

# Non-Traditional Security Issues: Should HIV/AIDS be Securitized?

Written by Victor Gigueux

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VICTOR GIGLEUX, AUG 10 2011

HIV/AIDS was first encountered more than two decades ago, and it has been reported that 60 million people have been infected by the virus, leading to 20 million deaths due to the illness (Elbe; 2002; pp.159). In 2008, the region the most affected by the epidemic was Sub-Saharan Africa constituting more than two-third of all the people living with HIV and approximately three quarter of AIDS-related deaths (UNAIDS Fact Sheet; 2009; pp.1).

Traditional understandings of security such as Realism have long dominated the field, in particular the Cold War era. This view on security identifies the state as a primary unit to be secured through military means in an anarchic system, with a focus on the preservation of the balance of power, deterrence as well as arms race. Thus, Realism including its emphasis on high politics and on its 'black-boxes' approach of the state leaves little place in order to study broader fields such as health security that states may face, and therefore does not take into account HIV/AIDS as a threat to human, national or international security (Glaser; 2010; pp.17). However, although the epidemic has had dramatic effects on human lives and could rightly be viewed as a humanitarian issue, scholars have recently emphasised the growing negative effects of HIV/AIDS on core pillars of states, receiving ever more attention by policy-makers as a potential threat to national security (Elbe; 2010; pp.418). Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasised the far-reaching ramifications on economic, social and political stability in Africa of the illness forming the basis for the subsequently created Resolution 1302 of the Security Council, which constitutes the cornerstone of the securitizing process of HIV/AIDS (McInnes; 2006; pp.337). The broad aim of this essay will be to investigate the process of securitization of HIV/AIDS in the context of the African continent. This will be undertaken using the Copenhagen School, as it is an efficient analytical tool especially regarding to its securitization theory put forward by Barry Buzan.

The Copenhagen School demonstrates how an issue can be securitized 'meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure' (Buzan et al.; 1998; pp.24). Before this stage, an issue may also be 'nonpoliticized', implying that the state does not handle it, or move to a 'politicized' phase in which 'the issue is part of public policy requiring government decision' (Buzan et al.; 1998; pp.23). The Copenhagen School employs a 'multi-sectoral' analysis, in which the referent object and the threat may differ in each sector (Emmers; 2010; pp.137). In other words, the school defines, as their different levels of analysis, the following five sectors: military sector with the state as referent object; the political sector with sovereignty, the economic sector with national economies or firms; societal sector with collective identities representing the referent object and the environmental sector with species or habitats (Buzan et al.; 1998; pp.22-23 and Emmers; 2010; pp.137). From that point of view, the Copenhagen School should be credited for its attempts to broaden the security agenda necessary for the present investigation; to areas which will provide a good basis for examining the effects of HIV/AIDS. It could be argued that Buzan's theory remains state-centric as it traditionally refers to the state or essential components of the state in its definition of security, illustrating continuity with traditional approach to security (Buzan et al.; 1998; pp.21). This aspect may prove particularly useful as this essay is primarily concerned with HIV/AIDS posing a threat to national security in Africa.

This essay argues that it is necessary to focus on several aspects of the state in order to understand the full extent to which HIV/AIDS poses an existential threat to African national securities, while also suggesting that a human point of

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view should not be discarded. It will be proposed that the speech act theory of the Copenhagen School is situated at the centre of securitizing HIV/AIDS in Africa. However, it will show that such process has not been uniform, therefore undermining the statement that HIV/AIDS constitutes a threat to African security. Finally, this study makes a case, based on argument held by Stephan Elbe that it is necessary to take into account normative dimensions in securitizing HIV/AIDS. The first part of this essay will focus on the impacts of HIV/AIDS on African states at several levels including military, political, as well as societal. Speech acts from leaders concerning the epidemic and the ways the disease has been framed in Africa will form the subject of the second part of this essay; while in the third part the normative concerns regarding the securitization of HIV/AIDS will be investigated.

It is crucial to begin by examining the effects of the epidemic and to determine whether they are significant enough so as to form a substantial threat to African security.

