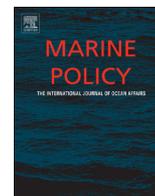




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What is maritime security?



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ABSTRACT

Maritime security is one of the latest buzzwords of international relations. Major actors have started to include maritime security in their mandate or reframed their work in such terms. Maritime security is a term that draws attention to new challenges and rallies support for tackling these. Yet, no international consensus over the definition of maritime security has emerged. Buzzwords allow for the international coordination of actions, in the absence of consensus. These, however, also face the constant risk that disagreements and political conflict are camouflaged. Since there are little prospects of defining maritime security once and for all, frameworks by which one can identify commonalities and disagreements are needed. This article proposes three of such frameworks. Maritime security can first be understood in a matrix of its relation to other concepts, such as marine safety, seapower, blue economy and resilience. Second, the securitization framework allows to study how maritime threats are made and which divergent political claims these entail in order to uncover political interests and divergent ideologies. Third, security practice theory enables the study of what actors actually do when they claim to enhance maritime security. Together these frameworks allow for the mapping of maritime security.

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1. Introduction: Maritime security—In search for a meaning?

Maritime Security is one of the latest buzzwords of international relations. Major actors in maritime policy, ocean governance and international security have in the past decade started to include maritime security in their mandate or reframed their work in such terms. In 2014 the United Kingdom, the European Union as well as the African Union (AU) have launched ambitious maritime security strategies. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) included maritime security as one of its objectives in its 2011 Alliance Maritime Strategy. The U.S. pioneered this development when launching a national Maritime Security Policy in 2004. Also, the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) of the International Maritime Organization included maritime security in their list of tasks. As reflected in the U.S. policy, the concept of ‘maritime security’ gained initial salience after the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the associated fears over the spread of maritime terrorism. If maritime terrorism has largely remained a virtual threat [28], the breakthrough for maritime security came with the rise of piracy off the coast of Somalia between 2008 and 2011. The dangers of piracy for international trade brought the maritime dimension of security to the global consciousness and lifted it high on policy agendas. Moreover, the inter-state tensions in regions, such as the Arctic, the South China Sea, or the East China Sea and the

significant investments in blue water navies of emerging powers, such as India and China, have increased attention for the oceans as a security space [7,20,26,35,40].

Maritime Security, like other international buzzwords, is a term that draws attention to new challenges and rallies support for tackling these. Discussions of maritime security frequently do so by pointing to ‘threats’ that prevail in the maritime domain [22,23,33,43,44]. They refer to threats such as maritime inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods, arms proliferation, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, or maritime accidents and disasters. The argument is then that maritime security should be defined as the absence of these threats. This ‘laundry list’ approach to defining maritime security has rightfully been criticized as insufficient since it does neither prioritize issues, nor provides clues of how these issues are inter-linked, nor outlines of how these threats can be addressed. It moreover creates enduring puzzles over which threats should be included. Are climate change and disasters at sea maritime security issues? Should inter-state disputes be treated in terms of national security rather than maritime security? Others advocate for an understanding of maritime security as “good” or “stable order at sea” [39,44,23]. In contrast to the ‘negative’ definition of maritime security as absence of a range of threats, this understanding provides a ‘positive’ conceptualization that projects a certain ideal-typical end state that has to be reached. In this approach there is however hardly any discussion of *what* “good” or “stable” order is supposed to mean, or *whose* order it is intended to be. Instead the

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discussion turns immediately to questions of how law enforcement at sea can be improved. A related discussion aims at defining maritime security in positive terms by linking it to 'economic' or 'blue growth'. In this economic attempt to define maritime security, similar questions arise: whose economy is it concerned about, and who will be the primary beneficiaries of such growth? Discussions of responses to maritime security outline a rather broad and incongruent mix of diverse policy proposals which tend to include calls for more coordination, information sharing, regulation, law enforcement and capacity building. Again it remains open what and who should be coordinated or regulated and who should build what kind of capacity. In short, and as several observers have alluded to: no international consensus over the definition of maritime security has emerged [22,23].

