Ten years ago, Anthony Burke and I submitted an edited book manuscript to Manchester University Press: *Critical Security in the Asia-Pacific*. The book attempted to explore the contours and utility of a critical approach to security in the region. Such an approach, as we understood it, would entail an exploration of the politics and ethics of particular security representations and practices in the region; a willingness to focus on people as referent objects of security—those for whom security is to be promoted or realised; and an openness to a broad security agenda that recognised the multiple ways in which people are, and could be, threatened. We outlined a conception of a critical approach to security that encompassed both deconstructive and reconstructive impulses: the former aimed at exposing the assumptions and implications of traditional security discourses, the latter at building a normative case for alternative approaches to security. Contributors were asked to engage with various dimensions of such an approach and in particular to apply elements of the above either to key issues on the security agenda, or to issues neglected in dominant accounts of security studies and practice.

Given the ambitious scope of this project, it was necessarily a partial account of the security agenda in the region from a critical perspective. We could not do justice to the range of issues that such a perspective justifies analysing, and even our definition of the region itself was contestable. The book served, ultimately, as an illustration of the possible utility of viewing regional security through a critical lens, rather than a systematic examination of the security dynamics of the Asia-Pacific from a critical perspective. The chapters engaged with regionalism; the role of the military in southeast Asia; the economic-security relationship in the region; the role of epistemic communities in influencing security strategy in Singapore; separatism in Indonesia; human insecurity in Burma; Australian identity and security politics; environmental security; asylum; Chinese security discourses; nuclear proliferation; the ‘war on terror’; North Korea; and gender and security in the Asia-Pacific.

This paper reflects on this book ten years on, asking whether scholarly and practical trends have supported or undermined the case for a critical approach to security in making sense of (or indeed helping to shape) regional security dynamics. And together with the various contributions of three panels here at this conference, it explores what such a project might look like now—in terms of its scope, the issues covered or the ways in which previous authors might approach their contributions now. The first section reflects on key developments in the intervening decade, discussing the apparent return of regional geopolitics, changing security perceptions and approaches by a range of key actors, and the rise of India and the ‘Indo-Pacific’ regional frame. The second explores the regional ‘resonance’ of critical security, focusing in particular on scholarship in and about the region, and the take-up of related conceptualizations such as ‘human security’ and ‘non-traditional security’. The final section draws this analysis together, suggesting what a 2017 edition of *Critical Security in the Asia-Pacific* might look like.

**Key Developments**
If it is difficult to do justice to the range of ways in which Asia-Pacific security dynamics might be examined through a critical security lens in a book manuscript, it is near impossible to adequately account for changes in security dynamics in the region over the past decade in a short section of a paper. This ‘update’ will focus on three key dynamics. First, I will touch on the changing dynamics (some would say the ‘return’) of geopolitics associated with the US pivot to Asia and China’s actions in the South China Sea. Second, I will note the evolution of regional actors’ security discourses associated with shifting norms and perceptions (whether applied to Japan’s security normalization or ASEAN’s evolution, for example). And finally, I will briefly discuss the rise of India and its determination to take on a more assertive role in east Asian politics, most recently manifested in Prime Minister Modi’s ‘Act East’ foreign policy proclamations (Hall 2015; Rajendram 2014), along with the related rise of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ regional frame. All three have significant implications for regional security dynamics and for the ways in which a critical security approach might be applied or find some degree of policy purchase.

The Return of Geopolitics

In late 2011, US President Obama announced a foreign policy ‘pivot’ to East Asia. In the decades preceding this announcement, US foreign policy had focused significantly on dynamics in Europe and more recently the Middle East. As outlined by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton (2011), the ‘pivot’ would entail:

- Strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions;
- Expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.

While emphasizing the centrality of the region to broader global politics in making this commitment, it was interpreted by some as a response to the rising power of China and even the need to focus on China’s containment (Logan 2013). And it was also a commitment enabled by the steady withdrawal from the US’ military commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately for US strategic planners, realising this shift in emphasis from the Middle East/Europe to East Asia was complicated significantly by events in the Ukraine, the worsening situation in Iraq, the descent of Syria into civil war, and the rise of Islamic State. All required significant diplomatic attention, while the situation in Iraq and Syria has necessitated a recommitment of the US military.

