

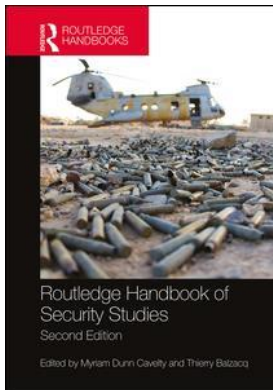
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11

RISK AND SECURITY

Karen Lund Petersen

In Security Studies, *risk* has become a forceful description of current trends in the American and European governance of security, portrayed in the management of global threats such as terrorism, climate change, organized crime, and nuclear proliferation. These policies are often described by concepts of risk, resilience, and precaution. But what exactly is the relation between Security Studies, risk, and these seemingly new practices of governance? And how do these concepts challenge the conventional understandings of risk and security?

The one thing uniting these concepts and debates is a preoccupation with the unknowable, the new threat, the uncertain future, and the subsequent difficulty of management and prevention. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens talk about an increasing ‘ambiguity of knowing’ in today’s approaches to risk, Zygmunt Bauman about the vision of unnamed and unanticipated threats, and Frank Furedi about the ‘crisis of causality’ and a following idiom of fear (Baumann 2006: 11; Beck 1992: 183; Furedi 2009: 202; Giddens 1992: 85). In these statements, each scholar tries to grasp a changing temporality: a changing understanding of the relation between present and future in the management of threat. The argument is that we are no longer able to control, predict, or even manage the future and that, consequently, traditional risk management strategies cannot be upheld. In this context, resilience and precaution have become the dominant neologisms describing the impossibility of possible management: the new hybrids between practices of risk and security.

On the face of it, risk in Security Studies is about the management of new and possible catastrophic threats; about an increasing concern for how security politics is being bureaucratically managed in the everyday mundane practices of governments, civil groups, and private companies. In this debate, we ask how the unknown has become the baseline for decision-making. How the idea of the unknown – the ambiguity of knowledge – is constituted as an object of knowledge in the practice of security. Thus, at the meta-theoretical level, the debate on risk in Security Studies is about how we handle the paradox of asserting knowledge in a world of unknowns, about defining ‘the thing’ that potentially can provide a basis for decision-making.

This chapter tells the story of how the concepts of risk and security increasingly merge in Security Studies and how contemporary security practices of resilience and precaution write and rewrite classical notions of risk.

The first part of the chapter briefly introduces past and current debates on the concept of risk, discussing how it relates to current trends in Security Studies.¹ The second part presents the two ways in which the concept of uncertainty has figured as a counter-concept to risk, while the third

part shows how we are currently engaging these concepts of uncertainty – two different understandings of knowledge – in the current perceptions of precaution and resilience. The final part of the chapter takes up some of the central discussions in Security Studies on riskification and securitization and discusses how we should theoretically develop future studies on risk and security.

Risk in Security Studies: a partial history

As we understand it today, the concept of risk came into being in the early modern era, around the same time that the nation-state was established as the main political unit. Just as state formation was an answer to the ongoing religious wars, risk became a powerful secular alternative to religious visions of fate. Where destiny could determine fate, risk designated a belief in the possibility for human progress and control over the future. Risk thus became the antithesis to destiny (cf. Bernstein 1998; Douglas 1990; Giddens 1991; Luhmann 1991).

While the concept of risk, associated with risk management as an organizational decision-making practice, is still very much about control and the management of possible futures, uncertainty has become the absolutely most defining counter-concept to risk. Frank Knight's work from 1921 addressing the distinction between risk and uncertainty has become iconic in risk studies. He defined risk as the 'known chance' (related to probability) and uncertainty as the unknown; uncertainty thus designating the impossibility of classification, quantification, and, to some extent, also prevention (Best 2008; Knight 1921: 245; Runde 1998). Where rational behaviour can help us manage or even possibly eliminate risk, uncertainty refers to indeterminacy between the actions of today and the events of tomorrow.

In International Relations (IR), the Cold War debates on security largely escaped this debate on management. Focused on the study of war and national security, IR was generally more concerned with political order, identity, and social contract. Uncertainty (in the form of anarchy) was largely the premise upon which the international system operated, and thereby also the basis of any decision-making. In 'a balance of power vision', the only certainty that existed was the reoccurrence of war.² In comparison with the individual economic ontology³ expressed in most risk thinking during the twentieth century, the 'management' of security was inextricably linked to the idea of a social contract, to the idea of national interest and politics.