Is this lack of consensus problematic? Understanding maritime security as a buzzword provides answers. As Cornwall [15] suggests, buzzwords "gain their purchase and power through their vague and euphemistic qualities, their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, and their normative resonance." These are exactly the qualities that maritime security brings. Buzzwords are what Gallie [17] has called "essentially contested concepts". Such concepts represent a general agreement in the abstract, but they generate endless (and irresolvable) disagreements about what they might mean in practice. In Löwy's [24] understanding these concepts have a beneficial function since they allow actors to coordinate their action and proceed in joint activities while simultaneously disagreeing over local meanings. In policy formulation buzzwords allow for "a measure of ambiguity to secure the endorsement of diverse potential actors and audiences" ([15]: 474). They provide "concepts that can float free of concrete referents, to be filled with meaning by their users. In the struggles for interpretive power that characterize the negotiation of the language of policy, buzzwords shelter multiple agendas, providing room for manoeuvre and space for contestation" ([15]: 474). Buzzwords, however, also contain the risk, to mask political interests, and underlying ideologies and leave much of what is actually done in their name unquestioned ([15]: 472).

Core contemporary international political terms, such as peacebuilding or human security (e.g. [9,18]), have such qualities. Grasping maritime security as a buzzword, allows us to understand the salience as well as disagreements around the concept. Buzzwords, as the literature shows, enable the international coordination of actions, under the absence of consensus (e.g. [9,11]). Buzzwords, however, also face the constant risk that disagreements and political conflict are camouflaged. Such disagreements might break up in crisis situations and lead to stalemates and in-action when it is most needed. They might moreover lead to contradicting activities and weak coordination, when actors think they are talking about the same things, when de facto they are not. If maritime security is a buzzword, then there are little prospects to form an international consensus on the concept. To phrase it more directly, the intellectual quest of identifying the definition that is logically superior by rationalist criteria and everyone will hence have to agree on is a rather unproductive exercise. Divergent political interests and normative understandings will always lead to different understandings of the concept.

Yet, how can we then cope with this situation? To find an answer, we need to identify frameworks by which one can grasp the commonalities and disagreements that the concept of maritime security entails. The objective of this article is to propose three of such frameworks. These can be developed from recent security studies. Security studies has been struggling with similar questions for decades (e.g. [8,37]). The lessons from these discussions suggest meaningful ways of how to push the intellectual and policy debate on maritime security forward. The frameworks that are particularly useful are (1) 'semiotics' which intends to map different meanings by exploring the relations between maritime security and other concepts, (2) the 'securitization' framework which provides the

means to understand how different threats are included in maritime security, and (3) security practice theory which aims at understanding what actions are undertaken in the name of maritime security.

The reminder of this article is structured as follows. The next section draws on the core insights from semiotics that concepts gain their meaning in relation to other concepts. Maritime security can hence be understood in the way it organizes older established and more recent concepts. These include the concept of marine safety, seapower, blue economy and resilience. Studying these relations lead to the outline of a maritime security matrix that can be used to map divergent understandings of maritime security and explore how different actors situate threats. Section 3 introduces the securitization framework. The core tenet of this approach is to study how threats are made and what divergent political claims they entail. This is an approach especially useful to uncover political interests and divergent ideologies. The fourth section discusses the framework of security practice theory. Here the question is focused on what actors actually do when they claim to enhance maritime security. The fifth section concludes in arguing for studies that draw on these framework. Such studies have significant value and facilitate international coordination by mapping different understandings of maritime security and bringing political conflicts to the fore.

2. Conceptual relations: A maritime security matrix

In semiotic thinking the meaning of a term can be grasped by exploring the relations of the term to others. Concepts acquire their meaning relationally, through their similarities and differences from other words. The term 'fish', for instance, achieves sense though its contrast with 'meat' or 'seafood', its association with 'gills' or 'fins' and its relation to 'water'. Maritime security can be analyzed in similar ways by recognizing the relations to other terms. Maritime security organizes a web of relations, replaces or subsumes older, established concepts, as well as relates to more recently developed ones. At least four of these require consideration: seapower, marine safety, blue economy, and human resilience. Each of these concepts points us to the different dimensions of maritime security. The concepts of seapower and marine safety are century old understandings of danger at sea, the latter two have arisen at roughly the same time as maritime security.

A discourse on security at sea preceding the current debate on 'maritime security' is that of naval warfare, the importance of maritime power projection, and the concept of seapower. Firmly based in a traditionalist understanding of national security as the protection of the survival of states, the concept of 'seapower' aims at laying out the role of naval forces and at elaborating strategies for their use [39]. In peacetime the role of warships is mainly seen in protecting the core sea lines of communication in order to facilitate trade and economic prosperity by means of deterrence as well as surveillance and interdiction [36]. The concept of seapower is related to maritime security in several ways. It first concerns the fact that naval forces are one of the major actors in maritime security. Moreover, discussions of seapower address in how far state forces should act outside their territorial waters, engage in other regions than their own and have a presence in international waters.