In terms of the military implications of HIV/AIDS, a convincing argument was proposed that the epidemic has negatively affected national armed forces. Elbe notes that HIV rates among African militaries are systematically higher than the rates of the populations at large. He argues that soldiers are usually recruited from a pool of sexually active age; and that away from their communities enduring physical and psychological strains, their likelihood to undergo unprotected sexual relations as a way to reduce their anxiety is high (Elbe; 2002; pp.163). Moreover, as soldiers trained for combat, they are more likely to 'valorize violent and risky behaviour' in a military environment that is known to attract sex workers (Elbe; 2002; pp.163). These aspects are thought to be playing a major role in exposing the armed forces to sexually transmitted viruses such as HIV. It is relevant to highlight the links between AIDS in the military and the risks for security. It is noted that AIDS is in some cases the primary cause of death in the military (Singer; 2002; pp.9). The epidemic can provoke, in already deteriorated armies, 'a dangerous weakening of military capabilities' by causing the loss, of not only regular soldiers but more importantly, the death of specialized personnel and officers (Singer; 2002; pp.9 and Elbe; 2002; pp.165). Additionally, it was found that a decrease in readiness and morale could have a negative impact on the army abilities to perform their duties, therefore undermining deployment effectiveness (Elbe; 2002; pp.165). From a realist (state) perspective, it is possible to argue that this 'hollowing out' and decline in efficiency of African militaries may be perceived by an enemy as an opportunity for attack, therefore making HIV/AIDS a substantial threat to national security (Singer; 2002; pp.10).

However, counter arguments downplaying the seriousness of those above aspects, thus rejecting HIV/AIDS as serious threat to the military should be emphasised. McInnes is sceptical regarding the 'hollowing out' argument, on the ground that armies are always prepared for those personnel losses because of potential combat. Moreover, he further disagrees by highlighting that the number of candidates for entering the armed forces is always higher than the positions available, ensuring a constant supply of new recruits (McInnes; 2006; pp.321). It is stressed that the secrecy over the details on national armed forces allows governments to conceal the weaknesses of their armies, thus refuting the argument that the weakening effects of HIV/AIDS may lead to a external aggression (McInnes; 2006; pp. 332). In a wider picture of conflicts, it should be mentioned that HIV/AIDS in Africa is now being used as a weapon of war. It emerged that rape has been used in various African conflicts such as in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia as well as in Congo as an intentional act to spread the HIV virus (Singer; 2002; pp.20 and Elbe; 2002; pp.167). In those conflicts, soldiers were reported to have deliberately inflicted rape with the aim to transmit the virus to civilian populations as mean to 'heighten the impacts of their attacks and create long lasting harms' to the targeted population (Singer; 2002; pp.20).

A large part of the literature on HIV/AIDS is dedicated to the harmful implications of the epidemic on national militaries and its worsening effects on war, while sometimes omitting the extent to which African governance has been affected (De Waal; 2003; pp.2). It has been argued that HIV/AIDS may put greater strains on already weakened central state institutions, and its eroding effects are said to contribute to potential state failure (Singer; 2002; pp.11). The epidemic can undermine African governance by causing the death of large numbers of personnel essential to running efficient governing institutions. De Waal underlines that long political experience and professional skills are key to well functioning state bodies; however HIV/AIDS has contaminated and is causing major losses among staff possessing those attributes (De Waal; 2003; pp.11). Moreover, this loss in human resources damages the moral of the remaining workers further undercutting the efficiency of those national bodies (De Waal; 2003; pp.12). This has been replicated in several sectors, but the crucial point is that the virus in Africa 'has tended to claim the lives of the

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most productive members of society, who are not easily replaced' such as teachers, health workers and civil servants (Singer; 2002; pp.11). Second, political discontent concerning the handling of the issue by governments may also arise, threatening the political stability of the state. As central institutions weaken, the confidence in government can decrease, and as McInnes suggests dissatisfaction may emerge from the dependency on foreign aid (McInnes; 2006; pp.317). This situation may provide opportunities for 'coups, revolts and other political and ethnic struggles to secure control over resources' allowing warlords to fill the power vacuum and take control over certain areas (Singer; 2002; pp.12). This demonstrates that HIV/AIDS can contribute to state failure in Africa and thus can be considered as a major threat.