In the 1980s, this realist conception of security, tied to the organization of the nation-state, became increasingly questioned. It was argued that a concept of (international) politics defined by order and territory could not capture the new developments, that the aim of security politics was more than just avoiding the reoccurrence of war, and that it was embedded in every political decision in the everyday bureaucratic management of the nation's security (Bigo 2000; Buzan et al. 1998).

Almost parallel to this development in Security Studies, sociologists and anthropologists pointed to the political nature of risk and criticized the rather instrumentalist understanding expressed in conventional risk management practices. Most prominently, Ulrich Beck (1992) has linked different conceptions of risk to the evolution of the industrial society and Mary Douglas has focused on the political choices involved in the societal selection of which risks to prioritize (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). In the French poststructuralist camp, scholars pointed to the disciplining effects and neoliberal character of the dominant economic practices of risk analysis (Ewald 2001; O'Malley 2004; Rose 1993). Common for these scholars was a focus on the politics of risk analysis and its historical and cultural heritages.⁴

Although the concepts of risk and security are shaped by their respective disciplinary histories, the recognition that security is also about the 'internal' management of security and that risk management is fundamentally political did bring the debates together. Yet this unity of interest in the governance of new, uncertain, and often catastrophic threats also exposes the limits of the two

disciplinary perspectives. While we might agree to the political nature of risk management and the fact that security is more than ‘merely’ military security, Security Studies still struggles with how to understand and theoretically comprehend security as a bureaucratic practice of state agencies, civil organizations, and private enterprises. Likewise, risk studies increasingly struggles to understand ‘security matters’ as threats that cannot be delimited in space or time (cf. Beck 2003).

In this environment where concepts of risk and security constantly meet, neologisms of resilience and precaution have come to define a political and hybrid practice of ‘security risk management’. These concepts, as I will argue, draw upon different understandings of uncertainty to bring out the ‘securityness’ of risk.

Risk as uncertainty: the ambiguity of knowing

There are basically two ways in which the concept of uncertainty figures a counter-concept to risk: one where uncertainty is positioned as a different category of knowledge and one where uncertainty prescribes a fundamental ambiguity of life. These two concepts of uncertainty, I will later argue, correspond to the current practices of precaution and resilience, respectively.

The *first* understanding follows Knight and defines uncertainty as a category of threats that are distinct from normal (measurable and controllable) risk. Accordingly, uncertainty is observable and can be dealt with politically: it is possible to locate and categorize and, on that basis, define strategies for dealing with these uncertainties. This understanding can be found in every conventional approach to risk management, in scenario analysis, and in likelihood-impact analysis. In scenario analysis, the explicit purpose is to identify possible uncertain futures and translate them into manageable risks – to make the future present (Bradfield et al. 2005; Postma and Liebl 2005).

In the *second* understanding, uncertainty is a fundamental premise of life and possible wealth; it is not a category of threats that can be seized and managed. We simply cannot categorize uncertainty since ‘we don’t know what we don’t know’. In this version (as represented in the works of J. M. Keynes, for example), uncertainty is a condition of social affairs, distinct from steering and control in political and social affairs. In this second form, uncertainty exceeds control and risk analysis. Uncertainty cannot be categorized, but is a fundamental fact of social life (Best 2008: 356; Runde 1998). This understanding of uncertainty, I will later argue, can be found in resiliency strategies focusing on business continuity and emergency planning, and in responsabilization strategies such as awareness campaigns.

These different concepts of uncertainty are not, however, merely descriptions of the ways in which we, as researchers, observe others’ observations; they are also evoked for the sake of arguing that the contemporary concept of risk is qualitatively different than previously, that there is a historical and structural shift in our understanding of risk.⁵ This argument is presented clearly in Ulrich Beck’s work (1992, 1999). In his distinction between first and second modernity, he makes the case for how societies have increasingly become aware of possible global catastrophes and how this awareness has changed our perception of risks. In the first modernity, a decision was based on the idea of progress. The object of fear was a *definable* Other (God, class, or nations). A decision could therefore rest on calculation and the vision that it was possible to control the future. In the second ‘reflexive’ modernity, decisions are often based on what *we do not know*. We have become reflexive about our own production of risk, as we are acknowledging the existence of a fundamental uncertainty about the relationship between present action and future consequences. The object of fear is the ‘end of the world’ or the catastrophe that might occur.

Another prominent scholar describing a similar development is François Ewald. In his analysis of the history of insurance and the concept of precaution, he shows how the concept of risk has been highly central to the internal organization of society throughout modern history.

The understanding of risk as locatable and calculable legitimizes the so-called internal order of society, he argues. Risk has come to govern our understanding of modern politics and become 'naturalized' as a principle of political governance that defines the meanings of responsibility and legality (Ewald 1991).