While the US was attempting to re-engage the region, China was demonstrating new assertiveness in its approach to America’s regional allies, especially around the question of claims to the South China Sea. The subject of competing sovereignty claims, the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea- signed by China and ASEAN states- had raised hopes that such claims would be resolved through dialogue or international arbitration. China, however, raised stakes in its claims to an extensive area of the South China Sea with a 2009 submission to the United Nations asserting the continued validity of a map of territory it first published in 1947. But it was in 2014 that China began drilling near the contested Paracel Islands, and commenced a process of island construction on submerged reefs in the Spratly Islands. These developments were vehemently opposed by Vietnam and the Philippines.
respectively. The United States has also been critical of these developments, and has continued to allow naval vessels to patrol in areas near Chinese-occupied territory despite China’s attempts to restrict navigation rights.1

This issue is clearly significant for many of the claimants and indeed in broader economic terms: around one third of global maritime trade passes through the South China Sea, and it is believed to hold significant oil and gas reserves. Yet for some, it is as significant for its role in showcasing a more ‘assertive’ Chinese foreign and security policy approach, one more consistent with offensive Realist claims that China will become more revisionist than status-quo oriented as its material power capacity relative to the United States grows (see, eg, Mearsheimer 2006). The issue is one that not only risks becoming a site of conflict between claimant states, but an axis of great power regional conflict that draws in other parties, such as Australia. For all its various and uncertain implications, the apparent return of great power rivalry and the threat of interstate conflict in the region arguably undermines the extent to which a broader security agenda or normative security vision is likely to gain more traction in the Asia-Pacific.

**Evolving Regional Actors**

While all actors’ circumstances and security perspectives have changed in the past decade, some have shifted more than others. Ten years on, we have seen changes in the regional security architecture and something of a shift in the approach of existing institutions such as ASEAN, while Japan and Indonesia’s conception of and approach to security looks to have shifted ground substantially since 2007.

On institutions, the past ten years have seen the further development of the East Asia Summit (whose first meeting was in 2005), and the establishment of an ASEAN + 8 organization focusing on defence cooperation and military training (including 10 ASEAN member states along with China, Japan, South Korea, the US, India, Russia, Australia and New Zealand). This complicates making sense of an already somewhat messy combination of institutions in the region, with overlapping and changing membership and emphasis often reflecting different visions of what regional (security) architecture is for (see Tan 2011). We have also seen important developments in the last decade with mature institutions such as ASEAN.

ASEAN has traditionally been viewed as an organization suspicious of deep political integration, and defined by its commitment to non-intervention in the affairs of other member states. Yet as Allan Collins (2013) notes, ASEAN departed from its strict interpretation of the ‘non-interference’ norm in its response to the Burmese military’s violent crackdown on protesters in that year (part of the so-called Saffron Revolution). While stopping short of applying the sanctions enacted by other states, ASEAN’s position was one that suggested a willingness to engage in both public criticism of the military’s actions and an unwillingness to support Burma’s position in the United Nations, for example. And on the question of integration, we saw the endorsement of the ASEAN Charter in 2008, the 2015 establishment of an ASEAN Economic Community, pointing to further integration of the region, and a commitment to an ASEAN Political Security Community Blueprint for realization in 2025. Whether these trends are in

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1 China scrambled two fighter jets to expel a US guided missile destroyer from an area close to Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands in May 2016, describing the US action as an ‘illegal threat to peace’ (ABC 2016).
response to the growing sense of community in the region, as proponents suggest, or the growing threat posed by China, as critics suggest, this period has seen significant shifts in the ways in which ASEAN can be understood, including as a security actor (see Jones 2012). Recognising the dynamics and significance of these changes in security terms requires an interpretivist approach and an ideational ontology that encourages a focus on the possibility of changing identities and institutions (see, for example, Acharya 2014; Hameiri and Jones 2013).