Third, in the event that the state does not entirely collapse, it is not clear whether democratic governance will remain or can be adequately promoted in states with high HIV prevalence. It was highlighted that corruption has risen amongst government officials or civil servants who are unable to afford HIV treatments for themselves or family members through lawful means (De Waal; 2003; pp.12). De Waal is of opinion that HIV/AIDS has negatively impacted population abilities to participate in the political life. He suggests that HIV/AIDS has damaged civil society due to the loss of members in organisations promoting a healthy civil society. Furthermore, because family priorities lie in caring for the sick, it is understandable that the population 'readiness' to take part in elections has diminished (De Waal; 2003; pp.13). This combined with the de-institutionalisation of governments through the loss of experienced personnel can in turn lead to the further centralisation of power in the hand of small ruling elite, which already characterized many African governments; therefore undermining the development of democratic processes at national level (De Waal; 2003; pp.15).

HIV/AIDS can also be involved in the deterioration of identities among the population of Africa, which can subsequently pose threat to African societies. As people infected by the virus are stigmatized, they become more vulnerable (Ostergard; 2002; pp.341). Because, they are HIV positive, their families and communities may reject them, therefore losing a sense of belonging. This situation creates opportunities for warlords to recruit those victims on the ground of ethnic resentment for instance, thus fuelling ethnic violence. A particularly vulnerable population group are children because as noted by Singer, 'this mass of disconnected and disaffected children is particularly at risk to being exploited as child soldiers' (Singer; 2002; pp.16). Here, the notion of 'disconnected' is central because it shows how isolated children whom parents have died from AIDS may constitute a new pool of easy recruitments with no strong attachment (Singer; 2002; pp.15).

For instance, in Sierra Leone, it is estimated that 48,000 children have been used as active soldiers by several violent groups, 12,000 of whom were girls (Brocklehurst; 2010; pp.452). In fact, it has to be noted that girls and women are disproportionately affected by the epidemic. The social constructions of what it means to be female, render women to be more at risk of sexual violence, increasing their likelihood of infection (UNAIDS; 2009; pp.22). However, a major critique of the state-centric approach to HIV/AIDS as a security threat has been put forward. It has been suggested that this outlook only considers women as victims and because of its focus on the state and on the impacts of HIV amongst the military, it 'does not engage with the structural gender conditions under which people, in particular women, become vulnerable' (Seckinelgin et al; 2010; pp.518). Shifting the focus from the military to people's experience, Seckinelgin argues that 'gender vulnerabilities put under stress during Burundi's conflict, owing to the mobility of the population and changing social relations, have been instrumental in creating greater HIV risks' (Seckinelgin et al; 2010; pp.533).

This part aims to concentrate on the process of securitization itself with a focus on language in order to ascertain how HIV/AIDS can and has been articulated as a threat to African security. Central to the following analysis is speech act theory essential component of the securitization approach defined by Buzan, which rests on the assumption that 'by saying words something is done'; meaning that language does not only convey information, it also has a constitutive role (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.26 and Elbe; 2006; pp.124). In other words, security threats do not exist independently, but rather are socially constructed as such through language (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.31). Therefore, policy-makers use speech act as a social activity involving shared understandings, with the objective to frame specific issue as threat to security (Elbe; 2006; pp.124).

As a starting point, it is necessary to draw attention to the very fact that governments and international organisations

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talk about and address the issue, illustrating that it is not ignored and is in fact part of the political realm. This is most significantly shown by the call for dialogue amongst states at meeting such as the UN Security Council and the General Assembly dedicated to the matter. Buzan highlights that the enunciator 'must be in position of authority', hence the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan represents such position; that is why his address on the situation of Africa must be subject of investigation (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.33). Buzan characterized a successful speech act if 'it can be argued that this issue is more important than other issues and should take absolute priority', feature observable in Annan's speech when it is stated that 'fight against AIDS in Africa is an immediate priority' (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.24 and Annan; 2000). The sense of emergency and the prioritization is further emphasised in Holbrooke's comment, considering AIDS 'the number one problem facing Africa today' (Holbrooke in Annan; 2000). Moreover, Buzan's criterion that an issue must be 'presented as an existential threat' possessing 'a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects' is fulfilled by Annan's statement stressing that 'nowhere else has AIDS yet become a threat to economic, social and political stability on the scale that it now is in southern and eastern Africa' (Annan; 2000). It is important to note that Buzan argues that an efficient speech act involves the notion of 'point of no return'. This is clearly visible in the Ethiopian Ambassador's speech at the UN General Assembly, in which the international community as audience has 'no choice than to begin acting now' (Hussein; 2001).