That said, Ewald also shows how this modern logic of decision is being confronted today. He observes what can be called a 'culture of precaution' – an understanding of risks as non-risks (or as 'uncertainty' in the sense defined by Knight). I quote: 'While the language of risk, against the background of scientific expertise, used to be sufficient to describe all types of insecurities, the new paradigm (precaution) sees uncertainty in the light of an even newer science . . . science that is consulted less for the knowledge it offers than the doubt it insinuates' (Ewald 2001: 274). In describing a precautionary logic, Ewald draws a distinction between the modern form of risk and that of uncertainty. For society and political order, the consequences of this shift described by both Beck and Ewald are huge, as responsibility no longer refers to the consequences of a decision, but to the decision itself. In this world, uncertainty of knowledge is no longer 'innocent', but the mere existence of suspicion commits one to take precautionary steps. Moral obligations are, as Ewald (2001: 285) puts it, 'swallowed up in public ethics', an ethics based on *doubt* rather than exact science.⁶

Beck and Ewald have some striking observations on what is involved in reflexive and/or precautionary risk decisions and how these reflections have become a precondition for how we approach and act in social affairs; how we can no longer describe uncertainty as 'just' a category of knowledge that can possibly be transformed into manageable risks. For these authors, uncertainty and doubt have become a fundamental fact of life.

The question, however, remains: how are these concepts of uncertainty reflected in what are argued to be the new risk-mitigating practices – precaution and resilience? Do these risk-mitigating practices envision risk and uncertainty as categories of knowledge or, in the vision of these concepts, is politics based on the idea of fundamental uncertainty?

Precaution and resilience as risk practices

Precaution and resilience appear increasingly frequently in academic writings as well as in policy documents as descriptions of *the* new risk management practices that can help us manage possible catastrophes and unforeseen security threats. In the following, I will go through the debates on these concepts and try to come to terms with the newness of these visions.

Precaution

As a political concept, the precautionary principle became popular as a legal and political instrument with the Brundtland Report and the UN Rio summit in 1992. In the Rio Declaration, precautionary action became established as an approach to risk mitigation, because 'where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing such measures' (UN 1992, principle 15). The emphasis on a lack of scientific evidence (uncertainty) together with emphasis on the possible catastrophic character of the threat defined the meaning of precaution.

While scientific *uncertainty* became the most powerful discourse in the debates on the precautionary principle, freedom of choice was not considered a valuable position. Rather, precaution came to designate 'a special kind' of decision-making. Precaution came to refer to (scientific) uncertainty as a 'category of knowledge'; as something that can be targeted, comprehended, and therefore also possibly managed (similar to Knight 1921). It designated the 'possibility of possible' management: a 'vision of movement' from uncertainty to risk and management.

This concept of precaution as ‘possible management’ is, however, not only represented in the literature on environmental matters (e.g. Kahan et al. 2010) but also present in the entire literature on black swans (Taleb 2007) and the general literature on scenario building (Bradfield et al. 2005; Chermack 2011; Postma and Liebl 2005). In IR we find this understanding of precaution in the debates on the US–EU trade relations and the disagreement on what can and should form the basis for risk regulation at the international level (Lee et al. 2009; Stirling 2007; Vogel 2012).

There is also, however, another concept of precaution present in Security Studies, one that draws on the second vision of uncertainty (uncertainty as a fundamental premise of life). Drawing on the observations made by Beck and Ewald about decision-making in late modernity, critical scholars have observed how a changed understanding of threats has triggered a shift in the rationale behind the governance of security risks. A new rationale of precaution, based on a fundamental uncertainty, has been injected into today’s management of security and left us with a paradox of defining moral obligations of doubt within a paradigm of management, it is argued (Aradau and van Munster 2007; Kessler and Werner 2008; Kessler 2010; Rasmussen 2009).

Within this line of thinking, de Goede (2008) and Furedi (2009) have raised a distinct criticism of the first concept of precaution, arguing how scenario thinking works to translate imagined futures into current management and control, and how such a process of remediation potentially escalates fear.

Resilience

The concept of resilience, Walker and Cooper write, ‘has infiltrated vast areas of social science, becoming a regular, if under-theorized, term of art in discussions of international finance and economic policy, corporate risk analysis, the psychology of trauma, development policy, urban planning, public health and national security’ (2011: 143). Yet the meaning of the term and the associated practices are much debated (cf. Dunn Cavelty et al. 2015a).