The concept of 'marine safety' addresses the safety of ships and maritime installations with the primary purpose of protecting maritime professionals and the marine environment. Marine safety in the first place implies the regulation of the construction of vessels and maritime installations, the regular control of their safety procedures as well as the education of maritime professionals in complying with regulations. Marine safety is closely linked to the work of the International Maritime Organization and

its Maritime Safety Committee¹ which acts as the core international body for developing rules and regulations. If the core concerns of marine safety, following the Titanic accident in 1912 were in search and rescue and the protection of the life of seafarers and passengers, this has gradually shifted to environmental concerns and the prevention of collisions, accidents and the environmental disasters these may cause. Notably oil spills recorded from the 1970s have raised the profile of the environmental dimension of marine safety, while events such as the 1991 Gulf War oil spill revealed the link between traditional security and environmental concerns. Safety concerns are core to maritime security given that it may involve environmental and cultural interests. Marine safety has also been increasingly linked to maritime security given that the maritime industry, shipping companies and their employees are simultaneously potential targets (e.g. of pirates, terrorists, or criminals) as well as potential perpetrators (by engaging in maritime crimes such as trafficking of persons, illicit goods or weapons or in collaborating with violent actors).

Maritime security is however also linked to economic development. Throughout history the oceans were always of vital economic importance. The majority of trade is conducted via the sea and fisheries is a significant industry. Both global shipping and fisheries have developed into multi-billion industries. The commercial value of the oceans has moreover been increasingly re-evaluated due to the economic potential of offshore resources, centrally fossil energy but also seabed mining, as well as the economic promises of coastal tourism. The concepts of 'blue economy' and 'blue growth' – proposed at the 2012 Rio+20 world summit² and widely endorsed, for instance, in the European Union's *Blue Growth Strategy* – aim at linking and integrating the different dimensions of the economic development of the oceans and constructing sustainable management strategies for these. The concept of blue economy is linked to maritime security since sustainable management strategies not only require the enforcement and monitoring of laws and regulations, but a secure maritime environment provides the precondition for managing marine resources.

Two of the core dimensions in the concept of blue economy, food security and the resilience of coastal populations are directly linked to the fourth concept that needs to be considered for understanding the semiotic relations of maritime security, that is, human security. Human security is a major proposal for an alternative to understanding security in terms of national security coined in the 1990s. Proposed originally by the United Nations Development Program, the concept intends to center security considerations on the needs of people rather than states (e.g. [18,27,30]). Core dimensions of human security concern food, shelter, sustainable livelihoods and safe employment. Considering that fisheries are a vital source of food and employment, notably in the least developed countries, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing is a major problem impacting human security³. Human security has however several maritime dimensions, which stretches from the security of seafarers to the vulnerability of coastal populations to maritime threats more broadly. Notably the resilience of coastal populations has been identified as a key factor in the emergence of maritime threats and is hence vital in their prevention⁴.

Maritime Security relates these four concepts to each other, or potentially even intends to replace them. The semiotic perspective implies that for understanding what meaning actors subscribe to

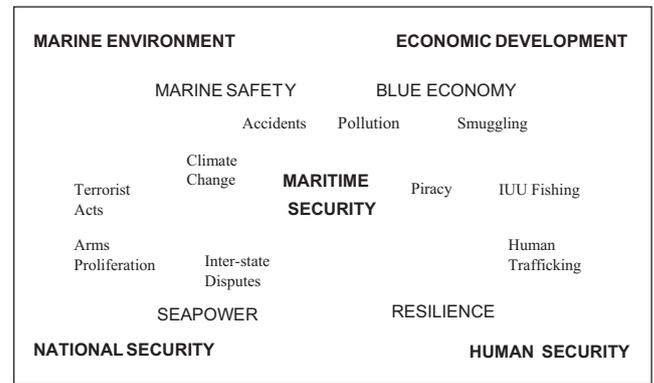


Fig. 1. Maritime security matrix.

maritime security we can study the relations they suggest to those other concepts. Graphically this can be projected as a matrix. Fig. 1, provides a maritime security matrix that intends to project the relations between those concepts in ideal typical terms. It places maritime security in the center of these. It also situates the different issues of maritime security, further discussed below, in those relations.