We have also seen changing security perspectives and approaches from consequential state actors in the region. Increasing political stability under democracy in Indonesia has enabled a more outward looking and ambitious foreign and security policy approach, with Indonesia increasingly demonstrating a willingness to weigh in on regional security debates and issues. In Japan, the process of security ‘normalization’ has been a significant shift in its approach to the region and in its conception of security. Under Prime Minister Abe in July 2014, Japan’s cabinet formally reinterpreted the limitations of Article 9 of its constitution, a move that would allow Japan to engage in collective self-defence. In the previous twelve months, Abe had already increased Japan’s military budget for the first time in a decade, created a national security council and ended a ban on weapons exports (Leaf 2014). Such developments appear oriented towards a more assertive China, and possibly lingering doubts over the US’ extended deterrence.

**The Rise of India and the Indo-Pacific**

Another key change in the region has been the continued rise-in both capacity and significance-of India as a regional player. From the 1990s India had committed to orient its foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific, under its so-called ‘Look East’ policy approach. But a significant increase in both ambition and capacity in recent years has ensured a genuine relevance to regional security dynamics (see Pardesi 2015). Since 2002, India has increased its defence spending by two thirds, and now has the 6th largest military budget in the world. This has been at least in part facilitated by significant economic growth, with India now a top 10 global economy, and the world’s second largest country in terms of population. While substantial domestic challenges remain (the millions still living in poverty, environmental damage and lingering internal security concerns), India’s recent policy approach has been increasingly assertive on questions of its foreign policy ambition. Indeed current Prime Minister Modi has shifted the language of Indian foreign policy from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ since coming to power in 2014. While the extent to which the ‘Act East’ language ushered in a new foreign and security policy doctrine is questionable (see Hall 2015), it reinforced a broader sense that India was keen to take on a more interventionist strategic role in the region. Given its role as a de facto nuclear power, along with a history of animosity with China, this increase in capacity and ambition has important implications for the region.

India’s increasing relevance to the geopolitics of the region is recognised in both a push for the country to become a member of APEC, promoted aggressively by former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and the reconceptualization of the Asia-Pacific region as the ‘Indo-Pacific’. The latter, promoted by analysts such as Rory Medcalf (2014; 2013), is a label that represents an acknowledgement of the growing significance of the region in commercial and strategic terms, China’s growing engagement in the Indian Ocean sphere, and the scale of increase in India’s material (and especially military) capacity (see also Phillips 2013a).
China clearly looms large over the shifting foreign and security policy orientation of India: both in terms of internal drivers of policy and the interests of allies in drawing India into the region to assist with counterbalancing China. Although dissolved in 2008, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia and India seemed to represent a geopolitical circling of China, for example. In these contexts the continued rise of India, and its desire to assert itself more robustly in the region, means that it becomes difficult to examine the security dynamics in the region without a sustained analysis of the role of India.

A Resonance for Critical Security?

In academic work on security in or about the region, assessing the fortunes of a critical approach in terms of its take-up and application depends very much on the way ‘critical’ is understood. In the original edition of our book, several scholars (see, for example, Davies, Elliott, McDonald and Lee-Koo in Burke and McDonald eds. 2007) indicated support for a large C, large T vision of Critical Theory (see Brown 1994) which explicitly endorsed emancipation. Building on the work of the Frankfurt School, and later Ken Booth (1991), these contributors defined security in terms of freeing the most vulnerable from unnecessary structural constraints that created harm and constrained life choices.

If judged in terms of the take-up of an explicitly emancipatory political and normative agenda in the region, the critical security project has been a failure. The ‘critical security’ frame does not feature in course offerings among key institutions in the region, at least once our focus moves north of Australia. Few articles in journals or monographs in book series that constitute key outlets for critical approaches to security feature an Asian focus or even an Asian case study. This applies, from an albeit brief survey, to journals such as Critical Studies on Security or Security Dialogue, and book series such as Routledge’s Critical Security Studies or Manchester University Press’ New Approaches to Conflict Analysis series - the series in which our book originally appeared. Conversely, journals focused on security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific do not feature papers outlining an explicitly ‘critical security’ approach, and are dominated by analyses of the traditional security agenda: the South China Sea dispute; the broader ‘rise of China’ debate; counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency; regional security architecture; and the US role in the region. This applies to journals such as Asian Security, The Pacific Review and, to a lesser extent, International Relations of the Asia-Pacific.

