

RISKING LIVES: AIDS, SECURITY AND THREE CONCEPTS OF RISK

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Abstract:

How is the relationship between risk and security to be conceptualized? This article explores this question in relation to global health issues – a frequently overlooked area of international relations in which the languages of risk and security have recently converged. Focusing specifically on the international politics of HIV/AIDS, the article analyses three different notions of risk that could serve as the basis for conceptualizing this risk-security nexus – risk as a ‘danger of modernization’ (Beck), risk as a ‘neologism of insurance’ (Ewald), and risk as a ‘biopolitical technology’ (Foucault). A biopolitical understanding of the confluence of risk and security is shown to best capture the practical uses to which the language of risk is being put in the securitization of HIV/AIDS; it also allows for the identification of political problems that emerge when international institutions seek to formulate international health policy on the basis of risk categories.

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How is the relationship between risk and security to be conceptualized? Global health issues are a frequently overlooked area of international relations around which the languages of risk and security have recently converged, especially in the case of the AIDS pandemic. Although national and international policy frameworks for addressing HIV/AIDS have long been infused with the language of risk, it is only in the past couple of years that these frameworks have begun to draw upon the language of security as well. This ‘securitization’ of HIV/AIDS was inaugurated symbolically on 10 January 2000 when the United Nations Security Council temporarily abandoned its traditional concern with regulating the deployment of armed force in international politics, and considered instead the growing impact of HIV/AIDS on peace and security in Africa. The meeting was deliberately timed to coincide with the first gathering of the Security Council in the new millennium, rendering the meeting both deeply symbolic and also historic in that the Council had never before considered a disease to pose a threat to international peace and security. In light of the wider securitization of HIV/AIDS that has since ensued, the AIDS pandemic now constitutes an important site in which the languages of risk and security intersect in contemporary world politics, and in relation to which various conceptualizations of this risk-security nexus can be usefully explored. This article identifies and evaluates three concepts of risk – as a ‘danger of modernization’ (Beck), as a ‘neologism of insurance’ (Ewald), and as a ‘biopolitical technology’ (Foucault) – that can serve as the basis for conceptualizing this emerging risk-security nexus. The latter approach is shown to best capture the ways in which international institutions such as UNAIDS

have been combining the languages of risk and security in order (i) to intensify the call for biopolitical governance in the international system, (ii) to render biopolitical interventions aimed at managing the health of populations more economical, and (iii) to also overcome some of the political obstacles that the legal sovereignty of states poses to the successful implementation of these interventions. This conceptualization of the risk-security nexus as a 'biopolitical technology' also allows for the identification of political problems that emerge when international institutions seek to formulate global health policy on the basis of risk categories.

1. 'Risk' in the Securitization of HIV/AIDS

Following the watershed meeting of the Security Council in January 2000 various studies have begun to assess empirically the ways in which HIV/AIDS has ramifications for human,¹ national,² and international security³ respectively.⁴ These studies argue that the social, economic, and political stability of communities (and even entire states) can be undermined in the long run by HIV prevalence rates ranging

¹ See Pieter Fourie and Martin Schönteich, 'Africa's New Security Threat: HIV/AIDS and Human Security in Southern Africa,' *African Security Review*, 10(4), 2001, <http://www.iss.co.za>; Peter Piot, 'AIDS and Human Security', speech delivered at the United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan, 2 October 2001; and Lincoln Chen *et al.* (eds), *Global Health Challenges for Human Security* (Camb., Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

² Laurie Garrett, *HIV and National Security: Where Are the Links?* Council on Foreign Relations, July 18, 2005; Andrew T. Price-Smith, *The Health of Nations: Infectious Disease, Environmental Change, and Their Effects on National Security and Development* (Camb., Mass.: MIT Press, 2001); Robert L. Ostergard Jr., 'Politics in the Hot Zone: AIDS and National Security in Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 23(2), 2002, pp. 333-350; Rodger Yeager and Stuart Kingma, 'HIV/AIDS: Destabilizing National Security and the Multi-National Response,' *International Review of the Armed Forces Medical Services*, 74(1-3), 2001, pp. 3-12; Radhika Sarin, "A New Security Threat: HIV/AIDS in the Military," *World Watch*, March-April, 2003, pp. 17-22; and Lindy Heinecken, 'Strategic implications of HIV/AIDS in South Africa', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 1(1), 2001, pp. 109-113.

³ Dennis Altman, 'AIDS and Security', *International Relations*, 17(4), 2003, pp. 417-427; Stefan Elbe, *The Strategic Dimensions of HIV/AIDS*, Adelphi Paper for the International Institute of Strategic Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Peter Singer, 'AIDS and International Security', *Survival*, 44(1), Spring 2002, pp. 145-158; and National Intelligence Council, *The Global Infectious Disease Threat and Its Implications for the US*, January 2000, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/nie/report/nie99-17d.html>.

⁴ I have explored competing definitions and meanings of human, national, and international security in Stefan Elbe, 'HIV/AIDS: The International Security Dimensions' in Elke Krahmman (ed.), *New Threats and New Actors in International Security* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 111-130. For another good overview see Robert L. Ostergard (ed.), *HIV/AIDS and the Threat to National and International Security*. London: Palgrave, 2007.

between ten and thirty percent of the adult population;⁵ that in some African armed forces HIV prevalence rates are estimated to range between forty and sixty percent, raising concerns about their combat effectiveness;⁶ and that HIV/AIDS even has important ramifications for international peacekeeping operations which, because they are staffed by members of these same armed forces, can serve as a vector of the illness where and when they are deployed.⁷ These studies have not fallen on deaf ears. ‘The national security dimension of the virus is plain,’ the director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency could be heard arguing before a Senate intelligence panel in 2003, ‘[i]t can undermine economic growth, exacerbate social tensions, diminish military preparedness, create huge social welfare costs, and further weaken already beleaguered states.’⁸ In retrospect, the unprecedented meetings of the Security Council have thus proved decisive in terms of placing the global AIDS pandemic on the international security agenda.

