GLOBAL SECURITY

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Contents

Summary

Security has traditionally been related more to states than to people or planet Earth. Since the seventeenth century, when the current system of states began to emerge, security has been most commonly understood and practiced with reference to the needs and interests of states. Often, the state itself came to be treated as the subject of security rather than the means of providing security for its inhabitants. In the post-World War II era, the focus on the well-being of states was reflected in the dominance of approaches seeking "national security." Notwithstanding alternative understandings and practices of security that have always existed, it was this state-focused and externally-directed approach that prevailed throughout the Cold War era. Although alternative thinking that pointed to the individual, societal, and global dimensions of security began to develop during the Cold War it did not flourish until after it ended. Especially since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the global dimension of security has also gained prominence. It remains rare, however, for the planet to be treated as the subject of security in its own right. Instead, it is more common for prevailing approaches to portray the global dimension of security as a context within which threats to "national security" emerge.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the modern state system in the seventeenth century, it has been common for security to be understood and practiced with reference to the needs and interests of states. Although in its early origins, the idea of popular sovereignty suggested that the state should be considered an *instrument* for producing security for

its citizens, with the establishment and retrenchment of the state-system in the seventeenth century the state itself came to be treated as the *subject* of security. After World War II, this approach focused on providing "national security" wherein security was related more to states than to people or to the planet. But this was not the only approach. Alternative thinking and practice which pointed to the individual, societal and global dimensions of security also developed during the Cold War. This essay traces security thinking during the Cold War and lays out the multiple dimensions of human and global insecurities as experienced in the twenty-first century. It then turns to look at the global dimension of security that has increasingly come to prominence since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. As will be seen, the global dimension of security is still far from being treated as a subject in its own right but is usually portrayed as a context within which threats to "national security" emerge.

2. Cold War Approaches to Security

In its initial formulations, human beings were treated as the ultimate referent for security studies. For example, social contract theories explain the need relationship between the "sovereign" and "the people" in terms of the latter's need to exchange the exercise of sovereignty for security. In this early arrangement, "the people" were the referent of security whereas the "sovereign" was the agent allocated the job of security provision.

Over time, however, the state has come to be treated as the primary referent. The problem is that in many cases, states did not always fulfill their side of the bargain and became agents of insecurity rather than providers of security. Sometimes this was the result of governments deliberately persecuting particular segments of their populations. At other times insecurity was generated by privileging the concerns of a majority or a dominant group/class/gender/race. Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, for example, have shown how militarism at home has consequences for women's security and sociologists such as Paul Gilroy have highlighted how racial hierarchies persisted as part of mainstream politics even in apparently developed and secure states such as the United Kingdom.

2.1. National Security – The Focal Point of Cold War Approaches to Security

The first reference to "national security" found in official US documentation is in the National Security Act of 1947. This sought to pull together and coordinate various efforts related to the security of the state, including defense, intelligence and planning. An early definition was provided by the U.S. public intellectual Walter Lippmann in *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Shield of the Republic* (1943). "A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war." In this formulation, "national security" was really about "state security." In those contexts such as the Soviet Union where the term "state security" was preferred, the choice of terminology reflected not attention to detail but politics – the Soviet Union, which suffered from what was popularly referred to as "the nationalities question," refrained from invoking the "nation" in policy discourse. In other contexts, as with the post-colonial world, the concept of "national security" was embraced as a tool for ostensibly

bringing together peoples in the joint project of building a "nation-state."

Reflection upon the potential implications of such a versatile concept did not take long to emerge. The first and perhaps finest example of such reflection can be found in US political scientist Arnold Wolfers' 1957 essay entitled "National security as an ambiguous symbol." Warning against the use of "national security" by policymakers and analysts to justify any policy they favoured, Wolfers called on his colleagues for more precision in conceptualizing "national security" so that not anything and everything can be justified by invoking this very powerful concept. His call was either not heeded by his colleagues, or policymakers were not inclined to let go of this powerful tool in that throughout the Cold War era, "national security" served as the linchpin of policymaking in different parts of the world. In 1983, Barry Buzan's survey revealed that "national security" retained its quality as an "ambiguous concept" – indeed it was precisely its ambiguity which facilitated its employment as an ideological tool.