Third, Buzan puts forward that through language of security, 'by labelling it [an issue] as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means' (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.26). In the context of AIDS in Africa, the Ugandan President Yoweri underlined HIV/AIDS as an existential threat when he pointed out to the military that the epidemic was the real threat to the national army in comparison to war (ICG; 2004; pp.6). As a result the International Crisis Group notes the need for such measures to be introduced and that the Ugandan Government has been at the forefront in doing so. Those have included the allocation of health educator to each battalion, the expulsion of any soldiers diagnosed with the virus, and in the case of the South African army a compulsory HIV screening prior deployment (ICG; 2004; pp.8-16). Finally, the dramatization that Buzan refers to as essential in securitizing an issue has been present in the case of HIV/AIDS. In fact, terms and analogy such as 'global crisis', 'catastrophic', 'greatest threat to humanity' and 'AIDS is as destabilizing as any war' have all contributed to the framing of the epidemic as a security matter (Hussein; 2001 and Prins; 2004; pp.940). Overall, a clear case by crucial actors was made to securitize HIV/AIDS especially in the context of the African continent. Vice-President Gore put forward three major points which all build the argument in favour of a move of HIV/AIDS to the security agenda. It is stated that 'the heart of security agenda is protecting lives' and that 'when a single disease threatens everything from economic strength to peacekeeping, we clearly face a security threat'; he concludes that 'it is a security crisis because it threatens not just the individual citizens, but the very institutions that define and defend the character of a society' (Gore in Prins; 2004; pp.941). A clear cut securitization of HIV/AIDS at a state level is exemplified by the US government and its representative David Gordon who frames the issue as a threat to national security on the ground that 'the exacerbation of military conflicts by the presence of AIDS, may draw on US resources'. This explains the adoption of extraordinary measures, which have been translated by the Bush administration engagement to provide \$US15 billion plan for the fight against AIDS (Prins; 2004; pp.947).

On the other hand, this process has not occurred in a standardized manner and resistance have been made from several directions. Traditional security community has opposed the securitization of AIDS because it represents a broadening of the security agenda eventually leading to the 'dilution of the meaning of security' (Prins; 2004; pp.941). The epidemic has not always been situated in the security domain and it was long viewed as health issue and dealt with as such domestically by health sectors (Prins; 2004; pp.938). An argument suggests that the 'the region's marginal status in global economics and politics' was a major factor for the past non-securitization of HIV/AIDS (Eberstadt; 2002; pp.23). From an African point of view, it was identified that 'denial at the public scale' was highly common in Africa illustrating the fact that in some cases the epidemic has not been considered as a threat to security and thus causing a major lack of response (Prins; 2004; pp.934). This practise was used in South Africa under Thabo Mbeki who has long been sceptical about the agreed science on HIV and denied the threat posed by HIV/AIDS to his country, which was exemplified by a comment made by his health minister arguing that HIV could be cured by eating more vegetables, regarding antiretroviral drugs as "poison" (Butler; 2007).

Another shocking viewpoint highlighting unwillingness to acknowledge and face the threat of the epidemic and its devastating impacts, was presented by the Democratic Republic of Congo's officials reacting on alleged rapes