Yet the securitization of HIV/AIDS is a noteworthy development in international relations not just because it is an unconventional expansion of the international security agenda. One of the most striking and hitherto under-theorised aspects of this securitization is that it has been enabled and extensively facilitated by the language of risk, which it draws upon in at least three ways. First, ‘risk’ plays an enabling and constitutive role in the securitization of HIV/AIDS. In the debate on

⁵ International Crisis Group, *HIV/AIDS as a Security Issue*, Washington, D.C. and Brussels, Belgium, June 19, 2001; International Crisis Group, *HIV/AIDS as a Security Issue In Africa: Lessons From Uganda*, Kampala and Brussels, Belgium, April 16, 2004; and Robyn Pharaoh and Martin Schönsteich, *AIDS, Security and Governance in Southern Africa: Exploring the Impact*, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Paper 65, January 2003;

⁶ Stefan Elbe, ‘HIV/AIDS and the Changing Landscape of War in Africa’, *International Security*, 27(2), 2002, pp. 159-177; Lindy Heinecken, ‘Living in Terror: The Looming Security Threat to Southern Africa’, *African Security Review*, 10(4), 2001, pp. 7-17; and United States Institute of Peace, *AIDS and Violent Conflict in Africa*, Washington, D.C., 15 October 2001.

⁷ See Roxanne Bazergan, ‘Intervention and intercourse: HIV/AIDS and peacekeepers’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 3(1), April 2003, pp. 27-51; United States General Accounting Office, *U. N. Peacekeeping: United Nations Faces Challenges in Responding to the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Peacekeeping Operations*, Washington, D.C., December 2001; Duane Bratt, ‘Blue Condoms: The Use of International Peacekeepers in the Fight Against AIDS’, *International Peacekeeping*, 9(3), Autumn 2002; and P. Tripodi and P. Patel, ‘The Global Impact of HIV/AIDS on Peace Support Operations’, *International Peacekeeping*, 9(3), Autumn 2002, pp. 51-66.

⁸ Testimony of Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tenet, before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 11 February 2003.

HIV/AIDS and security the pandemic is usually presented not so much as an immediate and overwhelming existential security threat, but as an underlying and longer term security risk. HIV/AIDS may not have any demonstrable, empirical security ramifications in the present, but left unchecked it is deemed to potentially develop such implications in the future. Many of the security arguments about the impact of HIV/AIDS on the armed forces, on state-stability, on peacekeepers, etc. thus function precisely by identifying various risk factors, and then speculatively linking them in such a way that HIV/AIDS could be seen to produce a security crisis *in future*. For example, one of the perambulatory clauses of the historic Security Council Resolution 1308 – the first resolution ever to be passed on HIV/AIDS by the Council – claims that HIV/AIDS ‘if unchecked, *may* pose a *risk* to stability and security’ [emphasis added]. Frustrated with the speculative nature of many such arguments, some scholars have recently noted that ‘[t]hose who write on AIDS and security are advised to avoid, if at all possible, using the word ‘may’ or at least to note that while the epidemic may do x, it may also not do x’ (Whiteside et. al. 2006: 215). If they did, the articulation of HIV/AIDS as a security issue would probably have stop dead in its tracks; for it only works successfully on the basis of a risk logic in which the future is permitted to determine the actions taken in the present. Put differently, it is only on the prior basis of an underlying risk consciousness that it even becomes possible to link HIV/AIDS and security in the first place. It is in this sense that risk can be said to fulfill an enabling and constitutive role in the securitization of HIV/AIDS.

Second, the notion of risk also emerges in this securitization of HIV/AIDS through frequent references to various ‘risk groups’. Beyond the usual risk groups long associated with HIV/AIDS, the debate on HIV/AIDS and security has led to

identification of two additional ‘risk groups’. First, UNAIDS – the specialized United Nations agency tasked with addressing the international spread of HIV/AIDS – routinely construes the world’s armed forces as a high-risk group regarding HIV infection, pointing out that ‘[a]mong male population groups, military and police report the highest risk behaviour and number of partners. Sexually transmitted infection rates among military personnel are two to five times greater than those in civilian populations in peacetime. These figures increase dramatically during conflict.’⁹ Although the reliability of such epidemiological information is very difficult to establish, and indeed has been the result of considerable controversy,¹⁰ this has not prevented UNAIDS from developing programmes to raise awareness and change the behaviour of armed forces, as well as peacekeepers, throughout the world. Think tanks also frequently construe states such as India, China and Russia as a second important risk group. Some security analysts have thus warned of a ‘second wave’ of HIV/AIDS that ‘now threatens countries both in and outside of Africa, including a number of big states – most notably India, China, Russia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia – with a combined population of 2.8 billion people, where instability will have enormous regional and global ramifications.’¹¹ These countries are being put under growing pressure to scale up their national HIV/AIDS programmes. In both of these instances ‘risk’ constitutes a label attached and attributed to certain groups of individuals or states thought to exhibit above average levels of HIV/AIDS, or the potential to acquire very high levels of HIV prevalence within the population in the near future.

⁹ UNAIDS, ‘AIDS and Security’ Factsheet, http://www.unaids.org/en/Issues/Impact_HIV/HIV_and_security.asp, accessed 14 February 2006.

¹⁰ See, for example, Laurie Garrett, *HIV and National Security: Where Are the Links?* Council on Foreign Relations, July 18, 2005

¹¹ Mark Schneider and Michael Moodie, *The Destabilizing Impacts of HIV/AIDS: First Wave Hits Eastern and Southern Africa; Second Wave Threatens India, China, Russia, Ethiopia, Nigeria*, Washington, D.C.: CSIS, May 2002, p. 2.