Over the years, the concern with the security of states did not merely reflect state practices but was reinforced by the academic study of world politics in universities. In particular, the prevalence of Realist theories of International Relations reinforced a state-centered outlook, a military-focus, and a scientific-objectivist understanding of theory and the theory/practice relationship in the study of security (see McSweeney 1999: Part 1). Let us look at each of these characteristics.

State-centrism involved treating the state as the central actor in world politics and concentrating on the activities of states when studying international phenomena. Realism's state-centered outlook certainly introduced a degree of neatness and clarity to the study of the complexity of international phenomena. But as with all simplifications, many crucial aspects were lost in the process. It was also notable that despite this focus on states, state-building was under-theorized; states were taken to be "black boxes" the internal components of which were not considered worth investigating.

Realism's *military-focus* manifested itself in a search for militarized solutions to problems that could also have been addressed through non-military means. Military factors and capabilities were given greater attention in the threat assessments and policy calculations of states as the East-West conflict intensified during the 1960s. Indeed, for some analysts it seemed as if foreign policy could be equated with deterrence.

Realism's *scientific-objectivist* understanding of theory and the theory/practice relationship resulted in essentially (but not always openly) normative theories masquerading as "objective" approaches to international phenomena. Opinions based on "scientific knowledge" were treated as credible whilst the explicitly normative approaches of some of their critics were presented as mere opinion or "propaganda."

Not surprisingly, the other major influence on Cold War security studies was the Cold War itself. This exerted a gravitational pull on how the discipline emerged, developed and was sustained.

2.2. Cold War Thinking On the Individual and Societal Dimensions of Security

2.2.1. The Commission on Global Governance and Common Security

It was Mikhail Gorbachev's adoption of the precepts of common security thinking that made the headlines and brought critical approaches to the forefront of world politics during the 1980s. Common security is based on the idea that security must be sought and maintained not against one's adversary, but with him/her. This is because states, in search for security, may end up rendering themselves even less secure by enhancing their military power, which causes the others to feel insecure and increase their own military power in response – the condition referred to as the security dilemma (see Booth and Wheeler 2007). Common security seeks to mitigate the security dilemma by organizing security policies in coordination with the others to maximize mutual as opposed to unilateral security.

The need for such coordinated approaches was considered more acute in a Cold War environment characterized by the imminent threat of global nuclear catastrophe. Olof Palme, in his introduction to the report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues entitled *Common Security: A Programme for Disarmament* (1982) wrote: "Our alternative is common security. There can be no hope of victory in a nuclear war, the two sides would be united in suffering and destruction. They can survive only together. They must achieve security not against the adversary but with him. International security must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on a threat of mutual destruction." By putting common security into practice, Gorbachev changed the Soviet approach to arms control by means of accepting sufficiency rather than seeking parity with the United States. Accordingly, the Soviet Union was able to make unilateral concessions in arms reduction, which, in turn, took away the West's threat and paved the way for the end of the Cold War.

2.2.2. Academic Peace Research and Stable Peace

Although it was students of common security who emphasized global security and pointed to its non-military dimensions, before them academic Peace Research had laid the intellectual groundwork by producing studies that focused on individuals and social groups as well as a potential global society as referents for security. Students of Peace Research also suggested alternative (non-military, non-zero sum, non-violent) security practices putting special emphasis on peace education and the role of the intellectual.

The works of Johan Galtung and Kenneth Boulding were critical in pointing to the individual and societal dimensions of security. According to the "maximal" approach introduced by Galtung, peace in its positive sense did not just mean the absence of war; it was also related to the establishment of conditions for social justice. In making this point, Galtung distinguished between "personal" or "direct" and "structural violence." The latter is defined as those socio-economic institutions and relations that oppress human beings by preventing them from realizing their potential. Violence, for Galtung, is all those "avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life*, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible." In addition to distinguishing between direct and structural violence, Galtung also defined "cultural

violence" as those mechanisms that render acceptable both direct (as in killing, repression, or de-socialization) and structural violence (exploitation, penetration or marginalization). Thus, Galtung turned both the use of violence and the ways in which that use is legitimized by the society into a subject of study for students of Peace Research. By adopting a broader definition of violence and an approach that focused on human needs, Galtung and other peace researchers shifted the focus away from the state and the military dimension of security, to individuals and social groups and their needs.