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conducted by soldiers with intentions of spreading the virus, for which it was said they were 'boys being boys', thus legitimizing the acts as natural and underestimating the harms on the affected population (Ostergard; 2002; pp.345). Regarding the epidemic as a non-security matter, economists in the West have even suggested that HIV/AIDS in Africa and its subsequent decrease of population size may provide the conditions for economic growth in the region, ignoring any harmful effect (De Waal; 2003; pp.7). This is reinforced by Prins when accusing the 'rich world' of not being so 'unhappy to see many black deaths arising through inaction' (Prins; 2004; pp.940). Although, the formal securitization of HIV/AIDS has occurred, it is still possible to pin point cases for which it is said that the epidemic implications have been left aside. First, Peter Piot's address to the Security Council in 2003 criticised the institution for failing 'to expressly address AIDS in a number of recent resolutions establishing and extending UN missions' (Piot in ICG; 2004; pp.15). Second, it was argued that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has limited its efforts in providing a structured and efficient account of the impacts of HIV/AIDS on the continent development, therefore offering no basis for further action to slow down the spread of the virus (ICG; 2004; pp.3). In order to conclude about the aspects indicating a reluctance to link AIDS and security, it is possible to claim that some African governments may have prioritize other issues such as the establishment of the rule of law and the decrease in poverty at the expense of tackling the epidemic (ICG; 2004; pp.16).

Buzan lays the emphasis that 'actors and their audiences securitize certain issues as a specific form of political act' (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.33). Securitization is a 'political choice' and for that reason the Copenhagen School specifies that the move to securitization involves 'to weigh the always problematic side effects of applying a mind-set of security against the possible advantages of focus' (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.29). This dilemma relates to the normative concerns that have to be taken into considerations in order to assess whether an issue can be considered as security, because securitization is an act which ultimately has political consequences. In the context of securitizing HIV/AIDS, Elbe argues that the debate necessitates the inclusion of a normative debates so as to efficiently evaluate 'the long-term benefits and drawbacks of using such a security framework to respond to the disease' because it defines the way this is performed (Elbe; 2006; pp.122). It is important to note that the theoretical framework offered by the Copenhagen School tends to regard securitization negatively as it signifies a 'failure to deal with issues as normal politics', implying the dangers that such a move can reveal (Buzan et al; 1998; pp.29).

The first major disadvantage of opting for a security mindset when dealing with HIV/AIDS relates to the upgrading of the issue to the state level, meaning an increase of state involvement in the health and social life of the population, to a significant level it could potentially lead to infringement of civil liberties. Civil society may lose capacity to act upon the issue as it is placed in the hands of the military and the intelligence of states. It has been pointed out that the CIA has increasingly become a central player in outlining the security consequences of HIV/AIDS, potentially resulting in undemocratic responses such as spying or suspending civil rights protection (Elbe; 2006; pp.128). Measures have been taken to restrict the allocation of visas to HIV positive individuals as in the case of the UK. This leads to a second detrimental effect of securitizing HIV/AIDS. It is conceivable that Africans in particular may be targeted and ascribed as a HIV group carrier, subsequently putting a label on the group and generalizing it as threat to security. This is highly condemnable because it allows 'exclusionary and dehumanizing responses' (Elbe; 2006; pp.128).

Third, it is expected that the securitization may introduce a "threat-defence" logic which would lead to a state-centric approach in handling the epidemic as opposed to the health sector-led management. In fact, it is not clear whether the state as primary actor would deliver adequate responses if any in tackling HIV/AIDS, as it is primarily concerned in protecting its core interests and unwilling to go beyond those (Elbe; 2006; pp.129 and Peterson; 2003; pp.80). As a consequence of securitizing HIV/AIDS, governments with limited financial resources are more likely to prioritize their armed forces in providing HIV drugs; while restricting the access from the general population (Elbe; 2006; pp.130). Many organisations in Africa gather their efforts in the aim of lowering the stigma attached to people living with HIV. Their works are necessary 'in terms of normalizing societal attitudes' so as to reduce the marginalization of victims (Elbe; 2006; pp.130). By contrast, a security framework and portrayal of the illness as 'destructive' may produce counterproductive effects because people living with the virus would increasingly be viewed as threat to society (Elbe; 2006; pp.130).

On the other hand, excessive attention on the harmful outcomes, risks concealing potential benefits of securitizing HIV/AIDS. The danger may not come from the excessive involvement of governments but the total absence of it as

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demonstrated above in the case of South Africa's denial. From this perspective, the securitization may prove particularly useful at drawing attention and triggering responses from national, regional and international actors. In the context of the present theoretical framework, Elbe argues that the signal sent by the linking of HIV/AIDS with security would activate 'a shift out of the non-politicized status in many countries', thus allowing 'a proper politicization of the issue' and increased resources to be allocated (Elbe; 2006; pp.132). For example, giving greater importance to epidemic in the political agenda has benefited health sectors by becoming better resourced and the securitization at an international level has put pressure on national governments to address the issue. At an economic level, a major barrier preventing African countries from obtaining sufficient HIV medicines constitutes the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS).