Closer attention to the ways in which these risk groups are constructed in the securitization of HIV/AIDS, however, shows that this process has not necessarily proceeded on the basis of sound epidemiological data. Rather, these risk groups have been identified more indirectly because they are perceived to combine various more general risk factors associated with the transmission of HIV. In relation to the perception of the armed forces being a high risk group, scientifically sound epidemiological studies are virtually impossible to come by. UNAIDS nevertheless construes them as a risk group precisely because they are deemed to combine several wider risk factors in relation to HIV/AIDS, such as being sexually active, being mobile, being away from their homes and partners for long periods of time, valorising risk-taking behaviour, and being a population with many occupational opportunities for casual sexual encounters. The same is true regarding the second risk group consisting of countries such as India, Russia and China, where reliable epidemiological knowledge is similarly difficult to obtain, but where these states are again singled out because they combine certain more general factors, such as being strategically significant, being great powers, being populous countries, being nuclear states, etc., which would make the emergence of a more widespread epidemic in these countries a particularly disconcerting development. These copious references to risk *factors*, rather than just risk *groups*, mark the third way in which the securitization of HIV/AIDS is extensively drawing upon the language of risk – rendering it an important site in contemporary world politics for exploring the nexus between risk and security, as well as its possible conceptualization.

2. Risk Society – HIV/AIDS as a ‘Danger of Modernization’?

One of the most influential ways in which the conjuncture of risk and security has hitherto been theorised in international relations and security studies is through Ulrich Beck’s work on the risk society. Christopher Coker has drawn upon Beck’s work in order to advance an influential re-interpretation of NATO as a twenty-first century ‘risk-community.’¹² These attempts to bring risk theory to bear on the Western Alliance have not only been the subject of considerable scholarly debate,¹³ but have also been appropriated by NATO.¹⁴ Martin Shaw, moreover, has focused on the notion of ‘risk-transfer’ whereby political leaders and military commanders deploy a variety of strategies to externalize and shift the political risks associated with armed conflict onto other parties.¹⁵ In his view this ‘risk-transfer militarism’ has now become a defining component of the new Western way of warfare.¹⁶ The concept of risk has also been utilised by scholars to explore a host of other prominent security issues ranging from weapons of mass destruction¹⁷ and the nature of contemporary terrorism,¹⁸ through to aspects of the ‘War on Terror’.¹⁹ Increasingly, this interest in the risk-security nexus is also shared by Beck himself, who has devoted more explicit

¹² Christopher Coker, ‘Globalisation and Insecurity in the Twenty-first Century: NATO and the Management of Risk’, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper No 345, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹³ Mikkel V. Rasmussen, ‘Reflexive Security: NATO and International Risk Society’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, June 2001, pp. 285-309; Shlomo Griner, ‘Living in a World Risk Society: A Reply to Mikkel V. Rasmussen’, *Millennium*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2002.

¹⁴ Jos van Gennip, *Policy Implications of the Risk Society*, Committee Report of the 2005 Annual Session, 171 ESC 05 E, 2005, <http://natopa.ibicenter.net/default.asp?SHORTCUT=672>, accessed 12 December 2005.

¹⁵ On this point, see also Yee-Kuang Heng (ed.), *War as Risk Management*, London: Routledge, 2005.

¹⁶ Martin Shaw, *The New Western Way of War: Risk-Transfer War and Its Crisis in Iraq*, Cambridge: Polity 2005 and Martin Shaw, ‘Risk-transfer militarism, small massacres and the historic legitimacy of war’, *International Relations*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2002, pp. 343-60. See also Christopher Coker, *Humane Warfare*, London: Routledge, 2001, especially pp. 51-66.

¹⁷ On weapons of mass destruction see Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society*, Cambridge: Polity, 1999.

¹⁸ See L. Freedman, ‘The Politics of Warning: Terrorism and Risk Communication’, *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2005, pp. 379-418; and Claudia Aradau & Rens van Munster, *Governing terrorism and the (non-)politics of risk*, Faculty of Social Science, University of Southern Denmark, Political Science Publications No. 11/2005.

¹⁹ See Keith Spence, ‘World Risk Society and War Against Terror’, *Political Studies*, vol. 53, 2005, pp. 284-302; and Mikkel V. Rasmussen, ‘It Sounds Like a Riddle’: Security Studies, the War on Terror and Risk’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2004, pp. 381-395; and Neve Gordon and Dani Filc, ‘ Hamas and the Destruction of Risk Society’, *Constellations*, vol. 12, no. 4, December 2005. See also Yee-Kuang Heng, ‘The “Transformation of War” Debate: Through the Looking Glass of Ulrich Beck’s *World Risk Society*’, *International Relations*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 2006, pp. 69-92.

attention to the security dimensions of the risk society following the tumultuous events of September 11, 2001.²⁰

It is perhaps not surprising that the merging of risk and security should have first been conceptualized through the notion of the risk society. Ulrich Beck is after all amongst the vanguard of contemporary risk theorists. Throughout a string of influential books and articles written on the ‘risk society’ over the past two decades, Beck has probably done more than any other scholar to articulate and popularise the concept of risk in academic and policy circles. In his influential book on the *Risk Society* Beck defined risk as ‘a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself.’²¹ In many ways this is a striking definition in that Beck here gives the notion of ‘risk’ no deeper meaning than that already found in its everyday usage, namely as a synonym of hazard, danger or insecurity.²² He merely appropriates this conventional language, and then deploys it to capture one specific set of historically novel dangers – those associated with modernization.²³ The concept of risk thus becomes analytically useful for Beck as a means of highlighting the existence of new global dangers such as environmental degradation or nuclear technology which are not caused by random acts of nature, but which are born out of the very practises of human modernization themselves. ‘[I]n the course of the exponentially growing productive forces in the modernization process,’ Beck argues, ‘hazards and potential threats have been unleashed to an extent

²⁰ See Ulrich Beck, ‘The Silence of Words: On Terror and War,’ *Security Dialogue*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 255-267, 2003; and Ulrich Beck, ‘The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2002. Second, there is also a theoretical question as to how, if at all, the concept of risk can enhance our understanding of contemporary security practices. 2, pp. 39–55.

²¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage, 1992, p. 21.

²² Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 13.

²³ Beck defines modernization in a footnote as ‘Modernization means surges of technological rationalization and changes in work and organization, but beyond that includes much more: the change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes in lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in the norms of knowledge.’ Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 50.

previously unknown.’²⁴ A risk society is concomitantly a society that has become aware and apprehensive about the existence of these dangers – not just a society in which these dangers are present.²⁵ Risk societies are increasingly concerned with how ‘risks and hazards systematically produced as part of modernization [can] be prevented, minimized, dramatized, or channelled’ and how risks can ‘be limited and distributed away so that they neither hamper the modernization process nor exceed the limits of that which is “tolerable” – ecologically, medically, psychologically and socially.’²⁶

There are two aspects of the securitization of HIV/AIDS that clearly resonate with Beck’s thesis on the risk society, and that would lend further support for conceptualizing this risk-security nexus along his lines. First, the fact that HIV/AIDS is articulated as a long-term security risk, rather than as an immediate and present existential danger, echoes what for Beck is perhaps one of the most significant ramifications of the rise of the risk society, namely the importance placed on possible future events. One the characteristic features of the risk society for Beck is that the relationship between past, present and future is reversed because:

... the actual social impetus of risks lies in the *projected dangers of the future*. In this sense there are hazards which, if they occur, would mean destruction on such a scale that action afterwards would be practically impossible. Therefore, even as conjectures, as threats to the future, as prognoses, they have and develop a practical relevance to preventative actions. The center of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but *in the future*. ... the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future, thus, something non-existent, inventive,

²⁴ Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 19.

²⁵ Beck, *Risk Society*, p. 21.

²⁶ Beck, *Risk Society*, pp. 19, 42-43.

fictive as the “cause” of current experience and action. We become active today in order to prevent, alleviate or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow – or not to do so.²⁷

This process is clearly at work in the securitization of HIV/AIDS as well. In the absence of compelling evidence that HIV/AIDS is already posing a direct threat to national and international security, it has nevertheless been possible to construe HIV/AIDS as a security issue by outlining the possible implications that the epidemic could have *in future*. As we have seen, it is thus precisely the future-oriented nature of risk consciousness that has allowed UNAIDS, along with a wide array of other governmental and non-governmental institutions, to effectively use the ‘future’ as a fairly blank canvass upon which to outline possible worst-case scenarios in relation to HIV/AIDS, and to do so in a space where the constraints of empirical verification are much less severe. In a risk society the present is controlled not so much, as George Orwell famously insisted, by those who control the past, but by those who control – metaphorically speaking – the future.

Yet as a wider political strategy for seeking to reduce the international spread of HIV/AIDS, the securitization of HIV/AIDS will only be successful if it is informed by a deeper account of what is driving the spread of the virus. Here Beck’s notion of risk as a ‘danger of modernization’ is also useful in a second way, in that it allows scholars to explore the extent to which the global AIDS pandemic is fuelled by various processes of human modernization. The modernization of transport infrastructure in developing countries – including the paving of new roads – can, for example, have unanticipated consequences in terms of creating new avenues for the virus to spread. In parts of Africa the spread of HIV/AIDS shadowed the building of

²⁷ Beck, *Risk Society*, 34.

the Kinshasa Highway which traverses the African continent from East to West (from Congo to Kenya). As Keith Suter notes, '[i]f the virus had been noticed earlier, it might have been named the 'Kinshasa Disease' to note the fact that it passed along the Kinshasa Highway during its emergence from the African forest.'²⁸ Moreover, in the early stages of the pandemic modern medical advances surrounding blood products and blood transfusions also played an important role in disseminating the virus around the world. Although screening procedures for blood transfusions have greatly improved since then, this problem re-emerged in China during the 1990s, when several Chinese companies began to collect blood plasma from poor farmers in Henan province. The problem was not only that these companies used collection methods that were not sterile and safe, but also that the collection of the blood plasma entailed separating the red blood cells from the plasma and then returning the former to the donors after they had circulated in contaminated machines, thus greatly increasing the chances of infection.²⁹ In this way, too, modern scientific advances in the production of medicines and blood products have inadvertently generated new risks fuelling the international spread of HIV/AIDS, and it is possible to view the pandemic, at least in part, as a 'danger of modernization'.

Despite these valuable insights, however, there are two equally important reasons for why the emerging risk-security nexus manifested in the securitization of HIV/AIDS cannot ultimately be theorized through Beck's framework. First, although it is possible to identify various ways in which aspects of human modernization create new avenues for the virus to spread, it is also true that these same practices of modernization have helped to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS (e.g. through other

²⁸ Keith Suter, *Global Order and Global Disorder: Globalization and the Nation-State*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003, p. 120

²⁹ June Grasso, Jay P. Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power*, 3rd ed., New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004, pp. 315-16.

pharmaceutical and other medical advances); it is precisely those countries reflecting a high degree of modernization, as conceived of by Beck, that have also managed to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS better than many countries reflecting lower levels of modernization. This fact disrupts any straightforward attempt to construe HIV/AIDS exclusively or even predominantly as a ‘danger of modernization’ and thus as an element of the risk society. Second, the entire impetus for Beck’s thesis on the risk society rests on the assertion that the dangers of modernization it confronts are qualitatively new in the sense that they are the direct result of human modernization. Instead of providing further evidence for the validity of Beck’s thesis on the risk society, the securitization of HIV/AIDS indicates that ‘natural’ dangers are still very much an important feature of contemporary societies; HIV/AIDS is an example of the continued saliency of ‘natural’ rather than ‘man-made’ threats. The securitization of HIV/AIDS thus undermines the major thrust or impetus of Beck’s thesis by challenging the overriding emphasis he places on artificial, man-made hazards rather than more naturally occurring ‘dangers’. In the end, the conceptual framework advanced by Beck can thus only make a limited contribution to understanding the risk-security nexus as it is presently manifested in the securitization of HIV/AIDS, requiring the consideration of alternative conceptualizations.

