Non-Traditional Security Issues (Ntsi) in Mekong Region.
A Theoretical And Methodological Approach.

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ABSTRACT

Since more than 20 years after the end of Cold War, a new concept of security has been imposing itself to the attention not only of IR scholars but to policy makers, even included the ones traditionally attached to conservative and realist views of world politics.

The emergence of transnational threats, the changing face of international terrorism and other issues related to aspects before not immediately linked with security (as health and food concerns) have been making evident to everybody that it was necessary to adopt a wider and broader concept of security.

More than that, there are at present some issues of international relations that can be successfully addressed only with the help of this broader and more flexible approach.

Said so, the aim of this research is to show how the NTSI not only can play an important role in understanding the international relations between China and the countries of Mekong Area, but also that it represents the most useful
approach – as this is especially the case where the main threats, both at intra-state and inter-state level, are exactly what is defined “no traditional security issues”.

Therefore, we can set define as following the hypothesis of the research: the NTS issues are the most useful tools to analyse the IR in some areas, because sometimes the main threats are exactly what is defined “no traditional security issues”, as in the case of the Upper Mekong Area.

As well, on these basis, it is possible to define a methodology, based on NTSI, that combines different theoretical approaches - the (neo)realist, the liberalist and the Constructivist one, as well as the recent Chinese strategic thinking - to successful investigate the regional relations and Chinese foreign policy in this area.

This thesis has been articulated in two main parts.

The first one consists of two chapters, which give the essential theoretical framework of reference (useful because analysis of international relations employing exclusively the NTSI-key is still rare) and a discussion on the adopted methodology.

The second one is composed by the last three chapters, which are devoted to discuss the choice of the area, the hypothesis, the main (NT) security issues, and the case-study.
The obvious starting point is the exam of the concept of security, because it is at the origin, both historically and logically, of the emerging of the NTSI in International Relation studies.

Among the topic here covered will be: the extent and the relevance of the new concept of security, and how 15 years transformed both the theory and the practice of IR, in quite a revolutionary way; the most relevant theories for this research; the (relative) irrelevance of the liberal school in its traditional formulation for this kind of analysis; the centrality of realism in the present IR debates – and the likelihood of its comeback after 9/11; the issue of the governance and the evolution of the Westphalian state; the security dilemma – in both realist and constructivist view; the definition of NTSI and their emersion in IR literature; the notion in current IR; a general framework and some concept definition.

A section of this part will take into exam some research and activities in the field of NTSI with specific relation to Asia that have been flourishing in the very last years.

The most important and comprehensive one is the Ford-IDSS project, mainly based at Singapore, which is studying the NTSI in ASEAN Countries according to the methodology of the Copenhagen School.

While of the utmost interest for the present research – in the sense that they are implementing the same methodology to the analysis of common issues
– there are however two important differences with the approach here implemented:

1) The analysis of the NTSI is conducted essentially looking at the internal policy of the single states – and not as a matter of international relations. Here the effort is to show not only how NTSI could be relevant in the relations between countries but also that in some cases (the Mekong area) they can be the primary issue of these relations.

2) The methodology adopted is purely the one used by the Copenhagen school – while the approach here, as already noted, is more variegated, in the way it will be later clarified, even if the Copenhagen school still represents the main theoretical reference.

Also, as above mentioned, in the last years even the academic circles in China have seen a surge of interest about NTSI, with a few studies on the topic; they will be considered briefly here, as useful to evaluate how much these conceptual elaborations can adapt well with the Chinese political thinking; also, the way in which this quite new topic for the general, realist-oriented, Chinese political thought is regarded has of course a lot of relevance for the target area.
A possible and useful broadening of the research would be to investigate also which is the status of discussion about NTSI in the other countries of the Mekong area – as they national policies are of course affected by it.

A lack of time and resources will keep it out from the frame of the present work – and can be the subject of further investigations.

The next necessary step is to devise a methodology to adopt.

As later clarified, in this research, however relying heavily on the Copenhagen school’s approach, the methodology adopted could be considered a mixed one – both involving constructivist and realist procedures, as well as taking into account the critics moved to the Copenhagen school’s securitisation logic by the new liberalist approach (Ikeberry).

This is the key part of the work, as once clarified the theoretical framework and defined the methodology to adopt, everything will go on rather smoothly. The successive steps will consisted in efforts for successfully collecting sources and material and interpreting data on the basis of previous tool assessment.

The main hypothesis is the choice of Mekong area as the clearest example of how not only NTSI issue approach are the most useful for analysing the IR of a target area, but also that in some is the only real effective to the scope.
I will demonstrate as well the potential of the uses of NTSI for generalization in IR in the Asia-Pacific region, even for cases where concerns of traditional security are more pressing.

It is quite evident, in fact, that this approach represent the trend of the future in IR, at least in the sense that even the traditional security issues now are presenting some new and atypical aspects.

As in the tradition of the Copenhagen school, there will be 2 main directories for the investigation, geographic and sector-based - involving the first the 3 different levels of investigations – global, state and regional - and the second an array of different sectors.

The choice done for the definition of sectors here is for a matrix of T/NT issues&agents, which are very useful to better identify their characteristics (also interesting in the case of already noted of terrorism).

For the very topic of this research, there are some NTSI more useful than others, and that could be useful to analyse them at theoretical level, before look at them in the practice.

