



Martin SEARLE

Martin Searle is an Associate Research Fellow at the Centre Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. His research focuses on migration and on the implications of new technologies on humanitarian theory and practice.

Martin previously worked six years with the international medical humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF). During that time he worked in South Sudan, Central African Republic, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Malaysia on a mixture of conflict response, healthcare exclusion, HIV and TB treatment, and migrant and asylum issues. He also worked at MSF headquarters on communications and advocacy for the South and Southeast Asia operational portfolio.

Managing politicisation to prevent securitisation: Migration policies in Southeast and East Asia

Abstract:

Migration in much of Southeast and East Asia is a significantly politicised issue, as it is in Europe and the US. Using the twin frameworks of securitisation and human security theory, this paper argues that, in contrast to Europe and the US, policy-makers in this region face overwhelming incentives to mitigate and placate that politicisation in order to prevent migration from being constructed as an overwhelming security challenge. Those motivations stem from the reliance of both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries on migration within their respective economic growth strategies. That dependence is made even heavier given those countries' use of economic growth to deliver political legitimacy.

The paper highlights ways regional policy makers seek to manage this tension between facilitating migration on the one hand and being seen to tackle the "threats" constructed around that migration on the other. The paper argues that these policies produce a contradiction within the concept of human security. Fundamentally, the policies result in human security's focus on ensuring people's "freedom from want" undermining its parallel priority of ensuring their "freedom from fear." This produces highly ambiguous results for the wellbeing of migrants themselves.