Working with such a matrix first of all allows for the study of the types of relations established by different actors between maritime security and other concepts. The matrix provides moreover a basis for scrutinizing what actors include and exclude in their concept of maritime security. As further discussed in Section 3, interpretations of threats can differ remarkably. For some actors, an issue might be primarily linked to the economic dimensions, while it is for others an issue of national security or safety. Fig. 1 is an ideal-typical version which reflects how the author would relate the concepts to one another. It is important to note that drawing on the matrix does not imply starting out from any idealized understanding and to argue that maritime security *should* integrate all of the four other concepts. The matrix is an analytical tool to grasp the differences and commonalities of understandings of different actors.

Security actors significantly diverge over how they draw these relations and position threats within these. NATO's Alliance Maritime Strategy [29], for instance, excludes the lower, left corner from its understanding of maritime security in arguing that these are separate so called high end tasks, and then primarily focusses on issues related to the blue economy and human resilience. The African Integrated Maritime Strategy of the AU [5], by contrast centers on the blue economy and argues that maritime security challenges are primarily relevant because they hamper economic growth. Starting out from the upper right corner the AU quite surprisingly excludes traditional considerations of inter-state dispute or state rivalry from its strategy. Other strategies, such as the EU's or UK's maritime security strategy, have strong relations to all four concepts and argue for a comprehensive approach that emphasizes the connectivity of the issues ([41]).

3. Deconstructing threats: The securitization framework

A second framework can be drawn from constructivist security studies developed since the 1990s. The political debates over the content and priorities of security and defence policies in the aftermath of the Cold War led soon to the recognition within security studies that what was required was an analysis of the political process by which threats are constructed and issues are lifted on the security agenda. One of the major frameworks that emerged out of this discussion is the 'securitization framework'. Originally proposed by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan [14] the framework posits that there is a genuine logic to threat construction, hence such processes can be analyzed through a generic framework.

¹ The mandate of the MSC defines the issues it deals with as comprising of "aids to navigation, construction and equipment of vessels, manning from a safety standpoint, rules for the prevention of collisions, handling of dangerous cargoes, maritime safety procedures and requirements, hydrographic information, log-books and navigational records, marine casualty investigation, salvage and rescue".

² The concept of blue economy was initially proposed by Pauli's [31] report to the Club of Rome.

³ See for instance the analysis of fisheries in Sierra Leone by Thorpe et al. [38].

⁴ See the discussion in Abbott and Renwick [1] and Klein [21] for the case of piracy.

Securitization suggests that threats are constructed by (a series) of claims that draw on a certain generic grammar. In this grammar an issue, such as piracy, is presented to be an existential threat to a certain referent object, for instance the nation state or international trade. Such claims are only successful if they are presented by actors that have the authority to speak about security and if a relevant target audience accepts such threats. Threat construction usually comes along with a proposal for measures that should be taken to protect the reference object from the threat. For Buzan and Waever [14] it is a specific characteristic of security, that counter-measures are extraordinary and often extreme. They might involve military instruments up to the scale of military conflict or a significant cut-back of civil liberties.

Drawing on the securitization framework to understand maritime security leads to two potential tracks of investigation. First, the question can be addressed by which securitization claims 'the maritime' has become an issue that is securitized. This implies to ask how the contemporary understanding of the oceans and the sea as a space of insecurity and threats has come about and how it has changed over time. Writing a genealogy will be the likely outcome considering that the discourse of the oceans as a zone of danger and uncertainty can be traced at least back to the Antique [25]. Such an analysis provides a grand picture of how and why 'the maritime' is a source of insecurity or a reference object that requires to be protected.

The second track is a fine-grained analysis of how different issues have been securitized to form the maritime security agenda. A careful reconstruction of the issues on the laundry list of maritime security is the outcome and attention given to the question of who securitizes issues towards which audience and with what kind of reference objects in mind. For deciphering different (and competing) political interests it is particularly revealing to ask which reference objects are entailed in maritime securitizations. What are the reference objects that actually have to be protected from the maritime security threats?