Galtung underlined the futility of the task of trying to achieve peace without tackling the structural causes of the security of individuals, social groups as well as states. Distinguishing between "negative" and "positive" peace, Galtung argued that peace defined merely as the absence of armed conflict is only a "negative peace." "Positive peace" on the other hand referred to the absence of both direct (physical) violence, and indirect (structural and cultural) violence. Galtung emphasized that to attain positive peace it is not enough to seek to eliminate violence; existing institutions and relations should be geared towards the enhancement of dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among peoples coupled with a respect for the environment.

Spurred on by debates with Galtung, Kenneth Boulding's conception of "stable peace" was invaluable in emphasizing that peace maintained through the threat and use of force cannot be stable. Boulding explained stable peace by comparing it with unstable peace (peace maintained through threatening mutual annihilation, i.e. nuclear deterrence). Unstable peace is defined as a condition in which no real expectations exist that peace (understood as the mere absence of armed conflict) will be maintained in the future. Stable peace, in contrast, exists when two sides learn how to make peace through creating trusting relationships that disarm people's minds as well as their institutions. Such relationships, argued Boulding, would stand the stress of crises that threaten to tear them apart simply because of the existence of firm expectations regarding future relations.

Another crucial contribution of Peace Research was the emphasis put on the increasing inappropriateness of established ways of thinking about security for the security concerns of individuals and social groups in the West. The practices of Western European peace movements during the 1970s and 1980s also served to drive this lesson home. This was a concern shared by students of Third World security, who maintained that Western-originated state-focused approaches were unable to address the security needs and interests of state as well as non-state actors in the Third World. Cold War approaches focused on East/West stability and its maintenance through nuclear deterrence and nuclear power balancing, whereas some Third World states had been trying to reject the automatic categorization of their problems into an East/West framework—as was the case with the Non-aligned Movement.

2.2.3. Third World Approaches

Students of Third World security criticized the almost exclusive focus on crises and conflicts within established (Cold War) ways of thinking about security often to the neglect of "longitudinal security processes" – processes of development through which the security of individuals and social groups are maintained. The writings of academic

Peace Research, especially Galtung's stress on the structural causes of insecurity struck a chord with Third World policymakers in an era marked by the formation of the Non-aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and the calls for a New International Economic Order at the United Nations. The Non-aligned Movement was composed of a group of states, which emphasized the differences between their security agendas and that of superpowers. The ideology of the movement constituted a fundamental challenge to mainstream thinking at the time.

During the 1980s some students of Third World security took up these issues once again. Caroline Thomas differentiated between two approaches to security. The first approach was adopted by those states in the developed world that were (relatively) satisfied with the status quo and saw security mainly in terms of its maintenance. They privileged the maintenance of stability of the existing system as a foremost security concern. The second and more holistic approach, argued Thomas, was adopted by those states in the Third World that included economic, political and environmental issues in their security agenda. The search for security in the Third World was mostly about maintaining domestic security through state-building, establishing secure systems of food, health, money and trade as much as it was about military build-up. Accordingly, many Third World states saw a change in the status quo not necessarily as a threat but as conducive to security – provided that change came in the desired direction, that is, towards the creation of an international economic structure sensitive to the needs of Third World states.

Although the distinction Thomas drew between the security needs and interests of developed and developing states is helpful to a certain extent, it should be stressed that not all developing states were against the status quo. Indeed, it was not always the case that the Western conception of security was top-down, whereas that of the Third World was bottom-up. Rather, there were both developed and developing states (and non-state actors) among those that propagated top-down views on security. For instance, when some Third World policymakers spoke of the need to address the non-military dimensions of insecurity, they often meant the need to curb the right of their citizens to exercise democratic freedoms in an attempt to strengthen their regime. The practical implication of this state-focused approach to security was the state's domination over society where society's sacrifices were viewed as obligations. The state's privileges, in turn, were justified as being necessary for its survival. Accordingly, those who dared to challenge the security practices of their states and pointed to the individual and societal dimensions of security were marginalized at best, or accused of treachery and persecuted at worst.