But dismissing the purchase of a critical approach to security in the academy on these grounds is problematic for a number of reasons. In particular, while the labels of ‘critical security’ or ‘emancipation’ may not be prominent, analysis in the broad ‘critical’ tradition has grown substantially in scholarship on and within the region. Constructivist analyses of security and those applying the ‘securitization’ framework have been increasingly common. Such accounts reflect an interest in the constructed nature of both security threats and security referents, challenging traditional conceptions of the origins of security interests and pointing to the politics of security and threat construction. Of course Amitav Acharya’s (2014) work has been central to examining the evolution of ASEAN as a security community in the constructivist tradition, while Evelyn Goh’s (2013) analysis of regional order building in the region also draws on constructivist

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2 Indeed it was Chinese objections to this dialogue that saw new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd withdraw Australia from the talks after coming to power.
thought. On securitization too, a range of analysts have identified the ways in which ‘new’
security issues such as disease, migration, environmental change, and energy access have been
constructed as security threats (see Curley 2008; Hameiri 2014; Phillips 2013b). But we also see
attempts to examine and account for traditional security dynamics through such analyses, with
analysts exploring the securitization of issues such as the South China Sea dispute (eg Lynch
2015). To the extent that these analyses challenge traditional approaches to security, illustrate the
politics of security and/or articulate a broader ontology of security, all can be located in a critical
security tradition or approach.

The above accounts might be viewed as ‘deconstructive’ rather than ‘reconstructive’: breaking
down existing assumptions or dynamics of security and its construction, rather than developing a
normative position on the way security should be understood and approached. As noted, the latter
is closer to the emancipatory impulse of the so-called ‘Welsh School’ of critical security studies
(see Booth 1991; Browning and McDonald 2013). Even here, however, we can discern an
increased willingness to articulate visions of how security should be understood and approached
in the Asian context. This is evident in analyses endorsing ‘human security’, an approach that
entails a focus on the suffering of people rather than the defence of states or the stability of the
region (eg Curley 2012; Nishikawa 2010; Elliott et al eds. 2013). It is evident too in endorsement
of ‘non-traditional security’. Here, analysts have argued that the range of acknowledged threats to
security should be extended beyond military threats to transnational challenges such as
environmental change, disease, crime and migration (Caballero-Anthony ed. 2016; Hameiri and
Jones 2013; de Ceuster 2014). Human security and non-traditional security ultimately both make
claims about what security should mean- one decoupled from realist accounts that emphasise the
territorial preservation of the nation-state from (usually external) military threat.

While these approaches encourage a changing conception of what should count as a threat (non-
traditional security), and even whose security matters (human security) in the region, there
remain pressing questions about the relationship between power and knowledge and the extent
to which these approaches are as transformative as implied. Both clearly have particular
resonance and traction in the region. Human security was embraced by the Japanese government
(Bacon 2014) and has been taken up in a range of analyses of regional security dynamics, as
noted. And while a search for ‘critical security’ in prominent academic search engines reveals few
entries with a focus on Asia, the same can certainly not be said of ‘non-traditional security’.
Indeed the NTS in Singapore is home to the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies,
comprising a network of research institutes and think tanks.

For human security advocates, whether their focus is Asia or elsewhere, the challenge has been
the extent to which theirs is an agenda that has been ‘co-opted’ by states, whether practices in
the name of ‘human security’ move beyond business-as-usual, and whether the approach
ultimately defaults to existing institutions and actors as security agents (see McDonald 2012). For
non-traditional security advocates, the danger here is the extent to which the focus ultimately
endorses existing conceptions, agents and referents of security while adding new threats. This
has always been among key criticisms of ‘environmental security’ advocates: that in making the
case for viewing environmental issues as security issues they still fail to genuinely engage with the
meaning of security (see Krause and Williams 1996), and can fall short of asking us to reflect upon
or interrogate questions such as ‘who is security for?’ and ‘what work does security do


politically?’ (see McDonald 2013). In this sense, we might ask whether the ‘NTS’ framing moves us sufficiently beyond the politics and problems of existing accounts of security as taken up and applied in the region. Does it continue to focus our attention on the preservation of the status quo, for example? And is it essentially ‘business as usual’ in security terms with some additional threats thrown into the mix? These were concerns we raised in the 2007 book, not only about some scholarship in the region but also the supposed embrace of ‘comprehensive security’ by institutions such as ASEAN.

