

Introduction

On Regions, Powers, and Regional Security Complexes, or What Does Regions and Powers Mean for Theory and Practice in 2015?

Over the course of the past decade there has been a growing interest in the academic study of regional security, as part of the broader literature on regionalisms and notably as by the authors of the Copenhagen School. In their highly influential book *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, the most authoritative account of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to date,¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver restate the cause for a regionalist approach to security in a synthesis of neorealism and constructivism in IR. Since “threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones” they propose that international security dynamic clusters into distinct regional security complexes. Those specific security regions are defined as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another” (p.44). With hindsight, a decade after *Regions and Powers*, and a quarter-century since the landmark formulation of security sectors and regional security in *People, States, and Fear*, it is a convenient time to take stock and look at the perspectives of the debates that are generated by the study of Regional Security Complexes. Journal of Regional Security has opened its pages for contributions that address RSCT from various theoretical and multidisciplinary perspectives, and the authors in this issue of the journal have ventured to offer theoretical accounts, empirical analysis, as well as critique and reflection upon the meaning and applications of RSCT in the period that indicates possibilities for significant changes in patterns and dynamics of regional security in the early 21st century. In a more recent article on regional security in Asia, Buzan notes that “Asian supercomplex is clearly emerging and becoming stronger”, while “the global level itself is probably moving towards a scenario in which a system containing several great powers and no superpowers, becomes more regionalized.”² Security dynamics that shape the global and regional outlook in the 21st century are located in East Asia, the Middle East and in the post-Soviet space, while the dynamics in Africa remain a significant challenge for the understanding of RSCs – demonstrating the variety of qualities that their respective dynamics give to the understanding of what shape the security regions may take (pre-, proto-, sub-complexes). The articles in this special section take on the notion of regional security complexes as defined in *Regions and Powers*, but at the same time they suggest novel ways of expanding the discussion and analysis. Guided by the call for authors and

1 At the time of writing this text, a search on Google Scholar shows that *Regions and Powers* has been cited 2,279 times in various scholarly publications.

2 Buzan 2011, “The South Asian Security Complex in a Decentring World Order: Reconsidering Regions and Powers Ten Years On”, *International Studies* 48 (1): 1–19.

the original call of the *R & P*, the articles cover the expanse of regional level of analysis more broadly, but more specifically deal with the security dynamics of the Middle East and the European/post-Soviet RSCs. The themes that are elaborated range from military security and deterrence, to region-building, to security community building, and role of historical and collective memory. A special focus is paid to the role of two regional security actors, namely Turkey in the Middle Eastern RSC and Russia in the process of building a wider Northern European security region.

With a view from 2015, a RSCT-based reading of Middle East, European and post-Soviet RSCs would position Turkey and Russia as regional centres, with the latter being the great power unipole, and the former a powerful regional, insulating power that mediates a complex pattern of trans-regional influences and outside great-power politics, while exhibiting its own sense of agency. The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Syria set the context to thematize the relations between these two regional complexes, and their adjacent dynamics – that is, the relationship between Russia and the EU, as well as the relations between Turkey, the EU, other Middle Eastern security actors with the outside “penetrators” such as the US, EU, and Russia.

To the prolific study of regional security contributes the body of work on regionalisms. The three articles in this special section address the role of regional powers, as well as small states in various aspects of regional security dynamics. They also reflect on theoretical propositions of the RSCT and provide space for discussion about the possibilities of looking at the alternative theorizations that build on the cross-fertilization between the original RSCT and other discussions in IR and social sciences more generally.

The issue opens with the article by Henrik Breitenbauch, which deals with the position of the Northern European security region and its small states within the broader “Euro-Russian Regional Security Complex”. The article draws on literature on regional security and European integration, and offers a conceptualization for the understanding of political and security position of the Nordic states by differentiating between the internal/external dimensions that characterize the political and security regions. The author employs Martin Heidegger’s concept of *Geworfenheit*, or, ‘thrownness’ into the world to “express how the states of the greater Nordic space are always already subject to the dynamics underlying that space and how this condition affects the states’ interpretation of their changing surroundings, including translation into political regionality.” In an empirical part of analysis, Breitenbauch argues that Russia’s new foreign policy has “created a greater Nordic space “security region” that also draws attention from the external actors such as the United States in an effort that may contribute toward a strengthened sense of political regionality within what he calls a “greater Nordic region” in the light of the conflict in Ukraine.

The second article, written by Hakan Mehmetcik, concerns the role of deterrence as a concept after the end of the Cold War. The author argues the concept of deterrence has been subject to a renewed interest, particularly at a regional level. The RSCT has “an important explanatory power for resolving regional dynamics in which deterrence practice is generally shaped,” and “aims to bridge the gap between deterrence studies and regions, as a level of analysis, by integrating RSCT within the wider deterrence discussion.” Mehmetcik brings up an interesting argument that “regions can be perceived as the independent actors of deterrence relations,” and notes that two modes of deterrence – among regions and between regions. As to the analytical value of the RSCT for the study of nuclear deterrence, it can help “deterrence studies explore more eloquently the factors and actors of the deterrence issues” in an attempt to depart from their being “trapped in the Cold-War mindset.”

The third article, co-authored by Oguz Dilek, Emre Iseri, and Nihat Celik, examines the reasons why Turkey has not succeeded in creating a security community in the Middle East in the time of the uprisings in the Arab world in this decade of the 21st century. They argue that there are three “hinderances”, at systemic, regional and domestic levels that prevent the creation of the significant change in this, traditionally regarded regional ‘(in)security complex’. For the authors, the success of the process of Europeanization is linked with the possibilities for building a security community there – with the process being slowed down with the protracted story of Turkey’s EU membership candidacy. The state of democratic development, regional powerhood and international prestige are the ingredients of a successful attempt to produce the regional environment conducive for creating a security community spurred by Turkey – something that is, as the authors note, at least, “uncertain” given the domestic politics in the country in 2015.

While the first three articles have treated RSCT and its theoretical and empirical considerations more specifically, the article by Jelena Subotić indirectly joins the regional security discussions in dealing with the subject of memory and security by exploring the „competing narratives of genocide“ in the former-Yugoslav states. The author argues for a novel approach in the study of narratives that takes their dynamic nature, interaction and dialogue as opposed to conventionally understood fixed and static narratives. In the analysis of the political narratives of genocide in Serbia and Croatia, Subotić shows how „narratives change and shape identities of social actors, give meaning to their actions, and create discursive space in which some social actions make sense, and other become unimaginable,” while also holding potential to “ultimately shaping political choices actors make.”

This issue of the *Journal of Regional Security* closes with Marija Popović's review of Amitav Acharya's latest book *The End of American World Order* that contributes to scholarly and public debates about the changing dynamics and multipolarization of international relations. Acharya's claim that "the American World Order is coming to an end whether or not America itself is declining" (p.2) is relevant for the understanding of the power-structure of the regionalized international system, and can be relevant for the understanding of the present and future of security dynamics in RSCs across the world.

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