These agreements entitle Western pharmaceutical companies to hold the patents on drugs, giving them exclusivity on the productivity and the pricing, generally unaffordable for African states. Hence, the use of HIV/AIDS/security nexus would enable the agreements to be overruled on the ground of "security exceptions" set up by the WTO, compelling pharmaceutical companies to lower the prices (Elbe; 2006; pp.134). Just as the "threat-defence" logic may trigger inadequate responses by states, it may also create an appeal for state to act as they perceive their national self-interests being threatened, whereas humanitarian incentives may not be strong enough for action (Elbe; 2006; pp.134). Although, the securitization of HIV/AIDS in Africa can produce a redirection of funding favouring the military, such a plan can contribute to wider positive effects on the general population, because the military has an essential role to play in addressing the issue. Progress made within the military through education due to extra funding are crucial in decreasing HIV prevalence amongst soldiers, but also highly important to the wider population because the likelihood of soldiers acting as vector is reduced. The crucial point made by Elbe is that such prioritization, as a consequence of securitizing the epidemic should not 'come at the expense of funding for civilian programs' (Elbe; 2006; pp.136). Ultimately, while normalization decreases the likelihood of people being discriminated against, one has to bear in mind that such strategy may introduce the danger of people being less aware about the risks posed by the disease (Elbe; 2006; pp.137). Therefore, it is necessary to emphasise that an equilibrium between normalization and securitization highlighting the dangers of HIV/AIDS has to be maintained.

To conclude, it is essential to stress that HIV/AIDS can be considered as a major threat to African security for several reasons. It has been found that AIDS has had a weakening effect upon African armies by causing considerable losses within the ranks especially amongst individuals with long military experience and reducing soldiers readiness to deploy effectively. From traditional state perspective, AIDS is therefore a threat because it renders state militaries vulnerable to external attacks. In Africa, it is established that the disease is increasingly deteriorating the political stability and establishment of democracy in many countries by eroding their institutional base, in turn increasing corruption and offering opportunities for revolts as desperation grows within the population. Thus, the epidemic creates the conditions of instability within states favourable for armed groups to carry out attacks against the establishment and other enemy ethnic groups. The likelihood of this scenario is reinforced by the loss of identity that groups of population suffer. Those who have lost attachment will turn to violence for survival, which strengthens ethnic groups and their tendency to engage in ethnic violence.

Although this represents worst thinking analysis, ignoring the impacts of AIDS upon the core components of African states would place the continent in greater danger. However, the state-centric approach should not overshadow the benefits that human security view could bring in identifying where the threats of HIV/AIDS lie. Whether HIV/AIDS can be considered a threat, also depends on how the disease is framed. Speech act theory demonstrated that the notion of HIV/AIDS as a threat has been constructed by actors through language of dramatization, thus allowing its shift from a health to a security issue. Nevertheless, this process of securitization remained incomplete as many actors opposed such a much move. Finally, this investigation has uncovered the dangers of framing HIV/AIDS as a security issue including the disproportionate and undemocratic involvement of the state further undermining people lives, while emphasising that state participation as a result of securitization may prove to be the solution as it may generate adequate and wide responses. Contrastingly, in broader terms the non-securitization should always remain an option, however HIV/AIDS in Africa has been let unnoticed long enough.

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Dr Victor Gigeux is an early-career foreign policy analyst and teaching assistant at The University of Edinburgh with expertise in small states' foreign policies, the EU's international roles and diplomatic practices as well as in peacekeeping. He is also the founder and co-convenor of the Foreign Policy Analysis Research Network (@RoleResearch). After completing his PhD in May 2018, Victor is now investigating the EU's use of foreign policy instruments, including sanctions and engagement, to promote human rights and democratic governance in non-member countries. Victor Gigeux is on Twitter @VictorGigeux