There is certainly an issue here if analysts are orienting towards the NTS framing because of its apparent political purchase or at least acceptability: this would imply that policy preferences are serving to define the limits of intellectual inquiry. This is a particularly significant issue in a region in which question marks remain about the extent of academic freedom, including in leading sites for security studies like China (Phillips and Pilkington 2016) and Singapore (Kinser 2015): the latter the home of the Centre for Non-Traditional Security.

There is also some evidence to support the idea that in some instances, states are emphasizing non-traditional security issues and cooperation associated with it as a mechanism for consolidating strategic partnerships driven by more traditional strategic concern. This might be applied to the example of responses to the 2004 tsunami. Here, the US, Japan, India and Australia established a coalition to coordinate aid delivery, in the process solidifying strategic relations while responding to regional disaster. Such a development suggests challenges associated with making clear distinctions between a traditional and non-security agenda, challenges heightened if non-traditional security is still viewed through the lens of state security.

These issues raise important questions about the politics of security as applied to critical approaches, especially those that wish to contribute to debates about security practices: should our concern be with speaking truth to power and articulating a bold vision for substantially different sets of approaches and actors, or engaging with those institutions and actors with capacity to enact change, attempting to encourage more progressive practices in the process? Of course, this is a simplistic binary in the sense that scholarship (and individual scholars) can do both. But it serves to remind us of the importance of engaging with the politics of security. We should be in a position to articulate grounds for incremental progressive change to those with the power to enact it, even while compelling ourselves to keep sight of a vision of security worlds that are genuinely ethically defensible. This is a challenge for a critical approach to security, but one in which intellectual openness, humility and reflexivity – combined with acceptance of a division of academic labour within the broad contours of such an approach – might go some way to addressing.

**What would change?**

If genuinely crafting a text now that better reflected changes in security configurations and dynamics since 2007, what would change? First, the conception of the region would change. As the earlier discussion of the rise of India suggests, it is difficult to justify excluding India from an analysis of Asia-Pacific security dynamics, certainly compared with states such as Australia. The importance of India to Asia-Pacific security is suggested by its growth and commitment to

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3 I am indebted to Andrew Phillips on this point.
deeper strategic engagement with the region in its foreign and security policy, its inclusion within key institutions in the region, and the increasing embrace of the terminology of the ‘Indo-Pacific’. While an expanding ontological focus would clearly pose challenges, including to the title of the book, drawing a line at the western border of Myanmar or the southern border of China does not do justice to the changing configurations of influence and power in the region.

Another complicated question concerns which issues should be the subject of analysis. At one level, a critical perspective of course enables and even encourages a focus on issues less immediately visible on the security agenda. This is a core insight of feminist approaches to international security (see, for example, Enloe 2000; Shepherd 2013; Tickner 2004). And many analyses in the original text remain prescient even in the context of substantial change. While Roland Bleiker’s chapter on the future challenges associated with dealing with a nuclear North Korea was written just months after Pyongyang’s first nuclear test in 2006, his analysis remains remarkably applicable even after the demise of Kim Jong-Il and further nuclear tests in 2009, 2013 and 2016.

Yet there were certainly issues we included because of their apparent significance to the regional security agenda, and flow-on implications for the lives of people in the region, that have arguably declined in significance in the intervening years. The 2007 book featured analyses of the US-led War on Terror, the struggle for democracy in Burma, and separatism in Indonesia. None of these issues have wholly disappeared. The threat of jihadi Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia remains, profound limits to Burmese democracy are still evident even after the transition to elections, and activists continue to agitate for autonomy or independence in West Papua, Aceh and Ambon, for example. Yet other issues, from India’s engagement with the region, the dynamics of contestation over the South China Sea, disaster prevention and management, and the significance of energy security, for example, suggest themselves as alternative candidates for a contemporary analysis of Asia-Pacific security dynamics. All issues could benefit in particular from a critical perspective, one engaging with whose security these threats challenge and the assumptions upon which actors’ engagement with security dynamics of the region are based.