3. The Risk-Security Nexus as a ‘Neologism of Insurance’?

A second and very different way in which the emerging nexus between risk and security has been conceptualized more recently in international relations is through the practices of various insurance institutions. François Ewald argues that if the term risk is to be analytically useful in any meaningful sense it must be studied in relation

to insurance: '[r]isk is a neologism of insurance'.³⁰ Ewald believes that it is possible to detect within the various practices of insurance an underlying logic, which he refers to as a unique risk *rationality* in order to differentiate it from the common view (shared by Beck) that risk merely denotes a set of possible future dangers. For Ewald, risk 'designates neither an event nor a general kind of event occurring in reality (the unfortunate kind), but a specific mode of treatment of certain events capable of happening to a group of individuals – or, more exactly, to values or capitals possessed by a collectivity of individuals: that is to say, a population.'³¹ Unlike Beck, Ewald thus urges his readers not to view risk merely as a potential future hazard, but more fundamentally as a particular method of breaking down, rearranging and ordering reality according to a set of unique principles frequently embodied by insurance institutions.

This unique risk rationality of insurance has three constituent components: 'it is calculable, it is collective, and it is capital.'³² For an event to be able to constitute a risk in insurance terms it has, firstly, to be *calculable* (rather than uncertain) in 'it must be possible to evaluate its probability',³³ and in a sense the task of insurance is precisely to make the future reasonably calculable in relation to the phenomena that fall within its domain. Second, risk is *collective* for insurance purposes in the sense that it can only be applied to groups, not individuals. An insurer cannot predict which individual will have an accident, he can only predict, within a population (e.g. a group of factory workers), the probabilities that *someone* will have an accident. In this sense insurance 'works by socializing risks. It makes each person part of the whole.'³⁴

Insurance schemes work by taking contributions from many different people,

³⁰ Francois Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 198-199.

³¹ Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', p. 199.

³² Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', pp. 201-202.

³³ Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', pp. 201-202.

³⁴ Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk', pp. 202-203.

‘pooling’ their respective contributions, and then redistributing some of these resources to those who are actually befallen by an accident. Finally, the rationality of insurance risk also works on the basis of *capital*, by which Ewald means that ‘[w]hat is insured is not the injury that is actually lived, suffered, and resented by the person it happens to, but a capital against whose loss the insurer offers a guarantee.’³⁵ Insurance cannot rectify the actual loss of a loved one, or a lost limb, but it can address the financial repercussions of such events. It can perform the unpleasant but necessary task of putting a price on the value of an arm, or a leg, or indeed a life. It is thus ultimately a means of financial restitution.

Thinking about risk within the context of insurance has important conceptual advantages. Not only does Ewald arguably advance a rigorous and analytically more precise concept of risk, but he also allows for the nexus between risk and security to be conceptualized in a very different manner. For if insurance is itself seen as a security technology, i.e. as a cognitive, institutional and social apparatus designed to secure life itself, then insurance practices can be seen as constituting a kind of risk-security nexus in and of themselves. It then becomes possible to study the practices of insurance companies in order to analyze the manifold tactics they deploy in order to secure life. Moreover, one can excavate which underlying concepts of life animate these insurance practices, how these practices change and evolve as a result of the genetic and molecular re-articulations of biological life, and indeed what political problems emerge when these new understanding of life become the subject of various insurance technologies – as expressed for example in widespread fears about genetic screening. This understanding of risk as a neologism of insurance has already begun

³⁵ Ewald, ‘Insurance and Risk’, p. 204.

to serve as the basis for a new and stimulating research agenda into a variety of contemporary insurance practices.³⁶

This approach to the risk-security nexus also opens up interesting avenues for further research regarding the practices that many life and medical insurance companies have adopted in relation to persons living with HIV/AIDS. Although scholars of international relations and security have not hitherto analyzed these practices in detail, they deserve more sustained analysis both because of the discriminatory practices that persons living with HIV/AIDS continue to experience around the world when seeking access to insurance,³⁷ as well as the unique challenges the illness poses to underwriters in terms of its nature and the lengthy cycle of progression from initial HIV-infection to developing AIDS. Casting the risk-security nexus within this context of insurance, moreover, allows for important similarities between the practices of insurance companies and those of international institutions such as UNAIDS to be identified. To cite but one example, in an effort to increase its international influence UNAIDS has pursued exactly the same strategy deployed by many commercial insurance companies in order to get people to take out their insurance policies. Commercially operating insurance companies train their salespeople to somberly remind customers of the various insecurities that could befall an individual throughout his or her life, and to patiently outline worst-case scenarios, before pointing out the proper financial instruments to manage those risks. By way of analogy, UNAIDS has begun to securitize HIV/AIDS as a way of frightening states about what might happen if they do not take precautionary measures to shield their

³⁶ Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero, 'Biopolitics of Security in the 21st Century', *Review of International Studies*, forthcoming 2008; Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero, 'The Biopolitical Imaginary of Species Being and the Freedom to Underwrite in the Molecular Age', *Theory, Culture and Society*, forthcoming 2008. Luis Lobo-Guerrero, 'Biopolitics of specialist risk: Kidnap and ransom insurance', *Security Dialogue*, 38(3), forthcoming September 2007.

³⁷ See, for example, Lawrence O. Gostin, Chai Feldblum and David W. Webber, 'Disability Discrimination in America: HIV/AIDS and Other Health Conditions', *JAMA*, 1999 vol. 281, no. 8, pp. 745-752.

populations from a wider HIV/AIDS epidemic. As Peter Piot candidly admits, one of his goals as director of UNAIDS has been to make sure that ‘we redefined AIDS from a medical curiosity into an issue for economic and social development, an obstacle for that, and as a security issue...’³⁸ In this sense the securitization of HIV/AIDS could be said to form the marketing strategy that UNAIDS uses to justify its *raison d’être* and to convince states to implement various international HIV/AIDS interventions.