Especially the metaphorical status of the concept, originating in biology, renders it both debated and politically powerful. The ‘original’ description of resilience, designating the ability of complex eco-systems to adapt and persist, is figuratively and metaphorically linked to the need for organizational adaptation and recovery in the face of new and possibly catastrophic threats. The political concept of resilience thus takes over the idea of a ‘normal’ state of affairs or, as some scholars argue, an unquestioned ‘equilibrium’ that we must constantly preserve or strive towards (Prior and Hagmann 2013; Stark 2014) – in health policies, climate policies, and security. In security, homeland security in particular, resilience has come to describe the capacity of organizations or systems to endure and survive in the face of new threats, and thus the ability of organizations and citizens to mobilize to adapt to new global and transcending threats.

Resilience therefore does more than merely describe a certain logic of decision-making; it also designates a state of affairs or the preferred condition of an organization or system.⁷ The metaphorical status of the concept is what makes it powerful, as it fixes and naturalizes the meaning of political mobilization and leaves little room for choice and hence contestation and debate.⁸ Like the ‘invisible hand’, ‘becoming resilient’ is described as a natural process that is given by the use of metaphor. There is simply no choice but to adapt!

In many ways one can argue that resilience is a transcending form of securitization, as it assumes a need for immediate action/adaptation. Yet the relation between means and ends is only vaguely defined and remains somewhat metaphorical. In conventional risk management, the future is a preferred future and the goal is to get there; in a resiliency paradigm, the goal is to sustain what we have already achieved. Thus, contrary to conventional risk analysis, the construction

of resilience as a metaphor makes preservation, rather than progress, the natural political ideal. The concept of resilience thus lacks vision!

How is this need for adaption described in Security Studies? Similarly to the concept of precaution, the concept of resilience relies on an understanding of the future as increasingly uncertain. Yet the concept of resilience does more than defend a decision climate that celebrates the ability to adapt by acting in a precautionary manner (Stark 2014). Rather, resilience describes a need for preserving essential societal functions and designing adaptable institutions.⁹ The means to resilience are emergency management, business continuity planning, awareness raising, and responsabilization of citizens and companies.

In many ways, the description of resilience (as being used in Security Studies and by policy-makers) breaks with the consequentialist thinking of conventional risk analysis. In the context of resilience, risk mitigation is not a matter of making the unknown known; rather, the premise is that we will never know. This way of thinking about risks thus installs 'radical' uncertainty as a general principle upon which decisions are made and describes a demand of some kind of identification of the existing uncertainties. In that way, we should adapt by preparing for a fast recovery.

The concept of resilience generally presumes a fundamental uncertainty in social life: one that we cannot escape; one that relies on doubts, worst-case thinking, and a wish for preserving that which we already have. It is an 'approach to risk management that foregrounds the limits of predictive knowledge and insists on the prevalence of the unexpected' (Walker and Cooper 2011: 147). Yet compared to precautionary approaches, 'resilience' involves a different temporality: its metaphorical status makes it a strategy about the 'means' only, not the 'ends'. The concept of resilience presupposes a description of a preferred political order, an equilibrium, and calls for means of preservation rather than new visions.

As I have argued elsewhere, this deontological form of risk management is increasingly present in the security practices of private companies. Corporate security management is no longer based so much on the idea of assessing the threats external to the organization as about preparing for the worst and being morally obliged to our own morality (Petersen 2012b: 127–8). In this version of risk, risk management is not about defining the future in the present but about the present of the present. Michael Power (2007) makes a similar observation, talking about the 'implosion of risk management' in private financial companies. He argues that auditing has become the means for making the company accountable to its own morality (not the law). Consequently, such practices tend to install doubt and suspicion as the baseline for decision-making and leave us with a deontological ethic whereby moral obligations are 'swallowed up in public ethics'.

Conclusion

As argued in the introduction to this chapter, risk in security is about how to know and act on the unknown. Two conceptual meanings of uncertainty have dominated risk thinking since the mid-twentieth century: meanings which can be found in the new risk-mitigating strategies in security governance, precaution, and resilience. In one understanding, uncertainty is a category of knowledge that we constantly seek to control and can possibly be transformed into manageable risks. This understanding of risk is still very much alive in the current debates on precaution, scenario-building, and black swans as attempts to make the unknowable future known.

In the second version of uncertainty, risk management has moved beyond the possibility of management. Uncertainty is a fundamental premise of life that transcends all other forms of management. The first concept of uncertainty (uncertainty as possibly manageable) dismantles previous

consequentialist thinking and celebrates a deontological vision of decision-making. In many ways, the concept of resilience repeats this vision of knowledge in its celebration of preservation by adaptation.