Conclusion

When assessed in terms of the take up of the term ‘critical security’ in scholarship, or the prospects of a normatively driven engagement with security in practice, the past decade has not appeared promising. As noted, the term has not found a significant foothold in scholarship in or about Asian security, especially when understood in terms of emancipatory politics. And the re-emergence of great power politics and geopolitical challenges in the region, with accompanied concerns about interstate conflict, has arguably made it difficult for broader security issues or non-state referent objects to find their way onto security agenda or into debates about security. This is perhaps unsurprising- it was the waning and end of the Cold War that enabled the broader and deeper security agenda to gain international purchase, a product both of the apparent capacity to focus on threats other than nuclear warfare and the possibility of imagining genuine international cooperation to address transnational challenges. In this context, the apparent return of great power state rivalry in the region arguably pushes against recognition of an extended range of threats and referent objects.
Yet on both counts, to dismiss either the purchase or utility of a critical security perspective would be a significant error. On the issue of the contemporary security agenda in the region, two points need to be made. First, a critical perspective is crucial for allowing us to genuinely understand those dynamics. The reductionism and simplicity of the question of whether China is a ‘revisionist’ or ‘status quo’ power does not remotely do justice to the drivers of Chinese foreign and security policy nor changes in its approach to international relations over time. While its actions in the South China Sea may appear reckless or bellicose, this was also a state that has committed to support international action on climate change (at least in Paris in 2015), and endorsed the ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) principle. Indeed in the interests of managing the potential misuse of R2P to justify military intervention or the imposition of models of governance, a case could be made that China’s continued caution on the ‘application’ of the concept has allowed it to take on a constructive role in global debates (Teitt 2011). A critical approach, especially one that entails a genuine focus on domestic politics, changing responses to international normative contexts and the centrality of interpretation of the actions of others is central to making sense of China’s foreign and security policy perspectives. This was a point made compellingly by Yongjin Zhang in the 2007 edition of the book.

Second, a critical perspective encourages a normative commitment to recall the costs of a focus on the territorial preservation of the nation-state from (usually external) military threat, and the need to focus our attention on the rights and needs of vulnerable populations in the region. While issues such as great power rivalry may dominate the regional security agenda, a critical perspective encourages us to recognise that this is neither inevitable nor necessarily justifiable. On the question of inevitability, critical perspectives drawing on constructivism or securitization point to the shifting nature of security agenda and the capacity for different issues or threats to rise and fall. And on justifiability, as advocates of human security or an emancipatory approach to security would argue, we cannot continue to ignore the scale and effects of poverty, disease, natural disasters, political repression and environmental change while claiming a focus on the dynamics that genuinely threaten the lives and livelihoods of people in the region. The introduction to our 2007 book began with the example of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 in making the case for the relevance of a broader security agenda and a return to a focus on people. The introduction to a text 10 years later could easily begin with a discussion of climate-induced flooding in south Asia, the political repression of Rohingya populations in Myanmar, or the devastating effects of the 2011 tsunami in Japan.

Finally, on the issue of take-up in the academy, both within Asia and in scholarship about the region, it is difficult to justify dismissing the relevance and purchase of a critical security approach. While those explicitly endorsing emancipation might be few on the ground (beyond the 2007 edition of our book), authors engaging with Asian security dynamics have increasingly embraced constructivist approaches, the securitization framework, a non-traditional security focus and an emphasis on the imperative of human security. All of these developments in the academy push us beyond a narrow and atavistic focus on national security from a realist (and especially structural realist) perspective, and all were difficult to imagine on either the political or academic agenda in the region as recently as 20 years ago. There may be lingering concerns about how far these frameworks and concepts ultimately push us, and whether they remain too wedded to existing security agents and agenda. But there is little doubt they move beyond traditional
security perspectives, and encourage recognition of the widening and deepening of security. The challenge will ultimately be to continue to promote this agenda and demonstrate the benefits of a critical security perspective in deepening our understanding of existing security dynamics, while exploring opportunities to push both scholarship and practice further in recognizing the normative imperative of changing the way we think and act in security terms. It is that challenge that the papers in this series of panels attempt to take up.

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