

SECURITISING BIOLOGY: BIOLOGICAL THREATS AND STATE PREPAREDNESS IN THE WAKE OF A PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

The management of infectious diseases in the realm of public health has shown increasingly overlapping areas with biological warfare preparedness. While the acknowledgement of these common elements is not only frequent but also codified in an international treaty and subject to distinct regulations, research into how these two fields connect is scarce. Potential deliberate use of biological weapons typically leads to intense political mobilisation and ensuing dedication of financial resources. Contrarily, the management of health crises over the last decades has been severely flawed, and no country in the world is considered fully prepared to a pandemic, according to the Global Health Security Index. The current COVID-19 pandemic has recently been further proof of the inadequacy of state-level prevention and preparedness capabilities. This dissertation aims at bridging the existing conceptual gap and policy divide between biological warfare and infectious disease preparedness, and to analyse elements that can be mutually applicable and potentially beneficial. It will do so by establishing analytical equivalence between the securitisation of an artificial biothreat and a nature-borne infectious disease in order to show that this approach (i.e., securitisation) has produced generally positive outcomes in the context of biothreat response and preparedness. Consequently, it will show that the opposite approach – anti-securitisation – has instead jeopardised the United States’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study thus constitutes the starting point for the elaboration of alternative views on the utility of applying the securitisation theory to the field of infectious diseases and of biothreats in general, with the purpose of improving national and international response to future outbreaks.