Despite these important conceptual advances and analogies, however, Ewald’s framework too faces fundamental problems when it comes to conceptualising the risk-security nexus as it has emerged in the context of the securitization of HIV/AIDS. First, the underlying risk rationality employed by international organisations such as UNAIDS deviates substantially from the threefold one outlined by Ewald. Regarding the question of *calculability*, for example, whereas insurance relies on the actuarial laws of probabilities, UNAIDS ultimately has to rely upon (often very patchy) epidemiological, rather than actuarial, knowledge – such as levels of morbidity, mortality, the presence of contagious organisms, etc.³⁹ The securitization of HIV/AIDS also cannot follow a *collective* logic in the way insurance does. As a biological quality, health cannot be commodified, priced and then spread (or ‘pooled’) across various states or populations through the use of money and other financial instruments. It is simply not physically possible to do so because health is not exchangeable and tradable in the way money is. Ultimately, the securitization of HIV/AIDS is not even based on *capital* in the way envisioned by Ewald. Although UNAIDS is certainly trying hard to get states to commit financial resources, it is not trying to convince states to purchase complicated financial instruments designed to meet the potential economic losses induced by high HIV prevalence rates; rather it is

³⁸ Peter Piot. Remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations meeting on ‘HIV and National Security’, 18 July 2005.

³⁹ See Lorna Weir, ‘Recent developments in the government of pregnancy’, *Economy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1996, p. 382.

appealing to the anticipated financial costs of the pandemic in order to get states to invest in health care provision and prevention strategies. The underlying rationality of UNAIDS, therefore, is not an insurance based one, but an epidemiological one, and this hinders the use of Ewald's work on insurance in terms of conceptualizing the risk-security nexus as manifested in the securitization of HIV/AIDS.⁴⁰ Second, this insurance-based approach also does not work for the more basic reason that the institutions and actors advancing this securitization of HIV/AIDS are simply not insurance institutions, but rather a complex network of international organisations, governments, non-governmental organizations, scholars, etc. Although insurance companies remain important actors in the international politics of HIV/AIDS, they are not at the forefront of framing HIV/AIDS as a security issue. This ultimately places fundamental limits not so much on the work of Ewald itself, but on the extent to which his work can be used to theorize risk-security nexus as it is manifested in the ongoing securitization of HIV/AIDS; the latter is an important contemporary example of a risk-security nexus emerging outside the domain of insurance requiring a conceptual approach not confined to the latter.

4. Securing Life – Risk as a ‘Biopolitical Technology’

Michel Foucault's wider work on biopolitics shares many affinities with that of Ewald (who was one of Foucault's students); but because it does not confine itself to the domain of insurance it opens up yet a third way of conceptualizing the merging of risk and security. Unfortunately Foucault's reflections on biopolitics remained largely fragmentary and cursory until his premature death, probably of AIDS-related illnesses,

⁴⁰ On the notion of an epidemiological risk rationality see Mitchell Dean. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage, 1999, p. 189.

in 1984.⁴¹ Yet it is clear that Foucault deployed three distinct concepts to capture the growing preoccupation of modern power with the biological dimensions of human existence – *biopower*, *anatomo-politics*, and *biopolitics*. Of the three, biopower is the most widely cast notion and generally designates that which ‘brought life and its mechanism into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent for the transformation of human life.’⁴² This new type of biopower, whose emergence Foucault located in eighteenth-century Europe, acted over persons as biological or living beings rather than as legal or political subjects; its emergence marked the ‘acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being.’⁴³ Henceforth politics would no longer be concerned merely with settling questions of war and peace, or with organizing society’s material enrichment; it would additionally come to bear on peoples’ physical well-being, health, and longevity.⁴⁴ This last expansion in the domain of political power – whereby man’s biological existence becomes the target of deliberate strategies of control and intervention – is summarily referred to by Foucault as ‘biopower’.

Within this broader category of biopower Foucault further distinguished between two of its distinct manifestations or ‘axes’ – anatomo-politics and biopolitics. Foucault used the term anatomo-politics to designate political strategies targeting ‘man-as-body’ in the attempt to make individual human bodies more productive and docile. Biopolitics, by contrast, refers to political strategies aimed collectively at

⁴¹ See, for example, his February 1978 Lecture given at the College de France entitled ‘Governmentality’, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1: Ethics* (London: Penguin Press, 1997), as well as his course summaries ‘Security, Territory, and Population’, ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’, and ‘On the Government of the Living’ in James Faubion (ed.), *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3*, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 143

⁴³ Michel Foucault, ‘Lecture 17 March 1976’ in ‘*Society Must Be Defended*’: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 239-240.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century’, in Faubion (ed.), *The Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3: Power*, p. 95.

‘man-as-species’;⁴⁵ it is the attempt to regulate aggregate biological occurrences at the *population* level, such as lowering a population’s mortality rate, increasing its average life expectancy, stimulating its birth rate, decreasing its morbidity levels, and so on.⁴⁶ In the end Foucault could thus succinctly define the *biopolitical* dimension of biopower as ‘the endeavour, begun in eighteenth-century Europe, to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population....’⁴⁷

Although Foucault did not extensively reflect on the theme of risk in his writings on biopolitics, a biopolitical approach to the risk-security nexus would seek to analyse the multiple ways in which the merging of these two languages augments and facilitates the ability of international institutions to govern the biological characteristics of populations, including their health and levels of HIV/AIDS. Each of the three conjunctures of risk and security identified at the outset of this article can be shown to perform exactly such biopolitical functions, albeit in quite different ways. First, and as we have already seen, it is precisely the language of risk that first allows UNAIDS to position HIV/AIDS as a security issue, and thus to garner greater international support and resources in their efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. This securitization of HIV/AIDS enabled by the language of risk is a biopolitical practice par excellence in that it marks a powerful international intervention targeted directly at the level of *population* – echoing Foucault’s observation that in a biopolitical age ‘[t]he population now appears more as the aim of government than

⁴⁵ Foucault, ‘Lecture 17 March 1976’, p. 242.