What, then, is the place of this debate in Security Studies? One of the most powerful approaches in Europe is found in securitization theory, developed by Ole Wæver,¹⁰ and much of the debate on how to place risk in Security Studies tries to link up to this debate. One set of scholars argues that the risk perspective is substantively different from securitization: risk designates a different way of governing security, one that escapes the existential character of security and is therefore more fundamental to everyday (Aradau et al. 2013; Hagmann and Dunn Cavelti 2012; Petersen 2012b).

From a completely different perspective, Corry and Clapton have proposed that we expand securitization theory with a theory of riskification (Clapton 2011; Corry 2012). Riskification is, according to Corry, the 'construction of conditions of possibilities of harm (a risk) to a governance object' (249). The main point is that risk, contrary to security, is concerned with potential threats (contrasted to immediate threats) and therefore leads to precautionary action.¹¹ According to Corry and others, in this risk perspective, the unknown threats are localizable and thereby potential objects of management.

There are at least two remarks to be made regarding this risk agenda in critical Security Studies: one that rests on mere empirical observations and the other that relates to the limits of possible critique. First, to identify risk as riskification may render us blind to the many concepts of risk practices in daily life and to the fact that these two concepts increasingly merge in the daily practices of organizations, companies, and governments. As we have just seen, this trend can be observed in the practices associated with resilience and precaution. These neologisms, while drawing on different concepts of uncertainty, do not take a specific form, but rather open up different decision logics and political solutions. Although these neologisms centre on how to handle new and uncertain threats, the claims to knowledge expressed in these concepts are very different. We need to recognize the actual negotiations of meaning going on in the practice of security. These conceptual constructions are deeply political, as they construct responsibility and possible political action differently.

Second, we need to ask about the possibility of critique – not only regarding the possibility of a critical examination of the political effects of the many policy innovations in the area of security but also in relation to the theories we produce. For analytical and normative reasons, it is important to single out the performativity of the different conceptual uses and expose the scientific limits and enable an evaluation of each analysis. Scholars have criticized the Copenhagen School concept of securitization for being overly formalistic; for ignoring or marginalizing the political power of new institutional arrangements and discourses within the field of security (Huysmans 2006). Yet while we might question the validity of the concept in today's practice of security, the theorization that this approach represents is preferable on the grounds that it enables scientific critique and debate concerning the usefulness of what we do.

In sum, we should not give up on the ability to see new forms of security governance, nor should we attempt to escape theory. Maybe we should not stick to either securitization or riskification but instead constantly widen our horizons to envision and theorize new forms of security . . . and risk?

Notes

- 1 The conceptual analysis presented is inspired by Reinhart Koselleck's approach to conceptual history. A focus on the constellation of concepts and counter concepts, and how they prescribe meaning and political action, is essential (Koselleck 1985).
- 2 Felix Berenskoetter (2011) argues that the idea of future uncertainties has played little or no role in constructivist analysis.

- 3 The social welfare argument has, however, been a strong component in the twentieth-century understanding of risk (see Ewald 2001), yet the purpose of much of the thinking on, e.g., insurance was to calculate and individualize risks to the benefit of society as a whole.
- 4 For an overview of these debates, see Petersen 2012b.
- 5 In the actual risk practice of organizations and companies, these two forms are often not considered exclusive; even if uncertainty is accepted as a fundamental fact, politics and management are always about control; about making political decisions and selecting threats and risks.
- 6 Michael Power (2007) has a similar observation when talking about an increasing ‘implosion of risk management’. Analyzing corporate decision-making, he argues that we currently see more and more businesses acting towards an increasingly uncertain risk environment and that this has led to an increase in internal auditing and control, self-control and moral action being the one thing that can be controlled. This development is also reflected in some of the debates on Corporate Social Responsibility (see e.g. Thompson 2012).
- 7 Or as Dunn Cavelyt, Kaufmann, and Kristensen write, resilience has become ‘an organizing principle in political life’, designating a meaning of uncertainty as complexity as well as idea about responsible subjects (2015: 6–8).
- 8 Pendal et al. (2010) argue that the metaphorical translation into politics makes the concept vague and therefore not very powerful.
- 9 These functions aimed at maintenance are sometimes referred as ‘societal security’, as the social value and norms to be upheld (Lindberg and Sundelius 2012).
- 10 For an overview of the debate, see Gad and Petersen (2011).
- 11 In this perspective, there is no sensitivity regarding the difference between conventional risk thinking (consequentiality, causality) and precautionary decision logics, as described above.

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