Bottom-up views of security voiced by non-state actors in the Third World did not get heard unless they adopted violent practices in the attempt to form a state (as in the case of the Palestine Liberation Organization) or capture state power in their own countries (as with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hezbollah). The efforts of those such as the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria that undertook grassroots activism during the 1980s and set up a network of medical clinics and charitable associations serving the poorest and most crowded localities that the government failed to reach, were clouded by their violent practices which characterized most of the period that followed the 1991 elections.

There are significant exceptions to this generalization though. The Palestinian Intifada managed to capture the world's attention as well as sympathy during the 1980s by relying on non-violence—a practice mastered by Gandhi during the period that preceded India's independence. The Zapatistas in Mexico have also been successful in getting their voices heard through mostly non-violent means. They chose to represent the enormous poverty and misery experienced in the Chiapas (together with a significant portion of the Mexican population) by adopting the language of anti-globalization movements around the world. By timing their uprising for the day of the beginning of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association) the Zapatistas successfully pointed to the detrimental effects of neoliberal globalization in general and its impact on indigenous peoples in particular.

Much of the critical thinking (and practices) surveyed above remained on the margins throughout most of the Cold War. Critics of Cold War security thinking were themselves criticized for their "normative" or "political" approaches to international affairs. It was in the post-Cold War period that these issues were revived once again by students of security who took up the opportunity presented by the disappearance of the Soviet Union to broaden the security agenda (by including the non-military dimensions of security) and to point to threats faced by individuals and social groups.

3. Post-Cold War Approaches: Re-thinking Security

The end of the Cold War provoked a long overdue interest in re-thinking commonly held assumptions as well as practices of security around the world. The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of works that rejected the inherent primacy of the state and focused instead on the individual, societal and global dimensions of security and how they interacted with the state system. As a consequence, some argued that "International Security" might no longer be the best label for the newly emerging field given that an inter-state framework was no longer considered sufficient. "Global security" or "world security" were proposed as alternatives.

In the post-Cold War era, the academic debate on security was accompanied by an increasing number of governments which claimed they were interested in promoting "human security" (see below). The next part of this essay discusses some of the key questions and concepts that formed the security debates of the 1990s.

3.1. Whose Security?

In the post-Cold War era, academic studies on security took more sociological forms than ever before. In a path-breaking article published in 1991, Ken Booth questioned the dominant answers to the question: whose security should we be focusing on? The choice of referent object had huge repercussions for the types of threats to be addressed and the type of solutions to be provided. For example, from the perspective of a superpower concerned with the maintenance of its regional and global interests, so-called "rogue states" constitute the most important threat to international security. A recent example for this could be found in United States President George W. Bush's as articulation of the "axis of evil" and its central role in undermining international peace and security. The three states in question – Iraq, Iran and North Korea – were depicted

as "outlaw regimes that possess and are developing chemical, biological and nuclear weapons as well as the missiles to develop them." These states were viewed as threatening not only because of their destructive potential, but also because of their support for international terrorism and repression of their own people. On the other hand, from the perspective of people who took to the streets to demonstrate against US policies towards Iraq, or Israel's policies towards the Palestinians, it is human rights violations, economic injustice and political oppression that constitute the main threat to their security. Indeed, from the perspective of a Saudi woman, the major threat to her life chances is not Iraqi weapons of mass destruction but her own government's policies. From the perspective of Egyptian schoolchildren, it is the accumulation of weapons systems that threaten their long-term security by directing valuable resources away from education and healthcare.

This stark contrast between the security interests of governments and individuals—the so-called "Scuds versus butter" dilemma all Middle Eastern governments have to face—is also voiced by Moroccan author Fatima Mernissi who has asked: "How can Arab women hope to overcome opposition in their societies and go out in search of paid work if the economies of their countries are devoting a large part of their wealth to unproductive expenditures like the importation of weapons that don't even serve any useful purpose, as the Gulf War amply demonstrated?" Viewed through her lenses, those extra-regional governments which sell the weaponry, those regional governments which prioritize their own security and invest in the military, and those individuals and social groups who fear the changes that democracy and human rights may introduce to their daily lives, could all be considered as partners in maintaining this climate of human insecurity. In sum, the simple question of "whose security?" has provoked a lively debate over whether individuals, states or other groups should form the primary referent of security.

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