⁴⁶ Foucault’s usage of the term ‘population’ here does not just refer to a numerical aggregate of individuals, but more specifically to ‘living beings penetrated, compelled, ruled by processes, by biological laws. A population has a birth rate, a death rate, an age curve, an age pyramid, a degree of morbidity, a state of health, a population may perish or may, on the contrary, expand.’ Michel Foucault, ‘Les mailles du pouvoir’, in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 193, cited in Bruce Curtis, ‘Foucault on Governmentality and Population: The Impossible Discovery,’ *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 27(4), Fall 2002, pp. 505-533.

⁴⁷ Foucault, ‘The Birth of Biopolitics’, p. 73.

the power of the ruler.’⁴⁸ By enabling HIV/AIDS to be positioned as a security issue, the language of risk thus allows for greater priority and legitimacy to be given to the pursuit of what are ultimately biopolitical objectives in the current international system.

Beyond pushing biopolitical concerns higher up the agenda of national and international policy-makers, the language of risk also augments the scope of biopolitical governance in the international system by rendering the interventions undertaken by UNAIDS more economical. One of the challenges for UNAIDS in confronting a phenomenon on the scale of the global AIDS pandemic is that it is a fairly young international institution with only a modest range of resources. Its core annual budget for 2006-2007 was US\$ 320.5 million.⁴⁹ In such a material context where it has insufficient resources at its disposal for addressing the global AIDS pandemic, the language of risk provides UNAIDS with a vital mechanism for stretching these resources by channeling them towards those interventions where the resources are deemed to make the most substantial impact, i.e. towards interventions that target the perceived ‘risk groups’. In the securitization of HIV/AIDS this focus on risk groups is evident, as we have seen, in the various interventions that are targeted specifically at armed forces and peacekeepers, as well as on populous and strategically significant states where early preventative measures are deemed to provide a much more efficient way of preventing the further rise of HIV/AIDS. This method of ‘maximising’ the impact of available resources marks the second way in which risk is functioning as a ‘biopolitical technology’ in the securitization of HIV/AIDS.

⁴⁸ Cited in Tim Brown, ‘AIDS, risk and social governance’, *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 50, 2000, p. 1275.

⁴⁹ UNAIDS. *Revised Unified Budget and Workplan 2006-2007*. Geneva: June 2006, p.5. <http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2006/Revised%202006-2007%20UBW.pdf>. Accessed 28 June 2007.

Third, the language of risk also assists international organizations such as UNAIDS in overcoming some of the constraints imposed on their sphere of operation by an international order based on the legal sovereignty of states. Beyond the aforementioned economic constraints, another significant political obstacle for international institutions such as UNAIDS in seeking to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and to manage levels of health amongst the world's populations, is that it is dependent on the cooperation of sovereign member states. This true both in supplying epidemiological data about the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, as well as for implementing the public health interventions it recommends. In terms of reducing this obstacle to the biopolitical governance of the world's populations, the language of risk is useful in yet a third way in that it opens up a way of governing HIV/AIDS internationally that is less dependent on the consent of member states, and that may be perceived by the latter as less intrusive of their sovereignty. This is because, as Robert Castel has argued in his influential essay 'From Dangerousness to Risk', many discourses on risk:

dissolve the notion of a subject or concrete individual, and put in its place a combinatory of factors, the factors of risk. ... The essential component of intervention no longer takes the form of the direct face-to-face relationship between the carer and the cared, the helper and the helped, the professional and the client. It comes instead to reside in the establishing of flows of population based on the collation of a range of abstract factors deemed liable to produce risk in general.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Robert Castel, 'From Dangerousness to Risk' in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 281.

This key characteristic of this new mode of governing the population is that it functions not by analyzing each member of the population individually, but by identifying various risk factors and then intervening only in those cases where the risk factors produce a ‘dangerous’ combination within an individual. Castel was referring the systematic screening of children at a few days, a few months and at two years of age introduced in France in 1976. From that point onwards, specialists collected data on the medical background and situation of the parents including their age, nationality, social class, etc. A certain pre-determined combination of factors would then trigger an automatic alert which, in turn, prompted a visit by a specialist or social worker ‘to confirm or disconfirm the *real* presence of a danger, on the basis of the *probabilistic and abstract* existence or risks. One does not start from a conflictual situation observable in experience, rather one *deduces* it from a general definition of the dangers one wishes to prevent’.⁵¹ This enables populations to be governed not by direct observation, but from more of a distance.

Although Castel primarily draws upon examples from domestic politics, when it comes to international organizations such as UNAIDS, this more ‘indirect’ form of governing populations that works through general statistical risk factors, rather than on the basis of concretely manifested dangers, also has substantial political uses; it enables those working for UNAIDS to become less dependent upon the co-operation of individual member states when exercising surveillance over the health of populations. Regarding the armed forces, for example, UNAIDS actually has very little reliable epidemiological data supplied to it by member states, and it cannot compel states to disclose such information. Rather than this preventing the activities of UNAIDS, however, the latter can overcome this problem by working on the basis of

⁵¹ Castel, ‘From Dangerousness to Risk’, pp. 287-8.