The NTSI presented here will be the most relevant ones in the case of ir between China and its southern neighbours – also described by using some of the results & achievements of scholars that have successfully used these tools for analysing South-East Asian issues.
The analysis will be conducted by looking at the way they are present in the Mekong Region, and by four distinct points of view: 1 – the international community, i.e, the IR debate – essentially the Western one – on the matter; the Chinese one; the Mekong countries one; and the one – often not at all unitary – of the NGO and civil society.

The four levels could be different even in the primary evaluation – namely, if a topic is security-related or not – leave all the possible divergences of opinion.

The evaluation of their level of securitisation, in the way that will be explained, will be undertaken as well.

A peculiarity for this geographic area in comparison of others for the same level/sectors analysis is the relevance of NGOs and civil society on the level of securitisation; actually, NGOs and civil society are not well developed in China and in most Mekong countries – so their influence is considerably weaker than in other cases.

A partial exception is represented by Thailand, as the study case of the Mekong River Dams will show.

As a general classification, sectors in NTSI are divided in Environmental security, Human security, Economic security and Political & social security – and this classification will be here followed, even if some of them are in this case on the borderline.
As well, the political & social security has been inserted as a part of the human security paragraph, as, for the area in object, it has not an autonomous importance to justify a separate discussion.

Following on, an important part of the analysis will be devoted to identify and classify the tools of the trade for this specific case of international relation analysis - with a focus about atypical data collection, analysis and evaluation.

The topics covered here is first a general review of somewhat atypical or less classical tools for IR studies – and in which way they can be useful to analyse new scenarios. Some of them are related to information technology or just unthinkable, for political opportunity or cultural reasons, just a decade ago – as the use of declassified intelligence.

Internet, furthermore, represented for social science a revolution that nobody now can ignore.

Here, more specifically, I made extensive use of web sources for (i) intertextual analysis and the search for hints of securitisation – covering the different kind of approach and different traditions (ii) the collection and the analysis of second hand sources and commentary texts – as press, publications of various types, newsgroup, unofficial websites, blogs (iii) the archives of intelligence sources – national and foreign governments, IIOO, military and private consultancy companies – and the kind of possible stuff that can come from declassification, open sources, covert action and finally espionage (iv) the
references for the use of satellite imaginaries and GIS data and software (v) some data about the impact of technology on the data collection.

A case study will be presented here, both as a way to show how methodology works in practice and to verify if the Mekong region could be positively identified as a Geographical Security complex in the Buzan’s point of view.

The case study chosen is the Mekong River Dams, for the reasons will be later explained.

In order to understand correctly the background, as well, the account will be preceded by a brief outlook of the international relations between China and Mekong Area Countries, their historical summary and recent evolutions.

Also the case study will show the possible role of international cooperation in dealing with NTSI issues played by ASEAN, ARF and the others multilateral institutions – as in solving and “securitising” these issues, especially at regional level.

It is very well acknowledged that the states in the Asian-Pacific region are still extremely concerned with state sovereignty – a fact that is commonly referred to as the ASEAN way.

Nevertheless, despite their concern for upholding state sovereignty, they showed to have realized that inevitably they have to make concessions – and the areas selected for that are essentially the ones identified as NTSI. As the SARS-
emergency in 2003 has showed, in NTSI issues cooperation and joint-efforts are paramount for an effective management of threats.

This could again enhance the role of international and regional organization and make instruments as CBMs and PD more useful and effective.

However the results, anyway, the possibility to consider the Mekong region as a stand-alone RSC has to be rejected, for considerations that will be presented later.

A brief, closing note on the sources employed on the present research, as a wide range of sources has required to be taken into account.

I have explained, in the section devoted to the methodology, the special caution due in the choice of texts – of different type.

Since textual analysis is widely used, it is very important the choice of the sources – namely on which texts relying primarily.

In this section will be explained in which way the choices have been made and on which basis. It will be discussed other aspects regarding the typology often itself non-traditional of identification, search and collection.

An extensive reference list will be attached, for future studies.
Non-Traditional Security Issues in the Upper Mekong region

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Analytical Summary

Foreword

I - Theoretical framework of the research

- from the cold war to the new concept of security

- The main contending theories, (neo)realism and liberalism

- the English school, the constructivism and the Copenhagen School

- the concept of Comprehensive Security

- the NTSI debate in ASEAN Countries: the Ford-IDSS project

II - Methodology, the factual basis of the research and the tools of the trade
- Analogies and differences with the methodology of Ford-IDSS Project and a mixed approach to NTSI;

- The components of securitisation process and some definition: the security dilemma; the securitising actors, the referent objects and the modality of securitisations

- The 3 levels of analysis and the matrix approach

- The tools of the trade: review of (a) typical tools in IR studies: open source intelligence, the use of satellite imaginaries and GIS data and software, the recognition of written sources by data mining

III- The Hypothesis of the research – evaluation and explanation

- The main hypothesis of the research

- The choice of China and the IR in the Chinese tradition

- China’s New Security Concept and the NTSI in China
- China relations with the other securitising actors: (1) the super-national level, (China and Mekong Area Countries; ASEAN, ARF and ASEAN +3) and (2) the intra-national level (NGOs)

IV- Analysis Level-sectors

- Break down of the sector/levels
  - a. Environmental security
  - b. Human security
  - c. Economic security
  - conclusive remarks

V. An intersector case-study: the Mekong Dam issue

Conclusion

Appendix 1
Appendix 2
Appendix 3
Appendix 4
Reference list