheless, a final chapter elucidating the cross-issue nexus between policy analysis and academic investigation would have been useful. Another comment, though not strictly related to the contents of the book, is that the purpose of having the editor also co-author each and every chapter is somewhat unclear, although this might have helped in effectively producing overarching argumentation throughout this commendable endeavor.

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