more general risk factors, and can thus nevertheless construe the armed forces as a risk group requiring targeted interventions because they are deemed to combine a host of more general risk factors. In the language of Castel, we might say the armed forces can be construed by UNAIDS as a potentially ‘dangerous combination’ of risk factors – such as being mobile, being sexually active, etc. Even in the absence of firm epidemiological data being supplied to it by national governments, UNAIDS can thus proceed in its call for states around the world to implement HIV/AIDS programs in risk groups such as the armed forces. Here the language of risk provides UNAIDS with a less intrusive method for governing the health of populations that does not require first subjecting all members of the world’s armed forces to HIV-tests, which would prove politically extremely controversial and would be likely to encounter immense resistance by national governments. The third biopolitical function performed by the risk-security nexus is consequently that it allows UNAIDS to politicize the health of populations even without explicit initial consent or cooperation from member states, thereby sidestepping some of the obstacles posed to its operations by the legal sovereignty of states. As in the previous two cases, here too the risk-security nexus is functioning as a ‘biopolitical technology’, i.e. as a political rationality that enables, economizes, and augments the geographic scope for biopolitical governance in contemporary world politics. It also means that unlike the prior two approaches to the risk-security nexus, a wider biopolitical approach to the conjuncture of risk and security can actually capture the practical uses to which the language of risk is being put in the securitization of HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

What are the political implications of using this combined language of risk and security in order to achieve these wider biopolitical objectives in the international system? On a practical level, there are several problems with seeking to govern populations through risk. Focusing on risk groups and risk factors tends to reduce the complexity of individuals' sexuality and behaviour.⁵² In the case of the armed forces, for example, not all members of the armed forces are identical in terms of their sexual behaviour, and there may well be important differences between the behaviours of different armed forces. Similarly, it is not clear that the epidemiological drivers of the epidemics in India, China and Russia are the same as in the worst-affected countries of Africa and that they will necessarily run the same course. Working primarily through the language of risk factors and risk groups can thus lead to other important sources of the pandemic being overlooked, because there may be important vectors of transmission that have been missed or not accounted for in the list of more general risk factors. Moreover, this form of governance also opens up the prospect that individuals who may not be contributing to the spread of the pandemic become subject to new interventions when these are not necessary, simply because they are affiliated with a sub-population deemed to be potentially 'dangerous' in terms of combining various more general risk factors. This can culminate in inefficient and potentially wasteful use of scarce resources that put lives at risk. The absence of more reliable epidemiological data on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the armed forces is one case in point where substantial financial and political resources have been invested without a sound underlying epidemiological basis, and where recent figures do not

⁵² Lupton, *The Imperative of Health*, p. 88.

always substantiate the claims made by UNAIDS about heightened levels of HIV prevalence amongst the armed forces.⁵³

Beyond these more practical concerns, the merging of risk and security in the international politics of HIV/AIDS also creates a political climate in which it seems justifiable, and indeed necessary, to regulate and adapt the sexual behaviour of these 'risk groups'. Not surprisingly, the securitization of HIV/AIDS has generated its own new forms of political intervention. UNAIDS, for example, is particularly keen on promoting the 'HIV/AIDS Awareness Card' it recently developed, which is now routinely deployed during international peacekeeping operations following requests by the Security Council to address the problem of peacekeepers spreading HIV/AIDS. The card – which has been produced in ten different languages ranging from the obligatory English all the way through to Kiswahili – recommends to peacekeepers that 'condoms should be used for all types of sexual acts', and urges them to 'limit your alcohol intake and stay away from drugs.' The most striking feature of this card, however, is undoubtedly that it also uses fear and uncertainty to incite peacekeepers to exercise self-discipline over their bodies by reminding them that '[t]he HIV virus can be present anywhere in the world. You do not know who is infected with HIV.'⁵⁴ The impossibility of knowing whether any given sexual partner is HIV-positive should induce desired behaviour change amongst UN peacekeepers. In this way the deployment of 'risk groups' in the securitization of HIV/AIDS paves the way for a variety of novel international health interventions that seek to shape the behaviours of individuals in manners conducive to the achievement of biopolitical goals.

⁵³ Alan Whiteside, Alex de Waal and Tsadkan Gebre-Tensae 'AIDS, Security and the Military in Africa: A Sober Appraisal' *African Affairs*, 105/419, 2006: 210-218.

⁵⁴ For a copy of the AIDS awareness cards, see UNAIDS, *On the Front Line: A review of policies and programmes to address AIDS among peacekeepers and uniformed services*, New York: 2005, p. 22.

Another way of putting this same point is to suggest that the risk-security nexus evident in the securitization of HIV/AIDS is performing what Foucault called normalizing practices, i.e. practices whereby populations are subject to continuous indirect surveillance and where those groups deviating from the desired biological norms (such as being HIV-negative) are targeted by a variety of political interventions. 'A normalizing society' Foucault argued, 'is the historical outcome of a technology of power centred on life'. Whilst penning these thoughts on biopower in the 1970s, Foucault had still believed, perhaps erroneously, that many parts of the non-Western world were outside this biopolitical sphere, noting, for example, how '[o]utside the Western world famine exists, on a greater scale than ever; and the biological risks confronting the species are perhaps greater, and certainly more serious, than before the birth of microbiology.'⁵⁵ If Foucault were alive today, however, he may well have been struck by the fact that the ongoing securitization of AIDS is now in the process of globalizing such biopolitical considerations not least through extensive use of the language of risk. The securitization of HIV/AIDS thus marks an important mechanism through which the Western world can increasingly subject the rest of the world to these same biopolitical strategies in the name of 'life' and collective 'health'. All of this gives rise to a deeper political trade-off. On the one hand, not to draw upon the language of risk and security in order to garner more international support and resources for persons living with HIV/AIDS would be to risk the lives of those who may otherwise perish. Yet to draw upon the language of risk and security in order to prevent this outcome would also be risking lives in the very different sense of encouraging international political interventions which, in the name of life itself, seek to inscribe various biopolitical and risk-based identities and subjectivities onto the

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, p. 143.

world's populations. Although there are good grounds for believing that the late Foucault would not have wanted the later concerns to trump the former politically, it remains true that whichever path one chooses – one ends up *risking lives*.