The majority of international actors defines maritime security by identifying a number of threats that the concept includes. If the precise phrasing differs across agencies, the 2008 UN Secretary General's Report on *Oceans and the Law of the Sea* provides an outline of the threats commonly included ([42], 18–33). The report differentiates between seven. (1) Piracy and armed robbery, (2) terrorist acts, (3) the illicit trafficking in arms and weapons of mass destruction, (4) the illicit trafficking in narcotics, (5) smuggling and trafficking of persons by sea, (6) illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and (7) intentional and unlawful damage to the marine environment.

Recent strategy documents by the EU and the UK offer similar outlines. The UK's 2014 maritime security strategy refers to "maritime security risks" rather than threats, and clusters some of the issues together. It describes one of these risks for instance as the "disruption to vital maritime trade routes as a result of war, criminality, piracy or changes in international norms" ([41]: 17). It also adds to this list by including "cyber attacks against shipping or maritime infrastructure" ([41]: 17). The EU likewise includes cyber security but extends the list of seven threats by also including "territorial maritime disputes, acts of aggression and armed conflict between States" ([16]:3) as well as "potential impacts of natural disasters, extreme events and climate change on the maritime transport system and in particular on the maritime infrastructure" and "conditions at sea and in the coastal zone that weaken the potential for growth and jobs in the marine and maritime sectors" ([16]: 4).

The objective of a fine-grained securitization analysis will be to reconstruct how these threats and risks have been lifted on the agenda of the respective actors. This will provide an understanding what the respective actors deem worth protecting (and what not) and by which measures. Taking this perspective will show when

and how actors understanding of threats converge and when they significantly differ.

The securitization framework moreover points us to an important dynamic: As the literature has shown, securitization implies that issues are treated as urgent and top-priority matters and that usually more resources are devoted to them [14]. The securitization of maritime problems is then on the one side a welcome development since it raises the profile of maritime issues and increases the resources available to address these. Securitization, on the other side, has a distinct logic which usually entails that extreme measures are taken and short term reactions are preferred. Phrased otherwise securitization does not necessarily lead to optimal and sustainable solutions. Hence, the outcome might be wrong investments or to give preference to hugely expensive short term solutions (such as employing military forces). This dynamic has been for instance shown for the case of migration⁵. Understanding migration as threat has undermined economic or humanitarian understandings, led to often extreme measures of border control and silenced the humanitarian tragedies that cases of illegal migration might imply.

4. Security practice and communities of practice

The third framework moves away from considerations of language and asks what actors actually do in the name of maritime security. What kind of activities are conducted when actors say that they are doing maritime security?

Such a perspective takes up clues from securitization analysis in that it is interested in the implementation of the measures that securitization processes imply. It is embedded in an understanding of security politics in which practice, understood as organized patterns of doing and sayings, is the central unit of analysis [32,12]. From such a perspective also the question of which tools and technologies, such as navy ships or satellites, are used in maritime security practice is of core interest.

There is a spectrum of practices which are conventionally part of maritime security, yet agencies engage in different of these⁶. These practices first include those that are geared at Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). This includes surveillance through radar, satellites or tracking data and the sharing and fusing of such information through databases and service centers. Second, activities at sea, such as patrolling, interdictions, searches and inspections, but also exercises. Third, law enforcement activities, such as arrests, the transfer of suspects, as well as prosecution, trials and prisons. Fourth, coordination activities on different levels. This might involve meetings and conferences and the harmonization of legal standards, procedures, mandates or the development of strategies and implementation plans. Other potential practices might, fifth, be seen in activities such as naval diplomacy, capacity building, but also naval warfare. In this latter type whether the practices belong to maritime security or not, will be contested.

Studies of maritime security practices revolve around two different perspectives which promise different insights. Studies of routine practices, that is what actors do on an everyday basis such as those outlined above, will reveal how the meaning of maritime security becomes settled and institutionalized in a distinct set of practices. Another perspective implies to investigate when it is contentious, whether a set of activities should be carried out under the name of maritime security. Practices such as naval warfare, naval diplomacy and maritime capacity building, potentially belong to other fields of meaning (war, diplomacy, development). Studying the controversies

⁵ For the debate on the consequences of the securitization of migration see among others Aradau [6], Huysmans [19], and Roe [34].

⁶ See Bueger and Stockbruegger [13] for an exemplary reconstruction of such practices drawing on the case of counter-piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

around such practices promises insights on how actors delimit the meaning of maritime security.

The provision of maritime security is a major inter-agency challenge even on a national level. The broader the understanding of maritime security the wider the range of actors involved. While the precise form of national coordination, joint policies and operations, and information sharing depends on the design of governmental activity different functional agencies require to be coordinated. This includes civil-military coordination, since “there is no definable separation between civil activities and naval operations” ([23]: 6). It includes several regulatory agencies, such as ministries of transport, fisheries, agriculture and trade, and legal agencies, from coast guards, to port authorities, border guards, the police or intelligence services. It also concerns the coordination between the state and shipping and fishing companies, resource industries, as well private maritime security providers. Actors from the maritime industry are a potential target as well as potential perpetrators. Private security provision is a growing industry. Security companies not only protect port facilities or maritime installations but also provide armed guards on board vessels, or might even be contracted to manage entire Exclusive Economic Zones, such as in the case of Benin.

Maritime security is widely understood as a transnational task. The 2008 UN Secretary General’s Report stresses the importance of international cooperation and coordinated responses, and stresses that maritime security is a shared responsibility and requires a new vision of collective security. Other maritime strategies including those of the US, NATO, the EU or the UK equally emphasise the importance of multilateralism and joint coordinated responses. This is consequential given that maritime security threats are transnational and perpetrators operate across boundaries, maritime insecurity has transnational consequences, but also due to the liquid nature of maritime territorial boundaries, and the complex transnational character of global shipping and trade in which any single operation includes various nationals and jurisdictions.

Scrutinizing who does what in the name of maritime security moreover enables to address what actors actually do together, how they cooperate with each other and what potential effects this cooperation can have. A viable route to addressing this dimension is to rely on the concept of maritime security communities.

The concept of maritime security communities [10] describes an ideal form of cooperation between all actors relevant to the maritime sector. In this ideal form all maritime stakeholders securitize together, that is, they identify which threats are existential for which referent objects, and what should be done about it. Actors engage on a day to day basis, share information and coordinate their activities. They develop a common repertoire of understandings and tools to foster maritime security. The concept of maritime security communities draws on and specifies the concept of security communities for the challenges of maritime security. Following the original proposal by integration theorists Karl Deutsch, security communities have been understood as a form of political cooperation largely characterized by the absence of war, the peaceful settlement of conflict among a communities members and a growing sense of mutual trust and the development of a collective identity. For Deutsch and later generations of analysts, NATO and the European Union were the proto-types of security communities [2,4].

The notion of maritime security communities integrates current thinking about security communities and develops this concept further in arguing that an appropriate understanding of security has to go beyond the traditional understanding of the absence of war. Security communities are a distinct form of security governance that differs from others such as alliances [3,13]. Security communities are about shared securitizations, how distinct threats are identified and how a community deals with them collectively. Moreover, this reformulation clarifies that what makes security communities thrive are not formal treaties, communiques or declarations, but everyday

transnational practices. This might involve high-level politicians and diplomats, but primarily concerns the broader range of lower and mid-level security practitioners and experts and how they engage with each other. The concept of maritime security community is an ideal type. It is useful to evaluate how actors collaborate in maritime security. Yet, no really existing community will ever fully correspond to the expectations of the concept of security community.

5. Conclusion: Mapping maritime security

Maritime security is a buzzword. It has no definite meaning. It achieves its meaning by actors relating the concept to others, by attempts to fill it with different issues and by acting in the name of it. If actors agree on the value of maritime security in general terms, its practical meaning will always vary across actors, time and space. Striving for a universally acceptable definition of maritime security is hence an unproductive quest. This article has set out to devise ways of how to cope with the multi-vocality of the concept. Three strategies have been outlined to make sense of the meaning of maritime security and to unravel political interests and worldviews. These strategies provide productive access point into the study of maritime security and scrutinizing the divergent perspectives of actors in distinct spaces.

Asking the question ‘What is Maritime Security?’, hence, leads to a prospective research agenda of mapping the meaning of the concept. Such studies have direct policy implications on national and international level. They reveal when and how actors agree and disagree and foster mutual understanding. They enable to cope with coordination problems, and allow for a different type of interpretation of maritime disputes that do not start with assumed interests of actors but with an analysis of the meaning actors subscribe to the maritime as a security space. Finally, such studies will also assist in establishing the contours of the emerging sub-discipline of Maritime Security Studies and elaborate on its transdisciplinary links to economics, development studies, environmental studies or global governance studies.

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